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Hegel, Spinoza, and McTaggart on the Reality of Time

“Nun haben die Sirenen eine noch schrecklichere Waffe als den Gesang, nämlich ihr Schweigen”¹

Abstract. *In this paper, I study one aspect of the philosophical encounter between Spinoza and Hegel: the question of the reality of time. The precise reconstruction of the debate will require a close examination of Spinoza’s concept of tempus (time) and duratio (duration), and Hegel’s understanding of these notions. Following a presentation of Hegel’s perception of Spinoza as a modern Eleatic, who denies the reality of time, change and plurality, I turn, in the second part, to look closely at Spinoza’s text and show that Hegel was wrong in reading Spinoza as denying the reality of duration and change. Ironically, Hegel’s misreading of Spinoza as denying the reality of duration and change has been compensated for by a reading of Hegel as denying the reality of time by one of Hegel’s most prominent followers, John Ellis McTaggart. I discuss McTaggart’s reading of Hegel’s Logic in the final part of the paper.*

In diesem Aufsatz wird ein Aspekt der philosophischen Auseinandersetzung von Spinoza und Hegel studiert: die Frage der Realität der Zeit. Die präzise Rekonstruktion benötigt eine Betrachtung von Spinozas Begriffen „Zeit“ (tempus) und „Dauer“ (duratio) und von Hegels Verständnis dieser Begriffe. Hegels These folgend, dass Spinoza ein moderner Eleate ist, der die Realität von Zeit, Veränderung und Vielfalt leugnet, wird im zweiten Teil anhand von Spinozas Text gezeigt, dass Hegel unrecht in der Behauptung hat, dass Spinoza die Realität von Dauer und Veränderung leugnet. Ironischer Weise wird die Spinoza fälschlicher Weise zugeschriebene These der Leugnung von Dauer und Veränderung von einem seiner Nachfolger Hegel selbst unterstellt, nämlich von John Ellis McTaggart. Hiermit beschäftigt sich der letzte Teil des Aufsatzes.

¹ “Now the Sirens have a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely their silence” (Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes*, pp. 88–89).

Introduction

Hegel's numerous discussions of Spinoza are usually highly sympathetic and appreciative. This of course does not mean that he was free from common European prejudices of his day and that he did not associate Spinoza with a fictional "Orient,"² i.e., another "night in which all cows" – Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist – "are black." But Hegel's cultural and religious prejudices are not the subject of this paper.³

Two clear indications of Hegel's high regard for Spinoza are the fact that he allots to Spinoza one of the longest and most detailed discussions in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, and his astounding pronouncement that "thought must begin by placing itself at the standpoint of Spinozism; to be a follower of Spinoza is the essential commencement of all philosophy."⁴ Hegel is also quite generous toward Spinoza in setting a pretty high bar for any adequate refutation of Spinoza:

Effective [*wahrhafte*] refutation [of Spinozism] must infiltrate the opponents' stronghold and meet him on his own ground [...]. The only possible refutation of Spinozism can only consist, therefore, in first acknowledging its standpoint as essential and necessary

2 See, for example, Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, p. 252: "The profound unity of [Spinoza's] philosophy as it finds its expression in Europe [...] all this is an echo from Eastern lands." Cf. *Encyclopedia Logic*, § 151, Addition, and *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, p. 253: "It was no arbitrary choice that led [Spinoza] to occupy himself with light, for it represents in the material sphere *the absolute identity which forms the foundation of the Oriental view of things.*" Italics added. I would like to thank Dina Emundts, Eckart Förster, Zach Gartenberg, and Sally Sedgwick for their most helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. An early version of the paper was presented at the 2017 meeting of the Hegel Society of Great Britain at Oxford University, and I would like to thank the audience for their questions and comments. I am particularly indebted to Bob Stern and Stephen Houlgate for helpful conversations after my talk.

3 In passing, let me note that Spinoza himself was not free from similar prejudices. See, for example, his remark about Islam in the preface to the *Theological Political Treatise* (III/7/4). Unless otherwise marked, all quotes from Spinoza's works and letters are from Curley's translation. I have relied on Gebhardt's critical edition (cited by volume/page/line) for the Latin and Dutch text of Spinoza. I use the following standard abbreviations for Spinoza's works: CM – *Metaphysical Thoughts* [*Cogitata Metaphysica*], KV – *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being* [*Korte Verhandeling van God de Mensch en deszelfs Welstand*], Ep. – *Letters*.

4 Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, p. 257. This praise is, in part, double-edged; Spinoza is indeed where philosophy should begin, yet in order to unfold, it must go beyond Spinoza.

and then [secondly, in] raising it to a higher standpoint on the strength of its own resources [daß aber zweitens dieser Standpunkt aus sich selbst auf den höheren gehoben werde].⁵

Hegel's requirement to meet the opponent on his own ground sets a high standard for philosophical polemics. We can, for example, envision a more modest criterion according to which both sides of the debate must establish a commonly agreed upon set of ground rules for the debate.⁶ However, as we will shortly see, it is questionable whether Hegel observed even this more modest criterion for philosophical polemics.

The current paper will focus on only one aspect of the philosophical encounter between Spinoza and Hegel: the question of the reality of time.⁷ The precise reconstruction of the debate will require a close examination of Spinoza's concept of *tempus* (time) and *duratio* (duration), and Hegel's understanding of these notions. As we shall shortly see, '*tempus*,' for Spinoza, does not mean precisely what we (and, may I hint, Hegel) mean by this term.

In the first part of the paper, I will present and discuss Hegel's perception of Spinoza as a modern Eleatic, who denies the reality of time, change and plurality. The issue of the reality of time and change in Spinoza is central to Hegel's reading of Spinoza, as it undergirds his claim that Spinoza's system lacks life and is incapable of advancing beyond the absolute unity of being. In the second part, I will look closely at some of Spinoza's texts (especially his celebrated "Letter on the Infinite"), and show that Hegel was wrong in reading Spinoza as denying the reality of duration and change. I will also point out the passages that may have led Hegel (and others) to this erroneous conclusion. Ironically, Hegel's misreading of Spinoza as denying the reality of duration and change has been compensated for by a reading of Hegel as denying the reality of time by one of Hegel's most prominent followers, John Ellis McTaggart. In the third and final section, I will discuss McTaggart's reading of Hegel as relegating time and temporality to the less fundamental layers of reality.

⁵ Hegel, *Science of Logic* (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 12), p. 15.

⁶ For a very elegant illustration of this second attitude, see Hawley, "Identity and Discernibility."

