It is remarkable how many important philosophers of the past have come to think: “If my own philosophy were to be rejected, the only alternative would be Spinozism.” As the papers in the present collection illustrate, conclusions of roughly this form were reached in one way or another by Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Jacobi, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling. Perhaps, then, the most general reply that might be offered on Spinoza’s behalf would be this: “Such astute philosophers must have been right in judging disjunctively that either their own philosophy or Spinozism was correct. Their own philosophies are all inconsistent with one another. From these premises, you may draw your own conclusion about the truth of Spinozism.”

The first premise of this short and swift argument may, of course, be disputed. Whether the argument is sound or not, however, there is both historical and philosophical value in understanding in greater detail how Spinoza would have responded to the interpretations and criticisms of the philosophers who came after him – and of none is this more so than the German Idealists, for whom his philosophy figured so centrally in so many ways and through so many modes of transmission well described in these pages. In what follows, therefore, I will endeavor to offer as faithfully as I can on his behalf some of that response, not (I am sorry to say) on every important topic raised in the rich array of contributions here, but on some of the particularly central and recurring ones: God, finite modes, the attributes of Thought and Extension, and the human mind. In doing so, I will seek to distinguish accurate from inaccurate interpretations and substantive from merely apparent disagreements, and I will sometimes call attention to additional resources within Spinoza’s philosophy that may not have been fully appreciated by his successors. Based on this limited treatment of central parts of his philosophy, I will also venture along the way brief and opinionated assessments of the continuing value and significance of that philosophy in the light of subsequent appropriations, objections, and revisions. This is nevertheless just
One step in constructing a hypothetical dialogue between Spinoza and the German Idealists; for I will not try to anticipate the replies of the latter to my proposed Spinozistic response, nor Spinoza’s response to those replies. The completion of the dialogue I must leave to others.

GOD

From the very beginning, no part of Spinoza’s philosophy attracted more attention than his treatment of God. Even the most basic question about it has been contentious: Is he a theist or an atheist? Both Jacobi and Mendelssohn, in agreement with the bulk of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century readers, regarded Spinoza as an atheist—a characterization recently defended by Steven Nadler as well. Herder and Hegel rejected this characterization, and Novalis, in a famous phrase, calls him a “God-intoxicated man” (Gottbetrunkener Mensch). In addressing this most basic question, much depends, of course, on the intended interpretation of those vexed and historically shifting terms ‘atheist’ and ‘theist.’ Nevertheless, this is one of many issues of Spinoza interpretation in which it is essential to place equal weight on each side of what he regards as an illuminating identification: thus, in his striking formula “God or nature” (Deus sive Natura), both terms of the identity are equally appropriate, and neither notion is employed to the exclusion or reduction of the other. Spinoza’s God has, in a quite literal way, many of the crucial characteristics of the God of philosophical theologians, including absolute perfection, necessary existence, infinity, eternality, omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience; moreover, his God is the first cause of all things and an appropriate object of intellectual love. On the other hand, theologians have grasped the nature of this being only “through a cloud” in his view, for God is not a person, has no purposes, is not benevolent, issues no commands, and exercises no particular providence; moreover, God produces no substances but only modifications of itself, and can be said to love human beings only insofar as it is the substance of which the individuals who love human beings are modes.

If the criterion for theism is, as many propose, belief in a being that is “worthy of worship,” then arguably Spinoza’s position does not qualify. Yet this is not through any deficiency on the part of his God, but only because worship, as contrasted with intellectual love, is too superstitious and self-abnegating an attitude to be fully rational for any being to adopt toward anything. For Spinoza, in contrast, religion is not defined in terms of worship as that is generally understood, but encompasses instead
“whatever we desire and do of which we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God” (E4p37st). Because he simultaneously naturalizes divinity and divinizes nature in a single infinitely expressive substance, he effectively reinterprets science itself as the highest form of religion.

