

Review of Omri Boehm's *Kant's Critique of Spinoza*

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1. Introduction and Summary

Boehm has succeeded in writing a book that simultaneously and successfully engages with a major episode in the history of philosophy and contributes to our understanding of the metaphysical landscape. Despite discussing two very challenging and terminologically tricky philosophers—Spinoza and Kant—, *Kant's Critique of Spinoza* is clearly written and extremely illuminating. The book also has an unusual urgency: throughout one senses that there is something at stake as we wind our way through argument, objection, counter-argument, clarification, purported refutation, etc. Boehm signals such urgency in the preface by framing the book as an attempted recovery of the one and only possible response to nihilism. Boehm traces the term “nihilism” back to Jacobi's concern over the impact of Spinozist necessitarianism.¹ Boehm understands nihilism as the package of doctrines that entail the following:

[V]alue is relativized to some anchor within the world . . . [If] *ex hypothesi* everything within the world is an accidental consequence of blind causality, any anchor can only be as good as any other. Talk of value thus becomes either consciously fictional (a noble lie, perhaps) or meaningless. The point is this: if all value is arbitrarily fixed in relation to some anchor, x, there is no reason not to fix value to non-x. Talk of value then becomes, as Stanley Rosen writes, “indistinguishable from silence.” From a Kantian point of view, the significant point to notice is that this conclusion doesn't seem much affected if one substitutes x by “reason,” “rational beings,” or something of the sort. (KCS xi)

It is worth lingering on the quoted passage before I detail the contents of Boehm's book. The passage gives a sense of Boehm's stance: he is writing in an analytical style “from a Kantian point of view.” Also, he

takes seriously the Straussian concern with the threat of nihilism and noble lies (without himself deploying Straussian forms of writing). In addition, Boehm embraces the “principle of sufficient reason” (PSR), which denies brute facts and insists on a reason for everything. While it is often thought that in the first *Critique*’s “Second Analogy of Experience,” Kant restricts the scope of the PSR to the bounds of human experience, in Boehm’s hands the PSR seems to have a wider scope of application.² To be sure, Boehm does not assume but rather defends the PSR, even though he denies it foundational status (he accords higher status to what he calls the Kantian maxim of the “essence of the Enlightenment”: “to use one’s own understanding—never to believe something I cannot myself understand” [KCS 182]). Nevertheless, the quoted remarks already suggest that Boehm is not so much asking his reader to return to Kant, but rather by getting Spinoza and Kant right, to move beyond Kant.

There are two main interpretive claims put forward in *Kant’s Critique of Spinoza*. First, Boehm contends that in his pre-critical period, Kant is not just familiar with Spinoza, but that he is a Spinozist (especially in his 1763 *The One Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, which is referred to in the literature and hereafter in this paper as *Beweisgrund*).³ Second, Boehm argues that in Kant’s critical period, Spinoza (and the threat of Spinozism more generally) is not just a central concern of Kant—as a close analysis of the antinomies reveals—, but that Kant is what Boehm calls “a regulative Spinozist” (as opposed to an “ontological Spinozist”). In effect, Boehm’s text is an extended philosophical interpretation of Kant’s remark in the second *Critique* that unless transcendental idealism, which is understood as regulative Spinozism, is adopted, “nothing remains but Spinozism,”⁴ a remark that Boehm quotes five times (KCS vi, xxiii, 5, 46, 83). Boehm helps overturn a scholarly consensus that prior to the outbreak of the *Pantheismusstreit* (the pantheism controversy) in 1785 (recall that the first edition of the first *Critique* appeared in 1781), Kant was not very interested in Spinoza. Boehm’s position has superficial similarity to Jonathan Israel’s claims in his works on the so-called “radical Enlightenment” (Israel is acknowledged at KCS xxiii), but Boehm’s treatment of the philosophical issues is far more sure-footed and sophisticated than Israel’s.⁵

