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SPINOZA'S
Ethics

A Critical Guide

EDITED BY

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CHAPTER 3

*Two Puzzles about Thought
and Identity in Spinoza*

John Morrison

I. Introduction

When something seems obvious, it's often tempting to think it has always seemed that way. But there are many counterexamples: symphonies that are now celebrated were once denigrated; freedoms that are now sacrosanct were once unrecognized; and theorems that are now foundational were once doubted. So it shouldn't be too surprising to learn that metaphysical principles that are now taken for granted were once violated.

I think the Indiscernibility of Identicals is such a principle. Roughly stated, it's the principle that indiscernibility is necessary for identity. In other words, x and y are identical only if there are no discernible differences. Many contemporary philosophers regard this principle as obvious, if not definitional. It's even an inference rule in many logics (e.g., Barker-Plummer, Barwise, and Etchemendy, *Language, Proof and Logic*, p. 49). But it hasn't always had this status. In other work I argue that there's a tradition, rooted in Aristotle, in which sharing the same essence is sufficient for identity, even when there are discernible differences ("Descartes and Spinoza on Numerical Identity and Time"). For example, young Socrates and old Socrates are identical because they share the same essence, even though there are discernible differences in their heights, weights, and complexions. Philosophers in this tradition would deny that indiscernibility is necessary for identity.

Importantly, many in this tradition would still accept a principle like the Indiscernibility of Identicals. Aristotle says that the most certain of all principles is that "the same attribute cannot *at the same time* belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect" and that this implies that "it is impossible that contrary attributes should belong *at the same time* to the same subject" (*Metaphysics*, Bk 4, 1005b19–20 and 26–27, emphasis added, Trans. Ross, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, p. 46]). He would thus accept the principle: x and y are identical only if there is *no*

time at which they're discernible. There's a lot to say about this tradition, and some question whether philosophers in this tradition would really reject the Indiscernibility of Identicals (e.g., Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, chapter 29). But this isn't the venue to discuss those details and controversies.

I believe that Spinoza, like others in this tradition, would deny that indiscernibility is necessary for identity, and that this is the key to understanding some of his most puzzling claims. My argument will build on an argument from another paper ("Spinoza on Mind, Body, and Numerical Identity"). In that paper, I argue that Spinoza would reject the Indiscernibility of Identicals in response to a puzzle about a mind's relation to its body, in particular how a mind can be identical to its body, even though the mind thinks and does not move, whereas its body moves and does not think. While from a contemporary perspective these claims might seem inconsistent, I think that Spinoza is best interpreted as rejecting the Indiscernibility of Identicals. As I interpret Spinoza, he thinks that a body and its mind are identical because they share the same essence.

In this chapter, I will discuss two related puzzles. The first puzzle involves the mind and the idea of the mind, in particular how they can be identical, even though the mind thinks about bodies and nothing else, whereas the idea of the mind thinks about ideas and nothing else. The second puzzle involves the mind and the idea of a thing that belongs to an unknown attribute, in particular how they can be identical, even though the mind thinks about bodies and nothing else, whereas the idea thinks about things belonging to the unknown attribute and nothing else. I will argue that Spinoza would respond to both puzzles by rejecting the Indiscernibility of Identicals. In particular, that he would say that the relevant minds and ideas are identical because they share the same essence.

This doesn't mean that Spinoza completely severs the links between identity and discernibility. Like those working in the Aristotelian tradition, he might still accept a principle like the Indiscernibility of Identicals. In particular, he might still accept a principle that's restricted not only to times, but also to attributes and what I'll call "levels" and "columns" within the attribute of thought. While from a contemporary perspective these restrictions might seem unprincipled, I'll argue that they follow from a basic feature of Spinoza's metaphysics, in particular the "dimensions" along which a thing can vary while its essence remains the same.

If I'm right, Spinoza's view is simultaneously traditional and innovative. It is traditional in that it links identity to essence, rather than indiscernibility, so that things can be identical even if they're discernible. It is innovative in that it allows things to be identical even if they're discernible *at a given time*. It is also innovative in that it depends on his innovative view of bodies, ideas, and their essences.

Here's the plan: In the next section, I'll summarize my paper on the mind's relation to the body. In the third and fourth sections, I'll consider the puzzles just mentioned. In the fifth section, I'll consider related textual puzzles about unity. And in the conclusion, I'll explain why there might still be a link between identity and indiscernibility.

2. Identity across Attributes

As a way of sharpening the first puzzle, let's focus on Spinoza's favorite philosophical character: Peter. Suppose that Peter woke up one morning and decided to go for a run. Let BODY be the body that went running, and let MIND be its mind. According to Spinoza, BODY is a mode of extension, and MIND is the corresponding mode of thought, in particular the idea that thinks about BODY (by E2p13). There's compelling evidence Spinoza would say that MIND and BODY are numerically identical. There's also compelling evidence he would say that MIND thinks and does not move, whereas BODY moves and does not think. But these claims seem jointly inconsistent with the Indiscernibility of Identicals. How would Spinoza respond?

As mentioned previously, I believe he would reject the Indiscernibility of Identicals. More exactly, I believe he would insist that BODY and MIND are numerically identical, despite discernible differences, because they share the same essence.¹ What is their shared essence? I think it's a *pattern of activity*. As a way of introducing patterns of activity, let's consider BODY and MIND individually.

BODY is composed of smaller bodies (E2PhysDigPr), and those bodies are arranged into a pattern of motion (by E2PhysDigDr). As a helpful simplification, let's suppose (absurdly!) that BODY is composed of only four smaller bodies and that they are arranged into the following pattern of motion:

¹ In his chapter in this volume, Garrett also claims that Spinoza would reject a common understanding of the Indiscernibility of Identicals, but, unlike me, Garrett doesn't claim that BODY and MIND are identical because they share the same essence.

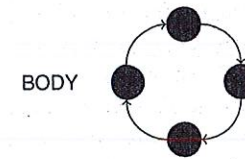


Figure 3.1 BODY's pattern of motion

The arrows indicate which bodies cause which other bodies to move.

According to Spinoza, for every body, there is an idea that thinks about it (by E2p3). MIND is the idea that thinks about BODY (by E2p13). Moreover, the parts of MIND are ordered and connected in the same way as the parts of BODY (by E2p7). Therefore, given what we're supposing about BODY, MIND is composed of four ideas that are arranged into the following pattern of thinking:

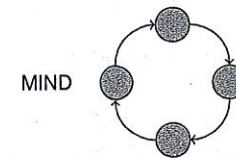


Figure 3.2 MIND's pattern of thinking

The arrows indicate which ideas cause which other ideas to think.