A second question of pressing practical interest to German Idealists concerning Spinoza’s treatment of religion was whether his ethical philosophy was congenial to the ethical teachings of Christianity. Herder’s answer, at least, was affirmative, as Michael Forster observes; yet the relation is more complex. To understand the relation between Spinoza’s ethical philosophy and Christianity, we must invoke his distinction between the free and those who are yet in bondage to the passions – that is, between genuine philosophers and the multitude. For the free, Spinoza rejects not only the attitude of worship, as it is ordinarily understood, but also such paradigmatic Christian virtues as repentance, humility, and pity. As species of sadness or pain (tristitia), these passions are all harmful to the free, who have no use or need for them either for themselves or in maintaining love and friendship with others. For the multitude, in contrast, such passions – like worship itself – may often have necessary instrumental value in motivating valuable cooperative behavior that would otherwise be impossible for them because of their limitations. In his critique of the Christian virtues of humility, mortification, and self-denial, Spinoza is a forebear of Hume and Nietzsche – as Nietzsche, and almost certainly Hume as well, appreciated. For philosophers and the multitude alike, on the other hand, Spinoza recommends the Christian policy of returning love for hatred – not because it is a divine command, but because it is the most effective means for transforming enemies into friends, through a natural psychological mechanism that he seeks to explain.

A third question about God is more theoretical, and more critically motivated: is God, as a substance, sufficiently active? This is a question raised by Herder and, partly through his influence, by Hegel (see Forster). Certainly Spinoza would be surprised at the raising of this question: power is for him the very essence of God (E1p34), and everything is caused entirely by God’s power. This is not to deny that finite individuals things also have and exert powers, of course, but Spinoza’s monism allows him to say that these powers are simply limited shares of God’s infinite power, power exerted by God through its modes. As expressed in the attribute of Extension, this power is physically dynamic; as expressed in the attribute of Thought, it is at once both logical and psychological, for the power of logic simply is the power of divine psychology.
A reply on Spinoza’s behalf

Herder preferred to think of God as unified active force itself, rather than an active substance. But for Spinoza, this merely invites the question “in virtue of what are all exercises of active force exercises of the same active force?” Herder appeals specifically to living force to account for the specific characteristic activity of living things, while Spinoza holds that all individual things possess some conatus or endeavor for self-preservation whereby they are “animate … in different degrees” (E2p13s). In seeking to break down, rather than to explain, the absolute metaphysical distinction between living and non-living things, however, Spinoza is nevertheless a mechanist, not a vitalist, in both physics and biology. Yet he is a mechanist who aims to preserve the legitimacy of teleological explanation in nature (see Beiser). He does so not by appeal to divine teleology, which he emphatically rejects in the Appendix to Ethics, Part 1, and not by appeal to a special kind of causal power, but by construing the reality and individuality of singular things as a function of their ability to operate as what we might call teleological selectors — that is, to engage in (mechanistically explicable) behavior that is conducive to the preservation of the pattern of motion and rest that, he argues, they most fundamentally or essentially are.

By locating all power and activity in a single substance, Spinoza is able to avoid thorny issues about the efficacy of causes that are otherwise difficult to resolve, such as how powers to affect and susceptibility to be affected can be matched to each other without any quasi-intentionality on the part of distinct causes and effects, and how “laws of nature” can have an ontological status that allows them to be genuinely explanatory of the interactions of the things they supposedly “govern.” This is because in Spinoza’s monism (as in Leibniz’s monadology, with the striking exception of divine creation and conservation) there are no causal relations between distinct substances. Instead, the nature of the one substance fully determines all of the powers and the reciprocal susceptibilities of its own modal expressions, while the “laws of nature” are not external to the things in causal interaction but serve simply to explicate the character of these internal powers. In addition, Spinoza was surely right to see human beings, along with animals and plants, as existing at different points on a scale with inorganic things, rather than as parts of a “dominion within a dominion” (Preface to Ethics, Part 3) possessed of a metaphysically special kind of causal force. While neither seventeenth-century mechanism nor vitalism proved to be sufficient for biology, it seems fair to say that the more parsimonious mechanism offered the better (one is tempted to say, the more live) research program.
The active role of God as the only substance brings us to a second topic of particular interest to German Idealism: the metaphysical status of individual things as finite modes said to be produced by that substance. In this domain, the most basic question is whether finite modes genuinely have being for Spinoza. Maimon and Hegel both interpret him not as an atheist but as an acosmist, for whom only the one substance has genuine being, and so answer this question in the negative. Yitzhak Melamed, in his contribution to this volume, shows convincingly and in detail why Hegel was wrong to read Spinoza as an acosmist who simply denied the existence of finite things. Michael Della Rocca, however, argues in his important contribution that Hegelian interpreters are right at least to an extent: finite things for Spinoza exist only to a degree, and to an inverse degree do not, because they are only to a degree intelligible. This more moderate claim, I suggest, is itself right only—and appropriately, perhaps—to a certain extent.