Boehm’s first argument nicely converges with my own claims about the pre-critical Kant (especially in the *Natural History of the Heavens*).⁶ Our entirely independent arguments offer mutual support. However, I offer two qualifications about this convergence. First, if Boehm had engaged more thoroughly with Ursula Goldenbaum’s work (particularly on Mendelssohn and on historiography), he could have availed himself

of more evidence and thereby usefully complicated his story.⁷ Second, Boehm has a tendency to treat the pre-critical Kant as having a stable position, rather than one that is developing and is in debate with many interlocutors.⁸ I leave it to pure Kant specialists to debate Boehm's second argument. However, I note that this argument allows us to put Kant into the wider eighteenth-century context—a move that is still surprisingly rare in Kant scholarship, which tends either to focus on Kant's German sources, or to follow a bit too closely the contours of the dialectic between rationalism and empiricism, as offered by Kant and subsequent scholars. So, it is to be hoped that Boehm will help to encourage a historiographical revolution in Kant scholarship.

In what follows, I first offer a brief critical summary of the book, and then I turn to evaluate some of its major themes. In addition to the preface, the book has an introduction and five chapters. Chapter one carefully reconstructs Kant's ontological argument in the *Beweisgrund* of the pre-critical period. Boehm shows that Kant's position commits him to substance monism, and that there is every reason to believe that Kant knew this. Boehm is not the first analytical philosopher to acknowledge that a philosopher can let a discerning reader understand her position beyond what she explicitly states.⁹ Yet it is a shame that Boehm did not engage with Mendelssohn's extended positive review of the *Beweisgrund* in the journal *Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend in 1764*.¹⁰ For one wonders if Boehm thinks Mendelssohn missed the implication of Kant's argument, or (as I think more likely) Mendelssohn understood it fully and showed discretion. It is notable, as Boehm notes, that Kant in turn defends something like Mendelssohn's position in the third *Critique* (KCS 203). Either way, the first chapter secures for Boehm not just an interpretive point about the pre-critical Kant (as a set-up to a better evaluation of the critical Kant); it also reveals that the ontological argument, the PSR, and monism are systematically connected.

Chapters two and three form the heart of Boehm's book. Boehm shows that Spinoza's position is responsible for one of the ways in which the antinomies of reason are generated, and in addition, that Spinoza has resources to circumvent their results. Chapter two focuses on the first antinomy, and chapter three focuses on the third. According to Boehm, the two antinomies are "systematically related" (KCS 110). Along the way, Boehm also offers suggestions about how some of the other antinomies may be connected to Spinozism. I return to Boehm's treatment of this material below; I argue that while Boehm is right to foreground Spinoza's role in the antinomies, he misses the ways in which attention to Newton and eighteenth-century Newtonianism complicates the story he wishes to tell.

Chapter four brings Spinoza and Kant into conversation. While drawing on historical material, including Kant's and Spinoza's actual views, it offers a rational reconstruction of both of their views on topics like the ontological argument, the nature of complete infinity, the nature of Spinoza's *causa sui*, and the possibility of freedom. The chapter shows, first, that a Spinozistic version of the ontological argument can survive Kantian scrutiny; if the PSR is true, then necessitarianism obtains. On behalf of the Kantian anti-necessitarian, Boehm constructs a burden-shifting argument that allows the theoretical use of the PSR on normative grounds: the way the world is is not the way it ought to be. It is an especially interesting chapter, and one that will open up a lot of avenues for further research and debate. Even so, below I express some reservations about Boehm's treatment of Spinozism.

The final chapter offers a rereading not just of Kant's responses to the *Pantheismusstreit*, but the significance of the *Pantheismusstreit* as such:

The break of the *Pantheismusstreit* does not represent Spinoza's rediscovery. It represents the moment in which his radical thinking moved from the clandestine underground to the center of the public debate. It marked the moment in which Spinoza's impact on Enlightenment thinking became public. The *Streit's* technical philosophical question—Does the PSR lead to Spinozist metaphysics?—was politically and publicly reinterpreted: Is there room for a genuine moderate version of enlightened rationality?" (KCS 209)

While one wishes that Boehm had shown a bit more suspicion of the very idea of a rupture, and had made explicit that the "public" here is a Germanic one—as Boehm's evidence shows that Spinoza's impact was abundantly clear to readers of Bayle, Toland, and Diderot—, his general point is convincing to this reviewer.

