

Online Appendix A, Supplement 12

Spinoza or Hegel: The Inclusive and the Exclusive Oneness Redux

Pierre Macherey, in his groundbreaking *Hegel or Spinoza?*, has hit on the heart of the question of how Hegel ends up veering so far from his early Spinozist insights—in our terms, how he backslid into typical monotheist forms of thoughts after going perhaps farther than anyone else in grasping the deep atheist mysticism of Spinoza’s system. The key, on Macherey’s analysis, is Hegel’s misreading of Spinoza’s “determination is negation.” In the context of the original letter in which this remark occurs (Letter 50, to Jallis), Spinoza is talking about a geometrical figure. Macherey reads this statement as pertaining only to such figures, which he claims that Spinoza would regard as mere “things of reason” or “aids to the imagination,” which is to say, something that really exists, but not independently of the mind or minds that conceive them. He marshals strong evidence that Spinoza does not regard the actual modes of Substance as mere things of reason or aids to the imagination, which is incontestably right. The claim then is that “determination is negation” applies only to things of reason, not to actual modes. In fact, his translation of the famous line “determination is negation” actually comes out as “since the determination is [in this case] a [mere] negation” (there are no definite or indefinite articles in Latin, once again a crucial consideration to bear in mind when reading Spinoza). What then is the determination of modes, the real concrete modifications of Substance? It is something that follows from the nature of an infinite thing.

For what is it to be real, to be really there, for Spinoza? Not to be a negation of something else, nor even the exclusion of a possibility. Rather to be anything real is to be a mode of God, which means that every determinate mode is a way of God in a fixed and determinative way. That means to bear the same sort of immanent causal power as God has (E1p36). To be real is first and foremost to be producing something, not to be negating something. More strictly, this means to produce something else, not to negate something else, while yet--when understood correctly as a mode rather than a mere “part” of God, or a self-standing “thing” separable from

God--remaining immanent to, indivisible from, what it produces. Only causes and effects understood in isolation from Substance are subject to transitive rather than immanent causality. Insofar as nothing exists in isolation from Substance, there is no transitive causality: in that sense, all causality is immanent causality. But insofar as there are finite modes of mind that do—and must (E2p36)—conceive things inadequately, there is in God also, insofar as he is modified by these modes, transitive, or mechanical, causality. The infinite intellect of God conceives adequately that it must necessarily have also inadequate cognitions, and thus must experience also transitive causality. Only for this transitive causality is negation all there is to difference and determination. In the case of adequately conceived, immanent causality however, to exist is simply to also produce more than one is, something other than one is, while still remaining immanent to what is produced.

Here is what we have instead of pure negation: the immanent production of “otherness”—but as Macherey will say, this otherness is for Spinoza a matter of “diversity, not opposites.” Hence Spinoza’s position must be “to produce otherness is to be real.” We claim further that the production even between modes themselves must be immanent rather than transitive causality—for the transitive causality is actually literally incoherent, a matter of Imagination rather than Understanding. If genuine causality is reducible to logical entailment, as we’ve argued it is for Spinoza, then the cause does not vanish when the effect arises, and is never separable from it, but rather remains immanent to it—as the formal essence of the mode doing the causing, which is eternal and infinite. The appearance of one thing replacing another is strictly a function of the inadequate ideas of Imagination—which, as we’ve argued, are necessary and real, but only insofar as they exist in the minds of finite modes which are themselves necessary and real. Even in this imagined transitive causality, to be present at all is, for Spinoza, to produce otherness, albeit in this case without remaining present in the otherness so produced.

This is to be contrasted to the idea that “to exclude otherness is to be real,” which is how Hegel reads it, though he also knows that in the end this also has to involve the production of and relation to all otherness. That is why he needs the dialectic, determinate negation, negation of negation. But does the exclusion of otherness get the upper hand in the end? Can we trace the enormously subtle but nonetheless decisive exclusivity of Hegel’s final vision of the Idea to this

