

THE DAY IN WHICH ALL COWS ARE WHITE: SPINOZA'S ACOSMISM IN ANOTHER LIGHT

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Abstract. In this essay, I aim to defend Spinoza against Hegel's claim that he annihilated finite things and the real differences they instantiate. To counter Hegel's charge of acosmism, I try to conceive of a Spinozist kind of acosmism that would mean not a metaphysical eliminativism or nihilism about finitude and diversity, but rather a metaphysical fictionalism about finitude that entails a latent application of the principle of the discernibility of identicals. I do this by focusing on the correspondence between Spinoza's three kinds of knowledge – imagination, intellection, and intuition – and his understanding of things as being finite, infinite in kind, and absolutely infinite. In the process, I also entertain Yitzhak Melamed's argument that Hegel was wrong to accuse Spinoza of acosmism, but was onto something by noting the lack of full or self-subsistent existence on the part of finite modes. Melamed offers a reading that claims Spinozist individuals are weak and functional properties that follow from God as his effects. I respond that Melamed would be correct only if we view things from the perspective of the first kind of knowledge, which is a perspective that is by definition false. I conclude, then, that finite things in Spinoza, *qua* finite, are not illusions, but fictions, and that when viewed truly or truthfully they are so many infinite in kind or absolutely infinite ways one infinite and eternal substance, God or nature, is discernibly identical to itself.

Keywords: Spinoza, Hegel, Acosmism, Discernibility, Infinite, Knowledge, Truth

I. Hegel's Charge of Acosmism

Do finite things exist? That is, are there any concrete, numerically distinct, particular things? Can anything true be said of finite things? That is, can one assert a proposition about the concrete and finite particularity of a thing that successfully corresponds to it? Note that these are two different sets of questions. It seems we could answer the former pair in the affirmative and the latter in the negative, or vice versa. It seems possible we could say something true of finite things even if they did not exist,¹ or that we could say nothing true of finite things even if they did exist. Finite things neither need nor do not need to exist in order for it to be possible to be

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able or not to be able to say anything true of them. If it is the case that it is impossible to say anything true of finite things, the falsity of a proposition about them need not amount to their total nonexistence, their complete and utter unreality. That nothing true can be said of a particular target – in this case, finite things – neither means that nothing can be believed or said about such a target nor that we may not have other, perhaps affective, prudential, or instrumental, reasons for speaking as if we could say something true about it. In other words, that nothing true could be said about a target does not annihilate it, and it might be detrimental if we thought that it did. It would be wrong to claim that the falsity of a proposition amounted to the total annihilation of its intended target. On the other hand, if it is the case that nothing true could be said of a target – again, finite things in this case – it would be imperative both to discover how we could successfully ignore this fact (at least assuming we could not function as human beings if we genuinely believed there were no finite things) and discover what we could possibly truly say about finite things if it was false that they were really finite.

I start with this distinction between existence and truth because I would like to show that Hegel made the mistake of confusing Spinoza's idea that nothing true could be believed of finite things *qua* finite with an annihilation of finite things and the plurality implied by their existence. On the other hand, I would also like to show that Hegel was partially right in thinking that Spinoza rejected the full existence of concrete particular things, again, as merely or only finite. Hegel famously charged Spinoza with acosmism, the position which denies in some way the existence of the world (cosmos) of finite things. Yitzhak Melamed has recently pointed out that Hegel was merely expanding upon a point made by earlier German Idealists like F.H. Jacobi and Salomon Maimon.² In his attempt to defend Spinoza from the charge of atheism, Maimon claimed that “in Spinoza’s system the unity is real while the diversity is merely ideal” and that “God...and nothing but him has any existence at all.”³ Hegel’s charge of acosmism against Spinoza is perhaps best presented in *The Encyclopedia Logic* where he writes that Spinoza’s substance is “the dark, shapeless abyss, so to speak, in which all determinate content is swallowed up as radically null and void, and which produces nothing out of itself that has a positive subsistence of its own.”⁴ In the entry on Spinoza in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel claims that, in Spinoza, “the world has no true reality” and “there is therefore no such thing as finite reality, it has no truth whatever.”⁵ And in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but in indirect reference to the early Schelling’s apparently Spinozist leanings, Hegel describes the nihilistic oblivion of there only existing an infinite substance as “the night in which all cows are black.”⁶

Melamed claims that while Hegel’s official argument for the unreality of finite things in Spinoza turns out to be unsound, he was onto something regarding the exact status of what Spinoza called “modes,” those things which exist in and are conceived through the one infinite and eternal essentially existing substance. Spinozist modes are notoriously slippery entities. I would assert that what they actually are depends upon the perspective from which they are viewed. For Spinoza, there are three fundamental perspectives from which modes can be regarded: the first, second, and third kinds of knowledge. The first kind of knowledge is falsity (or imagination and opinion), the second kind is true ideas (or common notions), and the third kind is truth (or

intuition). Now, Spinoza is often interpreted as proposing that some, if not all, modes are singular or individual things (see EIIId7).⁷ It is on the issue of the exact nature of singular things, individuals, or modes that Melamed believes Hegel is mostly correct in treating them as not fully existing. For Melamed, Spinozist individuals are weak and functional. Such weakness, however, does not mean modes do not exist. While admitting he was right to emphasize the modes' lack of full self-subsistence, Melamed counters Hegel by claiming there are aspects of Spinoza metaphysics that simply require that finite things exist in some way. Melamed concludes by rejecting Hegel's charge that Spinoza was an acosmist, but he does admit that modes, most of them at least, do not fully exist.⁸

To enter into this conversation between Hegel and Melamed, I aim to do a few things in what follows. First, I will show that Hegel mistakenly accused Spinoza of regarding finite things as “illusions” when he more often regarded them as “fictions.” I will then claim that Spinoza can be regarded as an acosmist only if by acosmism we mean a kind of metaphysical fictionalism, and not metaphysical nihilism or eliminativism, about finite things. Second, I will counter Hegel's claim that Spinoza annihilated the reality of difference, diversity, and plurality by reducing everything to an undifferentiated abyss of oneness. I will do this by discovering in Spinoza's metaphysics and epistemology a latent use of the “principle of the discernibility of identicals” (PDI), as offered in the contemporary metaphysics of Donald L.M. Baxter, in which difference is understood not in terms of quantitative or numerical distinction, but qualitative or aspectual distinction. Finally, I will summarize my arguments by claiming that Spinoza can still be regarded as an acosmist, as Hegel charged, only if we reconceive acosmism to mean not a metaphysical eliminativism about finitude and plurality, but a metaphysical fictionalism about finitude that involves a qualitative and aspectual understanding of real difference. I will then finish by pointing out some problems with Melamed's claim that Spinozist modes are weak.

