

Yitzhak Y. Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, xxii + 232 p.

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In his important new study of Spinoza's metaphysics, Yitzhak Melamed argues for a doubly-dualist reading of Spinoza. First, he argues that at the root of Spinoza's metaphysics is the traditional dualism of substance and mode. Second, Melamed argues that Spinoza accepts a dualism of thought and being, according to which the realm of thought parallels the rest of being in a way that no other attribute does.

The book is divided into two parts, one for each dualism. The first part consists of four chapters, the second of two. The main claims Melamed makes in those chapters are as follows: 1. Against the interpretation offered by Edwin Curley, inherence should be understood in the traditional sense, and not be simply identified with efficient causation. Particular things can be seen as *propria* of God. 2. Spinoza draws only weak boundaries between finite individuals, in a way that gives some support to Maimon's and Hegel's acosmist reading of him. That reading is ultimately unsustainable, however, since it conflicts with a number of Spinoza's central concerns. 3. Contrary to Michael Della Rocca's recent interpretation, inherence, causation, and conception should not be identified, and we should accept that there are genuine metaphysical bifurcations in Spinoza's system. These bifurcations are ultimately grounded in the substance/mode distinction. 4. In each attribute, there is an infinitely descending chain of everlasting infinite modes, linked by immanent causation, with only one such mode at each link and decreasing reality/perfection at each step. Finite modes are interacting parts of infinite modes. While Spinoza did not fully develop this part of his theory, it is plausible that infinite modes helped him distance himself from occasionalism and to explain the connection of finite modes to God's infinite essence. 5. Spinoza has two doctrines of parallelism: one stating that there is an idea parallel to every thing that exists, and another stating that the modes of every attribute are parallel to those of every other. The first doctrine seems to imply that the attribute of thought must have more modes than other attributes, while the second seems to imply that it must have the same amount. 6. The solution to this puzzle is that modes of thought, unlike modes of other attributes, each have infinitely many aspects, one for each attribute to which they are parallel.

While I expect that the claims of Chapter 6 will draw the most attention from Melamed's readers, the entire work is filled with intriguing arguments and

suggestions. What is most impressive about the book, I think, is the diversity of resources that Melamed appeals to along the way. Though his approach is situated in the contemporary Anglophone metaphysical approach to Spinoza, Melamed makes impressive use of ancient, medieval, early modern, 19th century, and contemporary analytic philosophy, as well as a range of non-English secondary literature. His argumentation is similarly diverse, ranging from broad historical considerations to informed speculation about Spinoza's philosophical development to very subtle textual analysis – all the while making use of nearly all of Spinoza's corpus. Not coincidentally, Melamed devotes a number of pages to discussing methodological issues. These discussions will be of interest to all historians of philosophy.

I focus my discussion here on Part I. Martin Lin's piece in this volume focuses on the claims of Part II. I am generally sympathetic the major claims of Part I. That said, I have some doubts about several arguments Melamed offers in support of those claims, especially in the first three chapters.

On Curley's interpretation of inherence

Melamed devotes the majority of Chapter 1, the longest chapter of the book, to an extended critique of Edwin Curley's interpretation of the relation between substance (God) and modes (all other things), that is, of inherence. As Melamed understands him, Curley takes that relation to be simply efficient causation. Yet such an interpretation, Melamed argues (drawing some on earlier commentators), faces a number of problems. Melamed lists a total of thirteen objections, but most of them seem to stem from three core concerns: (1) Spinoza consistently treats inherence and causation distinctly, and describes inherence in fairly traditional terms (e.g., in E1p15 and E1p16c1, which separately state that all things are in God and that God is the cause of all things), (2) Spinoza and others who knew his views well took his theology to be much more radical than the common view that God was the efficient cause of all things, (3) Spinoza gives specific examples of what he means by inherence, and these examples fit far better with the traditional understanding of inherence than with anything like efficient causation. Melamed provides some other objections as well, including the worry that understanding inherence as efficient causation fails to dignify the extent of Spinoza's pantheism and cannot explain make sense of Spinoza's claim that God is omniscient.