⁷ I discuss another aspect of Hegel's reading of Spinoza as an acosmist, i.e., the reality of modes, in my "Acosmism or Weak Individuals?"

1 Hegel on Spinoza's Eleaticism

The historical location of Spinoza in the early modern period does not fit well within the context of Hegel's scheme of the unfolding of the history of philosophy. Truly, says Hegel, Spinoza does not belong to the modern world, which is constituted by the appreciation of the individual "through the agency of Christianity."⁸ Spinoza, in contrast, has no place for individuality, and his philosophy is nothing but an impressive, yet anachronistic, reappearance of ancient Eleatic monism.

Taken as a whole this constitutes the Idea of Spinoza, and it is just what was 'τὸ ὄν' to the Eleatics [...]. Spinoza is far from having proved this unity as convincingly as was done by the ancients; but what constitutes the grandeur of Spinoza's manner of thought is that he is able to renounce all that is determinate and particular, and restrict himself to the One, giving heed to this alone.⁹

The view of Spinoza as a *modern Eleatic* (a paradoxical term for Hegel) appears also in Hegel's *Science of Logic*:

The being of the Eleatics or the Spinozistic substance are only the abstract negations of all determinateness, without ideality being posited in them – in the case of Spinoza [...] infinity is only the absolute affirmation of a thing, consequently *only the unmoved* unity.¹⁰

This last, brief extract may perhaps provide us with some insight into Hegel's reasons for viewing Spinoza as denying the reality of movement and particularity (i.e. the reason for the affirmation of "*only the unmoved* unity"). At the beginning of the *Ethics*, Spinoza notes that "being finite is really, in part, a negation and being infinite is an absolute affirmation of the existence of some nature."¹¹ What Spinoza presumably had in mind by this claim is that whenever we refer to any given x as *finite*, we thereby deny some existence (the existence of whatever is *not* x) of x .¹² In other words, in order for an existing thing x to be limited, it must be limited by another *existing* thing; it cannot be limited by that which

⁸ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, p. 258.

⁹ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, pp. 257–258.

¹⁰ Hegel, *Science of Logic* (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 21), p. 148. Italics added.

¹¹ *Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 8, Schol. 1: "[Cum] finitum esse revera sit ex parte negatio, et infinitum absoluta affirmatio existentiae alicujus naturae."

¹² See *Ethics*, Part I, Def. 2: "That thing is said to be finite in its own kind that can be limited by another of the same nature."

does not exist.¹³ This claim of Spinoza is the closest he comes to asserting the “*determinatio negatio est*” formula in the *Ethics*.¹⁴ Hegel admired this formula, and thought that Spinoza did not properly appreciate the importance of his own finding.¹⁵ In the above short extract from the *Science of Logic*, Hegel seems to reason that insofar as Spinoza’s God is absolutely infinite, it cannot be limited (a valid inference which Spinoza clearly affirms), and that Spinoza would have to deny that God has, or can have, any genuine determinations or qualities (a conclusion that Spinoza would reject).¹⁶ Were the Spinozist God to have attribute *y* – Hegel presumably reasoned – this would thereby deprive God of whatever existence that is *not y*. From the claim that God has no genuine determinations, Hegel seems to infer that Spinoza’s God is unmoving or unchanging, insofar as change is movement from one determination to another.¹⁷

Now, Spinoza, of course, adheres to the Law of Non-Contradiction and would readily agree that neither God, nor any other being, may be the subject of both *y* and *not-y*. But he would deny that because God has one attribute, say extension, it cannot have any other attribute. After all, Spinoza defines God as a substance consisting of *infinitely many* attributes (*Ethics*, Part I, Def. 6). For Spinoza, each attribute is conceptually and causally independent of all other attributes,¹⁸ and his construal of the conceptual barrier between the attributes is so robust that it precludes even a *negative* conceptual relation among the attribute, i.e., the instantiation of attribute *x* in God (or any other pre-

13 Moreover, it must be limited by something which shares its nature (*Ethics*, Part I, Def. 2).

14 The “*determinatio negatio est*” formula appears in Ep. 50 of Spinoza (IV/240/14).

15 Hegel, *Lecture on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, pp. 286–287. For a detailed discussion of the “*determinatio negatio est*” formula and its meaning in Spinoza and Hegel, see Melamed, “*Omnis determinatio est negatio*.”

16 The core issue at stake is how one understands the “*determinatio negatio est*” formula. In my, “*Omnis determinatio est negatio*,” I spell out Hegel’s and Spinoza’s opposed interpretations of this formula.

17 For Hegel, the determinations of attributes and modes are merely artificially inserted into Spinoza’s system, without showing how the concept of God, or the substance, unfolds into its opposite determinations. Hegel is right in criticizing Spinoza for not proving adequately that Extension and Thought are attributes. However, the main engine of Hegel’s logic – the unfolding through self-negation and sublation – could not be accepted by Spinoza due to his strict adherence to the Law of Non-Contradiction.

18 See *Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 10: “Each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself,” and *Ethics*, Part II, Prop. 6: “The modes of each attribute have God for their cause only insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute.”

sumptive substance) cannot provide a reason for the non-instantiation of any other attribute, *y*, in the same substance.¹⁹

The second definition of Part One of the *Ethics* reads: “That thing is said to be finite in its own kind that can be limited by another of the same nature.” Had Spinoza affirmed that the attributes share some common kind, or nature, Hegel would be right to insist that diverse attributes limit each other, and that as a result Spinoza must renounce ascribing any determinations to God. As far as I know, Spinoza never provided a definition of what constitutes a genuine kind [*genus*] or nature. Yet, the foundations of his ontology leave no room for the existence of a meta-nature, shared by all the attributes: were the attributes to share any genuine common nature, this common nature would allow us to (partly) conceive one attribute through another, and the conceptual barrier between the attributes would collapse.²⁰

Hegel’s view of Spinoza as a modern Eleatic is not merely a critique, as he expresses genuine admiration of what he takes to be Spinoza’s position:

Spinoza makes the sublime demand on thought that it *consider everything under the form of eternity, sub specie aeterni*, that is, as it is in the absolute. But in an absolute which is only an *unmoved* identity, the attribute, like the mode, is only as *disappearing*, not as *becoming*.²¹

For Hegel, Spinoza’s ability to gaze at things *sub specie aeternitatis* is truly sublime. There is no doubt to my mind that for Hegel – just as for many other deep thinkers – the Sirens of Elea proved to be highly seductive.²² Perhaps for this reason he felt the need to constantly remind his readers (and himself) that Spinoza’s alleged denial of change and becoming is one-sided, and must be corrected so as to allow for genuine life, change, and multiplicity.²³

Before we turn to examine Spinoza’s actual views on the reality of change and temporality, let me note briefly that Hegel’s view of Spinoza as a modern El-

¹⁹ See Della Rocca, “Spinoza’s Substance Monism,” pp. 28–29.