As Boehm notes in the closing lines of the book, this general point has a two-fold significance. First, it means that the "theoretical basis of religion *had* to be destroyed in order to save religion from radical thinking. . . . In order to secure religion and morality, the threat imposed by metaphysics cannot merely be argued against. It must be destroyed in its root" (KCS 232). Second, it indicates that *thereby* the project of thwarting nihilism can be undertaken. Thus, in the closing sentence Boehm returns to the first sentence of his book.¹¹ The project of thwarting nihilism is not fully undertaken in the book, and there are hints that Boehm is planning a sequel in which Kantian ethics will be offered as a "genuine alternative" to nihilism (KCS xxvii). So, Boehm treats the upshot of Kant's arguments as showing that rational faith has been saved (KCS 217), but that for the full articulation of this issue he will "have to return in a different context" (KCS 226). This is fair enough.

The philosophical excitement of Boehm's treatment of Kant as critically engaging Spinoza is to be found in the ways he sees the ontological argument and the PSR as mutually illuminating each other, and how they in turn illuminate debates over modality, substance monism, infinity, etc. This is not just a matter of historical curiosity. Now that species of dogmatic (so-called "knee-jerk") metaphysics are back in fashion,¹² including robust defenses of monism¹³ and the PSR,¹⁴ the questions of nihilism and fatalism may well also return, at some point, as significant ones.

2. Newtonian Reflections

In this section I offer three criticisms that are all loosely related to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Newtonianism and natural philosophy. The significance of these remarks is primarily historical, but they also entail that the conceptual landscape may be more complex than Boehm allows.

First, I start with a low-level move. Boehm writes:

In Kant, naturalistic causality is understood as mechanical, or efficient causality. We naturalistically understand an event if and only if we see how it necessarily follows from another event that precedes it. Arguably, Spinoza favors a similar conception. A thing, A, is said to be the cause of another, B, if B necessarily follows from A (e.g., EIp16c1; Ip25; IIp5). Of course, a mechanistic conception is the hallmark of seventeenth-century scientific naturalism, of which Spinoza is supposed to be a champion. Now if one clings to this efficient naturalistic conception, the notion of a "self-caused entity" is identical to a notion of an entity that is "not caused at all." For the causal conception that's assumed in the notion of a self-caused entity is entirely different from—in fact, it excludes—the naturalistic-efficient conception. (KCS 142–3)

I doubt Boehm gets Kant's account of causation right in the first sentence (given that he doesn't even mention the role of laws). But even assuming that he is correct about Kant's notion of causation—he is only expressing a Kantian prejudice.¹⁵ In Spinoza (and arguably in Locke), the model form of causation is the way in which a (hidden) essence produces regular or exceptionless (visible) effects, all things being equal. (Hereafter I use the following notation to describe the model: '<essence → effect>'.) This is, in fact, also the natural reading of the propositions from the *Ethics* that Boehm cites in this passage (EIp16c1, EIp25, and EIIp5),¹⁶ although the latter proposition is not explicit either way.¹⁷ In fact, Spinoza is not a fellow traveler of the mechanical philosophy or even the scientific revolution.¹⁸ This is not to deny that Spinoza also recognizes the mode-on-mode (billiard ball) model of effi-

cient causation (EIp28); rather, my point is that he takes it to be derivative from the exemplary model (and also to have lower epistemic status).

