

Spinoza on Intentionality and Mental Dependence

Karolina Hübner

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[draft – comments very welcome – please contact before citing]

Much has been written already about two aspects of Spinoza's account of the mind-body relation: about his prohibition on *causal* relations between minds and bodies, and about the *identity* of certain pairs of minds and bodies. What has been relatively neglected in contrast is the intentional ('of' or 'about') relation that, according to Spinoza, every human mind essentially has to some existing body. A prospective investigator will not be encouraged by the fact that Margaret Wilson deemed this part of Spinoza's system “mysterious”, while Jonathan Bennett thought it grounded on “deep” assumptions that Spinoza “does not discuss” but which simply “cannot be true”.²

Spinoza describes achieving “knowledge of the human mind” as one of the fundamental goals of his magnum opus, the *Ethics*. The basic aim of this paper is to contribute to a systematic study of Spinoza's metaphysics of mind insofar as it bears on this essential intentional relation between minds and bodies. This inquiry into the essential intentionality of minds amounts to investigating Spinoza's answer to the question, What does it take for there to be a mind? What is the essential constitution of any mind? This is because Spinoza's basic claim is that human minds exist because, and only if, their essential intentional objects – bodies – do.

One of the central tasks of the paper will be to determine whether the existence of this essential and constitutive intentional relation between human minds and bodies commits Spinoza to some sort of ontological and explanatory

1 Spinoza himself talks in terms of ideas being “of”, “affirming” and “expressing” something. An idea “affirms” and “expresses” what it is of (e.g., a definition “expresses” the nature of the definiendum [E1p8s2]; cf. Garrett 2009:288). I will sometimes use “represent” as a synonym for Spinoza's “be an idea of”. Throughout I will use “thought”, “concept”, and “idea” interchangeably.

I rely on the following abbreviations for Spinoza's works: E=*Ethics*, Ep=Letters, KV=*Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-being*, NS=*De Nagelate Schriften van B.D.S.* (a 1677 Dutch edition of Spinoza's writings), TIE=*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. In citing from *Ethics* I use the following abbreviations: app=appendix, ax=axiom, c=corollary, def=definition, d=demonstration, pref=preface, p=proposition, s=scholium.

2 Wilson 1999:156, Bennett 1984:§37.3; cf. Barker 1938:160, Della Rocca 1996:22.

dependence of minds on bodies.³ Several commentators, including Bennett, Curley, Koistinen, and Nadler, have drawn this conclusion; some of them have gone on to characterize Spinoza as a “materialist”, insofar as he appears to treat bodies as ontologically and explanatorily more fundamental than minds.⁴ Thus, according to Nadler,

Spinoza does have materialist tendencies insofar as the nature of the human mind and its functions are grounded in the nature of the human body. Perhaps we can call it an explanatory materialism, without thereby implying that mental phenomena or events are *causally* explained by physical phenomena or events.⁵

In similar vein Koistinen concludes,

that thinking does not produce objects of its own is a fundamental feature in Spinoza’s philosophy of mind... Any idea of an object of an attribute X is ontologically dependent on the attribute of X...[I]deas are individuated through their other-attribute objects.⁶

So understood, Spinoza fundamentally disagrees with Descartes that it is possible to conceive of ourselves as thinking things without also, and indeed more fundamentally, conceiving of something extended.⁷

For the purposes of this paper, I will call such readings of Spinoza’s account of the mind ‘Dependence Readings’. Prima facie, such readings find plenty of

3 I will use the locutions “minds depend on bodies” and “mental properties depend on physical properties” interchangeably since in Spinoza’s ontology minds are also properties (of substance) (cf. e.g. E1p16d).

By “explaining” I mean providing adequate cognition. Throughout I translate *cognitio/cognoscere* as “cognition/cognize” rather than “knowledge/knowing”, given the normative associations of the latter pair of terms (Spinozistic *cognitio* can be false).

4 Spinoza has been characterized as a “materialist” for different reasons; here I’m interested in this assessment only insofar as it hinges a mind’s *intentional* relation to a body.

5 2008:597. Nadler is here discussing E2p13s and E5p39s but interprets the dependence expressed therein as grounded in “parallelism” (586). In fact however both passages describe the mind’s intentional relation to a body (in E2p14, which grounds E539s via E4p338, it is a question of what the mind “perceives”).

6 2016:§1; cf. 2009:168-9, 182. Cf. Rice (Spinoza endorses a “representational dependence” of minds on bodies; “The content of an idea is a relation which it has to noncognitive entities” [1999:41-2]); Ayers 2007:76; Barker 1938:159; Bennett 1984:§30.2; Curley 1988:74-5, 78; Malinowski-Charles 2011:126; Matson 1971:577; Steinberg 2000:35-6. See also 2.1.

7 Cf. Ayers 2007:76.

textual support. Exhibit number one perhaps is the fact that in the *Ethics* Spinoza's claim that the human mind is an idea of a body is followed immediately by his physics, on the principle that we cannot understand any "idea" unless we know the "object" of which it is an idea (E2p13s).

If Dependence Readings are right, we should regard Spinoza's theory of mind as part of his systematic inquiry into the problem of dependence. Thus far this subject has been discussed by Spinoza's commentators primarily in reference to his division of all metaphysically possible entities into substances (independent entities) and modes (dependent entities) (E1def3&5). So another reason why we may want to ask if Spinozistic minds really depend on bodies in some sense is that if Dependence Readings are correct, then Spinoza's theory of mind may shed light on his understanding of dependence more generally.

Now, readers of Spinoza will know that for him thought, as a certain kind of being, is explanatorily irreducible and self-sufficient – i.e., an "attribute" (E2p1, E1p10). So any reading of Spinoza that treats an instance of thinking (a human mind) as explanatorily dependent on a bit of physical reality (an existing body) as Dependence Readings do is likely to seem implausible off the bat. (Indeed, many readers have tended toward the opposite, idealist conclusion: thought seems to play such an outsized role in Spinoza's metaphysics that one might worry that perhaps all there is in the end is thought.)⁸ But as the existence of Dependence Readings suggests, Spinoza's account of the mind in fact puts in question this presumed explanatory self-sufficiency of thought. So although there certainly are reasons to consider thought an especially privileged attribute, what I'd like to show in this paper is that there are equally reasons to worry about thinking's failure to be explanatorily self-sufficient.

As this hopefully begins to make clear, what is at stake in investigating the intentional element of Spinozistic minds is not merely a better understanding of Spinoza's account of the mind and its relation to the body. What is also at stake is the internal consistency of the philosophical system he elaborates in the *Ethics*. Spinoza's account of the mind sits uneasily with some of his key epistemological commitments. Namely, if Spinoza's account of the human mind as essentially intentionally related to some body indeed entails an explanatory dependence of the mental on the physical, such that cognition of bodies is necessary for cognition of minds, this contradicts not just the aforementioned (i) explanatory self-sufficiency of the realm of thought (often described as a conceptual "barrier");⁹ but also another doctrine standardly ascribed to Spinoza, namely the claim that (ii) all cognition (or at least all veridical cognition) of a thing is a cognition of its causes.

8 Consider e.g. Spinoza's definition of any attribute as a way of "conceiving" (E1def4). On thought's privilege see e.g. Curley 1969:145ff, Della Rocca 2008, Donagan 1988:119, Joachim 1901, Melamed 2013:153ff, Nadler 2006:126, Newlands 2011a,b.

9 E.g. Della Rocca 2008.

Any reading that regards minds as explanatorily dependent on bodies is inconsistent with this doctrine because according to Spinoza minds and bodies cannot stand in causal relations to one another (E3p2s). Bodies for Spinoza are simply not the right sort of thing to give us cognition of minds. But this seems to be precisely what his account of the constitution and essential intentionality of the human mind requires.

To summarize: the central task of this paper is (i) to advance our understanding of Spinoza's metaphysics of mind by determining how he understands the intentional aspect of the mind-body relation insofar as this amounts to an account of the essential constitution of the human mind, and in so doing (ii) to determine whether Spinoza's account of the mind commits him to a dependence of minds on things in other attributes, in violation of his basic epistemological commitments.

To anticipate, briefly, I will conclude that we should reject the claim that Spinozistic minds depend, either ontologically or explanatorily, on entities in other attributes. Spinoza indeed appeals to physical properties in his account of the human mind. But, I will argue, on pain of systematic inconsistency, these appeals have to be understood as references to the body *as represented* – the body as an immanent intentional object of the mind – not as references to an extra-mental entity in a different attribute. If my proposal is correct, Spinoza's account of minds qua intentional turns out not to commit him to a dependence of minds on bodies, pace Nadler et al. This in turn removes the worry that Spinoza's account of the mind undermines either his commitment to the explanatory closure of each attribute or his account of cognition as cognition of causes.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section (§1) I outline Spinoza's conception of the mind. I then present arguments for Dependence Readings (§2), and show why Spinoza's other commitments call such readings into question (§3). Next, I survey two plausible but ultimately inadequate alternative interpretations (§4), and, finally, conclude with my own proposal (§5).

