

## Spinoza's Attributes and the "Intermediate" Distinctions of Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus

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### Introduction: The Attribute Problem

Spinoza defines *attribute* at E1d4 as “what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence.” Spinoza then argues (at E1p10) that each attribute must be conceived “through itself.” That is, each attribute is conceptually independent. One can clearly and distinctly conceive of Thought without Extension and vice versa. Spinoza then argues (at E1p11) that there is only one substance and that the attributes of Thought and Extension are both attributes of this one substance. Herein lies a problem. If the one substance has both the attribute of Thought *and* the attribute of Extension—does that entail that substance has more than one essence? If substance has more than one essence, how exactly is that different from just having two substances? On the other hand, if there is only one substance with one essence, then are the attributes illusions?

Traditionally, answers to these questions have fallen into one of two camps: subjectivist and objectivist. Subjectivists claim that the attributes are merely *conceptually* distinct, but not ontologically or really distinct. Substance has only one essence and it can be thought about in a number of different ways.<sup>1</sup> The attributes are distinct in the way that “Samuel Clemmons” and “Mark Twain” are distinct. The advantage of subjectivism is that it preserves substance monism. Spinoza's substance has only one essence. But there is a major problem. Subjectivism seems to entail that the attributes are in some way illusory. Intellects conceive of attribute A apart from B, however, ontologically it is impossible for A to exist without B. Thus, it seems, intellects *are mistaken* to make such a distinction. Because Spinoza claims that even the infinite intellect conceives of the attributes in this way it follows that the infinite intellect does not understand things truly. However, Spinoza states explicitly that the infinite intellect does understand things truly. Thus, either Spinoza contradicts himself or subjectivism is false. Most commentators find this argument (first presented, to my knowledge, by Gueroult<sup>2</sup>) conclusive. Few embrace an unqualified subjectivism today.

Objectivists, on the other hand, claim that the attributes are distinct entities that exist in themselves. Thus, the one substance has more than one essence (an essence for each attribute). Substance monism is preserved by the fact that the complex of attributes is a “complex of very special elements.”<sup>3</sup> Curley, for example, explains how the infinite number of attributes come

together to make a single substance by appealing to the fact that each attribute exists necessarily. Thus, it is impossible for one attribute to exist without the others. The advantage of objectivism is that it ensures that the infinite intellect understands things truly. Objectivism entails that the attributes are not illusions, but exist as we understand them to be. The disadvantage is that it is unclear whether objectivists can really get substance monism with a complex of entities each of which exists “in itself.”

In this paper, I attempt to cut a middle path between subjectivism and objectivism. In the thirteenth century a number of Scholastic philosophers (including Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus) argued for the existence of various “intermediate” distinctions. These distinctions are mind-independent (like the real distinction) but non-numerical (like the conceptual distinction). Thus, such distinctions are weaker than the real distinction (because we do not end up with two different entities), but stronger than the conceptual distinction (because the distinction is not merely a mental one). A number of such distinctions were proposed in the thirteenth century and they were used to solve a number of complex metaphysical puzzles. Duns Scotus, for example, argued for a particular kind of intermediate distinction which he called a *formal distinction*. Scotus claimed that this distinction can be used to separate the persons of the trinity. Henry of Ghent, a little before Scotus, argued for a different intermediate distinction which he called an *intentional distinction*. Henry then used his intentional distinction to explain the relation between a thing’s existence and its essence. In this paper, I argue that Spinoza’s attributes are likely intermediately distinct. Furthermore, I argue that the intermediate distinction which separates Spinoza’s attributes is likely a distinction very similar to Henry’s intentional distinction.