II. Spinoza's Fictionalism

Along with providing the history of the acosmist reading of Spinoza, Melamed succinctly notes that, starting with his early readers like Pierre Bayle on through to Hegel, Spinoza has been consistently denounced as an Eleatic philosopher, as someone who regarded all diversity and change as *illusory*. In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel summarized this view: “Parmenides has to reckon with illusion and opinion, the opposites of being and truth; Spinoza likewise, with attributes, modes, extension, movement, understanding, will, and so on.”⁹ While I am not convinced by Melamed that Spinoza may not have been an Eleatic philosopher, we will have to table the discussion of that issue for another, more pressing concern. This is that both Hegel and Melamed treat “illusory,” “fictional,” “unreal,” and “untrue” as roughly synonymous terms. We have already seen above how Hegel conflates untruth with unreality. Melamed continues in Hegel's manner with phrases like “...if the finite modes are mere illusions...” and “Spinozistic modes were reckoned mere fictions...,” without considering that illusions and fictions might be different things, especially for Spinoza.¹⁰ I can find no instance in Spinoza's works where he uses anything like *illusio*, though there are times – for instance, in the preface to his *Theological-Political Treatise* –

where he speaks of the “delusions of the mind.” Delusions, however, are much closer to fictions than illusions insofar as a delusion is a false belief that is affirmed as true, while an illusion is a false impression provisionally accepted based on the force of certain sensations and images. In contrast to *illusio*, there are many occasions where Spinoza discusses *fictio*, *figmentum*, and the like. To give just one example, the appendix to part I of the *Ethics* involves the demolition of a variety of human prejudices and superstitions, all of which appear to rest on the false belief in teleology in nature. Spinoza writes that “all final causes are nothing but human fictions” (*EIapp*).

Spinoza's earlier, unfinished work, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (*TdIE*), contains a relatively lengthy discussion of fictions as a kind of falsity. In fact, there are points in the text where it seems there might not be much of a difference between a false idea and a fictitious one. Spinoza writes that “a fictitious thing is false by its very nature” (*TdIE* II/23), and that “between fictitious and false ideas there is no other difference except that the latter suppose assent; i.e. . . ., while the presentations appear to him [who has the false idea], there appears no causes from which he can infer (as he who is feigning can) that they do not arise from things outside him” (*TdIE* II/25).¹¹ Since we know from the *Ethics* that Spinoza believes there can be no faculty of assent based on free will (*EIp32*), when one is determined to have a fictitious idea one has also necessarily been determined to assent to that idea. In other words, there is likely never a case of a fictitious idea to which the one that has it does not assent. The falsity of a fiction, of that which is assented to, can only be overcome, therefore, if the fiction itself is overcome. But, what exactly is a fiction for Spinoza? A fiction is an idea that is constituted by a confusion or uncertainty about the existence of the thing of which it is the idea. In other words, a fiction is an idea that is unclear whether the thing of which it is the idea necessarily exists. If I think what I have an idea of could possibly exist or not, then my idea is fictitious. If I knew that what I had an idea of necessarily existed or could not possibly exist, then I would truly know that thing. I feign knowing that which I am unsure exists necessarily or not (*TdIE* II/19-20).¹²

Spinoza also has some very interesting things to say about fictions in his early *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being*. In the first chapter, he provides an a posteriori proof for the existence of God (*KV* 1/15), where he aims to explain how we can have an idea of an infinite, perfect, and essentially existing being like God if we ourselves are supposedly only finite thinking things. He says that since “the things knowable are infinite [and] a finite intellect cannot comprehend the infinite, . . .if man's [capacity of forming] fiction[s] were the sole cause of his Idea, then it would be impossible for him to perceive anything” (*KV* 1/16). But since we can perceive, or rather conceive, things, especially an infinite thing, Spinoza claims we must be able to know God, that is, we must be able to have non-fictitious ideas. God, *the* infinite being, determines us, we discover, to have a true idea of him and all his attributes. Thus, he must exist or else we would not have such an idea. What I want to emphasize is that, for Spinoza, neither God nor his attributes – that is, nothing truly infinite – can be understood through or as a fiction: “[I]t is clear that the Idea of infinite attributes in the perfect being is no fiction” (*KV* I/17).

What this implies then is that all knowledge of finite things, regarded as finite, *must* be fictional and that all such fictional knowledge is false. * Of course, I am

supplying some missing premises for Spinoza here. Spinoza clearly states that what is truly knowable is what is infinite and what is infinite cannot be truly known with fictions. I take it as implied, for Spinoza, that the reason why the infinite cannot be truly known with fictions is because fictions are the way finite things are known and thus such feigned knowledge, by not being of the infinite, must be false. This seems to also imply a correspondence between finitude and falsity (or fictionality), on the one hand, and infinity and truth, on the other. I can see no way the finite could not be fictitious if nothing could be truly known of it *qua* finite. Thus, nothing true can be known of finite things *qua* finite. If finite things, as finite, can be known only through or as fictions, then nothing can be truly known of finite things as finite. This does not mean, on the other hand, that we may not be able to know finite things truly or truthfully, that is, without fictions. However, what we would know about them, and how we would know it, would necessarily not involve finitude. I would like to claim that finitude itself is a fiction for Spinoza, that all knowledge, all *true* knowledge, must of necessity be a non-fictitious or non-fictional knowledge of infinity, a knowledge which itself must be infinite, an infinite and thus true knowledge of the infinite. In the *Short Treatise*, it appears that falsity *is* fictional thinking (thinking with, as, and through fictions), while true knowledge is an infinite thinking of infinite beings (God and/as all his attributes). This does not imply that finite things are mere illusions or that they do not exist, that Spinoza totally annihilates them. Rather, it means that finitude is false and that the fiction of finitude can never provide us with access to either what is true about them or the truth itself, which is God's infinity. Falsely knowing – or, more precisely, cognizing – finite things involves feigning them as truly finite. Finite things are only falsely or fictionally finite. Finitude is a pretense. What finite things truly are, are infinite things.

It remains a debate as to why Spinoza did not return to finish the *TdIE* after he moved on to other works. Perhaps he died too young or perhaps he was ultimately unhappy with where the discussion was headed. It is also not entirely clear if Spinoza disavowed the content of the *Short Treatise*. After all, there is much in that text that was carried over into the *Ethics*. Even though Spinoza did not treat falsity in the *Ethics* in exactly the same terms as the *TdIE* or the *Short Treatise*, I would like to think that much of what he says about false and fictitious ideas in these texts still represents Spinoza's mature thinking on epistemological issues. In the *Ethics*, falsity, or the first kind of knowledge, is knowledge based on received affections, sensations, images, signs, random experiences, and hearsay. Spinoza calls the first kind of knowledge, “opinion or imagination” (*EIIp40s2*). All thinking determined and constituted by the reception of external stimuli is false. Human beings are naturally determined to primarily think through the imagination and to imagine themselves and all other things that affect them as being finite entities. The affections by which the human mind thinks are images which present to the mind a world structured by space and time and populated by an indefinite amount of numerically distinct and self-subsistent concrete particular things. This presentation is entirely wrong for Spinoza.

It is false to regard things as being really or truly finite, for that is merely how one is affected and determined to imagine reality. I can see no reason not to view Spinoza's understanding of the imagination and knowledge of the first kind as being

another way of describing thinking with fictions. Knowledge based on external affections is knowledge based on the image of things seeming to be singular and finite. This seeming, this mutilated and confused uncertainty regarding just exactly *what* is affecting us and *how*, is precisely the thinking with fictitious ideas Spinoza called falsity in his earlier works. To imagine is to feign. It is to pretend there is a world out there full of discrete entities. As long as we view things from the perspective of the images of finitude by which they affect us, we can only regard them with the uncertainty of not explicitly knowing whether they necessarily exist or not, which is the very nature of a fictitious idea. Again, I can see no reason not to associate what Spinoza means by falsity in the *Ethics* with what he means by fictitious ideas in the *TdIE* and *Short Treatise*. Falsity is fictional thinking: the feigning, pretending, and imagining of things as being truly or really finite.

