

# The Universal Nature of a Spinozistic Substance

Michael A. Istvan Jr.\*

## Abstract

There is a longstanding alliance between rationalism and realism concerning universals. Spinoza does not disrupt that alliance. The nature of a Spinozistic substance, after all, is a universal. That is what I argue here. My central point is that a realist conception of universals is a key presumption behind Spinoza's case for substance monism, a view historically recognized as a natural outgrowth of realism's toleration of strict identity in diversity. After defending my central point (and, in addition, the secondary point that Spinoza is likely cognizant of this presumption), I respond to two concerns. First, I explain how the nature of a Spinozistic substance is a universal even though there can be only one instance of that nature. Second, I explain how Spinoza's infamous rejection of universals does not contradict the fact that the nature of a substance is a universal.

**Keywords:** Spinoza, Attributes, Properties, Universals, Tropes, Realism, Antirealism, Nominalism, Monism

## 1. Introductory Remarks

The status of universals in Spinoza's ontology has been a topic of disagreement over the centuries. Considering Spinoza's characterization of universals as abstract figments of the imagination,<sup>1</sup> some commentators have held that Spinoza is an antirealist concerning universals.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand,

- 1 See TIE 19.3/G II 10 lines 16-19, TIE 76/G II 29 lines 5-15, TIE 93/G II 34 lines 15-22, and TIE 99-100/G II 36 lines 6-29; KV 1.6/G I 43 lines 7-8, KV 1.10/G I 50, KV 2.16.3a/G I 81 lines 18-19, and KV 2.16.4/G I 82 line 5ff; CM 1.1/G I 235 lines 10-30; CM 2.7/G I 263 lines 5-9; E1app, E2p40s1, E2p49s/G II 135 lines 22-23, E4pref/G II 207, and E4p62s/G II 257 line 28; Ep. 2/G IV 19 lines 10-20.
- 2 For a thorough list of commentators who have held that Spinoza is an antirealist, see Michael A. Istvan Jr., *Spinoza and the Problem of Universals: A Study and Research Guide* (Diss. Texas A&M University, 2015), ch.1.2 and esp. Appendix D. Here is a clear expression of the interpretation that, in Pollock's more dramatic words, Spinoza is "the downright enemy of [...] universals" (Frederick Pollock, *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy* (New York: American Scholar Publications, 1966), 141):

\* Austin Community College; michael.istvan@austincc.edu; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8675-4510>

and considering Spinoza's many statements about how distinct things can be strictly identical in some respect (as in when he says that one and the same essence is equally in each individual with that essence, such that each would be destroyed were the essence of just one destroyed<sup>3</sup>), other commentators have held that Spinoza is a realist.<sup>4</sup>

A few commentators, in light of such textual and scholarly tensions, conclude that Spinoza contradicts himself when it comes to the status of universals.<sup>5</sup> My position, as I argue in this paper, is that Spinoza does not contradict himself: Spinoza is a consistent realist concerning universals. Unlike more typical approaches, which center around whether Spinoza allows for universal species essences in the realm of dependent entities, I restrict my focus to the foundational level of Spinoza's ontology. That is, I focus on a substance in its absolute nature (the attribute level) rather than a substance in its nonabsolute nature (the mode level)—for the most part leaving aside discussion of intra-attribute universality, something I explore elsewhere.

My paper proceeds as follows. In section 2, I define key terms ("universal" and "nonuniversal," "realism" and "antirealism") and then lay out what background assumptions about Spinoza's metaphysics underpin my argument (the major one being that Spinozistic attributes are ontologically authentic). In section 3, I argue that the attributes of a Spinozistic substance are universals. A Spinozistic attribute, to summarize the argument, cannot be a nonuniversal because nonuniversal attributes do not conform to the principle of the identity of indiscernibles—a principle to which Spinoza without question believes attributes do conform. Although my central point in section 3 is to show, in effect, that a realist conception of universals is a key presumption behind Spinoza's case for substance monism, I lay out reasons to think as well that Spinoza is likely cognizant of this

---

[According to Spinoza's] non-realist construal of "agreement," to say that certain particulars "agree in nature" is just to say that they resemble one another [(rather than that they are identical in some respect) . . .]. [I]t is this non-realist construal of "agreement" as a cognized similarity that puts us on the right track in interpreting Spinoza's metaphysics. (Karolina Hübner, "Spinoza on Essences, Universals and Beings of Reason," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 97, no. 1 (2016): section 3.2)

3 See E1p17s/G II 63 lines 18-24 as well as E2p37-E2p39d, E1p5d, E1p8s2/G II 51 lines 13-14, and E2p10s; TTP 4.6; TP 11.2; Ep. 34.

4 For a thorough list of commentators who have held that Spinoza is a realist, see Istvan, *Spinoza and the Problem of Universals*, ch. 1.2 and esp. Appendix D. Here is a clear expression of the interpretation that, in Fullerton's more dramatic words, Spinoza was "at heart as thorough a realist as any philosopher of the Middle Ages [...]. [H]e thought like a realist, he felt like a realist, he wrote like a realist" (George Fullerton, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (New York: H. Holt, 1894), 220; George Fullerton, *On Spinozistic Immortality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1899), 33):

[If Spinoza were a nominalist, then each mode] might bear similarities to, but it could have nothing in common with, other modes. There could be no one nature in many things [...]. Nominalism, in short, would be the reductio ad absurdum of his philosophy. (Francis Haserot, "Spinoza and the Status of Universals," *Philosophical Review* 59, no. 4 (1950): 469-492)

5 For a thorough list of commentators who have held that Spinoza is inconsistent on the status of universals, see Istvan, *Spinoza and the Problem of Universals*, ch. 1.2 and esp. Appendix D. Here is a clear expression of the interpretation that, in Martineau's more dramatic words, "Spinoza unconsciously retains the realism which he professes to renounce" (James Martineau, *A Study of Spinoza* (London: Macmillan, 1882), 150n2):

[For an antirealist like Spinoza] modes cannot share a common property [...]. [And yet t]here exist certain properties which are identical in all finite modes. Such an admission appears to put Spinoza's purported stance against the objective reality of universals in serious jeopardy (Edward Schoen, "The Role of Common Notions in Spinoza's Ethics," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 15, no. 4 (1977): 539-546)

presumption. In section 4, I respond to what seems a crucial concern: how an attribute can be a universal given the impossibility in Spinoza's ontology of an attribute having more than one instantiation. A Spinozistic attribute, despite being necessarily unique, is still a universal, so I explain, since it is the sort of thing that would be one and the same in each substance said to have an exactly similar attribute. Although my central point in section 4 is to show, in effect, that the objection rests on a metaphysically and historically mistaken view about universals, I lay out reasons to think as well that Spinoza is likely cognizant of the fact that the impossibility of an attribute's multiple instantiation does not render an attribute a nonuniversal. In section 5, I respond to what seems another crucial concern: how an attribute can be a universal given Spinoza's pejorative remarks against universals. Spinoza's pejorative remarks, so I explain, target those *bogus* universals apprehendable merely through the imagination, not those *real* universals—like the attributes of Extension and Thought—apprehendable through the intellect. Although my central point in section 5 is to show, in effect, that there is no inconsistency between Spinoza's rejection of universals and the fact that Spinozistic attributes are universals, I lay out reasons to think as well that Spinoza likely makes a conscious effort to preempt the charge of inconsistency.

## 2. Definitions and Assumptions

Point 1.—A universal is an entity—most typically a *qualitas* entity (property, nature, attribute, essence)—that is in principle disposed to remain undivided even when predicated of multiple things. In the (boilerplate) words of Keckermann, a central influence on Spinoza with respect to this subject, a universal is that which is apt to be one in many (“[*unum*] *aptum est multis inesse*”).<sup>6</sup> To say that a universal is *apt* to be one in many is to say, at minimum (and as Spinoza puts it), that it does not itself impose a restriction on the number of items instantiating it (see E1p8s2/G II 50-51 in light of E2p49s; Ep. 50). As an entity apt, in other words (and in the language of Bayle), to be “indivisibly the same in every one of [the items instantiating it],” a universal is unique in that only it can ensure the unity, as Leibniz (in line with Suárez) puts it, of “identity in variety.” This is a unity tighter than the tightest of extrinsic attachments among things even in the most perfect operational harmony. This is a unity, so it is crucial to understand in this paper, tighter than even the unity of inherent exact similarity.<sup>7</sup> Reflecting these core facts is Spinoza's own gloss on the concept, which adheres

6 Bartholomäus Keckermann, *Systema logicae* (Hanouiae: Apud Guilielmum Antonium, 1602), 46–48, 68; see Francesco Cerrato, *Cause e nozioni comuni nella filosofia di Spinoza* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2008), 119–120; Piero Di Vona, *Studi sull'ontologia di Spinoza. Parte I* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1960), vi, 46–47, 56, 81–83, 119, 140, 145, 156ff; Jakob Freudenthal, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinoza's in Quellenschriften, Urkunden und nichtamtlichen Nachrichten* (Leipzig: Verlag Von Veit, 1899), entry 106; Jeroen Van De Ven, “Life,” *The Bloomsbury Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Wiep Van Bunge (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 13.

7 Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), entry on “Abelard”; Gottfried W. Leibniz, *Briefwechsel zwischen Leibniz und Christian Wolf*, ed. Carl I. Gerhardt (Halle: H. W. Schmidt, 1860), 172 and 161; Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1988), 5.2.8, 6.1.12-15, 6.2.1-2, 6.2.13, 6.5.3, 6.6.5, 6.6.12, 6.7.2; see C. Delisle Burns, “William of Ockham on Universals,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 14 (1914): 82; James Ross, “Suárez on Universals,” *Journal of Philosophy* 59, no. 23 (1962): 743.

to Aristotle's canonic description in *De interpretatione*:<sup>8</sup> a universal is that which is said *wholly* and *equally* of each individual of which it is said (E2p49s/G II 134 lines 8-10), such that it "must be in each" individual of which it is said and "the same in all" of them (just as the essence of man is "[NS: wholly and equally [in] each individual man]") (E2p49s/G II 135 line 5ff, E3pref/G II 138 lines 12-18; see TIE 76; TP 3.18). In summary, a universal is the sort of entity that, even when in many items, resides wholly in each of those items.