### I. Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus on the Nature of the “Intermediate” Distinction

The purpose of intermediate distinctions is to provide a “real basis for our distinct concepts” in cases where the two conceptually independent objects (such as the persons of the trinity) are not really or numerically distinct.<sup>4</sup> The reason such a “real basis” is needed is in order to explain the difference between correct and incorrect distinctions of this kind. If one draws a distinction between *a* and *b*, this distinction is correctly drawn if and only if there is some real basis for the distinction in the world (such as being numerically distinct). If the distinction fails to have a real basis in some actual mind-independent fact, then attempting to draw a distinction there is a mistake. Therefore, correct distinctions between *a* and *b* where *a* and *b* are not really distinct (that is, not two different things)<sup>5</sup> is possible only if there is some mind-independent fact “which is present in the world [and] not even partially caused by the intellect.”<sup>6</sup>

Henry of Ghent proposed his *intentional distinction* as just such a mind-independent fact.<sup>7</sup> Henry argues that there is an intentional distinction<sup>8</sup> between “an actual existing entity’s essential being (*esse essentiae*) and its existence (*esse existentiae*).”<sup>9</sup> The “essential being” (*esse essentiae*) of some existing entity is the type of being that the thing’s essence has in itself (*per se*). Henry explains his intentional distinction saying, “For with those that are really identical in the same [thing], sometimes diverse concepts are formed such that neither of them in its concept includes the other.”<sup>10</sup> Henninger interprets these passages as providing two necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for an intentional distinction:

(H1) neither the concept of *a* includes that of *b*, nor vice versa.

(H2) *a* and *b* are really (numerically) the same.

When these two conditions are met, “then *a* and *b* are intentionally distinct.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, according to Henry, the being a thing has and the distinct type of being that thing’s essence has are numerically identical in the external world, yet the one external thing (correctly) causes two distinct concepts in the mind (the *esse existentiae* and the *esse essentiae*).<sup>12</sup> These two *intentiones* are, according to Henry, “merely potentially [distinct] prior to the act of thought.”<sup>13</sup>

The objective basis for the correct distinction between *intentiones a* and *b* is, therefore, the one external object. It is an objective fact prior to any act of thinking that *if* there was a mind to receive the formal species of the object, *then* a conceptual distinction would in fact be drawn between *a* and *b*.<sup>14</sup> Thus, some power (*potentia*) must exist in the single external object prior to the actual drawing of the conceptual distinction by an intellect. This power (*potentia*) is sufficient to account for the correctness of the distinction between the two *intentiones*. Henry is thus able to distinguish between correct and incorrect distinctions on the basis of the source of the distinction. If the external object is the cause of the two different concepts to the intellect, then one can correctly distinguish two *intentiones*. If, however, the external object causes only one concept, then any attempted distinction would be in error.

Henry’s intentional distinction was, however, unpopular. Most of Henry’s contemporaries, including Duns Scotus, argued that the external thing itself was not sufficient to provide an objective basis for a distinction between two *intentiones a* and *b*. Scotus argues that there must be some kind of actual mind-independent *distinction* (not merely a certain power) in the world which can take place between numerically the same *intentiones* (what Scotus calls “*realitas*”). Scotus writes that if Henry of Ghent is correct “then the object of both concepts [*a* and *b*] should be identical unless you grant that one and the same extra-mental thing ... generates two objects in the intellect” (which is, of course, exactly what Henry grants).<sup>15</sup> Scotus, in this rejection of Henry’s distinction, appeals to the view that there must be some kind of isomorphic relationship between external objects and the mental objects caused by them.<sup>16</sup> Scotus’s “formal distinction does not deny the intentional distinction of Henry,”

explains Wolter, “but merely postulates what is needed in things in order to account for it.”<sup>17</sup> Scotus’s distinction is, therefore, an attempted expansion of Henry’s.

Scotus defines his distinction by saying, “*a* and *b* are formally non-identical [within a single subject] ... if and only if the definition of *a* does not include *b* and the definition of *b* does not include *a*.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, two things are formally distinct if and only if

(S1) *a* and *b* are really the same.

(S2) the definition of *a* does not include that of *b*, or vice versa.

Whereas Henry defines his intermediate distinction in terms of distinct *concepts*, Scotus defines his in terms of distinct *definitions*. The move is significant. If a definition is a list of the essential features, then Scotus’s move forces him to do something Henry could not do, which is predicate different essential properties to different *realitas* within a single subject.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, according to Henry one external object produces two correctly distinguished mental objects whereas, according to Scotus, two numerically indistinguishable, but essentially different, *realitas* produce two correctly distinguished mental objects.<sup>20</sup> Scotus is thus able to preserve some degree of isomorphism between the mind and the world.