1. Minds: An Overview

1.1. Spinoza's account of the mind in the *Ethics* contains four main theses relevant to our inquiry. The first of these is

Bundle: Minds are just more or less complex ideas.

Or, in Spinoza's own words, the “idea that constitutes the formal being [*esse*] of the human Mind is not simple, but composed of a great many ideas” (E2p15, cf. E2p11). In other words, there is nothing more to a Spinozistic mind than ideas, i.e. particular acts of “affirmation” or “negation” (E2p49). A Spinozistic mind has no “faculties” or general powers, no underlying substratum or thinking “thing” to

which these idea-acts might belong (E2p15, E2p48-9).¹⁰

1.2. Later on we will be able to state more precisely what sorts of ideas make up minds. For now let me turn to the second principle crucial for our purposes. This principle reflects what I described above as Spinoza's commitment to the explanatory self-sufficiency of different kinds of being (or "attributes"):

Barrier: Nothing physical can be explained or caused by anything mental, and vice versa.¹¹

Here is how Spinoza himself describes this principle, using the terminology of "modes" – the ontological category that includes all minds and bodies – and which designates dependent modifications of basic kinds of being:

each attribute is conceived through itself without any other [*per se absque alio concipitur*] (by 1p10). So the modes of each attribute involve the concept of their own attribute, but not of another one [*conceptum sui attributi involvunt non autem alterius*] and so (by 1ax4) they have God [=substance] for their cause only insofar as he is considered [*consideratur*] under the attribute of which they are modes (E2p6d)

Spinoza's own glosses suggest that for an attribute to be "conceived through itself" means that "cognition", and "form[ing] a concept" of, this attribute does not "require [*indigere*]" the cognition or a concept of a different attribute (E1def3, E1p2, E1p8s2 [II/50]).¹² So cognition of the fundamental nature of physical reality (in Spinoza's terminology, cognition of the "attribute of extension") cannot be necessary for cognition of the attribute of thought, and vice versa. Like Descartes, Spinoza seems

¹⁰ Cf. Della Rocca 1996:41-2; Parkinson 1954:102-3; Renz 2011:102; Taylor 1937:148.

Bundle follows in part from Spinoza's commitment to nominalism; on the latter, see e.g. Carriero 2005; Jarrett 1991; Author-a. For criticisms of *Bundle* see e.g. Barker 1938:418; Leibniz 1989:277; Steinberg 2000:34; Taylor 1937:148ff; Wilson 1999:126ff.

Spinoza takes it to be axiomatic that "Man thinks" (E2ax2): It is unclear whether this axiomatic because it's indubitable (cf. Donagan 1988:117), or because we are necessary modifications of a thinking substance (cf. E1p25c). It's unclear that Spinoza has a good argument for why substance itself must think (e.g. Della Rocca 1996, (cf. Donagan 1988:117, Author-c).

¹¹ Cf. e.g. Aquila 1978:275; Bennett 1984:§19.2; Della Rocca 1996:10, 2002:18, 2008:43; Jarrett 1991:466-9; Melamed 2013:84; Newlands 2012:41; Shein 2009:1.3.1; Steinberg 2000:33; Taylor 1947:150. For dissent see Koistinen 1996, Author-MS-b.

¹² Presumably this is a condition on *adequate* cognition.

On "conceiving through" see also e.g. Lin 2006:145; Morrison 2013; Newlands 2012.

to regard <thought> and <extension> as incommensurable conceptual primitives.¹³

For the purposes of our inquiry, the most important part of the passage quoted above is its claim that modes of each attribute (including particular minds and bodies) “involve” the concept of their own attribute but of no other. Many scholars gloss *involvere* as to “implicate” or “imply”.¹⁴ But Spinoza's own usage of *involvere* suggests that it denotes a broader range of necessary conceptual relations. It can indeed mean implication (as when God's essence “involves” existence [E1def1]). But Spinoza also uses “involvement” to describe cases where the relata merely have something “in common [*commune*]” and can “be understood [*intelligere*] through one another” (E1ax5) as do modes of the same attribute (for example a rock and a pair of scissors, both modes of extension). Conceptual “involvement” is for Spinoza a condition of intelligibility: we can “understand” one thing through another only if the two things have something “in common”. Ideas and movements, in contrast, have “no common measure [*ratio*]” (E5pref; II/280).

Now, since for Spinoza only what is intelligible is metaphysically possible (E1ax2, E1pualtd2), causal relations will be possible only among modes of the same attribute. Only such modes have something “in common”. And so Spinoza concludes that the “Body cannot determine the Mind to thinking, and the Mind cannot determine the Body to motion, to rest or to anything else” (E3p2).¹⁵ This unintelligibility of causal relations between such incommensurable relata is precisely what dooms, in his view, Descartes's interactionist account of the mind-body “union”.

What, I ask, does [Descartes] understand by the union of Mind and Body [*mentis et corporis unionem*]? What clear and distinct concept does he have of a thought so closely united to some little portion of quantity?...[H]e had conceived the Mind to be so distinct [*distinctam*] from the Body that he could not assign any singular cause, either of this union or of the Mind itself. [...O]f course, since there is no common measure [*ratio*] between the will and motion...the forces of the Body cannot in any way be determined [*determinare*] by those of the Mind. (E5pref; II/278-80)¹⁶

1.3. This commitment to *Barrier* naturally prompts the following question: Can entities that, like minds and bodies, have nothing “in common” nonetheless be

13 E.g. Descartes, *Sixth Meditation*, AT7.78.

14 On *involvere* see e.g. Gabbey 2008; Garrett 2010, 2013; Jarrett 1978; Wilson 1999:154.

15 E3p5d clarifies that “determination” has a causal sense.

16 As Wilson notes (1999:151), Descartes himself doesn't think that only things of the same attribute can intelligibly causally interact (AT7.213), pace Bennett (1984:49-50).

Spinoza's ban on trans-attribute causal relations has of course also the benefit of the causal closure of the physical realm.

intelligibly related? Perhaps surprisingly, Spinoza's answer is 'yes'.

The answer has two parts. First, Spinoza proposes that things that differ in attribute can nonetheless be “one and the same thing [*una eademque...res*]” (E2p7s). Here the basic (and persistent) interpretative difficulty has been establishing the relevant sense of “sameness” and “oneness”. Most scholars today think that it is best approximated by the idea of a numerical identity of token minds and bodies;¹⁷ this is also the interpretation I will assume for the purposes of this paper. This then is the third doctrine relevant to our investigation:

Identity: Every mind is numerically identical to some body, and vice versa.¹⁸

1.4. The second, less well-known part of Spinoza's answer to the question, Can things with nothing “in common” nonetheless be intelligibly related?, is contained in the following principle:

Intentionality: Every human mind essentially has an intentional ('of' or 'about') relation to some existing body.¹⁹

Here are key passages that establish *Intentionality*:

The first thing that constitutes the actual being of a human Mind [*Primum quod actuale mentis humanae esse constituit*] is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which actually exists (E1p11)

The object of the idea constituting the human Mind [*Objectum ideae humanam mentem constituentis*] is the Body, or a certain mode of Extension

¹⁷ E.g. Della Rocca 1996:118f; Melamed 2013:187; Schmidt 2009checkxx. For dissent see Bennett 1984:§34-5; Delahunty 1985:197; Marshall 2009; Schmidt 2009; Author-b.

¹⁸ For more on how I understand *Identity* see note 75.

Given *Barrier*, *Identity* gives rise to a much-discussed puzzle regarding the sense in which we can talk of “unity and sameness” when faced with the non-identity of the properties of the allegedly identical relata and with substitution failures of co-referring expressions in causal claims. (For example, if mind₁ is identical with body₁, and body₁ causes body₂, shouldn't we be able to say that mind₁ causes body₂? But this violates *Barrier*.) For original statement of this problem see Bennett 1984:141; Delahunty 1985:197; for solutions focusing on the intensionality of causal contexts see Jarrett 1991; Della Rocca 1996:118ff. For one alternative account see [Author-MS-xx].