To return to Hegel's charge that finite things do not exist *at all* for Spinoza, that he *annihilates* them, we can see that this is simply not the case. Spinoza is not a metaphysical eliminativist or nihilist about finite things, that is, he does not treat them as simply non-existent.¹³ What Spinoza does instead is to argue that the way we come to know things as finite, self-subsisting entities is false because it is based not on any internal, intellectual, rational, or active conception of *what* they truly are and *how* they really exist, but rather merely on a passive reception of how they affect us. If we were to adequately conceive of the real nature of things, we would have to switch to a perspective through which we would not regard them in the way they imbue us with the fragmented images of a feigned finite existence. We would have to conceive of them from the perspective of that in which they inhere and what serves as their true essential existence: the infinite substance that is God or nature. Hegel is wrong to accuse Spinoza of regarding finite things as illusions or as not really existing at all. For Spinoza, to regard things as finite is to regard them falsely or fictitiously. Finitude is a fiction for Spinoza, the fiction that constitutes falsity. This does not mean things do not exist or that the fictions themselves by which they are falsely regarded do not exist. They exist. They are real. But what they – finite things, the fictions they are – really are, is neither finite nor fictitious. Finite things are not really or truly the fictions they falsely are. Falsity, the first kind of knowledge, is only one perspective that can be taken on things. It is a perspective which cannot give one access to the true nature of things. Since Hegel understood finite things to be real only if they had an independent or self-subsistent existence, Spinoza would view Hegel as being inherently and entirely wrong about things since it is absurd, for Spinoza, to posit the existence of finite substances. Spinoza would view Hegel as being trapped in the first kind of knowledge insofar as he can only imagine a world in which substance and subject would be truly distinct and where there must be a real and numerical plurality of finite things.¹⁴ This is only one of many instances where Spinoza and Hegel are completely irreconcilable. The point for now though is that things are not illusions or illusory for Spinoza, as Hegel thought and Melamed at least rhetorically affirmed, but rather fictions, feigned or pretended realities that are by definition false.

Based on Spinoza's view that nothing true could be said or believed about finite things *qua* finite, and that all false thinking of finite things involves feigning, it could be argued that Spinoza was a proto-metaphysical fictionalist about finite things.

Contemporary metaphysical fictionalism comes in a variety of forms. The main two are hermeneutic and revolutionary. Hermeneutic fictionalism is usually characterized as the view that claims made within a certain discourse do not aim at being literally true, that they are not in the business of being either true or false, and that when we use these claims we are only pretending or appearing to assert propositions. Revolutionary fictionalism says that claims made within a certain discourse do aim at being literally true, but they systematically fail, they are all false, and yet we have other reasons for continuing to use these false claims.¹⁵ One way of distinguishing hermeneutic from revolutionary forms of fictionalism is to note the noncognitivism implied by hermeneutic forms. In other words, forms of hermeneutic fictionalism do not involve beliefs, but rather emotions and desires, while revolutionary forms do involve beliefs. If we were to apply these forms of fictionalism to Spinoza, we can see there will not be a complete correspondence, but instead an overlap of elements from both the hermeneutic and revolutionary forms.

On the one hand, Spinoza never seems to doubt that as we talk about finite things we are engaged in a cognitive activity, that we genuinely hold certain beliefs about the world and how it affects us. So, it does not appear Spinoza would approve of the noncognitivism implicit in hermeneutic fictionalism. This is mostly because Spinoza is cognitivist about *all* kinds of speech acts and forms of expression. As we will see, everything, from the perspective of the attribute of thought, is both a thinking thing and internally or essentially a true idea. However, Spinoza's absolute cognitivism, which could also be described as his panpsychism, does not mean he is not also just as emotivist or expressivist, for he thinks everything expresses its affective reaction to being affected in some way and is always conatively determined in some degree by its essential desire to continue to exist. In other words, the hard distinction between belief, desire, and emotion that is common for us is simply nowhere to be found in Spinoza. All thoughts or ideas involve cognition and the expression of beliefs, and all bodies involves both the reception of sensations or affections and the expression of emotions or affects, and, because of his notion of parallelism, as we will see, all thoughts or ideas *are* bodies and vice versa. What this entails is that Spinoza could not be a straightforward hermeneutic fictionalist because he did not deny the cognitive element to what is said of finite things.

Now, on the other hand, as we have seen, Spinoza says that everything thought and said of a finite thing *qua* finite is false, that all ordinary discourse about things as concrete particular substances systematically fails to capture the true nature of things. So, it would seem then that Spinoza is closer to a revolutionary fictionalist about finite things insofar he affirms that we are always aiming at the truth about finite things, but that we always fail to capture that truth as long as we feign them as truly finite. Also, since the revolutionary fictionalist thinks we have other reasons (usually prudential or instrumental reasons) to continue to speak as if a false discourse is true, we could find, if the space in this essay permitted, aspects of Spinoza's philosophy that recommended we speak and act in such a way that momentarily ignored the first kind of knowledge's falsity. Just as one quick example, Spinoza minces no words about the utter falsity of teleology in nature, and yet the way he discusses the nature of desire and the striving to persevere (*conatus*) essential to all

things it would seem we still need to think of what motivates us to act in roughly teleological terms.

However, it is not like Spinoza is a perfectly revolutionary fictionalist about finite things either. While he is cognitivist about talk of finite things, he argues, as we have also seen, that that talk, that expression of belief, *is* a feigning or pretending that finite things are really finite when in truth they are not. In other words, for Spinoza, believing there really are finite things is both systematically false *and* a total pretense. Therefore, if Spinoza is to be regarded as a metaphysical fictionalist, some sort of synthesis will have to be made of hermeneutic and revolutionary fictionalism. I would claim that Spinoza's fictionalism about finite things holds that we are both really asserting *and* really pretending that finite things really exist when in truth they do not exist as finite. What distinguishes Spinoza's fictionalism from contemporary forms is not only this strange synthesis of belief and pretense, but the fact that we can overcome it by taking different perspectives on things, perspectives that entail neither the belief nor the pretense that they are really finite, but rather infinite. These perspectives are the second and third kinds of knowledge.

III. The Discernibility of Identicals in Spinoza I: Infinity in Kind

Along with the accusation of annihilating finite things, Hegel charges Spinoza with annihilating the plurality, diversity, and difference implied by the existence of finite things. Again, Hegel is wrong. Spinoza does not annihilate plurality or difference. Instead, he did much the opposite: he infinitized and absolutized difference. It could be argued that no thinker has a more diverse universe than Spinoza, which indeed sounds strange insofar as there is probably no thinker more monistic than Spinoza as well. It all depends on how one understands identity and difference. It is commonly held that finite things are themselves and not other things, that the baseball on my desk is really and truly distinct from the desk. It is also usually thought that if two things were really the same thing, if they shared all the same properties, they would be identical. This is the principle of the identity of indiscernibles (PII), which can be regarded as a reformulation of the principle of non-contradiction. If two things sharing all the same properties could be different, then somehow the same thing could both be and not be itself by being both itself and something else. Thus, there cannot be two things that have *everything* in common because then there would be more than one of a self-identical thing, which is absurd. If two things really share everything, then there is really only one thing. Self-identical things are not distinct from themselves, but other things, things identical only to themselves. But what if it is a fiction, as it is for Spinoza, that there is a plurality of really or truly distinct finite things in the first place? That is, what if there is no way of truly conceiving the apparent numerical plurality of distinct finite things? If, for Spinoza, it is false that there really is a plurality of distinct and self-subsistent finite things, then what are things going to be and how are they going to differ?