Boehm might concede the interpretive point, but might argue that this is so much the worse for Spinoza because the <essence \rightarrow effect> model of causation is a remnant of a discarded Aristotelian science. But that would be too hasty here. Spinoza does not rely on final causes (or teleology).¹⁹ Moreover, Spinoza's <essence \rightarrow effect> model is, in part, modeled on a formal cause explanation once common in geometry (as he himself says in EIapp).²⁰ And we can understand *causa sui* in such terms.²¹

My second criticism, which gets me to a central issue in Boehm's book, focuses on the question, "in virtue of what is 'causa sui' conceived as existing?" This matters for the larger debate between regulative Spinozism (critical Kant) and ontological Spinozism (Spinoza), because if there is a decent Spinozistic answer to that question, then Spinoza-style transcendental realism is still a viable option.²² I quote a passage from Boehm that allows us to explore the relevant issues:

[Michael] Della Rocca's only valid case in point is the question "in virtue of what is 'causa sui' conceived as existing?" and, to that question, he can answer (*if* he can) by denying the validity of the question: *causa sui*, he will say, "is conceived to exist because it is what it is." Only in the latter case may the PSR's "in virtue-of-what" question be a bad question, reducible to a genuine misunderstanding.

But, in this light, it turns out that rationalism ultimately assumes the validity of the traditional ontological argument. The question in virtue of what substance is conceived to exist can be dismissed as a mere misunderstanding of the concept only if existence is a predicate, participating in substance's essence. What needs to be underlined is that at stake is not merely a rationalist argument concerning the theological question of God's existence. At stake is the viability of the rationalist position itself: Without the ontological argument, the edifice of conceivability and of the PSR falls apart. (KCS 160)

Here I recount a Spinozistic alternative to Della Rocca's purported answer, inspired by Samuel Clarke, to the question "in virtue of what is 'causa sui' conceived as existing?," which is entirely overlooked by Boehm. For, from the vantage point of the (Spinozistic) PSR, the only proper answer is "necessity." Necessity both legitimately ends an explanatory regress, and is a proper primitive ground that avoids opening the door to idealism (as Della Rocca's version of the PSR does), as

well as building a kind of harmony-between-mind-and-world-view (the optimistic side of rationalism) into Spinozism from the start.

Once one shows that something is necessary, there is no need for a further question in metaphysics (obviously, this kind of argumentative strategy can be easily abused in human affairs as a species of ideology, so one should be suspicious of instances of this strategy); according to Clarke, necessity is the “formal cause” of God and the grounds of all existence.²³ As he explains in correspondence with Joseph Butler in 1713: “Necessity absolute, and antecedent in order of Nature to the existence of any subject has nothing to limit it; but if it operates at all (as it must needs do) it must operate (if I may so speak) everywhere and at all times alike.”²⁴

To put Clarke’s point another way, absolute necessity has the same impact everywhere and at all times and should have the same consequence everywhere and at all times. So, if such necessity operates in some respect, Y, then we ought to expect Y to be homogeneous in relevant ways. And if the most fundamental form of necessity operates in all possible respects, then we ought to expect general homogeneity. But here what matters is that such absolute necessity has “nothing to limit it.” The operation of such necessity is thus the right kind of “cause” or explanatory ground to help account for the existence of infinite entities (substance, space, time), including the right sort of *totum analyticum*. (This is why Boehm is right to argue that when one tries to be consistent, the PSR, some versions of the ontological argument, and necessitarianism all entail and support each other.) So, the “cause” of substance,²⁵ understood as *natura naturans*, is itself *absolute necessity*. That is to say, absolute necessity entails absolute existence in Clarke’s approach.

Obviously, Clarke’s view of modality is metaphysical, and without further articulation and formalization, it remains obscure. Part of the problem is that modern formal approaches to modality are developed in ways that do little justice to the Spinozistic intuitions behind this notion of necessity. But that is to be expected given that Spinozism is willing to reject a lot of common sense views about modality. Another problem with the Clarke-inspired answer is that “necessity” is perhaps too coarse-grained an answer if one wishes to explain the details of particular existence. While that is undeniably true, it is worth reminding ourselves that “metaphysical necessity” is only proffered here as the answer to the question “in virtue of what is ‘causa sui’ conceived as existing?”

I have not claimed that giving the answer “necessity” to the question “in virtue of what is ‘causa sui’ conceived as existing?” refutes Boehm. All I claim is that this approach is a genuine, potentially illuminating

alternative to Della Rocca's approach that frames Boehm's way of exploring the debate between Kant and Spinoza. But I also submit that this helps to explain why one species of the ontological version of the PSR ("for every infinite entity that exists, there is a reason why it exists") may not involve a transcendental illusion after all.²⁶ Again, this does not settle the debate. Rather, my point is to reinforce Boehm's claim that the proper, ultimate locus of the debate between the Kantian and the Spinozist is on the plane of modality (or necessity), and especially how these are related to our moral and epistemic convictions (see KCS 183).