## II. Spinoza’s “Mysterious” Distinction

Now let us skip forward about four hundred years to the early Enlightenment and discuss the nature of Spinoza’s “mysterious” distinctions which separate his attributes. Following Edwin Curley, many contemporary Spinoza scholars attempt to understand some specific aspect of Spinoza’s thought by “deducing” it from Descartes’s view on a similar subject.<sup>21</sup> Although we have to be careful not to go too far with Curley’s deductive method, I believe it is useful when properly understood and so I will adopt the method in this section.<sup>22</sup> Thus, I will first briefly discuss Descartes’s real and conceptual distinctions and then Spinoza’s (partly reconstructed) objections and alternative. I will attempt here to reconstruct a “deduction” from Descartes’s real and conceptual distinctions back to Henry’s intentional distinction.

In the *Principles of Philosophy* section 60, Descartes defines two things as *really distinct* whenever

(R1) We can clearly and distinctly understand one apart from the other.<sup>23</sup>

(R2) God has the power to separate them.<sup>24</sup>

These two conditions seem to be necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for a real distinction. The conceptual distinction in Descartes *Principles*, on the other hand, is more confusing and more intimately tied up with the (albeit, germane) example he gives. Descartes writes in section 62 of the *Principles*:

a *conceptual distinction* is a distinction between a substance and some attribute of that substance without which the substance is unintelligible; alternatively, it is a distinction between two such attributes [that is, properties] of a single substance. *Such a distinction is recognized by our inability to form a clear and distinct idea of the substance if we exclude from it the attribute in question.*<sup>25</sup>

The key to understanding Descartes's conceptual distinction is recognizing that when one conceptually distinguishes *a* from *b*, one loses the "ability to form a clear and distinct idea" of one or both *a* and *b*.<sup>26</sup> Descartes argues that God has the power to separate *a* from *b* whenever we can clearly and distinctly conceive one without the other. Thus, two things are conceptually distinct, according to Descartes, if and only if

(C1) We are unable to form a clear and distinct idea of one apart from the other.

(C2) God does not have the power to separate them.<sup>27</sup>

These two conditions both are both necessary and jointly sufficient.

When Spinoza rejected Descartes's substance pluralism and physical determinism and embraced monism and necessitarianism, he was forced to change the nature of the distinctions allowed in his metaphysics. The deduction from pluralism to monism is convincingly inferred by Edwin Curley and the deduction from limited determinism to necessitarianism is convincingly inferred by Jonathan Bennett.<sup>28</sup> It would take me too far a field to rehearse their arguments here. Instead I want to focus on previously unnoticed consequences of these two deductions—namely, their impact on the *nature* of the distinctions allowed into Spinoza's metaphysics. We will find that Spinoza is forced (as a monist and necessitarian) to abandon both Descartes's real distinction and his conceptual distinction. In their place he embraces a problematic "mysterious" distinction, which I will argue in the next section is Henry's intentional distinction.

Monism and necessitarianism force Spinoza to abandon condition R2, which requires that God "have the ability to separate them." Even setting aside the question of whether such a condition makes sense given Spinoza's understanding of "God" as nature (although, I think it does),<sup>29</sup> no thing can be separated from anything else in Spinoza's metaphysics for two reasons. First, there is only one substance. Particular objects are merely "modes or modifications" of the single substance and cannot be or be conceived without it.<sup>30</sup> Second, if every mode's existence and state is necessary and every mode is causally linked to every other, then every mode is necessarily linked to every other. One mode cannot be actually separated from anything else. Similarly, if there is only one possible world (as, I believe, necessitarianism entails), then the attributes also cannot be separated from substance nor from one another.<sup>31</sup> Such existential independence does not exist in Spinoza's metaphysics. So nothing, according to Spinoza, is really distinct from anything else.