In order to see why, we must distinguish, as Spinoza does, between two different ontological notions: existence (existentia) and reality (realitas). Like Descartes and many others before him, he holds unequivocally that different things have different degrees of reality, corresponding to different degrees of perfection and power. Thus, only God is real to the highest extent, but human beings have more reality and perfection than animals or plants, and human beings can increase their degree of reality as they become more virtuous and thereby acquire more conatus or power for self-preservation. In sharp contrast, Spinoza never writes of existence as a matter of degree. Indeed, his version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, which Della Rocca quotes—“for each thing there must be a cause either of its existence or of its non-existence” (E2p11d)—seems to presuppose both in its formulation and its specific employment that the distinction between existence and non-existence is binary, with each specifiable thing having a cause for either the one status or the other, not causes for each.

As Della Rocca rightly emphasizes, Spinoza’s Principle of Sufficient Reason demands that things exist if and only if they are conceivable, or intelligible. For Spinoza, however, each thing that exists is fully conceivable through its causes and so fully exists. Against this, Della Rocca argues...
ingeniously that all relations, including the substance–mode relation, lack full intelligibility, and hence that their relata must lack full existence. Yet whatever the intrinsic (that is, non-relational!) merits of this argument may be, Spinoza would reject it. While he would certainly agree that relations between distinct substances would be unintelligible, the following of internal properties as consequences from an infinitely powerful essence (very much like the way in which the properties of a circle follow from its essence) is for him the very nature of intelligibility itself; relations between individual modes are rendered intelligible by their both being modes of the same substance. Whereas a thing has existence if and only if it is conceivable, however, reality varies with the extent to which a thing is conceivable through itself: An individual or “singular” thing approximates in a finite way, for Spinoza, to the status of a genuine substance just to the extent to which it is “in itself” (“in se”; E3p6), which is a defining characteristic of substance. To whatever limited extent a singular thing is conceived through itself, it is also the cause of its own (continuation in) existence through its conatus, and to just that extent it is real.

Of course, one use of the term ‘exist’ is to express the range of our quantifiers; and given that there are degrees of metaphysical reality, one might choose for particular metaphysical purposes to limit the range of one’s quantifiers to things that have some relatively high degree of reality. At one extreme, such a policy will license the claim that “there exists” nothing but God, the one substance. Spinoza’s own policy, however, is to interpret quantifiers as ranging over whatever has at least some degree of reality – in each case, the specific degree of reality appropriate to the kind of thing it is and the power that it has. Thus, every finite thing that has any degree of reality fully exists; only purported things that have no reality at all fail – and then fail fully – to exist.

Spinoza’s way of distinguishing the binary distinction between existence and non-existence from the distinction of degrees of reality seems to me a promising way of approaching contemporary debates about the ontological status of composite things – and especially non-living composite things. On Spinoza’s view, any composition of things that has

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\[E_{p9}\] states that “the more reality or being each thing has, the more attributes belong to it.” However, this cannot mean that even singular things differ in degree of reality only by having more or fewer attributes. For Spinoza clearly states that singular things differ in their degrees of reality and perfection (see, for example, the Preface to *Ethics*, Part iv), even though all singular things express all of the infinitely many attributes, and do not have any attributes belonging to them. Since attributes belong only to substances (that is, as it turns out, the one substance), I take \[E_{p9}\] to refer only to substances. I thank Yitzhak Melamed for raising this question.

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any power to preserve itself in its own right thereby exists as a composite thing in its own right, while its degree of reality corresponds to its degree of that power – which also corresponds, as we have seen, to the extent to which it is animate.

