Kobe University Repository : Kernel

PDF issue: 2026-11-25

Transformative notion of Attribute as Auxiliary Concept in Spinoza's Ethics

Higuchi, Tomoko

(Citation)
国際文化学研究 : 神戸大学大学院国際文化学研究科紀要,65:1-36

(Issue Date)
2026-03

(Resource Type)
departmental bulletin paper

(Version)
Version of Record

(JaLCDOI)
https://doi.org/10.24546/0100503391

(URL)
https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14094/0100503391

Transformative notion of Attribute as Auxiliary Concept in Spinoza's *Ethics*

Tomoko HIGUCHI

1. Introduction[1]

Spinoza's philosophy introduces a novel framework for understanding God through the concept of attributes, which serve as intellectual tools rather than components or causes of God's being. Attributes, such as extension and thought, which are discussed in Part 2 of the *Ethics*, allow the mind to conceptualize God as a self-caused substance (causa sui) consisting of infinite attributes. These attributes do not cause God but enable a coherent understanding of His nature by functioning as "auxiliary lines," a term we borrow from geometric construction. These concepts help conceive the idea of God's notion without resorting to circular reasoning or relying solely on descriptive definitions, aligning with Spinoza's systematic and logical approach to metaphysics.

Central to Spinoza's method is the distinction between subjectivist and objectivist interpretations of attributes. Subjectivists argue that attributes are constructs of the finite intellect, perceived "as if" they constitute God's essence, while objectivists claim that attributes genuinely reflect God's essence as perceived by the infinite intellect. Through logical and causal structures, Spinoza transitions from discussing single-attribute substances—conceptual constructs that do not exist in reality—to demonstrating the existence of God as a unique, infinite being. This transition maintains divine simplicity while reconciling the plurality of attributes with the unity of substance.

©Tomoko HIGUCHI 2026

2. *Causa sui*

The notion of *causa sui* in Spinoza has to be understood in the context of the Cartesian debate on *esse a se*. In this section, we will focus on how the notion of *causa sui* was employed in Descartes' *Meditations*, a use which provoked a discussion between him and his opponents. Descartes distinguishes between two concepts of *esse a se*—a negative sense ("not from another") and a positive sense ("from itself as a cause"). Caterus questions the coherence of the positive sense, asking how a being can cause itself if it does not preexist. Descartes responds that God, due to His immensity, is self-caused in a way analogous to an efficient cause producing its effect, with His essence necessarily entailing eternal existence. Arnauld, in his critique, argues that self-causation is logically impossible and rooted in human intellectual limitations, asserting that truths like God's existence should be explained through formal rather than efficient causes. Descartes defends his view of God as *causa sui*, acknowledging its complexity while maintaining that God's essence itself ensures His eternal self-existence.

2.1 *Causa sui* in Descartes

The concept of *causa sui*[2] is found in Descartes' Third Meditation. He writes;

> In respect of this cause one may again inquire whether it derives its existence from itself or from another cause. If from itself, then it is clear from what has been said that it is itself God. If, on the other hand, it derives its existence from another cause, then the same question may be repeated concerning this further cause, namely whether it derives its existence from itself or from another cause, until eventually the ultimate cause is reached, and this will be God.[3]

Here, Descartes makes a distinction between *esse a se* (to be by itself) and *esse ab alio* (to be from another). Caterus and Arnauld raise a question and formulate a refutation regarding this paragraph.

Caterus, in the First set of Objections, points out that *esse a se* has two meanings, a positive and a negative sense. In the positive sense, it means "from itself as a cause," while in the latter sense it means "not from another." Caterus holds that *esse a se* in the latter sense can be predicated of everything, while *esse a se* in the former sense implies a question; "how can we prove that this being embraces all things and is infinite?"[4] For such a being "does not derive existence from itself as a cause, nor did it exist prior to itself," according to Caterus.

Replying to this objection, Descartes writes that God "stands in the same relation to himself as an efficient cause does to its effect, and hence … he derives his existence from himself in the positive sense,"[5] because of His immensity. According to Descartes, the efficient cause is a cause as long as it produces the effects and time is regarded as a sequence of moments: "I regard the divisions of time as being separable from each other."[6] As a consequence, a cause that preserves the existing things, or creates them "at each moment of time," is called efficient. Likewise, God preserves Himself "by the positive influence of an efficient cause." The point here is that "the essence of God is such that he must always exist." *Causa sui* in the negative sense is applicable to things due to the "imperfection of the human intellect," for we do not see the cause. On the other hand, since the idea of God is so immense, we understand that the existence of God derives from itself, i.e. He is *causa sui* in the positive sense: "He [God] stands in the same relation to himself as an efficient cause does to the effect."

Arnauld refutes this argument in the Fourth Objection. He proposes a syllogism to show that Descartes argument is invalid;

> In order to derive my existence from myself, I should have to derive my existence from myself positively and, as it were, causally. Therefore, it is impossible that I derive my existence from myself.[7]

The major is taken from Descartes, and the minor is evident from the natural light, according to Arnauld. Furthermore, he adds that a thing cannot give anything to itself if it does not possess that thing. Thus, he refutes Descartes: “No one can give what he does not have. Hence no one can give himself existence unless he already has it. But if he already has it, why should he give it to himself?”[8] Arnauld further writes that God does not create himself nor preserve himself continuously in time, and therefore, “God cannot be conceived of as deriving existence from himself in the positive sense, except through an imperfection of our intellect, which conceives of God after the fashion of created things.”[9] He notes that *causa sui* is applicable not to the essence but only to the existence of things. For example, there is an efficient cause of a given triangle, but it is impossible to answer why the sum of the angles of this triangle is equal to two right angles in terms of efficient cause; the question should be answered in terms of the triangle’s nature or essence. In other words, the reason why the sum of the angles in a triangle has is equal to two right angles cannot be explained in terms of the efficient cause of the triangle; it can be only explained by referring to the nature of triangles in general, and this is an explanation in terms of the formal cause of the triangle.

Against these objections, Descartes answers that God’s *causa sui* should be interpreted positively and “that God is the cause of himself in a sense analogous to an efficient cause.”[10] In general, Descartes admits only the efficient cause among Aristotle’s four causes (efficient, formal, material, and final). Nonetheless, he does use the concept of formal cause when referring to the existence of God.[11] In this respect, Descartes’ discussion of the

existence of God rests on an obscure notion of causality.

2.2 Spinoza and the definition of *causa sui*

Spinoza defines *causa sui* in a completely different way from Descartes. Spinoza's first definition in the *Ethics* is a definition of *causa sui*: "By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, *or* that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing." One noticeable point of this definition according to Matsuda (2011: Ch. 5) is that it does not refer to the debate between Descartes and his opponents. In other words, it does not refer to either the positive or negative interpretation of *causa sui*. In addition, Spinoza does not mention the formal cause at all.

