

Critical Comments on Martin Lenz's *Socializing Minds: Intersubjectivity in Early Modern Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press 2022)

General Introduction

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Abstract

This is the introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Spinoza Studies* dedicated to discussion of Martin Lenz's *Socializing Minds: Intersubjectivity in Early Modern Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022). It provides an overview of the topic that the papers in this issue are centered around, an outline of the main theses of *Socializing Minds*, and acknowledgments for the related workshop.

Keywords: Spinoza, intersubjectivity, contrariety, bodies, property

Most of us find it commonsensical to think that our minds are tucked away in our bodies, hidden from others, while the skin provides a boundary of our precious selves. But this is not the only way to think about ourselves. What if thoughts and feelings float in bundles, passing from one to another, transmitted like viruses through physical media or through imitation? Following the reading of Spinoza I explore in my book, you wouldn't have a mind, if it were not for other minds. The central thesis of the book discussed in this special issue is that at least some early modern philosophers start from an intersubjectivity thesis, i.e., the assumption that human minds depend on other minds. One way of cashing out this thesis is to assume that they depend on other minds for their very being. This is what I call a *metaphysical model of intersubjectivity*. As I see it, Spinoza's account of the mind should be read as a metaphysical model of the mind. If this reading is correct, it follows that our minds are only partially our own minds. Ideas strive by themselves, as it were, to survive, to find suitable hosts, and to develop themselves against contrary ideas. The *Comments* in this special issue engage with the intersubjective approach in Spinoza. Since they partly also touch on the general

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claims of the book, I provide a brief overview of the book and the workshop from which the papers emerged.

Socializing Minds provides the first reconstruction of intersubjective accounts of the mind in early modern philosophy. Some phenomena are easily recognized as social or interactive: certain dances, forms of work, and rituals require interaction to come into being or count as valid. But what about mental states, such as thoughts, volitions, or emotions? Do our minds also depend on other minds? The idea that our minds are intersubjective or social seems to be a fairly recent one, developed mainly in the 19th and 20th centuries against the individualism of early modern philosophers. By contrast, this book argues that well-known early modern philosophers often started from the idea that minds are intersubjective. How then does a mind depend on the minds of others? Early modern philosophers are well known to have developed a number of theories designed to explain how we cognize external objects. What is hardly recognized is that early modern philosophers also addressed the problem of how our cognition is influenced by other minds. The book provides a historical and rational reconstruction of three central but different early modern accounts of the influence that minds exert on one another: Spinoza's metaphysical model, Locke's linguistic model, and Hume's medical model. Showing for each model of mental interaction (1) why it was developed, (2) how it construes mind-mind relations, and (3) what view of the mind it suggests, this book aims at uncovering a crucial part of the unwritten history of intersubjectivity in the philosophy of mind.

The *Introduction* to the book explains what intersubjectivity is and why we should care about the history of this idea. Taking issue with the common historiography, this part briefly looks back at Gilbert Ryle's famous *Concept of Mind* that presents us with a discussion of Descartes' *cogito* before developing what is now often referred to as behaviorism. I argue that, rather than just drawing a caricature of Cartesianism, Ryle gains enormous argumentative mileage out of his "Cartesian Myth" for his own approach: Claiming that Cartesian dualism entails individualism about the mind, Ryle runs together two theses that should rather be kept separately. In decoupling mentalism and individualism, I show that minds can be and indeed were taken to interact and directly affect one another.

Chapter One presents Spinoza's concept of the mind as grounded in contrary conative interaction. Since Spinoza thinks that the identity of individuals lies in their striving for self-preservation (*conatus*), his position is often interpreted as a version of individualism. However, given that Spinoza takes individuals to be determined by their convergence in striving, any number of entities striving in the same way can be called an individual. Thus, metaphysically speaking, whole communities can be seen as individuals. But what is the crucial principle according to which minds are related to one another? Building on what it means for an idea to have a *conatus*, the chapter shows that it is the notion of contrariety that is crucial for understanding his metaphysics of the mind.

Chapter Two presents Locke's theory of ideational and linguistic intentionality as based on the acceptance of the speech community. While Locke's view is commonly taken to be individualistic, it is often overlooked that his position is clearly embedded in an anthropological view that deems humans as inherently social animals. I show that his crucial step lies in uniting two traditions that have mostly been kept apart: Aristotelian semantics, on the one hand, and the anthropology underlying the political thought in authors such as Pufendorf, on the other hand. Mediated by language, the content of human thought is determined by tacit consent. What makes the expressions of ideas correct or incorrect is determined by whether they are accepted by other members of the linguistic community.

In contrast to numerous interpretations, it is thus argued that the decisive factor in the determination of ideas turns out to be intersubjective.

Chapter Three presents Hume as endorsing a medical model of intersubjectivity. While it benefits greatly from so-called naturalistic and therapeutic readings, it differs from those in that it takes the references to medicine not as metaphorical. Rather, I will try to spell out how the model shapes Hume's view of the mind. It shall be argued, then, that for Hume medical assumptions help us see how our mental lives are socially shaped. Although Hume is not explicit about the precise medical theories he endorses, he is adamant to defend his account of sympathy against competing explanations, especially against so-called climate theories according to which our mental life is largely shaped by our physical environment rather than through interactions. The emerging position is that the sympathetic interdependence of our minds forms the background against which our views count as normal or good.

The *Conclusion* considers the crucial alterations in the common picture of early modern philosophy of mind that this study leaves us with. Even if early modern authors often seem to consider mental states as arising independently of the social environment, the explanatory focus is intersubjective: For Spinoza, Locke, and Hume mental states of individuals have to be explained in relation to other minds. The conclusion contextualizes the metaphysical, linguistic, and medical models by highlighting their early modern opponents and some current philosophical debates in which these models survive. In a further step, I provide a brief survey of potential receptions of the models in Anne Conway, Condillac, Dugald Stewart, and Immanuel Kant.

The *Comments* on my book by Daniel Bella, Lorina Buhr, Andrea Blättler, and Ivo Eichhorn were first presented at a workshop in May 2023 at Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, kindly organized by Andrea Blättler and Ivo Eichhorn. I would like to express my gratitude to the organizers, commentators, and participants whose instructive contributions still keep me pondering on the issues we discussed. Moreover, I would like to thank the four anonymous reviewers appointed for this special issue for their great suggestions.

All comments engage with the central thesis of my chapter on Spinoza. Here, contrariety is introduced as the central notion explaining how minds relate to one another. Zooming in on the relation between *contrariety* and *agreement* as the basis of the conatus of ideas, Daniel Bella presents his comment as a dialogue exploring which of the two might have priority. Lorina Buhr, in turn, discusses the *Aristotelian background of the notion of contrariety* and offers a reinterpretation of the contrasting relation between ideas as complementarity. Seeing that my book focuses mainly on the attribute of thought, Andrea Blättler asks what the interactionist reading means for the attribute of extension and considers the *relations between bodies*. Since I discuss the ownership of mental states in the light of my intersubjective reading, Ivo Eichhorn raises the question of whether my interpretation attributes to Spinoza a problematic understanding of (*mental*) *property*.