A second and related question in which German Idealists took much interest is whether Spinoza is able to explain individuation (see Moyar and Vater). Of course, his substance monism precludes any explanation of individuation that appeals to differences of substance. Instead, however, he offers, as we have seen, a conception of singular things as finite modes of substance that are themselves to some degree substance-like or quasi-substantial in having their own power to exist, their own essences or natures – and even their own modes, which follow at least partly from those essences or natures. Individuals (individua) are composites of singular things that are themselves substance-like in these respects. As a body, expressed through Extension, an individual is constituted by a self-maintaining pattern of motion-and-rest; as a mind, expressed through Thought, it is constituted by an awareness of such a pattern. This is in many ways a promising approach to individuation. Owing in part to interest in super-substantivalism in physics and in part to arguments by Jonathan Schaffer for priority monism in metaphysics (see Della Rocca), monism in general has recently and quite properly been enjoying something of a revival. Qualitative pattern persistence, rather than irreducible substance-hood, is arguably the defining characteristic of individual things as distinguished from merely random aggregates.

A third famous question concerning the status of finite modes – raised by Jacobi, Hegel, and others – is this: can Spinoza explain the “transition” from the infinite to the finite? In approaching this question on his behalf, however, we must ask what degree of specificity is required for such an explanation. In virtue of his commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, Spinoza is committed to the existence of an absolutely necessary and absolutely infinite being, and he is committed to there being an intelligible sufficient reason, in the nature of this being, for the existence of finite modes. The outline of an explanation is to be found, plausibly at least, in the thesis that a substance that is variegated into infinitely many finite quasi-substantial modes expresses more reality and perfection than one that is entirely homogeneous and undifferentiated. He is also committed by the Principle of Sufficient Reason to there being an intelligible necessary entailment from the nature or essence of this being to a complete account of what each of its finite modes is like at each stage of its history. More specifically, for Spinoza, this entailment proceeds first by
showing how a set of infinite modes – pervasive and permanent properties of substance – follow from the attributes (Thought, Extension, and many that are inaccessible to the human mind) that constitute the essence of the one substance. One of these infinite modes is itself the “infinite individual” composed of all other individuals; and the infinite history of this permanent and pervasive individual includes the histories of all of those variegated finite singular things that are its parts. The complete explanation of each individual part invokes the nature of the infinite modes and the natures of all those other singular things that produce or modify it; but the infinite individual as a whole follows directly from the nature of the other infinite modes and ultimately from the nature of God itself, a nature that must necessarily be expressed in a system of modes of maximal perfection and reality.

This is, in outline, a resourceful account of the derivation of the finite from the infinite. Of course, Spinoza does not claim to be able to produce the full and detailed explanation of any individual finite mode, but it is a consequence of his metaphysics that no finite human mind could possess it; the degree of power of thinking required to produce it is possessed only by God.

A final question concerning the domain of finite things, raised especially by Hegel (see Forster), is whether time is unreal for Spinoza, and, if so, whether space should also be understood, by parallel, to be a mere appearance. Before addressing it, however, it is necessary to note that this formulation of the question is doubly unfortunate from Spinoza’s perspective – first in its contrast between reality and appearance, and again in its reference to space and time. For Spinoza, the proper contrast with reality is not appearance but imperfection and lack of power; appearance is, as confusion or inadequacy of perception, only an epistemological category, not an ontological one. Confusion of perception indicates lack of reality, not in the perceived but in the perceiver; and although effects generally have less reality than their more powerful causes, this does not reduce them in any ontological sense to “mere appearances.” The treatment of appearance and reality as opposing poles on an ontological scale is due not to Spinoza but to Leibniz and Kant. With respect to the second pair of terms, although Jonathan Bennett has used ‘space’ as another term for the attribute of Extension, the concept of ‘space’ is merely an abstraction from the attribute of Extension for Spinoza. This is not simply a terminological point; Extension, as he conceives it, is sufficiently rich in nature not only to entail the truths of geometry but also to entail the actual existence of infinitely many finite bodies in motion and rest. In partial
parallel, the notion of “time” (tempus) is for Spinoza a product of the imagination, a mere attempt at measurement by standard instruments of a genuine underlying order, which he calls “duration” (duratio). A better formulation of the question, then, is whether what exists is truly characterized in terms of Extension and duration.