In his *Ethics*, Spinoza defines *causa sui* as a being whose essence involves existence, meaning it cannot be conceived without existing. This avoids the debates surrounding Descartes' positive and negative interpretations of *causa sui* and bypasses reliance on formal causality. However, Spinoza faces challenges in demonstrating the existence of such a being without circular reasoning. Unlike Descartes, whose argument assumes God's existence as inherent without proof, Spinoza employs a genetic method, aiming to explain *causa sui* through its cause. This method faces difficulties: interpreting *causa sui* negatively negates external causes, making a genetic definition impossible, while a positive interpretation risks circularity by referencing self-causation. Despite these challenges, Spinoza persists in defining God through a genetic framework, contrasting with Hobbes, who avoids defining God philosophically due to the lack of external causation.

The problem here is how to define such a being and demonstrate its existence. In the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, Spinoza cites Descartes' demonstrations of the existence of God in the *Arguments* (the *Arguments Proving the Existence of God and the Distinction Between the*

Soul and the body Arranged in Geometrical Fashion), the geometrical demonstration attached to the Reply to the Second Objection. According to Part 1, Proposition 5 of the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* (Spinoza, 1985: 246):

> God's existence is known from the consideration of his nature alone.
>
> Dem.: To say that something is contained in the nature of a concept is the same as saying that it is true of that thing (by D9). But necessary existence is contained in the concept of God (by A6). So, it is true to say of God that necessary existence is in him, or that he exists.

The problem with this syllogism is clear at a glance. The minor is Axiom 6, and this axiom[12] contains the proposition that ought to be demonstrated. Of course, the axiom states that God's existence can be known from His nature, but it also asserts His existence, which should be demonstrated. In other words, the aim of this proof is to show that knowledge of God's existence follows from a consideration of His nature, but the axiom says that the existence of God is contained in His nature, and since this is an axiom, it is employed without demonstration. Thus, this demonstration rests on a *petitio principii*.

The difficulty derives from the notion of *esse a se* and the synthetic order. Since God exists *a se*, He must exist by himself. In the synthetic order, the principles, i.e. God and the first principles, are the point of deperture. If we use the synthetic order to prove the existence of God, we will inevitably fall into a *petitio principii*, because we need to start with Him, who exists by Himself. According to Descartes, a synthetic order persuades readers by a long chain of demonstrations deduced from first principles. Therefore, Descartes regards the synthetic order as the manner

of persuading, not an inventive method, or the true way of philosophy. Descartes himself prefers the analytic order, the order of discovery. And since the analytic order proceeds from what is given to us to the first principles and God, the above difficulty does not occur in this order.

The problems with the definition of *causa sui* make it impossible to demonstrate the existence of the thing that is *causa sui*. Since the synthetic order, according to Descartes, commences with definitions and then proves a number of propositions, there will not be any demonstration unless the definitions are given. This is not problematic for Descartes, who considers analytic order as the proper method of philosophy. As we saw above, however, the analytic order is not possible for Spinoza. The problem then is how to demonstrate the existence of God *a priori*, neither analytically nor synthetically.

2.2.1 The genetic definition and *causa sui*

Demonstrating *causa sui* in an *a priori* fashion: this is the problem. The difficulty becomes much more acute with Spinoza's use of the genetic definition. He employs the definition of God and *causa sui* in order to demonstrate that God, or the Substance, is *causa sui*. Furthermore, as we have seen, and as Spinoza himself suggests in Letter 60, his definition of God is genetic. It is an application of the genetic method of definition to God.

In the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza argues that a definition of things which are not created must exclude the cause, which is required in a definition of created things. This criterion is reasonable if we consider the nature of genetic definitions in general and *causa sui* in the negative sense. For instance, Hobbes, who discusses genetic definitions, excludes theology, i.e. the study of God, from philosophy, because God is not a thing that is generated by something else, and He can neither be

resolved nor synthesised. According to Hobbes, God is not generated. This means that he does not regard God as *causa sui* in the negative sense; rather, he holds that God does not have any cause. While Spinoza often refers to Hobbes in his discussion of genetic definitions, there is a considerable difference between their views: unlike Hobbes, Spinoza gives a genetic definition of God. The application of the genetic method of definition to God is one of the issues in which these two philosophers part ways.

The difficulties involved in giving a genetic definition of *causa sui* can be explained in the following way. If we attempt to define genetically something that is *causa sui*, say A, the definition will run into two different problems, depending on whether we understand *causa sui* negatively or positively. If we take *causa sui* negatively, the definition of A cannot be given, because the genetic definition needs to include its cause. Since the cause is A itself and is not given in this case, it will be impossible to define A by its cause. On the other hand, the positive interpretation of *causa sui* also faces a difficulty. Since *causa sui* in the positive sense is something that is the cause of itself, we will have to define A in terms of itself if we want to give A a genetic definition (because the cause of A is itself), but this cannot be admitted because it is circular. Thus, if we take the negative interpretation concerning *causa sui* will be undefinable genetically, while the positive interpretation will give us a circular definition of *causa sui*.

3. Attributes

In this section I will argue for the following two points: (1) that the “attributes” that Spinoza uses to define God should be regarded as His “auxiliary lines”, which are employed in order to form the concept of God; (2) that the concept of attribute undergoes a transformation from a Cartesian one to a Spinozist one through the demonstration. To show this,

we will begin by discussing the subjectivist and objectivist interpretations of Spinoza's concept of attribute, focusing especially on the simplicity of God. Next, we will see that Spinoza uses "auxiliary lines", namely the concept of a substance consisting of a single attribute, or substance distinguished by its attribute, to form the concept of God, a Being which is *causa sui*. This is "auxiliary lines", similar to what is used in geometrical constructions, rather than a component or true cause. This explains why Spinoza regards his definition of God as genetic, as he writes in Letter 60. I will also discuss a consequence of our first point, namely the transformation of the Cartesian notion of attribute, which can be regarded as supportive of the subjectivist view, to the Spinozist concept of attribute, which is objectivist.

In the previous section we saw the difficulties involved in proving the existence of *causa sui* from a definition. However, Spinoza succeeds in doing so with his geometrical demonstrations. A clue to understanding how this might be possible is the concept of construction in geometry. The following passage from the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* shows how Spinoza interpreted geometrical constructions:

> To form the concept of a sphere, I feign a cause at will, say that a semicircle is rotated around a center, and that the sphere is, as it were, produced by this rotation.[13]

What is important here is that Spinoza "feigns" (*fingere*) the cause of the sphere, namely, the rotation of a semicircle. The sphere itself is not caused by the rotation of a semicircle, but to suppose the rotation of a semicircle is the simplest way of forming the concept of a sphere.