small glitch in the premises, this misreading of Spinoza? For although nothing is excluded from the Idea, there are still some things that are lesser, or even non-actual, in the final vision: the Parmenidean distinction reasserts itself, so that when the mature Hegel says, “The Real is the Rational,” he means (and says explicitly) that therefore not everything that happens is real. Much of what we think is going on just doesn’t count as any part of reality. And this stuff, therefore, is not including in the Absolute Idea. He may add, “except as sublated.” This is perhaps Hegel’s way of trying to redescribe in his own terms the point we made about transitive causality in Spinoza: isolated things, and mechanical causality between them, exists only in dependence on inadequate ideas of finite beings, not independently. But for Spinoza this is still necessary existence, because inadequate ideas necessarily exist just as they do, and are fully in God like everything else. Indeed, it is crucial to the self-therapy he proposes in Part V of the *Ethics* that we can have adequate ideas about these inadequate ideas, understanding them as necessary and (I argue) therefore also eternal and omnipresent insofar as they follow from the nature of an eternal and omnipresent thing. This is different from sublation in Hegel’s sense, although both involve integrating a fragmentary idea into a more complete idea that explicitly expresses the productive power of Reason. We can illustrate the difference with an example. Walking around in the world, I naturally see the earth as flat. If I gain some additional knowledge of the causes of my seeing it that way, by studying astronomy and optics, I will continue to see the earth as flat, but in addition I will have some understanding of why I see it that way, and why I *necessarily* see it that way. At the same time, I will know the earth to be round. These are not in conflict with each other, and neither is more “real” than the other—indeed, neither is less necessary, eternal and omnipresent than the other. I may have a large number of adequate ideas, rational knowledge, about the flat world I inhabit and see, based on those same laws of optics, but now premised and derived only from the necessary experience of flatness, bracketing in those contexts the further rational knowledge of what causes that experience of flatness itself. All my practical calculations and chartings of how things behave in a flat world will fall into this category; the vast majority will not require any knowledge of the roundness of the earth, but will still be adequate in that they express a true generation of a conclusion from a given premise. Any acts of true understanding based on an adequate idea—for example, some superstitious traditional geomantic

lore—remains valid, not only because of the absolute necessity of each such deed in the nature of God, but also because the true value of understanding lies in the actual *activity* of drawing a conclusion from a premise: the increased power of the mind’s activity in the actual deed of thinking is the real value of an adequate idea, rather than a static accumulation of known facts. Those ideas derived reasonably from any premise, even a factually false one, will be rational, the Second Kind of Knowledge, and thus will be experiences of the increase in the thinking power of the mind. If I further add the knowledge that this very appearance is a necessary consequence of my having this body and the laws of optics and astronomy is a necessary consequence of the nature of God, I can even have Third Type of Knowledge, Intuition, about all the flatness-premised conclusions I am applying within that context. I can continue to do Euclidean geometry, even after I learn that it is not the only possible geometry, and make perfectly valid and adequate deductions on that basis; and by understanding that this geometry is a necessary consequence of the nature of God, but not the only one, I can even have Intuition about all the deductions I do in that sphere, as long as I eliminate the incorrect assumption that it is the only valid geometry that follows from the nature of God (which should be no surprise, given God’s infinite nature). That there is such a geometry, and that certain things follow necessarily from its premises, is all real knowledge—and the knowledge that the very existence of this geometry absolutely necessary is even Intuition, the Third Kind of Knowledge. Such is the case for Spinoza. In Hegel’s case, in contrast, the sublation of “the world is flat” into “the world only appears flat, because of the laws of optics and astronomy; the appearance of flatness is a moment in the true knowledge of the roundness of the earth” leaves that flatness behind once and for all. It gets a place in the developmental process, and is granted full necessity as well as a necessary and indispensable role in advancing toward the true knowledge that the earth is flat. All further deductions from the flatness of the earth are now to be dismissed as illusions. They may be themselves reintegrated into the new true knowledge of the roundness of the earth, but the flatness of the earth has now dropped out as a true and valid premise. It is at this point not real or true, in the sense that no conclusion drawn from this premise has any place in the finished system of true knowledge. If I want to retain any of this traditional knowledge based on false premises, I will have to rederive all of them anew from the true premise, weeding out all those that require

the premise of flatness of the earth. It is in this way, for Hegel, that some experiences drop out entirely from reality, in spite of the claimed sublation of everything that occurs. It is for this reason that Hegel ends up with an extirpation of falseness in a progressive accumulation of knowledge, a process of sublation that entails dropping contents along the way rather than enriching them, even though in a certain sense “everything, even transcended illusions” is retained. And it is for this reason that Hegel is able to so confidently play the judge of world history, and, more ominously, of the relative value of various cultures and peoples and practices. The non-exclusive oneness of Spinoza has finally, in the end, been reabsorbed into the exclusive oneness of God: the allegedly all-inclusive oneness that serves to exclude.