Expressed in this way, Spinoza’s answer is unquestionably affirmative. The attribute of Extension is the same thing as the one extended substance, which has infinite reality. Unlike Extension, duration is not itself an attribute of God; rather, it is an order that pertains equally to all attributes. That order is, however, a genuine one, grounded in genuine causal relations, and prerequisite for the existence of conatus, motion and rest, and much else. Moreover, just as infinite modes of Extension are pervasive throughout the extended order, whereas finite modes of Extension have specific locations throughout it, infinite modes of each attribute are pervasive throughout the durational order of that attribute, whereas finite modes have specific locations in that durational order. God or substance may be said to be present through its modes both everywhere and everywhen, although in a deeper sense the spatial and durational orders of things are themselves “in” God, in the sense of being modes of, and conceived through, God. (God is not in duration, one might say, but duration is in God.)

Genuine as these orders are, however, perceiving them from a location within them – as opposed to understanding them as wholes, from God’s eternal perspective – is necessarily an indication of limitation, finitude, and inadequacy. Nevertheless, the orders themselves are fully genuine as orders of things themselves, and are not merely Kantian forms of sensibility (see Boehm). This Spinozistic view of “space and time” is generally compatible with contemporary views of the universe as a space-time individual rather than a collection of distinct substances distributed through an independent Newtonian absolute space and absolute time. It is also consonant with the contemporary idea that the perception of the flowing or passage of time is a consequence of the causal relations within it.

THE ATTRIBUTES OF THOUGHT AND EXTENSION

The question of the reality of space as an order of Extension brings us directly to a third general topic: the status of the attributes, and particularly the attributes of Thought and Extension. Here there are two longstanding
A reply on Spinoza's behalf

257

questions in the German Idealist tradition of interpretation, of which the first and most basic is this: are distinctions between or among the attributes illusory for Spinoza?

Spinoza defines ‘attribute’ as “what the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence” (E1d4) and this has long suggested to many readers that attributes are perceived by the intellect without a basis in the nature of substance itself. But as many commentators have pointed out, intellect, for Spinoza, always thinks things truly. There is for him a fundamental parallel between how things are conceived and how things are, evident both in his definition of substance as “that which is in itself and conceived through itself” (E1d3) and in his definition of mode as “that which is in another through which it is also conceived” (E1d5). Accordingly, if the intellect perceives different attributes as each constituting the essence of substance, then different attributes do constitute the essence of substance.

To be sure, the distinction between attributes is not real distinction in Descartes’ technical sense of “a distinction between two substances.” (Spinoza does state that two attributes “may be conceived to be really distinct” (E1p10s), but this is only because he is treating Descartes’ proposed criterion of a real distinction – namely, separate conceivability – as if it were the definition of ‘conceived to be really distinct,’ so as to give it some application.) Spinoza’s radical proposal is that there is not just one kind or domain of existence but infinitely many, of which we know precisely two – Thought and Extension – and that everything that exists exists in each of these ways. Thus, far from being mere properties of a substance, the attributes are rather domains or manners of existence in which each of the properties of a thing exists, so that in knowing everything about any one attribute, one knows everything that exists, but only one of the infinitely many manners in which everything exists. Indeed, properly conceived, “existence” proves to be something of a secondary and disjunctive notion, equivalent to “thinking or extended or …,” for there can be no conception of existence at all except as existence through one or more attributes. Partly for this reason, attributes do not “arise from substance” in Spinoza, as Hegel suggested. Rather, they are substance, in each of its manners of existing. Nor need Spinoza offer any further explanation of why there are the attributes there are; each attribute is self-caused (i.e., God as self-caused in that manner) and self-explanatory. Far from being in any way illusory, therefore, each attribute – as both a dimension in which God’s power is expressed and the very existence of God itself in
that dimension – is not only actual and genuine, but also infinitely real within its own domain.\footnote{See Eid6expl for the distinction between absolute infinity and infinity within a kind.}

Despite this, it may seem that the Principle of Sufficient Reason demands that the difference between the attributes must ultimately be merely illusory, in order to satisfy a principle that Della Rocca draws as a corollary from the Principle of Sufficient Reason: “There must always be a sufficient explanation for why two things are not identical.” Two things are non-identical, however, simply in virtue of being two; put more precisely, what calls for explanation is why two compatible characteristics are not combined in the same substance. Thus, for example, because Thought and Extension are compatible, and there is no explanation for their belonging to different substances, we can be confident for Spinoza that they belong to the same substance. The complement of this corollary, however is that there must always be an explanation for less-than-maximal diversity within a substance, inasmuch as this diversity contributes to the substance’s reality or perfection. This second corollary is of equal importance for a rationalist like Spinoza, for whom the self-explanatory character of God’s existence is seen in the Ontological Argument’s establishment of a supremely real and perfect being, a being whose nature can be seen to entail both corollaries. Hence, if there were not an infinite plurality of genuine, self-caused, and self-explanatory attributes of the one substance, this too would violate the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Spinoza’s distinctive combination of substance monism and attribute pluralism properly provides a framework in which to recognize the genuine and essential difference between the mental and the physical within a single conception of nature.