The same kind of supposition, or arbitrary "auxiliary lines", can be found in Spinoza's definition of God. God exists by himself, i.e. as *causa sui*, and so it is impossible to give a genetic definition of Him without falling

into circularity. However, just as the sphere can be defined by the rotation of a semicircle, which is not the true cause of the sphere, God is defined as “By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.” Of course, these attributes cannot cause God. They are the auxiliary lines in forming the concept of God.

To examine this point further, it is necessary to reconsider the problem of the attribute in Spinoza scholarship. According to Letter 60, Spinoza’s definition of God expresses the efficient cause of God. E1Def6 reads “By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.” This definition employs the notion of “attribute,” which is defined as “what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence” (Spinoza, 1985: 408)

3.1 Construction with “auxiliary lines”

How, then, should we understand Spinoza’s demonstration of God’s existence by means of attributes? We propose that the attributes are “auxiliary lines” utilized in order to form the concept of God. In his *Ethics* and writings like Letter 60, Spinoza explains that attributes express God’s internal efficient cause, much like geometric constructions clarify abstract forms. For instance, the rotation of a semicircle aids in conceptualizing a sphere without being its true cause. Similarly, attributes help define God as an infinite substance while maintaining logical rigor. Spinoza employs these auxiliary constructs to navigate the challenges of defining *causa sui*, where God’s nature involves both self-causation and the absence of external causation. This approach aligns with his broader philosophical project, which uses logical deductions to explore complex metaphysical entities.

3.2 Genetic Definition of God in Letter 60

In Letter 60, Spinoza suggests that his definition of God expresses His internal efficient cause, making it possible to deduce all of His properties. This clearly implies that the definition of God is genetic. However, God is *causa sui*, and a genetic definition of a *causa sui* is impossible. Our proposal suggests a new solution to this problem: although the attributes are not the true cause of God, since the cause of God, which is *causa sui*, does not exist, or God Himself, according to Caterus' two interpretations of *causa sui*, they serve as "auxiliary lines" in the construction of the concept of God. We can thus see how the definition expresses the"internal efficient cause" of God.

In Letter 60 to Tchirnhaus, Spinoza argues that a idea or definition of an object must express or involve its efficient cause. He rejects a definition of a circle that only describes a property of the circle, for it does not express the cause of the circle. He believes it is possible to deduce all the properties of the circle from the genetic definition of the circle, which defines it through its method of construction. Spinoza writes that the definition of God as the supremely perfect being does not express His efficient cause, but his own definition does express it, and that this enables him to deduce all the divine properties. This clearly shows that Spinoza's definition of God is genetic, defining Him by His internal efficient cause.

Causa sui, regardless of whether it is construed positively or negatively in Caterus' sense, cannot be defined genetically without falling into circularity. If we understand *causa sui* positively, it means the cause of God is Himself. Therefore, a circularity will follow if we try to define God by His cause. On the other hand, if *causa sui* is understood negatively, it follows that God has no cause, and hence it is impossible to define God genetically. Furthermore, although some interpreters claim that the introduction of a formal cause can remedy this problem, it is difficult to discern the notion of

formal cause in Spinoza's philosophy.

Instead, Spinoza employs the notion of attribute to form the concept of God. This supports Spinoza's claim that his definition of God expresses his internal efficient cause. The concept of attribute functions as a "auxiliary lines" in his construction of the concept of God.

Recall the example of the sphere in TIE; given the idea of the rotation of a semicircle, the mind perceives the sphere and this perception is true, because there is no ellipse in the perception. By contrast, if there is an ellipse in some perception, the perception is false regardless of whether it corresponds with reality or not. The demonstration of the *Ethics* starts with definitions, and from these definitions, the concept of God is formed in an adequate way, or in other words, without any ellipse in perception, by means of the concept of a substance consisting of a single attribute, which functions as a "auxiliary lines". The concept of the attribute is also employed in defining God. For this reason, it is possible to regard the definition of God as expressing the efficient cause that causes the concept of God, which is *causa sui*.

3.3 Auxiliary lines

Spinoza's method is evident in his transition from single-attribute substances to an infinite substance. While substances with single attributes do not exist in reality, they function as auxiliary lines to derive propositions about God, such as His infinity and self-causation. Scholars like Gueroult highlight how Spinoza builds the concept of God as a unique, infinite substance through logical steps rooted in geometric reasoning. This approach avoids reductive interpretations and resolves challenges in proving God's existence and essence while maintaining divine simplicity.

In TIE, Spinoza discusses the rotation of a semicircle,[14] which can be called as "auxiliary lines" of the concept of the sphere. Although there is no

sphere in Nature that is caused by a rotating semicircle, such a perception is still true, and to suppose a rotating semicircle is a very easy way of forming the concept of a sphere. However, Spinoza continues that it is only insofar as the perception affirms the rotating semicircle, together with the concept of a semicircle and the cause that determines its motion, that the affirmation of the rotation of semicircle is true, because, according to Spinoza, “falsity consists only in this: that something is affirmed of a thing that is not contained in the concept we have formed of the thing.”[15] Hence, the affirmation of the concept of the sphere must be conjoined with that of the concept of the semicircle and the cause of its motion.

A similar example can be found in Letter 60, which explains generation of the defined things from their definitions. According to this letter, the definition of a circle as “a space described by a line one end of which is fixed and the other moving” expresses the efficient cause of the circle, and hence all its properties can be deduced from this definition. It follows that the definition that “expresses the efficient cause” should be preferred to other definitions that also truly describe what a circle is. Likewise, according to Spinoza, the definition of God that he gives in the *Ethics* expresses the internal efficient cause[16] of God. Although no circle is caused by the movement of the line one end of which is fixed, the idea or concept[17] of the circle formed by the mind in such a manner is true, as Spinoza says in TIE 72. Similarly, although God is not caused by the attributes constituting His essence, this is a manner of forming the concept of God.

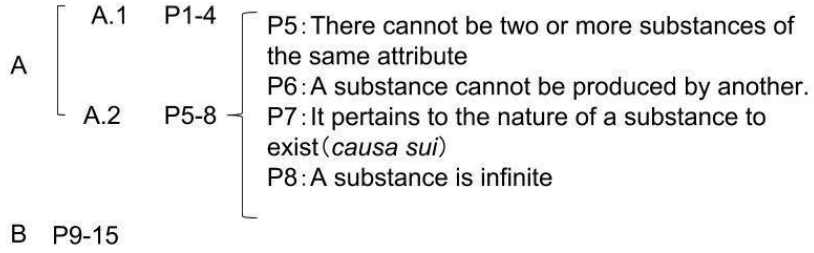
Subsequently, it will be necessary to examine the demonstrations of the *Ethics*. In this section, we only note that the attributes function as “auxiliary lines” in the demonstration, just as the construction of a geometrical figure may require auxiliary lines which are not the true cause of that figure.