As I hope these diagrams indicate, even though BODY is composed from bodies that move and MIND is composed from ideas that think, they still share the same *pattern of activity*. Unlike patterns of motion and patterns of thought, patterns of activity don't specifically involve bodies or ideas, motions or thoughts. They're less specific. Or, as I think Spinoza would put it, they're less "determinate" (e.g., E1p25c, E1p28). We might diagram the pattern of activity shared by BODY and MIND:

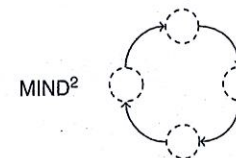


Figure 3.3 BODY's and MIND's pattern of activity

In this diagram, the nodes don't specifically involve bodies or ideas, and the arrows don't specifically involve motions or thoughts. Of course,

BODY and MIND share this pattern of activity only given our (absurd!) assumption that BODY is composed of only four smaller bodies that are arranged into an incredibly simple pattern of motion. More realistically, they share a pattern of activity that involves millions of parts arranged into a far more complex pattern, to enable them to continue existing despite the many threats to their existence, such as hunger, disease, and violence (by E3p6). Nonetheless, given our purposes in this chapter, there's no harm in simplicity.

I expect many scholars will readily agree that BODY and MIND have the same pattern of activity, and that BODY actualizes that pattern in moving bodies, whereas MIND actualizes that pattern in thinking ideas. But I expect many will at least initially resist my suggestion that this pattern is the *essence* of both BODY and MIND, because they'll be inclined to think that it's essential to BODY to move but not to think, whereas it's essential to MIND to think but not to move. So it's worth saying a bit more about this suggestion.

I think that Spinoza and Descartes disagree about the essence of MIND. According to Descartes, the essence of MIND is to think. But according to Spinoza, the essence of MIND is a pattern of activity that isn't specific to thought. To better understand this disagreement, consider an analogous disagreement about statues. According to some philosophers, it is essential to a clay statue to be made of clay. But according to other philosophers, the same statue could have been made from marble, and thus it isn't essential to the statue to be made of clay. The essence of the statue might instead specify only its shape. Likewise, according to Spinoza, it isn't essential to MIND to think, because the same thing could have been actualized by another kind of activity. In fact, according to Spinoza, it is *currently* actualized by another kind of activity, namely moving. Just as some think that the essence of a statue specifies its shape but not its matter, Spinoza thinks that the essence of MIND specifies its pattern of activity but not its specific kind of activity, namely, thinking. Likewise for the essence of BODY.

I realize this interpretation might be surprising. In the other paper, I spend a lot of time developing, motivating, and defending it. In this chapter, I'll just mention some of the evidence that Spinoza is committed to the identity and discernibility of BODY and MIND, mostly as background for our discussion of the other puzzles.

Let's start with Spinoza's commitment to the identity of BODY and MIND. Spinoza says that a body and its mind are "one and the same thing" (E2p7s). This expression traditionally means numerical identity. For

example, Descartes writes in the *Second Replies* that, "Whether what we call mind and body are one and the same substance, or two different substances, is a question which will have to be dealt with later on" (AT VII: 161 | CSM II: 114). That "one and the same thing" means numerical identity is also indicated by the expression itself, with "same" [*eademque*] indicating that it's about identity, "one" [*una*] indicating that it's about numerical identity, and "thing" [*res*] indicating that it's about an individual rather than a kind, activity, or some other metaphysical category (he uses "individual" for this purpose in E2p21s).

Let's next consider Spinoza's commitment to the discernibility of BODY and MIND. He says that just as there is "no common measure between the will and motion, there is also no comparison between the power, or forces, of the mind and those of the body" (5Pref | G II 280/13–15). Some claim that this merely reflects a limitation on the concepts we use to think about BODY and MIND, respectively. But, for reasons I discuss in "Spinoza on Mind, Body, and Numerical Identity," I'm inclined to think it reflects a metaphysical difference that goes beyond the ways in which we conceive of BODY and MIND, so that we couldn't compare their powers even if we were using different concepts. Spinoza mentions other, related differences between BODY and MIND: that they have different causes and effects (E3p2); that only bodies tremble, sob, and laugh (E3p59s); and that only minds perceive, believe, and feel (e.g., E5p39s, E3p2s[i]). Once again, as I'm inclined to interpret Spinoza, these aren't merely conceptual differences. Thus, I think that Spinoza is committed to the discernibility of BODY and MIND.

There's of course much more to say about these commitments, but I hope this is enough for present purposes.

Our interpretation explains both the identity and discernibility of MIND and BODY. They are identical because they share the same essence. They are discernible because they actualize that essence in different ways; MIND actualizes it in thinking ideas, whereas BODY actualizes it in moving bodies. Or, as I think Spinoza would put it, MIND *expresses* that essence in thinking ideas, whereas BODY *expresses* it in moving bodies. Thus, when he says that a mind and its body are the same thing "expressed in two ways" (E2p7s), I think he's saying that they are two ways of actualizing the same essence. I think he's saying something similar when he says that each thing follows from God's essence in "infinite ways [*modi*]" (E1p16). In particular, I think he's saying that each thing is actualized in each of God's infinitely many attributes. Just as someone in the Aristotelean tradition might say that Socrates exists in many ways, because

he exists in a different way at each time, I think that Spinoza is saying that each thing exists in many ways, because it exists in a different way in each attribute.

Spinoza never mentions the Indiscernibility of Identicals, and he certainly never endorses or rejects it. But given his commitments to the identity and discernibility of MIND and BODY, and that he might be working in a tradition that didn't take this principle for granted, I predict that he'd reject it.

This doesn't mean that Spinoza completely severs the link between identity and indiscernibility. He could still accept a principle that's restricted to times and attributes. According to this principle, x and y are identical only if there is no time and attribute at which they're discernible. I think that both restrictions have similar explanations. Let's start with the restriction to times. Over the span of a day, BODY might be running in the morning and resting at night. Likewise, over the span of its lifetime, it might be upright when young and crouched when old. Nonetheless, it is always the same body, because it always has the same pattern of activity, and thus the same essence. More generally, given Spinoza's view of essences – (i) that they're patterns of activity, (ii) that these patterns of activity can remain the same over time, and (iii) that sharing the same essence is sufficient for identity – the same body can exist in different ways at different times, including as running in the morning and resting at night, and as upright in youth and crouched in old age. We'd thus expect him to deny that identity requires indiscernibility across times. I'm suggesting that Spinoza has a similar approach to identity across attributes. In particular, given his view of essences – (i) that they're patterns of activity, (ii) that these patterns of activity can remain the same across attributes, and (iii) that sharing the same essence is sufficient for identity – the same thing can exist in different ways in different attributes, including as a body in the attribute of extension and as a mind in the attribute of thought. For example, Peter exists as BODY in the attribute of extension and as MIND in the attribute of thought. If I'm right, we'd expect Spinoza to deny that identity requires indiscernibility across attributes.