²⁰ This investigation can be pushed further by raising the objection that in *Ethics*, Part I, Def. 6, Exp. Spinoza asserts that of something that is merely infinite in its own kind (i. e., the attributes) “we can deny infinite attributes from it” (presumably, all the other attributes). I have to reserve this exploration for another occasion, as it would take us aside from our main topic.

²¹ Hegel, *Science of Logic (Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 11), p. 377.

²² See McTaggart, “Unreality of Time,” p. 457: “In all ages the belief in the unreality of time has proved singularly attractive.”

²³ For further texts in which Hegel describes Spinoza as denying the reality of becoming and change, see *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, pp. 288–289, 515–516, and *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, pp. 142–144.

eatic was developed partly in response to Jacobi's assertion that "in Spinoza duration [*Dauer*] is mere illusion [*Wahn*]."²⁴ In his early essay, *Faith and Knowledge* (1802–1803), Hegel expresses astonishment at Jacobi's attempt to refute Spinoza by (Jacobi's) showing that Spinoza's version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason does not allow for the reality of time.²⁵ With such a "refutation," claims Hegel, Jacobi was just bursting through an open door.

The doctrine of the absolute *simul* [*Das absolute Zugleich*], the doctrine that God is not the transient [*vorübergehende*] cause, but the eternal cause of things, and that things outside God [*außer Gott*]²⁶ are nothing in themselves, and hence *things in time and time itself are nothing* – every line of Spinoza's system makes the proposition that time and succession [*Zeit und Succession*] are mere appearance so utterly trivial that not the slightest trace of novelty and paradox is to be seen in it. Jacobi cites Spinoza's conviction that "everything must be considered solely *secundum modum quo a rebus aeternis fluit* [according to the mode in which it flows from eternal things]" and that "time, measure, number must be considered as kinds of idea abstracted from this mode, and hence, as entities of the imagination [*Wesen der Einbildung*]."²⁷ So how could the proposition that succession is mere appearance not belong to Spinoza?²⁸

The passage that both Jacobi and Hegel refer to appears in Spinoza's celebrated "Letter on the Infinite," and the precise explanation of this very passage will be our primary task in the next part of the paper. We will begin, however, with a brief explication of the *Ethics*' definitions of eternity [*aeternitas*] and duration [*duratio*].

2 Spinoza on *Aeternitas*, *Duratio*, and *Tempus*.

At the beginning of Parts One and Two of the *Ethics*, Spinoza presents the following definitions of eternity and duration:

Ethics, Part I, Def. 8: By ETERNITY I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing.

Exp.: For such existence, like the essence of a thing, is conceived as an eternal truth, and on that account cannot be explicated by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived

²⁴ Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 188 (Jacobi, *Werke*, I/1, p. 20).

²⁵ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 106.

²⁶ Trivially, for Spinoza, "things outside God" are nothing, since "Whatever is, is in God" (*Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 15).

²⁷ Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 371 (Jacobi, *Werke*, I/1, p. 257), cf. p. 290.

²⁸ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 106 (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4, p. 353–354). Italics added.

to be without beginning or end [proptereaque per durationem, aut tempus explicari non potest, tametsi duratio principio, et fine carere concipiatur].²⁹

Ethics, Part II, Def. 5: DURATION is an indefinite continuation of existence [*Duratio est indefinita existendi continuatio*].

Exp.: I say indefinite because it cannot be determined at all through the very nature of the existing thing, nor even by the efficient cause, which necessarily posits the existence of the thing, and does not take it away.

In earlier studies, I have argued that, for Spinoza, (divine) eternity has little to do with any kind of temporality – not even Platonic atemporality – but that it is in fact a *modal* notion: the necessity (or necessary existence) of *that which exists solely by virtue of its essence*.³⁰ For Spinoza, all things – the porcupine and my idea of the porcupine included – exist by necessity, but it is only God whose necessary existence is due to its essence, while the porcupine and my idea of the porcupine exist necessarily by virtue of their external causes.³¹ Eternity in this strict sense of *self-necessitated* existence belongs only to God (and its attributes³²). Yet, Spinoza is willing to use ‘eternity’ in a second and weaker sense – which denotes infinite duration – as long as we take care to ascribe this kind of second-best eternity *only* to modes, and not to God.³³

In sharp contrast to eternity, duration is the existence of things which exist *not* by virtue of their essence (or what is the same: their nature), but rather by virtue of their efficient cause. Spinoza makes this point in the *explicatio* of the definition of duration, and adds that the efficient cause of a mode “necessarily posits the existence of the thing, and does not take it away.” This last claim is closely related to Spinoza’s *conatus* doctrine, according to which the essence of modes makes them always strive to persevere in their being, and that the essence of modes cannot cause their destruction. Therefore, the destruction (i.e., the termination of their duration) can only result from their encounter with external causes.³⁴

²⁹ Italics added.

³⁰ See Melamed, “Spinoza’s Deification of Existence,” and “Eternity in Early Modern Philosophy,” pp. 149–163.

³¹ See *Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 33, Schol. 1: “A thing is called necessary either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause. For a thing’s existence follows necessarily either from its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause” (II/74/6–8). Cf. Garrett, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism.”

³² See *Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 19.

³³ See CM I.10 (I/270/17–25). Cf. Melamed, “Eternity in Early Modern Philosophy,” pp. 160–161.

³⁴ See *Ethics*, Part III, Props. 4–6. As far as I can see, the *conatus* doctrine does not apply to God, insofar as the existence of God is his essence. Thus, to say that God strives to persevere in

Spinoza does not define ‘*tempus*’ in the *Ethics*, yet we can point out as a clear pattern that most, if not all, of the mentions of ‘*tempus*’ in the *Ethics* are in the context of the activity of the imagination, which for Spinoza constitutes the lower kind of cognition, and the only source of inadequate ideas.³⁵ We find a more detailed analysis of time and temporality in Spinoza’s celebrated “Letter on the Infinite.”

