

RESEARCH

François Lamy's Cartesian Refutation of Spinoza's Ethics

Jack Stetter

Loyola University, New Orleans, US
jckstetter@gmail.com

François Lamy (1636–1711), a Benedictine monk and Cartesian philosopher whose extensive relations with Arnauld, Bossuet, Fénelon, and Malebranche put him into contact with the intellectual elite of late-seventeenth-century France, authored the very first detailed and explicit refutation of Spinoza's Ethics in French, *Le nouvel athéisme renversé* (1696). Regrettably overlooked in the secondary literature on Spinoza, Lamy is an interesting figure in his own right, and his anti-Spinozist work sheds important light on Cartesian assumptions that inform the earliest phase of Spinoza's critical reception in the seventeenth-century. I begin by presenting Lamy's life and the contentious state of Spinoza's French reception in the 1680 and 1690s. I then discuss a central argument in Lamy's refutation, namely the Cartesian objection that Spinoza's account of the conceptual independence of attributes is incompatible with the theory of substance monism. Contrasting Lamy's objection with questions put to Spinoza by de Vries and Tschirnhaus, I maintain that by exhibiting the direction Spinoza's views on substance and attribute took in maturing we may accurately assess the strength of Spinoza's position vis-à-vis his Cartesian objector, and I argue that, in fact, Spinoza's mature account of God as an expressive ens realissimum is not vulnerable to Lamy's criticism. In conclusion, I turn to Lamy's objection that Spinoza's philosophy is question-begging in view of Spinoza's account of God, and I exhibit what this point of criticism tells us about the intentions of the first French Cartesian rebuttal of the Ethics.

Keywords: Spinoza; François Lamy; substance; attribute; Cartesianism; atheism

Si cela peut s'appeler reconnaître un Dieu, je ne sais pas pour moi ce qui s'appelle n'en reconnaître point.

— Dom François Lamy

§1. Introduction

Many important seventeenth-century thinkers have recently reemerged from obscurity to become subjects of sustained scholarship, yet it would be naïve to expect a return to philosophical glory for *all* once famed philosophers. Regrettably, I suspect that the Benedictine monk and Cartesian philosopher François Lamy (1636–1711) is one thinker whose marginality may well endure.

Only one of Lamy's works, the sprawling three-volume *De la connaissance de soi-même*, has enjoyed the benefits of modern reediting.¹ For Francisque Bouillier, although *De la connaissance de soi-même* is Lamy's most 'considerable' work, it amounts to no more than an 'imitation' of Malebranche's *De la recherche de la vérité* (Bouillier 1868, vol. 2, 367). The twenty-seven other works Lamy wrote have not been so lucky,

¹ Lamy (2008–10). A manuscript of the second edition is available as Lamy (1699). Lamy is the subject of one relatively recent monograph: Ginzburg (1992). Other recent discussions of Lamy's philosophical works include: Ablondi (2008); Woolhouse (2001); Woolhouse and Francks (1994). Cooper discusses Lamy's contention that Spinoza's philosophy encourages pride in Cooper (2013), 73–76. François Lamy is not to be confused with his contemporary, Bernard Lamy (no relation). All translations of Lamy here are my own.

including the work that will interest me here most, *Le nouvel athéisme renversé, ou Réfutation du système de Spinoza* [*The New Atheism Overthrown, or Refutation of Spinoza's System*] (1696). This work is not only the very first refutation of Spinoza's *Ethics* in French but also the very first attempt at a geometrical refutation of the *Ethics* published in any language.² Biographical information is furnished by Claude-Pierre Goujet's (1697–1767) *Bibliothèque des auteurs ecclésiastiques du 18ème siècle* (1736) (Goujet 1736, vol. 1, 311–313) and by René Prosper Tassin's (1697–1777) *Histoire littéraire de la Congrégation de Saint-Maur* (1770) (Tassin 1770, 351–367). Further details about Lamy's life with regards to the development of his anti-Spinozist project are provided by Paul Vernière in his *Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution*.³ Scant availability of primary-source material, coupled with linguistic barriers, help explain Lamy's unfortunate obscurity.

My aims here are to present Lamy in context (§2) and evince the importance of *Le nouvel athéisme renversé* (§§3–4). Significantly, Lamy's refutation relies on prominent Cartesian assumptions. Examining the grounds of Lamy's refutation along with the resources available to Spinoza for responding to his Cartesian objector indicates both how Spinoza's basic metaphysical project innovates with respect to standard Cartesian views and why Spinoza earns the dubious honor of being called a leading atheist. As a case in point, I assess Lamy's rebuttal of Spinoza's theory of the conceptual independence of attributes in relation to the theory of substance monism.⁴

The underlying philosophical problem here for Spinoza is **the problem of God's unity**: how can several conceptually independent attributes pertain to one substance? Lamy approaches the problem by way of leveling objections at *Ethics* 1p10 and scholium.⁵ In a characteristically Cartesian manner, Lamy objects that conceptually distinct attributes constitute really distinct substances, and that, therefore, a single substance cannot have many conceptually independent attributes (**the unity objection**). I defend Spinoza's position against the unity objection by exhibiting that Spinoza's view of God as infinitely expressive is central to his mature doctrine of substance and attribute and that, in fact, *the concepts of substance and attribute are God-specific* (**the God response**).

Yet Lamy additionally levels **the bedrock objection**. Lamy avers that the God response evinces that the bedrock of Spinoza's metaphysics is question-begging, since Spinoza relies on an understanding of God that *assumes* the coherence of the concept of a substance with many attributes. Indeed, on Lamy's view, either we acquiesce to Spinoza's allegedly wrongheaded view on God and we grant all consequences that follow from that view, the bedrock of Spinoza's 'system,' or we don't, and that's that: 'the process is empty and goes no further [*le procès est vide sans aller plus loin*]' (Lamy 1696, 251–253). In other words, for Lamy, 'the impious Spinoza [*l'impie Spinosa*]' professes an invalid philosophy, and his strength lies solely in ruse and his talent at playing on humankind's 'penchant for libertinism [*penchant pour le libertinage*]' (Lamy 1696, 78). In conclusion, I examine the bedrock objection and argue that, by Spinoza's lights, it would likely appear ineffective, inasmuch as the onus of proof should fall on the theologically minded Cartesian to explain how God could be the most real being without possessing infinitely many attributes.

§2. From Duelist to Dualist

Born in 1636 at the Château de Montireau on the Loire, not far from Blois, 'Dom' François Lamy—a soldier, then a Benedictine monk, and finally a prominent Cartesian in his day—had a fascinating and even folkloric life.

As a young man, Lamy is a light-cavalry captain in the armed forces under the command of le Duc de Richelieu (Goujet 1736, vol. 1, 311–313), as well as a duelist of some renown (Tassin 1770, 352). He later becomes well-respected in the art of public debate (Tassin 1770, 366). Bouillier notes that Lamy 'could be said to have brought with him to the cloister the belligerent attitude of military encampments' (Bouillier 1868, vol. 2, 364). The Maurist historian Tassin gives us the following physical description of Lamy: '[Lamy] was of an average height, but stout; he had a happy physiognomy, handsome hair, a noble stature, a gentle air, and insinuating manners: qualities that are brilliant in society, but often detrimental to salvation' (Tassin 1770, 352). Le Père André, something of an adversary of Lamy and Jesuit follower of Malebranche, writes that:

² Note that Lamy's work precedes fellow French Cartesian Pierre-Sylvain Régis's (1632–1707) refutation of Spinoza by several years. See Régis (1996), 901–934. I am grateful to Tad Schmaltz for drawing this to my attention.

³ Vernière (1982), 241–250. Drawing primarily from Vernière, Jonathan Israel discusses Lamy's importance in Israel (2002), 488–491.

⁴ I am thankful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting an outline here. They further suggested phrasing the discussion in terms of 'the unity objection,' 'the God response,' and 'the bedrock objection,' which I gratefully embrace and use here.

⁵ All English-language translations of Spinoza are from Spinoza (1985 and 2016). I use the conventional system for *Ethics* citations. Hence, 1p1 means Part 1, Proposition 1; 2a1 means Part 2, Axiom 2; 3p2d means Part 3, Proposition 2, demonstration; 4pr means Part 4 Preface; 5p10s means Part 5, Proposition 10, Scholium; etc. For the Latin I have consulted Spinoza (1925).

