

Seven Challenges for Garrett's Interpretation of Mind-Body Identity in Spinoza

Introduction

Descartes's metaphysics left his successors with many difficult questions. For example, he holds that minds can think but not move, while bodies can move but not think (CSM II 54). But if their activities are so different, how can they causally interact? He also holds that minds and bodies can exist without each other (CSM II 54). But if they can exist apart, what unifies them into a single human being?

Spinoza's naturalistic metaphysics can be understood as an attempt to avoid or answer many of the questions raised by Descartes, including the two just mentioned. He avoids the first by denying that minds and bodies causally interact, while retaining Descartes's view that only minds think and only bodies move (IIIp2, VPref). He answers the second by insisting that they are unified in the strongest sense in that they are identical (IIp7s, IIp13). But these responses are in tension. If mind and body are identical, how can minds think without bodies thinking, or bodies move without minds moving?

Let's turn this into a puzzle by focusing on Spinoza's favorite philosophical character: Peter (e.g., IIp7s, IIIp48). Peter's mind has certain properties: it believes, perceives, and thinks. Peter's body has other properties: it moves, rests, and is extended. Call the relation between a thing and its properties "instantiation." Spinoza seems committed to both:

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| (Discernibility) | Peter's mind instantiates thoughts and not motions, while Peter's body instantiates motions and not thoughts. |
| (Identity) | Peter's mind and Peter's body are numerically identical. |

These claims are hard to reconcile because they seem mutually inconsistent with a principle that many now regard as obviously, if not definitionally, true:

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| (Indiscernibility) | If x and y are numerically identical, and x instantiates a property, then y instantiates that property. (Indiscernibility of Identicals) |
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Which claims, if any, would Spinoza reject?

Don Garrett (2017) develops a sophisticated and clever answer on Spinoza's behalf. In what follows, I pose seven challenges for Garrett's interpretation — challenges that, while serious, may ultimately have satisfactory responses. I offer them as invitations for further development and refinement.

According to Garrett, Spinoza would reject either (Discernibility) or (Indiscernibility), depending on how they are disambiguated. The foundation of Garrett's solution is Spinoza's ontological pluralism.

Spinoza's ontological pluralism builds on an earlier tradition. Aristotle wrote that "the soul is in a sense all existing things" (*De Anima* III.8, 431b21, trans. Shields 2016: 61). He apparently

meant that, because the soul can think about anything, it can become like anything. But in what way can it become like something? He later clarifies that when the soul thinks about a stone, “for the stone is not in the soul, but rather its form” (431b29, trans. Shields 2016: 61). Thus, when the soul thinks about a stone, the form of the stone exists within it. How exactly? This was a subject of intense debate among the medieval Aristotelians (see Pasnau 1997). Aquinas held that when we think about a stone, the form of the stone exists “intentionally” in the soul, while it exists “really” in the world. Scotus later called intentional existence “objective existence,” emphasizing the form’s status as an object of thought.

Descartes endorses this distinction (see Ariew 2011, Ch. 2). He writes:

“Objective being” simply means being in the intellect in the way in which objects are normally there. ... By this I mean that the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect — not of course formally existing, as it does in the heavens, but objectively existing, i.e. in the way in which objects normally are in the intellect. Now this mode of being is of course much less perfect than that possessed by things which exist outside the intellect. But ... it is not therefore simply nothing (CSM II 74–75; Garrett 2017, p.274).

Descartes and the medieval Aristotelians accept a weak version of ontological pluralism: some things, such as the stone and the sun, exist in multiple ways, both formally and objectively. According to Garrett, Spinoza accepts a much stronger version, on which everything exists in multiple ways. Peter, for example, exists in Extension as Peter’s body and in Thought as Peter’s mind. According to Garrett, the fact that Peter exists in these two ways establishes that Peter’s mind and Peter’s body are numerically identical (see also Hübner 2022, p.50). Spinoza’s ontological pluralism is thus supposed to commit him to (Identity).