The “Letter of the Infinite” is a fascinating, yet dense, text in which Spinoza unfolds the outlines of his ontology in the course of explaining his “discoveries about the Infinite.”³⁶ Though the letter is quite early (dated April 20th, 1663), it is a crucial source for understanding Spinoza’s metaphysical theory even in his very late period, as we know that Spinoza circulated copies of this letter among friends even in his late period.³⁷ We have no evidence of a similar attitude by Spinoza toward any other letter, and it is thus no surprise that both Jacobi and Hegel were deeply intrigued by this letter.³⁸

Spinoza begins the letter by drawing three distinctions regarding the infinite: (1) between that which is infinite by virtue of its essence and that which is infinite by virtue of its cause; (2) between that which has no limit and that which cannot be equated with any number, though we know its maximum and minimum; and finally, (3) between “what we can only understand, but not imagine, and what we can also imagine.”³⁹ It is the latter distinction that will interest us primarily here.

being is just like saying that the number two “strives to be an even number.” In Propositions 8 and 9 of Part III, Spinoza makes clear that the striving of each thing involves indefinite duration (or time) which is the kind of existence of modes, but not of God.

35 See, for example, *Ethics*, Part II, Prop. 44, Schol. (II/125/26 and 126/5). In *Ethics*, Part II, Prop. 17, Cor. Spinoza explains the generation of our notion of the *present* as the work of the imagination (II/105/20). For Spinoza’s distinction between the three kinds of cognition, see *Ethics*, Part II, Prop. 40, Schol. 2.

36 Ep. 12 (IV/52/25).

37 See Eps. 81 (IV/331/10) and 81 (IV/332/7). Currently, we have three variants of the Letter on the Infinite: the version which appeared in Spinoza’s 1677 *Opera Posthuma*, a Dutch version which was part of the *Nagelate Schriften*, the early Dutch translation of Spinoza’s works which appeared simultaneously with the *Opera Posthuma*, and finally, a copy of the letter made by Leibniz.

38 For Jacobi’s discussion of the letter, see *Main Philosophical Writings*, pp. 217 n. 28 and 371 (Jacobi, *Werke*, I/1, pp. 94 n. 1 and 254). Hegel discusses the letter quite extensively. See, for example, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, pp. 261–263; *Science of Logic (Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 21), p. 247; *Encyclopedia Logic*, § 104, Addition 2; *Faith & Knowledge*, pp. 106–112.

39 Ep. 12 (IV/53/2–9). Presumably, the three distinctions are *not* orthogonal, i.e., they divide reality along the same lines (though this is not absolutely clear).

Following the three distinctions, Spinoza introduces the key terminology of his ontology. We will focus on his distinction between substance and mode, and between eternity and duration.

I call the Affections of Substance Modes. Their definition, insofar as it is not the very definition of Substance [*quatenus non est ipsa substantiae definitio*], cannot involve any existence. So even though they exist, we can conceive them as not existing. From this it follows that when we attend only to the essence of modes, and not to the order of the whole of Nature, we cannot infer from the fact that they exist now that they will or will not exist later, or that they have or have not existed earlier. From this it is clear that we conceive the existence of Substance to be entirely different from the existence of Modes.

The difference between Eternity and Duration arises from this. For it is only of Modes that we can explicate⁴⁰ the existence by Duration. But [we can explicate the existence] of Substance by Eternity, i.e., the infinite enjoyment of existing, *or* (in bad Latin) of being.⁴¹

Two observations are in order here. Firstly, the passage suggests a clear bifurcation between the existence of modes and that of substance, and it is this bifurcation which is the ground of the difference between eternity and duration. The substance's essence involves existence and thus substance is eternal. In contrast, the essence of modes does not involve existence, and thus their manner of existence is durational rather than eternal. Secondly, upon a closer reading, the distinction between substance and modes appears somewhat subtler. Notice that at the beginning of the passage Spinoza seems to qualify the claim that the definition of modes does not involve existence by noting that this is so "insofar as [the definition of mode] is *not* the very definition of substance." Does this qualification imply that if we were to define or conceive the modes *through the very definition* (or essence) of substance, their essence would involve existence? At this point, I would leave this possibility as a mere suggestion. Shortly, we will see that in the *Ethics*, Spinoza claims just that.

Let us turn now to the passage in the "Letter on the Infinite" which appears, *prima facie*, to strongly support the reading of Spinoza as denying the reality of modes, and thus also duration.

But if you ask why we are so inclined, by a natural impulse, to divide extended substance, I reply that we conceive quantity in two ways: either abstractly, *or* superficially, as we have it

⁴⁰ I amend here Curley's translation of "*explicare*" as "explain," since it seems that Spinoza is not looking here for the causes which explain existence (the cause of the existence of a mode is another mode, not "duration"), but rather addresses the two opposite manners of explicating, or spelling out, existence.

⁴¹ Ep. 12 (IV/54/9–55/3). Italics added.

in the imagination with the aid of the senses; or as substance, which is done by the intellect alone. So, if we attend to quantity as it is in the imagination, which is what we do most often and most easily, we find it to be divisible, finite, composed of parts, and one of many. But if we attend to it as it is in the intellect, and perceive the thing as it is in itself, which is very difficult, then we find it to be infinite, indivisible and unique, as I have already demonstrated sufficiently to you before now.⁴²

For Spinoza, divisibility pertains to modes, and modes only: substance is indivisible.⁴³ In arguing that when quantity is conceived by the *intellect* it is conceived as an infinite, indivisible, and unique substance, while the *imagination* conceives quantity as divisible, finite, and composed of parts, Spinoza seems to affirm that modes, insofar as they are divisible, are merely cognitions of the imagination. Since the imagination, for Spinoza, is the source of inadequate cognition, it would seem that by their very nature modes are the result of inadequate and false cognition.⁴⁴

The last conclusion, arguably, was reached somewhat too fast. Recall that at the beginning of the “Letter on the Infinite” Spinoza draws a distinction “between what we can only understand, but not imagine, and what we can *also* imagine.” The passage we just discussed makes clear that substance is “what we can only understand, but not imagine,”⁴⁵ but what are the things which we can *both* understand *and* imagine? Are they not the modes? Indeed, if we look again at the long passage just quoted, we would see that while the passage states that the substance is conceived by the intellect, it *does not* exclude the possibility of conceiving modes by the intellect as well. In order to confirm the claim that modes can be conceived either by the imagination or the intellect, let us turn to the immediately succeeding passage in the same letter.

Next, from the fact that when we conceive Quantity abstracted from Substance and *separate Duration from the way it flows from eternal things* [*quo a rebus aeternis fluit, separamus*], we can determine them as we please, there arise Time [*Tempus*] and Measure [*Mensura*].

⁴² Ep. 12 (IV/56/5–15).