I think that Melamed is right that we have ample reason to deny that Spinoza understood the inherence of modes in substance to just be an instance of efficient

causation. Moreover, while Curley himself rejects putting his view in terms of efficient causation,¹ Melamed has textual basis for reading Curley as he does. At the same time, I think Melamed's criticisms miss the most plausible aspect of Curley's reading, which identifies God with "the most general principles of order exemplified by things."² The relationship between a principle of order and a thing that exemplifies it is not one of efficient causation, though, like efficient causation, it can be understood as a sort of asymmetric dependence. Such dependence might be enough to justify Curley's use of causal language. For instance, since electromagnetic forces are essential to my body, I would not exist if the principles underpinning those forces did not hold. However, those principles would hold if I did not exist (Curley himself claims that the fundamental principles of nature are explanatorily basic, and that this part of why Spinoza identified God with those principles³). In such a case, we could say that my body is *produced by* those forces, that it exists *because of* those forces. That said, the fact that we can use causal language to describe such a relation is consistent with saying that Spinoza used causal language only to describe efficient causation.

Melamed sets aside this vein of Curley's reading (12), though his reasons for doing so were not clear to me. For not only is the claim that substance is a principle of order more explicit in Curley's writing than the claim that inherence is efficient causation, but the former does better against most of Melamed's objections than the latter does. Call the former the Principle Reading and the latter the Efficient-Causation Reading.

On the Principle Reading, it comes as no surprise that Spinoza treats causation and inherence differently. For example, the claim that all things are in God, as the Principle Reading understands it, does not obviously imply that God is a cause of all things (in Spinoza's sense of 'cause'), so E1p16c1 is not simply a restatement of E1p15. At the same time, the Principle Reading would indeed put Spinoza at odds with most of his contemporaries, both in his understanding of God and in the non-traditional view of inherence that it would imply. A mode of anger inhering in my body, for instance, would be a matter of the anger being an exemplification of some general principle that is my body or my body's essence (such the ratio of motion and rest Spinoza mentions in the Physical Digression). That said, the Principle Reading does not straightforwardly answer all of Melamed's objections. Whether it allows a sufficiently recognizable sense in which God is omniscient, for instance, is a difficult question.

Spinoza as Acosmist

Melamed devotes most of the second chapter to a discussion of whether we should accept an acosmist reading of Spinoza, according to which Spinoza takes the world of finite things to be unreal or illusory. Melamed takes Hegel to be the most forceful advocate of this reading. While he thinks Hegel offers some important considerations, Melamed ultimately rejects the acosmist reading.

Hegel objects that Spinoza failed to derive finite things from infinite things. If so, then finite things are not properly grounded in reality, and so unreal. Melamed replies that Spinoza does indeed derive finite things, as propria of substance (72). Melamed's reply here seems to miss Hegel's point: stating that y is derived from x is not the same thing as providing a derivation of y from x, and it seems to be the latter that Hegel is concerned with. Spinoza can of course state that finite things follow from God's essence, but, given his liberal epistemology, it would seem to be a problem for him if we cannot make any sense of how that works.

Melamed is more sympathetic with Hegel's complaint that Spinoza's world is "shapeless," since he thinks Spinoza's criteria for distinctness between finite things are very weak (74). A shapeless world, he thinks, is one in which finite things are unreal or illusory. Melamed focuses on E2d7, which states that if a number of individuals jointly cause some effect, then they are all one singular thing. This is a weak criterion in two related senses, Melamed claims: for one, it means that any aggregate of things, under some circumstances, could constitute a singular thing; for another, it means that an entity can be part of infinitely many individuals (75). Roughly the same concerns arise for Spinoza's criterion for individuation of singular things (in the Physical Digression). I had trouble understanding a crucial step in this argument: the connection between permissive criteria of individuality and individuals' being unreal. It seems like there would be nothing incoherent about a view according to which there were very many real things, many of which overlapped.⁴