The second longstanding question about the attributes of Thought and Extension is this: is either of these two known attributes more fundamental for Spinoza than the other? One alternative, first suggested by Herder, commonly favored by Marxists, and defended in the present by Edwin Curley, is broadly materialist: Extension is in some way more fundamental than Thought. A second alternative, proposed as a revision of Spinoza by Herder, commonly favored by Hegelians, and defended in the present by Michael Della Rocca, is broadly idealist: Thought is more fundamental than Extension. It seems to me, however, that this is another case in which what Spinoza intends as a striking identification – namely, that the thinking substance (res cogitans) is the extended substance (res extensa) – is properly interpreted only by putting equal weight on both sides, without
any reduction or elimination. To do otherwise would be to violate either
the reality of each attribute or their explanatory independence, on which
Spinoza insists (see Beiser, who describes the significance of this inde-
pendence in connection with Trendelenburg).

As Della Rocca rightly emphasizes, Spinoza is committed to the fol-
lowing three principles: to be is to be intelligible; x exists iff x is intelligible;
and the nature of each thing consists in the thing's availability to thought.
Spinoza intends these, however, not as reductions in one direction or the
other, but as identities that are reversible with equal illumination: to be
intelligible is to be; x is intelligible iff x exists; and each thing's availability to
thought consists in its having a nature. In order to understand the force of
these principles fully, however, it is necessary to understand his distinc-
tion between formal and objective being.

Although it has a long history, the distinction is most familiar to the
majority of contemporary readers through its role in Descartes' arguments
for the existence of God. For Spinoza, as for Descartes, there are two ways
in which a thing (whether a body, or an idea, or something else) can exist:
formally, outside ideas and thought about it; and objectively, in ideas or
thought about it. That things can have objective being thus constitutes an
explanation of intentionality: things can be literally – although of course
not formally – present in thoughts. For Descartes, this means that the
objective being of a thing is contained in an idea about it (if such an idea
exists), and, in general, something can have either kind of being without
having the other (since many things can be objects of thought without hav-
ing formal being, or have formal being without being objects of thought).
To the question of how ideas are capable of containing the objective reality
of something other than itself, Descartes has no answer except that ideas
are just the kinds of modes that can do this. Spinoza, however, makes a
radical simplifying proposal: ideas do not contain the objective being of
things other than themselves. Rather, they simply are the objective being of
the things of which they are the ideas. For him, this identification means
that everything with one kind of being also has the other. Furthermore,
it is the very nature of Thought itself to constitute the objective being of
things. Thus, one consequence of the (self-explanatory) fact that Thought
is one attribute among infinitely many others is that things of every kind
(including ideas themselves, which can be the objects of ideas of ideas)
exist both formally and objectively. This is a doctrine that repays careful
comparison with Hegel's identification of subject with object.

If an idealist interpreter proposes to reduce existence to intelligibility
or to explain the former by means of the latter, therefore, he or she is in
effect proposing to reduce formal being to objective being or to explain the former by means of the latter. In fact, however, no reduction or explanatory primacy is needed; that everything has both kinds of being is just another consequence of the Principle of Sufficient Reason’s requirement of maximal diversity within a substance. For this reason, principles identifying being with intelligibility must be interpreted with some care. For Spinoza, some terms (‘body,’ ‘mind’) are attribute-specific, referring to a thing or feature of a thing as it exists within a particular attribute, while others (‘duration,’ ‘cause,’ ‘existence’ itself) are attribute-neutral, referring to a thing or feature of a thing in a way that applies to it disjunctively, as it exists in all attributes. Similarly, and in consequence, some terms (‘idea of,’ ‘object of’) are specific with respect to the formal being–objective being distinction, while others (‘being,’ ‘duration,’ ‘cause’) are at least potentially neutral with respect to this distinction. ‘Intelligibility,’ however, is a potentially ambiguous term. It may refer specifically to thought about a thing, and hence specifically to its objective being, or it may refer in an attribute-neutral way to the feature of a thing that is expressed formally as its possibility, and objectively as its conceivability by thought. Thus, to say that “to be is to be intelligible” may express an identity in which both terms are taken as attribute-neutral, in which case it is true. If, however, it is meant to deny the plurality of ways of being that is reflected in the formal–objective distinction, then it is false, just as much as a claim that Thought and Extension are the same attribute would be false.