Spinoza’s ontological pluralism is also supposed to make existence and instantiation relative to attributes. As Garrett understands Spinoza’s view, there is existence in Thought and existence in Extension, but no existence simpliciter. Peter exists in Thought (exists-T) as Peter’s mind and in Extension (exists-E) as Peter’s body, but there is no univocal sense in which Peter exists in both Thought and Extension. The same goes for instantiation. Peter’s mind instantiates-T thoughts, and Peter’s body instantiates-E motions, but there is no univocal sense in which Peter instantiates both thoughts and motions.

(Discernibility) is ambiguous between these different kinds of instantiation. Spinoza would accept the first disambiguation but not the second:

- (Discernibility-1) Peter’s mind instantiates-T thoughts and not motions, and Peter’s body instantiates-E motions and not thoughts.
- (Discernibility-2) Peter’s mind instantiates-T thoughts and not motions, and Peter’s body instantiates-T motions and not thoughts.

(Indiscernibility) is similarly ambiguous, and Spinoza would accept the first disambiguation but not the second:

- (Indiscernibility-1) If x and y are numerically identical, and x bears an instantiation relation to a property, then y bears an instantiation relation to that property.
- (Indiscernibility-2) If x and y are numerically identical, and x bears an instantiation relation to a property, then y bears the same kind of instantiation relation to that property.

Unlike the original three claims, Spinoza can consistently accept (Identity), (Discernibility-1), and (Indiscernibility-1). On Garrett's interpretation, the puzzle thus admits of a clean solution, and the solution turns on his ontological pluralism. Garrett's ontological pluralism has implications beyond the mind-body puzzle. If Spinoza's ontological pluralism is correct, then his naturalism is ontologically richer than most, since things in nature would exist in fundamentally different senses.

This is an attractive interpretation, worth our attention, but it faces challenges. The first four concern (Identity) and the remaining three concern (Discernibility).

Seven Challenges

1. What is Spinoza's metaphysical explanation for (Identity)?

Suppose that I wrote a paper announcing a profound metaphysical discovery: that I, John Morrison, am identical to the number 7. I would expect the response: How is that possible? After all, 7 is eternal and prime, and you are neither of those things. It would not be very satisfying for me to then respond: don't worry about the profound differences between me and the number 7, because they're just differences between my material existence and my numerical existence. My claim is absurd, and waving at "different ways of existing" does nothing to make it less so.

Now, suppose I showed you a picture of a baby and then, to your great surprise, announced that I am numerically identical to that baby. You might respond: How can *that* be the same person as *you*? After all, the baby was so small and precious, and you, well, are neither of those things. It would not be very satisfying for me to then respond: don't worry about the profound differences between that baby and me, because they're just differences between my 1979 existence and my 2026 existence. These are just two ways in which I exist. Unlike the first case, my identity claim might be true — I might really be that baby. But it still isn't enough to merely appeal to different ways of existing. We expect a deeper explanation, and there is an entire philosophical literature devoted to providing one. Authors in that literature appeal to spatiotemporal continuity, overlapping memory chains, and a persisting biological organism, among other factors. As this suggests, true identity claims between apparently different things still call out for explanation, and merely gesturing at "different ways of existing" doesn't provide one.

Moving another step closer to our puzzle, suppose that I told you that representational vehicles — such as sentences in books and neural ensembles in the brain — are identical to their contents, and are thus identical to propositions. This would seem just as absurd as the claim that I am identical to the number 7. Vehicles are concrete, located in space, causally efficacious. Propositions are abstract, not spatially located, and causally inert. How can they be identical? It would not be very effective for me to respond: Don't worry about these differences, because

vehicles and propositions are just different ways in which the same thing exists. The apparent category difference between vehicles and contents isn't dissolved or explained by relabeling it as a difference in "mode of existence." It's just redescribed.