Point 2.—A nonuniversal (a particular) is that which lacks, even in principle, the aptitude to be one and the same, undivided, in many. Following Ockham, who points out that "*numerical difference* is the essence of the particular" (since otherwise the supposed particular *in itself* would be a universal),<sup>9</sup> nonuniversals are, in effect, those entities whose indiscernibility "is not sufficient for identity" and thus whose distinction from each other is "irreducibly primitive."<sup>10</sup> Whereas perfect resemblance suffices for identity in the case of universals, nonuniversals—entities whose brute nonidentity to one another ensures noncompliance to the principle of the identity of indiscernibles—fail to satisfy that identity condition.<sup>11</sup>

Point 3.—Realism is the view that there are (or at least could be) universals. Realists, in effect (and as Suárez describes them), are those who hold that objective agreement between distinct items can at least in some circumstances be explained in terms of *strict identity* between those items: one and the same form, nature, way, attribute, property, or so on wholly present in each.<sup>12</sup> On this view, substance *o* and presumably-distinct substance *r* both objectively being *F* (extended, say) is to be analyzed, at least in some circumstances, as *o* and *r* having one and the same attribute *F*ness.

Point 4.—Antirealism is the denial of realism. Antirealists, in effect (and as Suárez describes them), are those who hold that "agreement" or "sameness" or "resemblance" or "similarity" between distinct items—even if objective as well as absolutely perfect—can never be a matter of strict identity

8 Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, trans. John L. Ackrill (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 17a39-40.

9 Burns, "William of Ockham," 88, 99; see Richard Cross, "Medieval Theories of Haecceity," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2010); Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Aronold S. Kaufman and William K. Frankena (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 228; Michael A. Istvan Jr., "On the Possibility of Exactly Similar Tropes," *Abstracta* 6, no. 2 (2011): 158–177.

10 Keith Campbell, *Abstract Particulars* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 44; Yakir Levin, "Cartesian Minds," in *25th International Wittgenstein Symposium*, eds. Christian Kanzian, Joseph QUITTERER, and Edmund Runggaldier (Kirchberg am Wechsel: ALWS, 2002): 133.

11 See David Armstrong, *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 114; Campbell, *Abstract Particulars*, 44; Douglas Ehling, "Distinguishing Universals from Particulars," *Analysis* 64, no. 4 (2004): 229–230; Anna-Sofia Maurin, *If Tropes* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 17; Thomas Pickavance, *Universals, Particulars, and the Identity of Indiscernibles* (Diss. University of Texas at Austin, 2008), 148; George Stout, "Universals Again," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 15 (1936): 9; Udo Thiel, "Individuation," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 213–215, 233; Udo Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject: Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21; Donald Williams, "Universals and Existents," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 64, no. 1 (1986): 3.

12 Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, 6.1.12, 6.2.11, 6.4.6; see Riccardo Chiaradonna and Gabriele Galluzzo, "Introduction," in *Universals in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Riccardo Chiaradonna and Gabriele Galluzzo (Pisa: Edizioni della Scuola Normale, 2013), 3; Scott MacDonald and Norman Malcolm, "Medieval Philosophy," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 6., ed. Edward Craig (New York: Routledge, 1998), 273–274; Fullerton, *On Spinozistic Immortality*, 27, 32.

between those items.<sup>13</sup> On this view, substance *o* and presumably-distinct substance *r* both objectively being *F* (spherical, say) is never to be analyzed as *o* and *r* having one and the same attribute *F*ness.

Point 5.—I hold that Spinozistic attributes are ontologically authentic: that is, they are non-illusory, truly “out there” (as opposed to mere projections of the classifying mind).<sup>14</sup> I also hold that Spinozistic substances are nothing but their attributes (as opposed to substrata in which attributes inhere). I lack the space to defend these claims in detail. Simply consider the following points:

(1) Spinozistic attributes exist “outside the intellect” (E1p4d) and so “in reality”<sup>15</sup>. That they exist in reality is what we would expect since (a) *infinite* intellect finds that God has—indeed, *consists of*<sup>16</sup>—many attributes (E2p4d in light of E1def6) and (b) the perception of infinite intellect—like the perception of *any* intellect, in fact (1p30d in light of E1def6)—cannot be mistaken as to what is true of reality in itself and cannot fail to be isomorphic with reality in itself.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Spinoza holds that each attribute, or “first element” of reality (TIE 75), is self-sufficient (Ep. 36): each is an “eternal”

13 Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, 5.2.8, 6.1.12-15, 6.2.13, 6.5.3; see Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Le sens commun: la philosophie de l'être et les formules dogmatiques* (Paris: Desclée, de Brouwer & cie, éditeurs, 1936), 39-40n1; Samuel Newlands, “Spinoza on Universals,” in *The Problem of Universals in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Stefano Di Bella and Tad M. Schmaltz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 62–86; Hübner, “Spinoza on Essences,” section 3.2; Ross, “Suárez on Universals, 736–748; Haserot, “The Status of Universals,” 470, 484. According to antirealist interpretations of Spinoza, then, to say in Spinoza’s world that items have an attribute in common, or belong to the same kind, or share an essence, or agree in nature, or have the same property, or so on is to say that those items at best merely exactly resemble (Hübner, “Spinoza on Essences,” esp. note 57). As Rice puts it, in Spinoza’s antirealist world “‘x has something in common with y’ = def ‘x is similar to y’”—not that there is one and the same feature instantiated by each (Lee Rice, “Tanquam Naturae Humanae Exemplar: Spinoza on Human Nature,” *Modern Schoolman* 68, no. 4 (1991): 301; 299, 301; see also Lee Rice, “Spinoza on Individuation,” in *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. Eugene Freeman and Maurice Mandelbaum (La Salle: Open Court, 1975), 210). Newlands agrees that Spinoza’s talk of agreement, sharing, commonality and the like should be understood in the antirealist-friendly way of mere similarity or resemblance. He makes the point well:

[O]bjective similarities [rather than identities] among particulars are that which, in things, ground the content of universal concepts [for Spinoza, who as a nominalist] uses “agreement” in a thinner sense that does not require literal sharing or multiple instantiation. (Newlands, “Spinoza on Universals,” 65–67)

14 Spinozistic attributes, in the parlance of Spinoza scholars, are “objective.” They are objective, yes, despite being dependent on intellect in the innocuous sense that everything in Spinoza’s ontology is dependent on intellect. Everything is dependent on intellect simply in that there is necessarily an intellect comprised of ideas for everything in Spinoza’s ontology (such that, even though the intellect in question is not causally responsible for all of these things to which it refers, deleting that intellect would entail deleting all of the things to which it refers) (see E2p3 in light of E1p30). By the way, attributes in Spinoza’s metaphysics are not the fundamental properties that, as Spinoza puts it, *imagination* might perceive as constituting the essence of God: jealousy, love, and so on. Rather, they are the fundamental properties that, as Spinoza puts it, *intellect* perceives as constituting the essence of God: Extension, Thought, and so on. See E1def6 in light of E1app/G II 82, E4p37s2; CM 1.6/G I 248 line 28-I 249 line 2; KV 1.7/G I 44 line 29, KV 1.2.28-29; TTP 4.11, TTP 13.8; Ep. 19/G IV 93, Ep. 21/G IV 127 lines 24-35, Ep. 56.

15 See Ep. 4; see Ep. 9 IV/43/21-30; CM 1.1/G I 235 lines 10-13, CM 1.2/G I 238 line 20ff, CM 1.6/G I 245 line 25.

16 See E1p10s; see E1p4d, E1p14c2 in light of E1p4d-E1p6c-E1p15d-E1p28d, E1p19, E1p20c2, E1p28d, E1p29s, E1p30d; Ep. 9 IV/45; Ep. 70.

17 See E2p43s, E2p44d in light of E4app4; CM 2.8; Ep. 12, Ep. 64; KV app1p4; KV 1.9.3; KV 2.22.4a.



“creature” (TIE 100; Ep. 6 IV/36) that is *in itself* (E1p29s; Ep. 2 IV/7/25-29), *conceived through itself*<sup>18</sup>, and thus (by E1a4) *self-caused*.<sup>19</sup>

(2) Spinozistic substances—*considered truly or in themselves or in their absolute natures* and so independent of any modes (see E1p5d)—are nothing but their attributes<sup>20</sup>: “*Deus sive omnia Dei attributa*” (E1p19/G II 64 line 9, E1p20c2/G II 65 lines 6-7). If a substance in itself were not merely, in effect, the totality of its attributes, then a substance in itself would have something in excess to the totality of its attributes—some substratum in which the attributes inhere. It is clear, however, that a substance in itself does not have something in excess to the totality of its attributes. That is why Spinoza, for whom the *entirety* of reality is intelligible, says that the only knowledge possible (which is in fact knowledge of *everything*) is knowledge of either the attributes or the modes of God (E1p30d; see Ep. 56), and thus that the only knowledge of God—God *considered truly or in himself or in his absolute nature*, that is—is of God’s attributes (see E1p30d in light of E1p5d).<sup>21</sup>

Point 6.—Since Spinozistic attributes are ontologically authentic, Spinoza must endorse a constituent antirealist analysis—in short, a trope analysis—of a substance having attributes if he is an antirealist concerning universals. Unlike a *nonconstituent* antirealist analysis, which denies that substances have attributes that are universals by denying that substances have attributes altogether, a *constituent* antirealist analysis denies that substances have attributes that are universals by denying that the attributes that they really do have are universals.<sup>22</sup> On this view, which on occasion has been attributed

18 See E1p29s; E1p10s; Ep. 2, IV/7/25-29, Ep. 8 IV/41; KV 1.7/G I 47 lines 1-3, KV 1.8/G I 47 lines 20-25.

19 See Ep. 10/G IV 47 lines 15-16; E1p20d in light of E1def8 and E1def1, E1p10s, E1p29s; KV 1.2/G I 32 line 27ff; KV 1.7/G I 47 lines 1-3, KV app2/G I 119 lines 15-20; TIE 92. For a detailed defense of the view that Spinozistic attributes are ontologically authentic, see Istvan, *Spinoza and the Problem of Universals*, chs. 3–5.

20 See E1def6, E1p4d, E1p10s, and E1p14c2 in light of E1p4d-E1p6c-E1p15d-E1p28d, E1p19, E1p20c2, E1p28d, E1p29s, E1p30d; Ep. 9 IV/45; DPP 1p7s; KV 2pref4/G I 53 lines 10-13.

21 For a detailed defense of the view that Spinozistic substances, considered in their absolute natures and so independent of their modes, are nothing but their attributes (however many they are said to have: one or many), see Michael A. Istvan Jr., “Spinoza’s Bundle Analysis of Substances Having Attributes,” *InCircolo: Rivista di filosofia e culture* 9 (2020): 137–185 in addition to section 3 below. For whatever it might be worth here, I hold (in line more or less with Deleuze, Curley, and Donagan) that Spinoza’s God, which Spinoza proves early in the *Ethics* to be the only substance (despite initiating his chain of reasoning noncommittal as to how many there are), is nothing but the totality of its *formally distinct* attributes: attributes incapable of existing without one another and yet, given their individual self-sufficiency, not causing one another. Seeing the attributes as merely formally distinct is a first step toward seeing how my bundle interpretation harmonizes with the unity and simplicity of God (see Istvan, “Spinoza’s Bundle Analysis,” esp. section 4; Michael A. Istvan Jr., “In Homage to Descartes and Spinoza: A Cosmo-Ontological Case for God,” *The Philosophical Forum* 52, no. 1 (2021): section 2.2).