¹⁹ Cf. Alanen 2011; Barker 1938; Bennett 1984:§37.3; Curley 1988:61-2; Donagan 1988:122-3; Jarrett 1982:164; Garrett 2008, 2016; Joachim 1901:125-6; Koistinen 2016; Nadler 2008:579; Parker 1954:105; Renz 2011; Wilson 1999:129-31, 156. For denials that Spinoza holds *Intentionality* see Allison 1987:88-9; Matson 1971:577; Pollock 1880:132.

which actually exists, and nothing else. (E2p13)²⁰

the essence of the Mind consists in this (by E2p11 and p13), that it affirms the actual existence of its body (E3GenDefAff; II/204)

The upshot of such passages is that a bundle of ideas will count as a “human mind” only if this bundle is essentially *of* some actually (i.e., durationally) existing body.²¹ An idea or “cognition” (E4p37d) of such a body is the essence of a human mind, i.e. what is necessary and sufficient for a human mind to exist. Spinoza talks about this in terms of what must be a human mind's *objectum* or *ideatum*.²²

For Spinoza the mind-body relation thus turns out to be also a case of an idea-intentional object relation.²³ Now, it wouldn't be unusual to claim that *ideas* are essentially intentional. But Spinoza makes a stronger claim: it is the mind itself that is essentially intentional, rather than merely *having* intentional states.²⁴ Spinoza's conclusion becomes less surprising once we take into account his reduction of minds to composite ideas: if there is no difference in kind between minds and ideas, any possible property of ideas, such as intentionality, can also be a property of a mind.

Intentionality thus helps to flesh out the *Bundle* thesis: to the claim that ontologically there is nothing more to a mind than ideas, we can now add that what is required for the existence of a human mind in particular is just the idea of something extended and existing.²⁵ And for Spinoza it is precisely in this intentional

20 For accounts of “nothing else” see e.g. Allison 1987:96; Della Rocca 1996:25-8; Matson 1971:574; Melamed 2013; Radner 1971; Renz 2011. For a reading on which E2p13 describes only the epistemic grounds for self-ascription of affections see Renz 2011:110.

21 Cf. Della Rocca 1996:37.

Spinoza also acknowledges another sense of “actuality”; see E5p29s.

22 Cf. Barker 1938:164.

That *ideatum* and *objectum* are interchangeable terms for Spinoza is clear, e.g., from E2def4 and its Explanation, as well as from E2p5, which derives a point about “*ideata sive res perceptas*” from a point about “*ideae objectum*” in E2p5d (emphases added). For dissent see Garrett 2016 who claims that Spinoza distinguishes between *objectum* as what an idea is *identical* with, and *ideatum* as what it is *of*. I offer further reasons against Garrett's reading in Author-MS-e.

23 Cf. Ayers 1998:1077; Parkinson 1954:105.

24 Cf. Renz 2011:102; Parkinson 1954:105.

25 If we were to express the essential content of a human mind in a proposition it would be something like the affirmation, “This body, this limited thing capable of motion, exists” (E2def1, E2ax1'). On the non-propositional nature of Spinozistic ideas see also Carriero 2016.

One might think that Spinoza asserts a stronger thesis: namely that a human mind essentially affirms the *essence* of an existing body, given his claim that “the essence of Peter's mind...directly explains [*explicat*] the essence of Peter's body” (E2p17s). But

relation of a human mind to an existing body that the “union” of our mind and body consists (E2p13)²⁶ – and not, per impossibile, in a causal relation between them, as on Descartes's account: “We have shown that the Mind is united [*unitam*] to the Body from the fact that the Body is the object of the Mind [*corpus mentis sit objectum*] (see [2]p12 and 13)” (E2p21d).^{27,28}

1.5. This is the final doctrine I would like to introduce:

Substantiality: Minds are substance's ideas of existents.

As an unlimited, or omniscient, thinking thing (E1def6, E2p1, E2p3, E2p7c), God

arguably *explicare* like *involvere* denotes a conceptual relation holding in principle: a mind “explains” a bodily essence in the sense that the ideas constituting this mind imply this essence by representing something else about this body.

26 Cf. Jarrett 1982:172; Malinowski-Charles 2011:126; and KV2app[7-8], 1.19[11].

The thesis may seem unusual, but Leibniz, for example, also explains the mind-body union of his corporeal substances by a representational relation – specifically, by the harmonious perceptual relations between the dominant monad and subordinate monads of the organic body. (See correspondence with Des Bosses [Leibniz 2007]).

For another account of “union” see Marshall 2009:913-4.

27 In E2p21s Spinoza claims that this union can be understood also through *Identity*; for why that is consistent with my claim see note 75xx.

28 In my discussion of *Intentionality* I have qualified the mind in question as “human”. Human minds are also the focus of Spinoza's own account, in line with the *Ethics*' stated goal of self-knowledge. But Spinoza is also, notoriously, a panpsychist who holds that there are minds of greater or lesser complexity for every finite existent – not just for every actually existing body, but also for the infinitely many kinds of entities we are incapable of cognizing (E1def6; E2p13s; KV2app[9, 12]; Ep66, E2ax4-5). Arguably, what is essential to any “mind” is its intentional relation to some existing thing (cf. Bennett 1984:§37.3; Renz 2011:102): any “mind” must represent something that actually exists (rather than, for example, a mere possible) (cf. E2p8c&s, E2p11). But not all minds essentially represent existing bodies, as human minds do (cf. Parkinson 1954:107). Conversely, arguably not all minds that essentially represent bodies constitute human minds. (For example, canine minds presumably also essentially represent bodies. Presumably the difference between human and canine minds lies in the complexity of the body being represented (cf. E2p13s). On how to understand kinds in Spinoza's framework see references in note 10.)

In short, mindedness is not a unique fact about human beings; conversely, the fact that human bodies are related to minds does not reveal something special about these bodies (for example, their physiological sophistication) – the most such sophistication can explain is the complexity of human minds (cf. E2p13s). In this sense what is at stake in assessing Dependence Readings of Spinoza's account of the mind is thus not simply the truth of any narrowly conceived “materialism” – bodies are just one of infinitely many kinds of entities that can play the role of a mind's essential intentional object.

necessarily has a true idea of every existing thing (E2p8). And minds for Spinoza are nothing other than these substantial ideas of existents (E2p13s).²⁹ As a thinking thing I am *constituted* by a divine idea of an existing body; but I do not *have* this idea in the same way that I might for example have an idea, or a perception, of a rock in my hand.³⁰

Spinoza's account of the essential constitution of a mind is thus an account of a very specific sort of idea: God's idea of an existent. It is not a general theory of how we represent.³¹ For Spinoza, as for many theologians, divine ideas are necessarily non-sensory, particular, clear and distinct, and veridical, representing only what is (E2p32, E2p36, E2p7c, E2p8c, E2p41, KV1.6[7]). In contrast, a general account of Spinoza's theory of ideas would also have to address many elements (such as mechanisms of misrepresentation, ideas derived from sense-experience, specifically human rationality, the possibility of unconscious ideas, the validity of general ideas, representations of mere possibles, etc) that are part of an account of how finite thinkers think but not part of Spinoza's account of the essential constitution of minds. What I am interested in exploring in this paper is only the latter: Spinoza's account of the essential constitution of minds, especially of human minds, before they acquire further ideas in the course of their durational existence. It is in this circumscribed sense of mind-as-essentially-constituted that I will use the term "mind" throughout.

In short, my goals in this paper are far more modest than those of a comprehensive account of Spinozistic ideas generally. To reiterate, they are (i) to argue, on the grounds of inconsistency with Spinoza's basic epistemological and metaphysical commitments, against the claim that Spinoza's account of the constitution of minds renders them essentially ontologically and explanatorily dependent on entities in other attributes; and (ii) to offer an alternative account of the essential constitution of minds and of their essential intentional relation to bodies that would not be vulnerable to that particular charge of inconsistency. But I undertake these tasks with the understanding that my interpretation, if successful, does not block the possibility that *our* ideas (such as my perception of this rock) might depend on things in other attributes (although I hope that my interpretation will make such readings far less plausible), and with the understanding that

Spinoza's commitment to panpsychism follows from his identification of "minds" with substance's ideas (E2p13s).

²⁹ On Spinoza's reasons for this identification see [author-MSxx].

³⁰ For detailed argument see Matheron 1969:64, 68, Dongan 1988:127-8, Author-MS-c.

³¹ I think Wilson's classic criticism of Spinoza's identification of minds with substantial ideas – which she thinks makes Spinoza unable to account for mental representation, consciousness, and specifically human rationality (1996:126-30) – conflates these two issues.

(Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this.)

ultimately only a comprehensive treatment of Spinoza's account of ideas in general can clear his account of the mind of the charge of inconsistency tout court.³²

2. Dependence

With these clarifications out of the way let me turn now to Dependence Readings – i.e., to interpretations of Spinoza on which human minds essentially depend on bodies. Different commentators understand this purported dependence in different ways, and spell it out to different degrees. In this section, I'd like to examine the textual case in favor of Dependence Readings and outline what I take to be the most plausible version of such a reading.

2.1. As we saw above, one of the pillars of Spinoza's account of the mind is *Intentionality*, the doctrine that every human mind is essentially 'of' or 'about' some existing body. Prima facie *Intentionality* commits Spinoza to an ontological and explanatory dependence of the mental on the physical. For it appears to assert that there is a human mind only if this mind essentially represents some body, and to imply that knowledge of bodies is necessary for knowledge of human minds. This is how Curley, for example, opens a chapter entitled “Spinoza's Materialism”:

it is the essence of the human mind to be related to something else....Its essence is to be an idea of that existing body. If we conceive of it as being capable of existing apart, we must be conceiving of it inadequately...To understand the mind we must understand the body...In spite of all the parallelistic talk, the order of understanding never proceeds from mind to body.³³

One may have reasons independent of Spinoza's framework for cheering on his apparent recognition that there can be no human minds without brains. Prima facie, there also seems to be plenty of textual confirmation for Dependence Readings. Most salient perhaps is the aforementioned fact that Spinoza's introduction of the doctrine that the human mind is an idea of an existing body in E2p11-13 is followed immediately by a digression into his physics:

no one will be able to understand [the union of Mind and Body] adequately, or distinctly, unless he first knows adequately the nature of our Body [*ipsam adaequate sive distincte intelligere nemo poterit nisi prius nostri corporis naturam adaequate cognoscat*]... [I]deas differ among themselves,

³² I offer such a comprehensive account of Spinoza's account of minds and thought in Author-MS-d.

³³ 1988:74-5, 78.

as the objects themselves do, and...one is more excellent than the other, and contains more reality, just as the object of the one is more excellent than the object of the other and contains more reality [*ideas inter se ut ipsa objecta differre unamque alia praestantiorem esse plusque realitatis continere prout objectum unius objecto alterius praestantius est plusque realitatis continet*]. And so to determine what is the difference between the human Mind and the others, and how it surpasses them, it is necessary for us...to know the nature of its object, i.e., of the human Body [*ad determinandum quid mens humana reliquis intersit quidque reliquis praestet necesse nobis est ejus objecti...hoc est corporis humani naturam cognoscere*] (E2p13s)

Consider also the following:

the idea which constitutes the essence of the Mind involves the existence of the Body so long as [*tamdiu...quamdiu*] the Body itself exists...[T]he present existence of our Mind depends only on this, that the Mind involves the actual existence of the Body [*praesentem nostrae mentis existentiam ab hoc solo pendere quod scilicet mens actualem corporis existentiam involvit*] (E3p11s; II/48)

because the essence of the Mind consists in this...that it affirms the actual existence of its body, and we understand by [']perfection['] the very essence of the thing, it follows that the Mind passes to a greater or lesser perfection when [*quando*]...it affirms of its body...something which involves more or less reality than before (E3GenDefAff; II/203-4)

The Mind neither expresses the actual existence of its Body, nor conceives the Body's affections as actual, except while the Body endures (by 2p8c); consequently (by 2p26), it conceives no body as actually existing except while its body endures. Therefore, it can neither imagine anything...nor recollect past things...except while the body endures (E5p21d)³⁴

Passages like these seem to confirm quite unequivocally that for Spinoza human minds depend on bodies. It is worth stressing here that these cross-attribute references are not symmetric: to my knowledge in the *Ethics* Spinoza never similarly infers claims about physical properties from claims about mental properties.³⁵ Such asymmetry in exposition certainly does not prove explanatory dependence, but it is plausibly explained by it.

The above passages suggest furthermore that the dependence obtains in the

³⁴ Cf. E5p23d, E3p2s[1] (II/142), E2p14.

³⁵ Cf. Bennett 1984:§37.1-2; Curley 1988:78; Della Rocca 1996:22.

following interrelated respects:

- (i) existence (E2p11, E3p11s, E5p23d): a human mind exists durationally only if a body durationally exists;
- (ii) essence (E3p11s, E3GenDefAff): the essence of a human mind consists in a representation of a body;
- (iii) individuation (E2p11, E2p13s): to remain in existence as a particular human mind, this mind must represent a particular body; this representation renders this mind distinct from all other minds;³⁶
- (iv) causal power (E2p14, E3GenDefAff, E2p13s, E3p2s[1]): the degree to which a mind is causally autonomous and productive depends on how powerful the body it essentially represents is (i.e., on how many different actions this body's parts bring about on their own at any time);³⁷
- (v) representational content (E2p11, E2p13-14, E3GenDefAff, E5p21d): a mind not only essentially represents a particular body, this body's existence makes possible further ideas with empirical content ("imagination" or ideas of this body's affections).³⁸

Collectively these five commitments describe a general ontological and explanatory dependence of human minds on bodies. Ontological dependence, because any human mind seems to depend on some body for existence, individuation, for having a certain essence or representational content and causal power. In particular, since Spinoza thinks that there is a human mind only if this mind essentially represents some existing body, it appears to be part of the essence of a human mind that it exists only if some body exists. We could characterize this sort of ontological dependence as essential existential dependence.³⁹

The passages also seem to describe an *explanatory* dependence of human minds on bodies: we must, it seems, refer to bodily properties (such as the existence of a body and its degree of reality) to explain a mind's essence, existence, its fundamental representational content, at least some of the ideas it can produce,

³⁶ The component ideas of a mind would presumably be united into one mind-bundle by virtue of being ideas of parts of one body.

³⁷ Cf. E2p49s[III.A.(iii)]. For identity of "power" and "perfection" see E4pref (II/208), for a correlation of "power" and "reality", E1pualtds.

Spinoza gives an attribute-neutral description of the essence of any existing "thing" with its causal power (E3p7d), which I take to mean physical or motive power when applied to bodies, and the power to produce ideas when applied to ideas.

³⁸ In the case of a mind, 'essence' overlaps with 'representational content': not all of the latter is essential to a mind.

³⁹ More precisely still, using the classification in Lowe 2005, we could call this "rigid existential essential dependence".

and why it is the same mind over time, distinct from other minds.⁴⁰ In short, Spinoza also seems to be committed to an explanatory dependence of human minds on bodies insofar as acquiring cognition of a human mind seems to require us to make an irreducible and non-reciprocal reference to an existing body. Physical properties may not suffice to explain all of the properties of a human mind,⁴¹ but for Spinoza such references appear to be nonetheless necessary for understanding mental properties enumerated above, (i)-(v).

It is worth emphasizing here that the majority of the passages cited above explicitly tie this apparent dependence to what is true of the mind qua *idea of a body* – that is, to its intentional relation to a body. Thus in asserting that we have to know bodies in order that we may know minds E2p13s appeals to a general principle governing “ideas” and their “objects”. Similarly, E3GenDefAff states that the essence of a mind consists in “affirming” (asserting) the existence of a body, as well as that this mind’s “degree of reality” hinges on what it “affirms” of that body. Finally, E3p11s is explicit that the existence of the mind “depends” on this mind “involving” the existence of a body; as we saw earlier, “involvement” is for Spinoza a conceptual relation. In short, the passages cited appear not only to confirm the existence of an explanatory and ontological dependence of human minds on bodies, but also to link this dependence to the intentional relation between these two entities.

2.2. As we just saw, there is a non-negligible amount of textual evidence in favor of Dependence Readings. To conclude, let me say a bit more about how we might understand the dependence at issue here in more general and systematic terms.

An analogy with the Aristotelian account of substance will be helpful for fleshing out the sort of asymmetric, simultaneously ontological and explanatory dependence that is at stake here.⁴² Very roughly, for Aristotle, the priority of substance means that accounts of dependent entities must make reference to substance as to what is ontologically prior. In contrast, an account of substance does not make reference to any other entity. (To take the standard example, a diet can be

⁴⁰ Cf. Allison 1987:98.

⁴¹ In particular, one may worry whether it is even possible to account a mind’s intentional ‘aboutness’ by appealing to physical properties. (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this.)

⁴² So the sort of ontological dependence that I take to be appropriate to Spinoza’s framework is not dependence as understood on purely modal analyses but rather dependence along the lines of neo-Aristotelian essentialist analyses (e.g. Fine 1994, 1995; Koslicki 2012). On the problems created by purely modal analysis of dependence in Spinoza’s framework see Garrett 1991, Author-c.