The explanatory reduction of existence to facts about a relation to thought is inherently implausible – indeed, it seems to me, inherently much more implausible than the Principle of Sufficient Reason is plausible. It is therefore a good thing for the defender of the Principle of Sufficient Reason that it does not demand that reduction. Spinoza’s substance monism and attribute pluralism, with its accompanying formal–objective distinction, offers a promising framework both for understanding the underlying nature of intentionality and for resolving the “hard problem of consciousness.” It does the latter by providing a rationale for a panpsychism that treats thought and consciousness not merely as a property belonging, incomprehensibly, to some things and not others, but rather as a parallel manner in which all things exist, albeit with different degrees of power. Indeed, Spinoza identifies consciousness with power of thinking, so that degrees of consciousness correspond to degrees of causal power within a relatively integrated mental network of ideas. It does the former by treating each thing’s thought and consciousness as consisting essentially and in the first instance in its awareness of itself as existing in various manners.
THE HUMAN MIND

Explaining the presence of thought and consciousness in the universe is one thing; accounting for its specific form in the human mind is another. Concerning this final topic, German Idealists posed at least three questions. The first, raised by Fichte (see Haag) and others, is whether Spinoza can explain self-consciousness. Although he does not postulate any dialectical structure to self-consciousness, we have just seen that Spinoza offers a radical explanation of consciousness as power of thinking, and a radical explanation of intentionality by identifying the idea of a thing with its objective being. On his account, therefore, the idea of any individual thing is, in the first instance, just that thing’s awareness or consciousness of itself — i.e., its mind. Thus, for example, the human mind is the idea of the human body; that is, the mind is the objective being of what is, formally, a human body. For this reason, the real question is not whether Spinoza can account for self-consciousness, but whether he can account for consciousness of anything else.

Fortunately, Spinoza does offer such an account for the case of sense perception in *Ethics*, Part 2, based on his axiom (E1a4) that effects are always conceived (whether adequately or inadequately) through their causes. Hence, to be aware of a state of one’s own body is also thereby to perceive, if only inadequately and confusedly, the causes of that state in the nature of one’s own body, the nature of the parts of one’s own body, and the nature of external bodies that affect one’s own body. This provides a kind of derivative or representational intentionality whereby one perceives external bodies *in virtue of* being immediately aware of states of one’s own body. Yet because the contributions of the natures of one’s own body, the parts of one’s body, and external bodies to the current state of one’s body are all initially confused in sense perception, it may well take considerable cognitive effort to begin to distinguish oneself more clearly as oneself from one’s surroundings.

In *Ethics*, Part 5, Spinoza then extends the account from sense perception to intellection. In intellection, he holds, one is immediately aware of an infinite mode that is the *formal essence* of the body; but in virtue of this awareness, one is also aware of properties that are shared among all bodies, and one necessarily conceives the nature of the attribute that is the ultimate cause of those properties. From this understanding of the attributes, in turn, cognition of other things, proceeding from cause to effect, is achievable by those with sufficiently powerful minds; this highest form of cognition is *scientia intuitiva* (see Nassar, Förster, and Vater).
Spinoza’s doctrine that awareness is in the first instance awareness of a state of one’s body offers a potentially useful explanation of why the awareness of the same external reality may differ qualitatively from perceiver to perceiver, depending on the nature of the perceiver’s sensory and cognitive apparatus.