22 So if Spinoza is an antirealist, then he is not going to be endorsing any form of nonconstituent antirealism, and so including its four most popular forms. (1) *Predicate antirealism* or *terminism*: a view, sometimes attributed to Hobbes, according to which substance *o* being *F* is not to be analyzed as *o* having some attribute *Fness* but rather merely as *o* arbitrarily falling under the predicate “*F*” (such that *o* would not be *F* were predicate “*F*” deleted). (2) *Concept antirealism* or *conceptualism*: a view, sometimes attributed to Abelard, according to which substance *o* being *F* is not to be analyzed as *o* having some attribute *Fness* but rather merely as *o* being subsumed arbitrarily under concept *F* (such that *o* would not be *F* were the concept *F* deleted). (3) *Resemblance antirealism*: a view, sometimes attributed to Gassendi, according to which substance *o* being *F* is not to be analyzed as *o* having some

to several early modern figures,<sup>23</sup> substance *o* and presumably-distinct substance *r* both objectively being *F* is to be analyzed as *o* and *r* each having its own nonuniversal (and so exactly similar but nonidentical) attribute *F*ness—each having, in the parlance of contemporary metaphysics, an *F*ness trope.

### 3. Spinozistic Attributes are Universals

Spinoza is an antirealist concerning universals only if the attributes of a Spinozistic substance are tropes (see section 2, point 6). The question, then, is whether they are tropes. The answer is that they are not. Consider the following argument (which assumes, of course, that we are talking about *Spinozistic* substances):

1. If attribute *F*ness is a trope, then if there are two distinct *F* substances, the *F*ness in the one is nonidentical to the exactly similar *F*ness in the other.

Rationale.—Since tropes are nonuniversals, and since nonuniversals do not conform to the principle of the identity of indiscernibles (see point 2, section 2),<sup>24</sup> the *F*ness trope in one substance is nonidentical to the exactly similar *F*ness trope in the other substance.

---

attribute *F*ness but rather merely as *o* suitably resembling paradigm *F* substances (such that *o* would not be *F* were those other *F* substances deleted). (4) *Austere antirealism*: a view, sometimes attributed to Leibniz, according to which substance *o*'s being *F* is not to be analyzed as *o*'s having some attribute *F*ness but rather simply as *o*'s being *F* (such that *o*'s being *F* is, in effect, unanalyzably brute). It makes sense that the *relational* forms, options 1 through 3, are out for Spinoza. God cannot be parasitic upon something else—a predicate, a concept, a paradigm—to be what God is. It makes sense that the nonrelational form, option 4, is out too. Things have true definitions for Spinoza (see E1def6 in light of Ep. 2). A true definition refers to a thing as it is in itself (Ep. 9 and Ep. 4). Since for Spinoza a true definition refers only to the properties of a thing (in particular, its essential properties, see 1p8s2), things really do have properties in themselves.—For a list of historical representatives of these various antirealist positions and more (especially in the early modern period), see Istvan, *Spinoza and the Problem of Universals*, esp. Appendix A.

- 23 The trope analysis has been attributed, for example, to Reid, Locke, Boyle, and also Spinoza. For a thorough list of commentators, see Istvan, *Spinoza and the Problem of Universals*, ch. 2.2.2. and Appendix A 3.4. Several commentators, so it seems a good time to mention, suggest that the debate over whether the attributes have objective reality in Spinoza's system, on the one hand, and the debate as to whether attributes are universals in Spinoza's system, on the other, perfectly overlap when set in the context of the early modern period (see Haserot, "The Status of Universals," 470–484; Martineau, *A Study of Spinoza*, 150n2; Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), 142–156). The environment of the early modern period was one where, as Bolton suggests, the default assumption was that properties are universals (Martha Bolton, "Universals, Essences, and Abstract Entities," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 183–186). It was an environment, in effect, where the default way to reject universals was to adopt one of the many non-trope forms of antirealism mentioned in the previous footnote—rejecting, that is, the ontological authenticity of *qualitas* entities altogether, and so the possibility of the trope option (even if one still used property-quality-essence-attribute language for the sake of convenience).
- 24 Remember, exactly similar tropes are entities whose distinction from each other is brute. Since the PSR is to be honored in Spinoza's system (see E1a2, E1p7d, E1p8s2, E1p11d2; E1p16; E1p18), such talk of brute distinction between perfectly resembling tropes is to be understood—if only to give the trope interpretation a fighting chance—in Spinoza's *welcomed* sense of bruteness (see Michael A. Istvan Jr., "A Rationalist Defence of Determinism," *Theoria*

2. It is not the case that if there are two distinct *F* substances, then the *F*ness in the one is nonidentical to the exactly similar *F*ness in the other.

Rationale.—Since the *F*ness in the one substance would be indiscernible from the *F*ness in the other substance (see E1p5d), and since indiscernibility implies identity for Spinoza (E1p4 plus E1p5d), the *F*ness in the one would have to be strictly identical to the *F*ness in the other.

Therefore, it is not the case that attribute *F*ness is a trope.

Here is the basic argument in relaxed terms. Spinoza says that if we assume that there are two substances indiscernible in terms of attribute *F*ness, then the *F*ness in the one would be strictly identical to the *F*ness in the other. The *F*ness in the one would be strictly identical to the *F*ness in the other because, so at least Spinoza thinks it enough to point out, the *F*ness in the one would be indiscernible from the *F*ness in the other (E1p5d/G II 48 lines 13-15). The trope analysis, however, denies that the indiscernibility of the two substances in terms of *F*ness entails the identity of the two substances in terms of *F*ness. Therefore, it is not the case that *F*ness is a trope, a nonuniversal nature.<sup>25</sup>

Spinoza would be unentitled to his all-important E1p5 view—namely, that distinct substances indistinguishable in terms of attribute are truly identical—if he endorsed the trope analysis. Consider a rendition of E1p5d:

Assume there are numerically different substances, *s*<sub>1</sub> and *s*<sub>2</sub>, of the same nature or attribute (G II 48 line 10). Things are numerically different only if they are different in terms of modes or in terms of attributes (E1p4). (Mode difference and attribute difference are the only candidate grounds for numerical distinction because whatever is is either in itself or in another (1a1), that is, whatever is is either a substance (E1def3) or a mode (E1def5), and a substance is the totality of its attributes (E1p4d, and see point 5, section 2). Since *s*<sub>1</sub> and *s*<sub>2</sub> are both of the same nature or attribute, the explanation for their numerical difference can only be that they have different modes. The problem is that even the most drastic difference in modes cannot ground the numerical difference between substances. For substances are prior in nature to modes (E1p1, and see TTP 4.8; E1p5d, E1p10; KV 1.2/G I 25 line 35), as is clear by the asymmetrical dependence relation between substances and modes: modes depend on substances whereas substances do not depend on modes (see E1def3 and E1def5). Since substances are numerically different only if they have different attributes (E1p4 in light of E1p1), the opening

---

87, no. 2 (2021): section 5.1). That is to say, it is to be understood as meaning that their distinction from each other is due to nothing but *themselves alone*: there is an answer to why they are distinct and *they themselves* provide that answer. Their distinction from one another is to be understood, in effect, as primitive in the PSR-friendly sense of *self-grounded* rather than in the PSR-unfriendly sense of *true-but-ungrounded*.

25 “[A] conflict between Spinoza’s view and trope theory,” so Melamed nicely makes the point, “is the issue of the possibility of perfectly similar tropes, which Spinoza, following his endorsement of the Identity of Indiscernibles (E1p4), would be pressed to reject” (Yitzhak Melamed, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics of Substance: The Substance-Mode Relation as a Relation of Inherence and Predication,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 78, no. 1 (2009): 74n182; see also Yitzhak Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 56n186).



assumption—that *s1* and *s2* are of the same nature or attribute—is absurd. Therefore, there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute.

How would regarding attributes as tropes undermine Spinoza's E1p5d? By granting (a) that there are two substances (*s1* and *s2*) indistinguishable in terms of attribute (which Spinoza does at E1p5d/G II 48 line 10), and by granting (b) that Spinoza regards attributes as tropes (which we are, in effect, for *reductio*), we are granting that substances *s1* and *s2* have attributes indistinguishable and yet nonidentical. The problem is clear. For Spinoza, there is numerical difference between substances only if there is qualitative difference between them. That is, Spinoza endorses the dissimilarity of the diverse or, if you will, the discernibility of the nonidentical: the contrapositive rendering, of course, of the identity of indiscernibles (E1p4 in light of E1p5d). If he thought that indiscernible attributes were nonidentical, then he would be barred from saying that *s1* and *s2* are the same substances. Spinoza does not regard attributes as tropes.

What Spinoza does is take attributes to be universals, and thus strictly identical in all purported instances. That is what allows his posited *many* substances of the same nature at E1p5d to be “turned” (*versus*) into “one” (*unus*), in accord with the meaning of the Latin term for “universal” (“*uni-versus*”) and in accord with Socrates's claim that the universal is friend to the singular and foe to the plural (see *Meno* 77a). “Nominalists, and this includes most empiricists, must say no” to the question whether the sameness between “different [substances] having the *same* property, being of the *same* kind, and so on” can be “strict identity.”<sup>26</sup> Spinoza, on the contrary, clearly says “yes.”

That Spinoza says “yes” is crucial to his case for monism. The following argument sets us up to see exactly why.

1. If Spinoza rules out the reality of multiple substances exactly similar in attributes *merely based on their being exactly similar in attributes*, then he must hold the following positions: (a) each substance is nothing but its attributes; (b) a substance's attributes are universals.
2. Spinoza does rule out the reality of multiple substances exactly similar in attributes *merely based on their being exactly similar in attributes* (see E1p4-E1p5d, E1p14d).

Therefore, Spinoza must be holding the following positions: (a) each substance is nothing but its attributes; (b) a substance's attributes are universals.

Premise 2 is obvious. What, though, is the rationale for premise 1? Why think, that is, that the two positions stated in the consequent of premise 1 (position-a and position-b) are each necessary for the antecedent?