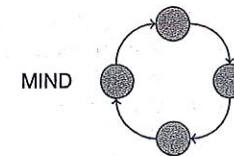
In the following sections, I will extend this interpretation to Spinoza's puzzling claims about ideas and their relations to each other. I thereby hope to further support this interpretation by showing that it explains more than just Spinoza's claims about the mind's relation to the body. I also hope to improve our understanding of two important but obscure parts of Spinoza's metaphysics.

3. Identity across Levels within Thought

The second puzzle is about identity across "levels" within the attribute of thought. Recall that, according to Spinoza, for every body, there is an idea that thinks about it. This is an instance of a more general principle: for every *thing*, there is an idea that thinks about it (E2p3). This principle applies to the ideas themselves (see E2p2od). As a result, for every *idea*, there is an idea that thinks about it. The result is infinitely many "levels" within the attribute of thought. For example, there is an idea of MIND that's one level up. Let's call it MIND². There is also an idea of MIND² that's yet another level up. Let's call it MIND³. Iterating, there's MIND⁴, MIND⁵, and so on. According to Spinoza, these are all modes of thought. I'll say more about ideas at higher levels in a moment. But for now let's just consider MIND and MIND².

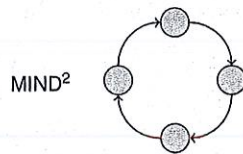
Here's the puzzle: There's compelling evidence Spinoza would say that MIND and MIND² are numerically identical. There's also compelling evidence he would acknowledge a difference, namely, that MIND thinks about bodies and nothing else, whereas MIND² thinks about minds at the first level and nothing else. But these claims seem jointly inconsistent with the Indiscernibility of Identicals. How would Spinoza respond?

As mentioned earlier, I believe that Spinoza would again reject the Indiscernibility of Identicals. More exactly, I believe that he would insist that MIND and MIND² are numerically identical, despite discernible differences, because they share the same essence, namely, the same pattern of activity. Recall that for simplicity we're assuming that MIND is composed of four ideas and that these ideas are arranged into the following pattern of thinking:



(Figure 3.2 repeats here)

For every idea, there is an idea that thinks about it (by E2p3). By stipulation, MIND² is the idea that thinks about MIND. The parts of MIND² are ordered and connected in the same way as the parts of MIND (by E2p7; see E2p2od). Therefore, given what we're supposing about MIND, MIND² is composed of four second-level ideas that are arranged into the following pattern of thinking:

Figure 3.4 MIND²'s pattern of thinking

As I hope these diagrams make clear, even though MIND is composed of ideas that think about BODY, and MIND² is composed of ideas that think about MIND, they still share the same *pattern of activity*, in particular the pattern diagramed in the previous section. In that diagram, the nodes don't specifically involve first-level ideas or second-level ideas, and the arrows don't specifically involve thoughts about bodies or thoughts about ideas.

I expect most scholars will readily agree that MIND and MIND² have the same pattern of activity, and that MIND actualizes that pattern in thoughts about BODY, whereas MIND² actualizes that pattern in thoughts about MIND. Or, as I think Spinoza would put it, MIND expresses that pattern in thoughts about BODY, whereas MIND² expresses that pattern in thoughts about MIND.

More controversially, I'm suggesting that this pattern is the essence of MIND and MIND². In support of this interpretation, let's consider Spinoza's commitment to the identity and discernibility of MIND and MIND². The most important passages are in the following proposition, demonstration, and scholium:

E2p21: The idea of the mind is united to the mind in the same way the mind is united to the body.

Demonstration: We have shown that the mind is united to the body from the fact that the body is the object of the mind (see 2p12 and 2p13); and so by the same reasoning the idea of the mind must be united with its own object, that is, with the mind itself, in the same way as the mind is united with the body, q.e.d.

Scholium: This proposition is understood far more clearly from what is said in 2p7s; for there we have shown that the idea of the body and the body, that is (by 2p13), the mind and the body are one and the same individual, which is conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension. So the idea of the mind and the mind itself are one and the same thing, which is conceived under one and the same attribute, namely, thought. The idea of the mind, I say, and the mind itself follow in God from the same power of thinking and by the same necessity. For the idea of the mind, that is, the idea of the idea, is nothing but the form of the idea insofar as this is considered as a mode of thinking without relation to the object. For as soon as someone knows something, he thereby knows that

he knows it, and at the same time knows that he knows that he knows, and so on, to infinity. But more on these matters later.

In this scholium Spinoza says that a mind and the idea of the mind are "one and the same thing." He would thus say that MIND and MIND² are "one and the same thing." As noted earlier, this expression traditionally means numerical identity. For this reason, I think he would say that MIND and MIND² are numerically identical. Corroboration comes later, in E4p8, when he says that this scholium establishes that an idea of a mind is not really distinct from the mind itself.

There's also a systematic reason why he *should* say that MIND and MIND² are numerically identical, at least if he'd say that BODY and MIND are numerically identical. In particular, take whatever argument commits Spinoza to the identity of BODY and MIND. A parallel argument will commit him to the identity of MIND and MIND². For example, if I'm right that BODY and MIND are identical because they share the same pattern of activity, then MIND and MIND² must be identical because they too share the same pattern of activity.

There's a second systematic reason why he should say that MIND and MIND² are numerically identical. It will take several pages to introduce this second reason, but I think it's worth the effort.