My third criticism focuses on a central part of Boehm's text (especially chapters two and three), which offers a rereading of Kant's antinomies in order to show that these address Spinoza and Spinozism. The aim of this rereading is to help explain the critical Kant's claim that the two viable metaphysical options are either Kant's transcendental idealism, which in Boehm's hands is itself regulative Spinozism, or a form of transcendental realism, which can be best understood as a species of metaphysical Spinozism. I am fully persuaded by Boehm that Spinoza is indeed a central interlocutor in these antinomies.

Boehm notes correctly that Descartes and Leibniz—both of who distinguished between space as indeterminately large and as infinitely large, in order to claim that space was indeterminately large (and thus not infinite)—reserved "true infinity exclusively for God" (KCS 75). By contrast, "Spinozism is committed to the world's infinity" (KCS 79). This suggests to Boehm (and I agree) that Kant is concerned with Spinozism in the first antinomy's antithesis. But does it follow that Spinoza is the only such Spinozist known to Kant? I think not. Newton too is such a Spinozist, not just in texts unknown to eighteenth-century readers, but also in the "General Scholium" (and the *Principia* more generally). This is not obvious if one identifies, as too many Kant scholars still do, Clarke's correspondence with Leibniz as *the* Newtonian position. Even if there weren't Newtonian texts known to Kant that suggest otherwise, it would be a mistake to treat Clarke's presentation as *echt*-Newton, because the whole exchange between Leibniz and Clarke is framed from the start by Leibniz's insinuation at the start of the exchange that Newton is a crypto-Spinozist (an explosive charge by the time Leibniz makes it).²⁷

Newton embraced the true infinity of space right at the start of the *Principia*: "Now no other places are immovable but those that, from infinity to infinity [*ab infinito in infinitum*], do all retain the same given position one to another; and upon this account must ever remain unmoved; and do thereby constitute immovable space."²⁸ This is a core Newtonian commitment unchanged through all the editions. In the

“General Scholium,” added to the *Principia*’s second edition in 1713, Newton explains the relationship between God and infinite space.²⁹ I quote two passages:

[God] endures always and is present everywhere, and by existing always and everywhere he constitutes duration and space. Since each and every particle of space is always, and each and every indivisible moment of duration is everywhere, certainly the maker and lord of all things will not be never and nowhere.

[T]he supreme God necessarily exists, and by the same necessity he is always and everywhere.³⁰

According to the first passage, God and time (and space) co-exist eternally—so there is no first creation of a moment of time. Newton denies that God should be identified with space (and time): “He is not eternity and infinity, but eternal and infinite; he is not duration and space, but he endures and is present” (P 941). God is thus always and everywhere immanent within the order of nature (understood as existing in space and time). Newton does not shrink back from claiming that space and time are truly infinite. Moreover, the existence of space is a (non-causal) consequence of God’s existence (“by existing always and everywhere he constitutes duration and space”). In the “General Scholium,” Newton does not explain the nature of this consequence.³¹

In the fourth letter to Bentley (which became public in the middle of the eighteenth century), Newton allows “that there might be other systems of worlds before the present ones, and others before those, and so on to all past eternity, and by consequence that gravity may be coeternal to matter, and have the same effect from all eternity as at present.”³² The pre-critical Kant also embraced the position that “infinite space is brimming with solar systems [*der unendliche Weltraum von Weltgebäuden wimmele*].”³³ In context, Kant refers to Huygens (who is, in part, responding to Newton) as his source.