First, here is why position-a—namely, that each substance is nothing but its attributes—is necessary for the antecedent of premise 1. If substances are not just their attributes (the only *qualitas* entities there are at the level of substances *considered truly*), then what that means in Spinoza's historical context (as in ours) is that each substance at its core is a substratum: a bare particular in which its attributes inhere.<sup>27</sup> Since substrata are nonuniversals (and so fail to conform to the principle

26 David Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 15.

27 See Melamed, “Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance,” 74; Roger Woolhouse, *Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz: The Concept of Substance in Seventeenth-Century Metaphysics* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 49.

of the identity of indiscernibles: see point 2, section 2), the substratum that each substance is at its core is necessarily numerically distinct from any other substratum.<sup>28</sup> So each substance must be exhausted by its attributes (as we already know to be nonconditionally true for Spinoza: see point 5, section 2) if Spinoza rules out the reality of multiple substances exactly similar in attributes merely based on their being exactly similar in attributes.

Second, here is why position-b—namely, that attributes are universals—is necessary for the antecedent of premise 1. If attributes were nonuniversals, then it should be clear by now what that means: each substance would have its own attribute numerically distinct from any other attribute of any other substance—numerically distinct even if exactly similar. Remember: an attribute is a universal if and only if exact similarity suffices for identity (otherwise it is a trope—a nonuniversal attribute).<sup>29</sup> So each attribute is a universal if Spinoza rules out the reality of multiple substances exactly similar in attributes merely based on their being exactly similar in attributes.

Nolan, in line with Jarrett before him,<sup>30</sup> suggests that Spinozistic attributes must be universals for this reason. He suggests as much in a telling side-comment in the midst of pointing out that, if a Cartesian substance too is nothing but its attributes, Descartes is entitled to a plurality of substances only if attributes are nonuniversal properties.

Descartes's theory of universals is a corollary to his theory of attributes [...]. Attributes [...] are not universals [...]. An attribute [for Descartes] cannot be [a universal] because, if it were, then all substances which shared it would be identical. If substance A is identical with the attribute [*F*ness] and substance B is identical with [*F*ness too] then, by the transitivity of identity, A and B are also identical. *Spinoza would approve of this result* but Descartes would not.<sup>31</sup>

Whitehead also holds that Spinoza's construal of attributes as universals enables him to move from substance pluralism to substance monism early in the *Ethics*. Spinoza's view that entities can be "described by universals" is, according to Whitehead, what allows him to collapse many substances into one.

An actual entity cannot be described, even inadequately, by universals [...]. The contrary opinion led to the collapse of Descartes's many substances into Spinoza's one substance.<sup>32</sup>

---

28 See Burns, "William of Ockham," 88, 99; Cross, "Medieval Theories."

29 See Douglas Ehring, *Tropes: Properties, Objects, and Mental Causation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 44.

According to Ehring, "Exact similarity is sufficient for identity for universals. Inherently exactly similar universals are identical no matter how they are related spatially or causally (or temporally) [...]. [But] particulars do not satisfy this same identity condition [...]. [F]or universals, but not tropes, inherent exact similarity is sufficient for identity." (Ehring, "Distinguishing Universals," 229–231)

30 See Charles Jarrett, "Cartesian Pluralism and the Real Distinction," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 19, no. 3 (1981): 356.

31 Lawrence Nolan, "Descartes' Theory of Universals," *Philosophical Studies* 89, no. 2/3 (1998): 170–171 (my emphasis).

32 Alfred Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David R. Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 48.

As is clear in his dictionary entry on Abelard (as well as in his earlier Sedan *Theses* of 1680), Bayle insists that realism concerning universals is what allows Spinoza to arrive at the view that there can be only one substance. In that entry, Bayle describes how Abelard convinced his teacher, William of Champeaux, to renounce realism. Clearing Champeaux's mind of realism amounted to clearing Champeaux's mind, so Bayle writes, of "disguis'd Spinozism." In a footnote following this remark, Bayle expounds upon the link between realism and Spinozism:

[As Abelard notes, the believer in universals is one who says that] "the same thing exists essentially and wholly in every one of its individuals, among which there is no difference as to essence, but only a variety arising from a number of accidents." The Scotists [...] are not wide of this notion. Now I say, that Spinozism is only carrying this doctrine further: for, according to the followers of Scotus, universal natures are indivisibly the same in every one of their individuals: the human nature of Peter is indivisibly the same with the human nature of Paul. Upon what foundation do they say this? Why, because the same attribute of man, which is applicable to Peter, agrees with Paul. This is the very fallacy of Spinozism. The attribute, say they, does not differ from the substance, of which it is predicated: therefore, wherever the same attribute is found, there is the same substance; and consequently, since the same attribute is found in all substances, there can possibly be but one substance.<sup>33</sup>

Bringing out what is most relevant to me, here is what Bayle is saying. Spinoza, like all realists concerning universals, holds that the same attribute exists wholly in every one of the substances with that attribute. Spinoza also holds, however, (1) that substances are just their attributes (E1p4d; see point 5, section 2) and (2) that modes—the "accidents"—*cannot* individuate substances (E1p5d). In light of his realism plus his endorsement of these two additional points, Spinoza finds there to be nothing left to individuate substances. Spinoza concludes, therefore, that there is only one substance.

Bayle's view that realism opens the door to substance monism is widespread throughout the history of philosophy. We see it from Abelard to David of Dinant to Leibniz to Mendelssohn to Maret to Bradley to De Wulf to Stout. "[T]he doctrine that qualities and relations are universals," Stout says, "leads naturally, if not inevitably, to the denial of an ultimate plurality of substances."<sup>34</sup> Monism appears to be, De Wulf explains, "the logical and necessary consequence of extreme realism."<sup>35</sup> As Maret puts it, from realism to the denial of substance pluralism and the affirmation, in particular, of "Pantheism there is but one step."<sup>36</sup> That "one step" is presumably what Bayle, in the above quote, breaks up into two: (1) affirm that substances are nothing but their attributes (attributes regarded as universals) and (2) affirm that modes cannot individuate substances.

Nowadays it is often considered embarrassing to endorse, as I have argued Spinoza does, the view that substances are nothing but their universal attributes. The reason is that such a view, "bundle realism" in contemporary lingo, entails a principle—one of Spinoza's most cherished, in fact—that

33 Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, entry on "Abelard."

34 See John Mackenzie, "Universals and Orders," *Mind* 31, no. 122 (1922): 191.

35 Maurice De Wulf, *History of Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1952), 154.

36 See John Hunt, *An Essay on Pantheism* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1866), 147–148.

many regard as too ridiculous even to be considered: that indiscernibility between substances entails their identity. Beebe, Effingham, and Goff put the problem nicely:

There is a significant difficulty facing the bundle theorist who takes properties to be universals. This is because the conjunction of bundle theory and realism about universals entails that two distinct objects cannot have all the same properties. If object *x* is just a bundle of its properties, [and if] object *y* is just a bundle of its properties, and the properties of *x* are numerically identical to the properties of *y* (being [that they are] universals), it follows that *x* is numerically identical to *y*. However, it seems eminently possible for there to be two distinct objects with all the same properties.<sup>37</sup>

Here is Armstrong's rendition:

If the bundle-of-universals view is correct, then it follows that two different things cannot have exactly the same properties [...]. For given this theory, they would be exactly the same thing. However, against the Bundle theory, it seems possible that two things should have exactly the same properties, that is, be exactly alike [(and still be two) ...]. What I have just said is recognized to be an important argument against the bundle-of-universals analysis.<sup>38</sup>

Spinoza, however, is fine—flagrantly fine—with the indiscernibility-implies-identity implication of his bundle realism (see E1p4-E1p5d; KV app1p4c/G I 116 line 25ff). As the saying goes: one philosopher's modus tollens is another philosopher's modus ponens. And so philosopher *x*, who represents the contemporary sensibility, reasons as follows:

1. If bundle realism is true, then there cannot be indiscernible substances even in principle.
2. There can be indiscernible substances in principle.

Therefore, bundle realism is false.

Spinoza, on the other hand, reasons as follows:

1. If bundle realism is true, then there cannot be indiscernible substances even in principle.
2. Bundle realism is true.

Therefore, there cannot be indiscernible substances even in principle.

Spinoza's identity of indiscernibles might be seen, in effect, as a consequence of his bundle realism. The bundle aspect is stated throughout the *Ethics* (see point 5, section 2). The realist aspect is a background assumption (see especially the discussions surrounding E1p8s2 both at the end of this

---

37 Helen Beebe, Neil Effingham, and Peter Goff, *Metaphysics: The Key Concepts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 23.

38 Armstrong, *Universals*, 64–66.

section and toward the end of section 4)—an assumption defensible, were the need ever to rise, on grounds of the principle of sufficient reason (PSR).<sup>39</sup>

Here is a more relaxed way to think about the matter. As Ockham never let his realist opponents forget, a problem that nags realism is how to account for why this thing is *this* thing and not some other—possibly qualitatively indiscernible—thing.<sup>40</sup> Unlike antirealism, which renders the need to search for a principle of individuation superfluous (since it holds that whatever exists is nonuniversal in itself), realism faces a problem as to how to account for individuation (since it is the view that allows for strict identity in diversity). Realism faces this problem because, to use again Socrates’s colorful way of speaking, the universal is friend to the singular and enemy to the plural. How does Spinoza handle the individuation issue nagging realists like himself? He simply uses it to reject substance pluralism!

Spinozistic attributes are universals. That much seems clear. There are reasons to think, however, that Spinoza also understands at some level that each attribute is a universal. Consider the following case. A nature, Spinoza states, does not itself impose a restriction on the number of substances of which it is equally predicated (E1p8s2/G II 50-II 51; Ep. 50; TIE 95).<sup>41</sup> That a nature does not itself impose a restriction on the number of substances of which it is equally predicated means, according to common understanding, that it is a universal (see point 1, section 2). Look at it this way. Why does Aristotle famously insist that “definition is of the universal”?<sup>42</sup> There are two reasons, and Spinoza endorses both here at E1p8s2: (1) the definition of a thing refers to the nature of a thing and (2) the nature of a thing imposes no restriction on the number of things of which it is predicated. The more important point, however, is this: that a nature does not itself impose a restriction on the number of substances of which it is equally predicated means, according to Spinoza’s own understanding, that it is a universal. For a universal, Spinoza explains, is that which could be equally predicated of one, or many, or infinitely many things (E2p49s/G II 134 lines 8-10). Why is it significant to point out here that a nature is a universal for Spinoza? Well, an attribute is a nature. Spinoza says so explicitly, using the identity term “*sive*” to link “attribute” and “nature” (E1p5).