Spinoza's answer rests on two factors: his understanding of absolute or indivisible infinity and his latent use of a principle known as the discernibility of identicals (PDI).¹⁶ I will start with the latter. The contemporary metaphysician Donald L.M. Baxter has developed the idea that something can differ from itself without

instantiating a contradiction or becoming a different thing. Usually, Baxter notes, when something seems to differ from itself – say, when I have mixed feelings or when something changes through time – we thwart the emergence of a contradiction by dividing ourselves or things into distinct parts, by using different descriptions, by focusing on different times, by denying that the property had is the property lacked, and so on.¹⁷ Baxter thinks we can avoid a thing's becoming self-contradictory if we allow it differ from itself without its losing its identity. The way we can do this is to discern the ways a thing can differ from itself and yet remain self-identical. Such discernment takes the form of what Baxter calls “aspectival distinction.”¹⁸ Things have different aspects. We can use “as” phrases to regard a thing in a variety of ways: the baseball on my desk can be viewed as white, as spherical, as autographed by Wade Boggs, etc. All these are the ways the baseball is. We can discern all the different ways a thing exists by focusing on all the different perspectives that can be taken on it or all the different aspects of itself it exhibits. There is no need to turn these aspects into different parts on pain of instantiating a contradiction. Rather, we can note that it is self-evidently clear that there is a plethora of ways a thing can be discerned from itself and yet remain completely self-identical. Moreover, as noted, it is probably the case that the true identity of a thing is all the discernible ways, all the distinct aspects by which, it exists.

There is obviously much more to Baxter's notion than this, and it has a lot to do with complications in mereology and other sub-fields of metaphysics that deal with issues of composition, but what I would like to do now is show how Spinoza latently used the PDI in both his understanding of the absolute infinity of attributes that constitute the essence of substance and his understanding of the infinite in kind infinity of finite modes that follow from the attributes. I would like to show that if the essence of all individual things is, from one perspective, the infinity in kind of immediate modifications and, from another perspective, the absolute infinity of attributes, then they too, along with the attributes and the infinite modes, must be all the discernible ways one absolute and essentially existing substance is identical to itself. In other words, I would like to claim that Spinoza does not annihilate plurality or difference, as Hegel charges, but rather renders all differences – differences of attribute and mode – so many discernible ways one infinite thing is identical to itself. This claim rests entirely on properly grasping Spinoza's admittedly strange conception of infinity and how that conception figures in his epistemology. I will show how Spinoza's threefold division of kinds of knowledge corresponds to his threefold division between finitude, infinity in kind, and absolute infinity. As we have already seen, the first kind of knowledge, falsity, is a fictional or feigned knowledge of things as really distinct finite entities. The first kind of knowledge is false because it is a fictional knowledge of fictions, of things viewed as being really finite. We can now move on to the second and third kinds of knowledge to see how true ideas or common notions are the adequate conceptions of things as being infinite in kind modifications of substance, and how the active and intellectual intuition of the formal essences of things as being ultimately the attributes of substance themselves constitutes the truth that the absolute infinity of things are all so many discernible ways one substance essentially exists and so is identical to itself.

After explaining the first kind of knowledge, Spinoza moves on to knowledge of the second kind, what he calls “true knowledge” and “reason.” The second kind of knowledge is constituted “from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things” (EIIp40s2). What are these “properties of things?” Spinoza refers us to the preceding two propositions, which deal with “those things common to all and which are equally in the part and in the whole” (EIIp38). Common notions are going to be adequate ideas of what is common to all things. To discover what is common to all things, Spinoza takes us back to the so-called “physical digression” in part II of the *Ethics* where he details the exact nature and function of singular bodies. There he tells us that “all bodies agree in certain things” (EIIp13l2). What all bodies agree in is “that they involve the concept of one and the same attribute,” with that attribute being extension, and “that they can move now more slowly, now more quickly” (EIIp13l2d). In other words, what all bodies agree in, what is common to all of them and what they all share, is the fact that they are all extended and that they all move at different speeds. All bodies are animate (EIIp13s). The fact that they are all animate Spinoza calls “motion and rest.” All bodies move and, according to the third lemma, determine each other to speed up or slow down “to infinity.”

Spinoza emphasizes that what is common to all bodies cannot be the essence of any one of them in particular (EIIp37). Body A cannot be essentially constituted by its degree of motion and rest while body B simply neither moves nor rests. Rather, the motion and rest that defines one body defines all other bodies as well, even if they all move at different speeds. In other words, motion and rest itself will not be limited to any individual bodies, but rather will be *all* the degrees of speed and slowness of all bodies. Spinoza asserts that bodies are not distinguished by reason of substance, but by speed and slowness, which can be seen as the first example of Spinoza's latent application of the PDI: all bodies are identical as one substantial motion (motion and rest), but discernible as so many differing degrees of the speed and slowness of that substance. All singular bodies are parts of the one individual body that is the whole of nature. They are all the ways in which one substantial motion modifies itself through an infinity of speeds: “... if we proceed in this way to infinity, we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one Individual, whose parts, i.e., all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole Individual” (EIIp13s). Spinoza thus does not annihilate difference or plurality, as Hegel claims. Rather, he sees all the differences of singular bodies as being the qualitative self-alterations of one body, the aspects by which it changes and differs from itself without ever really differing from itself or becoming another thing. The degrees of speed which define and distinguish every different body are all the discernible yet self-identical ways one whole individual body modifies itself.

While we can conceive of what is common to all bodies by inferring what they all share and what constitutes their common essence, we can also come to conceive of motion and rest by starting with God, the one absolutely and indivisibly infinite being. In response to a letter sent by G.H. Schuller, but conveying questions from the German count von Tschirnhaus, Spinoza gave the reply of “motion and rest,” from the perspective of the attribute of extension, to the request for an example

of something immediately produced by God (Ep 64). In part I of the *Ethics*, Spinoza discusses what is immediately produced by God as being that which God proximately causes and as what follows from his absolute nature (EIp28s). Spinoza mentions in a number of places that what immediately follows from God cannot be absolutely infinite, but rather infinite in kind. For example, Spinoza claims each of the “absolutely infinite attributes” of the divine nature “expresses a nature infinite in kind” (EIp16d). (We will see shortly what distinguishes absolutely infinity from infinity in kind). Therefore, what is both immediately produced by God *and* common to all singular bodies will have to be neither absolutely infinite nor simply finite, but something “in between,” and that will be something infinite in kind. The content of the second kind of knowledge, the formal essence of what a common notion adequately conceives, will be infinite in kind. The motion and rest that is immediately produced by God through the attribute of extension and common to all bodies is neither the absolute infinity of extension itself nor the finitude of the particular bodies that are the modes or modifications of its holistic motion. Motion and rest is infinite in kind. It is the infinity to which all bodies determine each other to speed up or slow down, as mentioned in EIIp13l3.¹⁹