According to the second passage above, the modal status of God’s existence and God’s infinite spatiality is said to be identical. So if God exists then infinite space (and time) exists. Newton does not explain his views on necessity in the “General Scholium” (or elsewhere, I think), but I pointed out above that the now-less-familiar works by Clarke do explain necessity as the terminating point of inquiry under the guidance of the PSR. Either way, Newton’s views on God, space, and time are sometimes neo-Spinozist.³⁴

Of course, Newton’s views are not identical to Spinoza’s because Newton treats space and time relatively symmetrically, whereas in Spinoza time is not an attribute of substance (whereas extension is). In fact, it is worth noting that Kant, in a passage from the *Critique of*

Practical Reason frequently quoted by Boehm, treats Spinozism as the view according to which “space and time are essential determinations of the original being itself.”³⁵ As such, this characterization is closer to the historical Newton than to the historical Spinoza. (Boehm recognizes, of course, that Kant treats space and time more symmetrically than Spinoza does, but fails to note the Newtonian provenance of this.)

So, returning to Boehm, he is simply wrong when he identifies Newton with the view “that the world is not infinite and has a beginning” (KCS 80), and when he claims that there is “only one relevant rationalist thinker who has a good reason to insist, as does the Antithesis [of the first Antinomy], that the world is positively infinite,” which is Spinoza (*ibid.*) (To avoid confusion, Boehm treats Newton as a rationalist dogmatist, not an empiricist.)

Intriguingly, while Boehm has to explain why, given his identification of the position in the Antithesis with Spinoza, Kant would attribute the position to “a principle of pure empiricism” (see KCS 86), my suggestion that it could just as well be Newton’s position to which Kant here refers faces no such quandary. That is, everything that Boehm here claims about what Kant might mean by “pure empiricism” could also be attributed to Newton. Moreover, when Kant identifies the empiricism of the Antithesis (one that goes too far) with Epicureanism³⁶ (an identification that Boehm recognizes on KCS 105 n.28), this fits with Kant’s pre-critical interpretation of Newton as a kind of Epicurean, as I have argued elsewhere.³⁷

So, what follows from this? Kant did distinguish between Newton and Spinoza when it suited him. But in Kant’s hands, Spinozism mixes elements from both Newton’s and Spinoza’s writings. (This is not to deny that Spinoza is the more consistent Spinozist than Newton, of course.) This observation does not undermine Boehm’s larger claims about the philosophical dialectic, but it does undermine his interpretation of Kant.

3. Kant Versus Spinoza: Freedom, Affectivity, and Reason

In this final section here, I want to focus critically on Boehm’s characterization of Spinoza and Spinozism. First, I explore his account of freedom in Spinoza. Then I call attention to his neglect of affectivity in Spinoza. Finally, I argue that Boehm has misunderstood Spinoza’s account of reason and its relationship to practical philosophy. Consider the following passages:

[F]aith can be taken seriously as a condition of ethics. This, more than any other reason, is why Kant’s thought should be studied as an answer to Spinoza: no philosopher strived like Spinoza to reduce

practical reason and faith to theoretical reasoning; indeed, this is why his geometrical metaphysics is called the *Ethics*, why Substance is dubbed “God.” Kant attempts to put that Spinozist picture on its head: neither practical reasoning nor faith are reducible to theoretical reasoning; ultimately, in fact, he would argue that theoretical reasoning is grounded in practical reason. (KCS xxiii)

To understand Kant’s position as a genuine alternative to such [Nietzschean] ethics—and to be able to consider this Kantian alternative as a genuine possibility for us—we must be willing to take seriously the project of denying knowledge in making room for faith. Historically speaking, this means that we must come to terms with Kant’s answer to Spinoza and Spinozism. (KCS xxvii)

Jacobi’s claim that Spinoza’s philosophy is the only possible one relies on his understanding of the PSR; first, as the normative criterion of rationality; and second, as the “spirit of Spinozism.” *Ex nihilo nihil fit*—Jacobi argues that this principle entails both necessitarianism and pantheism. And, interestingly, he claims to have learned this lesson from Kant’s *Beweisgrund*. As we saw in chapter 1, this isn’t, *pace* Frederick Beiser, merely a “tendentious” reading of Kant, who himself was aware of his Spinozist commitment. . . . Accordingly, he thinks it would be vain to try to give a rational defense of freedom, morality, or faith, because such a defense is beforehand committed to the PSR and would fall back on fatalistic pantheism. (KCS 201)