For other accounts of Spinozistic dependence see Koistinen 2016; Morrison 2013; Newlands 2010.

called “healthy” because it promotes the health of some substance.)⁴³ If we understand Spinoza's account of the mind on this model, that account makes reference to an existing body precisely because it is the thing on which this mind ontologically depends. Conversely, Spinoza's account of the body does not have to make a reciprocal reference to a mind, since it does not depend on it.⁴⁴ (Indeed, Spinoza's definition of the essence of any non-simple body as a “*ratio* of motion and rest” [E2L5] is articulated in terms of physical properties alone.)

We can also draw here on how Spinoza himself characterizes ontological and explanatory dependence and its converse, “prior[ity]” in nature and knowledge (E2p10cs, E1p1, E2p11d). Spinoza's view seems to be that, if *y* is “prior” in nature to *x*, then *y* is the sufficient ground for *x*'s existence. (For example, “when [an idea] is given, the other modes (to which the idea is prior in nature) must be in the same individual” [E2p11d]).⁴⁵ Modes are clearly ontologically dependent on substance in this sense: if substance is given, modes necessarily follow (E1p16). Ontological dependence so understood is also true of the mind-body relation as interpreted by Dependence Readings: if bodies are given as existents, necessarily (given divine omniscience) so are minds. Likewise, if we take “priority in knowledge” to mean that what is posterior in knowledge is conceived through what is prior in knowledge, again this holds true both of the substance-mode relation and the mind-body relation as interpreted by Dependence Readings: just as modes are conceived through substance (E1p15, E1p16d), at least some properties of human minds (e.g. its existence and fundamental representational content) are also, on such readings, conceived through our ideas of bodies. To observe the “proper order of philosophizing” (E1p10cs), we must explain God's nature before we explain anything else, since all things depend on God (E1p15, E1p10cs); on Dependence Readings it is for this same reason – that of reasoning in line with the direction of dependence – that we must explain the nature of bodies before we can explain the nature of human minds, as Spinoza insists in E2p13s.⁴⁶

To be sure, if Spinozistic minds are indeed ontologically dependent on

43 Cf. Corkum 2013:79, 83. See *Met.* 1003a35 ff.

44 This analogy artificially restricts the framework to mind and bodies – of course both minds and bodies would be ontologically dependent on God/substance for Spinoza.

45 For a different interpretation of priority see Newlands 2010:474.

46 One could think that this analogy between how Spinoza understands dependence in the case of the mode-substance relation and the case of the mind-body relation as interpreted by Dependence Readings might count as a systematic reason in favor of Dependence Readings. But the analogy is limited. The substance-mode relation is most often cashed out in terms of a cause-effect relation (E1p16c1) and a property-thing relation (E1p16d, though see Curley 1969). But *prima facie* it seems implausible that minds should be understood as the properties of bodies, and, by *Barrier*, it is metaphysically impossible that they should be considered as bodily effects. (Spinoza also never describes bodies as “prior” to minds.)

bodies, this cannot be a case of *causal* dependence since, given *Barrier*, only other thinking things can cause a mind's existence. But it is open to proponents of Dependence Readings to claim that Spinoza endorses some non-causal kind of ontological dependence. (Koistinen for example speaks in terms of “ontological” and “constituent” dependence.)⁴⁷ Indeed, the proposal that minds depend on bodies in some *sui generis*, non-causal, sense fits well with the title Spinoza gives to the Part of the *Ethics* devoted to the mind: that title invokes the “origin [*origo*]”, not the “causes”, of the mind (II/83).⁴⁸

3. Some problems with dependence claims

In the preceding section I offered what I take to be the most compelling case for adopting a Dependence Reading of Spinozistic minds. In this section I will argue that such readings are inconsistent with Spinoza's other commitments, and so should be rejected.⁴⁹

Here are the primary worries one may have about consistency of Dependence Readings with the rest of Spinozist framework:

(i) It is unclear that such readings are consistent with *Identity*. Can minds genuinely ontologically depend on bodies if they are also numerically identical to them? (Keeping in mind that we are dealing here with robust, asymmetric ontological asymmetry.)

(ii) On Dependence Readings, the cognition of at least some properties of minds requires cognition of bodies. So it is also unclear that Dependence Readings are consistent with *Barrier*, which to recall states that things in one attribute cannot

⁴⁷ 2009:169, 2016n3. Allison and Matson use the terminology of “function” (Matson 1975:577; Allison 1987:95).

⁴⁸ Cf. Wilson 1999:183.

However, it is difficult to square the claim that minds depend on bodies for existence with the fact that minds cannot *causally* depend on bodies. (Cf. Garrett 1991:208.) Spinoza himself seems to think that the “reasons” for a thing's existence are given precisely by citing the relevant “causes” (Επιαιτῆδι). (Cf. Newlands 2010:474-5.) Advocates of Dependence Readings thus seem committed to a position on which the existence of minds depends in two different ways on two different variables: causally on other thinking things, non-causally on bodies. This is not obviously incoherent, but certainly requires clarification as to how the two sorts of dependency relate (and, given Spinoza's commitment to intelligibility, why there must be two). We cannot say for example that the mind depends for existence non-causally on the same thing on which it depends causally under a different attribute, since the body on which the mind purportedly depends non-causally is the body to which it is identical, whereas causally this mind depends on a thinking thing identical to the *cause* of that body.

⁴⁹ Alternatively, one could rethink the standard readings of the offending doctrines. I cannot undertake this in the limited space of this paper but see e.g. Koistinen 1996, Morrison 2013, Marshall 2009, Author-MS-b.

be cognized through things in another attribute.⁵⁰ According to *Barrier*, the existence of minds is supposed to be explicable by thought alone. In fact Spinoza states explicitly that

God can form the idea...of all the things that follow necessarily from [his essence] solely from the fact that God is a thinking thing, and not from the fact that he is the object of his own idea [*formare posse ex hoc solo nempe quod Deus est res cogitans et non ex eo quod sit suae ideae objectum*] (E2p5d)

Minds clearly belong to the category of ideas here described: they are ideas formed by God of a subset of things that necessarily follow from his essence – the subset of actually existents.

(iii) This inconsistency of Dependence Readings with *Barrier* generates a further inconsistency with another basic epistemological principle widely ascribed to Spinoza. This is the aforementioned principle that *all* cognition is cognition of a thing's causes. Most commentators believe that, for Spinoza, if *x* is conceived or explained through *y*, then *x* is also caused by *y*.⁵¹ Call this doctrine *Causal Cognition*. Since by *Barrier* minds and bodies cannot stand in causal relations, by *Causal Cognition* they also cannot serve to explain one another. In other words, an explanatory dependence of minds on bodies is incompatible with the standard interpretation of Spinozistic cognition: on Dependence Readings, cognition of minds is tied not to the causal relations in which minds stand (to other thinking things), but to the minds' intentional relations (to the bodies they essentially represent).

In short, Dependence Readings appear to be inconsistent with at least three fundamental metaphysical and epistemological principles standardly ascribed to Spinoza: *Identity*, *Barrier*, and *Causal Cognition*. If Dependence Readings are correct, one may well doubt that Spinoza succeeds in his stated goal of providing a more intelligible replacement for Descartes's account of the mind's causes and its “union” with the body. Furthermore, although as noted Spinoza's account of minds needs to be distinguished from his general account of ideas, it is worth stressing that the difficulties just outlined easily generalize, if the purported dependence of

⁵⁰ Cf. Barker 1938:159-60.

Della Rocca tries to block a worry about consistency of E2p13s with *Barrier* by emphasizing that a mind's “affirmation” of bodily existence is a mental property (1996:37). But this seems insufficient, since what is essential to a human mind is not *any* affirmation, but specifically an affirmation that makes essential reference to a body.

⁵¹ E.g. Della Rocca 1996:11; Garrett 2002:136; Jarrett 1978:20, 29, 1991:472; Melamed 2013:89-90; Newlands 2010:475-6; Wilson 1999:162n27. For the debate over the scope of E1ax4, see e.g. Morrison 2015, Wilson 1999.

human minds on bodies is taken to be the consequence of the intentional nature of ideas (as E2p13s might suggest). This is because, if we grant this assumption, then every idea will depend ontologically and explanatorily on its intentional object(s). In particular, every idea of a non-idea (whether of a body or of an entity in a humanly unknowable attribute) will depend for explanation on something in another attribute, in violation of both *Barrier* and *Causal Cognition*. This will be true not only of minds or God's ideas of existents, but also of God's ideas of eternal essences (E2p8) of things in attributes other than thought, as well as of all *our* own empirical ideas of external bodies, acquired in the course of our existence. Insofar as such ideas become (non-essential) components of our minds, human minds will turn out to depend not just on the bodies they essentially represent, but on indefinitely many other bodies.⁵²

4. Some alternatives

In the previous section I showed that there are reasons to worry about the consistency of Dependence Readings of the mind with epistemological and metaphysical commitments commonly attributed to Spinoza. There is thus significant pressure to find an alternative to such readings. This will be my task in the remainder of the paper. First, in this section, I will outline two plausible but ultimately unsatisfactory solutions; in §5 I will offer my own proposal.