Surely, the same is true for Peter's mind and Peter's body. After all, Peter's mind thinks and Peter's body is extended and moves. If someone tells us they are identical, we expect them to explain how this could be. It would not be satisfying for them to respond: don't worry about the differences between Peter's mind and Peter's body, because they're just different ways in which Peter exists.

There is a further reason to want an explanation for the identity of Peter's mind and Peter's body: it might explain why Peter's mind is not identical to all of the other things Peter represents. After all, Peter thinks about many things — the sun, the moon, his neighbors, last night's dinner — and thus all of these bodies exist objectively in his mind. Without an explanation, it can seem arbitrary that Peter's mind is identical to his body but not identical to all of the other bodies that exist objectively in his mind (see Hübner 2022, pp. 63–65 for an unflinching response).

Garrett does not attribute a metaphysical explanation to Spinoza for (Identity), nor does he explicitly acknowledge the need for one. Of course, this does not mean he thinks no explanation is needed — the topic may simply fall outside the scope of his chapter. But one gets the impression, perhaps mistakenly, that he thinks Spinoza's ontological pluralism itself suffices: that the fact that Peter exists formally as his body and objectively as his mind is sufficient for (Identity). But I'm not sure how that inference is supposed to work. Existing in two ways doesn't seem sufficient for identity from either a historical or contemporary perspective.

Let's start with the contemporary perspective. The objective existence of a body in Peter's mind is supposed to explain how Peter can think about that body. Thus, when a body exists objectively in Peter's mind, he has an intentional relation to that body. But intentional relations are not ordinarily sufficient for identity. Consider reference. The term "Peter's body" refers to Peter's body. But it doesn't follow that Peter's body is identical to "Peter's body." Words are almost never identical to their referents. Thus, reference isn't sufficient for identity. Likewise for depiction. A painting of Peter depicts Peter's body. But it doesn't follow that Peter's body is identical to the painting. Paintings are almost never identical to the things they depict. Thus, depiction isn't sufficient for identity. For the same reason, if one of Peter's ideas represents his body, it doesn't follow that the idea is identical to his body. For dualists, this is overdetermined because material things cannot be identical to immaterial things. Peter's body might be included in the *content* of the word, painting, or idea, perhaps as a constituent of the relevant proposition. But it isn't identical to the word, painting, or idea itself.

The same appears to be true for objective existence. Peter's body might exist objectively in the sense that it is a constituent of a proposition. Or it might have some form of abstract existence, like numbers, universals, or Meinongian objects. None of these would entail identity. There doesn't appear to be anything about objective existence, as opposed to these other intentional relations, that would entail identity. Intentional relations do not seem sufficient for (Identity).

But perhaps that's too quick. When a body exists objectively in Peter's mind, perhaps he bears some further, non-intentional relation that is sufficient for identity. Which relation could that be? Peter's existence as body and his existence as mind could be parts of a single whole, Peter. But mereological relations don't entail identity. My two hands are parts of me, but that doesn't mean my hands are identical to each other. Likewise, on the perdurantist theory of persistence, the baby from earlier is a temporal part of me, but that doesn't mean the baby is identical to my current temporal part. Next, Peter's formal and objective existence might be two properties of Peter. But co-instantiation doesn't entail identity: Peter's height and weight are co-instantiated without being identical. Finally, Peter's formal and objective existence might be determinates of a common determinable. But determinable-determinate relations don't entail identity. If I create a statue first in marble and then in clay, the two statues are instances of a common determinable, but that doesn't mean they are identical. Thus, even if objective existence is more than a purely intentional relation, there still doesn't seem to be anything about it that would entail identity.