[Lamy] was a bit precious, a bit vain, presumptuous, loved to stand out, imaginative, delicate, sensitive, and enough of a philosopher, who could have passed for a great mind if only he had the natural taste and good sense that all good writers must have. [...] In a word, [Lamy] was displeasing because he tried so hard to please. Malebranche's supreme copycat, [Lamy] pretends to be as meditative, but merely copies Malebranche without resembling him (Bouillier 1868, vol. 2, 364).

In 1658, Lamy's life is saved during a duel from a mortal blow to the heart by his copy of *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, and he decides to take the cloth with the Maurists (Tassin 1770, 352). The relatively new Benedictine Congregation of Saint-Maur, established in 1618, is well known for its scholarly pursuits. Lamy's career as a philosopher-monk is characterized mostly by visiting (and presumably precarious) lecturing positions. Perhaps the chronic stress associated with the choice of itinerant lifestyle explains why he later suffers frequent migraines (Tassin 1770, 353–355). In 1672, while at the Abbey of Saint-Remi in Reims, Lamy discovers Descartes's writings in the abbey library (Tassin 1770, 354). Lamy is the first Maurist to teach Cartesian philosophy (Tassin 1770, 354). Thus begins a life espousing Cartesianism at the most prestigious religious institutions in seventeenth-century France. From 1673 to 1676, Lamy teaches philosophy and theology between the Abbey of Mont Saint-Quentin and at the Abbey of Saint-Médard of Soissons (Tassin 1770, 354). From 1676 to 1679, he teaches theology at the Abbey of Saint-Germain des Prés (Tassin 1770, 354). Lamy travels between several additional abbeys before arriving at the Abbey of Saint-Faron de Meaux in 1685, where Lamy meets Bossuet. Bossuet promptly charges Lamy with the composition of *Le nouvel athéisme renversé* (Tassin 1770, 355). (Upon its publication in 1696, Lamy states that he wrote most of the work 'ten years ago' (Lamy 1696, i).) Soon thereafter appointed prior in the Diocese of Meaux, Lamy leaves Meaux in 1687 for the Abbey of Saint-Denis. Only then does he settle down. Lamy remains in Saint-Denis until his death at seventy-five in 1711 (Tassin 1770, 355–356).

Lamy's contemporaries confirm his status. Both Bayle and Leibniz refer to Lamy as one of the 'most able' (Leibniz 1996, 382, 384) or 'strongest' (Bayle 1704, vol. 3, 773)⁶ Cartesians. Arnauld recognizes Lamy's authority in matters of interpretation of Augustine (Tassin 1770, 366).⁷ Lamy avows a fondness for Malebranche's philosophy in several works (Tassin 1770, 356–365),⁸ especially his theory of ideas (Bouillier 1868, vol. 2, 365–366), and Lamy comes to Malebranche's defense in correspondence with Arnauld, Leibniz, and Nicole (Tassin 1770, 364). But Lamy is not servile, and, despite professing agreement with Malebranche's view that 'we see all things in God,'⁹ Lamy criticizes Malebranche's account of how we attain certain knowledge of external singular things as unsatisfying, preferring Augustinian epistemic humility on this point (Bouillier 1868, vol. 2, 371).¹⁰ Lamy thus has the strong standing required for Bossuet's controversial assignment.

The delay in publishing *Le nouvel athéisme renversé* indicates the troubled state of French Spinozism. It does not take long after Spinoza's death in 1677 for his mature philosophy to make headway in France. The States of Holland's decree in June 1678 forbidding the sale of Spinoza's works, combined with the Papal bull committing Spinoza's works to the *Index*, merely increases distribution costs (Israel 2002, 293). Already clandestinely in circulation in Latin, in 1678 Saint-Glain publishes his French translation of the *Theological-Political Treatise* in two versions, each with an enticing title: *La Clef du sanctuaire* and *Le Traité des cérémonies superstitieuses des juifs* (Vernière 1982, 110). As Vernière notes, 'Thanks to Saint-Glain, the thick *in-quarto* from 1670 became a thin *in-12* easy to dissimulate and read' (Vernière 1982, 26). The *Opera posthuma* also circulates in a clandestine form. A young Bayle buys his copy on the streets of Paris in 1679 (Vernière

⁶ In December 1696, Abbot Dubos writes to Bayle to draw his attention to the recent publication of *Le nouvel athéisme renversé* by 'one of our best philosophers.' After receiving Lamy's work, as a token of his gratitude, Bayle sends Lamy his own 'piece on Spinozism' via Abbot Dubos in August 1697. Bayle and Lamy therefore worked in isolation from one another while their views on Spinoza gestated. See Lettres 8, 9, 11, and 14–17 in Bayle (1983), 154–159.

⁷ For a discussion of the centrality of Augustine to Descartes's French readers, especially Malebranche and Arnauld, see Schmaltz (2017), 121–164.

⁸ Bouillier (1868), vol. 2., 363, maintains that Lamy is a genuine 'malebranchiste.' Cf. Lennon's introduction to Malebranche (1997), xx: 'The name of Malebranche was not associated with any movement in philosophy; nor was he the founder of any eponymous school, certainly not of the Cartesian sort of which he himself was a member.'

⁹ See Malebranche (1997), 628: 'We see all things in God through the efficacy of his substance, and particularly sensible things, through God's applying intelligible extension to our mind in a thousand different ways.' Significantly, the claim in *Elucidation 10* that God must contain 'an ideal or intelligible infinite extension' (626) is the same claim that elicits the accusation that Malebranche embraces Spinoza's identification of God and extension. See *infra*, note 12. For analysis of Malebranche's theory of ideas, see: Nadler (1992); Schmaltz (2000).

¹⁰ Bouillier extensively cites and discusses Lamy (1706).

1982, 112). In fact, owing to the simultaneous presence in Paris of Huygens, Tschirnhaus, and Leibniz, all three familiar with Spinoza, talk of the content of the *Ethics* likely begins to spread in Paris as early as 1675 (Vernière 1982, 95–111).¹¹

After the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and the expulsion of French Protestants, French intellectual life darkens, becoming orthodox and stifled, paranoid even. Construction at the Château de Versailles is complete. Monarchical absolutism is the order of the day and state religion is the guarantor of national morality. The dogged persistence of Spinozism is likely unsettling to elites in the know. Spinoza's works are contraband, and the dominant strategy is to adopt a form a wishful thinking and hope that the problem disappears on its own. Between 1679 and 1683, Arnauld allegedly writes a refutation of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, now lost. In 1690, in correspondence, Arnauld claims: 'I have read no works of Spinoza; but I know these are evil books, and it does great harm to read them. [...] It is a natural right to not read such books, unless one has a special talent for refuting them' (Vernière 1982, 116). Malebranche, for his part, adopts a riskier approach in discussing Spinozism in that he draws attention to similarities that may otherwise go unnoticed. As early as 1683, Malebranche encounters the *Ethics*. Spinoza's role in his *Méditations chrétiennes et métaphysiques* (1683) is patent—Spinoza is a foil against which Malebranche can refine his understanding of God's free act of creation and the nature of 'intelligible extension.'¹² But, aside from such protective countermeasures, little is done to *explicitly* and *philosophically* dispute Spinoza's *Ethics*.

That task falls to Lamy. Bossuet's prodding suffices. Yet, after composing the first draft of *Le nouvel athéisme renversé*, the Sorbonne faculty dissuades Lamy from publishing the refutation on the grounds that its geometrical form, which includes large translations of Spinoza's text, is likely to enchant 'weak-minded' readers and thus backfire (Vernière 1982, 243–244). A 'vulgar' presentation of Spinoza's work is required. Lamy complies. The first half of his *Le nouvel athéisme renversé*, a study of 'the knowledge of human nature' and a brief discussion of the importance of metaphysics in general, is written in what Lamy calls 'the common method [*la méthode commune*]' (Lamy 1696, iii). With the endorsements of Fénelon *et al.*, the publication can now go forward (Lamy 1696, xxiii–xxxiii). Lamy exclaims: 'I was assured that the number of Spinoza's followers was growing day to day; that his errors had ruined the brains of a number of young people' (Lamy 1696, iv–v). He sincerely believes in his mission:

Some people might perhaps think that it would be best to dissimulate [Spinoza's] errors rather than publish them in the hopes of refuting them.