What distinguishes something infinite in kind from something finite is that it is not conceived on the basis of the imagination, that it is not the product of externally received affections. Infinity in kind cannot be feigned. Rather, it is discovered internally, reflectively, and rationally. The idea of what is infinite in kind and extended, the common notion of what is common to all bodies, is found to be the very active and adequate idea that constitutes the true nature our minds: the intellect. The imagination could never conceive of the infinite in kind not only because the imagination involves only the passive reactivity of perception and never the affirmative activity of conception, but also because it is precisely only the finite that *can* be imagined. Motion and rest is unimaginable. It can only be conceived, that is, regarded intellectually. To conceive of motion and rest, and so switch from a false to a true perspective on things, the mind must activate an internally and eternally active power to conceive what all things share. In other words, the mind must overcome the imagination – that faculty, as we have seen, which is constituted by the superior power of external bodies to force us to imagine them as finite – so to identify itself with its essentially active and innate intellectual power. This overcoming is achieved by the mind's discovery that it can only form a common notion of what is common to all bodies by forming a common notion of what all its ideas, and indeed all ideas, have in common. This is both the absolutely infinite attribute of thought and what would be the correspondingly immediately produced and infinite in kind mode of thinking, what Spinoza calls the “infinite intellect” (Ep 64).²⁰

All ideas are inherently active for Spinoza. It takes an intellect, not an imagination, to discover this. By its very nature then, the intellect will not be feigning finitude, but conceiving infinity. It takes an infinite intellect to form the common notion of motion and rest. That which is infinite in kind cannot be conceived by a finite mind, but by an infinite in kind mind. Therefore, the mind forms a common notion by discovering that it itself is already the eternally active, rational, and intellectual conception of itself as an infinite in kind mind that thinks what is infinite

in kind from the perspective of the attribute of extension, motion and rest. Only that which itself is infinite in kind can conceive of what is infinite in kind. Moreover, it is an infinite intellect that *is* the adequate idea of motion and rest. How does Spinoza show this?

First, he establishes the parallelism of ideas and bodies (EIIp7). For any mode of the attribute of extension, any body, there is a mode of the attribute of thought that thinks it, that is its idea. Nothing extended is not thought of and nothing thinking does not think something extended. For every finite thought, every image, there is a feigned finite body it thinks. The parallelism of finite ideas and bodies does not mean that such ideas are adequate, that is, true conceptions of the essential nature of either themselves as ideas or the bodies they think. Just because every finite thought thinks a finite body, that does not mean thoughts are adequate or true. In fact, we have already seen that they are necessarily false. In order for ideas to become the adequate concepts of the bodies they think they must cease feigning these bodies and start to conceive what is common to all of them. Spinoza asserts that ideas of what is common to all finite ideas and bodies are needed in order to overcome the falsity of the imagination. Such ideas will be necessarily be adequate: “those things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole, can only be conceived adequately” (EIIp38). Common notions are adequate because they are not received images of the particular bodies that affect us, but active conceptions of what all bodies, and thus all ideas of all bodies, share. These are the common notions of motion and rest and the infinite intellect. What an infinite intellect thinks and thus ultimately is – especially as it thinks itself, its formal essence – is, by parallelism, the infinite body that is its object, its objective essence: motion and rest. Such ideas are necessarily adequate and true.²¹

IV. The Discernibility of Identicals in Spinoza II: Absolute Infinity

What distinguishes infinity in kind from absolute infinity? How can absolute infinity be known? For Spinoza, God or nature, the one substance that essentially exists, is absolutely infinite: “By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence” (EId6). As we have seen, the essences expressed by the attributes are infinite in kind while the attributes themselves are absolutely infinite. Spinoza explains the difference: “I say absolutely infinite, not infinite in its own kind; for if something is only infinite in its own kind, we can deny infinite attributes of it [NS: (i.e., we can conceive infinite attributes which do not pertain to its nature)]; but if something is absolutely infinite, whatever expresses essence and involves no negation pertains to its essence” (EId6e). I think it could be claimed that what is infinite in kind for Spinoza is a whole individual, specific to and immediately produced by a certain attribute, which serves as an eternal and omnipresent feature common to all its parts, with the parts themselves, as conceived through a common notion, being the total plurality of all the discernibly identical ways it exists. What is absolutely infinite, on the other hand, is simply the attribute itself that is *what* all these discernibly identical things *are*, including both all feigned finite entities and the whole infinite in kind and

immediately produced mode known through and as a common notion. To clarify this further, let us look closer at just what the attributes are.

An attribute is what constitutes the essence of substance (EId4). However, the essence of substance is not just one attribute or even indefinitely many attributes, but *all* attributes. This is because, for Spinoza, the more attributes something has the more reality, power, perfection, and existence it has (EIp9). Something which is by definition eternal, and so exists of absolute necessity (what it is, is that it is), will have to have all and so simply *be* all reality, power, perfection, and existence. Therefore, God, it should be no surprise, will have and so be all attributes. What is infinite in kind, by following from and being expressed by the attributes, will thus necessarily not be absolutely infinite, because absolutely infinite reality, power, perfection, and existence can be denied of them. But, many questions remain. How can “absolutely infinite” describe both *all* attributes and *one* substance? What is the relationship, if any, between God and his attributes? Perhaps most importantly, how can we know God's absolute infinity?

To answer the first question, we need to focus on what Spinoza means when he simultaneously affirms that every attribute can be conceived through itself (EIp10) – and so also must be regarded as the cause of itself insofar as Spinoza always pairs self-conception with self-causation (EId1)²² – and that an absolutely infinite substance is indivisible (EIp12,13). It is on this point that we will see Spinoza's other major latent application of the PDI. Spinoza's substance is both one thing and many things. Indeed, it is both one thing and all things. On the one hand, God or nature is indivisible. Spinoza asks us to consider the contrary. If substance could be divided into parts, it would be divided into other substances which would either also be absolutely infinite or not. If an absolutely infinite substance could be divided into other absolutely infinite substances, then there would be two or more substances sharing the same nature, which Spinoza had already established as impossible (EIp5) because two or more substances sharing the same nature would, by the PII, be the same thing, insofar as two truly distinct substances could only be distinguished on the basis of a difference in attribute. This renders the existence of a plurality of substances absurd. If substance were to be divided into other substances which did not retain the nature of an absolutely infinite substance, then there would exist substances that violate the very definition of a substance as self-causal and self-conceiving. An infinite in kind or finite substance resulting from the division of an absolutely infinite substance would be the effect of, and so have to be conceived through, that substance, which is again absurd (EIp13d). Therefore, there can be only one absolutely infinite substance and it has to be indivisible.

On the other hand, this does not mean that that which is indivisible does not have a great diversity of ways in which it can be discerned. In fact, it has an absolute infinity of ways of being discerned. These ways are the attributes. For Spinoza, the attributes are the essence of substance (EId4). An essence is that without which a thing could not be what it is. The attributes are what substance is. No attributes, no substance. But there is an absolutely infinite plurality of attributes. This means that each attribute, from its own aspect or perspective, will have to be the absolutely infinite indivisibility of substance itself. The attributes are discernible, but they are

each identical as substance. Each attribute is as self-causal and self-conceiving as substance itself. Spinoza writes,

it is evident that although two attributes may be conceived to be really distinct (i.e., one may be conceived without the aid of the other), we still cannot infer from that that they constitute two beings, *or* two different substances. For it is of the nature of a substance that each of its attributes is conceived through itself, since all the attributes it has have always been in it together, and one could not be produced by the another, but each expresses the reality, *or* being of substance. (EIp10s)

Elsewhere, Spinoza uses the language of aspect or perspective to describe how each attribute simply *is* substance from its own perspective. Spinoza writes, “the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that” (EIIp7s).