For Spinoza, to really be as X is to be productive of non-X—while remaining immanent, as X, to non-X. X that brings about no non-X, or that vanishes in producing X, is not really there, not really X. The geometrical figure is a mere being of reason to the extent that it doesn’t produce anything. More strictly, this means that it is only minimally real, for there is no absolute passivity in Spinoza’s universe, nothing that doesn’t have *some* causal consequence. But it is passive in the only sense that Spinoza allows: it produces othernesses, but only in conjunction with a certain kind of mind, of which it is a power, or, as Blyenburgh points out, producing new othernesses only when it is conjoined with other premises or figures or procedures. This is Spinoza’s answer not to the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” but “What does it mean for there to be something?” which is the only real question (the former question is nonsense to Spinoza, and to me). The being of things is the being of the indivisible infinite active causal power of the Absolute, i.e., of what can be conceived only as existing, and this importantly involves the coexistence of every immanent cause and its definitionally different effects. Immanent causality of modes themselves, as opposed to mere things of reason, ensures that every entity is both itself and more than itself.

However, Hegel does have a point. He notices something in Spinoza that is crucial for thinking about determination—and we must give some credit to the idea that Hegel has stumbled upon the deepest possible ontological principle: determination really is negation, not something other than negation. Transcendentally, by definition, what it is to be determinate is what it is to be limited. So we can perhaps still ask: what is it to be this mode rather than that mode of

extension, why is one “way of expression” different from another way? Spinoza seems to have to say “it isn’t, if we consider what it really *is*, i.e., extension, rather than *how* it is being that.” Is a triangle different from a circle? They are both ways of expressing the essence of Euclidian space. They are both modes of that spatiality, ways of being spatial. They are both really spatiality—and perhaps each of them, understood completely, is really the totality of all of the common notions and formal essences pertaining to space. But there is still some difference between them, purely qua different expressions of the same thing. What do we really mean when we say a circle is not a triangle? In that case, clearly, we are still talking about figures, and hence, admittedly even for Macherey, negations. What both of them positively “are” is just space, they differ only in how they are being space, and this difference can only lie in the difference to other ways of expression, other “hows” that they exclude. But the same would go for “my body is not your body”—both are extension, the same “what,” but the difference between the two way of being extension—how can we understand *this* difference other than as a negation? The essence of my body, as something experienced in temporal existence, is a ratio of motion-and-rest, a specific style of motion. This very style of motion *just is* the endeavor to continue moving in just that way: my conatus. This essence is one of the ways in which infinite essence, the characteristic of “infiniteness,” expresses itself. As such, this ratio, this specific type of motion that I am, has to be what I would be doing unceasingly if all my actions were limited only by virtue of my own nature, not because they were curtailed by the blockage of other things. My eternal formal essence is present in existence as my actually existing nature: my conatus, this style of motion that is identical to its endeavor to continue moving that way infinitely. My conatus is that motion which I’m always involved in, which I’m involved in infinitely, with no intrinsic negation at all. For this reason it’s the criterion of all my other actions, the ultimate goal of all my other, instrumental motions. For this type of motion, again, “to persevere” and “to expand” are exactly the same, just as the motion of a projectile and its endeavor to continue and extend that motion are one and the same thing. (Cf. “Metaphysical Thoughts,” 1.6: there is no real distinction between motion and the tendency or striving to continue that motion.) To be moving a certain way is to be trying to continue to move that way. For it is infinite motion of this particular type without any negation. Indeed, it is the “self-creation” (*causa sui*) of Substance in a finite and

determinate mode: each moment God recreates me, said Descartes, which Spinoza now reinterprets to mean: I am Substance's power to recreate me at every moment. My continuing to be me, my own conatus, is God's command that I exist, and continue to exist: my desire to live into more and more moments and more and more situations is God's continual re-creation of me in each moment. There is nothing intrinsic to this motion which would limit it; in its essence it is this motion and the tendency to continue this motion forever, to overcome whatever external thing (in the existence series) gets in the way.