Melamed himself rejects the acosmist reading because he takes it to conflict with Spinoza's claims that finite things (a) can be objects of adequate knowledge, (b) are effects of God, (c) have order and connection, (d) can provide knowledge of God, and (e) fall under an infinite intellect. Yet all of these issues likewise seemed to me to carry no direct implications for or against finite things being illusory. Consider an illusory cat created by a magician. While we could not have adequate knowledge of a cat in this case, it seems that we could well have a sort of adequate

knowledge about this illusion (e.g., knowledge of how it was created). Similarly, it seems that this illusion would be an effect of the magician, that it can have order and connection (the illusory whiskers are on the sides of the illusory face), that it can provide us with knowledge of its creator (at a minimum: that she can create illusions of cats), and we would expect it to be known by an unlimited intellect in some way or other.

On Della Rocca's interpretation

The majority of Chapter 3 is aimed at Michael Della Rocca's claim that Spinoza identifies inherence, causation, and conception. Melamed's strongest point against Della Rocca, I think, is the most obvious one: if Spinoza had accepted such an important identity, we would have expected him to be much more explicit about it (94-95). Melamed offers a number of other points, however, several of which struck me as less conclusive.

Broadly speaking, Melamed's criticisms of Della Rocca take two forms: either arguing that Della Rocca's reading is committed to attributing unacceptable views about inherence to Spinoza, or drawing out how Della Rocca commits himself to unexplained metaphysical bifurcations that can be avoided on the traditional reading. Della Rocca himself insists that Spinoza avoids unexplained bifurcations.⁵

As an example of the first form of criticism: Melamed claims that it is problematic that Della Rocca's interpretation allows the inherence relation to hold between things with different temporal locations (99), and (relatedly) for modes to inhere in substrata that no longer exist (99-100). We get these implications insofar as Della Rocca holds that all clear instances of efficient causation (e.g., builders causing buildings) should be taken as instances of inherence, though we should note that Della Rocca's basic identification does not commit him to anything about which commonsense instances of causation should be taken to be instances of Spinozistic causation/inherence/conception. Melamed objects that this would make Spinozistic inherence radically unlike traditional inherence (and much more like efficient causation), for it would seem to mean that the existence of a mode need not depend on the existence of its substratum.

As Melamed is aware, these kinds of concerns are quite hard to apply. The mere fact that a reading attributes Spinoza an unorthodox view is not much of a point against it by itself. After all, the core of Della Rocca's proposal is that three *prima facie* distinct properties end up being identified. For that reason, we should

expect there to be surprising implications. Moreover, inherence is perhaps more metaphysically mysterious than causation, so collapsing the former (even with some surprising implications) into the latter carries some philosophical virtues.

Another criticism of this first form that Melamed offers concerns cases of joint causation. If two things can jointly cause some third thing, and if all instances of causation are likewise instances of inherence, then Della Rocca must accept that some things can inhere in two things at once. Not only is this odd, but it seems to mean that Spinoza is forced to admit the existence of universals: things which are had by more than one other thing (104). Yet Spinoza openly rejects the existence of universals (cf. E2P49s).

The sort of shared properties Melamed describes here aren't universals in the usual sense, though. Say that two rocks collide, and make a noise. Let's also say that Della Rocca is indeed committed to saying that the noise is a mode of both rocks (as opposed to being only partly a mode of both). While the noise is, in some sense, shared by the two rocks that caused it, there is only one instance of this noise. Yet since another way of defining universals is in terms of multiple instances, the sort of 'universals' Della Rocca's reading is committed to may not be the kind of universals Spinoza rejected.