I think there is an interesting and thus far unnoticed implication of Spinoza's latent application of the PDI in his understanding of the attributes: if each attribute is substance from its own perspective, then each attribute is also every other attribute, and thus substance itself, from its own perspective. In other words, if substance is comprehended under the attribute of thought, for example, then substance is thinking substance. But, this does not mean that substance loses the attribute of extension or any other attribute. Rather, it means that substance *qua* thinking substance is thinking substance *qua* an absolutely infinity of attributes, which must of necessity, essence, and definition mean that thinking substance is also every other attribute. Put differently again, as thinking substance or from the perspective of the attribute of thought, substance *is* thought and thought *is* the attribute of extension and every other, *all* other, attributes because, as substance itself from its thinking perspective, it must be all the other attributes in order to be substance. As substance, thought is extension and attribute c,d,e, etc., but so is extension, from its perspective, thought, attribute c,d,e, etc. Every attribute, as substance, is or is identical to every other attribute, but, again, only from its perspective. Every attribute is substance – that is, all attributes – from its perspective. Every attribute is identical as substance, but discernible as the attribute it is. To return to Hegel's charge that Spinoza annihilates plurality, let us again ask: how many discernible attributes are there? There are all of them, that is how many. And how many is all of them? One. One substance is all attributes. All attributes are substance. Each attribute is every attribute as substance. Every thing is everything. Spinoza did not annihilate plurality or diversity, as Hegel charges. He perfected, absolutized, and infinitized difference, rendering it identical to identity itself. God does not relate to his attributes as if they were distinct from him. Instead, they are simply all the discernibly identical ways he essentially exists. God's eternal plenitude, the necessity of his self-causal omnipotence, is constituted by the absolute self-identity of his infinite differences.

How we can know this truth about substance, that God is all the different ways everything is? For Spinoza, we must do something more than rationally conceive what all feigned finite things have in common. We must discover that even the

adequate ideas of the infinite in kind and immediately produced omnipresent features found in all things (motion and rest and infinite intellection for finite extended and thinking things, respectively) do not capture the real essence, the formal being, of all things. I think that, for Spinoza, to do this we must intuitively grasp that all singular things *are* the attributes they are in and through which they are conceived. In this way, they will thus be seen as all the discernible ways God is identical to himself, all the ways he expresses and modifies himself, his attributes and all that follows from them. I think this is what is ultimately intended by Spinoza's account of the third kind of knowledge. He writes that the third kind of knowledge, "which we shall call intuitive knowledge, ...proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [NS: formal] essence of things" (EIIp40s2). We must come to know things neither through the falsity of feigned finitude nor merely through the adequacy of the common notions, but through the truth of God's attributes.

Now, this is not to belittle the value of the second kind of knowledge, for we could not even form the desire for the third kind knowledge if we only knew things with the falsity of the first kind of knowledge (EVp28). On the other hand, were we to rest with a knowledge based on the common notions we would never know the truth of the substance which is the cause and true nature of the essence and existence of all things, especially ourselves. To go from true ideas to the truth, from the second to the third kind of knowledge, we must see that what God is, is what we and all things really are, that the true being of things is neither the feigned finitude of our affective imagination nor even the active and adequate conceiving of the whole individual of which all things are a part. The infinite intellect is not explicitly an absolutely infinite thinking. Motion and rest is not explicitly extension's indivisibility. We must come to know the absolutely infinite, not merely the infinite in kind. We can do this only if we understand, first, that God is all his attributes and that all the attributes are each other and so God himself from their own discernibly identical perspectives, and, second, that our own formal essence, what we really are, and the formal essence of all formerly feigned and intellectually grasped things, is in fact God's essence, that is, that the formal essence of the attributes *is* the formal essence of things. Only in this way can we form an adequate idea of the formal essences of the attributes in and through which our formal essence exists and is conceived. Moreover, only in is the way can we form an adequate idea that knows that the formal essence of an attribute *is* the formal essence of a mode, that knows, in other words, that God *is* all that follows and flows from his essence and that we and all things are all just so many more discernibly identical ways God essentially exists. I think this is what Spinoza means when he says, as we have the third kind of knowledge, we love God with an infinite intellectual love with which he loves himself (EVp36). With the third kind of knowledge, through the intuition of his attributes, we explicitly become what we are: discernible, yet identical ways in which God essentially exists.

But, how do we do this? How we do form an idea not just intellectually or rationally adequate, but intuitively adequate? And how do we know that the formal essences of the attributes is the formal essences of things? I would claim that it is again a matter of switching perspective. If we were able to form the common notions

by discovering that things were not merely what we were being externally determined to imagine them as, but rather that things were internally active expressions of a whole active individual, ways in which an infinite in kind unity existed, then we must take the process of discovery one step further. We must discover that what all things really are, are ways God essentially exists. We must take a perspective on things that focuses neither on the spatio-temporal images of feigned finitude nor the omnipresent features of infinite in kind modifications, but rather on what it is all things are in and through which they are conceived. The third kind of knowledge will be an adequate idea of what all modes are in and conceived through, that is, what all things are caused by and through which their essence and existence is explained. This idea is discovered as being inherent to the mind that intuits and in a sense activates it. What the mind discovers by activating it is that things, as they exist in God, and not as they exist through the imagination, exist *by* and *as* his causal power and necessity. Spinoza regards this as a perceiving of things “under a certain species of eternity” (EIIp44c2). Every false and true idea contains within it the truth of both itself and that of which it is the idea. Such is its positivity. To think that truth one must intuit the essence of all things, all ideas and bodies, as they exist in God and by his eternal necessity. This is what Spinoza means when he says that “each idea of each body, or of each singular thing which actually exists, necessarily involves an eternal and infinite essence of God” (EIIp45). Spinoza specifies that “by existence here” he is “speaking...of the very existence of singular things insofar as they are in God” (EIIp45s).

Things, regarded from the perspective of their existence in God, are just ways God himself exists. Spinoza writes, “Particular things are nothing but affections of God's attributes, *or* modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way” (EIp25c).²³ It is also important to emphasize that God is the one doing the expressing here. Modes are in God insofar as they are expressed through God and by God and so must, because of Spinoza's rejection of transitive causation (EIp18), eternally remain within God. In other words, all the ways God is determined are simply all the ways God determines himself. God expresses himself in and through his expressions of himself. I would like to suggest that the attributes are all the absolutely infinite and discernibly identical ways God expresses himself. The modes, what are expressed by God, all essentially exist in and through the attributes of which they are the modes or expressions. The third kind of knowledge is the intuition of the formal essence of a mode through the formal essence of the attribute of which it is the expression or modification and in which it essentially, necessarily, and eternally exists. This is the adequate idea by which we understand the infinite and eternal essence of our own bodies and minds. There exists in God an infinite and eternal idea of the infinite and eternal essence not only our own body, but all bodies: “in God, there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that body, under a species of eternity” (EVp22). I cannot help but think that the infinite and eternal idea of the infinite and eternal essence of a body is not only the infinite intellect's immediately produced and infinite in kind active and adequate idea of the infinite in kind motion and rest that is the whole individual body of nature itself, as we saw with the second kind of knowledge, but also, by applying the same parallelism through the third kind of knowledge, the attribute of thought's absolutely infinite and

adequate idea of the absolutely infinite attribute of extension, which is an idea that essentially *is* every idea of every body, or, in other words, an idea that is God's absolutely infinite and indivisible idea of himself as an absolute infinity of absolutely infinite and indivisible attributes that all things essentially are insofar as they are expressed in and through God's attributes. To know *this* is what it would mean to know God, to know the formal essence of all the things expressed by God from a knowledge of the formal essence of the attributes that express them.