---

39 The trope view of properties, the only other option if we accept the reality of properties and yet deny they are universals, stands in violation of the PSR. Consider the so-called “swapping problem” made famous by Armstrong (see *Universals*, 132) but presented in nascent form by Edwards in the early modern period (see *Freedom of the Will*, 228). Imagine two spheres with exactly similar but nonidentical roundness tropes. Now, imagine the tropes are swapped. Since the pre-swapped and swapped scenarios could not be told apart even by the most powerful mind, there is no sufficient reason for denying the identity of the purportedly two properties. To be sure, the swapping problem is not a mortal wound for trope theory according to many contemporary metaphysicians. Many contemporary metaphysicians, after all, reject the PSR. They do so in light of the apparent reality of uncaused quantum events (microworld events that pop up out of literal nonbeing)—a questionable interpretation of quantum mechanics, and one that conveniently serves an addiction (widespread in contemporary metaphysics) to pulling brute-fact cards (see Istvan, “A Rationalist Defence,” section 5.1). Such an empty possibility, however, would be a mortal wound according to Spinoza, committed as he stands to the most full-throated version of the PSR.

40 See Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, 213, 215, 233; Levin, “Cartesian Minds,” 134.

41 Technically, Spinoza says “individuals” here, rather than “substances.” But in E1p8s2 Spinoza used “individual” as the more general term, such that what applies to individuals in general applies to substances in particular. Indeed, in this scholium Spinoza is providing an alternative proof for E1p5: the view that there cannot be multiple *substances* with the same attribute.

42 See Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. John H. MacMahon (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1991), 1036a28-29 and 1040a8.



And he is clearly using the term “nature” as a stylistic variant of “attribute” in E1p8s2. For in E1p8s2 he is giving an alternative proof for E1p5: the view that “there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute.”

#### 4. Concern #1: How Can Unrepeatable Attributes Be Universals?

How can Spinozistic attributes be universals when there is necessarily only one substance, God, that instantiates each attribute? Does not the very uniqueness of Spinoza’s God—indeed, its necessary one-of-a-kindness—render that position a nonstarter? That is perhaps the most major concern someone might have with my claim that Spinozistic attributes are universals.<sup>43</sup> I have heard it raised again and again over the last decade from various Spinoza scholars (mainly the North American scholars).

Here is my short response:

1. Spinozistic attributes cannot be nonuniversals (as I have argued).
2. The domain of the universal and the domain of the nonuniversal are exhaustive and mutually exclusive.

Therefore, Spinozistic attributes are universals.

Such a response would likely be unsatisfying to those who raise the concern. Is not the whole point of a universal, one might say, to explain similar features in more than one substance? “If there is only one [*F* substance], it seems otiose,” as Adamson makes the point, “to posit a universal [*F*ness]. A universal is, after all, a one over many—not a one over one.”<sup>44</sup> Let me try to give a more satisfying response, then.

Adamson’s words here, it should be understood, are just a provocative set up for him to explain that, despite what nonspecialists in the problem of universals might believe, an attribute’s being instantiated only once does not rule out its being a universal. Just because a universal is that which in principle is disposed or apt to be one in many, that does not mean that a universal must *actually be* in many. The point—intuitive on its own (since how would the mere *number* of things with a

43 See Hübner “Spinoza on Essences,” section 2.2; Melamed, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics of Substance,” 75; Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 58.

44 Peter Adamson, “One of a Kind: Unique Instantiation in Plotinus and Porphyry,” in *Universals in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Riccardo Chiaradonna and Gabriele Galluzzo (Pisa: Edizioni della Scuola Normale, 2013), 329–330. For this reason, several commentators—including Macherey, Cushman, Goetschel, Hartshorne, Klercke, McMurtrie, Sutcliffe, Scruton, Wartofsky (see Istvan, *Spinoza and the Problem of Universals*, ch. 5.6)—lean toward the conclusion that Spinoza’s system deconstructs the universal-nonuniversal dichotomy. According to this conclusion, an attribute is *both* a universal and a nonuniversal: a universal for reasons explained in this paper, and a nonuniversal since there can be only one instantiation. In this case—in line with the both-and-neither-nor logic of deconstruction—an attribute is *neither* a universal *nor* a nonuniversal. “Since for Spinoza there is only one ultimate subject of predication (i.e., God),” so Melamed gestures toward the point with less Derridean certainty, “one may wonder whether the distinction between particular and universal properties has any real place” (“Spinoza’s Metaphysics of Substance,” 75). The problem with the deconstruction-dialetheism interpretation is Spinoza’s categorical claim that what is true can never contradict what is true (see Ep. 21 IV/126/30, Ep. 56; E1p11d).

certain nature affect *what* that nature is?)—has been long recognized by those in the know.<sup>45</sup> Echoing Alexander of Aphrodisias’s own explanation as to why a universal remains a universal no matter the number of its instantiations (“a human being is a human being, whether there are several sharing in this nature or not”),<sup>46</sup> Fonseca makes the point precisely:

The universal is [...] *apt by its own nature as to be in many items* [...]. It is not merely said by the philosophers [...] that *it is actually in* several items, but that *it is apt to be in* many items, for it may actually be [merely] in one individual.<sup>47</sup>

In fact, an attribute’s status as a universal is not ruled out even if it is *impossible* for it to have more than one instantiation.<sup>48</sup> Recall what I mentioned in section 2: to say that a universal is *apt* to be one in many is to say, at minimum (and in Spinoza’s language), that it does not itself impose a restriction on the number of items instantiating it (see E1p8s2/G II 50-II 51 in light of E2p49s). A sufficient indication of *Fness*’s aptness to be one in many is that if there were another *F* substance in addition to this *F* substance, then there would be one and the same *Fness* in each. A universal attribute even with *necessarily* one instance (phoenixness for Boethius and Porphyry) is still a universal, then, because it is the sort of thing with the disposition to be wholly repeated, a disposition apparent when put in certain counterfactual scenarios.<sup>49</sup> For example, even though for Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias it is metaphysically impossible for there to be another sun, sunness is still a universal because were there, *per impossibile*, another sun it would instantiate one and the same sunness nature undivided in each.<sup>50</sup>

There is, in effect, a litmus test, recognized since before the time of Aristotle, for whether an attribute is a universal. First you posit, even if *per impossibile*, some *F* substance in addition to the one that already exists (another sun, say, in addition to the one that already exists). Next you ask yourself whether there is one and the same *Fness* in each. If there is one and the same *Fness* in each, then the *Fness* of the substance with which you started is a universal. When we look to Spinoza’s moves at E1p5d and E1p14d, it is clear that he holds that if there were, *per impossibile*, another *F* substance besides God, then the *Fness* in both God and the other substance would be one and the same (see also perhaps E2p49s/G II 135 line 5ff, E3pref/G II 138 lines 12-18, E4p4d G II 213 lines 15-19).<sup>51</sup>

45 We see this point in Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Boethius, Ordo of Tournai, Gersonides, Fonseca, and more (see Istvan, *Spinoza and the Problem of Universals*, ch. 5.6).

46 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Quaestiones 1.1-2.15*, trans. by Robert W. Sharples (London: Duckworth, 1992), 1.3.8.12-17.

47 Pedro Fonseca, *Isagoge philosophica* (Olyssipone: apud Antoniu Alvarez, 1591), ch. 1.

48 See Chris Swoyer and Francesco Orilia, “Properties,” in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2011); Gideon Rosen et al, *The Norton Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Norton, 2015), 1114.

49 See Adamson, “One of a Kind,” 337; Chiaradonna and Galluzzo, “Introduction,” 18; Swoyer and Orilia, “Properties.”

50 See Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, 1036a28-29, 1038b, 1040b, 1040a8; Adamson, “One of a Kind,” 337–339, 345–350.

51 This line of reasoning here, along with the ways in which the trope view violates the PSR (see footnote 39), shuts down an objection I sometimes hear—an objection that rests on the mistaken idea that a property must actually be in many to be a universal. “Attributes would have to be universals, yes, if *per impossibile* there were more than one substance. But there is not more than one substance. Therefore, we can at least say *we do not know* whether attributes have to be universals for Spinoza.”

Does it still seem strange to say that attribute *Fness* has a certain aptitude for being one and the same in many when it is impossible that *Fness* ever could be in many? If so, look at it this way. An attribute is a nature (E1p5; E1p8s2). A nature, recall, does not itself impose a restriction on the number of substances that exemplify it (E1p8s2/G II 50-II 51; Ep. 50; TIE 95). That a nature does not itself impose a restriction on the number of substances that exemplify it entails, according to Spinoza, that only a cause *external* to a given nature can explain why there are multiple exemplifications of that nature (E1p8s2/G II 51). It is precisely because each self-sufficient attribute of a substance cannot be influenced by anything external to itself that there cannot be multiple exemplifications. A given attribute is not exemplified by more than one substance, in other words, because there is nothing beyond that substance to explain it being exemplified by more than one substance. It remains true, therefore, that an attribute in itself, like any nature in itself, does not impose a restriction on its number of exemplifications. It is important to remember that at E1p8s2 Spinoza uses this very fact to concoct an alternative proof for E1p5: the claim that there cannot be multiple exemplifications of an attribute. So clearly, in case there were any doubts, he holds that an attribute's inability to impose a restriction on the number of its exemplifications is compatible with it being impossible for it to have more than one exemplification.

Let me conclude this section by circling back to my core argument. The impossibility of an attribute's being instantiated in more than one substance does not mean that a given attribute has no aptitude to be one in many. Quite the contrary. The impossibility of an attribute's being instantiated in more than one substance is guaranteed *by its very aptitude to be one in many*—plus, of course, other bedrock facts. One such bedrock fact is that an attribute is prior in nature to its modes, in which case the distinction between two substances of the same attributes could not be grounded in their mode differences (see E1p5d). Another such fact is that substances are not in any way in excess to the totality of their attributes, in which case the distinction between two substances of the same attributes could not be grounded in their having different substrata (see E1p4d and point 5, section 2). As my core case for attributes being universals makes clear, to take away the presumption that attributes are apt to be one and the same in many—that is, to take away the presumption that attributes are universals—would be to undermine Spinoza's argument for the claim that there cannot be more than one substance with a certain attribute. That attributes are universals, rather than being ruled out by Spinoza's no-shared-attribute thesis (E1p5), is the key presumption behind that thesis!

## 5. Concern #2: How Can Attributes Be Universals When Spinoza Rejects Universals?

How can Spinozistic attributes be universals when Spinoza notoriously condemns universals? That is another concern someone might have with my claim that Spinozistic attributes are universals.<sup>52</sup> The concern only intensifies when we consider that, as I suggested at the end of section 3, Spinoza seems to comprehend that the attributes are universals. Do we have a contradiction here?

One would have to be fairly uncharitable to think so. Just as Nietzsche's pejorative remarks against morality do not mean that Nietzsche rejects all morality, Spinoza's pejorative remarks against universals do not mean that Spinoza rejects all universals. Spinoza rejects the ontological authenticity

---

<sup>52</sup> See Istvan, *Spinoza and the Problem of Universals*, Appendix D.

only of those universals apprehendable merely through the imagination: imaginative universals or, if you will, universals of imaginative experience.

