“A Substance Consisting of an Infinity of Attributes”: Spinoza on the Infinity of Attributes

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At the beginning of Part I of the *Ethics*, Spinoza provides the following definition of God:

E1d6: By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence [*Per Deum intelligo ens absolute infinitum, hoc est, substantiam constantem infinitis attributis, quorum unumquodque aeternam, et infinitam essentiam exprimit*].

Exp.: I say absolutely infinite, not infinite in its own kind; for if something is only infinite in its own kind, we can deny infinite attributes of it [NS[[1]](#footnote-1): (i.e., we can conceive infinite attributes which do not pertain to its nature)]; but if something is absolutely infinite, whatever expresses essence and involves no negation pertains to its essence [*Explicatio. Dico absolute infinitum, non autem in suo genere; quicquid enim in suo genere tantum infinitum est, infinita de eo attributa negare possumus; quod autem absolute infinitum est, ad ejus essentiam pertinet, quicquid essentiam exprimit, et negationem nullam involvit*].[[2]](#footnote-2)

The definition of God and its *explicatio* draw an important distinction between what is *absolutely infinite* and what is merely *infinite in its own kind*. God is absolutely infinite, but each of the infinitely many attributes of God is merely infinite in its own kind,[[3]](#footnote-3) since we can deny of it all of the *other* infinitely many attributes. Spinoza makes the last point quite explicitly in one of his early letters, where he uses the example of the attribute of extension and states: “Extension is not infinite absolutely, but only insofar as it is Extension, i.e., in its own kind.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Though this most fundamental definition of the *Ethics* unequivocally asserts that God has infinitely many attributes, the reader of the *Ethics* will find only two of these attributes discussed in any detail in Parts Two through Five of the book. Addressing this intriguing gap between the infinity of attributes asserted in E1d6 and the discussion merely of the two attributes of Extension and Thought in the rest of the book, Jonathan Bennett writes:

Spinoza seems to imply that there are other [attributes] – he says indeed that God or Nature has “infinite attributes.” Surprising as it may seem, there are reasons to think that by this *Spinoza did not mean anything entailing that there are more than two attributes*.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In this paper I will argue that Bennett’s claim is fundamentally wrong and deeply misleading. I do think, however, that addressing Bennett’s challenge will help us better understand Spinoza’s notion of infinity. I will begin by summarizing Bennett’s arguments. I will then turn to examine briefly the textual evidence for and against his reading. Then I will respond to each of Bennett’s arguments, and conclude by pointing out theoretical considerations which, I believe, simply refute his reading.

Part I: Bennett on the Infinity of the Attributes

Bennett presents the following five arguments to motivate his surprising claim: (1) Spinoza frequently uses “infinite” as virtually synonymous with “all.” The claim that God has all the attributes merely commits him to the view that whatever attributes are there, they must be instantiated in God. If there are only two possible attributes, then the claim that God has infinite attributes amounts to nothing over and above the claim that God has two attributes.[[6]](#footnote-6) (2) If Spinoza was serious in ascribing infinitely many attributes to God, he should have discussed them in some detail in the body of the *Ethics*.[[7]](#footnote-7) (3) In Letters 64 and 66, Spinoza attempts to explain why we cannot know any attributes other than thought and extension. However, argues Bennet, Spinoza’s claim is “a move so abrupt, ad hoc, and unexplained that we cannot even be sure whether it is a retraction of the metaphysics or of the epistemology.” [[8]](#footnote-8) (4) The traditional conception of God as an *ens realissimum* could have motivated Spinoza to ascribe to God *all* attributes or perfections. However, there was no respectable theological tradition that would motivate him to ascribe to God *infinitely* many attributes.[[9]](#footnote-9) (5) Spinoza had no theoretical or philosophical pressure that would push him to assert that God has more than two attributes.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Part II: The Textual Evidence

Let us turn now to examining Spinoza’s text and check whether it can support the claim that God/Nature has no more than the two attributes of extension and thought. We’ll begin with a simple question: is there *any* text in Spinoza’s oeuvre in which Spinoza asserts that there are no more than two attributes? To the best of my knowledge, the answer is “no.”[[11]](#footnote-11) In contrast, we have an abundance of texts – in the *Ethics* and outside it – in which Spinoza clearly commits himself to the existence of attributes other than thought and extension. Consider the following two passages from E2p7s:

Whether we conceive nature under the attribute of Extension, or under the attribute of Thought, *or under any other attribute*, we shall find one and the same order, *or* one and the same connection of causes, i.e., that the same things follow one another.[[12]](#footnote-12)

So long as things are considered as modes of thinking, we must explain the order of the whole of nature, or the connection of causes, through the attribute of Thought alone. And insofar as they are considered as modes of Extension, the order of the whole of nature must be explained through the attribute of Extension alone. *I understand the same concerning the other attributes*.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Notice that in both passages Spinoza does not entertain *the slightest doubt* about the existence of the unknown attributes. He does not say, “I understand the same concerning the other attributes, *if there are any*.” Instead, he affirms *without any reservation* that the same order of explanation should obtain with regard to the other, unknown attributes. Interestingly, we do have a nice example of Spinoza’s formulating a claim about an issue he is not confident about. Consider E3p2: “The Body cannot determine the Mind to thinking, and the Mind cannot determine the Body to motion, to rest or to anything else (*if there is anything else*).”[[14]](#footnote-14) In E3p2 Spinoza reservedly entertains the possibility that a body *might* be determined to states other than motion and rest, without committing himself to the existence of this third kind of state. In contrast, both passages in E2p7s clearly commit Spinoza to the existence of attributes other than extension and thought.

In addition to the two crystal-clear passages from E2p7s, there is an interesting yet more intricate passage in E2p13d, in which Spinoza is bothered by the possibility of a mismatch between the minds of modes of different attributes, i.e., he is bothered by the possibility that “the object of the Mind were something else also, in addition to the Body.”[[15]](#footnote-15) In order to rule out the possibility that my mind might have as its object not only my body but also a mode of one of the unknown attributes, Spinoza appeals to E2a5, which asserts that the human mind has access *only* to modes of extension and thought. I reconstruct this argument in greater detail in another place.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Turning now to Spinoza’s correspondence, in Letter 56 (dated Oct./Nov. 1674) Spinoza writes:

I don’t say that I know God completely, but only that I know some of his attributes, not all of them, *not even most of them. Certainly, being ignorant of most of them*, does not prevent my knowing some.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Spinoza’s assertion that we do not know the *majority* of the attributes clearly entails that he believed there are at least… five attributes. In an earlier letter, Spinoza referred to “other attributes” of God other than intellect (i.e. thought),[[18]](#footnote-18) hence implying that there must be at least… three attributes.[[19]](#footnote-19)

In Letters 64 and 66 Spinoza unmistakably asserts the existence of infinitely many attributes unknown to the human mind. We will postpone the explication of these crucial letters until we address the important question of Spinoza’s reasons for asserting that we cannot know any attributes other than thought and extension.

In the *Theological Political Treatise*, Spinoza does not employ his typical metaphysical terminology of substance, attributes, and modes,[[20]](#footnote-20) yet in a note appended to his discussion of nature in the sixth chapter, he remarks: “By Nature here I understand not only matter and its affections, but in addition to matter, infinite other things [*alia infinita*].”[[21]](#footnote-21) It is highly likely that these “infinite other things” are the infinite attributes (apart from extension).

In the *Short Treatise*, the infinitely many unknown attributes are discussed in detail in KV I 1,[[22]](#footnote-22) and the Second Appendix to the *Short Treatise* offers an elaborate discussion of the nature of the minds, or souls, of the modes of the unknown attributes:

The essence of the soul consists only in the being of an Idea, or objective essence, in the thinking attribute, arising from the essence of an object which in fact exists in Nature. I say *of an object that really exists,* etc., without further particulars, in order to include here not only the modes of extension, but also the modes of all the infinite attributes, which have a soul just as much as those of extension do.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Finally, as a piece of external evidence, consider the following passage from Leibniz’s notes on Spinoza’s metaphysics, following a conversation he had with their mutual friend, Walter von Tschirnhaus. As we will shortly see, Tschirnhaus was particularly knowledgeable about Spinoza’s views on the unknown attributes:

*He [Spinoza] thinks that there are infinite other positive attributes besides thought and extension.* But in all of them there is thought, as here there is in extension. What they are like is not conceivable by us; every one is infinite in its own kind, like space here.[[24]](#footnote-24)

In summary, we have, I believe, a solid body of textual evidence committing Spinoza to the existence of infinitely many other attributes beyond thought and extension. We do not have even a single text in which Spinoza asserts that God has, or even might have, only the two known attributes of extension and thought.

