

Reply to Comments

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Abstract

This is a reply to the comments by Daniel Bella, Lorina Buhr, Andrea Blättler, and Ivo Eichhorn. The individual responses attempt to identify the main challenges of the pieces and sketch answers to questions or elaborations on issues raised.

Keywords: Spinoza, intersubjectivity, contrariety, bodies, property

The foregoing comments on *Socializing Minds* critically reflect on my intersubjective reading of Spinoza. Zooming in on the topics of contrariety and agreement, socializing bodies, and the ownership of mental states as property, each of the comments takes crucial claims in my interpretation of Spinoza further and brings out new insights that merit much more engagement than I can offer in the following responses.

Response to Daniel Bella

Back in my student days, when studying linguistics, I learned that most sentences, and especially claims, are expressed in response to earlier sentences. So, one doesn't get up in the morning and utter "I think; therefore, I am." Rather, one makes such a claim, or indeed argument, in response to a prior claim, not rarely a claim to the contrary. If this is correct, contrariety helps us understand how texts and conversations evolve. Much later, it dawned on me that contrariety might also be a principle by means of which Spinoza distinguishes between minds and the strivings of ideas. Hence, according to my reading of Spinoza, the contrariety of strivings is what "sets off" the *conatus* of ideas against one another. Were there nothing contrary to my motion or ideas, no striving on my part would be required in the first place.

I thought it might be worth recalling the initial line of thought that triggered my reading in light of Daniel Bella's thorough and instructive dialogue between Homológiasphilia and Enantiouphilia about the relation between contrariety and agreement. The dialogue comes with a

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number of intriguing insights into the relation, such as the assumption that your mind and my mind “are only different minds because they do not agree on everything.” Apart from the fact that this dialogue presents us with a clear reminder of why this genre should be fostered in philosophy, it shows succinctly that the relation raises a priority question: What is prior, contrariety or agreement? On the face of it, the question seems already answered in that I said that the setting off of any conatus requires contrariety. For striving needs direction, and contrary motion is what affords direction. The *conatus*-related priority seems also in keeping with Spinoza’s premise to the conatus argument that things are of a contrary nature (E3p5). However, as recognized in Bella’s dialogue, contrariety requires that there be something in common, and thus agreement. While I agree with the position that the interlocutors eventually concur on—i.e., that “the same mind can be related to another mind by contrariety as well as by agreement”—the priority question strikes me still as one that merits more pondering. Going from Bella’s insight that our minds are all the same if there is no contrariety, I take it that the very difference of finite minds requires contrariety.

Response to Lorina Buhr

Although the emphasis on difference was famously taken up by thinkers such as De Saussure, Deleuze, and Derrida, it is Aristotle’s physics that Spinoza’s discussion of contrariety and agreement can be traced back to. Lorina Buhr’s contribution sets out the precise models in Aristotle that might have served as pertinent blueprints. Contextualizing contrariety in Spinoza, she succinctly places it as working against what she aptly calls “the inertia of beliefs” and raises the question of what “determines the aspect of contrariety.” Thus far, Buhr agrees with my general assumption that the notion of contrariety must be seen as originating from the theory of motion rather than from the logical context in which it is commonly placed. But as Buhr shows, there are two different places in Aristotle’s *Physics* from which Spinoza could have taken inspiration for his account of contrariety and it becomes clear quickly that it is not immediately obvious which of the two is closer to Spinoza’s account. As Buhr notes: “... there are two accounts of motion in Aristotle’s *Physics*, a principle-based account in *Physics* I.5–7, and a powers-based account of motion in *Physics* III.1. Both accounts should not be mixed up analytically, rather, I would argue, they provide two distinct but also complementary resources for conceptual and theoretical profiling.” One caveat that I would add to Buhr’s reconstruction is that Aristotle’s discussion of contrary motion involves multiple substances, whereas Spinoza’s discussion places all motion within one substance.

Following a careful discussion of both accounts, Buhr suggests that the relation between affects and ideas might be governed, not solely by contrariety, but also by the “principle of complementarity.” Bringing up contrariety is of course reminiscent of Bella’s priority question as to whether agreement or contrariety might be more fundamental. But on reflection, it becomes clear that complementarity offers a third way of conceiving of the relation between different beliefs. Like contrasting colors on a spectrum, beliefs or affects might not be mere contraries but complementing each other. As I see it, the idea of complementarity gains momentum once we invoke, not the perspective of an individual mind taking contrasts as contrary to its own states, but a holistic perspective from which contrasts appear indeed as different colors on a spectrum.