In order to examine the demonstration of the *Ethics*, we will consider

the interpretation put forward by Gueroult in his *Spinoza: Dieu (Ethique, 1)*. Gueroult employs the concept of the substance consisting of a single attribute to illustrate the first part of the demonstration that shows the existence of God, a substance with infinite attributes. It will be pointed out that a substance consisting of a single attribute should be understood as being distinguished by that attribute. And since the concept of such a substance is used to form the concept of a substance with infinite attributes, we will conclude that the former serves as the “auxiliary lines” of the latter. For a substance consisting of a single attribute has no place in reality; only the substance with infinite attributes exists, as Spinoza demonstrates.

3.4 Construction of the Concept of God

Gueroult divides the first 15 propositions of Part I of the *Ethics* into two sections, as shown in the table below.



The focus of our discussion is the propositions belonging to (a. 2). Proposition 5 maintains that there cannot be two or more substances of the same attribute. From this, propositions 6–8 are deduced based on the conceivable relationship among substances. P6 concerns the impossibility of a substance being produced by another. This follows from P5, which says that there can be at most one substance consisting of a unique attribute, and hence one substance cannot cause another. P7 then asserts the existence of a *causa sui* on the basis of P6. P8 maintains the infinity of

substance, and this is deduced from Propositions 7 and 5. The uniqueness of a substance given its attribute is shown in P5 and this is the key in P5–8, i.e. section (a. 2). The concept appearing in P5 is that of the substance consisting of a single attribute, which, as we have seen, is used to deduce P6–8.

As Gueroult says,[18] the aim of section (a) is to reach a plurality of infinite substances. Nonetheless, from P9, Spinoza goes on to construct the concept of a substance consisting of infinite attributes. Propositions 9 and 10 function as the transition point in this construction. Here, the object of the demonstration switches from a substance consisting of a single substance to a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, the former of which does not exist but the latter does.

This transition provokes a question: what is the substance consisting of a single attribute? According to Gueroult,[19] lines and the points are recognized before the recognition of a triangle, and though the idea of a triangle cannot be reduced to those of lines and points, the properties of lines and points are possessed by the triangle. The propositions concerning the substance consisting of a single attribute are applied to God in a similar fashion. However, this does not explain what the substance consisting of a single attribute is, and the example of the triangle composed of lines and points is also problematic. Whereas the lines and points are the composite elements of the triangle, an interpretation that construes the substances consisting of a single attribute as elements composing God should be refuted in light of divine simplicity.

Instead, I maintain that the concept of a substance consisting of a single attribute, or equivalently, the concept of a substance distinguished by its attribute, functions as “auxiliary lines” that serves to form the concept of God. For the attribute distinguishes the plurality of substances in (a. 2), which explains why Spinoza writes “substance or attribute” in P5. The

concept of a substance consisting of a single attribute is used to deduce the properties that are shown in P6-8, which are indispensable to form the concept of an infinite substance consisting of infinite attributes. Yet, the substance consisting of a single attribute cannot be the true cause of the infinite substance, not only because of the reasons mentioned above, but also because the object of the concept to be formed is *causa sui*. Therefore, we propose that it is “auxiliary lines”. Consider the construction of an equilateral triangle as shown in Euclid’s *Elements*. Here, two circles are used to construct the triangle. These two circles are not the cause of the triangle, but they are required to form the concept of the triangle. Likewise, the concept of a substance consisting of a single attribute, or substance distinguished by its attribute, is necessary in order to construct the concept in question and is employed for this purpose.

The “auxiliary lines” of a plurality of substances distinguished by their attributes enables Spinoza to use a real distinction in the demonstration. As it is difficult to demonstrate the existence of a *causa sui* positively, Spinoza proves that substance is *causa sui* negatively. However, such a proof requires the readers to feign the notion of a plurality of substances, since the proof involves the impossibility of one substance being produced from *another substance*. Therefore, it is necessary to feign the concept of a plurality of substances distinguished by their attributes. This distinction by attribute is real, since a real distinction is a distinction between substances. Thus, Spinoza uses a real distinction in the demonstration concerning the substances consisting of a single attribute.

3.5 The Subjectivist and Objectivist Interpretations

The debate over Spinoza’s definition of attributes involves subjectivist and objectivist interpretations, particularly regarding the intellect’s role (finite or infinite) and the meaning of terms like *tanquam* (as or as if).

Subjectivists see attributes as constructs of the finite intellect, while objectivists argue they genuinely reflect the divine essence as perceived by the infinite intellect. Spinoza's demonstrations ultimately reconcile these perspectives by showing that attributes, whether understood subjectively or objectively, pertain to the same unified substance. His philosophy also addresses Cartesian critiques, demonstrating how infinite attributes can coexist within a single substance by reinterpreting the intellect's role from finite to infinite perspectives.

There are two ways of interpreting Spinoza's definition of attribute, in particular regarding the phrases "as constituting its essence (*tanquam ejusdem essentiam constituens*)" and "the intellect perceives." For the word *tanquam* can mean "as," and "as if," and there is an ambiguity in what the term "intellect" indicates, i.e. whether it refers to the finite or infinite intellect. The different ways of interpreting these phrases are closely related to the famous discussion of the subjectivist and objectivist interpretations of substance and attributes. Shein (2009) summarizes this as follows:

> the subjective interpretation, traditionally conceived, takes the intellect in question to be the finite one, and 'tanquam' to mean 'as if (but not in fact).' The definition, according to this type of interpretation, should be understood as saying that attributes are what the finite intellect perceives of substance as if (but not in fact) constituting its essence. The objectivist interpretation, on the other hand, favours rendering 'intellect' as the 'infinite intellect' and 'tanquam' as 'in fact.' Objectivists, therefore, take the definition as stating that attributes are what the infinite intellect perceives of substance as in fact constituting its essence.