Part III: Responses to Bennett’s Arguments

I turn to address Bennett’s arguments in favor of his reading. (1) Bennett’s claim that in Spinoza ‘infinite’ always means “all” is not precise, to say the least. In Letter 12, the foremost text for Spinoza’s discussion of infinity, he notes that some “kind of infinite can be conceived to be greater than another infinite, without any contradiction.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Thus, the smaller infinity may not contain *all* the items contained within the larger infinity. It is also clear that in the explication of the definition of God in the *Ethics*, ‘infinite’ is *not* synonymous with ‘all.’ At the beginning of this paper, we have seen that each attribute is “infinite in its own kind.” Thus, when Spinoza claims in E1d6e “if something is only infinite in its own kind, we can deny infinite attributes of it,” he cannot mean that we can deny *all* attributes of what is infinite in its own kind; if we deny *all attributes* from, say, the attribute of extension (i.e., what is infinite in its own kind), nothing would be left.

Thus, it seems that in the two most significant texts in which Spinoza discusses infinity, he uses ‘infinity’ not as synonymous with “all.” But this is a relatively minor point. The following consideration seems to me more important. Bennett is right in claiming that if by ‘infinity’ Spinoza meant nothing over and above “all,” and if there were only two possible attributes, then for God to have infinite attributes would amount to nothing more than having two attributes. Yet, why not extend Bennett’s logic one step further? If *no* attributes were possible (and *no* modes were possible), it would still be perfectly correct under Bennett’s reading to assert that God has infinitely many attributes and infinitely many modes. If no attributes are possible, then God may still have all attributes, even though he has none (i.e., it would still be trivially true that he has all possible attributes). But since – per Bennett’s reading – ‘infinite’ is synonymous with “all,” one could then also truly assert that God has infinitely many attributes (though he has none). Yet, such an assertion would be highly misleading, and it would make no sense for a speaker who even suspects that there might be no possible attributes to assert that there are infinitely many attributes. The very same consideration also works against reading Spinoza’s infinity of attributes as “all, that is, two.” If Spinoza meant to claim that God merely has all the attributes, why should he not use the simple and common term “all” instead of the highly misleading “infinity”?

(2) Spinoza does not elaborate upon the nature of the other attributes in Parts Two to Five of the *Ethics* for a simple reason: the aim of these parts is the study of the nature of the human mind and the best measures leading to its blessedness. The preface to Part Two announces as much. It explains that from that point onward, Spinoza is homing in on a tiny fraction of his universe – the fraction that is relevant to the knowledge and blessedness of the human mind:

I pass now to explaining those things which must necessarily follow from the essence of God, or the infinite and eternal Being—not, indeed, all of them, for we have demonstrated (IP16) that infinitely many things must follow from it in infinitely many modes, *but only those that can lead us, by the hand, as it were, to the knowledge of the human Mind and its highest blessedness*.[[26]](#footnote-26)

From Part Two onward Spinoza is focusing on the restricted part of his universe that is relevant to the achievement of human blessedness. For the most part, the knowledge of the infinitely many unknown attributes is irrelevant to this endeavor.[[27]](#footnote-27) This is the trivial and primary reason for Spinoza’s silence about the infinitely many attributes.[[28]](#footnote-28) In addition, Spinoza had good reasons to believe that while we know that God/Nature has infinitely many attributes, we can hardly know anything about the nature of these attributes. He develops these claims in Letters 64 and 66, and we shall turn now to examine his reasons.