It also isn't obvious why this would follow from a historical perspective. The medieval Aristotelians and Descartes distinguished between the objective existence of a body in an idea and the formal existence of that idea. This allowed them to deny that the body was numerically identical to the idea. Aquinas, for example, explicitly held that the form's existing both in the stone and in the mind resulted in "formal identity," not numerical identity. He wrote that it "shouldn't be understood as a kind of identity, but as some kind of representation" (*Quaestiones disputata de spiritualibus creaturis*, 2.5 ad 7; see Pasnau 1997, Appendix A, p.303). There was intense debate about the ontological status of objective existence (Pasnau 1997, Ch. 2). Some, like Ockham, denied that it was a genuine kind of existence at all. Others, like Scotus and Descartes, held that thought objects have a "diminished" kind of being; Scotus described it as between full existence and non-existence, and Descartes described it as involving less reality than formal existence. But there was no debate among the medieval Aristotelians about whether bodies are numerically identical to ideas. And for good reason: the stone and the idea differ in nature (material substance versus act of cognition), are modally separable (the stone can exist without the idea), and have asymmetrical causal powers. As far as I'm aware, nobody in this tradition claims that a body and the idea of that body are "one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways" (IIP7s). Ontological pluralism, by itself, was not taken to entail numerical identity. This suggests that Spinoza's commitment to (Identity) follows from something other than his ontological pluralism. One might speculate that he misinterpreted his predecessors as holding that existing in two ways entails identity. But this would be doubly uncharitable: it would attribute to Spinoza a serious misunderstanding of his predecessors, and it would saddle his argument for (Identity) with an assumption he neither argues for nor has any apparent reason to accept.

If it seems as though existing in multiple ways entails (Identity), I suspect it's because of a confusion between two claims. The first is the weaker claim that it's the same thing that exists in thought and exists in extension, just as it's the same thing that is 5'6" and 180 lbs, that has a baby part and a current middle-aged part, and that exists as a marble statue and as a clay statue. The second is the stronger claim that the thing's existence in thought is identical to its existence in extension, i.e., that the mind is identical to the body. Ontological pluralism is committed to the weaker claim, but (Identity) requires the stronger one.

2. What is Spinoza's argument for (Identity)?

Even if there isn't a metaphysical explanation for why Peter's mind is numerically identical to Peter's body, we would still expect Spinoza to offer an argument for this conclusion. After all, it is one of his most important disagreements with Descartes.

Garrett does not explicitly reconstruct Spinoza's argument for (Identity). As with the first challenge, this may simply fall outside the scope of his chapter. But he does emphasize two features of Spinoza's system: strong ontological pluralism (Ip16, that God produces infinitely many things in infinitely many ways) and substance monism (Ip14, that God is the only substance). One gets the impression, perhaps mistakenly, that he sees one of these as providing the argument for (Identity). If so, there are two possible arguments to consider, though I don't think either is sufficient on its own.

The first argument rests directly on Spinoza's ontological pluralism, in particular Ip16:

- a. God has infinite reality.
- b. Therefore, God produces infinitely many things in infinitely many ways.
- c. Therefore, God produces Peter in thought and extension.
- d. Therefore, Peter's mind is numerically identical to Peter's body.

It is not clear why (d) is supposed to follow from (c). First, as we saw in the previous section, the fact that something exists in multiple ways doesn't entail that those ways are identical, and that's what's required for mind-body identity. Another problem is that this argument rests entirely on the premise that God's essence expresses infinite reality. It's unclear why infinite reality requires numerical identity across attributes. Infinite reality doesn't preclude numerical distinctness in general — God creates infinitely many numerically distinct finite things. Why should it preclude numerical distinctness across attributes?

There is a further textual difficulty. Spinoza's argument for substance monism culminates in Ip14 and Ip15. The next proposition, Ip16, begins an independent strand of argument about how God produces his modes. Yet in IIp7s, Spinoza says that the argument for mind-body identity has the same structure as the argument for substance monism. It's hard to see what that shared structure could be if the argument for mind-body identity depends on Ip16. If his point is simply that both conclusions follow from God's essence, this would be uninformative. *Every* proposition in the Ethics is ultimately supposed to follow from God's essence.