Spinoza himself directly criticizes Descartes's conceptual distinction. Spinoza's problem is with C1, namely that "we are unable to form a clear and distinct idea of one apart from the other." He writes:

[According to Descartes,] being, insofar as it is being, does not affect us through itself alone, as substance, and has therefore to be explained through some attribute, from which, however, it is distinguished only by reason. Hence I cannot sufficiently wonder at the subtlety of mind of those who have sought, not without great harm to truth, something that is between being and nothing.<sup>32</sup>

Spinoza's remark that Descartes's conceptual distinction seems to seek something "between being and nothing" is revealing. It tells us that Spinoza believes, like Scotus (but not Henry), that the mind and the world (in the context of Spinoza's metaphysics, substance and the attributes) are isomorphic in some sense.<sup>33</sup> Thus, if a conceptual distinction between *a* and *b* requires that *b* not be conceivable on its own, then Spinoza infers that the distinction implies that *b* cannot exist on its own either. However, because the one substance is defined by Spinoza, following Descartes, in terms of existential and conceptual independence such a dependence on its attributes seems to require that substance be something "between being and nothing." However, in Spinoza's metaphysics the only place where Descartes's conceptual distinction could play a role is in separating the attributes.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the distinction must be abandoned altogether. Nothing in Spinoza's metaphysics is conceptually distinct from anything else.

Given his other commitments Spinoza correctly rejects R2 and C1. This leaves Spinoza with R1, namely, "we can clearly and distinctly understand one apart from the other" and C2, namely, "God does not have the power to separate them." If we put these two conditions together, then we get:

(R1) We can clearly and distinctly understand one apart from the other.

(C2) God does not have the power to separate them.

Such a distinction which combined (R1) and (C2) would be pretty close to Henry's intentional distinction:

(H1) neither the concept of *a* includes that of *b*, nor vice versa.

(H2) *a* and *b* are really (numerically) the same.

But does Spinoza ever bring R1 and C2 together in this way? He seems to. In the *Appendix Concerning Metaphysical Thoughts*, Spinoza proposes, against Descartes, that "the affections of being are certain attributes under which we understand the essence or existence of each individual thing, although these attributes are distinguishable from the thing only by reason."<sup>35</sup> At E1p10s Spinoza argues that the attributes "can be conceived as really distinct, that is one without the help of the

other, still we cannot deduce therefrom that they constitute two entities, or two different substances.” In these passages Spinoza might be bringing R1 and C2 together and arguing that the attributes are conceptually, but not existentially, independent.

### III. Spinoza’s “Intentional” Distinction?

If the attributes are not really distinct, then the actual essence of substance (Thought-Extension-etc.) is one. Nevertheless, the human intellect perceives substance’s essence as being *two* distinct attributes (Thought and Extension) and the “infinite intellect”<sup>36</sup> perceives it as constituting an infinite number of distinct attributes (all but two of which are unknown to us).<sup>37</sup> So in virtue of what are the attributes *correctly* distinguished by minds?

Imagine that we accept Scotus’s solution and say that the attributes are formally distinct as Deleuze has recently suggested.<sup>38</sup> In that case an infinite number of relationships within the essence of substance allow each of the attributes a unique definition. However, this interpretation is highly implausible. If each of the attributes has a unique definition, then each has different essential features (which account for the differences in the definitions). However, if the attributes have essential features, then the essence of substance itself has an essence. Such a claim would seem to lead to some kind of an infinite regress even if we stipulate that the attributes are not properties of substance.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, most modern commentators agree that one cannot define, but simply name, the different attributes in much the same way as one cannot define, but only name, the experiences of different colors. Bennett argues that the attributes are “a basic, irreducible way of being.”<sup>40</sup> T. C. Mark concurs (although he has a different conception of the attributes) arguing that “each attribute is not something that can be described or understood at all. ... [T]he attributes are objects of perception.”<sup>41</sup> Spinoza seems to confirm this view by not attempting to individually define any of the attributes. Thus, it seems unlikely that the attributes are formally distinct because they cannot have distinct definitions.<sup>42</sup>

Imagine, therefore, that the attributes are intentionally distinct. In this case, one thing (substance) would have the power to produce different and independent concepts in minds. In such a case the different concepts would not imply that the object to which they correspond is plural because the objective basis for the distinction between the concepts is a *power* that the single object has. This conception seems to cohere fairly well with what Spinoza says. He seems to argue that substance only has one essence and he argues that the attributes “can be conceived as really distinct, that is one without the help of the other.”<sup>43</sup> If we accept intentionally distinct attributes, then we can say that the one Thought-Extension-etc. (i.e., the essence of substance) produces different concepts in the intellect (namely, Thought, Extension, etc.) These concepts are correctly

distinguished from one another because the cause of the distinction is the nature of substance itself. Substance provides the “real basis” for the distinction between Thought and Extension.