(3) Spinoza had a perfect explanation for the fact that one does not know the nature of any attributes other than thought and extension. According to Spinoza, the human mind is a complex idea (i.e., mode of Thought) whose object is nothing but a human body (a mode of Extension).[[29]](#footnote-29) One of the most central doctrines of the *Ethics* asserts that there is a parallelism, or isomorphism, between the order of things and the order of ideas (E2p7).[[30]](#footnote-30) Things (*res*) for Spinoza are everything that is real, including bodies and ideas. In E1p10, Spinoza argues that insofar as an attribute constitute the essence of substance (per E1d4), each attribute must be conceived through itself, just like the substance. E1p10 thus establishes a *conceptual barrier* between the attributes. Relying on E1p10 (and E1a4), Spinoza proves in E2p6 that the attributes are also *causally* isolated from each other (i.e., a mode from one attribute cannot cause a mode from another attribute). Thus, there is a causal and conceptual barrier between the infinitely many attributes.[[31]](#footnote-31)

In Ep. 66, Spinoza relies on these two doctrines – the Ideas-Things Parallelism of E2p7[[32]](#footnote-32) and the barrier among the attributes of E1p10 – to prove that not only cannot items belonging to different attributes interact causally with each other, but also *mental representations of items belonging to different attributes cannot causally interact with each other*. In other words, in addition to the barrier among the attributes introduced in E1p10 and E2p6, there is a *parallel barrier* *within* the attribute of thought among representations (i.e. ideas) whose objects are items belonging to different attributes. Thus, it is not only the case that my body cannot causally interact with a mode of the third attribute, but also the case that my mind (which is just the idea of my body) cannot causally interact with any mind (or idea) which represents items of the third attribute. The *parallel barrier*, which is internal to Thought, does not allow *any communication* between ideas representing different attributes. Our minds (i.e., the ideas of our bodies) cannot communicate with the minds of the (modes of the) infinitely many unknown attributes, just as our bodies cannot interact with the modes of the infinitely many other attributes. Each attribute (and its representation in thought) is isolated from every other attribute (and its representation in thought). Thus, contrary to Bennett’s claim, Spinoza’s argument in Letters 64 and 66 is well-grounded in E1p10 and E2p7. [[33]](#footnote-33)

(4) Spinoza was well acquainted with a philosophical and theological tradition that ascribes infinitely many attributes to God, though it was not the tradition under Bennett’s spotlight. In his discussion of the divine attributes in the *Light of the Lord*, Crescas develops in great detail the claim that God has infinitely many attributes and that each of his attributes is infinite.[[34]](#footnote-34) Given Spinoza’s detailed discussion and endorsement of Crescas’ conception of actual infinity in Letter 12,[[35]](#footnote-35) it is highly unlikely that he was unaware of this claim, especially since Crescas was not the only medieval Jewish thinker to advance such an argument.[[36]](#footnote-36) Another philosopher with whom Spinoza was of course acquainted and who affirmed that God has “countless” attributes beyond the ones we know is Descartes.[[37]](#footnote-37) These “countless” attributes of God cannot be just non-essential modes, since Descartes explicitly denies that God has any modes.[[38]](#footnote-38) There is, however, a subtle yet important difference between these claims of Descartes and Spinoza. Descartes’ claim that there are uncountable divine attributes which we cannot comprehend secures the transcendence of the Cartesian God.[[39]](#footnote-39) Spinoza’s claim that *Deus sive Natura* has infinitely many attributes which are not accessible to us makes *Nature* (with capital N, i.e., as not restricted to extended and thinking nature) *just as transcendent to us as God is*.[[40]](#footnote-40) This is a bold and highly original view which is consistent with Spinoza’s deep critique of anthropocentrism.[[41]](#footnote-41)

(5) Let’s turn to Bennett’s final point. Were there any theoretical and philosophical pressures within Spinoza’s system that would push him to affirm the existence of more than two attributes? Yes, there were. We will point out two strong reasons that motivated Spinoza to affirm that God has infinitely many attributes beyond extension and thought.