⁴³ See *Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 12, Prop. 13, Prop. 15, Schol. (II/59/34) and KV I.2 (I/26/8–16). Cf. Melamed, “Spinoza’s Mereology,” § 2. The passage above does not explicitly refer to modes, but since it contrasts the conception of quantity as divisible with the conception of quantity as substance, it would seem that the former conception of quantity is *qua* modes.

⁴⁴ This point is spelled out elegantly in Della Rocca (“Review of Melamed,” p. 296): “Since division is a function of the imagination, and since, for Spinoza, the imagination is the domain of inadequate, confused and not true ideas, it seems that to see reality in terms of divisible modes is, for Spinoza, to fail to grasp the way the world really is.”

⁴⁵ Were we to imagine substance, we would perceive it as divisible, but since substance by its nature is indivisible, this would not be possible.

surā] – Time to determine Duration and Measure to determine Quantity in such a way that, so far as possible, we imagine them easily. Again, *from the fact that we separate the Affections of Substance from Substance itself [quòd Affectiones Substantiae ab ipsa Substantiā separamus]* and reduce them to classes so that as far as possible we imagine them easily, arises Number, by which we determine [these affections of substance]. You can see clearly from what I have said that Measure, Time, and Number are nothing but Modes of thinking, or rather, of imagining.⁴⁶

Measure, time, and number are for Spinoza nothing but *entia rationis*, or rather, auxiliaries of the imagination [*imaginationis auxiliis*].⁴⁷ They are useful fictions which help us navigate the world, but they are also misleading notions which appear to us as belonging to the real furniture of the world, while truly they are mere abstractions. In the passage above, Spinoza describes the abstraction process through which these notions are generated.

The first step in this abstraction process is “separating Duration from the way it flows from eternal things.”⁴⁸ This assertion alone provides very strong evidence for the reality of *duration* (though not time) in Spinoza. Spinoza does not claim that “duration is *conceived as following from eternal things*” in which case we could still wonder whether this conception is adequate or not, but rather simply and categorically asserts that duration *flows from eternal things*.⁴⁹ Moreover, the process of separating duration from its ground in eternity is described in this passage as *equivalent to abstraction*, an activity typical of the imagination. This confirms again that truly (i.e., without the abstraction performed by the imagination), duration is tightly grounded in eternity, and thus must be real.

The passage continues by describing the manner in which *tempus* “arises” to determine duration (*after* it has been separated from eternity) as analogous to the rise of Measure to determine quantity. Presumably, *tempus*, for Spinoza, is

⁴⁶ Ep. 12 (IV/56/16–57/6). Italics added.

⁴⁷ Ep. 12 (IV/57/18 and 58/17). On Spinoza’s view of mathematics as a systematic science of non-entities, see Melamed, “The Exact Science of Non-Beings.”

⁴⁸ By “eternal things,” in plural, Spinoza refers here to *natura naturans*, or the realm of the infinitely many attributes. At the time of Ep. 12, the distinction between God and its attributes had not been fully developed, as is attested by the fact that the crucial distinction between “absolute infinity” and “infinity in its own kind” is not mentioned at all in this letter, whose main subject is the infinite. The term ‘attribute’ is not at all mentioned in this letter as well.

⁴⁹ The relation of flowing from, or following from, is just the kind of causation Spinoza calls “immanent causation.” It is the sub-species of efficient causation which obtains when the effect inheres in the cause. Cf. Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, pp. 61–66 and 121–122.

just duration measured by days, years, seconds, and other units.⁵⁰ The measure of duration helps us imagine it much more easily. Yet, if we reify durational units and treat them as real beings, we engage in fictional ontology. In this sense, Jacobi's and Hegel's claims that time is a mere fiction in Spinoza are trivially true, provided that we make it clear that the fictivity of *tempus* may well leave duration (and change) real. In other words, Jacobi and Hegel seem to be equivocating in their use of the term 'time [Zeit]' between the sense Spinoza ascribes to '*tempus*' (i.e., measured, abstracted duration), and the more frequent sense of the term as we normally use it. In order to establish that Spinoza denied the reality of *time in the latter sense*, Jacobi and Hegel should have shown that not only *tempus*, but also *duratio*, are imaginary for Spinoza. Alas, as we have just observed, this very paragraph of the "Letter on the Infinite" asserts that duration is part of the real furniture of the world, insofar as it flows from eternity.

Further support for the claim that Spinoza's modes are real comes from the penultimate sentence in the last quote from the "Letter on the Infinite." The sentence describes the manner in which the imagination generates our conception of *number*. First, "we *separate* the Affections of Substance from Substance itself." Thus, we have here a clear confirmation that without the separating activity of the imagination, *modes are truly in the substance*, and thus are real. In the second step in the production of our conception of number, the imagination arranges the (abstracted) modes in classes ("human beings, "rhinos," "things," etc.). Numbers allow us to greatly compress the detailed information we experience about each abstracted item by simply describing the class as "x number of ϕ things" (e.g., "seven penguins").

That modes and change are truly inseparable from substance (and thus that both are real) we can see also from another passage in the "Letter on the Infinite" in which Spinoza argues that if one conceives the extended substance without any motion, "*he will certainly be striving for nothing but depriving [privare] corporeal Substance (which we cannot conceive except as existing) of its Affections and bringing it about that it does not have the nature which it has.*"⁵¹ The argument in this last passage is a certain variant of *modus tollens*. Insofar as the modes (and motion) follow *necessarily* from the nature of substance,⁵² were the modes not to be instantiated (or even, were different modes instantiated), the substance's nature would have to be other than how it actually is (since

⁵⁰ Unlike Descartes, who follows Aristotle in defining *tempus* as the measure of movement, Spinoza defines *tempus* as the measure of duration. See Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I.57 (AT VIII A; CSM I, p. 212).

⁵¹ Ep. 12 (IV/60/13–15). Italics added.

⁵² See *Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 16 and its demonstration.

from the actual nature of substance, the actual modes must necessarily follow).⁵³ Now, for Spinoza, the nature (or essence) of substance is absolutely necessary. Therefore, the actual modes cannot fail to exist. Note further that in the sentence above Spinoza refers to the possibility of not having the actual modes, as “*depriving* substance of *its* affections,” which again stresses that the affections (and their motion) truly belong to substance.

At the beginning of our discussion of the “Letter on the Infinite,” I raised the suggestion that even the modes might be in some sense eternal, if we conceive them through “the very definition of substance.” This suggestion is confirmed by two key passages in the *Ethics*.