4.1. Perhaps the most obvious alternative to Dependence Readings is the suggestion that all references to bodily properties in Spinoza's account of the mind can be explained by his commitment to *Identity*.⁵³ On this reading, what Bennett et al treat as evidence of a dependence of the mental on the physical is treated instead as the consequence of minds and bodies being “one and the same thing”.

This is for example how Jarrett and Della Rocca try to reconcile *Barrier* with Spinoza's claim in E2p13s that we can infer a mind's degree of reality from the corresponding body's degree of reality.⁵⁴ As Della Rocca puts it, *Identity* entitles Spinoza to such trans-attribute conclusions without violating *Barrier* because the identity of modes in different attributes results in a necessary co-variation of all their “structural”, or “attribute-neutral”, properties. By virtue of their numerical identity, token minds and bodies will have, for example, the same number of effects and the same degree of reality.⁵⁵ On this sort of reading, the trans-attribute claims to which Spinoza is entitled are symmetrical: given *Identity*, he can infer not merely a

52 Cf. Matson 1975:59, Matheron 1969:34, Taylor 1947:15of. Thanks to [xx] for discussion of this issue.

53 Thanks to [xx] for discussion of this interpretation.

54 Jarrett 1982:173-4; Della Rocca 1996:20-1.

55 1996:21. More precisely, Della Rocca appeals both to *Identity* (E2p7s) and to the causal isomorphism of E2p7.

mind's degree of reality from a body's degree of reality, as he does in E2p13s, but equally a body's degree of reality from a mind's.⁵⁶

At first blush, the Jarrett-Della Rocca proposal is quite compelling: *Identity* can indeed explain not only why a human mind's degree of reality would necessarily reflect a body's degree of reality, but also why Spinoza can claim that minds exist only if bodies do (E3p11s, E5p23d), as well as why minds cannot imagine or recollect “except while the body endures” (E5p21d). (Since, if the relevant body does not exist, neither does the mind identical to it; a fortiori, this mind cannot exercise its cognitive powers). So appealing to *Identity* does remove some of the textual motivation for Dependence Readings. But it does not explain all of the claims that generate such readings. In particular, *Identity* cannot explain why human minds appear to depend on bodies for their essence and individuation. As we know, Spinoza's view is that to know the essence of a human mind, i.e., what it fundamentally represents, we must make reference to a body. Likewise, to exist as a particular human mind, this mind must represent a certain body, which representation renders this mind distinct from other minds. But the fact that a mind is numerically identical to some body cannot explain this mind's essential representational content. For why should a mind identical with a certain body also, in virtue of this identity, be *of that body*?⁵⁷ Why, to use Spinoza's language, should it “affirm”, “express” and “involve” a body – or indeed anything at all? So *Identity* cannot block the conclusion that at least claims bearing on the essential representative features of human minds are bona fide evidence of their dependence on bodies.⁵⁸

There are other reasons why the Jarrett-Della Rocca-style proposal does not help us. For one, it is textually implausible in two respects. First, as we have seen, the passages that invite Dependence Readings stress the intentional relation between minds and bodies, not their identity; second, Spinoza does not make the

56 *Identity* applies not only to my mind and body but also to any of their properties, insofar as for Spinoza my body and a property of my body are equally modes and so subject to *Identity*. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this.

57 Pace Curley, who finds the relation between *Identity* and *Intentionality* intuitive (1988:62). Allison expresses a related worry (1987:90).

Even if we do not interpret “sameness and oneness” as numerical identity but as real identity (Schmidt 2009), as co-constitution of something larger (Marshall 2009) or as mere isomorphism of causal orders, none of these relations can explain why a mind has for its essence a certain representational content.

58 The one interpretation of E2p7s can explain why a mind that is “one and the same” as a certain body would also be *of that body*: an idealist reading on which “bodies” are nothing over and above what human minds essentially represent. (Husserl e.g. suggests that for Spinoza the order of “things” is correlative with the order of “ideas” [E2p7] because to be a “thing” is just to be the intentional object of an idea [1906-7, 52n].) On such a reading, a mind essentially of a certain body is also identical with it in the trivial

sort of reciprocal inferences from mental to physical properties that are postulated by the proposal. More importantly, it's unclear that for every inference from body to mind that suggests dependence, Spinoza could consistently make the symmetrical inference in the other direction as the Della Rocca-Jarrett reading requires. Consider the key claim that the essence of a human mind lies in representing an existing body. Could Spinoza assert equally that the essence of a human body lies in its being represented by a mind? Such an assertion seems inconsistent with Spinoza's aforementioned definition of the essence of a non-simple body as a *ratio* of motion and rest. It seems implausible that 'being represented by a mind' could be understood as another equivalent description of bodily essence (since 'being represented' is not an intrinsic property as *ratio* is); it also cannot be either the effect or the cause of that ratio (since 'being represented by *x*' is not a physical property, and causal relations obey *Barrier*). Given divine omniscience any body will of course necessarily be represented by a mind. But not all necessary properties are essential to a thing (E1p16d, TIE[95]). So the mere necessity of being represented by a mind is insufficient to show that it is essential to a body to be represented by a mind. (Indeed, 'being represented by a mind' is a good candidate for a “common notion” – i.e., an idea of a universal or pervasive property [E2p38-9] – but no common notion can represent a property essential to a mode [E2p37].)

In short, *Identity* can neither explain all the passages that invite Dependence Readings, nor can it banish the appearance of an irreducible explanatory asymmetry between minds and bodies.

4.2. We could try to circumvent Dependence Readings in another way, namely by taking as our clue Spinoza's remark that investigating the properties of bodies in order to understand minds is “necessary for us [*necesse nobis est*]” (E2p13s). The phrase might suggest that those parts of Spinoza's account of the mind that look like evidence of minds' dependence on bodies are merely Spinoza's concession to the epistemological limitations of finite human minds. We might have to think about bodies in order to think about minds, and approach our “highest blessedness”. But a genuine philosophical explanation of the mind would refer to thinking things alone and follow the causal order of being, explaining why minds must have the properties they have. Again, Della Rocca serves as an example of this sort of approach: he argues that Spinoza's trans-attribute inferences in E2p13s are

sense in which any idea is numerically identical with its own content. This interpretation avoids Dependence Readings grounding all trans-attribute claims motivating such readings in *Identity*, while (trivially) securing the consistency of Spinoza's account of the mind with *Barrier* and *Causal Cognition* (trivially since all causation and explanation happens within thought as the sole attribute). But the reading secures these benefits at the price of eliminating extension as a genuine attribute, in violation of Spinoza's explicit commitments (E2p2).

consistent with *Barrier* because they are not genuine “explanations” but merely ways “we come to appreciate a certain fact”.⁵⁹

There are at least two problems with this proposal as well. First, the textual case for it is weak: it rests on a single phrase – “necessary for us” – whose meaning is far from clear. (What is the extension of “us”? Is it “limited human knowers”, as the proposal assumes, or is it those who observe the “right order of philosophizing”, as Spinoza urges [E1p10cs]? Earlier in the very same passage Spinoza writes that “no one [*nemo*]” can understand the intentional mind-body “union” unless the body is understood first.)

Second, it is difficult to justify the alleged “necessity” of the concession. It is true that according to Spinoza we are in the first instance knowers of bodies: the bodies we are and they ways they are affected (E2ax4). But the question is whether this means that *any* knowledge we might have must make reference to extension. This is what Dependence Readings claim. I have suggested that the fact that Spinoza endorses explanatory constraints like *Barrier* and *Causal Cognition* is inconsistent with such a claim.⁶⁰

Moreover, an advocate of this sort of proposal should be able to tell us what is it specifically about the nature of human minds that forces Spinoza to abandon the rigour of “explanation” *ratio essendi* when giving an account of human mind, although no such concession was necessary to give an account of any other instance of divine thought. What epistemological limitation is it that does not stand in the way of our grasping the nature of ideas generally (E1def3), of causal and dependence relations among them (E2ax3, E2p5-6), and of God's infinite idea of all things (E2p3-4), but bedevils an account of the essence, existence, and individuation of human minds, although after all are merely “parts” (E2p11c) of that divine idea?