V. Conclusion: Spinoza's Acosmism in Another Light

Hegel charges Spinoza with acosmism. He says that Spinoza annihilated finite things, and the real diversity they instantiate, by regarding them as illusory. I have argued, contrary to Hegel, that Spinoza did not regard finite things as illusions, but rather as fictions, as things viewed falsely if viewed as truly finite. Things are finite and really or substantially distinct, for Spinoza, only insofar as they are feigned through the ways in which we imagine they affect us. This is just one view on things, a particularly false view. It is the view Hegel himself took. Therefore, a Spinozist response to Hegel would be that he is misguided to accuse Spinoza of acosmism, on his understanding of the term. I have argued that Spinoza, instead of employing an eliminativist approach, employed a latent or early form of a metaphysical fictionalist approach to finite things. I have also argued that Spinoza was not eliminativist about difference, diversity, or plurality, but rather employed a latent or early form of Baxter's principle of the discernibility of identicals, in which an absolute infinity of discernible attributes and modes essentially serve as all the self-identical ways an eternally or necessarily existing substance, God or nature, expresses itself. So, where does that leave us? Can Spinoza still be regarded as acosmic in some way?

To return to Melamed for a moment, he would answer in the negative. He would say Spinoza could not be acosmic, in Hegel's sense, because finite modes really and truly exist, but as weak and functional properties that follow from the essence of God. By focusing on *EIp16d*, which states that "from the given definition of any thing a number of properties...really do follow necessarily from it (that is, from the very essence of the thing)," Melamed presses the point that all the modes, both infinite in kind and finite, must follow from God's essence as really distinct properties and so must, *contra* Hegel, really exist. And what they really exist as, for Melamed, are the *effects* of God's omnipotent causal power. Melamed shows that Hegel must be wrong in asserting that Spinoza annihilates finite modes insofar as Spinoza claims both that "nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow" (*EIp36*) and that the modes follow from God's nature. If modes did not exist, therefore, nothing, no properties, would follow from God's essence and so no effects would follow from his nature, which is absurd. Hegel, then, must be wrong and finite modes must exist.

While Melamed argues that modes exist, he also argues, continuing a reading offered by Della Rocca,²⁴ that their existence is in some way not full and so are only weak and functional. What appears to constitute the weakness of finite things in Spinoza, for Melamed, is the very fact that they are not really self-subsisting and distinct units or substances, that the differences between modes of the same kind are

fuzzy, aspectival, and a matter of degree and not kind.²⁵ It is precisely because Spinoza latently applies the PDI to modes that they are weak for Melamed. But, one must ask, what is weak about being an aspect of an infinite in kind individual and an absolutely infinite attribute? Indeed, what is weak about being a way in which God's self-causal omnipotence is expressed? Nothing at all. If viewed from the perspective of the second and, preferably, the third kind of knowledge, we can see that the formal essence of modes *is* the infinite in kind and absolutely infinite essence of immediate modes and attributes, respectively. Now, what is essentially infinite could not possibly be weak, for God's essence is infinite and his essence simply is omnipotent power: "God's power is his essence itself" (EIp34). God's power is omnipotent because it is that "by which he and all things are and act" (EIp34d). God is all things and all that they do. All things are God, his power to be all things and do what they do. God is omnipotent, and since God is all things, so too must all things be essentially omnipotent.

The problem with Melamed's view on finite things as weak and functional is that it is a view expressed entirely from the perspective of the first kind of knowledge. Things are only weak and functional, or indeed only finite, if viewed externally, in terms of how they relate to other feigned finite things. Viewed internally, from the perspective of their formal essence, they are infinite and so must be omnipotent, the very opposite of weak. Melamed would be correct that things are weak only if they were viewed from without, externally, in terms of how one receives affections from them, how one feigns them, how one may be composed into something else with them, and so on. But this is a completely receptive and reactive view, a false view, a view that does not adequately and actively conceive of the true essence of all things, which is God's absolute self-causal power. This takes us to another problem with Melamed's interpretation. He argues that finite things must exist because they are the effects of God's causation, but how can something that is, by essence and definition, eternally self-causal produce effects that really and truly exist *as* effects, that is, as things produced, as if his causation somehow ceased? *They cannot*. Nothing exists as a real effect of something self-causal, for self-causation means that all there is, is more of or only again the thing causing itself to exist. Eternal self-causation means, as we have seen from the perspective of eternity taken in the second and especially third kind of knowledge, all things are as self-causal as God himself because they *are* all the discernibly identical ways God absolutely infinitely and eternally expresses, or causes, himself to exist. Things are not the weak effects of God. Rather, they *are* his omnipotent self-causation, his absolutely infinite and eternal essential existence, all the discernible ways in and through which he is identical to himself.

So, again, is there any way to salvage the acosmic reading of Spinoza? I would answer in the affirmative only if by acosmic we mean not an eliminativism, but rather a fictionalism, about finite things. It is the case that, for Spinoza, there really are no existing finite substances, but the falsity of this perspective is the way we are determined by nature to first cognize the world. In a sense then, Spinoza seems to admit, it is a fiction we could not live without, at least at first. On the other hand, discovering that feigning finitude is false leads us, through the second and third kinds of knowledge, to the awareness that no finite things exist *qua* finite, but as infinite. It

leads us to the activation of and identification with what we essentially are, which is God himself, his omnipotent and infinite and eternal essential existence. Therefore, instead of relegating things to a dark abyss of indeterminate nullity, the night in which all cows are black, as Hegel claims, we can say that Spinoza's acosmism actually presents us with the perfect radiance of an absolutely transparent light, the day in which all cows are white. It is not that cows/things *are not*, somehow swallowed up into an oblivious nothingness, but that what they truly and really *are*, is the divine light.

References

¹ For example, "Doctor Doom is the dictator of Latveria," is a true statement about that particular fictional character, even though he obviously does not exist.

² Melamed, Y., "Acosmism or Weak Individuals?: Hegel, Spinoza, and the Reality of the Finite," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48/1 (2010): 77-92, see p. 79.

³ Cited in Melamed, Y., (2010): 79.

⁴ Hegel, G.W.F., *The Encyclopedia Logic*, trans. and ed. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, and H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 227.

⁵ Hegel, G.W.F., *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simson, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 281.

⁶ Hegel, G.W.F., *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 9.