The first passage appears in the Scholium to Proposition 45 of Part II of the *Ethics*. Proposition 45 asserts that each idea of *each singular thing* (i. e. mode) involves God’s eternal and infinite essence. Following the demonstration of this proposition, Spinoza notes:

By existence here I do not understand duration, i. e., existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly, and as a certain species of quantity.⁵⁴ For I am speaking of the very nature of existence, which is attributed to singular things because infinitely many things follow from the eternal necessity of God’s nature in infinitely many modes (see Part I, Prop. 16). *I am speaking, I say, of the very existence of singular things insofar as they are in God.* For even if each one is determined by another singular thing to exist in a certain way, still the force by which each one perseveres in existing follows from the eternal necessity of God’s nature.

The topic of the passage is the *existence* of singular things, i. e., modes. Notice Spinoza’s insistence that he is speaking here not of duration but rather “of the very nature of existence,” i. e., of the innermost kind of existence, which is clearly eternity. Modes can be conceived as eternal once we consider them, not as in any way independent, but rather “as they are *in God*.” When we conceive of modes in this manner, we really conceive of God, and God’s existence is eternity. Thus, conceived or defined by the very definition of substance, the modes are eternal.

The second passage appears in the context of Spinoza’s discussion of mind and eternity at the end of the *Ethics*. In Proposition 30 of Part V, Spinoza provides an example of a conception of a certain mode – the human mind – “insofar as it is in God.”

⁵³ Spinoza presents a very similar argument in *Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 33, demonstration.

⁵⁴ Existence conceived “as a certain species of quantity” is, in fact, *tempus*. Recall that Spinoza defines duration as an “*indefinite* continuation of existence” (*Ethics*, Part II, Def. 5; italics added).

Insofar as our Mind knows itself and the Body under a species of eternity, it necessarily has knowledge of God, and knows that it is in God and is conceived through God.

Demonstration: Eternity is the very essence of God insofar as this involves necessary existence (by Part I, Def. 8). To conceive things under a species of eternity, therefore, is to conceive things *insofar as they are conceived through God's essence, as real beings, or insofar as through God's essence they involve existence*. Hence, insofar as our Mind conceives itself and the Body under a species of eternity, it necessarily has knowledge of God, and knows, etc., q.e.d.⁵⁵

Notice the phrase in italics in the demonstration. When we conceive a mode – here, the human mind – through God's essence, the mode is really defined by the definition of substance, and *to that extent* the mode involves existence, i. e., it is eternal.

Let us provide a tentative summary. In this part of the paper, we have scrutinized Spinoza's claims about the reality of duration and modes. I have argued that, upon close examination, both the "Letter on the Infinite" and the *Ethics* affirm the reality of duration and modes. Hegel and Jacobi were trivially right in claiming that for Spinoza *tempus* is imaginary, but this claim is far from establishing the unreality of change, plurality, and duration in Spinoza.

3 Hegel, McTaggart and the Reality of Time (or Spinoza's Long Arm)

At least at first sight, Hegel appears to be the philosopher one could hardly suspect of denying the reality of time. History – both world history and, even more so, the history of philosophy – plays an absolutely central role in his system. In his philosophy of nature, time itself is presented by Hegel as one of the most important manifestations of the Concept.⁵⁶ We should thus be quite surprised to find an important interpretation of Hegel which suggest that *for Hegel* time does not take part in the ultimate layer of reality. In this part, I will discuss J. E. McTaggart's intriguing arguments for the atemporality of the *Science of Logic*.

In his seminal article of 1908, "The Unreality of Time," McTaggart presented a powerful argument in favor of the claim that fundamental reality neither con-

⁵⁵ Italics added.

⁵⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature* [*Encyclopedia*, Part II], §§ 257–259.

tains temporality nor provides proper grounding for temporal relations.⁵⁷ This was not, however, McTaggart's first attempt to prove the unreality of time.⁵⁸ In his 1896 book *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic* – a revision of his Cambridge dissertation – McTaggart unveils a series of arguments aiming to show that Hegel's logic is essentially atemporal, and that as a result we should understand Hegel's philosophy as banning time from its ultimate layer of reality.

At the beginning of the fifth chapter of *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, McTaggart poses a fundamental dilemma.

One of the more interesting and important questions which can arise in connection with Hegel's philosophy is the question of the relation between the succession of the categories and the succession of events in time. Are we to regard the complex and concrete Absolute Idea, *in which alone true reality is to be found*, as gradually growing up in time by evolution of one category to another? Or are we to regard the Absolute as existing eternally in its full completeness, and the succession of events in time as something *which has no part as such in any ultimate system of the universe?*⁵⁹

The extract above gives us clear indication of the nature of McTaggart's proof strategy. He is not about to deny that time has some place in Hegel's system, rather he will argue that Hegel is committed to the existence of multilayered reality, so that it is only the concrete Absolute Idea which emerges at the very end of the Logic of the Concept (and thus, the conclusion of the entire *Science of Logic*) can justly claim to be "true reality" and "the ultimate system of the universe." In this true and ultimate reality, time and succession has no place. McTaggart's interpretation not only allows for the presence of time in the less fundamental layers of reality, but he even openly admits that "Hegel certainly explains the past to some extent by bringing the successive events under successive categories." "Nevertheless," – claims McTaggart – "it seems to me that such a view is incompatible with the system. There are doubtless difficulties in either interpretation of Hegel's meaning, but there seems no doubt that we must reject the development of the process in time."⁶⁰

⁵⁷ By the last point I have in mind McTaggart's claim that insofar as the A-series is unreal, the attempt to ground the B-series in a conjunction of the A-series and the C-series fails (McTaggart, "Unreality of Time," p. 463).

⁵⁸ In the 1908 article, McTaggart notes that his reasons for rejecting the reality of time were not employed by any previous philosopher, Hegel included (p. 31). There are, however, some features shared by both the 1896 and the 1908 texts, such as the view of reality as having various layers.

⁵⁹ McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 140. Italics added.

⁶⁰ McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 140.

In order to establish these claims, McTaggart develops two chief arguments, and then offers textual support in defense of the view that Hegel's "absolute idea exists eternally in its full perfection," and that the process which unfolds in the *Science of Logic* is a mere reconstruction, rather than construction.⁶¹

Though each of the two arguments has several side proofs, we can reconstruct the core of the first argument in the following manner.