59 1996:21-2, 177n9.

An anonymous reviewer suggests that concern with the goal of “blessedness” (E2pref) could explain Spinoza's apparent explanatory concessions. But since blessedness requires genuine understanding (“our greatest happiness, or blessedness, consists...in the knowledge of God alone” [E2p49s]) it's not clear why it would require such concessions.

60 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this issue.

Epistemological limitations are relevant for ideas we acquire in the course of experience: in particular, the fact that we are prone to think in terms of inadequate empirical universals is a function of the finitude of our bodies (E2p40s1; for one account see Author-a.) But even this explanation appears to be a case of Spinoza relying on a property of the body (its finitude) to explain a property of the human mind (a way its ideas inevitably go wrong). This might seem like further evidence in favor of Dependence Readings. But arguably Spinoza also explains the general mechanism of confusion of ideas by reference to properties of thought alone in E2p11c. The account in E2p40s1 – a scholium – might then well qualify as a case of Della Rocca-style failure of genuine “explanation”.

There is one salient difference between human minds and all the other instances of divine thought, I suggest, but it lies in their intentional contents, not in some idiosyncratic epistemological limitation on our part. Human minds are distinguished from all other divine ideas solely by virtue of what they essentially represent – something both extended and existing. So bodies enter the picture because for *any* intellect, it is impossible to give an account of human minds, as distinct from other kinds of ideas, unless we also factor in what they – uniquely and essentially – are ideas of.

Finally, this proposal assumes that there is, or could be, something like a proper “explanation” of the human mind – an explanation that, unlike the account Spinoza actually gives in the *Ethics*, does not make reference to bodies and is given solely in terms of thought of itself. But how does one explain an idea that is *essentially of a body* in terms of thought alone? The proposal, at least as it stands, does not say.

5. Ontological pluralism to the rescue

Let me propose another way to interpret Spinoza's account of the mind, one that does not suffer from the weaknesses of Dependence Readings or of the two alternatives just surveyed.

5.1. My proposal takes as its starting point the following feature of Spinoza's theory of ideas. As is well known, Spinoza, like Descartes, explains the mechanism of representation with the help of a distinction between two modes of being:⁶¹ “formal reality”, which refers to the being of something qua existent in nature, and “objective reality”, which refers to the being of a thing qua represented, or the kind of being that consists in making something present to an intellect.⁶² On this

61 E.g. Allison 1987:89; Aquila 1978; Ayers 1998:1077; Carriero 2011:77, 2016; Donagan 1988:37ff, 1990:105; Garrett 2008, 2013; Gueroult 1974:70, 76-7; Jarrett 1982:168; Malinowski-Charles 2011; Nadler 2006: 124-5; Radner 1971.

I don't mean to suggest that Spinoza and Descartes agree on all particulars of the view; e.g. Spinoza disagrees (E2p7c) with Descartes's conclusion that objective reality is a “less perfect” mode of being (AT7.103).

62 A thesis of multiple kinds of being can seem obscure to contemporary readers. But as a theory of representation its pedigree goes back to Scholastics. The recent resurgence of interest in ontological pluralism (e.g. McDaniel 2010) may be regarded as an indication that such theories are at least not obviously incoherent.

Given the limited space of this paper I cannot do justice to the different interpretations that the formal/objective reality have received over centuries, nor situate Spinoza in this historical framework. I will limit myself in this paper to drawing on what Spinoza asserts explicitly in the *Ethics*. But see Ayers 1998; Brentano 1874, Brown 2007; Hoffman 2002; Kaufmann 2000; King 2006; Normore 1986; Tweedale 2006; Wilson 1978, Author-MS-d.

model, to have a true idea of a thing is for this very thing to exist in thought, with the kind of reality or being that is proper to mental or ideal entities.⁶³ Descartes famously offers the following illustration:

the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect—not...formally existing, as it does in the heavens, but objectively existing, i.e. in the way in which objects normally are in the intellect [*eo modo quo objecta in intellectu esse solent*] (First Replies, AT 7.102-3, cf. 7.40-2, 161-6)

I label this theory of ideas 'ontologically-pluralistic' insofar as it relies on an assumption of dual kinds or modes of being to explain the possibility of intentionality and truth.

Spinoza's adoption of this theory is clear from many passages; for example:

a true idea must agree with its object (by [1]ax6), i.e. (as is known through itself), what is contained objectively in the intellect must necessarily be in nature [*id quod in intellectu obiective continetur, debet necessario in natura dari*] (E1p3od)

God's [NS: actual] power of thinking is equal to his actual power of acting. I.e., whatever follows formally from God's infinite nature follows objectively in God from his idea in the same order and with the same connection. (E2p7c)

the human mind...too, is a part of Nature; for...in Nature there also exists an infinite power of thinking which...contains within itself the whole of Nature objectively [*in se continet totam naturam obiective*], and whose thoughts proceed in the same manner as does Nature, which is in fact the object of its thought (Ep32)⁶⁴

The picture that emerges from passages such as these is this. For substance to think what it brings into being is for those very things to *exist* in a certain way: namely, not merely with the "formal" reality they have as existents in nature, but also with the kind of being that, to use Descartes's phrase, is proper to mental or ideal objects. Thinking in its most fundamental instance – that of substance's necessarily true ideas – is thus to be understood as the coexistence of two kinds of reality: the

⁶³ I take this view to be a version of direct realism, following Brown 2007: if the idea of the sun just is the "sun itself existing in the intellect", then in knowing mental objects (the objectively real sun) we also thereby know something identical to their non-mental counterparts.

⁶⁴ Cf. TIE[34, 99], KVapp2[3-4, 6-7, 9, 15].

reality things have qua effects of substance, and the reality they have qua thought by this substance. As E2p7c suggests, substance's power to bring about these two kinds of beings – or, more accurately, to bring about beings that necessarily possess these two kinds of reality⁶⁵ – is one of its fundamental ontological features.⁶⁶ The necessity of things' existence with objective reality is arguably part of what it means for substance to be an infinite (unlimited) “thinking thing” (E2p1, E1def8). And as is the case with all such fundamental features in Spinoza's framework, the reason why being and thought work in this way must presumably be sought in the self-explanatory nature of substance itself (E1def3).⁶⁷

For our purposes what matters most about this picture of thought is the following. Within this kind of ontological and epistemological framework, for the human mind to essentially be of a certain existing body, as Spinoza holds, is for this body *to exist with the reality proper to a mental object*. In other words, Spinoza's claim that what is essential for the existence of a human mind is that it be of a certain actually existing body means that what is essential for the existence of a human mind is the *existence of this body as objectively real*. This objectively-real body is what the human mind *is essentially* for Spinoza. In other words, a human mind's essence is an objectively real body, a body being thought as existing by the divine intellect.

How does this affect the question of the human mind's purported dependence on bodies? My suggestion is that all of Spinoza's references to the body in his account of the human mind should be read as references to this *objectively real* body that essentially constitutes the human mind – rather than, as on Dependence Readings, as references to formally real bodies and so to an extra-mental reality, in violation of both *Barrier* and *Causal Cognition*.⁶⁸ Understood along the lines of my proposal, Spinoza's account of what it means for the human mind to be essentially of an existing body is precisely what we should expect given these two fundamental epistemological commitments on Spinoza's part: the existence of a human mind is not a matter of thought entering into a relation (whether of causality or of some sui generis dependence) with an entity in a different attribute – a formally real body out there in the world, so to speak. The existence of a human mind is instead a matter of a causal process fully internal to thought, ultimately due to substance as an infinite *res cogitans*: the production of a certain objective reality, or of a certain mental object. It is a property of thought alone that a certain collection of ideas comes to be of one thing or another. A human mind is a human mind not because it relates to and depends on some formally-real body, as on Dependence Readings, but because this idea relates

65 There is only a “conceptual” distinction between the two kinds of reality (E4p8d).

66 For an account of the two powers see Deleuze 1968.

67 Cf. Garrett's argument for the self-explanatory nature of the attributes (2012:257).

68 Cf. Barker 1938:165.

causally to other ideas, which bring into existence an idea with a certain objective reality: an idea of an existing body. Spinoza's fundamental claim is that to be a human mind a collection of ideas must represent some body as actually existing; drawing on what I called his ontological pluralism about ideas, or his theory of two kinds of being, gives us a way to understand in what sense a body can be a property of thought: namely if this body is a thing with objective reality alone, i.e. a thing existing in an intellect. So we are now in a position to explain how an idea that is essentially of a body can nevertheless be explained in terms of properties of ideas alone.