Consider the Appendix to Part 1 of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Here Spinoza rules out merely those universals that seem true according to the bodily apparatus of the perceiving subject: universals of imaginative experience (beauty, coldness, hardness, and the like). Spinoza ridicules the notion that the celestial spheres, for example, each instantiate the property *being harmonious in sound*. Even if the spheres do produce sounds, whether those sounds are harmonious in some way is relative to us. If those spheres produced sounds that gave us headaches, would we call them "harmonious"? The same goes with *smoothness*. Whether a given surface is smooth depends on the disposition of the perceiver. The surface that one hand finds smooth, after all, is bumpy to a sensitive hand. If we are to understand nature as it is in itself, which is what the "highest blessedness" involves for Spinoza, we must not let ourselves get distracted by such fictions (Ep. 21 IV/127/34-35; see TIE 39/G II 16 lines 11-20; E4p28d, E4app4/G II 267 lines 1-14, E5p42s; Ep. 75). That is what Spinoza urges, anyway.

Consider now E2p40s1, Spinoza's definitive statement against universals. Here Spinoza explains why we overlook the differences between perceived items. Not only is it that the differences are often slight (see TIE 76), but we are impacted by so many images at once (think of all the images of leaves when we look at a tree) that we lack the power to keep each separate from each other. To cope with the barrage of data, the finite mind—able to handle only a limited quantity of impressions—overlooks the peculiarities. Each leaf-image bleeding into one another, what stands out is what all these items seem to have in common. The commonality in question, though, is true of those items merely "insofar as they affect the body" (E2p40s1/G II 121 lines 19-20). Once again, Spinoza is rejecting the universals of imaginative experience.

In both E1app and E2p40s1 Spinoza rebukes those who let the imagination, the only source of falsity (E2p28s, E2p40s2, E2p41d, E5p28d), convince them that the commonalities grasped through sensation are true of reality itself. Arising "so immediately" from automatic comparison processes (CM 1.1/G I 234 line 32), which can make it go unnoticed that they are "merely our own work" (KV 1.10/G I 49 lines 5-6), these agreements are, in truth, a joint product of the objects *plus* our bodily dispositions—these objects *amalgamated with* our bodily dispositions (E2p16, E2p16c2, E2p25, E2p28, E3p27d, E3p32s, E3p56d, E4p1s). In fact, since our bodies are the sites of the amalgamation, these agreements—these truncated "affections of [our] imagination" (E1app), these "universal images of things according to [our physical] disposition" (E2p40s1)—indicate the natures of our bodies *more so* than the natures of the perceived objects (E1app, E2p16c, E2p16c1, E2p16c2, E3p14d, E4p9d, E5p34d) and so perhaps are best described as common "traces" left on our bodies (CM 1.1/G I 234).

So yes, Spinoza criticizes us for mistaking the common traces things leave on our bodies for positive universals instantiated in things themselves (E1app/G II 82 lines 16-22, E4pref/G II 208 lines 8-14, E4p73s; Ep. 6/G IV 28 lines 10-16; Ep. 54). But never does he set his sights on universals apprehended by the intellect (E2p40s2 in light of E5p40c), an unwavering source of adequate and thus true ideas (E2p40s2, E2p44; Ep. 2, Ep. 60). Spinoza does not set his sights, for instance, on the attribute of Extension, which he describes as a universal in his exposition of the Cartesian philosophy (DPP 1prol/G I 142 lines 33-34) and which he describes as being the true in-common-to-all-bodies referent of a "universal notion" in the *Ethics* (E2p37 plus E2p1312d in light of E2p40s2/G II 122

lines 1-2, E5p12d; see E5p36s). Given that Spinoza labels the ideational correlate of Extension a “universal notion,” and given Spinoza’s historically sensitive definition of a universal as that which is apt to be one and the same in many, it seems fairly clear that he himself regards Extension as a universal. After all, Spinoza repeats the formula “common *sive* universal” (E2p49s/G II 134 lines 4-5; TTP 4.6/G III 61 lines 16-17, TTP 6.10-11/G III 88 lines 15-16, TTP 7.6/G III 102) and associates being “inherent” in many with being universal (TP 3.18) and being “one and the same” in many with being universal (E3pref/G II 138 lines 12-18). This is significant since Spinoza states that the attribute of Extension is common to—as well as inherent and one and the same in—all bodies (E2p37 in light of E2p13l2d). It makes sense, then, that Spinoza has no problem calling the properties common to all bodies (the most fundamental one being Extension) universals (TTP 7.6/G III 102 lines 16-20) or insisting that “knowledge of [God, which gives rise to the love of God in which blessedness consists (see E5p42d plus TTP 4.6),] has to be drawn from universal notions that are certain in themselves” (TTP 4.6).

The telling mark as to whether a candidate universal pertains to nature as it is in itself is by what means it can be apprehended: if by the intellect or “pure thought,” then the candidate universal has objective reality; if merely through the imagination or bodily sensation, then it does not (TTP 4.5 in light of TTP 4.6; compare E2p40s2 with E2p40s1; see Ep. 13 IV/64/30; Ep. 11 IV/48/27-30).<sup>53</sup> Unlike the imagination, which sees only through how our bodies are impacted externally and thus often confusedly (E2p29s; see E2p49s/G II 132 lines 5-6, E3p32s), the intellect sees “by its inborn power” and thus always clearly and distinctly (TIE 31; see TIE 32, TIE 39, TIE 107-108; E3def 1e of the affects; Ep. 37). The intellect understands the world through mere ratiocination concerning “principles and axioms” (TTP 1.28; E2p29s) rather than through sense experience, which in presenting nothing more than ways in which our bodies are affected (E3p32s) cannot give us access to things in their truth (Ep. 10 IV/47/11-12). “Determined internally” rather than “from fortuitous encounters with [external] things” (E2p49s in light of E2p29s), active rather than reactive, the intellect “regards things clearly and distinctly” (E2p29s), that is, adequately (Ep. 37; E2p36, E2p40, E5p4s) and thus truly (E2p40s2, E2p44; Ep. 2, Ep. 60). “For it is when a thing is perceived by pure thought, without words or images, that it is understood” (TTP 4.10/G III 64-III 65).

To be sure, Spinoza calls universals “abstractions” and links abstractions with things that are not real (see E2p49s). But as is evident from his own unhesitant use of abstraction (as in when he says that to consider a substance truly is to abstract away (*deponere*) its modes: see E1p5d),<sup>54</sup> abstraction in itself does not seem to be an evil for Spinoza. Good abstraction is *rational* abstraction, the sort of abstraction from which bloom “pure notions” that explain reality as it is in itself: notions such as Extension or motion and rest (see E2p38c). Bad abstraction is imaginative abstraction, the sort of abstraction from which bloom impure notions that explain reality as it is related to sense

53 See Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), 40.

54 Spinoza uses not the infinitive “*deponere*” but the perfect passive participle “*depositis*” in E1p5d: “*depositis ergo affectionibus et in se considerata, hoc est (per defin. 3. et axiom. 6.) vere considerate*.” My translation italicizes the key phrase: “the modes therefore *having been stripped off* and it [(the substance)] *having been considered in itself*, that is (by E1def6 and E1a6) *having been considered truly*.” Notice that Eliot translates “*deponere*” as “to abstract [away],” rendering the passage in question as follows: “these affections being abstracted and one substance considered in itself, i.e. (by def. 3 and [axiom 6]) rightly considered”. See George Eliot, *Ethics by Benedict de Spinoza*, ed. Thomas Deegan (Salzburg: Unstitut Für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1981), E1p5d.



perception: notions such as color or smell (Ep. 6 IV/28/10-16; see also Ep. 56). When Spinoza refers to abstraction in the bad sense he refers to the sort of abstraction of which he finds the so-called schoolmen guilty: abstraction from sensorial information. And when he rejects universals, he has in mind something more like the sensible species of the schoolmen: commonalities in things discerned not by pure reason but with the tainting help of the imagination.<sup>55</sup>

It would be wrong to think that Spinoza did a bad job at making clear the target of his attack. Given that he lacked the hindsight of seeing that there would be a realist-antirealist interpretive rift among his commentators, Spinoza was clearer than we could have expected him to be. To my mind, I have already established the central point of this section: namely, that Spinoza's infamous rejection of universals does not contradict the fact that the attributes of God are universals. But when we look to how clear Spinoza is when he lays out his attack, it is easy to draw the additional conclusion that Spinoza, as if to obviate the charge of inconsistency at hand, consciously warns readers against thinking that he rejects all universals.

Notice Spinoza's language at E2p40s1 (again, his definitive statement against universals). He is quick to make clear that he rejects "those notions, which *they* call universals" (my emphasis). He is quick to make clear, in other words, that he denies the ontological authenticity of those universals that *others* have thought to be ontologically authentic. Why this matters should be fairly obvious, especially to those aware of the early modern endeavor—often quite conscious—to break with the entrenched philosophy of Aristotelianism.

First, defining the universals he rejects from the third-person perspective is a way for Spinoza to preempt charges that he is being contradictory in rejecting universals, on the one hand, while endorsing them on the other. Notions like "man" or "triangle" or "being" or "universal" are to be rejected, according to E2p40s1, as confused and inadequate when taken according to how some *others*, some *they*, use such notions. But that does not mean that such notions are to be rejected as confused and inadequate when used *on Spinoza's own terms*. And that makes good sense in the larger context. Spinoza uses all these terms in ways that clearly he does not find problematic. He sees no problem, for example, with talking about the nature that every triangle instantiates (E1p8s2) or with characterizing shapes (unlike colors) as true universals (DPP 1prol/G I 142 line 33; see Ep. 2). He shows no hesitation to describe God not only as a being (1def6; Ep. 36) but as a "universal being" (KV 1.2/G I 24 note f; TP 2.22). He feels fine referring approvingly—and close to one hundred times in the *Ethics* alone—to the "true definition of man" (E1p8s2) and to "universal human nature" (TTP 4.6; see E4pref) and to "human nature in general" (TP 11.2; Ep. 34) and to what can be derived from that nature "as it really is" (TP 1.4) and to eternal truths inscribed in that nature (TTP 16.6) and to how that nature differs from the natures of other biological species such as horses (see E3p57s). Perhaps most importantly, only a few paragraphs after he rejects the notions "they call" universal (E2p40s1; see E2p40s2/G II 122 lines 3-11), he is completely okay with endorsing notions that *he* calls universal—notions that adequately refer to the true properties of things described at E2p37-E2p39, one of those properties being the attribute of Extension (E2p40s2/G II 122 lines 12-14, E5p12d; see E5p36s).