But besides the fact that the damage has already been done, [...] besides the fact that news of this system has already made too much noise with the libertines, and everyday makes even more progress, so much so that we cannot possibly hope to suppress it by simply dissimulating it; it is necessary to refuse to the impious the belief that they could have that we fear them when we suppress their works. We must force ourselves to make them see that the true religion has nothing to fear from the part of reckless minds which are carried away, that one can only oppose to true religion pure extravagances, and that reason does not do any worse a job defending [true religion] than does revelation. Not to mention the fact that Spinoza's impieties are of such an excessive licentiousness that there are hardly but minds and bodies which are already corrupted that can even accommodate themselves to [Spinoza's impieties], and that to refute them [...] it is only necessary to relay them as they are, and to show their horrible consequences (Lamy 1696, 15–16).

Remarks about *Le nouvel athéisme renversé's* general structure are in order. Recall that Lamy is under the obligation to write much of it in the 'common method,' that is, in a 'less dry' form that would be 'more proportionate to the ordinary limits of the mind' (Lamy 1696, 83), *i.e.*, in prose, as an essay. He thus begins

¹¹ In November 1675, Schuller writes Spinoza on Tschirnhaus's behalf to ask that Spinoza share with Leibniz, whom Tschirnhaus has met in Paris, further writings (read: *The Ethics*). Spinoza refuses Tschirnhaus's request, though he had already exchanged with Leibniz on the subject of optics and had already proposed to send him a copy of the *Theological Political Treatise* in 1671. With hindsight, perhaps it is fair to say that Spinoza's wariness of Leibniz's intentions was well-founded. See Spinoza (1985 and 2016), vol. 2, Eps. 45, 46, 70, and 72. On Leibniz's understanding of Spinoza, see Lærke (2008).

¹² See in particular the '9^{ème} Méditation' in Malebranche (1958–67), vol. 10. In correspondence between 1713 and 1714, Malebranche's former student, J.J. Dortous de Mairan, further presses the issue of Malebranche's relation to Spinoza. See Malebranche (1958–67), vol. 19, 852–865, 870–879, 882–889, and 890–912. As Nadler (1992) notes, 'by making ideas identical in some manner with the divine substance [...] Malebranche avoids one problem at the price of opening himself up to a host of others. If intelligible extension simply *is* God insofar as his essence is representative of extended creatures, does this not imply that God himself is really extended? How can extended bodies "imitate" God, even in their imperfect way, unless God is extended? And this would appear to lead directly to Spinozism' (151). For a defense of Malebranche against de Mairan's charge of Spinozism, see Ablondi (1998).

with a summary of the *Ethics*, where he briefly describes alleged difficulties in Spinoza's philosophy, such as, for instance, Spinoza's 'monstrous' and 'paradoxical' view on 'the immortality of the soul,' namely that 'the soul is the idea of the body insofar as it exists' and that 'nonetheless it is also the idea of the body not insofar as it exists' (Lamy 1696, 26–32). Lamy then turns to demonstrating how 'knowledge of man's nature [*la connaissance de la nature de l'homme*]' corroborates Scriptural teachings and Christian morality, and thus proves adequate on its own to act as 'the stumbling block [*l'écueil*]' of Spinoza's philosophy (Lamy 1696, 93).

This demonstration exists for the purpose of ensuring Lamy's Catholic bona fides in the peering eyes of the Sorbonne, so that the geometrical refutation may be publishable. Hence, Lamy's compromising on Cartesian views that might appear heretical, too. Lamy's discussion here of the body and its putatively goal-oriented functions as evidence of God's wisdom is rather disappointing when we recall that Lamy is seen by contemporaries to be one of the great Cartesian thinkers of the day (Lamy 1696, 107–133), and that Descartes himself had controversially argued for banishing final causes from the study of the body, held to be comprehensible in terms of blind, machine-like interactions of various corporeal parts and organs.¹³ Still, putting the argument from design on display is a safe way to placate censors fearful that exposing Spinoza's thought encourages heresy.

The refutation's philosophically better half is the latter half, the geometrical rebuttal where Lamy hopes to show that Spinoza fails to achieve his stated goals. Lamy avers that all he must do is refute *Ethics* Part 1:

To overthrow Spinoza's system, it is enough to ruin the first part of what he calls his *Ethics*. This part, whatever name it is given, is in truth only a purified metaphysics; it contains the general principles and the foundation of the system of this miserable philosopher; we can assure ourselves that the destruction of this first part will lead to the ruin of the entire work; and that though we will not have refuted in detail the errors which are its consequences, they will be crushed, as it were, by the collapsing body and buried in its ruins (Lamy 1696, 235–236).

By Spinoza's 'system,' Lamy means not only what is included in the *Ethics* but what is included in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, too, a summary of which is given in the 'common method' (Lamy 1696, 34–72). Lamy continues:

So that this victory may be more assured, in combatting Spinoza we will only make use of the very arms that Spinoza has used and only of the method of the geometers of which he served himself to build his system. [...]

We hardly need but Spinoza's definitions of substance, attribute, and mode. With the first, we intend to overthrow the Second Proposition of the First Part, which will carry with it many others in collapsing. [...] With the two others, we believe we can ruin the Twelfth Proposition, and in doing so, further overwhelm the propositions already overthrown, and further ruin the remaining propositions of the First Part (Lamy 1696, 236–237).

Lamy doesn't quite stick to the plan; he remarks that 'there will be some transpositions and even repetitions' in this geometrical refutation (Lamy 1696, 238). Looking ahead, we find that Lamy's geometrical refutation is split into three parts, and that there is ample repetition indeed.

Its first part consists of French translations of the definitions and axioms of *Ethics* Part 1, followed by an critical analysis of Spinoza's definition of God (Lamy 1696, 245–256). As if restarting his undertaking, Lamy then adds a second part, called 'Section I,' which consists of heavily modified versions of Spinoza's definitions and axioms, with justifications for those modifications, followed by an extensive discussion of the first half of Spinoza's *Ethics* Part 1 with an eye to shortcomings in his theory of substance (Lamy 1696, 263–292). Here, Lamy sets up several counterpropositions and counterdemonstrations against Spinoza's own propositions and demonstrations. So, for example, Lamy's second proposition, set up against 1p2, states that 'it is false that two substances, with diverse attributes, have nothing in common' (Lamy 1696, 266). Not every proposition is refuted. The textual material to receive explicit treatment in the form of counterpropositions and counterdemonstrations includes: 1p2, 1p4, 1p5, 1p6c, 1p7, 1p8, 1p9, 1p12, 1p13, 1p14c1, 1p14c2, and 1p15.

¹³ See Descartes, *Traité de l'Homme* [1664] and *Les Passions de l'Âme* [1649], in Descartes (1897–1913), vol. 1. Hereafter cited as AT XII, etc.

In 'Section II' (what is, in fact, the third part) Lamy states he will pay special attention to Spinoza's theory of attribute and mode and that he intends to 'rupture the system starting from its Tenth Proposition' (Lamy 1696, 293). Thus, in thirty counterpropositions of his own (shot through with various extended commentaries), Lamy intends to refute Spinoza's 1p10–1p35 (Lamy 1696, 293–406). Again, not all textual material receives treatment and Lamy returns to discussing earlier propositions (Lamy 1696, 310–317). Lamy then concludes his geometrical refutation with a summary of 1app (Lamy 1696, 407–417), as well as a short list of 'correct' definitions that on their own are, Lamy maintains, sufficient for refuting Spinoza's 'system' (Lamy 1696, 419).

Returning to Lamy's embrace of the geometrical method, note that he believes it to be not only 'the most certain, the most exact, and the least subject to illusion' but also the best-equipped for the intended audience:

At the very least, we should admit that this method is of all methods the most appropriate for those who we have in mind with this work, I mean to say for a kind of spiritual libertine [*une espèce de libertins spirituels*] (if we can call them this); that is to say, libertines who pride themselves on their mind, their Philosophy, and their precision [*se piquent d'esprit, de Philosophie, et d'exactitude*]. They will no longer be able to complain that we only defend ourselves by means of eloquent speech, or by force of authority, and even less by piercing libel and invectives. For all others, we ask that they are not put off by the dryness of this method (Lamy 1696, 240–241).