Consider the overall pattern of motion within the attribute of extension, a pattern that includes all bodies at all times. Corresponding to each of these bodies is a first-level idea within the attribute of thought (by E2p3). The pattern of thinking of these first-level ideas is the same as the pattern of motion of bodies (by E2p7). To simplify the discussion, let's continue to focus on BODY, treating it as representative of bodies within the attribute of extension, and also on MIND, treating it as representative of first-level ideas within the attribute of thought. We might depict them:

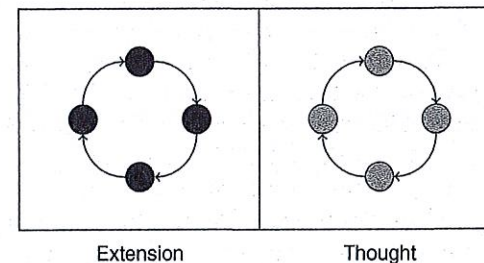


Figure 3.5 The pattern of motion of all bodies and the pattern of thought of all first-level ideas of bodies

Assuming that second-level ideas are numerically distinct from the first-level ideas, we can add MIND² to our diagram, treating it as representative of all second-level ideas:

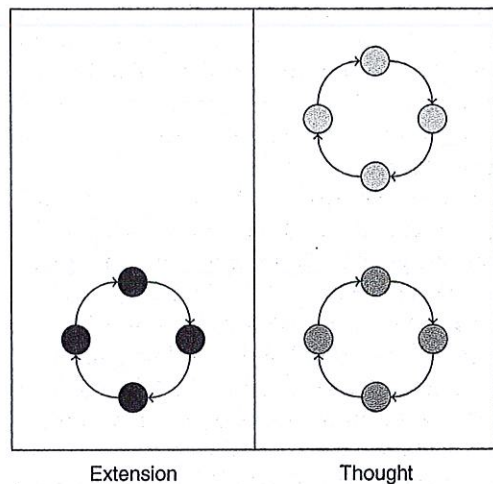


Figure 3.6 The pattern of motion of all bodies and the pattern of thought of all first-level and second-level ideas of bodies

Just as the pattern of thinking of first-level ideas is the same as the pattern of moving of bodies, the pattern of thinking of second-level ideas is the same as the pattern of thinking of first-level ideas (by E2p7; see E2p20d). Thus, just as there are no causal interactions between first-level ideas and bodies (see E3p2), there are no causal interactions between second-level ideas and first-level ideas. This creates an asymmetry between the attribute of extension and the attribute of thought. For example, consider all the bodies that don't causally interact with BODY. The first-level ideas of these bodies don't causally interact with MIND. But, whereas everything else in the attribute of extension causally interacts with BODY, there are many other things in the attribute of thought that don't causally interact with MIND, in particular all second-level ideas. While there is only one causal "channel" within the attribute of extension, there are two causal "channels" within the attribute of thought, creating an asymmetry between these attributes.

A geometrical analogy might help: if we're taking into account which points are connected to which other points, the ordering of points along a single line isn't the same as the ordering of points along two parallel lines. Every point on the single line is connected to every other point, whereas

every point on one of the parallel lines is unconnected to all the points on the other parallel line.

This asymmetry increases once we take into account third-level ideas, fourth-level ideas, and so on. These higher-level ideas result in infinitely many parallel causal channels within the attribute of thought, further differentiating the ordering of bodies in the attribute of extension and the ordering of ideas in the attribute of thought. Returning to our geometrical analogy: if we're taking into account which points are connected to which other points, the ordering of points along a single line isn't the same as the ordering of points along infinitely many parallel lines.²

Why is this a problem? Because Spinoza insists that there is no such asymmetry in their causal ordering. As he puts it, "whether we conceive of 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, that is, the same things follow one another" (E2p7s).

This problem seems intractable if MIND and MIND² are numerically distinct, regardless of what other metaphysical relations they bear. For example, even if they are parts of the same whole, their lack of causal interaction is still part of the attribute of thought's pattern of thinking, and thus the attribute of thought's pattern of thinking still wouldn't be the same as the attribute of extension's pattern of moving. If anything, this would just increase the discrepancy, because there'd be a part-whole structure within the attribute of thought that doesn't correspond to a part-whole structure within the material world.

I conclude that Spinoza should say that MIND and MIND² are numerically identical. In that case, the problem doesn't arise, because when we consider second-order ideas together with all the first-order ideas, we're not considering *additional* ideas. We're considering the same ideas *twice*. And that's illegitimate when comparing the pattern of activity in the attributes of extension and thought. It would be like considering all

² It is sometimes claimed that, if there are ideas at infinitely many levels, there are "more" ideas than bodies. See, e.g., Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, p. 154. According to Curley, this by itself violates E2p7. See Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, pp. 144–150; Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 64. However, since there are infinitely many ideas and bodies, establishing that there are "more" ideas than bodies would depend on Spinoza's conception of infinity, in particular whether he thinks there are grades of infinity, and, if so, how those grades are distinguished. We shouldn't assume that, like us, he'd distinguish grades of infinity using one-to-one correspondences. The problem I'm describing doesn't depend on any assumptions about the number of ideas and bodies. That being said, I don't think I'm describing a problem that will surprise anyone. What's perhaps surprising is my solution, namely that ideas at different levels are identical yet discernible.

bodies twice, thereby giving BODY double the number of causes as well as double the number of effects, thereby changing the pattern of motion within the attribute of extension. Thus, when diagramming the activity within the attributes of extension and thought, it is a mistake to include both first-level ideas and second-level ideas, as though they are distinct items, and moreover ad hoc to consider ideas twice while considering bodies only once.

It might help to consider an analogous point about times. Suppose we're trying to figure out whether the energy level of the universe is increasing. We first add together the energy level of every object that exists in the present. We then add together the energy level of every object that will exist in one second and every object that will exist in two seconds. Because many of the same objects will exist at both future times, this approach would lead us to count their energy levels twice, and thus to erroneously conclude that the energy of the universe is about to double. The obvious mistake was to compare the sum of the energy level of every object in the present with the sum of the energy level of every object at two times. Likewise, the mistake in our discussion of the attributes of thought and extension was to compare the sum of the activity of every object in the attribute of extension with the sum of the activity of every object at two different levels within the attribute of thought, because the same ideas exist at both levels.

If I'm right, the attributes of extension and thought are symmetrical, in that, for a given effect, there aren't additional things in the attribute of thought that are causally unconnected to it. There are still some asymmetries, for example, that a given thing exists in infinitely many ways in the attribute of thought, whereas it exists in only one way in the attribute of extension. But these other asymmetries are compatible with what he says in E2p7s. In that scholium he merely insists that there is "one and the same connection of causes," thereby ruling out causal asymmetries, but not asymmetries of other kinds.

We just considered textual and systematic evidence that Spinoza is committed to the identity of MIND and MIND². Let's next consider his commitment to their discernibility.

In the previous passage, Spinoza says that the idea of an idea is "nothing but the form of the idea insofar as this is considered as a mode of thinking without any relation to the object." If we're considering MIND without any relation to its object, we're considering MIND without considering its relation to BODY, and thus presumably without considering BODY at all. Since this is what MIND² thinks about, Spinoza seems to be saying that it thinks about MIND without thinking about BODY. In contrast, Spinoza

says that MIND thinks about BODY (E2p13). Thus, MIND and MIND² are discernible.