Furthermore Spinoza offers us an (albeit, confusing) argument for why the one substance has this particular power to produce different attribute-concepts in the mind. He seems to believe that it is connected with his claim that substance has an “absolutely infinite essence.”<sup>44</sup> The argument, as I reconstruct it, seems to go something like this. A substance with essence (i.e., attribute) R produces concept R in minds. Because the one substance, God, has an “absolutely infinite essence” it must produce every possible attribute-concept (not in every possible mind, but perhaps in every possible combination). Therefore, the one infinite essence must produce distinct concepts in the intellect. Although this argument leaves much to be desired, it does seem to provide additional support for the thesis that Spinoza’s “mysterious” distinction is (or is at least very similar to) Henry’s intentional distinction. Whereas Henry relies on an unnamed mind-independent power to ground his intentional distinction, Spinoza relies on the absolutely infinite essence.

More importantly, perhaps, is that this “Henrian” solution seems to maintain both of the advantages of the subjectivist and objectivist solutions while avoiding both disadvantages. According to my solution the attributes are not illusory (the advantage of objectivism) and substance has a single essence (the advantage of subjectivism). The attributes are correctly distinguished by minds because the absolutely infinite essence of substance (considered as a power)<sup>45</sup> ensures that they can be so distinguished. This real basis entails that the attributes are *correctly* distinguished. Thus, the infinite intellect does not err. Although I have left many questions here unanswered I believe that a “Henrian” interpretation may be a viable interpretation of the attributes that charts a course between the illusion-theory of subjectivism and the complex-monism of objectivism.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The most prominent subjectivist is Harry Wolfson. See Harry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (New York: Meridian, 1958), Vol. 1, Chapter 4.

<sup>2</sup> Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza*, Vol. 1: *Dei* (Paris: Aubier, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1988), 29-30. For a critique see Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), 64-65. Bennett's alternative is, however, problematic. Bennett claims that some modes are trans-attribute and that when these trans-attribute modes are combined with the attributes, then we get minds and bodies. Aside from the fact that Spinoza no longer gets mind/body identity (F + thought does not equal F + extension; at best they share a part), there is a more significant problem with this proposal. It forces Bennett to argue that "Nature really has extension and thought, which really are distinct from one another, *but that they are not really fundamental properties, although they must be perceived as such by any intellect*" (147, italics mine). I do not see how this view avoids the charge that the intellect misunderstands the attributes (the charge leveled against Wolfson). Michael Della Rocca also makes this charge against Bennett in *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), 164.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Williams, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2003), 23.

<sup>5</sup> In such cases, Henry of Ghent calls a and b "*intentio*" and Scotus calls them "*realitas*." Henry's "*intentio*" seems to be related to Aquinas's "*ratio*." See Allan Wolter, "The Formal Distinction," *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy* 3 (1965), 49. Amusingly, some translate Scotus's "*realitas*" as "thinglets." Despite my better judgment, I have chosen not to follow these translators in this paper.

<sup>6</sup> Williams, *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, 23.

<sup>7</sup> Henry of Ghent uses the intentional distinction in part to explain the relation between a thing's existence and its essence. See Henry of Ghent, *Summa Quaestionum Ordinariarum* (Franciscan Institute, 1953), a. 28, q. 4. Also see Mark Henninger, *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325* (New York: Clarendon P, 1989), 46 ff.

<sup>8</sup> And not a real distinction as Giles of Rome (d. 1316) argued.

<sup>9</sup> John Wipple, "The Reality of Nonexisting Possibles According to Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Godfrey of Fontaines," *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (1981), 743.

<sup>10</sup> I take this translation from Henninger, *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325*, 47.