Lamy understands the geometrical method to entail greater *persuasiveness*, whence its attractiveness. Lamy's take on the method's utility echoes Descartes's own view on it, as put forth in his replies to Mersenne's objections to the *Meditations*, where Descartes notes that, by means of the geometrical method (or 'the method of synthesis'), 'the reader, however argumentative or stubborn he may be, is compelled to give his assent.'¹⁴ Like Descartes here, Lamy's view is pragmatic.

For his part, Spinoza likely attached *philosophical* importance to writing *more geometrico*, the inexorable interlocking of logical premises and consequences mirroring in form the content of his deterministic and naturalistic philosophy. Lamy's point of view is rather in keeping with the point of view of a polemicist and strategist. Spinoza himself must have had an audience in mind, reckons Lamy, the same audience Lamy will now persuade to see things differently.

§3. Lamy Against Spinoza on Substance and Attribute

I will now zoom in on an important issue addressed by Lamy that is helpful for both accurately assessing late seventeenth-century Cartesian views on Spinoza as well as the originality and defensibility of Spinoza's own basic metaphysical project, namely Spinoza's effort to reconcile the theory of the conceptual independence of attributes with the theory of substance monism, or the problem of God's unity.

The textual material in Lamy's crosshairs is 1p10 and scholium. There should be little doubt that 1p10 and scholium are pivotal, unprecedented even. At 1p10, Spinoza writes:

Each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself [1p10].

In the scholium, Spinoza asserts that the conceptual independence of attributes is necessitated by God's nature as 'a being that consists of infinite attributes, each of which expresses a certain eternal and infinite essence' (1p10s). The crux of Lamy's objection is that these two features of Spinoza's God—substantial unity, on the one hand, and possessing infinite conceptually independent attributes, on the other—are mutually exclusive, since conceptually independent attributes must constitute really distinct substances.¹⁵ For

¹⁴ Descartes, *Replies to Second Objections*, in Descartes (1984, 1985, and 1991), vol. 2, 111 [AT VII 157]. Hereafter cited as CSM II 111, etc.

¹⁵ For a systematic treatment of Spinoza's substance monism in the *Ethics* and the role played by the conceptual independence (or 'barrier') of attributes, see Della Rocca (2002). Part of Della Rocca's interpretation consists in the claim that Spinoza is entitled to the view that there is only one substance by virtue of the fact that no attribute can preclude any other attribute from pertaining to the same substance, because this would infringe the conceptual barrier of attributes (22–33). Specifically, Della Rocca is interested in showing that the failure of the thinking substance to have extension cannot be argued in terms of the fact that thinking precludes extension. Significantly, Della Rocca considers that the conceptual barrier itself provides an answer to de Vries's Cartesian objection to Spinoza's account (29), which I return to below. Della Rocca rightly states that the Cartesian objector would surely press the issue of how a single substance can have a plurality of attributes (19), as the case of Lamy makes clear. Moreover, I find Della Rocca's interpretation of Spinoza's substance monism compelling. Nonetheless, I believe that the evidence marshaled below in defense of Spinoza evinces the extent to which Spinoza's general treatment of a metaphysics of substance and attribute is sub-

Lamy, the Spinozistic point of doctrine is, as a matter of fact, an 'illusion' and 'one of the most important of Spinoza's errors' (Lamy 1696, 303).

It is unsurprising that a persuaded Cartesian balks at Spinoza's position. We can see how Lamy's unity objection is Cartesian if we recall that, on Descartes's account, substance (mind–body) dualism is motivated by the claim that two conceptually independent attributes must constitute two really distinct substances. Indeed, for Descartes, mind and body are not only numerically or really distinct individual substances; they are different kinds of substance, having different essences or natures. The latter, stronger thesis of substance dualism, however, is built on the argument that, in picking out conceptually independent attributes, the intellect can track distinctions of the substantial kind.¹⁶ Following convention, I refer to this as **the Cartesian Real Distinction Argument**.

We may briefly paraphrase the Cartesian Real Distinction Argument as follows. The intellect picks out the essential property of substance, without which substance is inconceivable. This is the attribute (or 'principal attribute'¹⁷) of substance, of which the intellect forms a clear and distinct idea. For mind, this is thought: I cannot doubt that I am a *res cogitans*, and that it pertains to my essence as mental substance to think. Thought is conceptually independent from extension, however. Extension, on the other hand, is the principal attribute of body; the intellect picks out the fact that corporeal substance is necessarily extended, or that the idea of body involves the idea of extension.¹⁸ Therefore, mind and body have nonidentical essential properties, and thus, by Leibniz's Law, mind and body are not identical. Hence, if two things are conceptually independent, by virtue of possessing different attributes, they are really distinct substances, for they have been shown to possess nonidentical essences.¹⁹ In other words, there are as many substances as there are conceptually independent attributes.

The Real Distinction Argument yields two further consequences for metaphysics of substance and attribute: 1. Substance cannot have several attributes that would be conceptually independent from one another; and 2. by virtue of the fact that qualitatively distinct substances are really distinct entities, by virtue of the fact that two really distinct entities can be conceived the one without the aid of the other, and by virtue of the fact that what can be conceived apart from another can exist apart from another, mental substance and corporeal substance can in principle (*i.e.*, by divine power²⁰) exist the one without the other.

Spinoza rejects both consequences. On his view, there is only one substance and it is constituted by infinite attributes (see: 1p10s, 1p14, 1p14c, and 1p14c2), and both extension and thought are, as divine attributes, eternal or necessary (see: 1p10s, 1p19, 2p1, and 2p2).

Lamy finds that not only does Spinoza fail to recognize that a single substance's attributes are conceptually dependent on one another (Lamy 1696, 293–298) but, additionally, Spinoza fails to provide a satisfying account of why there is one substance with infinite attributes and not infinite substances all with one attribute (Lamy 1696, 301–303). Hence, what appears to be Spinoza's untenable position in maintaining that several really distinct attributes do not constitute several really distinct substances. Indeed, for Lamy, Spinoza's claim is sheer nonsense: *by definition*, many conceptually independent attributes pick out many really distinct substances.

ordinated to a specific view on God as *ens realissimum*, the 'expressions' of which must be infinite and eternal, and whose *essence* necessitates a one-of-a-kind relation between substance and attribute, wherein the assertion 'many conceptually independent attributes can belong to one substance' becomes both meaningful and, on Spinoza's view, factually true.

¹⁶ See Descartes's sixth meditation on 'the existence of material things, and the real distinction of mind and body' (AT VII 72–90/CSM II 50–62). I admit that my brief interpretation here of the sixth meditation's aims is not entirely unproblematic. I agree with Rozemond that, although in the sixth meditation Descartes's intention to establish 'the modal claim' that mind and body can exist apart from one another is central, the *argument* for the real distinction of mind and body consists primarily in their being different substances. See Rozemond (1998), 28–37. Cf. Carriero (2009), 379–386.

¹⁷ At *Principles of Philosophy* 1.53, Descartes describes the 'principal attribute' thus: 'each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred' (AT VIII A 25/CSM I 210).

¹⁸ Several commentators maintain, in fact, that substance is identical with its principal attribute. See Rodriguez-Pereyra (2008); Rozemond (1998), 10–12; and Watson (1987), 48.

¹⁹ See Descartes, *PPh* 1.60: 'Strictly speaking, a *real* distinction exists only between two or more substances; and we can perceive that two or more substances are really distinct simply from the fact that we can clearly and distinctly understand one apart from the other' (AT VIII A 29/CSM I 213).

²⁰ See Descartes, *PPh* 1.60: 'And even if we suppose that God has joined some corporeal substance to such a thinking substance so closely that they cannot be more closely conjoined, thus compounding them into a unity, they nonetheless remain really distinct. For no matter how closely God may have united them, the power which he previously had of separating them, or keeping one in being without the other, is something he could not lay aside; and things which God has the power to separate, or keep in being separately, are really distinct' (AT VIII A 29/CSM I 213).