Wolfson's interpretation is generally called subjective, while the

most notable objectivist interpretation was offered by Gueroult. Wolfson distinguishes the subjective and objectivist interpretations as follows:

> According to the former [subjective] interpretation, to be perceived by the mind means to be invented by the mind, for of themselves the attributes have no independent existence at all but are identical with the essence of the substance. According to the latter [objective] interpretation, to be perceived by the mind means only to be discovered by the mind, for even of themselves the attributes have an independent existence in the essence of the substance.[20]

Wolfson, referring to the medieval Jewish philosophers, maintains that Spinoza's usage of the attribute is influenced by the Jewish concept of the divine essence, which was considered "unknowable."[21] A problem in the Jewish philosophical tradition was how to "reconcile the apparent contradiction between the plurality of attributes and the simplicity of [divine] essence."[22] This remains problematic for Spinoza too, and as a solution to this, his notion of attribute must be interpreted subjectively, i.e. as "only different words expressing the same reality and being of substance."[23]

There are several objections to the subjectivist view. One is that if we take the subjectivist interpretation, it will result in an inadequate cognition of God's essence, which contradicts E2P45, since this view interprets "tanquam" as "as if."

Another issue is that Spinoza sometimes identifies the substance and its attributes. For instance, E1P4Dem (Spinoza, 1985: 411) speaks of "substances, or what is the same (by D4), their attributes, and their affections," while E1P19 (Spinoza, 1985: 428) reads, "God is eternal, or all God's attributes [*Deus sive omnia Dei attributa*] are eternal." Spinoza explains the relation between a substance and its attributes in E2P7S. Here,

he first reminds us that “whatever can be perceived by an infinite intellect as constituting an essence of substance pertains to one substance only,” and therefore, “the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that” (Spinoza, 1985: 451).

In contrast to this interpretation, Gueroult opts for an objectivist interpretation, according to which the attributes are constitutive of the divine essence. The objectivist or realist view holds that the infinite intellect perceives the attributes as constituting the essence of God. As shown above, this view is more plausible in light of the textual evidence found in Spinoza’s *Ethics*, and is therefore widely supported by Spinoza scholars.

Nevertheless, some problems have been identified. Shein (2013) comments that “objectivist interpretations place ontological weight on the “real distinction” between the attributes,” for the difference between the attributes must be grounded in the perceived attributes, not in the perceiving infinite intellect. Shein (2013) identifies another problem with the objective interpretation: “The danger of this kind of interpretation is that if the distinction is stressed too strongly, the unity of the substance is lost. If the infinite substance has “really distinct” attributes, and this distinction is grounded in, say, distinct natures or essences of the infinite substance, then there has to be an explanation of how a multiplicity of natures or essences can be united to form one substance.” In other words, one of the advantages of the subjectivist interpretation is that it secures the simplicity of God. Gueroult, addressing the question of how a simple God can at the same have an infinity of heterogeneous attributes, proposes that divine unity is to be found in God’s unique mode of causality:

> L'unité et l'indivisibilité de cet Etre n'est que l'impossibilité qu'il impose à ses attributs existants par soi, et réellement distingués quant

> à leur essence, de se dissocier et d'exister séparément. Son identité sous chacun d'eux n'est rien d'autre que l'indivisibilité de l'acte unique par lequel, tous en même temps (simul), de la même manière et avec la même nécessité («eodem modo et eodem necessitate), ils se causent et causent leurs modes ; acte qui, en conséquence, est celui-là même par lequel la substance unique, qu'ils constituent tous ensemble, se cause et cause ses modes.[24]

Nonetheless, I would like to argue that God's unique and necessary mode of causality results from His simplicity.[25] The unity of God is maintained in E1P14C, where Spinoza says, "as we indicated in P10S." In E1P10S, Spinoza suggests that the substance consisting of infinite attributes exists, and is unique and infinite, and therefore there is no need to search for a criterion to distinguish diverse substances. It is from E1P16 that Spinoza starts the proofs concerning the necessity of the divine nature that causes the effects. God is the unique substance, and this is why there is a unique divine act.

This point is evident from E2P7S (Spinoza, 1985: 451):

> Whatever can be perceived by an infinite intellect as constituting an essence of substance pertains to one substance only, and consequently … the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that. So also a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways …
>
> Therefore, whether we conceive nature under the attribute of Extension, or under the attribute of Thought, or under any other attribute, we shall find one and the same order, or one and the same

connection of causes, i.e., that the same things follow one another.

Here, Spinoza explicitly argues that the attributes pertain to one substance, which is comprehended under various attributes, and therefore there is one and the same causal order.

3.6 What is the problem?: From the Early Criticisms

Nonetheless, early criticisms on attributes give an alternative view on this problem. Before moving on to a consideration of this, it should be kept in mind that the distinction between subject and object in the modern sense does not appear in any form in Spinoza's *Ethics*. He does use the terms "subject" and "object," but they are not used in the post-Kantian sense. Therefore, we need to be careful not to fall into an anachronistic reading of the *Ethics*.

The main points of contention between the two readings of the definition of attribute are (1) whether the intellect is finite or infinite, and (2) whether "tanquam" is to be interpreted as "as if" or "as." Our interpretation suggests another reading, according to which the readers will read the definition in the subjectivist manner at first, but the demonstration then reveals that the infinite intellect perceives that the attributes constitute the divine essence.

First, as Van Bunge (2012: Ch.2) points out, Spinoza's contemporaries were concerned with the issue of how it is possible for attributes, which are conceived by themselves, to form a unique substance. This issue is found in Leibniz's annotations to the *Ethics*. With respect to the definition of attribute, Leibniz only raises the question of what kind of predicate they are. Regarding Spinoza's definition of God, he comments: "Now this is such a definition, for it still can be doubted whether a being having infinite attributes does not imply a contradiction. Furthermore, it can be

doubted whether the same simple essence can be expressed through many different attributes,"[26] and it is with regard to P9 that he writes; "it can still be doubted that several attributes may belong to the same substance, in the sense in which the author understands attributes."[27] Regarding P10 Leibniz repeatedly states; "one substance can have only one attribute if this attribute expresses its whole essence."[28] Thus, the problem that Spinoza's contemporaries identified regarding attributed was not whether the intellect in the definition of attribute is infinite or finite, or whether "tanquam" is to be read as "in fact" or "as if,"but how a unique substance can consist of infinite attributes.

Spinoza believes that the infinite and finite intellect differ essentially. In E1P17S, he proves that intellect and will do not belong to God's nature. He explains in this scholium that the divine intellect is the cause of the essence and existence of the human intellect. Hence, the divine intellect is different from ours. However, as Spinoza demonstrates in Part 2 of the *Ethics*, "when we say that there is in us an adequate and perfect idea, we are saying nothing but that (by P11C) there is an adequate and perfect idea in God insofar as he constitutes the essence of our Mind."[29] Since our minds are also modes of God, the adequate ideas that we possess can be seen as those included in God. Hence, when we have an adequate idea of attribute, it exists in God insofar as God constitutes our minds. Spinoza further writes; "the will and the intellect are nothing apart from the singular volitions and ideas themselves." Therefore, whether the "intellect" refers to the divine or human intellect is not an issue. For, although the infinite intellect is different from the finite intellect because it is the cause of the ideas, i.e. intellection, the adequate idea of attribute is the same in God and in our minds, our minds being modes of God.