The second argument rests on Spinoza's substance monism, in particular Ip14:

- a. God is the only substance. (Ip14)
- b. If Peter's mind is not identical to Peter's body, the thinking substance is not identical to the extended substance.

c. Therefore, Peter's mind is identical to his body.

This argument moves too quickly. A substance monist can still be a property dualist, holding that there is one substance with two sets of properties: mental ones (minds, thoughts) and physical ones (bodies, motions). On such a view, Peter's mind and Peter's body would be numerically distinct modes of the one substance, not identical. To rule this out, Spinoza would need a further premise. We could perhaps find such premises elsewhere in Spinoza's system, but it's at least worrying that he nowhere seems to argue in this way.

Moreover, even if this argument could be supplemented to establish that all mental properties (minds, thoughts) are identical to physical properties (bodies, motions) and vice versa, that still wouldn't be enough for (Identity). It would still be an open possibility that Peter's mind is numerically identical to Paul's body, Paul's mind is numerically identical to Andrew's body, and so on. What's needed is an argument that Peter's mind is specifically identical to Peter's body, and it's not clear to me what further premises might fill this gap in the argument.

There is a third kind of argument that I find more plausible. In the proposition preceding Spinoza's first statement of mind-body identity, he establishes that the mind and body have parallel causal roles. Like others, I'm inclined to think that this is a premise in his argument for mind-body identity. In particular, that Peter's mind and Peter's body having the same causal role explains their numerical identity (see Della Rocca 1996, Ch. 7–8 and Morrison 2022 for different versions). Unlike the first argument, this interpretation has the potential to explain (Identity) and why Spinoza waits until this proposition to assert (Identity). Unlike the second argument, this interpretation has the potential to explain why Peter's mind is identical to Peter's body and not another body — Peter's mind doesn't have a parallel causal role with any other body.

3. What is Spinoza's motivation for (Identity)?

According to Descartes, when the mind thinks about the body, the body exists objectively in the mind. Descartes doesn't explain how that's possible. This raises yet another question for his metaphysics.

According to Garrett, Spinoza endorses (Identity) as a "radical explanatory simplification" of Descartes: rather than explaining how the mind contains the objective existence of the body, Spinoza simply identifies the mind with that objective existence (p.275). Garrett describes this as a motivation for (Identity) rather than an argument for it. But even as a motivation, it's worth asking whether it succeeds: Does (Identity) really explain how the body can exist objectively in the mind?

As we saw, the medieval Aristotelians recognized that when we think about a stone, the form of the stone exists both in the world and in the soul. But what makes it the case that the form in the soul is the same as the form in the world? This was discussed extensively, with many subsidiary debates (Pasnau 1997). One was about how the form is transmitted from the world to the soul, including whether the soul actively acquires forms or passively receives them, and whether forms travel through the air or are transmitted instantaneously. Another was about whether the form in the soul is merely a copy of the form in the world. Yet another was about the kind of

existence the form has in the soul. The details of these debates don't matter for our purposes. What's important is that, in this tradition, a thing's objective existence in the soul was recognized as a genuine puzzle requiring explanation.

Like the medieval Aristotelians, Descartes holds that things that exist formally in the world can also exist objectively in the mind. But unlike them, he rejected forms. Without forms, the puzzle is even more acute: if x exists objectively in the mind and y exists formally in the world, what makes it the case that $x=y$?

According to Garrett, Spinoza tries to solve this problem by *identifying* the mind with the objective existence of the body. The thought seems to be that if the mind just *is* the objective existence of the body, we no longer need to explain how the mind *contains* that objective existence. But this mislocates the problem. The question Descartes couldn't answer was not about containment. It was about what makes one thing the objective existence of another. Even if the mind is identical to an objective existence, we still need to explain why it is the objective existence *of a particular body*. That is, we still need an account of how something that exists formally in the world can also exist objectively in the mind.