In short, on my proposal, and contrary to Dependence Readings, *Intentionality*, i.e. the thesis that human minds are essentially of bodies, does not entail any ontological and explanatory dependence of minds on entities in a different attribute. *Intentionality* turns out not to describe a *relation* – a fortiori, it does not describe a relation between mind and body as two distinct, formally real entities. Instead the claim that a human mind is essentially an idea of a body turns out to be a claim about the essential and intrinsic properties of an idea.⁶⁹

The error of Dependence Readings, I suggest, lies in their misidentification of the mind's essential intentional object: such readings take Spinoza's descriptions of human minds' essential *objecta* or *ideata* to be descriptions of the minds' formally real referents. I propose instead that we take these descriptions of the mind's essential *objecta* to be descriptions of purely mental objects, i.e. of bodies as objectively real, or as existing in an intellect. To my mind proponents of Dependence Readings overlook the inevitable ambiguity that a prima facie extension-specific term like “body” (or “sun”) will have on an ontologically pluralistic theory of ideas like the one Spinoza adopts. The word on its own leaves the mode of being of the thing to which we are referring underdetermined: if we speak of the “sun”, for example, we may be referring to the sun in either or both of its two modes of being – as the bright thing in the sky with a certain mass and circumference, or as this same very thing as existing in an intellect. Rather counterintuitively perhaps, words like “sun” and “body” are in themselves attribute-neutral, since they might be used to refer to a mental thing or an extended thing. (Perhaps this is part of Spinoza's distrust of language:⁷⁰ linguistic distinctions do not reliably map onto metaphysical ones.) As we saw in the course of this paper, interpreting Spinoza's references to bodies in his account of the mind as references to formally real bodies leads to charges of inconsistency. To this extent, an interpretation like the one just proposed, one capable of accommodating the references to bodies, within the attribute of thought seems to me preferable.⁷¹

69 Cf. Aquila 1978:281. On whether intentionality is a relation see e.g. Benoist 2007.

70 E.g. E2p49s, TIE[96].

71 See Barker 1938:164-7 for a different argument for this conclusion.

5.2. Let me show concretely how my interpretation works in the passages that invited Dependence Readings in the first place.

Consider first Spinoza's central claim that the "first thing that constitutes the essence of the Mind is...the idea of an actually existing Body" (E2p13). On Dependence Readings, this proposition announces the human mind's ontological and explanatory dependence on an actually extended thing in another attribute. On the reading now being proposed, its point instead is that what is essential to a human mind is the existence of an objectively-real body, the body as it is in the intellect. That is, for a certain bundle of ideas to count as a "human mind" this bundle must collectively represent a body – something explicable in terms of <motion>, <rest>, <size>, etc – and it must represent it as actually existing.

I suggest that we read Spinoza's assertion that a mind endures "insofar as it expresses the actual existence of the Body" (E5p23d) along the same lines. An idea "expresses" what it is of.⁷² On Dependence Readings, this passage confirms the explanatory and ontological dependence of human minds on formally-real bodies. On the current reading, to say that a human mind endures "insofar as it expresses the actual existence of the Body" is just to reiterate that there is a human mind as long as there is an idea with a specific representational content, i.e. an idea with a particular objective reality.

Spinoza can therefore also insist that to know how a human mind differs from other kinds of minds we must "first kno[w] adequately the nature of our Body" (E2p13s). This is simply to reiterate that to understand an idea we must know its essential representational content.

The same reasoning can be applied to Spinoza's claim that "the present existence of our Mind depends only on this, that the Mind involves the actual existence of the Body", such that a mind's existence and powers "are taken away [tolli] as soon as the Mind ceases to affirm the present existence of the Body" (E3p11s). "Involvement" like "affirmation" are conceptual relations.⁷³ In other words, Spinoza's point in this scholium is articulated purely in terms of properties of thought: the existence of a human mind depends on the ideas making it up affirming or implying the existence of certain body. That is, it depends on what these ideas are of, i.e. on their objective reality. So the existential "dependence" being invoked here is not that of a mind on a formally-real body, as Dependence Readings maintain, but rather of a thing on its own *essence*: the existence of a certain kind of idea (a human mind) depends on the objective reality that is essential to this idea being the idea it is, distinct from all other ideas. Recall how Spinoza defines "essence": the essence of a thing is precisely that which, "being

72 See note 1.

73 See note 1.

taken away [*tollere*], the thing is necessarily taken away, or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived" (E2def2).

Similarly, to propose that a human mind acquires a different degree of "perfection when...it affirms of its body...something which involves more or less reality than before" (E3GenDefAff) is just to make the quite intuitive claim that a mind's degree of power (i.e., its ability to self-sufficiently produce different ideas [E2p13s, E5p39s]) depends on what this mind represents: the richer its objective reality, or the more properties it represents, the more fertile this idea is as a ground of further inferences, compositions, abstractions, and so on. To assert that "ideas differ among themselves, as the objects themselves do" (E2p13s) is to make this same point more generally: what the term "object" picks out here is not a thing outside the attribute of thought but a purely mental object, a thing with merely objective reality – or, more plainly, the representational content of the idea.

Finally, we can also see why Spinoza would also assert that "no one will be able to understand" the mind-body "union" without considering the body a human mind essentially represents (E2p13s). The "union" of mind and body, I suggest, consists fundamentally in the fact that mind and body are one and the same thing, but with different kinds of being.⁷⁴

5.3. My aim in this paper has been to suggest a reading of Spinoza's account of the mind that explains how his apparent references to entities in other attributes can be made consistent with other important epistemological and metaphysical commitments, something that Dependence Readings, I have suggested, fail to do. My alternative solution hinges, as we saw, on stressing the ontological pluralism of Spinoza's theory of ideas, on which the possibility of intentionality and truth is explained by a duality of kinds of being that one and the same entity may have. That Spinoza adopts this way of thinking about ideas seems to me beyond doubt textually, as has been recognized by many commentators. What I have tried to show is that drawing on this element of Spinoza's epistemology allows us to explain how his account of the essential constitution of minds is consistent with his other commitments.

My aim in this paper was to offer an account of how Spinoza understands the essential constitution of minds, not a comprehensive account of Spinoza's theory of ideas.⁷⁵ Consequently I engaged with Spinoza's ontological pluralism about ideas only within the bounds of this single question. In particular, given Spinoza's identification of minds with substantial ideas, I was able to focus solely on how this theory works in the case of veridical ideas. But it is natural to wonder how

⁷⁴ In Author-MS-e, I argue that this is how we should understand the numerical identity of E2p7s: as the identity of a thing with itself but with two conceptually distinct kinds of reality.

⁷⁵ But see Author-MS-d.

this kind of ontological pluralism works itself out in other parts of Spinoza's epistemology. One may worry in particular about its viability as a *general* theory of ideas. (Can the appeal to two kinds of being satisfactorily account also for ideas of finite thinkers – for our confused sensory ideas, general ideas, ideas of mere possibles?⁷⁶ To what existents in nature would the objective reality of such ideas be identical?⁷⁷)

Answering such questions is beyond the scope of this paper. But I would like to stress here that for my reading of mind constitution to go through we only need to grant that Spinoza is committed to an ontologically-pluralistic theory of ideas at the level of the necessarily veridical substantial ideas, and that such a theory is consistent with everything else he says about these ideas. This is because for Spinoza how and what substance thinks is prior in the orders of being and explanation to how and what finite thinkers think (E1p1, E2p11c). So even if Spinoza's ontological pluralism were to turn out to be unsatisfactory as an account of the abstract or confused ideas of finite thinkers, this would not show that as an account of the essential constitution of minds this pluralism is a failure, such that my interpretation of minds is no more successful than the one offered by Dependence Readings. We can grant that Spinoza's ontologically-pluralistic theory of ideas offers a consistent account of substance's ideas of existents even if we have doubts about how it fares as a theory of *our* ideas.⁷⁸

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76 Carriero argues on textual grounds that Spinoza doesn't apply the objective/formal reality distinction to sensor ideas (2016:142n10). But one might worry that Spinoza's naturalism (E3pref) exerts pressure toward a uniform model of representation for both sensory and non-sensory ideas. (I address this more fully in Author-MS-d.)

77 Cf. Kaufman 2000:390.

One possibility is that for Spinoza sensory ideas are to be explained as things sensed existing objectively but in some partial manner (cf. E2p35). Arguably it is also open to Spinoza to say that abstractions are identical to combinations of formally-real things taken distributively (cf. Author-a).

For one account how misrepresentation works in Descartes's version of the view see Brown 2007.

(Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me about this.)

78 [Thanks]

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