Let us now look at Lamy's discussion of 1p10 and scholium in detail, before seeing how Spinoza stands up to his criticisms. The commentary begins in *Le nouvel athéisme renversé*, Section II, Proposition 1 and demonstration:

It is false, and Spinoza demonstrates poorly, that *each attribute of substance must be conceived by itself*, and on the contrary we can demonstrate by his own principles that no attribute of substance can be conceived by itself, but rather, its idea must include the idea of substance (Lamy 1696, 293).

Lamy's counterproposition is first followed by a 'notice [avertissement]':

It is in truth surprising that a man who prides himself in geometry as much as Spinoza did not perceive the falsity of his Tenth Proposition, and did not see that its so-called demonstration, uniquely founded on the definition that he gives of attribute, is but a coarse paralogism; and this it proves so little of what he claims it to prove, that all we need do is serve ourselves of his same definition and several additional notions that he gives of attribute to prove the exact contrary (Lamy 1696, 294).

The counterdemonstration then reads:

That which the mind discovers of a substance as constituting its essence, and as expressing its idea this same essence, cannot be conceived by itself, and its ideas must necessarily include the idea of the essence of the substance; this is evident. Indeed, an attribute is *that which the mind discovers of a substance, as constituting its essence*, according to our second definition, *and as expressing in its idea this same essence*, which Spinoza himself admits in his Sixth Definition, in the Scholium to the Tenth Proposition, and in the Demonstration to the Nineteenth Proposition, in the following remarkable terms: *By the attributes of God, one must understand that which expresses the essence of divine substance; that is the very thing that attributes must include in their idea, hoc ipsum, inquam, attributa involvere debent*. Consequently, no attribute of substance can be conceived by itself; but its ideas must necessarily include the idea of substance (Lamy 1696, 295–296).

Lamy understands Spinoza's view on attribute to be inconsistent in its use. Spinoza cannot have it both ways: attributes track the essence of substance, *and so* attributes cannot be conceived *without* substance.

Lamy's reading appears irrelevant, if not uncharitable in the extreme. Spinoza is not interested in showing that attributes are conceptually independent from substance but, rather, that they are conceptually independent *from one another*. To be fair, the wording of 1p10 is a trifle unspecific, and if one takes the passage *à la lettre*, as Lamy does, it may seem as if Spinoza were indeed suggesting that attribute is conceptually independent from substance.

Bracketing Lamy's uncharitability, the importance Lamy attaches to underlining the conceptual dependence of attribute on substance is brought out in the ensuing corollary:

It follows that *the attributes of one and the same substance cannot be conceived without relation to each another*. By the preceding proposition, they all include in their ideas the idea of the essence of the substance; it is visible that we cannot conceive any one of these attributes, without perceiving that which is common to all the others, and, consequently, without some relation to the others.

For example, divisibility, and so to speak, figurability [*la figurabilité*], or if one prefers, the capacity to be divided and to be figured [*être figuré*] are two attributes of extended substance; and their idea includes so essentially the idea of extension, that if we take the latter away it is no longer possible to still hold the idea of divisibility or of figurability. Where there is no extension, there is nothing to divide, nor to figure [*figurer*], a figure being but a limit in extension. This being stated, it is visible that these two attributes cannot be conceived without a mutual relation. For example, we cannot conceive of divisibility without extension; however, the idea of extension is the idea of figurability; thus, we cannot conceive of divisibility without relation to figurability. Likewise, we cannot conceive of figurability without extension; however, the idea of extension is the idea of divisibility; and so, we cannot conceive of figurability without the idea of divisibility (Lamy 1696, 296–298).

Built into Lamy's reasoning is the belief that 'figurability' and 'divisibility' are essential qualities of corporeal substance; thus, like extension, they are its attributes. His demonstration, therefore, consists in showing that, insofar as the definitions of these qualities pick out features that necessarily involve one another

(extension involves the ability to be 'figured' or divided, 'figurability' only pertains to that which is extended or divisible, and divisibility only applies to that which is extended or 'figurable'), by the same token, these qualities or attributes are conceptually independent neither from one another nor from the corporeal substance they qualify.

Spinoza might readily retort that to his Cartesian objector that, in fact, *he* is the good Cartesian here. It is apparent that, even on Lamy's terms, divisibility and 'figurability' are redundant with respect to extension, to which they are conceptually reducible. Thus, only the latter is a genuine attribute—or, if one prefers, it is the principal attribute. Spinoza's argument for the conceptual independence of attributes remains intact.

But Lamy has even more to say on the issues raised by Spinoza's account of the conceptual independence of attributes. Thus, in Section II, Proposition 2, Lamy turns directly to refuting 1p10s itself. He states:

It is false, and Spinoza demonstrates poorly, that *two attributes conceived without the aid of one another, and which are really distinct, do not constitute two diverse substances* (Lamy 1696, 299).

This proposition will receive two demonstrations, followed by a long scholium of sorts. The first demonstration reads:

The attributes of one and the same substance cannot be conceived without relation the ones to the others (by the preceding corollary); thus, two attributes conceived without the aid of one another, that is to say without relation to one another, and which are really distinct, are not attributes of one and the same substance; and consequently, it is false that they do not constitute two diverse substances (Lamy 1696, 299–300).

The alternative demonstration reads:

Attributes are that which one conceives as constituting the essence of substance (by our Second Definition). The essence of a substance cannot be conceived without itself, nor can it be distinct from itself (by the Second Axiom). Thus, two attributes conceived without the aid of one another and which are really distinct do not constitute the same essence of substance; and, consequently, it is false that they do not constitute two diverse substances (Lamy 1696, 300).

Lamy's definition of attribute as 'that which the mind perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence,' is, he claims, Spinoza's own, word for word (Lamy 1696, 258). Let us grant this. Now, the Second Axiom Lamy has in mind must be 'that which cannot be conceived by another, must be conceived by itself' (Lamy 1696, 258). This axiom figures in the first list of definitions and axioms he gives before Section I of the Geometrical Refutation. (The other Second Axiom, included in the list of definitions and axioms 'for the refutation of Spinoza's system' put forth at the beginning of Section I, reads like a Pascalian aphorism: 'Thought is more noble than extension' (Lamy 1696, 262).) It is the same as Spinoza's 1a2. Again, Lamy's point is that Spinoza has already committed to the conceptual independence of substance, which precludes the conceptual independence of its attribute(s). Substance is conceptually independent, and its attributes are conceived through it. But, as we have seen, Lamy does not intend to suggest that the conceptual dependence of attributes on substance entails the impossibility of one substance having many attributes; rather, each of these attributes is merely conceptually dependent on every other attribute in constituting the substance. Thus, if two things are conceptually independent and really distinct, they are two different substances.

Finally, faithful to Spinoza's own approach in the *Ethics* (where scholia often act as heuristic devices), Lamy summarizes his contentions against Spinoza's views on substance and attribute in the scholium (or 'notice') that follows the alternative demonstration above:

Since according to all reasonable people a thing's essential attributes are only this same thing conceived under different respects, or diverse manners of conceiving the thing, *modi cogitandi*, it is certainly very strange that Spinoza distinguishes them really one from another. Nobody has ever put more distinction between the essential attributes of a thing than between its manners of being. The manners of being of one and the same substance cannot be conceived without relation to one another, because they all include in their idea, the idea of the substance which is their subject (as according to the Third Definition). How does Spinoza, who admits this same definition of substance, claim that the essential attributes of one and the same substance can be conceived by themselves and without the aid of another idea? Isn't he just Metamorphizing attributes into

substances, and considering one and the same thing to be as many really distinct substances as it has essential attributes? To concede as much, it is only necessary to consult the definition Spinoza himself gives of substance. According to Spinoza, there is in God an infinity of essential attributes (by the Sixth Definition); and so it happens that this man who claims there is only one substance in nature, establishes, without reflection, an infinity of substances, with the additional condition nonetheless that he would like that they all together compose this admirable Being he calls God. We have spent some time refuting this illusion because it is one of the most important of Spinoza's errors (Lamy 1696, 301–303).