Spinoza does have something to say about this issue. For Spinoza, objective existence is a basic form of existence — it is existence under the attribute of thought (Garrett p.273–4). Because God's essence expresses infinite reality (Ip16), each thing must have all forms of existence, including objective existence. Thus, Spinoza's system *guarantees* that each body exists objectively. But Spinoza's system doesn't *explain why*, for a given objective existence, it is the existence of *this thing* rather than *that thing*. Analogously, if 13 people are in a room, it is guaranteed that at least two share a birth month, but the guarantee doesn't explain why a particular pair was born in a particular month. If x exists objectively in the mind and y exists formally in the world, Spinoza doesn't explain what might make it the case that $x=y$. The medieval Aristotelians would have found this unsatisfying. They regarded it as a genuine question why *this idea* is the objective existence of *this thing* rather than *that thing*. Thus, while Spinoza has more to say than Descartes, it is unclear whether he ever really addresses the question that Garrett suggests is motivating him.

For these reasons, I doubt that Spinoza's motivation for (Identity) is that it offers a "radical explanatory simplification" of Descartes's account of objective existence. His motivations seem to lie elsewhere.

There is a further puzzle. When Spinoza asserts that "a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing" (IIP7s), he seems to be disagreeing with Descartes. But if ontological pluralism entails identity, and Descartes accepts ontological pluralism, then Descartes should already be committed to this identity. Spinoza's only disagreement with Descartes would have been about whether the mind is the idea of the body, a disagreement that doesn't emerge until IIP11–13. Yet Garrett himself seems to read IIP7s as a point of disagreement with Descartes (p.273). This suggests that Spinoza is asserting something beyond mere ontological pluralism.

4. How does (Identity) cohere with Spinoza's other claims about identity?

Traditionally, questions about a thing's identity are supposed to be answered by its essence. This includes questions about its identity over time as well as its identity as a man, stone, or some other kind. Spinoza's views are traditional in this respect. For example, a body's identity over time is due to its retaining its essence (Morrison 2021). In the Physical Digression following IIp13, he argues that a composite individual can undergo various changes — including the replacement of its parts, the growth or shrinkage of those parts, and changes in direction of motion — while nonetheless retaining its identity because it retains its essence. But there are other changes that destroy the individual because its essence is lost (IIPhysD1, IVp39s). Spinoza also explains a body's identity as a member of a particular kind in terms of its essence, for example, “a horse is destroyed as much if it is turned into a man as if it is changed into an insect” because if it changed in these ways, its essence would be lost (IVPref). Thus, questions about a body's identity over time are answered by its essence.

This is reflected in Spinoza's definition of essence. He says that “to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing” (IId2). In other words, a thing's essence is constituted by whatever is necessary and sufficient for its existence as well as necessary and sufficient to conceive of it as existing.

Given the apparent dissimilarity between Peter's mind and Peter's body, we would thus expect Spinoza to appeal to a shared essence in explaining their identity (see Morrison 2022). But, as Garrett interprets Spinoza, the identity of Peter's mind and Peter's body is not explained by a shared essence because essences are themselves attribute-relative. In fact, given Garrett's claim elsewhere that essences are themselves modes (Garrett 2009), the identity of Peter's mind's essence and Peter's body's essence also requires explanation. Moreover, this explanation cannot itself appeal to a further shared essence, since essences presumably do not have essences of their own. This is puzzling for two reasons. First, the traditional role of essences is precisely to answer questions about identity, yet here essences raise the very question they are supposed to answer. Second, it introduces an asymmetry into Spinoza's system: diachronic identity and kind identity are explained by a shared essence, but identity across attributes — both of things and of their essences — must be explained by something else entirely.

5. What is the textual evidence for (Discernibility-1)?

According to Garrett, there is a different kind of instantiation for each attribute. There is instantiates-T, instantiates-E, and so on for all the other attributes. We can also construct disjunctive kinds of instantiation, such as instantiates-T-or-E. But there is no instantiation simpliciter. The only kinds of instantiation that apply across attributes are the disjunctive ones. The same is supposed to be true for other notions, such as causation (p.277).