However, Spinoza's contemporaries would have taken the term "intellect" in E1Def4 to refer to the human intellect, because it refers to

the Cartesian concept of attribute. Descartes writes about attributes in the *Principles of Philosophy*, which is clearly the origin of the Spinozist concept of attribute:

> We can, however, easily come to know a substance by one of its attributes, in virtue of the common notion that nothingness possesses no attributes, that is to say, no properties or qualities. Thus, if we perceive the presence of some attribute, we can infer that there must also be present an existing thing or substance to which it may be attributed.
>
> A substance may indeed be known through any attribute at all; but each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred.[30]

Here, Descartes uses the verb *percipiamus* (we conceive). If we were to summarize the above passages, we would get the following definition of attribute: “By attribute, I understand that which we perceive of a substance as constituting the essence of the substance.” For according to these passages, the attributes are what we perceive and through which we can conclude the existence of a substance; and the principal attributes, namely extension and thought, constitute the essence of substances.

The problem here is that as long as we understand attribute in the Cartesian sense, it is difficult to conceive of a unique substance consisting of infinite attributes. This might be the background to the question raised by Simon de Vries in Letter 8. He asks (Spinoza, 1985: 192):

> [Y]ou seem … to suppose that the nature of substance is so constituted that it can have more than one attribute, which you have

> not yet demonstrated, unless you depend on the fifth definition of absolutely infinite substance, or God. Otherwise, if I should say that each substance has only one attribute, and if I had the idea of two attributes, I could rightly conclude that, where there are two different attributes, there are two different substances.

Spinoza answers with what we now know as E1P10. He then repeats the following definition (Definition 3) which he had sent to de Vries, adding two examples (Spinoza, 1985: 195-196);

> By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., whose concept does not involve the concept of another thing. I understand the same by attribute, except that it is called attribute in relation to the intellect, which attributes such and such a definite nature to substance. [*Idem per attributum intelligo, nisi quòd attributum dicatur respectu intellectûs, substantiae certam talem naturam tribuentis*].
>
> …
>
> (i) I say that by Israel I understand the third patriarch; I understand the same by Jacob, the name which was given him because he had seized his brother's heel; (ii) by flat I mean what reflects all rays of light without any change; I understand the same by white, except that it is called white in relation to a man looking at the flat [surface].

This correspondence apparently made Spinoza realize that his concept of attribute confuses Cartesian readers, as he later rearranged the discussion in this letter. Since he starts with the Cartesian concept of attribute, it is difficult to understand the Spinozist concept of attribute by this definition. For this definition clearly states that the attribute is the

same as the substance, but has different names from the perspective of the intellect, and this “intellect” should be understood as the finite human intellect, as the above examples suggest.

According to our interpretation, the “intellect” in the definition should be understood as the human intellect, because the divine intellect is unable to feign anything.[31] Yet in the *Ethics* he clearly regards it as the infinite intellect. Therefore, we propose that at first the readers take the definition of attribute in the Cartesian sense, but the intellect referred to in the definition shifts from the finite one to the infinite one through the demonstration. And this transition is not problematic for Spinoza, since the adequate idea of attribute is the same in the finite and infinite intellects.

At first, the definition of attribute is understood in the Cartesian sense, because as we saw above, Spinoza’s demonstration utilizes the concept of substance consisting of one single attribute, or substance distinguished by its attribute. This is found in E1P5, concerning which Leibniz made his criticism.[32] This concept of a substance consisting of a single attribute is based on the Cartesian notion of attribute, since according to Descartes, for each substance that we perceive through an attribute, there is one principal attribute. It is with the aid of the Cartesian concept of attribute that the concept of a substance consisting of a single attribute can be conceived and used in the demonstration.

However, as the demonstration proceeds, it is proved that there is one infinite being defined as God, which consists of infinite attributes. This can be understood as a transition from substances consisting of a single attribute to the unique substance consisting of infinite attributes. As a result of the demonstration, we reach the unique and infinite being which Spinoza called *omne esse* in TIE. The proof of the existence of such a being reveals that this being exists exactly as defined. The transition from the “auxiliary lines”, the substance consisting of a single attribute, to the *omne esse*,

corresponds to the transition in meaning of the term *tanquam* from the subjective sense “as if” to “as (in fact).” Thus, the two points problematized in the subjectivist and objectivist (realist) interpretations of E1Def4 are not crucial in the understanding of attribute.

3.7 Intellect and Experience: Towards “Ontological Realism” [33]

As we have seen, the term used in the Definition of God, namely, “attribute” is not the cause of God. To put it in some other way, Spinoza successfully managed to define God without mentioning His cause and to form the concept of God in an a priori, synthetic order. According to Higuchi (2024: Ch.1) ‘s discussion based on Gueroult (1968), and as Spinoza himself writes in Letter 60, God’s definition is genetic- the definition expressing the internal efficient cause. The concept of God is not caused by the notion of attribute; rather it is “auxiliary lines” in a construction of the concept of God. Who would discuss that the circles are the causes of the equilateral triangle drawn in the middle of those two circles. They are no more than auxiliary figures used in construct an equilateral triangle.

Then some might wonder what God is. For we demonstrate the concept of God but they might think that this is an arm chair theory, conceived on an Ikea couch. To this question, Ueno (2024) clearly answers: even if it (= God or Substance) is nothing more than a construction in our mind, how could it be our real world? – it is ourselves that understand (intelligere) in the demonstration.

It is exact. In Ueno (2024), he proposes “ontological realism;”[34] according to which the *Ethics* asserts that what exists is God, not that God exists. I totally agree with this idea and am very inspired from this book; which makes me re-consider my theory on attribute. Then, what is needed for our discussion here is the one about reality.

In doing so, I argue that it is inevitable to mention (human)

“intellect,” about which Spinoza failed to define in TIE. We will argue that our intellect constructs the concept of God from so-to-say “nominal” definitions, i.e. the definitions that sets the meaning of the term by the author in the demonstration, and it is through the demonstration that we understand what our intellect is. In the *Ethics*, the intellect is of a significant importance. For instance, the third kind of knowledge, which is the very end that Spinoza wanted to achieve, is the intellectual love of God. Nonetheless, it is mysterious that the *Ethics* misses the definitions of intellect.