Whether Lamy is correct that 'nobody' has maintained that there is a greater distinction between the modes of a substance (what he calls its 'manners of being') and its attributes (what he calls here its 'essential attributes'), differences that would, on Lamy's view, be merely differences of reason, it is certain that Spinoza's view on the conceptual independence of the attributes, and the way this motivates substance monism, rather than, as Lamy points out, an 'infinity of substances,' is far from conventional by seventeenth-century standards.

Lamy contends that a substance constituted by many attributes must be a mere assembly. One might retort that, from a Cartesian perspective, another option remains: it mirrors the so-called substantial union of mind and body. On Lamy's understanding, however, this would be no better. For what he has ultimately in his sights is the fact that, on Spinoza's theory, God's essence can be correctly construed as extension. Lamy would have no truck with such a heretical claim (Lamy 1696, 301–303). To get its roots required showing that substance cannot have many attributes. The geometrical method, therefore, was well suited for the task: it is not enough to admonish Spinoza for his atheism; the theory had to be demolished, too.

However, I believe that Spinoza's God response is protected from Lamy's Cartesian-minded unity objection. Examining the defensibility of Spinoza's position has the added benefit of clarifying Spinoza's genuinely innovative stance on these issues.

Let's return to 1p10 and scholium. I have already flagged 1p10: 'Each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself' [1p10]. Spinoza maintains that this follows from the definition of substance in conjunction with the definition of attribute: the latter constitutes the essence of the former (1d4), and thus, like the former, is by definition conceived through itself (1d5). In the scholium, Spinoza connects this account to his theory of substance monism:

From these propositions it is evident that although two attributes may be conceived to be really distinct (*i.e.*, one may be conceived without the aid of the other), we still cannot infer from that that they constitute two beings, *or [sive]* two different substances. For it is the nature of a substance that that each of its attributes is conceived through itself, since all the attributes it has have always been in it together, and one could not be produced by another, but each expresses the reality, *or [sive]* being of substance.

So it is far from absurd to attribute many attributes to one substance. Indeed, 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 [sive]* eternity, and infinity. And consequently there is also nothing clearer than that a being absolutely infinite must be defined (as we taught in 1d6) as a being that consists of infinite attributes, each of which expresses a certain eternal and infinite essence.

But if someone now asks by what sign we shall be able to distinguish the diversity of substances, let him read the following propositions, which show that in Nature there exists only one substance, and that it is absolutely infinite. So that sign would be sought in vain [1p10s].

Spinoza turns the Cartesian Real Distinction Argument on its head. Attributes not only pick out essential features of substance; they 'express' the 'reality *or* being [*realitas sive esse*]' of substance. They are therefore, just like substance, conceived through themselves, since it is an essential feature of substance, part of its reality or being, to be self-conceiving. Attributes have thus 'always been in substance together' in that none is conceptually posterior to any other and therefore conceptually dependent on or 'produced by' any other.²¹

²¹ I am grateful to Bernard Pautrat for this suggestion.

The view of attributes as expressing substance's reality or being suggests that attributes also express substance's other essential features. Tellingly, in the second paragraph of 1p10s, Spinoza reckons that, inasmuch as divine substance's reality or being is limitless, it has limitless attributes expressing its essential features, like its 'necessity or eternity' and 'infinity.' Spinoza's talk of divine substance's expressibility thus serves to flag an added fundamental feature of his metaphysical picture, to wit, that, because divine substance's essence is infinite, its infinitely many attributes are themselves infinite.²² Significantly, Spinoza even holds that attributes express expressibility itself, since modes are expressions of attributes (1p25c).²³

In brief, though I would be hard pressed to say how Spinoza understands 'expression' in general, here it appears that divine expressibility connotes both the divine power of transferability without loss of primitive features along with the divine power of unlimited outpouring of primitive features.²⁴ Note however that divine expressibility is not so much argued for as it is simply asserted. We infer that attributes conceived independently cannot constitute distinct substances because attributes are only conceived independently *in the first place* because of a fact about the divine substance to which they belong and which they express. Remarkably, Spinoza's theory therefore posits that primitive features of attributes, like the fact that they are conceived through themselves and thus are conceptually independent, can be tributary of primitive features of the nature of the substance to which they belong.

I submit that in construing substance and attribute to be God-specific, the God response protects Spinoza against the unity objection and Lamy's worries about metaphysics of substance and attribute. It is by virtue of a specific feature of God that many attributes belong to one substance. Whereas a Cartesian will anticipate that the doctrine of many conceptually independent attributes belonging to a single substance must be shown to be coherent for Spinoza's notion of God to be coherent, Spinoza believes that it is the very notion of God that explains the coherence of the doctrine of many conceptually independent attributes belonging to a single substance. The central premise now in need of securing consists in the assertion that divine substance is infinitely expressive, and because this assertion is posited at the ground-floor of Spinoza's metaphysics, the God response stands only if we grant Spinoza his conception of God.

Before I consider three important objections against my reading of Spinoza's God response, and before I return to Lamy's added objection against the God response, namely the bedrock objection, allow me to briefly contrast 1p10s with its earlier prototype form as found in correspondence with de Vries, since it suggests that Spinoza abandoned an earlier, non-God-specific position under pressure from a Cartesian-minded unity objection. Additionally, I will show that Spinoza's later discussion with Tschirnhaus further suggests that substance and attribute are God-specific.

In February 1663, De Vries writes to Spinoza, confounded by the unity problem. The 'third scholium to proposition 8' (a prototype of 1p10s) reads:

From these [propositions] it is evident that although two attributes may be conceived to be really distinct (*i.e.*, one may be conceived without the aid of the other), they do not, on that account, constitute two beings or different substances. The reason is that it is of the nature of a substance that all of its attributes (I mean each of them) should be conceived through themselves, since they have always [*simul*] been in it together [Ep. 8].

De Vries inquires:

You seem, sir, to suppose that the nature of substance is so constituted that it can have more than one attribute, which you have not yet demonstrated, unless you depend on the fifth definition of

²² I agree with Melamed that Bennett is wrong in arguing that, for Spinoza, God's definition as 'an absolutely infinite being' [1d6] only commits Spinoza to viewing God as possessing 'all' (read: two) attributes, and not infinitely many. As Melamed notes, Spinoza explicitly denies that infinite quantities are the sum total of x number of (finite) aggregates, whereas Bennett's reading awkwardly forces this view onto Spinoza. That said, I think it bears underscoring how the description of God as '*substantiam constantem infinitis attributis*' [1d6] can be read either as 'substance consisting of an infinity of attributes' or 'substance consisting of infinite attributes.' The latter translation does not connote the view Melamed endorses, namely that infinitely many attributes belong to God. On my understanding, Spinoza means both, as in 'substance consisting of an infinity of infinite attributes.' See Melamed (forthcoming); Bennett (1984), 76–79.

²³ 1p25c: 'Particular things are nothing but affections of God's attributes, or modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.'

²⁴ A classic, if obscure, interpretation of Spinozistic expression is given in Deleuze (1968). I agree with Gartenberg that we would be well served by a 'unified account' (2) of Spinoza's views on expression, and that expression should be considered one of 'the fundamental relations that structure his ontology' (1). See Gartenberg (2017).

an absolutely infinite substance, or God. Otherwise, if I should say that each substance has only one attribute, and if I had the idea of two attributes, I could rightly conclude that, where there are two different attributes, there are two different substances [Ep. 8].²⁵

As with Lamy, De Vries need only generalize the Cartesian Real Distinction Argument. Take any two conceptually independent attributes p and q . For a Cartesian, the substances whose essences they respectively constitute are really distinct, and thus the substance whose essence is constituted by p exists apart from the substance whose essence is constituted by q . (I return to the implicit criticism that Spinoza is begging the question by presupposing the coherence of a substance with many attributes in discussing the bedrock objection below).

Spinoza responds:

You say that I have not demonstrated that a substance (or being) can have more attributes than one. Perhaps you have neglected to pay attention to my demonstrations. For I have used two: first, that nothing is more evident to us than that we conceive each being under some attribute, and that the more reality or being a being has the more attributes must be attributed to it; so a being absolutely infinite must be defined, *etc.*; second, and the one I judge best, is that the more attributes I attribute to a being the more I am compelled to attribute existence to it; that is, the more I conceive it as true. It would be quite the contrary if I had feigned a chimaera, or something like that [Ep. 9].