This difference ramifies. Because MIND thinks about BODY, it thinks about other bodies as well, in particular the bodies that causally interact with BODY (E2p16). In contrast, because MIND² doesn't think about BODY, it doesn't think about any other bodies. Instead, it thinks only about other minds (for reasons that parallel the demonstration of E2p16). Thus, while MIND thinks only about bodies, MIND² thinks only about the minds of bodies.

I conclude that Spinoza is committed to the identity and discernibility of MIND and MIND². In fact, he's committed to these claims by what he says *in the very same paragraph*; the first two sentences of the scholium commit him to their identity, and the last two sentences commit himself to their discernibility. Our interpretation explains these commitments. MIND and MIND² are identical because they share the same essence. They are discernible because they actualize that essence in different ways. In Spinoza's terminology, they are the same thing, expressed in two ways.

Despite their discernibility, MIND and MIND² are similar in at least one respect: they both think. Because attributes are kinds of activity, this similarity implies that MIND and MIND² belong to the same attribute, namely the attribute of thought. Thus, in at least this respect, MIND is more similar to MIND² than to BODY (see Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, p. 192).

Our interpretation doesn't just explain Spinoza's commitments to the identity and discernibility of MIND and BODY. It also explains why these commitments are consistent. In particular, if Spinoza links identity to essence, rather than indiscernibility, he might give up the Indiscernibility of Identicals, and thus consistently maintain the identity and discernibility of MIND and MIND². Once again, this doesn't mean that Spinoza completely severs the link between identity and indiscernibility. He could still accept a principle that's restricted to levels. According to this principle, x and y are identical only if there is no time, attribute, and level at which they're discernible (where the restriction to a level is vacuous for attributes other than thought). In that case, MIND and MIND² can be identical, despite discernible differences, because they are ways of existing specific to different levels. Like attributes more generally, he might be thinking about variation across levels as like variation across times.

As further support for this interpretation, note that it also explains why he says that MIND² is "nothing but the *form* of the idea insofar as it is

considered as a mode of thinking without any relation to the object" (E1p21s, emphasis added). Spinoza uses "form" and "essence" interchangeably (e.g., E2p10, E2PhysDigL4, E2p33d, E4Pref). He's therefore saying, or at least implying, that MIND and MIND² share the same essence. More exactly, he's saying, or at least implying, that MIND and MIND² share the same essence, except that MIND² actualizes that essence insofar as it considers MIND without considering BODY. In other words, MIND² actualizes that essence in thoughts about MIND rather than BODY.

We focused on MIND and MIND². But our interpretation extends to all levels within the attribute of thought. MIND, MIND², MIND³, MIND⁴, and so on are identical because they share the same essence, namely the same pattern of activity. They are discernible because MIND expresses that pattern in thoughts about BODY, MIND² expresses that pattern in thoughts about MIND, MIND³ expresses that pattern in thoughts about MIND², MIND⁴ expresses that pattern in thought about MIND³, and so on, up through the infinitely many levels within the attribute of thought.

4. Identity across Columns within Thought

We first considered a puzzle about identity across attributes. It involved MIND and BODY. We then considered a related puzzle about identity across levels within the attribute of thought. It involved MIND and MIND². Let's finally consider a puzzle about identity across "columns" within the attribute of thought,³ in particular a puzzle about the minds of things belonging to other attributes. It will involve MIND and what I'll call MIND-UNKNOWN.

Here's the background: Spinoza says that God has infinitely many attributes (E1d6). But he also says that we know only two attributes: thought and extension (E2a5). There are some interpreters who insist these might be God's only attributes, and that when Spinoza says that God has infinitely many attributes he just means that God has all the attributes that might belong to a substance (see, e.g., Wolf, "Spinoza's Conception of the Attributes of Substance," pp. 188–191; Kline, "On the Infinity of Spinoza's Attributes"; Donagan, "Spinoza's Dualism," pp. 93–94; Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, pp. 75–79, is more tentative). But, like many others, I'm convinced that Spinoza is textually and systematically committed to more than two attributes. For example, consider again Spinoza's claim that "whether we conceive of Nature under the

³ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 184, also describes them as columns.

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, that is, the same things follow one another" (E2p7s). The clause "or under any other attribute" suggests that there are attributes besides thought and extension. There's more to say in support of this interpretation, but I don't have anything to add to what's already been said (see, e.g., Ariew, "The Infinite in Spinoza's Philosophy"; Melamed, "The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics," pp. 12–15; Melamed, "Hasdai Crescas and Spinoza on Actual Infinity and the Infinity of God's Attributes," pp. 211–214; Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, pp. 167–177).

Assuming there are other attributes, within each of these other attributes there must be a mode with the same pattern of activity as BODY. This is a consequence of the fact that all of the attributes have "one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes." Let UNKNOWN be such a mode in one of the other, unknown attributes. Because for every thing, there is an idea in the attribute of thought that thinks about that thing, there is an idea in the attribute of thought that thinks about UNKNOWN (by E2p3). Let's call it MIND-UNKNOWN.

Here's the puzzle: There's compelling evidence that Spinoza would say that MIND is numerically identical to MIND-UNKNOWN. There's also compelling evidence that he would say that MIND thinks only about BODY and other bodies, whereas MIND-UNKNOWN thinks only about UNKNOWN and other modes of the relevant unknown attribute. But these claims seem jointly inconsistent with the Indiscernibility of Identicals. How would Spinoza respond?

This puzzle is similar to a puzzle that Tschirnhaus presses in his correspondence with Spinoza (Ep63 | G IV 274a/20–275a/10; Ep65 | G IV 2791–29). Tschirnhaus asks: how can MIND think about BODY, without also thinking about UNKNOWN, given that BODY and UNKNOWN are identical? The disadvantage of Tschirnhaus's puzzle is that it entangles us in a thorny question about the intensionality of thought. For example, according to some philosophers, we can think *de dicto* about Peter as a fisherman, without thinking *de dicto* about Simon as a fisherman, even though Peter and Simon are identical (see Cumming, "Names"). If Spinoza agreed with these philosophers, Tschirnhaus's puzzle might vanish, because MIND could think *de dicto* about BODY without also thinking *de dicto* about UNKNOWN. And it would take a lot of work to sort out whether Spinoza would agree with these philosophers. Fortunately, the puzzle I'm suggesting preserves the core of Tschirnhaus's puzzle without entangling us in the same issue.