TIE left unfinished at the point that Spinoza attempted at defining the intellect. It is very natural. For one thing, Spinoza wanted to define created things from the cause and non-created things without cause. Thus, he needed to discuss the intellect without its cause. For another thing, what Spinoza wanted to do there and what he did there were contradictory. He wanted to define things in an a priori manner, but he, at the same time, tried to define the intellect through its properties. This could be one reason why Spinoza failed to accomplish TIE.

In following and doing the demonstration of the *Ethics*, we, the readers, will understand what the intellect is, which is “something” in the proposition cited below:

> E5P23 (Spinoza, 1985: 607): The human Mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the Body, but something of it remains which is eternal.

Thus, this makes it possible to attain the third kind of knowledge, which is felicity as Spinoza calls. To understand this, it is necessary to mention the experience of the demonstration. The focus is on Spinoza’s *Ethics* and how reading it can be an active, philosophical process. The act of reading the *Ethics* is equated with doing the demonstration laid out

by Spinoza, where ideas affirm other ideas, creating an active, personal experience for the reader. Rather than being a passive exercise, reading is seen as a present event where the reader engages with the text, making it part of their lived experience. This experience is not just theoretical, but is connected to real-life ethics, as the geometrically ordered demonstration in the *Ethics* is meant to inform how we live. The text suggests that through following the demonstration, readers move from a basic understanding (second kind of knowledge) to a deeper, adequate understanding (third kind of knowledge), which aligns with Spinoza's philosophy and his explanation in *Ethics* (E2P40S2). Thus, reading *Ethics* is a process that leads to a more profound, experiential knowledge of reality.

What we should note here is that through the act of reading the demonstration, we come to understand both the nature and power of the intellect. Our "demonstrative eyes" are essentially just our intellect. It's important to remember that Spinoza left his TIE unfinished, particularly the section defining the intellect. Ueno (2012) suggests that the definition of the intellect led to circular reasoning, while Matheron (1987) argues that Spinoza had to restructure his philosophy in a geometrical form after abandoning this treatise. Cartesian readers of Spinoza's earlier works struggled with his idea that the objective and formal essences of the intellect are equally related, which contributed to the unfinished nature of the treatise. While these points help explain why the work was left incomplete, it's clear that the intellect—our own demonstrative intellect—cannot be fully understood or clarified without experiencing the demonstration itself.

4. Conclusion

We have seen that an *a priori* demonstration of the existence of a *causa sui* from a genetic definition is problematic. The geometrical demonstration

avoids this difficulty by means of the concept of attributes. Whether *causa sui* is understood positively or negatively, the existence of a thing that is *causa sui* cannot be defined genetically. It was thus a problem how the existence of such a thing could be demonstrated. Concerning the problem of the definition of *causa sui*, Spinoza does not define God as *causa sui* in Definition 6, and as to the impossibility of demonstration of the *causa sui* existence, the concept of God, which involves necessary existence, is formed with the aid of the notion of attributes. In Letter 83 (Spinoza, 2016: 487), Spinoza says that “from the mere fact that I define God to be a Being to whose essence existence pertains, I infer many of his properties.” Obviously, Spinoza takes God as *causa sui*, but he does not use the definition of God as *causa sui* to prove His existence. For a demonstration starting with such a definition would lead to the aforementioned perplexities. Instead of defining God as *causa sui*, it was necessary to define Him in terms of attributes.

Spinoza’s definition of attributes and their role in understanding God involves significant philosophical complexities, including debates between subjectivist and objectivist interpretations. Subjectivists view attributes as constructs perceived by the finite intellect “as if” they constitute the essence of substance, while objectivists argue that attributes genuinely define the divine essence as perceived by the infinite intellect. This debate hinges on how terms like "tanquam" are interpreted and whether attributes are mental constructs or ontologically real. Both interpretations aim to reconcile the plurality of attributes with the simplicity of God, reflecting broader challenges in Spinoza's metaphysical framework.

Spinoza’s approach to defining God builds on Cartesian notions of substance and attributes but introduces innovative methods, such as using “auxiliary lines.” These constructs, inspired by geometric reasoning, enable Spinoza to conceptualize God as causa sui—a self-caused being with infinite

attributes. While attributes are not the true cause of God, they serve as intellectual tools that make His nature comprehensible. This method avoids the circularity of directly defining God as self-caused while maintaining a coherent, deductive structure in his demonstrations.

The genetic method Spinoza employs further highlights his attempt to construct an understanding of God systematically. By transitioning from substances with single attributes to the infinite substance of God, Spinoza redefines the role of the intellect, showing how finite perspectives evolve into a comprehension of the infinite. His framework integrates logical and causal structures, allowing for a unified understanding of God's essence. Critics, such as Leibniz, grappled with the notion of multiple attributes within a single substance, but Spinoza's geometric approach resolves these concerns by emphasizing the unity and interrelation of attributes within an infinite being.

Notes

1 Abbreviations used in this paper:

ST Short Treatise of God, Man, and his Well-Being

PPC Principia philosophiae cartesianae

TIE Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione

TTP Tractatus Theologico-Politicus

Ep Epistola

Abbreviations for referring to the *Ethics*

Ex Part x of the Ethics

Def Definition

A Axiom

P Proposition

Dem Demonstration

C Corollary

S Scholium

App Appendix

AT Descartes, René. *Œuvres de Descartes*.(Vol. 1-11) Edited by Charlie Adam & Pierre Tannery. Paris: Cerf, 1897-1909.

2 Marion (1986) points out an inconsistency among the three conceptions of God in Descartes' *Meditations* that derive from historical precedents such as Duns Scotus, Ockham, and Suarez: (1) God as infinite, (2) God as most perfect being, and (3) God as *causa sui*. His interpretation suggests that such an inconsistency among the multiple divine denominations hides the infinite, or God, from finite thoughts.

3(Descartes 1985 :34, AT: VII, p. 49)

4(Descartes 1985 :68, AT: VII, p.95)

5(Descartes 1985 :80, AT: VII, p.111)

6(Descartes 1985 :79, AT: VII, p.109)

7(Descartes 1985 :146-147, AT: VII, pp.208-209)

8(Descartes 1985 :148, AT: VII, p.210)

9(Descartes 1985 :149, AT: VII, p.212)

10(Nolan 2014 :143)

11As Descartes writes in the Fourth Meditation: "Those who follow the sole guidance of the natural light will in this context spontaneously form a concept of cause that is common to both an efficient and a formal cause: that is to say, what derives its existence 'from another' will be taken to derive its existence from that thing as an efficient cause, while what derives its existence 'from itself' will be taken to derive its existence from itself as a formal cause - that is, because it has the kind of essence which entails that it does not require an efficient cause." (Descartes 1985 :167, AT: VII, p.239)

12 PPC1Ax6: Existence—either possible or necessary—is contained in the idea, or concept, of every thing (see Descartes, Ax10). Necessary existence is contained in the concept of God, or a supremely perfect being; for otherwise he would be conceived as imperfect, which is contrary to what is supposed to be conceived.