Response to Andrea Blättler

If we assume identity or parallelism of minds and bodies, it follows that the socializing of minds entails the socializing of bodies. Setting out from questions about Ryle's Cartesian Myth, the socializing of bodies did not seem to propose difficulties as principled as that of minds. After all, our bodies can meet and are thus not subject to what I call the contact problem. But once you recognize that, according to Spinoza, not all thoughts *in* our minds are parts *of* our minds, a similar issue arises for our bodies: Are there parts in our bodies that are not parts of our bodies?

Andrea Blättler carefully pursues this question in the Spinozist framework. While we might be inclined to see the skin as a given boundary of our bodies, this view loses its persuasiveness once we think of diseases like cancer or anorexia nervosa. Accordingly, Blättler writes: "In cases of anorexia, parts of an individual strive to exert control by starving other parts, while the latter, in turn, strive to survive, often in ways not conducive to the overall striving of the individual, either." Taking Blättler's point further we should take into account the medical model, as exemplified by Hume. Here, we can extend this concern to contagious diseases befalling numerous bodies. On the one hand, then, certain strivings inside our bodies might be alien to the purpose of the sick person; on the other hand, strivings emerging from our bodies might transcend their supposed boundaries. In a similar vein, we might think of a dance company striving to perform as a group and thus acting as a single individual. It becomes clear, then, that extending Spinoza's account of the mind to bodies challenges common ways of thinking about bodies. Rather, with Blättler we must see a *plurality* of bodily strivings in one body or across several bodies.

In addition to the plurality of strivings, Blättler also identifies a *variability* of strivings within what is arguably the same body. To give a simple example, I might change my strivings from wanting to be a weightlifter to becoming a pianist. Arguably, the former training of my muscles might now pose a hindrance to my delicate movements when playing piano. Blättler writes:

For instance, a bodily figure and its characteristic postures might have been good for an individual when performing a specific social role that he has grown into. They might no longer be good but hindering when, in the course of striving to a body more capable of acting, a mind more capable of thinking, he begins to assume different social roles. ... That is, the sets of interactions that are in agreement with his nature underlie *variability*. If some interactions were helpful to maintain the formerly characteristic bodily figure, they can now become hindering. Ideas springing from such interactions were once active but become passive.

Again, the assumption of strivings benefitting my body as a whole across time would be too simplistic. While it is true that I have not considered these issues in depth in my study, I see them as pertinent refinements rather than complications of my reading. That the emotional tracking of identity might consequently turn out to be "semi-robust" can indeed be seen as an advantage rather than a problem for Spinoza's account.

Response to Ivo Eichhorn

A clear outcome of Spinoza's account of the mind is that my or your mind might be populated with the thoughts of others. This means that some mental states passing through your mind might actually be the mental states of other people, rather than in any emphatic sense your own ideas. If you're internally reciting a poem, you might actually notice that the verses are not your own thoughts. But many thoughts you might proudly take to be your own might, unbeknownst to yourself, equally be an echo of your grandma's moral sermons. In light of these considerations, I wondered what it is that gives us a sense of "ownership" of our thoughts and in what way this sense can be mistaken, according to Spinoza. Relatedly, I proposed that our transition from inadequate to adequate ideas is one of "appropriation," where we make seemingly external thoughts our own.

Ivo Eichhorn challenges the very question of ownership as one that might be an anachronistic projection, more in line with Locke's views on property than with Spinoza's own tenets. It's true that "ownership" has such connotations, especially when we think of claims to originality, responsibility, or accusations of plagiarism. Eichhorn's reconstruction is a lot more nuanced, but the "Lockean trace" Eichhorn detects brings out an interesting point in the discussion of ownership and appropriation—irrespective of whether I am committed to it or not. Accordingly, he writes: "Certainly appropriation is not the same as property or ownership, but the property relation is deeply inscribed in the term." I particularly like the political dimension Eichhorn highlights. While we might think of owning our thoughts as a particular way of relating to them or embracing them, this talk also has a political ring of someone proudly claiming home-ownership or independence from authorities. There is no disagreement that Spinoza would see this sort of ownership as illusory. But what is important to note is that the insistence on ownership does still have a political dimension, whether illusory or not. As Eichhorn puts it, it will "certainly be imagined a bitter medicine by all those—that is us—who are passionately attached to their (mental) property." That is, we might cherish and cling to certain thoughts as our own, even if we begin to see that there is reason to let go of them. At the same time, it's important to note that Spinoza does recognize a transition from illusory ownership to true ownership in that certain thoughts will be adequate ideas following from people's own nature. As I see it, this is not so much a matter of ownership but of belonging. Like an "ugly duckling," we might slowly become what we are, conditional upon finding the appropriate ecosystem of ideas.

All that said, there is a deep disanalogy between ownership of thoughts and other kinds of ownership. My owning a piece of land would preclude someone else owning it. Not so with thoughts: My owning a thought would decidedly not preclude anyone else owning it. In fact, the more minds are sharing a thought, the stronger it might be said to become.