A second question about self-consciousness is, as Karl Ameriks notes, in effect posed by Kant: given Spinoza’s monism, do human minds not become for him merely thoughts thinking themselves, without a subject? To this question, the answer – as is so often the case with Spinoza – is a matter of degree. Although a human being is not an absolutely substantial subject in his view, the doctrine that finite individuals are quasi-substantial things with their own essences and power of thinking means that human minds are subjects in their own right, to some degree, with their own modes of thought – and the more coherent, more adequate, and wiser their thoughts are, the greater the degree. Furthermore, this is an answer to which Kant himself should be sympathetic. For he argues in the First Paralogism of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that our apparent knowledge of the underlying substantial nature of the thinking subject in a rational psychology is a metaphysical illusion, with the consequences that we cannot rule out a kind of noumenal monism in which the self is merely a mode of affection of something else. Thus, he writes, in “I think … it is not determined whether I could exist and be thought of only as subject and not as predicate of another thing” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B419).

For Spinoza, as for Kant, individual selfhood is a matter of having an integrated representation or cognition of things; and since all cognition begins in self-cognition for Spinoza, this means that a Spinozistic self must itself be an integrated thing. That this integration should be only a matter of degree rather than absolute may seem counterintuitive and even disappointing, but it is nevertheless largely supported by experience – as the only partially integrated consciousness resulting from the severing of the corpus collosum in so-called “split-brain” cases illustrates.

Finally, Fichte also asks whether, in denying the existence of a causally undetermined “absolute free will,” Spinoza is not denying a fact directly accessible to human consciousness in deliberation and choice between possible alternatives. The question of whether the causally unnecessitated character of the human will is accessible to introspection or is merely the product of ignorance and (perhaps) wishful thinking is a divisive issue, and one that readily leads to accusations of self-deception on both sides. Certainly, as Allen Wood notes, Spinoza owes his readers an explanation
of how the mere ignorance of causes, to which he attributes the belief in absolute free will, becomes a positive belief in their absence. Although he does not develop the thought, Spinoza might suggest that the natural feature of human psychology whereby we focus attention on those beings most like ourselves and direct all or nearly all of our emotional reactions of love and hatred toward them serves in effect as a denial of other causes to which those emotions might be directed.

More directly, however, Spinoza does argue that absolute free will is neither possible nor desirable, because it renders human action ultimately unintelligible. And although he is not only a causal determinist but also a metaphysical necessitarian, he need not be at a loss to account for the modal character of deliberation and choice. For deliberation requires only a distinction between oneself and external things, together with the corresponding modality of

being possible relative to (that is, not ruled out by) the current state of external things.

This modality is readily conceivable for Spinoza, for the doctrine that all things are necessitated does not entail that they be necessitated solely by the current states of external things, independent of the actor’s own internal state. In order to be a deliberator and teleological selector of actions from represented alternatives, in his view, one need not presuppose anything about how one is realized as a deliberator and teleological selector – and in particular, one need not represent oneself as a non-deterministic system.

The same general account of how deliberation and choice are possible for human beings also explains why, for Spinoza, God does not deliberate or choose among alternatives. Because nothing is external to God, there are no alternatives specifiable independent of God’s nature; instead, God simply understands how each necessitated event follows from God’s own nature. This externally unconstrained necessitation is, for Spinoza, the highest kind of freedom, and something to which, as quasi-substantial, we can only strive to approximate. His account thus offers to allow us to think of ourselves as just what science suggests we in fact are: natural entities deliberating and choosing through natural processes in a natural world.

**Conclusion**

Spinoza’s philosophy influenced German Idealism in many ways, both as a groundbreaking model to be followed and as a cautionary example to be avoided. As is often the case with great philosophers, he was influential both through the ways in which he was correctly understood and through
the ways in which he was misunderstood. Despite the criticisms offered by German Idealists on such topics as God, finite things, the attributes of Thought and Extension, and the human mind, Spinoza’s naturalistic religion; his substance monism; his panpsychist attribute pluralism; and his accounts of consciousness, intentionality, and freedom all remain important contributions to philosophy with considerable staying power. Spinoza is the great naturalist of the seventeenth century, as Hume is of the eighteenth. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the contest with his German Idealist successors for influence on twenty-first-century philosophy, he has a strong claim to make.

According to the famous concluding line of the *Ethics*, “all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.” Few philosophers are more difficult than Spinoza and the German Idealists, and understanding the dialectic between them is at least doubly difficult. The other contributions to this volume suggest how excellent the achievement of such understanding can be – and they go a long way toward making it less rare.