We may construe these defenses of the prototype view as appealing to the principle of plenitude.²⁶ The substance with infinite attributes has more being or reality than substances with fewer than infinite attributes. By the principle of plenitude, that which has all being or reality exists. Thus, substances with fewer than infinite attributes do not exist; we are 'compelled' to attribute existence to one substance with infinite attributes. Yet this is unsatisfactory. For instance, one substance with infinite attributes does not have more reality than infinite substances all with one attribute.²⁷ Noticeably, Spinoza sets no restriction on how attributes belong to substance. It is ostensibly considering the generic way that attributes confer reality on substances that we infer that the *ens realissimum* has the most attributes. But in skirting the heart of the issue, namely *why* conceptually independent attributes cannot constitute distinct substances, de Vries's version of the unity objection stands.

Compare this to the discussion with Tschirnhaus in July 1675. Tschirnhaus has Schuller ask Spinoza:

In 1p10s you say that nothing in nature is clearer than that each being must be conceived under some attribute (which I see very well), and that the more reality or being it has, the more attributes belong to it. From this it would seem to follow that there are beings which have three, four, *etc.*, attributes. Nevertheless, one could infer from what has been demonstrated that each being consists of only two attributes, namely, of some definite attribute of God and the idea of that attribute [Ep. 63].

²⁵ Spinoza's 'fifth definition' corresponds to 1d6. For my purposes here I will bracket the issue raised later in Spinoza's reply of how the distinction of attributes is not a mere a distinction of reason, especially with regards to Spinoza's Jacob/Israel analogy. Della Rocca (2002) shows how Spinoza's talk about 'designators' is meant to underscore that the intellect singles out or distinguishes the object in question (19). This observation diminishes the worry about the distinction of attributes being a mere distinction of reason. Still, one is left with the impression that Spinoza slightly equivocates on the objective grounding of attributes in substance in discussion with de Vries. For a recent detailed analysis of Spinoza on attribute, see Shein (2018).

²⁶ There is little discussion in the literature on Spinoza and the principle of plenitude. Exceptions include: Lovejoy (1936); Donagan (1989); Lin (2017); Newlands (2018); and Barry (2019).

²⁷ Donagan (1989) raises a similar objection. See also Gueroult's account of '*la substance constituée d'un seul attribut*' in Gueroult (1968), 107–140. Gueroult famously contends that in the *Ethics*, Spinoza first develops an account of substances with one attribute each from 1p1 to 1p8, before then constructing an account of substance with infinite attributes. For a defense of Gueroult's iconoclastic interpretation, see Smith (2014). However, as Smith points out, quoting Donagan, Gueroult's interpretation seems to render the unity of God particularly hard to grasp (672–681). An additional major objection to Gueroult is that, in maintaining the 'incompatibility thesis,' *i.e.*, the view that a substance with one attribute cannot express both the essence of its own attribute and the essence of substance with infinite attributes, Gueroult is led to divorce causality and essence in God, such that the attributes remain united in one substance only by virtue of God's unique causal act. See Schmaltz (forthcoming), ch. 6. I agree with Donagan that Gueroult's reading misplaces the emphasis on divine causality as the solution to the problem of the unity of Spinoza's God. Smith's emendation of Gueroult (682–686) resembles my interpretation of the God response, for Smith emphasizes the particular status of the *ens realissimum* in Spinoza's *argument* for substance monism, along with the fact that its one-of-a-kind infinite nature must be expressible in 'irreducibly different ways' (686). Barry (2019) follows Smith here. Yet I go further than either Smith or Barry in arguing that the notion of God as the *ens realissimum* is central to Spinoza's considered *concepts* of substance and attribute. I warmly thank an anonymous reviewer for showing me how my view is unlike these previous views.

Tschirnhaus gets the details of Spinoza's metaphysics wrong. However, the issue remains pertinent, namely why if attributes confer reality only a single substance with x attributes obtains. As per the evocation of 1p10s, underlying this query is the same problem raised by de Vries, namely how the real distinction of attributes does not make for several substances.

Spinoza replies:

We form the axiom of 1p10s from the idea we have of an absolutely infinite being (as I indicated at the end of that scholium), and not from the fact that there are, or could be, beings which have three, four, *etc.*, attributes [Ep. 64].

Here, Spinoza underscores that the 'axiom' (more reality = more attributes) of 1p10s is formed by the idea of God, and that divine substance's having many attributes cannot be generalized. Thus, the fact that distinct attributes do not constitute distinct substances is because all attributes belong to divine substance; *i.e.*, Spinoza explicitly holds the relation of substance and attribute to be God-specific.

I will now respond to three objections against my understanding of Spinoza's God response.²⁸

Objection 1. The first objection concerns 1d6e.²⁹ Spinoza could be read as allowing for the possibility of attributes constituting the essences of substances that are only infinite their kind. I believe though that Spinoza is using *that* view as a prop in the elaboration of his own theory. His implicit reasoning runs as follows. If *per impossibile* divine substance were *not* absolutely infinite, then we could 'attribute' reality to other substances infinite in their kind. But there is only one substance; therefore, divine substance must be absolutely infinite, or all attributes must pertain to it alone. I think the correspondence with Hudde (Ep. 36) suggests the same. There, Spinoza explicitly maintains that whatever expresses 'absolutely no imperfection' must belong to God's essence, since 'the nature of God does not consist in a definite kind of being, but in a being which is absolutely unlimited,' and thus 'its nature also requires everything which expresses being perfectly, since otherwise its nature would be limited and deficient' (Ep. 36). Once more, Spinoza is emphasizing that consideration of the nature of God is requisite for understanding the concept of attribute as 'expressing being perfectly.'

Objection 2. The second objection again concerns 1d6e, along with the role of expression in 1p10s and the sense in which the concept of an individual attribute is expressive of God's infinite nature. Now, an understanding of attributes as expressive of God's *absolutely* infinite nature would render the conceptual independence of attributes ill-founded, since any one attribute would thus also ground the infinitely many other attributes that belong to divine substance. How then do attributes remain individual *and* God-specific? The best answer to this thorny question is that, quite simply, divine substance and attribute are radically distinct ontological items. For instance, though God's infinite nature can only be expressed by having infinite attributes, and though attributes are also infinitely expressive, infinitely many infinite attributes do *not* belong to attributes in turn; *i.e.*, Spinoza does not identify *all* features of substance and attribute. Spinoza rather believes that a presumably specifiable set of primitive features of divine substance (conceptual independence, eternity, infinity, *etc.*) must belong to any attribute in virtue of God's nature and its infinite expressibility. Underlying this is the assumption that there is only one absolutely infinite divine substance and many attributes infinite in their kind. This Spinozistic line in the sand is no less perplexing for my reading than for any other interpretation of Spinoza's metaphysics.

Objection 3. The final objection concerns the indispensability of God to Spinoza's response to the unity objection and the reasoning on display at 1p10s. The textual basis for tracking a discussion of God in 1p10s is strong. Spinoza specifically cites 1d6 and thus thinks that the discussion at 1p10s fills in the specifics of the view put forth at 1d6 of God as 'a being consisting of infinite attributes, each of which,' *etc.* Admittedly, the definitions of substance and attribute seem to do the work on their own in 1p10d. I read 1p10s therefore as a gloss that both restricts and specifies by means of exhibiting the God response what otherwise remains objectionable and vague. I have argued that the mechanism that makes all attributes 'always be in substance together,' and thus that *prohibits* any attribute from being conceptually posterior to or dependent on any other attribute, is that attributes *express* God's being or reality, which is to say that God is infinitely expressive. This claim is indispensable inasmuch as a Cartesian objector like Lamy can maintain, *pace* Spinoza, that the concepts of substance and attribute construed in general are being mishandled. I do not find Spinoza's

²⁸ I am thankful to an anonymous reviewer for proposing these objections.

²⁹ 1d6e: '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: (*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.'

God response ham-fisted, though it is certainly reflective of his unwavering commitment to recalibrate Cartesian metaphysics of substance and attribute to accommodate an understanding of God's nature.