1. "[Hegel maintains that] the universe is fully rational."⁶²
(Premise)
2. If the Absolute Idea evolves in time, the process must be either finite or infinite.
(Premise)
3. Time is in itself infinite and empty, i.e., indifferent to its content.⁶³
(Premise)
4. The process cannot be infinite, because (i) it will constitute a "false infinity" of endless aggregation which Hegel rejects, and (ii) the evolution of the Absolute Idea in the *Science of Logic* is a process with a clear beginning and end, and if any of the steps in this evolution would take infinite time, "there would be no process at all."
5. The process cannot be finite, since in such a case the first event/category (i) would appear *ex nihilo* (contrary to (1)), and (ii) the temporal location of the first category in empty time would be arbitrary (contrary to (1)).
6. Therefore, the evolution cannot be in time, since it cannot take either infinite or finite duration (from 2, 4, and 5)

The first premise seems to be a variant of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.⁶⁴ The second premise is essentially a tautology. The third premise is more or less an affirmation of the Newtonian concept of time. The obvious question is whether Hegel accepts Newton's theory of time. Perhaps in order to establish this point, McTaggart cites Hegel's claim in §257 of the *Encyclopedia* that "time

⁶¹ McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 140.

⁶² McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 141, p. 158 (in the 1922 edition).

⁶³ McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 142, pp. 159–160: "To fix any point in time is to imply the existence upon both sides of it [...]. Time is in itself quite empty and indifferent to its content."

⁶⁴ Though the strength of McTaggart's version of the PSR is somewhat clear, as he notes: "It is perhaps not impossible that our minds should form the conception of something on which other things depend, *while it depends itself on nothing*. But an event in time could never hold such a place." (McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 142, p. 159. Italics added.)

is still outside itself.”⁶⁵ This brief note, however, falls short of establishing the claim that time, for Hegel, is empty and infinite. Indeed, in the Addition to §258 of the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel seems to take on the Newtonian concept of time, claiming that “time does not resemble a container in which everything is as it were borne away and swallowed up in a flow of a stream.”⁶⁶ Be that as it may, let us consider McTaggart’s derivation of steps (4) and (5).

McTaggart’s first point in support of (4) is that the unfolding of the categories in Hegel’s logic cannot be a process taking infinite time since Hegel considers infinite time as an example of the “bad infinity” of the understanding which Hegel “condemns as a mere mockery of explanation.”⁶⁷ McTaggart’s argument here seems to be well-grounded in Hegel’s text.⁶⁸ The second claim in support of (4) is much more interesting philosophically. It begins by reminding the reader that the unfolding of the dialectic in the *Logic* has a clear beginning and end, i. e., “there can be no steps before Pure Being, nor any steps after the Absolute Idea.”⁶⁹ Next, McTaggart asserts that “the number of steps is finite,” presumably referring to the *Logic*’s finite number of categories and transitions. At this point, McTaggart notes, each step must take either finite or infinite time. If the former, the entire process cannot take infinite time, since the sum of a finite number of steps which each take a finite time must be itself finite as well.⁷⁰ If the latter is true – i. e., some steps take infinite time – the process of the unfolding of the Absolute Idea can never be completed, since at least some of its steps would take infinite time.⁷¹

Let us turn now to McTaggart’s attempt to establish (5), i. e., that the process of the evolution of the Absolute Idea cannot take finite time. McTaggart’s first consideration in favor of (5) begins by noting that if the entire process is supposed to take a finite time, it must have a specific beginning in time, i. e., there must be a certain event *e* designating the time of the first item of the series (Pure Being). Per our assumption, *e* has no precedents. Thus, *e* would constitute a causeless event. Yet, “to deny that the first term of such a series requires a determining cause is impossible. It is perhaps not impossible that our minds

65 McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 142, p. 159.

66 See Newton, *Principia*, p. 64: “Absolute, true and mathematics time, in and of itself, and of its own nature, without reference to anything external, flows uniformly” and *Principia*, p. 66: “For time and space are, as it were, the places of themselves and of all things.”

67 McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 141, p. 158.

68 See Hegel, *Science of Logic (Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 21), pp. 129, 136–138 and 222.

69 McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 141, p. 159.

70 McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 141, p. 159.

71 McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 141, p. 159.

should form the conception of something on which other things depend, while it depends itself on nothing. But an event in time could never hold such a place.”⁷² In other words, just like any other event, *e* cannot appear *ex nihilo*.

McTaggart’s second consideration in favor of (5) relies on a familiar argument from the Leibniz-Clarke exchange of letters. Since, per premise (3), “time is in itself quite empty and indifferent to its content – no possible reason could be given why the process should not have begun hundred years later than it did.”⁷³ In a Newtonian empty time, God *cannot* have a reason to create the world at t_1 rather than t_2 .⁷⁴ The very same consideration tells us that even if – *per impossibile* – the first category of Hegel’s logic would appear *ex nihilo*, the choice of the specific point in time in which the entire process would begin cannot be explained. Thus, Hegel’s commitment to thoroughgoing rationality would be invalidated. In step (6), McTaggart correctly infers from (2), (4), and (5), that since the evolution of the Absolute Idea can be neither infinite nor in finite time, it cannot be in time at all.⁷⁵

I turn now to McTaggart’s second argument against the temporal development of the dialectic of the *Logic*.

If we suppose that the dialectic process came into existence gradually in time, we must suppose that all the contradictions existed at one time or another independently, and *before reconciliation, i. e., as contradictions*. [...] Such an assertion, however, would be absolutely untenable. To say that the world consists of *reconciled* contradictions would produce no difficulty, for it means nothing more that it consists of things which only *appear* contrary when not thoroughly understood. [...] All reasoning, and Hegel’s as much as anybody else’s, involves that two contrary positions cannot both be true. It would be useless to reason, if, when you had demonstrated your conclusion, it was true to assert the opposite of that conclusion.⁷⁶

The key premise of McTaggart’s argument here seems to be that Hegel wished to *sublate* the Law of Non-Contradiction, rather than completely do away with it. As contradictions arise in the dialectical process we realize that the lower steps of the dialectic are merely inadequate abstractions which require a reconciliation in a more concrete term which transcends both sides of the contradiction.⁷⁷ Howev-

72 McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 142, p. 159.

73 McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 142, p. 160.

74 See Leibniz’s third letter to Clarke, §6 in Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, p. 325.

75 McTaggart also explains (6) as a Hegelian sublation of the contradiction between (4) and (5). See *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 146, p. 164.