⁷ All references to the *Ethics* [E], the early works of Spinoza, and Letters 1–29 are to *The Collected Works of Spinoza* [C], vol. 1, ed. and trans. E. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). I use the following standard abbreviations for Spinoza's two earliest works: *TdIE* for *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* [*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*] and *KV* for the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being* [*Korte Verhandeling van God de Mensch endeszelfs Welstand*]. Passages from these texts will be referred to by means of the following standard abbreviations: initial numerals stand for part or book numbers, "a" for "axiom", "c" for "corollary", "p" for "proposition", "s" for "scholium", "pref" for "preface", and "app" for "appendix"; "d" stands for either "definition," when it appears to the right of the part of the book, or "demonstration," in all other cases. Hence, "E Id4" is the fourth definition of part I and "E Ip13d" is the demonstration of proposition 13 of part I. For the Latin and Dutch texts of Spinoza see, Spinoza, *Opera* [G], 4 vols., ed. C. Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925).

⁸ Melamed, Y., (2010): 84-92.

⁹ Hegel, G.W.F., *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), 98.

¹⁰ Melamed, Y., (2010): 90 and 81, respectively.

¹¹ Spinoza later writes, equating the false and fictional, "False and fictitious ideas have nothing positive...through which they are called false or fictitious..." (*TdIE* II/40).

¹² Admittedly, I am playing a bit fast and loose here with the distinction between illusion and fiction. It is not entirely clear that Spinoza wouldn't view illusions, delusions, and fictions as differing moments on a continuum of falsity, or at least see illusions as perhaps the immediate perceptual or sensitive events upon which fictions are based. Indeed, there are occasions where Spinoza's discussion of the mechanism of the imagination sounds like a description of illusions. What I am trying to emphasize is that it seems Spinoza does not use the language of illusion to describe falsity, but instead the language of fiction, because illusions are mere distortions of the senses, while fictions are posited ideational entities that betray the unreality of their objective content.

¹³ “In principle, anyone denying the existence of some type of thing is an eliminativist with regard to that type of thing.” Ramsey, R., “Eliminative Materialism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2013 Edition), ed. E. N. Zalta. Available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/materialism-eliminative/>, cited February 18th, 2014.

¹⁴ Without being led too far astray into the complexities of Hegel’s system, it is important to note that he posited a real difference between substance and what he called a subject, a finite human self, but which was also for him the real and living substance. See, Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 10-14. The point is that Spinoza would not abide by such a dualism, even if it might have been momentary for Hegel.

¹⁵ Eklund, M., “Fictionalism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2011 Edition), ed. E. N. Zalta, Available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/fictionalism/>, cited November 13th, 2013.

¹⁶ The discernibility of identicals is obviously going to be the opposite of the indiscernibility of identicals, but we must first note how the indiscernibility of identicals is the inverse of the identity of indiscernibles. If the latter principle says that two things sharing all the same properties must be identical, then the former principle will say that two identical things must share all the same properties. The difference between the two principles is important because while it may be the case that two things having the same properties would be identical, it is not necessarily the case that two identical things would share all the same properties. It is entirely possible for two identical things or one self-identical thing to both have and not have all the same properties. In other words, it is possible for two identical things or one self-identical thing to have discernible ways in which they differ from themselves, having and not having certain properties, while remaining identical. Things can have a great variety of discernible ways of being themselves while remaining all the while identical to themselves or other things. With respect to a self-identical thing, it can have an incalculable multiplicity of aspects by which it can be viewed as one thing. Being discernible from itself in a plurality of ways does not violate a thing’s self-identity. In fact, it may constitute it. A thing may simply *be* all the ways it has and does not have all its properties. And, likewise, two identical things can remain completely identical while also having a great variety of a ways in which they are discernible.

¹⁷ Baxter, D.L.M., “The Discernibility of Identicals,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 24 (1999): 37-55, see p. 37.

¹⁸ Baxter, D.L.M., (1999): 45.

¹⁹ It is also important to note that, according to propositions 21-23 in part I of the *Ethics*, nothing finite could possibly follow from God’s infinity, which again shows how the finite how has no true, but only fictional, existence for Spinoza.

²⁰ It is also important to note that when we discovered earlier that what goes into constituting a fiction, for Spinoza, is the fact one can realize one is the partial cause of their fictional thinking, we can now see that this realization implies one also has the innate power to overcome their fictional thinking. This entails a certain kind of bootstrapping power inherent within a mind that, having shifted away from falsely regarding itself as finite, can overcome its feigning so to adequately conceive of its true infinite essence.

²¹ It is important to note that Melamed believes Spinoza’s parallelism, especially as it is presented in *EIIp7* where the “order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things,” disproves Hegel’s charge of acosmism insofar as if there were simply no things at all, nothing would be parallel to anything else. Melamed, Y., (2010): 90.

²² I tend to disagree with the neo-Idealist propensities of Michael Della Rocca and some of his students when they claim that Spinoza reduced causation to conception and that all relations in Spinoza are ultimately ones of rational or intellectual explanation and conception (see

Newlands, S., "More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza," *Philosophy Compass*, 6/2 (2011): 109-119). I am more sympathetic to Mogens Laerke's claim that we could just as easily reduce all explanation and conception in Spinoza to causation (see Laerke, M., "Spinoza and the Cosmological Argument According to Letter 12," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21/1 (2013): 57-77).

²³ It is important to note that this is the case whether or not a mode exists from a durational perspective. On the other hand, to regard things as existing spatio-temporally is to feign them as finite, and so to regard them falsely. In part II of the *Ethics*, Spinoza discusses the nature of the ideas of things that do not exist. What Spinoza says about the formal essence of things that do not exist in a spatio-temporal sense is actually a description of the actual and true formal essence of all things regardless of whether they are feigned to exist or not. "The ideas of singular things, or of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended in God's infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of the singular things, or modes, are contained in God's attributes" (EIIp8). To explain this further, Spinoza give the interesting example of a circle in which an infinity of rectangles can emerge from the intersection of two equal straight lines drawn in the circle. While there is an absolute infinity of rectangles in the circle, only two spatially exist, the ones that are formed from the drawn lines, D and E. That these two rectangles exist in the sense that they can be seen, or rather imagined, does not deny that every other rectangle also exists in the circle. The formal essence of every rectangle, whether imaginable or not, actually exists in the circle. As Spinoza puts it, they are all "comprehended in the circle" (EIIp8s). From the perspective of the circle, the infinity of the rectangles actually and essentially exists and exists as much as the circle itself. The formal essence of every rectangle is implied by and exists in and through the formal essence of the circle. This is clearly analogous to how Spinoza understands the formal essence of singular things, whether they exist as feigned and in the imagination or not, in relation to the formal essence of the attributes of God in and through which they exist. I want to suggest that, from the perspective of God's attributes/the circle, all things/rectangles *are* the attributes/God/the circle. The formal essence of all things is the formal essence of the absolutely infinite and eternal essence of God himself, all his attributes, from the perspective of whichever attribute a mode expresses. (This reading of formal essences is slightly under the influence of Don Garrett, even though he only goes so far as to say that formal essences are infinite in kind. See, Garrett, D., "Spinoza on the Essence of the Human Body and the Part of the Mind that is Eternal," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. O. Koistinen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)).

²⁴ Della Rocca, M., *Spinoza*, (London: Routledge, 2008), chapter 7.

²⁵ Melamed, Y. (2010): 85.