How would Spinoza respond to our puzzle? Once again, I believe he would give up the Indiscernibility of Identicals. More exactly, I believe he would insist that MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN are numerically identical, despite discernible differences, because they share the same essence, namely the same pattern of activity. Recall our diagram of the four bodies and their contribution to BODY's pattern of motion, as well as our diagram of the four corresponding first-level ideas and their contribution to MIND's pattern of thinking:

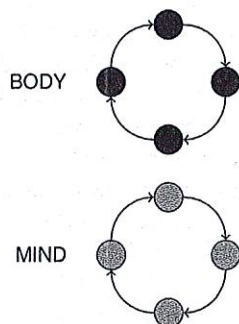


Figure 3.7 BODY's pattern of motion and MIND's pattern of thinking

By stipulation, UNKNOWN has the same pattern of activity as BODY. We can therefore depict it:

The arrows indicate which things in the unknown attribute causes which other things to engage in whatever activity is definitive of the unknown attribute.

MIND-UNKNOWN must have the same pattern of activity as UNKNOWN, because its parts are ordered and connected in the same way (by E2p7). We can therefore depict it:

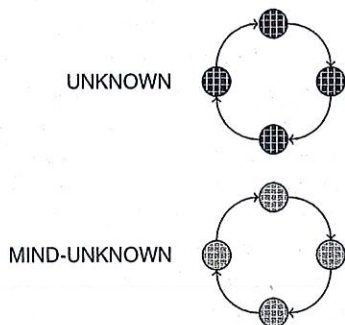


Figure 3.8 UNKNOWN's pattern of activity and MIND-UNKNOWN's pattern of thinking

As I hope these diagrams make clear, MIND, BODY, UNKNOWN, and MIND-UNKNOWN all share the same pattern of activity. I'm suggesting that this pattern of activity is their shared essence.

In support of this interpretation, let's consider Spinoza's commitment to the identity and discernibility of MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN. The best textual evidence of their identity comes from his exchange with Tschirnhaus. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza claims that from God's essence each thing follows in infinite ways [*modi*] (E1p16). For example, Peter follows from God's essence as BODY and as UNKNOWN. Tschirnhaus asks about the *ideas* of the infinite ways (Ep65 | G IV 279/25–29). Spinoza responds that these are just further ways in which a thing follows from God's essence (Ep66 | G IV 280/1–15; see also the first sentence of E2p3d). For example, Peter also follows from God's essence as MIND and as MIND-UNKNOWN. The only difference is that, as ideas, MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN are both contained in the infinite intellect of God.

I'm suggesting that these "ways" aren't distinct things. Instead, they're just different ways in which the same thing exists. If I'm right, then MIND, BODY, UNKNOWN, and MIND-UNKNOWN are all identical. While this textual evidence won't convince everyone, it's still worth pointing out that, once we start interpreting Spinoza's talk of "ways" as I'm suggesting, there are passages that commit him to the numerical identity of MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN.

There's also a systematic reason why Spinoza should say that MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN are identical, at least if I'm right that BODY and MIND are numerically identical and that MIND and MIND² are numerically identical. In particular, take whatever argument commits Spinoza to these identities. A parallel argument will commit him to the identity of MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN. For example, if I'm right that these identities follow from sharing the same pattern of activity, then MIND and MIND² must be identical because they too share the same pattern of activity.

There's a second systematic reason why Spinoza should say that MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN are identical, similar to the systematic reason developed in the previous section. In particular, if MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN are numerically distinct, then the pattern of thinking within the attribute of thought would not be the same as the pattern of motion within the attribute of extension, even though Spinoza is committed to their being the same (by E2p7s). Consider again the overall pattern of motion of bodies within the attribute of extension and the overall pattern of first-level ideas within the attribute of thought. To simplify the discussion, let's again treat BODY as representative of bodies, MIND

as representative of first-level ideas, and now MIND-UNKNOWN as representative of first-level ideas of things belonging to the unknown attribute. We might depict them:

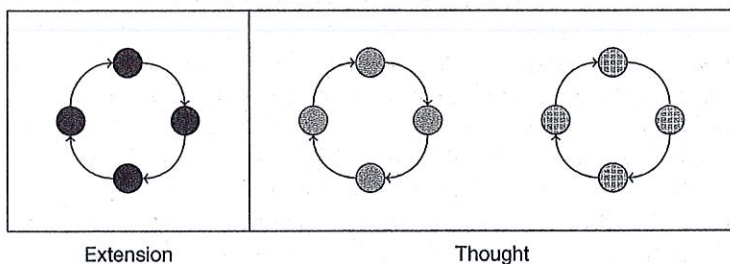


Figure 3.9 The pattern of motion of all bodies, and the pattern of thought of all first-level ideas of bodies and all first-level ideas of things in the unknown attributes

There are no causal interactions between the ideas of bodies and the ideas of things belonging to other attributes. As he says to Tschirnhaus, “each of the infinite ideas has no connection with any other” (Ep66 | G IV 280/11–12). He says this follows from E2p7s and E1p10, and thus is presumably saying that there are no *causal* connections between these ideas, because that’s the kind of connection under discussion in those passages (for more context, see E2p6d and TIE 41).

This creates another asymmetry between the attribute of extension and the attribute of thought. For example, consider all the bodies that don’t causally interact with BODY. The ideas of these bodies don’t causally interact with MIND. But, whereas everything else in the attribute of extension causally interacts with BODY, there are many other things in the attribute of thought that don’t causally interact with MIND, in particular ideas of things belonging to other attributes. Once again, while there is only one causal “channel” within the attribute of extension, there are two causal “channels” within the attribute of thought. This asymmetry increases once we take into account ideas of things belonging to *all* the unknown attributes.

This problem seems intractable if MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN are numerically distinct, regardless of what other metaphysical relations they bear. For example, even if they are parts of the same whole, their lack of causal interaction is still part of the pattern of thinking within the attribute of thought, and thus the pattern of thinking within the attribute of thought still wouldn’t be the same as the pattern of motion within the attribute of extension.

Once again, I think Spinoza should say that MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN are numerically identical. It would then be illegitimate to consider ideas of things in the unknown attributes as something *additional*, and also ad hoc to consider these ideas twice while considering bodies only once.