76 McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 147, p. 165. Italics added.

77 McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 147, p. 165.

er, if this process unfolds in time, every single pair of opposed terms – at the moment *preceding their reconciliation* – constitutes a genuine (and not merely apparent) violation of the Law of Non-Contradiction. According to McTaggart, Hegel accepts the Law of Non-Contradiction and shares the philosophical consensus that if one allows for genuine (and not merely apparent) contradictions, the very practice of logical demonstrations becomes pointless.⁷⁸

Not all interpretations of Hegel's *Logic* would agree with McTaggart's claim that Hegel allows only for apparent, but not genuine, contradictions. Perhaps in order to address this concern, McTaggart continues with the following sub-argument.

And again, if contrary propositions could both be true, the special line of argument which Hegel follows would have lost all its force. *We are enabled to pass on from the thesis and antithesis to the synthesis just because contradictions cannot be true, and the synthesis is the only way out of it. If the contradictions exist at all, there seems no reason that they should not continue to do so.*⁷⁹

The basic idea of this sub-argument – which is cogent even if one reads Hegel as allowing genuine contradictions – is that if one allows for a certain contradiction to obtain at t_1 , she must allow for the same contradiction at any other time as well. If the unfolding of the dialectic takes place in time, and if a contradiction (before its sublation) would thus obtain at t_1 , there would be no reason for us to sublimate the contradiction in any later time, if we were content with the unsublated contradiction at t_1 . Thus, if (1) we consider the dialectic as process spread in time, and (2) allow for genuine contradictions, the process cannot move any farther beyond the original contradiction.

Following these two intriguing arguments, McTaggart turns to establishing his claim by pointing out several key passages in Hegel's writings and lectures which seem to provide strong support for his reading.⁸⁰ In this context, McTaggart also addresses the obvious objection that his reading of Hegel as denying the reality of time in the ultimate layer of reality is inconsistent with the philosophical significance that Hegel assigns to history:

It is true that, in the Philosophy of Religion, the Philosophy of History and the History of Philosophy, he explains various successions of events in time as manifestations of the dialectic. But this proves nothing as to the fundamental nature of the connection of time with the universe. The dialectic is the key to all reality, and, therefore *whenever we do view reality*

⁷⁸ This consensus is not shared by many current paraconsistent logics.

⁷⁹ McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 147, p. 165–166.

⁸⁰ McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 149, p. 167–169.

under the aspect of time, the different categories will appear as manifesting themselves as a process in time.⁸¹

The categories can be realized in time, claims McTaggart, insofar as they are the blueprint for everything that is. However, for McTaggart, the *Logic* is not merely the blueprint of reality, but also its deeper layer, and in this layer, time takes no part.⁸²

McTaggart's talk about "viewing reality under the aspect of time" is obviously an allusion to Spinoza's "*sub specie aeternitatis*." In my concluding remarks, I note that McTaggart shared Hegel's reading of Spinoza as denying the reality of time. Yet, according to McTaggart, Spinoza was not the sole Eleatic philosopher of modern times. Once properly understood, claims McTaggart, Hegel's philosophy follows Spinoza in denying the reality of time in the ultimate ground or layer of reality.⁸³

Conclusion

McTaggart's arguments against the temporality of Hegel's *Logic* are quite sophisticated and impressive. Regrettably, they have been all but neglected in the scholarly literature of the past half century. The ill repute of speculative metaphysics in Anglo-American circles provides at least part of the explanation for this neglect.⁸⁴ Times have changed however, and metaphysics is no longer an anathema. While there may well be good, germane reasons for non- (or even anti-) metaphysical readings of Hegel,⁸⁵ one cannot avoid the impression that the still current aversion to metaphysics among Anglo-American Hegel scholars resembles the anxiety of those feeling hunted long after the hunter has already left the forest.

81 McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 149, p. 167. Italics added.

82 McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 149, p. 169. Notice, however, McTaggart's stress that the "Logic without the additional elements which occur in Nature and Spirit is a mere abstraction" (*Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, § 28, p. 29). Cf. Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics*, p. 134–5.

83 "Hegel regarded the order of time-series as a reflection, though a distorted reflection, of something in the real nature of the timeless reality." (McTaggart, "Unreality of Time," p. 474.)

84 Though see Stern's illuminating discussion of McTaggart as developing a reading of the *Logic* as theory of categories, anticipating late twentieth century "non-metaphysical" interpretations (*Hegelian Metaphysics*, pp. 117–142). Stern seems to use 'metaphysical' as more or less equivalent to what he calls "Neo-Platonic idealism" (p. 134).

85 Admittedly, this very term – 'metaphysical readings of Hegel' – is somewhat vague, though this is not the place for the required clarification.

A crucial premise in McTaggart's interpretation – that Hegel understands reality as multilayered, and that the dialectic of the *Logic* constitutes the deepest layer of reality⁸⁶ – has *not* been critically examined in the current article. The primary aim of my discussion of McTaggart was to draw attention to his arguments against the temporality of the *Logic*. Admittedly, one can accept these arguments while denying that, for Hegel, the *Logic* is *more* fundamentally real than the philosophy of nature and history.

In his 1908 article, McTaggart lists Spinoza and Hegel (along with Kant and Schopenhauer) as his modern predecessors in denying the reality of time.⁸⁷ Unlike other figures among the British Idealists, McTaggart never wrote a major study of Spinoza. Still, his studies of Hegel's philosophy are replete with venerating allusions to Spinoza, and a quote from the *Ethics* is inscribed on his gravestone.⁸⁸ His reading of Hegel as denying the reality of time closes the circle which began with Spinoza's "Letter on the Infinite," and Hegel's reading of Spinoza as asserting that "things in time and time itself are nothing." From this perspective, Hegel seems to be just right in claiming that "philosophy is the timeless comprehension of everything in general – time included – according to its eternal determination."⁸⁹ Indeed, in spite of their significant differences, for all three philosophers the conception of things "*sub specie aeternitatis*" is nothing short of sublime.

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⁸⁶ For a recent defense of the view that reality comes in layers, see McDaniel, "Degrees of Being."

⁸⁷ McTaggart, "Unreality of Time," p. 31.

⁸⁸ McDaniel, "McTaggart," § 1. Intriguingly, in his 1908 "Unreality of Time" article, McTaggart employs systematically the terminology of "involves" in its technical Spinozist sense of an asymmetric conceptual dependence (roughly, *x* involves *y*, if and only if, the concept of *x* presupposes the concept of *y*). See for example, p. 461 n. 1.

⁸⁹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature* [*Encyclopedia*, Part II], § 247, Addition (vol. 1, p. 207). Italics added.

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