(i) Spinoza’s first reason for affirming that God has infinitely many attributes beyond thought and extension is quite straightforward. Both in the *Short Treatise* and in the *Ethics* Spinoza denies that the infinite can be composed of an accumulation of finite parts.[[42]](#footnote-42) Now let’s suppose, per Bennett’s suggestion, that there is a finite number, *n*, of possible attributes. Thus, “the infinity of attributes,” i.e., the number *n* of attributes, would be composed of *n* attribute units, and this would flatly contradict Spinoza’s assertion that the infinite cannot be composed from the finite. Put in other words, Bennett’s suggestion that for Spinoza ‘infinite’ is synonymous with “all” makes Spinoza’s notion of infinity nothing but the sum-total of possible attributes. However, Spinoza explicitly rejects the view that infinity is the sum of any aggregation of finite units.

(ii) To begin elucidating Spinoza’s second reason, consider E1p9:

The more reality or being [*esse*] each thing has, the more attributes belong to it.

In E1p10s, Spinoza points to E1p9 as explaining his reason for defining God – at the very beginning of Part One - as consisting of an infinity attributes.

Nothing in nature is clearer than that each being must be conceived under some attribute, and the more reality, or being it has, the more it has attributes which express necessity, *or* eternity, and infinity. And consequently, there is also nothing clearer than that a being absolutely infinite must be defined (as we taught in D6) as a being that consists of infinite attributes, each of which expresses a certain eternal and infinite essence.[[43]](#footnote-43)

The passage above would appear pretty odd under Bennett’s reading: why would Spinoza formulate a *general rule* about the correspondence between the reality and the number of attributes a thing has, when only two attributes are possible at all? Still, to expose oddity is not to refute. Fortunately, we can push this line of objection toward a more conclusive result.

In a letter dated October 1674, three years before his death, Spinoza writes:

Truly, I confess I still don’t know in what respect spirits are more like God than other creatures are. *I know this: that there is no proportion* [*nullam esse proportionem*] *between the finite and the infinite*; so the difference between the greatest, most excellent creature and God is the same as that between the least creature and God.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Since the reality of God (per E1p9) correlates with the number of attributes God has, then, if God were to have any finite number of attributes *n*, there would be a clear and simple proportion between the reality of a finite being – for example, me – and God’s reality. Since I am constituted by modes of *two* attributes, the proportion between God’s reality and mine would be *precisely*: *n*/2. Yet, as the passage above states unequivocally, Spinoza denies the very possibility of such a ratio between the infinity of God and the finitude of finite things.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Conclusion

Toward the very end of his celebrated 1663 “Letter on the Infinite,” Spinoza writes:

I have, finally, set out briefly the causes of the errors and confusions which have arisen concerning the Problem of the Infinite, and unless I am mistaken, I have so explained all of them that I do not think any Problem about the Infinite remains which I have not touched on here or which cannot be solved very easily from what I have said. So I don’t regard it as worthwhile to detain you any longer with these matters.[[46]](#footnote-46)

The “Letter on the Infinite” is a difficult yet extremely important text for the study of Spinoza’s metaphysics, as it contains a concise presentation of the core of his metaphysics, as well as Spinoza’s advocacy of actual infinity.[[47]](#footnote-47) Still, Spinoza’s boasting – in the passage above – that he provided a complete explanation of all the aspects of the problem of the infinite was doomed to be falsified. In spite of Spinoza’s great effort in this letter to provide a comprehensive taxonomy of infinities, it would turn out that one distinction which is paramount in the *Ethics* – the distinction between absolute infinity and infinity in its own kind – is completely absent in the letter.[[48]](#footnote-48) A modest lesson one may take from this story is that when dealing with the infinite, one should not rush to announce one’s having exhausted the issue.

In this paper, we have studied Spinoza’s claim that God has infinitely many attributes. Against Bennett’s interpretation of this claim as committing Spinoza to the existence of no more than two attributes, I have pointed out two strong philosophical reasons - as well as a theological tradition - that would have motivated Spinoza to hold that God has infinitely many attributes beyond thought and extension. We have exhibited numerous texts, both in the *Ethics* and outside it, in which Spinoza commits himself to the existence of the infinitely many other attributes, and we have found not even a single text in which Spinoza asserts that God has – or even might have – only two attributes. We also explained Spinoza’s flawless argument in Letters 64 and 66 concerning why human beings (and generally, the minds of modes of extension) cannot know any other attributes beyond thought and extension.[[49]](#footnote-49) I submit that the case for taking Spinoza at his word, and reading “infinite attributes” as greater than any number, is as strong as it can be.[[50]](#footnote-50)