Second, Spinoza expects it to be obvious to his audience whom he means by "they" at E2p40s1. Consider the following facts:

---

55 See Fullerton, *On Spinozistic Immortality*, 34; Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, §11.2.

- (1) The scholastic philosophy, entrenched in most centers of seventeenth-century learning, was the target of those, like Spinoza, who aligned themselves with the self-styled “modern” drive to throw off the yoke of Aristotle.
- (2) Spinoza flags when he uses scholastic terminology, or refers to the scholastics. Often he will use, as we see in E2p40s1, a third-person-plural conjugation of speaking verbs (as in the case of *vocant*) and will capitalize the object of such verbs (as in the case of *Universales*). He likes to use such phrases as *ut aiunt*, “as they say” (KV 1.2/G I 22 line 23; E1p28s, E2p10s, E3p15s, Ep. 73, Ep. 75; see E4pref and E4p50s), and *Philosophi*, “the Philosophers” (KV 1.2.24, KV 1.7.2, KV 2.16/G I 81 line 38; CM 1.1/G I 234 lines 8-10, CM 2.10/G I 268 line 14; TP 4.4).
- (3) By “they” in E2p40s1 Spinoza means, as he in effect shows (G II 121 lines 13-35), those for whom universals are found out by way of abstraction from sensorial information. The universals of the schoolmen, so the audience of his day knows, are construed in precisely that way (see TTP 1.14).<sup>56</sup>
- (4) Just a few lines earlier than the E2p40s1 section in question (but still in the same scholium), Spinoza discusses the origin of those notions that they call “second notions” and “transcendentals.” Second notions and transcendentals are classic schoolmen terms.

It seems clear, then, that by “they” Spinoza means the schoolmen, those philosophers commonly described—especially in light of their central slogan *nihil est in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu*—as discovering universals by way of selective attention to sense data. Spinoza, in effect, is singling out schoolman universals, sensible species, in his official attack on universals at E2p40s1.<sup>57</sup>

“Universal” is one of several terms in Spinoza’s philosophy (right there alongside “being,” “man,” and “attribute”) that have both a Spinoza-friendly and a Spinoza-unfriendly sense. Spinoza is often careful in his language to indicate which sense he means at a given time. Just as he inserts the phrase “what the intellect perceives” in his definition of attribute to make clear that he is talking about the authentic attributes of a substance (as opposed to the inauthentic attributes projected by the imagination), he makes sure to specify that he is merely rejecting what “they call” universals: the universals of imagination (such as those to which the schoolmen are committed), not the universals of pure thought to which he is committed. And what goes for the official rejection of universals at

<sup>56</sup> See Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes, 1274-1689* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), 549.

<sup>57</sup> With exception to a few (Curley, Gaos, Cohan, Domínguez, Machado, Sensi, and also Bennett’s modernized rendering of the *Ethics*), many translations of the clause in question at E2p40s1 underemphasize or cover over that Spinoza is speaking about what some *others*, some *they*, regard as universals. Some translations do so by using passive or participle forms of the verb “to call” (instead of the present active form, *vocant*, that Spinoza uses): see A. Boyle, Eliot, Parkinson, Ratner, Gutmann, White and Stirling, Martinetti. Other translations do so by treating “*vocant*” as if it were the perfect passive participle “*vocatas*” (“called”): see Shirley, Fullerton, Daniel Smith, Willis, Hubka, Peña García, Bergua, Peri, Millet, Lurié. Other translations deemphasize the third-person perspective by using the indefinite pronoun “one” instead of “they”: see Appuhn, Saisset, Lantzenberg, Misrahi, Boulainvilliers, Van Suchtelen, Rasmussen, J. Stern, Auerbach, Von Kirchmann, Baensch, Schmidt, Bülow, Wolff, Ewald, Balling and Glazemaker. Other translations even go so far as to translate the key verb as “we call” instead of “they call”: see Elwes, Bardé.

E2p40s1 presumably goes more or less for the other passages in which Spinoza addresses universals.<sup>58</sup> Given the reign of the schoolmen philosophy from which the early moderns are in large part trying to break, I think Spinoza expects that when his audience hears “universals” they will think, more or less by default, of the universals of imaginative experience.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

The debate as to whether Spinoza is a realist concerning universals almost always takes place at the mode level of his ontology (the central issue being whether there can be features wholly present, literally identical, in more than one mode of a certain attribute). The debate centers, in particular, most often around whether Spinoza endorses universal species essences (the issue being whether there can be features wholly present, literally identical, in more than one mode of a certain attribute without being in all modes of that attribute). Elsewhere I have argued that Spinoza does accept the reality of universals at the mode level.<sup>59</sup> But from what I have argued here from several angles, evidence for the realist interpretation can be found even at the bedrock level of Spinoza’s ontology. The attributes themselves are universals. And as I suggest throughout this paper, there are good reasons for the stronger claim that Spinoza took himself to be committed to that view.

No doubt objections remain.<sup>60</sup> One thing is for sure, though. My finding that Spinoza is a realist does not sound strange in the larger context. Spinoza is, after all, both a substance monist and a rationalist. Why does that matter? Well, whereas the anti-universals worldview is historically associated with substance pluralism, the pro-universals worldview is historically associated with substance monism—the idea being that the antirealist cosmos is merely a heap of things that are more or less similar but at no level one and the same.<sup>61</sup> And whereas the anti-universals worldview

---

58 Even when it comes to the three most difficult passages to reconcile with Spinoza’s realism (KV 1.6/G I 42 lines 25-I 43 lines 7-8, KV 2.16/G I 81 lines 14-20; CM 1.1/G I 235 lines 10-30, where Spinoza seems categorical about universals being nothing), the imagination is the problem. The imagination runs wild enough to posit bare types, indeterminate kinds, as obtaining independent of any token we experience. As the intellect understands the matter, however, such types concocted from specific impressions (impressions of specific men, or of specific horses, of specific acts of willing) are just tools to help us organize sensory input. If it turns out impossible, however, to reconcile such passages with Spinoza’s realism, I am open to Bennett’s way of settling the matter: these passages are the remarks of a young thinker yet to come into his settled view, a view friendlier to universals (see *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, 38–39).

59 See Istvan, *Spinoza and the Problem of Universals*, chs. 6–9. Here I argue not only (1) that there are features wholly present in each mode of a certain attribute and (2) that there are features wholly present in more than one mode of a certain attribute (without being in all modes of that attribute). I argue, in addition, that every mode is a universal in the most robust sense—that is, in the inter-substance sense, rather than just the intra-substance sense. I use a similar line of reasoning to defend the latter claim as I use to defend the claim that each attribute is a universal: were there (*per impossibile*) another substance with an exactly similar mode as the other, those two modes in question would be one and the same for Spinoza.

60 See Istvan, *Spinoza and the Problem of Universals*, esp. chapter 2-5 and 11. What if, for example, the attributes are not ontologically authentic but rather “subjective”? Well, something has got to be a universal so that proofs like E1p5d go through. I would say that the *nature* or *essence* of a Spinozistic substance—or even just the substance itself—is a universal.

61 Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, entry on “Spinoza” note A and entry on “Abelard” note; Hunt, *An Essay on Pantheism*, 147–148; Mackenzie, “Universals and Orders,” 191; Burns, “William of Ockham,” 79, 82, 91, 96;

is historically associated with empiricism, the pro-universals worldview is historically associated with rationalism—the idea being that the senses, the main avenues to reality according to empiricism, apprehend some plant or other but never some *plantness* logos.<sup>62</sup>

## Acknowledgements

This paper is dedicated to M. A. Istvan Sr. and M. A. Istvan III. My project has benefitted from interactions with Aaliyah Fritz, Michael LeBuffe, Kristin Primus, Andrea Sangiacomo, Michael Della Rocca, Charlie Huenemann, José Bermúdez, Stephen Daniel, Britt Mize, Samuel Newlands, Pierre-François Moreau, Justin Lake, Alesha Brereton, Paul Bagley, Steve Barbone, Thomas Cook, Herman De Dijn, Aaron Garrett, Martin Lin, Stefano Di Bella, Gwen Marshall, Warren Montag, Steven Nadler, Don Garrett, Valtteri Viljanen, Amber Carlson, Hugh McCann, Andrew Youpa, and two reviewers at the *Journal of Spinoza Studies*. RIP to Dave “Plug Two” Jolicoeur from De La Soul and Timothy “Kid Nice” Howard.

---

De Wulf, *History of Medieval Philosophy*, 154; Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 48; Matteo Liberatore, *On Universals: An Exposition of Thomistic Doctrine* (London: Arts and Books Co, 1889), esp. 1, 9–10, 30; Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 4: Modern Philosophy, from Descartes to Leibniz* (New York: Image Books, 1960), 290–291; Michah Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 101; Eric Steinhardt, “Pantheism and Current Ontology,” *Religious Studies* 40, no. 1 (2004): 64; Robert Stern, “Hegel, British Idealism, and the Curious Case of the Concrete Universal,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2007): 134ff; Sharon Turner, *The History of England during the Middle Ages* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1830), 495n19, 512; Margaret Cameron, “William of Champeaux,” in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 1407–1409; Charles Plumtre, *General Sketch of the History of Pantheism* (London: Beacon, 1878), 299–300; Jean Jolivet, “Trois variations médiévales sur l'universel et l'individu: Roscelin, Abélard, Gilbert de la Porrée,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 97, no. 1 (1992): 112; Thomas Allbutt, *Science and Medieval Thought* (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1901), 35–36; Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy*, trans. James H. Tufts (New York: Macmillan, 1901), 408–410; Peter Coffey, *Epistemology: The Theory of Knowledge, an Introduction to General Metaphysics* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917), 303–304.

- 62 Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs*, 15; Armstrong, *Universals*, 76; Haserot, “The Status of Universals,” 471; Hunt, *An Essay on Pantheism*, 148; Burns, “William of Ockham,” 78, 93; Garrigou-Lagrange, *Le sens commun*, 74; Stern, “Hegel, British Idealism,” 144; Thiel, “Individuation,” 222; Turner, *The History of England*, 511; Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy: From Descartes to Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 1995), 19; Richard Aaron, *The Theory of Universals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), esp. 21, 86–89; David Bidney, *The Psychology and Ethics of Spinoza: A Study in the History and Logic of Ideas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 379; Friedrich Ueberweg, *History of Philosophy: From Thales to the Present Time* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1909), 11; Donald Williams, “The Elements of Being,” *Principles of Empirical Realism: Philosophical Essays* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1966), 223; Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 41ff; Ralph Cudworth, *The Works of Ralph Cudworth*, ed. Thomas Birch (Oxford: D. A. Talboys, 1829), 404; Viren Murthy, “Universals and Infinite Modes in the Thought of Spinoza,” *Dialogue* 37, no. 2/3 (1995): 49; Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), esp. 610, 661; Errol Harris, *Salvation from Despair: A Reappraisal of Spinoza's Philosophy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 25, 61; Frank Thilly, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Holt, 1914), 254, 513.