But while Spinoza explicitly distinguishes between two kinds of existence, formal and objective, he doesn't explicitly distinguish between attribute-relative kinds of instantiation and causation. As far as I can tell, there is no textual evidence that he treats these relations as attribute-indexed in the way Garrett's interpretation requires.

Consider some specific cases. First, Spinoza offers a single definition of mode: “that which is in another and is conceived through another” (Id5). If instantiation were relative to attributes, we would expect different definitions for thought-modes and extension-modes, each invoking a different instantiation relation. But Spinoza gives just one definition, suggesting a univocal notion of instantiation. Spinoza does offer attribute-specific accounts of what distinguishes modes within an attribute, such as the role of motion and rest in individuating extended modes. But these concern identity conditions for modes, not what it is to be a mode in the first place.

Second, Spinoza claims that God is self-caused (Ip7). On Garrett’s view, this would have to mean something like: God causes-T himself, causes-E himself, and so on, for all the other attributes. But Spinoza doesn’t present self-causation as a conjunction of attribute-specific relations. He treats it as a single fact about God. This suggests a univocal notion of causation. Likewise for the many other axioms and definitions about causation (e.g., Id1, Ia4).

Third, consider Spinoza’s denial of mind-body causation (Iip6, Iip2). On Garrett’s view, this denial would be trivially true because there simply is no relation of causation that could hold across attributes. Indeed, it would be a category mistake to even ask whether minds and bodies causally interact, and we would expect Spinoza to explain why. Consider his discussion of God’s extension in Ip15s. Anticipating that his readers would think it a category mistake to attribute extension to God, he carefully explains why it is not by correcting misconceptions about extension. If mind-body causation involved a category mistake, we would expect analogous clarification. Instead, he simply argues that minds don’t causally interact with bodies, as if answering a well-formed question. This suggests he is working with a unified notion of causation that could in principle apply across attributes, even though in fact it does not.

Fourth, in Iip7s Spinoza says that the order and connection of causes in thought and extension are “the same” (*idem*). But if causation-T and causation-E are different relations, in what sense could they be the same? Garrett might say that the two causal orders share some attribute-neutral structural feature. But what could this be? If causation is always relative to a particular attribute, there is no causal structure that transcends attributes. Given that Iip7 and its demonstration are about causal structure, it’s also unclear what other kind of structure he might be talking about. Spinoza’s language suggests something simpler: a single causal order found in both attributes, not parallel orders linked by an attribute-neutral relation we cannot grasp.

Finally, it is unclear how the attribute-relativity of these relations is supposed to be established within Spinoza’s system. Ip16 says that infinitely many things, including modes and their properties, follow from God’s nature. This might establish the attribute-relativity of modes and their properties. Relations like instantiation, causation, and power are not themselves modes, so it is not obvious that they fall within the scope of this proposition.

6. Does Spinoza need to relativize instantiation to attributes?

Garrett’s solution to the puzzle depends on relativizing instantiation to attributes. If there were just one kind of instantiation applying across attributes, then (Discernibility) would not be

ambiguous between (Discernibility-1) and (Discernibility-2), and Spinoza couldn't solve the puzzle by endorsing (Discernibility-1) and rejecting (Discernibility-2).

But there is another way to solve the puzzle. Rather than relativizing instantiation, Spinoza could simply reject (Indiscernibility) in favor of a weaker principle (Indiscernibility-w) restricted to properties within an attribute:

- (Indiscernibility) If x and y are numerically identical, and x instantiates a property, then y instantiates that property.
- (Indiscernibility-w) If x and y are numerically identical, and x instantiates a property in an attribute, then y instantiates that property in that attribute.