We just considered textual and systematic evidence that Spinoza is committed to the identity of MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN. Let’s next consider his commitment to their discernibility. Spinoza denies that MIND thinks about UNKNOWN. He treats it as axiomatic that “We neither feel nor perceive any singular things [NS: or anything of *Natura naturata*], except bodies and modes of thinking” (E2a5). Likewise, he writes to Tschirnhaus that “the human Mind, *or* the idea of the human Body, neither involves nor expresses any other attributes of God besides these two” (Ep64 | G IV 277/29–278/2). In contrast, there must be an idea that thinks about UNKNOWN (by E2p3), and by stipulation MIND-UNKNOWN is that idea (see also KV App 2 | G I 120/5–6; Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, pp. 166–167).

Thus, Spinoza is committed to both the identity and discernibility of MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN. Our interpretation explains these commitments: MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN are identical because they share the same essence, namely, the same pattern of activity. They are discernible because MIND actualizes the pattern in thoughts about BODY, whereas MIND-UNKNOWN actualizes the pattern in thoughts about UNKNOWN.

More generally, our interpretation explains the identity and discernibility of BODY, MIND, MIND², UNKNOWN, and MIND-UNKNOWN. They are identical because they share the same essence, namely the same pattern of activity. They are discernible because they actualize this essence in different ways: in BODY as a pattern of motion, in MIND as a pattern of thoughts about motion, in MIND² as a pattern of thoughts about thoughts about motion, in UNKNOWN as a pattern of whatever kind of activity is characteristic of its attribute, and in MIND-UNKNOWN as a pattern of thoughts about this other kind of activity.

Previous scholars have suggested that BODY, MIND, MIND-UNKNOWN, and so on are “facets” or “aspects” of the same thing (see Friedman, “Spinoza’s Problem of ‘Other Minds’”; Melamed, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics of Thought”; Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, chapter 6). But it has been rightly objected that these scholars haven’t told us enough about the underlying metaphysics (see Lin, “Yitzhak Melamed’s *Spinoza’s Metaphysics: Substance and Thought*,” p. 203; Melamed, “Reply to Colin

Marshall and Martin Lin," pp. 217–18). Our interpretation fills in the missing details.

Once again, this doesn't mean that Spinoza completely severs the link between identity and indiscernibility. He might still accept a principle that's restricted to columns within the attribute of thought. According to this principle, x and y are identical only if there is no time, attribute, level, and column at which they're discernible (where the restriction to a level and column is vacuous for attributes other than thought). Together with attributes and levels, he might be thinking about variation across columns as like variation across times.

5. Identity and Unity

As further support for our interpretation, let's consider four related textual puzzles.

The first puzzle is about the union of MIND and BODY. As noted before, in E2p7s, Spinoza says that MIND and BODY are numerically identical. But then later, in E2p12 and E2p13, he says that MIND thinks about BODY and only BODY, and that *this* is what allows us to "understand not only that the human mind is united to the body, but also what should be understood by the union of mind and body" (E2p13s). That's puzzling. If MIND and BODY are unified in that they're identical, how does the fact that MIND thinks about BODY help us understand their union? Consider that representation doesn't entail identity. For example, "Peter" represents Peter, but the word and the man seem to be united in a much weaker sense than identity. So, if the unity of MIND² and MIND is their identity, how does the fact that MIND thinks about BODY contribute anything to our understanding of their unity?

The second puzzle is about the union of MIND² and MIND. In E2p21, Spinoza says that MIND² is united to MIND in the same way as MIND is united to BODY. In the demonstration he says this is because, just as MIND thinks about BODY, so also MIND² thinks about MIND. But then in the scholium he says that this proposition is "understood far more clearly" from the fact that, just as MIND is identical to BODY, so also MIND² is identical to MIND. That's puzzling. If MIND² is united to MIND just in the sense that it thinks about MIND, then it is united to MIND just in the sense that "Peter" is united to Peter. How is this union understood far more clearly from the fact that MIND and MIND² are identical? Consider that identity doesn't entail representation. To choose an example external to Spinoza's metaphysics, a particle is identical to

itself, but it doesn't follow that it thinks about itself. To choose an example internal to Spinoza's metaphysics, BODY is identical to MIND, but it doesn't follow that BODY thinks about MIND. So, if the unity of MIND² and MIND is just that one represents the other, how does their identity contribute anything to our understanding of their unity?

The third puzzle is about the disunity of MIND and UNKNOWN. Spinoza says that MIND and BODY are unified into a "man" (E2p13c). But in a letter to Tschirnhaus, he says that MIND isn't the mind of UNKNOWN, thereby denying that MIND is united to UNKNOWN into anything like a man (Ep66 | G IV 280/10–12). Thus, MIND is united to BODY in a different sense than it is united to UNKNOWN. But, for the reasons discussed earlier, I think Spinoza is committed to saying that MIND is identical to both BODY and UNKNOWN. So why isn't MIND unified to UNKNOWN in the same sense it is united to BODY?

The fourth puzzle is about the disunity of MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN. Spinoza says that MIND and MIND² are unified into a "human mind" (E2p22d). But in the letter to Tschirnhaus he denies that MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN are the same mind, claiming that they "cannot constitute one and the same Mind of a singular thing" (Ep66 | G IV 280/9–10). Thus, MIND is united to MIND² in a different sense than it is united to MIND-UNKNOWN. But, for the reasons discussed previously, I think Spinoza is committed to saying that MIND is identical to both MIND² and MIND-UNKNOWN. So why isn't MIND unified to MIND-UNKNOWN in the same sense it is united to MIND²?

These are difficult puzzles. If Spinoza accepted the Indiscernibility of Identicals, they might even be unsolvable, because numerically identical minds would have to represent the same things in the same ways. For example, if MIND and MIND² are numerically identical, and MIND represents BODY, then the Indiscernibility of Identicals would imply that MIND² also represents BODY (see Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 186). Likewise, the Indiscernibility of Identicals would imply that MIND represents UNKNOWN, and MIND-UNKNOWN represents BODY. As a result, it would be hard to make sense of Spinoza's claims about the unities and disunities of these ideas.

This might be why some are drawn to the view that "one and the same thing" doesn't mean numerical identity. If MIND, BODY, MIND², and UNKNOWN aren't identical, then MIND and BODY might be unified merely in that MIND thinks about BODY, MIND² and MIND might be unified merely in that MIND² thinks about MIND, and MIND and UNKNOWN might be disunified merely in that MIND doesn't think

about UNKNOWN. But, for reasons mentioned in Section 2 and developed in greater detail elsewhere, I think it's implausible to deny that "one and the same thing" means numerical identity.