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<sup>11</sup> Henninger, *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250–1325*, 47. In note 21 Henninger reminds us that he is dealing primarily with Henry’s “major” intentional distinction and not the “minor” one. See Henry of Ghent’s *Quodlibet* V, q. 6.

<sup>12</sup> There seems to have been a distinction in Scholastic philosophy between “existence” and “being.” *Existence* is an all-or-nothing affair, something either has it or it doesn’t. *Being* on the other hand seems to come in degrees. The more kind-relative capacities a thing actualizes the more being it has. See Brian Davies, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004), 230.

<sup>13</sup> Wolter, “The Formal Distinction,” 49.

<sup>14</sup> This picture is complicated somewhat by Henry’s rejection of intelligible species. According to Henry the phantasm is able by itself to make an impression on the passive intellect. Thus, Henry denies the need for the phantasm to be converted into an immaterial intelligible species. See Robert Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1997), 306-10 for more on this subject.

<sup>15</sup> See Johannes Duns Scotus, *Opera Omnia* (Paris: L. Vivès, 1891-1895), n. 5., 466. Also see Wolter, “The Formal Distinction,” where he claims that Aquinas argues “[two things] are conceptually distinct not just in virtue of the one conceiving them but by reason of a property of the thing itself” (49).

<sup>16</sup> Aquinas, according to most (but not all) commentators, argues that this one-to-one correspondence is guaranteed because of a “formal identity” between the external object and the mental entity. The mental entity is thus *about* the external object because (1) the two forms are indistinguishable and (2) the object has the form *naturally* and the mind has it *intentionally*. See *ST.1a.85.2*. For general commentary see Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993), 138-39.

<sup>17</sup> Wolter, “The Formal Distinction,” 49.

<sup>18</sup> *Ordin.* I, d. 8, p. 1, q. 4, n. 193. Scotus uses “x” and “y,” for consistency I have changed this to “a” and “b.” See Henninger, *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325*, 82 ff. Scotus also accounts for *realitas* which do not have definitions saying, “if *a* and *b* are not capable of definition, then if they were capable of definition, the definition of *a* would not include *b* and the definition of *b* would not include *a*.”

<sup>19</sup> This conclusion is somewhat controversial. According to Peter King, Scotus limits his ontological commitments by considering “formally” to be a “modal operator” in that “A is not formally B.” King argues that “this formulation minimizes the ontological commitments of the formal distinction, since on its face, it does not require the existence of multiple property bearers within one and the same subject but merely asserts that a particular relation does not hold among two ‘ways’ (A

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and B) that a thing can be....” Thus, Scotus “avoids multiplying entities in things through his formal distinction.” Nevertheless King admits that this is a “highly contested point” (King in Williams, *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, 24). Given the widespread understanding (following Aristotle) that a definition is a list of essential features, I believe that it is likely that Scotus believes that the two *realitas* have different essences.

<sup>20</sup> Thus, it seems the identity of indiscernibles fails for Scotus. See Williams, *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, 22 for commentary. The principle fails because numerical identity cannot be cashed out in terms of indiscernibility. Nevertheless, it seems to me as though when it comes to *realitas* the identity of indiscernibles does hold. If there were two *realitas* in subject S which have the same definition, I fail to see how they could be even formally distinct.

<sup>21</sup> Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 3. Here Curley also defends his method. He writes that he wants his method to “make the abstractions of Spinoza’s philosophy seem intelligible and reasonable, [this deduction is] a way of going from the relatively familiar and natural to the unfamiliar and, prima facie, implausible.”

<sup>22</sup> Curley insists that he does not take Spinoza to be “merely an eccentric Cartesian, but rather ... as someone who was attracted by certain ideas in the Cartesian philosophy, and repelled by others, and who formed his own views largely by critical reflection on those of Descartes” (Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 37). Curley is not arguing (as some have said) that Spinoza was simply a “little Descartes.” It is my view, in fact, that Spinoza’s critical reflections on Descartes drive him to a position somewhere between the Scholastic philosophy of the thirteenth century and the mechanistic philosophy coming together around him. Spinoza thus has one foot in medievalism and one foot in modernism.