## References

- Aaron, Richard. *The Theory of Universals*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.
- Adamson, Peter. "One of a Kind: Unique Instantiation in Plotinus and Porphyry." *Universals in Ancient Philosophy*. Edited by Riccardo Chiaradonna and Gabriele Galluzzo, 329–351. Pisa: Edizioni della Scuola Normale, 2013.
- Alexander of Aphrodisias. *Quaestiones 1.1-2.15*. Translated by Robert W. Sharples. London: Duckworth, 1992.
- Allbutt, Thomas. *Science and Medieval Thought*. London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1901.
- Aristotle. *The Metaphysics*. Translated by John H. MacMahon. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1991.
- Aristotle. *De interpretatione*. Translated by John L. Ackrill. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Armstrong, David. *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1989.
- Armstrong, David. *A World of States of Affairs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Bayle, Pierre. *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*. Edited by Richard H. Popkin. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991.
- Beebe, Helen, Neil Effingham, and Peter Goff. *Metaphysics: The Key Concepts*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011.
- Bennett, Jonathan. *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984.
- Bidney, David. *The Psychology and Ethics of Spinoza: A Study in the History and Logic of Ideas*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940.
- Bolton, Martha. "Universals, Essences, and Abstract Entities." In *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, 179–212. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Burns, C. Delisle. "William of Ockham on Universals." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 14 (1914): 76–99.
- Cameron, Margaret. "William of Champeaux." *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*. Edited by Henrik Lagerlund, 1407–1409. Dordrecht: Springer, 2010.
- Campbell, Keith. *Abstract Particulars*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
- Cerrato, Francesco. *Cause e nozioni comuni nella filosofia di Spinoza*. Macerata: Quodlibet, 2008.
- Chiaradonna, Riccardo and Gabriele Galluzzo. "Introduction." *Universals in Ancient Philosophy*. Edited by Riccardo Chiaradonna and Gabriele Galluzzo, 1–21. Pisa: Edizioni della Scuola Normale, 2013.
- Coffey, Peter. *Epistemology: The Theory of Knowledge, an Introduction to General Metaphysics*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917.
- Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 4: Modern Philosophy, from Descartes to Leibniz*. New York: Image Books, 1960.
- Cross, Richard. "Medieval Theories of Haecceity." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta (2010). URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/medieval-haecceity/>.
- Cudworth, Ralph. *The Works of Ralph Cudworth*. Edited by Thomas Birch. Oxford: D. A. Talboys, 1829.
- De Wulf, Maurice. *History of Medieval Philosophy*. New York: Dover, 1952.
- Di Vona, Piero. *Studi sull'ontologia di Spinoza. Parte I: l'ordinamento delle scienze filosofiche. La Ratio. Il Concetto di Ente*. Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1960.
- Di Vona, Piero. *Studi sull'ontologia di Spinoza. Parte II: 'Res' ed 'ens'. La necessità, le divisioni dell'essere*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1969.
- Edwards, Jonathan. *Freedom of the Will*. Edited by Arnold S. Kaufman and William K. Frankena. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969.
- Ehring, Douglas. "Distinguishing Universals from Particulars." *Analysis* 64, no. 4 (2004): 326–332.
- Ehring, Douglas. *Tropes: Properties, Objects, and Mental Causation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Eliot, George. *Ethics by Benedict de Spinoza*. Edited by Thomas Deegan. Salzburg: Institut Für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1981.
- Fonseca, Pedro. *Isagoge philosophica*. Olyssipone: apud Antoniu Alvarez, 1591.



- Freudenthal, Jakob. *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinoza's in Quellenschriften, Urkunden und nichtamtlichen Nachrichten*. Leipzig: Verlag Von Veit, 1899.
- Fullerton, George. *The Philosophy of Spinoza*. New York: H. Holt, 1894.
- Fullerton, George. *On Spinozistic Immortality*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1899.
- Garrigou-Lagrange, Réginald. *Le sens commun: la philosophie de l'être et les formules dogmatiques*. Paris: Desclée, de Brouwer & cie, éditeurs, 1936.
- Gottlieb, Michah. *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Harris, Errol. *Salvation from Despair: A Reappraisal of Spinoza's Philosophy*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973.
- Haserot, Francis. "Spinoza and the Status of Universals." *Philosophical Review* 59, no. 4 (1950): 469–492.
- Hübner, Karolina. "Spinoza on Essences, Universals and Beings of Reason." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 97, no. 1 (2016): 58–88.
- Hunt, John. *An Essay on Pantheism*. London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1866.
- Istvan, Michael A. Jr. "A Rationalist Defence of Determinism." *Theoria* 87, no. 2 (2021): 394–434.
- Istvan, Michael A. Jr. "On the Possibility of Exactly Similar Tropes." *Abstracta* 6, no. 2 (2011): 158–177.
- Istvan, Michael A. Jr. *Spinoza and the Problem of Universals: A Study and Research Guide*. Dissertation at Texas A&M University, 2015.
- Istvan, Michael A. Jr. "Spinoza's Bundle Analysis of Substances Having Attributes." *InCircolo: Rivista di filosofia e culture* 9 (2020): 137–185.
- Istvan, Michael A. Jr. "In Homage to Descartes and Spinoza: A Cosmo-Ontological Case for God." *The Philosophical Forum* 52, no. 1 (2021): 41–64.
- Jarrett, Charles. "Cartesian Pluralism and the Real Distinction." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 19, no. 3 (1981): 347–360.
- Jolivet, Jean. "Trois variations médiévales sur l'universel et l'individu: Roscelin, Abélard, Gilbert de la Porrée." *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 97, no. 1 (1992): 111–155.
- Keckermann, Bartholomäus. *Systema logicae*. Hanouiae: Apud Guilielmum Antonium, 1602.
- Leibniz, Gottfried. *Briefwechsel zwischen Leibniz und Christian Wolf*. Edited by Carl I. Gerhardt. Halle: H. W. Schmidt, 1860.
- Levin, Yakir. "Cartesian Minds." In 25<sup>th</sup> *International Wittgenstein Symposium*, edited by Christian Kanzian, Joseph Quitterer, and Edmund Runggaldier, 133–135. Kirchberg am Wechsel: ALWS 2002.
- Liberatore, Matteo. *On Universals: An Exposition of Thomistic Doctrine*. London: Arts and Books Co, 1889.
- MacDonald, Scott and Norman Malcolm. "Medieval Philosophy." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 6. Edited by Edward Craig, 269–277. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Mackenzie, John. "Universals and Orders." *Mind* 31, no. 122 (1922): 189–194.
- Martineau, James. *A Study of Spinoza*. London: Macmillan, 1882.
- Maurin, Anna-Sofia. *If Tropes*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002.
- Melamed, Yitzhak. "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance: The Substance-Mode Relation as a Relation of Inherence and Predication." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 78, no. 1 (2009): 17–82.
- Melamed, Yitzhak. *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Murthy, Viren. "Universals and Infinite Modes in the Thought of Spinoza." *Dialogue* 37, no. 2/3 (1995): 48–56.
- Newlands, Samuel. "Spinoza on Universals." *The Problem of Universals in Early Modern Philosophy*. Edited by Stefano Di Bella and Tad M. Schmaltz, 62–86. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Nolan, Lawrence. "Descartes' Theory of Universals." *Philosophical Studies* 89, no. 2/3 (1998): 161–180.

- Pasnau, Robert. *Metaphysical Themes, 1274-1689*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011.
- Pickavance, Thomas. *Universals, Particulars, and the Identity of Indiscernibles*. Dissertation at University of Texas at Austin, 2008.
- Plumptre, Charles. *General Sketch of the History of Pantheism*. London: Beacon, 1878.
- Pollock, Frederick. *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy*. New York: American Scholar Publications, 1966.
- Rahman, Fazlur. *Avicenna's Psychology*. London: Oxford University Press, 1952.
- Rice, Lee. "Spinoza on Individuation." *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*. Edited by Eugene Freeman and Maurice Mandelbaum, 195–214. La Salle: Open Court, 1975.
- Rice, Lee. "Tanquam Naturae Humanae Exemplar: Spinoza on Human Nature." *Modern Schoolman* 68, no. 4 (1991): 291–303.
- Rosen, Gideon, Alex Byrne, Joshua Cohen, Elizabeth Harman, and Seana Shiffrin. *The Norton Introduction to Philosophy*. New York: Norton, 2015.
- Ross, James. "Suárez on Universals." *Journal of Philosophy* 59, no. 23 (1962): 736–748.
- Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945.
- Schoen, Edward. "The Role of Common Notions in Spinoza's *Ethics*." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 15, no. 4 (1977): 537–550.
- Scruton, Roger. *A Short History of Modern Philosophy: From Descartes to Wittgenstein*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Steinhart, Eric. "Pantheism and Current Ontology." *Religious Studies* 40, no. 1 (2004): 63–80.
- Stern, Robert. "Hegel, British Idealism, and the Curious Case of the Concrete Universal." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2007): 115–153.
- Stout, George. "Universals Again." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 15 (1936): 1–15.
- Suárez, Francisco. *Disputationes metaphysicae*. Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1988.
- Swoyer, Chris and Francesco Orilia. "Properties." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta (2011). URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/properties/>.
- Thiel, Udo. "Individuation." *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. Edited by Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, 212–262. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Thiel, Udo. *The Early Modern Subject: Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Thilly, Frank. *A History of Philosophy*. New York: Holt, 1914.
- Turner, Sharon. *The History of England during the Middle Ages*. London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1830.
- Ueberweg, Friedrich. *History of Philosophy: From Thales to the Present Time*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1909.
- Van De Ven, Jeroen. "Life." *The Bloomsbury Companion to Spinoza*. Edited by Wiep Van Bunge, 1–57. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Whitehead, Alfred. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. Edited by David R. Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne. New York: Free Press, 1978.
- Williams, Donald. "The Elements of Being." *Principles of Empirical Realism: Philosophical Essays*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1966.
- Williams, Donald. "Universals and Existents." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 64, no. 1 (1986): 1–14.
- Windelband, Wilhelm. *A History of Philosophy*. Translated by James H. Tufts. New York: Macmillan, 1901.
- Wolfson, Harry A. *The Philosophy of Spinoza*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934.
- Woolhouse, Roger. *Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz: The Concept of Substance in Seventeenth-Century Metaphysics*. New York: Routledge, 1993.