Our interpretation solves all four puzzles in another way. In particular, if Spinoza gives up the Indiscernibility of Identicals, there might be kinds of unity stronger than numerical identity. Consider MIND. Even though it is identical to both BODY and UNKNOWN, it is more unified with BODY, because it thinks about BODY without thinking about UNKNOWN. Likewise, consider MIND². Even though it is identical to both MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN, it is more unified with MIND, because it thinks about MIND without thinking about MIND-UNKNOWN. Thus, to understand the union of MIND and BODY and the union of MIND² and MIND, we need to take into account not only their identity, but also that one thinks about the other. This is why we can't understand the union of MIND and BODY until E2p13, why we don't clearly understand the union of MIND² and MIND until E2p21s, why MIND is not united to UNKNOWN in the same way it is united to BODY, and why MIND is not united to MIND-UNKNOWN in the same way it is united to MIND².

According to our interpretation, Peter exists as BODY, MIND, MIND², UNKNOWN, and MIND-UNKNOWN. But some of these ways of existing are more unified than others, so that only some of them count as a human being (BODY, MIND, MIND²), and only those also in the attribute of thought count as a human mind (MIND, MIND²). Similarly, Peter exists in many ways over time, but only some of them count as a child, and only some of those count as a toddler.

I'm not claiming that this is the only solution; that would require a much longer discussion. But our interpretation's ability to solve these puzzles is another consideration in its favor.

6. Conclusion

I earlier suggested that, while Spinoza would give up the Indiscernibility of Identicals, he needn't completely sever the link between indiscernibility and identity, because he might accept a similar principle with additional restrictions. In particular, he might say that x and y are identical only if there is no time, attribute, level, and column at which they're discernible (where the restriction to a level and column is vacuous for attributes other than thought). There's evidence that Spinoza accepts a principle along these lines. He argues that the human body isn't an extended substance

because the human body is divisible whereas an extended substance is indivisible (E1p13c, E2p10s). This presupposes a link between identity and indiscernibility.

From a contemporary perspective, these restrictions might seem unprincipled, and as a result Spinoza's view might seem uninteresting. To see why, suppose a contemporary philosopher listed all the claims that he wanted to be true, and then, when confronted with a contradiction, merely restricted whatever logical or metaphysical principles were responsible for the contradiction. In some cases, he might even restrict the Principle of Non-contradiction. On the surface, this philosopher might seem to be offering us a way to reconcile free will and determinism, deontology and consequentialism, physicalism and dualism, and so on. But we wouldn't pay much attention. After all, we don't just value internal consistency. We also value certain logical and metaphysical principles themselves, at least in the sense that we're willing to restrict them only if there's an independent and plausible explanation for the restriction. And it's not enough to be told that this would let us reconcile claims we want to be true. The explanation has to go "deeper," for lack of a better way of putting it.

From a contemporary perspective, it might at first seem that Spinoza is just as unworthy of our attention as this hypothetical philosopher; it might seem that he's arbitrarily restricting the Indiscernibility of Identicals to reconcile claims he wants to be true, namely, the identity and discernibility of MIND and BODY, MIND and MIND², and MIND and MIND-UNKNOWN.⁴ But these restrictions have a deeper explanation: they follow from basic features of his metaphysics, in particular how he's thinking about essence, identity, and existence.

Like Descartes, Spinoza would say that Peter both moves and thinks, and that his moving and thinking are fundamentally different activities, in that neither can be understood in terms of the other (E3p2s), and neither can be understood in terms of some further kind of activity (see, e.g., E1p10, E2p1, E2p2). Unlike Descartes, Spinoza would also say that Peter's existence is identical to his activity, because, more generally, a thing's existence is identical to its activity (for suggestive passages, see E1p20, E1p34, E1p36d). There's a lot more to say about this claim about existence and activity, and I expect disagreement. But, supposing I'm right, Spinoza must say that Peter exists in fundamentally different ways, given that Peter's moving and thinking are fundamentally different activities.

⁴ Thanks to Martin Lin and Shamik Dasgupta for pressing this objection.

How can one thing, Peter, exist in both ways? Spinoza is working in a tradition that links essence to identity. Within this tradition, Peter exists if and only if his essence remains the same. Spinoza's innovation is to suggest that the essences of finite things are patterns of activity that can remain the same despite inessential differences along a number of dimensions. Perhaps least controversially, at least for philosophers working in the seventeenth century, they can remain the same despite inessential differences across the temporal dimension. For example, Peter's pattern of activity can remain the same despite all the inessential differences between young Peter and old Peter. More controversially, patterns of activity can remain the same across attributes. For example, Peter's pattern of activity can remain the same despite all the inessential differences between MIND and BODY.

Moreover, these aren't the only ways in which Peter exists. Because the attribute of thought is supposed to "mirror" all of Peter's ways of existing, it must have columns to mirror his existence in each of the other attributes, and higher levels to mirror his existence at lower levels. Thus, Spinoza must say that Peter exists in a different way at each level and in each column within the attribute of thought. How can one thing, Peter, exist in all these ways within the attribute of thought? Patterns of activity can remain the same across levels and columns within the attribute of thought. For example, Peter's pattern of activity can remain the same despite all the inessential differences between MIND, MIND², and MIND-UNKNOWN.

In this respect, all the attributes, as well as all the levels and columns within the attribute of thought, are time-like, in that a thing can retain the same essence despite variation across these dimensions. Just as Peter can be "located" at many different times, he can also be "located" at infinitely many different attributes, and at infinitely many levels and columns within the attribute of thought. Moreover, he would not exist at all of these locations in virtue of having a distinct part in each of them. Instead, he would exist "wholly" at each location, to use a contemporary expression.

Within this framework, we'd expect Spinoza to reject the Indiscernibility of Identicals in favor of a principle that's restricted to attributes, levels, and columns. He wouldn't think that indiscernibility is always necessary for identity, because he'd think that the same thing can exist in discernible ways in different attributes, levels, and columns. Moreover, this response wouldn't result from an ad hoc attempt to combine claims that he wanted to be true. It would result from a systematic

rethinking of the interconnections between existence, essence, and identity. Its explanation would thus go much deeper, all the way down to the foundations of his metaphysical system.

Our interpretation raises many questions that we'll have to leave unanswered. But I hope that I've at least shown how our interpretation illuminates some of the darkest corners of Spinoza's philosophy.⁵

⁵ Many thanks to Jean-Pascal Anfray, Don Garrett, Shamik Dasgupta, Martin Lin, Yitzhak Melamed, and Alex Silverman for their helpful comments. Additional thanks to Yitzhak for his discussions of first-level ideas and unknown attributes, first in a colloquium talk, and later in *Spinoza's Metaphysics*. His work is responsible for my interest in these topics.