I move my right foot forward while walking. But I do not continue this forward motion forever: its nature "moving forward" is limited by a quantitative restriction: I move it forward this much but no more. I am not endeavoring an infinite moving forward of my leg: it must be curtailed, and I will and desire it to be curtailed. That is how I know "moving my foot forward" is not an adequate idea of my conatus, that my essence does not involve moving-foot-forward per se. But is there any action I would always continue? Is there anything I would always want to be doing, if "external" things did not get in the way? Smoking? Eating? Sex? Cocaine? Rollerblading (like "Slomo"—see link!¹)? Being awake? Try imagine doing any of these things 24 hours a day with no possibility of stopping. Is there anything I want to always be doing? Spinoza's answer is "life." Not life in general, but my life specifically, life of a certain type, the life of my own body. Spinoza's claim depends on this being thinkable without its negation. "Of a certain type but with no negation" is a contradiction for Hegel, for whom determination is just negation. But for Spinoza, ala Macherey, the "certain type" is an eternal and infinite essence in the essence sequence.

Still, it is one mode rather than any other mode; how is one "type of motion" distinguished from another except as a negation?

Spinoza's answer can only be: "Each of these two bodies is one way extension is expressed, and it is the nature of extension that there must be infinite ways of expression. So the difference between ways is itself an expression of the essence of extension." Each is one of the manners in which this infinite indivisible activity must express itself, since, following from its nature, its essence is to express its essence in infinite ways (E1p16). The difference is thus not

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xn87-mcnoVc>

(only?) a negation, but (also?) a necessary expression of the positive essence of infinity. What they express, what they are modes of, what they are, is not any particular finite essence, for which it might be possible to say that the *how* is something quite different from the *what*. Rather, it is positive infinity itself. The *what* in this case is none other than the unexcludability of every possible different *how*. What is expressed in infinite ways is the necessity of every expression. Their differences can now be understood in terms of their infinity.

Here we must return to the fundamental answer of Spinoza to the question: what am I? I am a mode of God. That is, I am a way in which God expresses itself. That is, I am a manner in which Godishness is expressed (by Godishness). Now for Spinoza, “Godishness” is just “absolute infinity”—necessarily existent essence, essence that involves existence. Godishness is infinity, indivisibility, activity. So I am a way of expressing infinity, indivisibility, and activity. I am one way of being infinite. I am one of the infinite ways in which infinite, indivisible and active types of infinity, indivisibility and activity express themselves. “Express” here means not becoming known to themselves or others, but simply that these are ways in which they operate. Metaphorically speaking, I am a wave on the ocean of God, a way in which the ocean expresses each of its properties of wetness, of motility, of transparency, which must apply to every single mode of ocean without exception, equally in the part as in the whole. I am the entire essence of the ocean in a particular form. One wave is distinguished from another not by what it is made of (they are both made of water), but by its motion. And the motion of a wave is precisely the tendency to continue that very motion in more parts of the water. What it is is a motion attempting to move into more of the water, to modify more of the water with precisely this kind of motion. The metaphor is limited, though, since of course two cases differ profoundly. In the case of water, only the fact that there will be some general susceptibility to becoming waves follows from the nature of water itself (wetness, motility, transparency, etc.), while the amplitude, shape and velocity of any specific wave is determined by things other than these properties that belong to the nature of water—that is, it they are determined by things like wind and the contour of the earth containing the water. In the case of God, the specific nature of this motion that wants to continue itself follows only from the nature of God, i.e., absolute infinity, which cannot be lacking this particular style of motion (for if it lacked it, it would not be

absolutely infinite). Insofar as it is considered in conjunction with its immanent cause—that is, adequately, fully, completely—I see that the premise and the conclusion are not two separate entities at all: they short-circuit into a tautology. To be infinite is to be *like this*. “Express” is still a useful verb for this in the sense that, for example, the word “dog” and the word *gou* 狗 are ways of saying the same thing in two different languages: this “meaning” allows itself to be said in multiple ways, indeed (in this case) in infinite different ways. I am one way of saying infinity, in a particular language and context. Every other thing is a translation of the same word into their own idiolect. My specific characteristics, what makes me me, this style of being that is trying to continue, is a way of saying “Infinity.”