The second form of criticism Melamed raises against Della Rocca is more subtle. Melamed claims that Della Rocca is forced to bifurcate the notion of inherence on three levels. First, Della Rocca needs a type of inherence that does not imply lesser reality (holding between finite things – cf. E4p62), and a type that does that does (that holding between substance and modes). Second, we will have one type of inherence that is temporal, and another that is not (101-02). Third, there is one type of inherence that must ultimately end in something that is in itself, and another that does not (103). Yet it is hard to see what explanation there could be of why inherence comes in these different forms. Melamed grants that, even in his own reading, there is a bifurcation within causation (immanent vs. transitive), but thinks that Della Rocca has to accept more bifurcations than he does: "I suspect that, in Spinoza, there is a genuine bifurcation of causality... On the other hand, Della Rocca... must explain the durational versus non-durational bifurcation of *both* inherence and causation" (102, Melamed's emphasis).

I found this criticism hard to evaluate. Della Rocca *identifies* inherence and causation, and all the bifurcations Melamed mentions end up being co-extensive. Given that identification, it does not seem like Della Rocca has more bifurcations to explain than Melamed does. Rather, Della Rocca can simply say that it is the

same single bifurcation in different guises.

At the end of the chapter, Melamed sets Della Rocca aside and directly considers Spinoza's bifurcation of causation and conception. Melamed proposes that causation is bifurcated into immanent and transitive, and that conception is, in a parallel manner, bifurcated into being 'conceived under' (which holds between modes and attributes) and the conceptual relation between an idea and the external cause of its existence. All this, he claims, is ultimately explained by the fundamental bifurcation between substance and mode.

This part of Melamed's discussion is very suggestive, and my sense is that something along these lines must be right. That said, I don't see how the explanation is supposed to go. Given just the definitions of substance and mode, we can imagine a world containing a single substance with a single mode, but only one type of causation (immanent) and conception (conception under an attribute). If that's right, then in what sense does the substance/mode distinction ground or explain the other distinctions?

Infinite Modes

The final chapter of Part I of the book concerns infinite modes. Melamed offers a careful discussion of the nature of infinite modes, arguing that within each attribute is an infinitely descending chain of these modes, with only one infinite mode at each step. Much of this discussion struck me as persuasive, so I will raise only two questions.

First: part of Melamed's reason for thinking that there is only one infinite mode at each step is that he takes Spinoza to hold that two distinct items cannot follow from the same cause (118-119). Melamed proposes that Spinoza accepts this principle on the basis of Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), and that without this causal principle, we could not have any systematic science. I did not follow the reasoning here. Consider a flat-footed example: volcanoes cause both tremors and smoke, and tremors and smoke are distinct. Nothing in that example seems to be in tension with systematic science, or with a strict allegiance to the PSR.

Second: Melamed claims that, for Spinoza, finite modes constitute a whole insofar as they mutually interact (131). Therefore, if Spinoza had not accepted infinite modes, then it would have to be the case that there were non-interacting finite modes, and we would have a species of occasionalism. This proposal struck me as illuminating, but incomplete. As stated, it would only explain why Spinoza

accepted *some* infinite modes, namely, those modes whose parts are the familiar finite bodies and minds. Not only that, but by itself it does not require infinity: couldn't a finite (but large) individual mode have played exactly the same role?

Conclusion

Since my discussion has been primarily critical, I want to again emphasize that I have a lot of sympathy for many of the views Melamed defends. More importantly, I found his arguments often surprising, and always tremendously engaging. His book offers something for anyone interested in Spinoza's fundamental metaphysics.

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Notes

¹ See the correspondence with Curley that Melamed quotes on 4.

² Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 42, quoted by Melamed on 10. See also the quote from recent correspondence cited by Melamed on 4.

³ Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 43.

⁴ Cf. realism with unrestricted composition, such as that found in David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1986), 211-13.

⁵ Michael Della Rocca, "Rationalism Run Amok," in *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, ed. Charlie Huenemann, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 26-52; 45.