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1. ‘NS [*Nagelate Schriften*]’ refers to the text of the 1677 Dutch translation of Spinoza’s works. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Unless otherwise marked, all quotes from Spinoza’s works and letters are from Curley’s translation. I have relied on Gebhardt’s critical edition (*Spinoza Opera*, 4 volumes (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Verlag, 1925)) for the Latin text of Spinoza. I use the following standard abbreviations for Spinoza’s works: **TdIE** - *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* [*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*], **DPP** – *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy* [*Renati des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae Pars I & II*], **CM** – *Metaphysical Thoughts* [*Cogitata Metaphysica*], **KV** – *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being* [*Korte Verhandeling van God de Mensch en deszelfs Welstand*], **TTP** –*Theological-Political* *Treatise* [*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*], **Ep.** – *Letters*.Passages in the *Ethics* will be referred to by means of the following abbreviations: a(-xiom), c(-orollary), p(-roposition), s(-cholium) and app(-endix); ‘d’ stands for either ‘definition’ (when it appears immediately to the right of the part of the book), or ‘demonstration’ (in all other cases). Hence, E1d3 is the third definition of part 1 and E1p16d is the demonstration of proposition 16 of part 1. I would like to thank Zach Gartenberg for his helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Spinoza’s assertion in E1p16d: “each of the attributes expresses an essence infinite *in its own kind*” (italics added). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ep. 4| IV/13/2-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bennett, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” 65. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Bennett, *Study*, 76; Bennett, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bennett, *Study*, 78-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bennett, *Study*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Bennett, *Study*, 76-77; Bennett, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Bennett, Study, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The closest Spinoza comes to the last claim is in a note to the first chapter of the first part of the *Short Treatise* where he claims: “After the preceding reflections on Nature we have not yet been able to find in it more than two attributes that belong to this all-perfect being.” (I/17/35-38). However, he *immediately* continues to argue against the view that God has merely two attributes: “And these give us nothing by which we can satisfy ourselves that these would be the only ones of which this perfect being would consist. On the contrary, we find in ourselves something which openly indicates to us not only that there are more, but also that there are infinite perfect attributes which must pertain to this perfect being before it can be called perfect.” (I/17/38-42).