To be more perfect is to be more real, and for Spinoza what is real is always actually God: to be real means to be God. So to be more perfect means to be more Godlike—less finite, less dependent, with more power to exist, with more causal consequences, able to affect and be affected in a greater number of ways (recall that for Spinoza, to “be affected” by something is still a power: otherwise the interaction simply destroys me), hence to do more and know more while remaining undestroyed by this doing and this knowing. But that only means to express more extensively in existence what it always is in essence: a specific essence that, insofar as it follows from the nature of an infinite and eternal thing, is itself already infinite and eternal. Its specificity, its difference from all other such eternal essences, is thus equally infinite and eternal. As such it can involve no negation whatsoever. We are asked to think of determinacy itself differently: not as effacing indeterminacy (infinity), but as expressing it.

But even if Hegel is right about this (and I’m not sure he has to be: that was a pretty good answer for Spinoza to give), Hegel’s answer is unfair to Spinoza: he thinks Spinoza knows only negation, but not the Absolute itself as negation of negation. He thinks that for Spinoza negation and affirmation are incommensurable opposites. But actually for Spinoza, negation is only a thing of reason—it exists, but only as an aspect of certain minds. As such, what negation really is is that affirmation, the affirmation of the negation, which is the real determination of that mode, that mind. The affirmation is the immanent cause of the negation, not the transitive cause. A negation is an aspect of an affirmation: it is one type of activity of one way of expressing the attribute of Thought.

How can we reconcile these, or at least be “fair” to both Hegel and Spinoza? For that I fear we must once again borrow a trope from Tiantai Buddhism: inherent entailment and the identity of Provisional Positing and Emptiness. The multiplicity (“three-thousandness”) of the one Nature is what is expressed, and is also what expresses that one nature and its irreducible diversity. What we do here is bring together the two kinds of negation. Hegel says what it is to be a thing is to be the negation of another thing. X is X means “ X being X is X ’s negation of being non- X , which is therefore immanent to it.” And therefore, he realizes, X and non- X always go together--the long way around to the key insight of Zhuangzi’s “Qiwulun.” The negation is negated. Spinoza says what it is to be a thing is to be the production of another thing. X is X means “ X being X is X ’s production of non- X , while remaining immanent to it.” And therefore, he realizes, X and non- X always go together. This “always” must be taken to mean strict necessity: it is intrinsic to X that it be accompanied by non- X , as it is intrinsic to a room that there be walls. “Accompaniment” that is not intermittent and not accidental but constant and necessary means the two are not really two different things at all, but a single essence. Production of a thing and negation of a thing are—the same thing! So says the Tiantai writer Zhanran: “Provisional positing is the affirmation of all elements of experience; Emptiness is the negation of all elements of experience; the Middle is seeing that each element is the totality--the inclusion of all elements of experience in both of these ways at once.” 立一切法，破一切法，統一一切法。Hegel says to be is to negate 破。Spinoza says to be is to affirm 立。Tiantai says precisely affirmation is negation is the inclusion of all as the mutual inclusion of the two. 即立即破即統。 This is a further turn of the screw on the distinction between “the meaning” and “the expression” which served us above in understanding how a single meaning can be expressed in an infinite number of alternate ways. For now the meaning is itself none other than “infinite alternate expressibility.” That is the single meaning expressed in infinite alternate ways: the necessary split between the two becomes their reconvergence, not as the abrogation of the split between meaning and expression, nor that between any two expressions, but as its absolutization: each expression is itself what is expressed in and as every other. As such, it is the difference between them itself that becomes their unity, in an infinite number of unifications: every distinction is omnipresent and absolute, and expressed as every other.

We come here to the key point, trackable in both Zhuangzi and Spinoza: the absolute is what is instantiated by its own negation. Spinoza should mean this when he speaks of it being “conceivable only as existing,” as we’ve seen above. Hegel should mean this when he speaks of “negation of the negation.” But do they? The Tiantai method is to “open up” these two opposite provisional expressions to reveal the truth, which lies in their entailment and implication of one another, the discovery that in their very contradiction of one another they are each saying both. Applying that method, we find that this is precisely what they do.