<sup>23</sup> René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* Vol. I (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995), 213.

<sup>24</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 213.

<sup>25</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 214. Italics mine.

<sup>26</sup> There is some cause for confusion here because generally speaking if one loses the ability only to conceive of one of the two distinct things then this is generally a sign of a modal distinction. See Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 85-86. However, Descartes seems to believe that the primary attributes can be conceived apart from their substances. Thus, we would seem to have to admit two types of conceptual distinctions in Descartes: (i) where neither *a* nor *b* can be conceived in isolation and (ii) where either *a* or *b* cannot be conceived in isolation.

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<sup>27</sup> Also see Lawrence Nolan, “Descartes’ Theory of Universals,” *Philosophical Studies* 89 (1997): 161-180, for a very similar interpretation of the conceptual distinction. Nolan explicitly argues that if two things are conceptually distinct, then they cannot be separated (by God).

<sup>28</sup> See Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 9 -19 and Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, 111-24.

<sup>29</sup> One may argue that this condition no longer makes sense because all possibilities are actual in Spinoza’s metaphysics. Nevertheless, “God has the power to separate them” can be understood as “God can separate them” which can be understood as “God does separate them.” Thus, this condition seems meaningful to me.

<sup>30</sup> See E1a5.

<sup>31</sup> The assumption that necessitarianism entails the existence of only one possible world is, however, somewhat controversial. For a defense see Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, 111 ff. See E1p12d where Spinoza argues that if the attributes were really distinct, then substance would be divided, which is impossible.

<sup>32</sup> Benedict Spinoza, *Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 182-83. This passage comes from his *Appendix Concerning Metaphysical Thoughts*, Part I, Chapter 3.

<sup>33</sup> At E2p7 Spinoza argues for a strong isomorphism between modes of thought and modes of extension on the basis of numerical identity between these two sequences of modes. Thus, Spinoza’s isomorphism is substantially stronger than Scotus’s. Nevertheless, I believe that the passage from the *Appendix* quoted in the main body of this paper also strongly suggests that there needs to be some isomorphism between the essence of substance and the attribute-concepts in the finite and infinite minds. This isomorphism will pose a problem for the objective interpretation which we will deal with briefly at the end of this paper.

<sup>34</sup> The modes are, of course, modally distinct.

<sup>35</sup> Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 183.

<sup>36</sup> See E1p21d and E1p30d.

<sup>37</sup> It seems as though we can conceive of one mode under attribute A or attribute B, but not both at the same time. See E 2p7. Whether this is true of all minds, however, may be somewhat controversial. Also Bennett has argued that there are only two attributes and that “infinite” should be understood in this context as “all.” For a clear discussion of this view see Don Garrett, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 64 ff. I believe that this position was successfully refuted by Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 143 n. 13.

<sup>38</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 64-67.

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<sup>39</sup> See Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 28-30; Garrett, *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, 85-88 for discussion of attributes as properties of substance. The problem with taking the attributes to be essential properties of substance is that it seems to add an element of complexity into the unity of substance. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 140-41, however, takes Spinoza's discussion to be a later version of a fairly traditional solution to the problem of Divine simplicity in medieval Jewish philosophy. He argues that unless we take attributes to be properties we cannot make sense of the E1p9 claim that "the more reality a thing has, the more attributes it has."

<sup>40</sup> Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 48.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas C. Mark, "The Spinozistic Attributes," *Philosophia* 77.7 (1977), 76.

<sup>42</sup> What about Scotus's caveat that "if *a* and *b* are not capable of definition, then if they were capable of definition, the definition of *a* would not include *b* and the definition of *b* would not include *a*?" (See note 16.) Could this help us to explain how the attributes can be formally distinct, but not have actual definitions? I fail to see how. Something has a definition if and only if it has essential features. If something lacks essential features, then it is not capable of definition. So I cannot make sense of Scotus's caveat and, therefore, don't believe it to be useful.

<sup>43</sup> E1p10s.

<sup>44</sup> See E1a6, E1p9, E1p11d.

<sup>45</sup> Spinoza does claim at E1p34 that "God's power is his very essence." This claim may lend more support for the "Henrian" interpretation.

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