    [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. II/90/14-18. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. II/90/23-28. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. II/96/12. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 169-171. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. IV/261/11-15. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ep. 35| IV/181/16. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Though I would not put much weight on the last source, since it addresses Spinoza’s 1663 book, *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy*, and one could argue that there Spinoza is referring to the Cartesian conception of God’s attributes. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Melamed, “Glimpse into Spinoza’s Metaphysical Laboratory,” 277-278. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. TTP Ch. 6| III/83/10, [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See note d| I/17/34-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. KV Appendix II| I/119/6-13. Cf. I/120/1-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Pollock, *Spinoza*, 161. Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften*, 6th Series, Volume 3, 385 (lines 12–15). Italics added. I slightly amended Pollock’s translation by replacing ‘in this world’ by ‘here’, which is more loyal to the Latin *hic*. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ep. 12| IV/53/12-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. E2pref| II/84/8-12. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Though, as we have already seen, the issue occasionally crops up in E2p13s, given the possibility of a mismatch between minds and their proper object. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. One may speculate that the version of the *Ethics* written by Spinoza’s twin in the third attribute would be silent about the nature of extension, since the latter kind of knowledge would be of no use in studying the measures leading to the blessedness of the mind of this third-attribute twin of Spinoza. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. E2p13. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. E2p7: “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things*.*” [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See Della Rocca’s elegant account of the barrier in *Representation*, 9-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For a detailed explication of the Ideas-Things Parallelism, see Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, Chapter Five. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. For a detailed presentation of this issue, see Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, Chapter Six, and Melamed, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics of Thought.” [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Crescas, *Or ha-Shem*, I, 3, 3 (pp. 106-108 in the 1990 edition). Cf. Harvey, *Rabbi Hasdai Crescas,* 91-94, and Levy, *Figures de l’infini,* 204-207. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ep. 12| IV/62/1-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See Harvey, *Rabbi Hasdai Crescas*, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See Descartes’ Letter to Mersenne from July 1641 (AT III 394| CSM III 185). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See *Principles of Philosophy*, I 56. Cf. *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* (AT VIIIB 348| CSM I 297). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. On the incomprehensibility of the infinite in Descartes, see Ariew, “The Infinite,” 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Notice, however, that in contrast to the incomprehensibility of the Cartesian God, Spinoza’s “unknown attributes” are comprehended by some *finite* minds, i.e., the minds of the modes of the unknown attributes. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See my paper, “Spinoza’s Anti-Humanism.” [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. “The infinite cannot be composed of a number of finite parts” (KV I 1 |I/18/10). E1p15s (II/58/27): “infinite quantity… is not composed of finite parts.” Cf. KV II 24 |I/107/1: “For how is it possible that we could infer an infinite and unlimited thing from one that is limited?” [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. E1p10s| II/72/10-17. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ep. 54| IV/253/7-11. Italics added. A similar argument appears at the end of E1p17s, where Spinoza argues that insofar as God is the cause of both the essence and the existence of finite things, they must differ “and *cannot agree with [God] in anything except in name*” (II/63/30). Italics added. Cf. CM II 11| I/274/32-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. The claim that there is no *ratio* between the infinity of God and finite things also appears in Gersonides (*Milhamot ha-Shem* III, 3, 23b| *Wars of the Lord*, vol. II, 114.), quoted above, and in Crescas, *Or ha-Shem*, I, 3, 3. Cf. my “Crescas and Spinoza,” 213-214. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ep. 12| IV/61/9-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ep. 12| IV/59/1-13 and IV/61/15-62/10. Spinoza’s defense of actual infinity may provide further reasons for rejecting Bennett’s reading. Clearly, in the *Ethics*, the absolute infinity of God is the strongest kind of infinity. Given Spinoza’s admission of actual infinity, it would seem highly likely that God’s infinity is actual (and actual infinity is clearly more than two). However, Spinoza does not explicitly use the terminology of actual infinity in the *Ethics*, and for this reason, I avoided resting my case on this consideration. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The main reason for the absence of this distinction seems to be that at this stage Spinoza has not yet fully developed

    the distinction between the substance and its attributes. The notion of attribute is not at all mentioned in Ep. 12, and in Ep. 9 – written merely a month before Ep. 12 – Spinoza virtually identifies the notions of substance and attribute (see IV/46/20-23). For a study of the development of Spinoza’s concepts of substance and attribute, see Melamed, “Glimpse into Spinoza’s Metaphysical Laboratory.” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. A reader who is still confused by Spinoza’s arguments in Eps. 64 and 66 is invited to consult my detailed reconstruction of Spinoza’s arguments in *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 156-165. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. In passing, let me note that in his 1883 *Foundations of a General Theory of the Manifolds: A Mathematico-Philosophical Investigation into the Theory of the Infinite*, Cantor was engaged in a closed study of Spinoza’s advocacy of actual infinity in Ep. 12, and of his theory of the infinite modes. Thus, for example, Cantor notes: “An especially difficult point in Spinoza’s system is the relationship of the finite modes to the infinite one; it remains unexplained how and under what circumstances the finite can maintain its independence with respect to the finite, or the infinite with respect to still higher infinities” (Cantor, *Foundations*, 892). Cantor’s discussion of the independence of finite modes clearly echoes the concerns raised by Hegel (for a discussion of the last issue, see my “Acosmism or Weak Individuals”). Overall, Cantor’s discussion of the kinds of infinity in Spinoza is blended with his own views about the transfinite numbers. Thus, Bennett’s mockery of “Spinoza and his contemporaries” who unlike Cantor “had just muzzles and puzzles” (Bennett, *Study*, 76) seems somewhat out of place, as Cantor’s writing seems to show that it was precisely “the muddles and puzzles” of Crescas, Spinoza, and Leibniz, that engaged Cantor and stimulated the development of his theory of transfinite numbers. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)