Both strategies have the same effect: The Indiscernibility of Identicals applies within an attribute but not across attributes. In one case, this is achieved by relativizing instantiation to an attribute. In the other case, this is achieved by explicitly restricting (Indiscernibility) to an attribute. I do not see a reason to prefer one of these strategies to the other. Whatever argument Garrett might give for relativizing instantiation to attributes could equally be taken to be an argument for explicitly restricting (Indiscernibility). It's thus unclear why Spinoza would need to relativize the instantiation relation rather than simply restrict the principle.

7. What does Spinoza's theory of adequate ideas contribute?

As I presented Garrett's interpretation, Spinoza's solution to the puzzle is supposed to follow from his ontological pluralism. But Garrett says that the solution also depends on Spinoza's theory of adequate ideas. It is not clear to me that it does.

Garrett introduces the theory of adequate ideas by noting that Spinoza has "high standards" for adequate ideas, "going far beyond merely representing, in some fashion or other, that a subject has some property that it does in fact have" (p.279). He then argues that cross-attribute predications like "the mind moves" fail to express adequate ideas because, "motion cannot truly be said to inhere in the human mind... because there is no manner of existence — neither Extension nor Thought nor any other — in which such an inherence relation could be realized or find expression" (p.280). Garrett concludes that Spinoza cannot assert cross-attribute predications. But it is not clear what the higher standards of adequate ideas contribute to this argument. Even if we accept a theory of adequate ideas with lower standards, such as the correspondence theory, we still cannot assert cross-attribute predications because there is no instantiation relation between things in one attribute and properties in another attribute. For example, we cannot assert that Peter's mind moves because there is no instantiation relation between Peter's mind and Peter's motions. The underlying constraint on assertion and truth is just the trivial constraint that, if not-p, we cannot truly assert "p". For example, we cannot assert "Peter's mind moves" because there is no instantiation relation between Peter's mind and Peter's motions. The force of the argument is entirely from Spinoza's ontological pluralism, specifically the claim that there is no instantiation relation across attributes. The theory of adequate ideas does not seem to be contributing anything new.

The point can be pushed further: we don't even need ontological pluralism to block cross-attribute predications. Once we give up the Indiscernibility of Identicals, we cannot substitute co-referring terms. Even if "Peter's body" and "Peter's mind" refer to the same thing, it doesn't follow that the same predicates apply to both. So we cannot move from "Peter's body instantiates Peter's motions" to "Peter's mind instantiates Peter's motions." Thus, as long as we're rejecting the Indiscernibility of Identicals, we don't even need ontological pluralism to block cross-attribute predications.

Moreover, on standard interpretations of Spinoza's causal axiom (Ia4), we also cannot form *inadequate* ideas of minds as instantiating motions, so it is unclear what his theory of *adequate* ideas is contributing. The axiom is standardly read as a biconditional: x causes y if and only if y is conceived through x (for a rare dissent, see my 2013). And it is standardly taken to apply to all cognition, not just adequate cognition. Conceiving x as instantiating y plausibly involves conceiving y through x. If so, then if we could have even inadequate ideas of minds as instantiating motions, minds would be causes of motions, violating Spinoza's denial of mind-body causal interaction (IIIp2). For this reason, cross-attribute predications can't involve inadequate ideas. They must be merely verbal combinations — words strung together without expressing any underlying idea, adequate or inadequate. The puzzle concerns all ideas, so a solution can't be derived from a theory specifically about adequate ideas. The theory of adequate ideas, again, adds nothing.

Conclusion

These seven challenges are interdependent. The first four concern (Identity): its explanation, its argument, its motivation, and its coherence with Spinoza's other identity claims. The last three concern (Discernibility): whether Spinoza relativizes instantiation, whether he needs to relativize instantiation, and whether his theory of adequate ideas plays a role. An interpretation that addresses one challenge in each group will likely address the others as well. With this in mind, I offer them as an invitation for further development, hopeful that the broader interpretive framework Garrett has developed across decades of work has the resources to address them.¹

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