Contingent or possible existence is contained in the concept of a limited thing.

13 TIE72 (Spinoza, 1985:32)

14 TIE72 (Spinoza, 1985: 32)

15 TIE72 (Spinoza, 1985: 32)

16 Spinoza only writes “I understand the efficient cause to be both internal and external.” According to the common understanding of this period, for instance according to Burgersdijk, the efficient cause is external. However, since Spinoza maintains that God has no outside, His efficient cause must be internal.

17 E2Def3: “By idea I understand a concept of the Mind that the Mind forms because it is a thinking thing.” (Spinoza, 1985: 447)

18 (Gueroult 1968 :141)

19 (Gueroult 1968 :142)

20 (Wolfson 1934 :146)

21 (Wolfson 1934 :142)

22 (Wolfson 1934 :154)

23 (Wolfson 1934 :156)

24(Gueroult 1968 :447)

25 Letter 35 maintains that one of the properties of the necessarily existing Being is “simple, and not composed of parts. For component parts must be prior in nature and knowledge to what is composed of them. In a being eternal by its nature this cannot be.”

26 (Leibniz 1969 :197)

27 (Leibniz 1969 : 200)

28 (Leibniz 1969 :200)

29 E2P34Dem (Spinoza, 1985: 472)

30 (Descartes 1985 vol. 1, :210 AT: VIII, pp.24-25)

31 Cf. TIE54 (Spinoza, 1985: 24) says “if there is a God, or something omniscient, he can feign nothing at all.”

32 According to Leibniz (1969), “I reply that there seems to be a concealed fallacy

here. For two substances can be distinguished by their attributes and still have some common attribute, provided they also have others peculiar to themselves in addition. For example, A may have the attributes c and d, and B the attributes d and e."

33 Ueno (2024 :112)

34 Ueno (2024: 112)

Literature

Primary Literature

Descartes, René. *Œuvres de Descartes*.(Vol. 1-11) Edited by Charlie Adam & Pierre Tannery. Paris: Cerf, 1897-1909.

----. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. (Vol. 1-3). translated by John Cottinghan, Robert Stoothoff & Dugald Murdoch. New York. NY: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Leibniz, Gottfried. W. *Philosophical Papers and Letters*. Edited by Leroy Loemker. Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1969.

Spinoza, Benedictus. d. *BARUCH DE SPINOZA OPERA*. Edited by Carl Gebhardt. Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925.

----. *The collected works of Spinoza: Volume I*. edited by Edwin Curley. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,1985.

----. *The collected works of Spinoza: Volume II*. edited by Edwin Curley. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,2016

Secondary Literature

Ariew, Roger, Des Chene, Dennis, Jesseph, Douglas. M., Schmaltz, Ted. M., & Verbeek, Theo. *Historical Dictionary of Descartes and Cartesian Philosophy* (Second Edition.). (Historical dictionaries of religions, philosophies, and movements; Historical dictionaries of religions, philosophies, and movements). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

Bunge, Wiep. v. *Spinoza past and present: Essays on spinoza, spinozism, and spinoza scholarship* (Brill's studies in intellectual history, v. 215). Boston: Brill, 2012.

Cottinghan, John. *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Della Rocca, Michael. *Representation and the Mind–Body Problem in Spinoza*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Dubouclez, Olivier. *Descartes et la voie de l'analyse* (1re éd.). (Épiméthée; Épiméthée). Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2013.

Higuchi, Tomoko. *Spinoza's Ethics: A recipe for God*. [Doctoral Thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam]. 2024.

Gueroult, Martial. *Spinoza Dieu (Ethique, I)*. Paris: Aubier-Montaigne,1968.

----. *Spinoza L'Ame (Ethique, II)*. Paris: Aubier-Montaigne. 1974.

Nolan, Lawrence. "The Third Meditation." In the *Cambridge Companion to Descartes' Meditations*, edited by David Cunning, 127-148. Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Matsuda, Katsunori. 近世哲学史点描 . Tokyo: Koro-sya, 2011.

Marion, Jean-Luc. "Entre analogie et principe de raison. " In *Descartes, objecter et repondre*, edited by Jean-Luc. Marion & Jean-Marie Beyssade, 305-336. Paris: PUF, 1992.

Melamed, Yitzhak. Y. "The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance, Attributes and Modes." In *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, edited by Michael Della Rocca, 84-113. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Mignini, Fillipo. "Fictio/ Verziering (e) in Spinoza's Early Writings." In *The Young Spinoza: A Metaphysician in the Making*, edited by Yitzhak. Melamed, kindle edition. Oxford University Press, 2015.

Shein, Noa. "The False Dichotomy between Objective and Subjective Interpretations of Spinoza's Theory of Attributes," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 17(3): 505–532, 2009.

----. "Spinoza's Theory of Attributes", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall

2013 Edition), (Edward N. Zalta Ed.), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/spinoza-attributes/, 2013.

Ueno, Osamu. スピノザ考 , Seido-sha, 2024.

Wolfson, Harry. A. *The Philosophy of Spinoza, Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934.

スピノザ『エチカ』における補助概念としての属性の変化する概念

樋口 朋子

本稿は、デカルトの esse a se ／ causa sui をめぐる論争（カテルス、アルノー）に対するスピノザの応答を手がかりに、『エチカ』の「属性」を実在的構成要素ではなく幾何学的作図における「補助線」として再解釈する。デカルトは神を肯定的意味での自己原因とみなし自己原因を擁護するが、アルノーは循環性を指摘する。本稿は、この難点を避けるためにスピノザが採る「生成的定義」―定義が内在的起生因を表現し、そこから諸性質を導出する作法―に注目し、書簡 60 の円の定義のアナロジーを用いて、概念形成としての因果を読み替える必要を示す。次に、Gueroult（1968）の区分に従って第 1 部定理 5–10 を検討し、現実には存在しない「単一属性の実体」という想定が、定理 6–8 を導くための作図線として働き、定理 9–10 で無限属性の唯一実体（神）へと対象が移行する手順を復元する。これにより、神の単純性と属性の多数性は、実在の分割ではなく読者の理解を導く補助線の操作として両立する、と結論づける。すなわち、「属性＝補助線」解釈によって、定義上の自己原因の循環を回避しつつ、神の必然的存在と内在因の秩序をア・プリオリに構成しうること、そして読解＝証明の経験が実在理解を深化させることを示す。

Keywords : Spinoza, Ethics, Philosophical method, Early modern philosophy, Attribute

©Tomoko HIGUCHI 2026