On Spinoza's considered understanding, God's nature specifically necessitates special facts about substance and attribute, namely that many of the latter can pertain to the former, and that nothing about the conceptual independence of the latter leads to the proliferation of the former. My interpretation is corroborated by the direction Spinoza's views took in maturing. The view of divine expressibility renders otiose Cartesian criticisms about substance and attribute considered *in abstracto*, and Spinoza thus possesses the conceptual resources necessary for responding to the heart of Lamy's contention, namely that substance and attribute simply cannot do the kind of work that Spinoza wants them to do. I do not mean to suggest that Spinoza is entitled to view the scholium as unassailable; rather, I believe that the Cartesian objector simply must dig deeper to get at the root of the matter.

Yet the perspicuous Lamy picks up on the correct interpretation of Spinoza's views. This explains why he thinks Spinoza is the leading 'atheist' philosopher. Spinoza's metaphysics relies *in toto* on theocentric commitments or ground-level convictions about God's nature. Consequently, it is full-bodied 'atheism' in that it is not saddled with additional considerations but is motivated by the sole refusal to countenance widespread views on God.

I will now turn to Lamy's last-ditch effort at refuting Spinoza, namely the criticism that Spinoza's idiosyncratic understanding of God makes Spinoza's entire 'system' question-begging (the bedrock objection).

§4. Conclusion

In a sense, it is normal that Lamy's criticisms prove ineffective. By his own admission, Lamy refuses to grant what is the most basic contention of Spinoza's philosophy on his view: the very definition of God. 'Nothing is less judicious and more at odds with the rules of the geometrical method than Spinoza's Sixth Definition' (Lamy 1696, 251–255), claims Lamy. In a long commentary on 1d6, where Spinoza defines God as 'a being absolutely infinite, *i.e.*, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses and eternal and infinite essence,' Lamy writes:

Definitions being principles of demonstration, it is contrary both to the rules and common sense to suppose that which one intends to demonstrate; this is nonetheless what Spinoza has done in his sixth definition and its explanation.

Spinoza intends to demonstrate that there is but one substance in nature; that God is this unique substance; that all things are only manners of being of this substance, and that that which can fall under its intellect is only a necessary consequence of the divine nature. It is visible that Spinoza supposes all this in his Sixth Definition.

For if God is the absolutely infinite Being, in the way that he includes formally in his essence everything that is truly real and everything which is a mark of perfection and reality, as Spinoza claims, and as is evident by his continual usage of this definition in the demonstrations; if, I say, God is such a Being: the process is empty and goes no further. This would itself make clear that there is nothing real outside of God, neither substance, nor accident; otherwise, one could deny something of the essence of God, and thus, this essence would include some negation, which is what Spinoza does not want at all. It would also make clear that there is only one substance; that all things are only the manners of Being of this substance, and that all that can fall under the intellect, that is to say, all that can be conceived as real, is only a necessary consequence, if not a part, of this substance.

And so, Spinoza could very well have spared himself these troubles in creating this host of demonstrations, axioms, and demonstrations, which he employs to prove his Paradoxes, if he had believed that we would concede the mere definition of God with its commentary; if he did not believe we would concede so much, he should also have spared himself all these troubles; since his System only works thanks to this definition alone, it is evident that in denying it, the troubles are pointless.

But it would be necessary that Theologians seriously revisit their sentiment to concede Spinoza's definition; rather, they commonly teach that we only know God by negation, that is to say, by that which he is not. It is not at all the case that his idea excludes all negation and includes formally all that can be conceived as real.

It is not that I do not also see that this latter sentiment is excessive taken *à la lettre*, and that I am not persuaded that we do not also possess a positive idea of God, by which we know him; but still, it is much more outrageous to maintain, like Spinoza, that the idea of God includes formally all that is real. This is to turn God into the most extravagant animal, the most terrible monster, the most bizarre chimera imaginable (Lamy 1696, 251–255).

There is an irony to Lamy's remarks. As is often true, humor masks unease. On Lamy's view, Spinoza's project is pointless. Why bother writing a lengthy treatise if it all boils down to one claim, take it or leave it? But this suggests that Spinoza's chances of success are not so bad. After all, one need only grant the definition of God to grant all the consequences of Spinoza's philosophy.

The bedrock objection, or Lamy's suggestion that Spinoza merely assumes the coherence of the concept of one substance with many attributes, is difficult to adjudicate.

I see two ways of tackling the bedrock objection. First, I do not think Spinoza would shy away from the allegation that his basic metaphysical project begs the question, and that, if we concede that Spinoza's definition of God describes genuine features about God and is not a merely stipulative definition, all the rest follows. As a matter of fact, Spinoza seems to believe that, upon reflection, anyone should make the needed concessions, since everyone already holds, if only obscurely, Spinoza's idea of God. Consider, for instance, the following claims:

Each idea of each body, or of each singular thing which actually exists, necessarily involves and eternal and infinite essence of God [1p45].

Spinoza further asserts:

The human Mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence [1p47].

The scholium is even more striking, where Spinoza writes:

[W]e see that God's infinite essence and his eternity are known to all [1p47s].

These bold assertions suggest that Spinoza might concede that the groundwork of his metaphysics presupposes its consequences. On this view, what he is doing is only making evident what is already 'known to all,' if only very obscurely.

Second, to fully appreciate Spinoza's peculiar doctrine of substance and attribute as God-specific and the forcefulness of the bedrock objection, we must consider the Spinozistic theory of essence.³⁰

Recall that on Spinoza's view a thing's essence does not ground general necessary features that pertain to a thing by virtue of its natural kind membership. Rather, the essence of a thing grounds specific, nongeneral necessary features, namely everything involved in the adequate conception of the thing. Thus, for Spinoza, everything has its own, one-of-a-kind essence. As he writes:

I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is [NS: also] necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily [NS: also] taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing [2d2].

Consider God's essence. Spinoza holds that the true definition of God will pick out whatever specifiable, presumably one-of-a-kind features belong to God's essence, such as its being infinitely expressive and having infinite conceptually independent attributes. Lamy retorts that this understanding of God's essence, or this definition of God, is willfully wrongheaded. But I suspect that, for Spinoza, God's status as *ens realissimum* should rather put the onus on Cartesian theories of God to explain how God lacks infinite attributes. We can consequently envision Spinoza ultimately retorting to his Cartesian objector that, given how thin the traditional view of God's essence is, it is natural that Lamy fails to derive specific claims, such as the claim that conceptually independent attributes belong to divine substance because divine substance is infinitely expressive, from that conception.

It is additionally beneficial that we have seen that the most accurate interpretation of Spinoza's intent in *Ethics* 1p10 and scholium is that he is motivated by an irreducible philosophical conviction about the nature of God and its unique, one-of-a-kind features, such as the unique, one-of-a-kind fact that it has infinite attributes that 'express' its 'reality or being' and thus must be conceptually independent, too. By the same token, Lamy's criticism of the compatibility of the theory of substance monism with the real distinction of attributes is ineffective. Grounded in the contention that substance and attribute do not tolerate the

³⁰ See the similar conclusion reached by Donagan (1973), 179–181.

treatment Spinoza submits them to, Lamy's unity objection fails to account for the fact that Spinoza does not strictly speaking intend to develop a generic and unspecified metaphysics of substance and attribute. Rather, Spinoza proffers a metaphysics of God, or a philosophical theology, if one prefers.

For Lamy, what is known to all about God is the exact opposite of what Spinoza believes. The consensus view of 'the theologians' carries more weight than Spinoza's intellectual monstrosity. Yet this suggests that Lamy's *own* undertaking is pointless. Why bother refuting an intellectual system in detail if all one need do is refuse to grant its alleged jumping-off point? Thus, we find that strategic considerations motivate the first French Cartesian rebuttal of Spinoza. On the one hand, libertines need reconverting. Spinoza has pulled the wool over their eyes, and Spinoza's trickery demands a rigorous response. On the other hand, publicly dueling with Spinoza's philosophy achieves two broader goals, and perhaps a third private goal, too. It secures the Cartesians from being associated with Spinoza's name. It secures France, *la fille ainée de l'Église*, from the internal threat. And it secures, for the ambitious and pugnacious Lamy himself, an illustrious posterity. On one count, at least, he certainly failed.³¹

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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