In regulative Spinozism (that is, Kant’s critical position), the PSR is a kind of epistemic imperative (“for every thing [*p*] that exists, we demand a reason why *p* exists”), while the key maxim (which is also the “essence of enlightenment”) is to “use one’s own understanding—never to believe something I cannot myself understand” (KCS 182). By contrast, metaphysical Spinozism embraces an ontological commitment to the PSR: “for every thing [*p*] that exists, there is a reason why *p* exists,” which itself—from the Kantian position—becomes caught up in a transcendental illusion (KCS 172). (In addition, Boehm discusses positions that try to finesse the choice between the epistemic and metaphysical versions of the PSR, as well as those that accept the ontological version but then add bells and whistles to avoid pure Spinozism, which are both taken to be fundamentally unstable. I don’t discuss this here, and I also ignore issues about the role of infinity in these discussions.)

Having briefly set this up, let’s stipulate that Spinoza was a metaphysical Spinozist, and that the PSR plays the roles assigned to it in Boehm’s (Jacobi-inspired) hands. This entails, and Boehm is right about this, that the ontological argument is both a central part of

Spinozism and is also defensible within it.³⁸ But Spinoza's philosophy also gets distorted from within the Kantian framework in at least two ways (the second is more subtle than the first). The two may be connected, but I treat them separately. First, Spinoza's conception of freedom, which we can capture in the slogan "acting from reason," is never really taken seriously by Boehm (here he follows the Jacobi-Lessing reading of Spinoza [see KCS 201]). According to Spinoza, to be free is to act from knowledge (or adequate ideas, or virtue, etc.). By this I do not mean that complete Spinozistic freedom is almost out of reach for ordinary mortals (who are always under the influence of passive affects)—a point that may (in light of the view that "ought implies can") be thought to be a *reductio* of the Spinozist position. Rather, I mean that Boehm treats Spinoza as a kind of compatibilist (KCS x). To be sure, Spinoza is (probably) best understood as a compatibilist in the strict sense. However, this does not really do justice to the Spinozist position (that in various ways he inherits from Descartes and other strands of Platonism), which is not in the business of defending the freedom of the will, but rather is interested in another notion of freedom altogether.

Boehm recognizes this, of course, and sets up the challenge to Spinozism as follows:

An idea x is adequate in mind y iff God's idea x is given in virtue of having y . When this is the case, mind y is not compelled into thinking by any external forces: it thinks only ideas that are contained within it and, in that sense, it is genuinely free. Let us grant that if the human mind can satisfy this criterion, man is free when conceiving an adequate idea. (KCS 135–6)

Oddly, Boehm recognizes that this challenge can be met from within Spinoza's system for common notions (KCS 138–9), but he insists (even though he grants that Spinoza's position of freedom is "coherent" [KCS 140]) that this is not sufficient because it is circular. He then turns the issue into a question of the degree to which Spinoza can offer a plausible account for the acquisition of "an adequate idea of the unconditionally existing substance" (KCS 139).

Now, the main reason I say that Boehm cannot take Spinoza's account of freedom seriously is that he does not scrutinize the merits of this (neo-Stoic) freedom from, say, the vantage point of morality or a politics worth having. That is, even if Spinoza's view is considered not very promising as a "solution" to the problem of free will, it seems unfair not to evaluate it in light of the political and moral (not to mention epistemic) projects in which it plays, and is intended to play, a serious role.

Boehm also simply assumes—in line with Jacobi and Lessing—that Spinoza's position leads to (a bad kind of) fatalism, or even nihilism.³⁹ (By contrast, Boehm does not let Spinoza criticize the Kantian and extremely voluntarist conception of freedom, even though Spinoza has resources to cast doubt on it.)⁴⁰ We can say about Spinozism what Adam Smith notes in the context of an otherwise very critical analysis of Stoicism: that it had a “great influence upon the character and conduct of its followers, cannot be doubted . . . its general tendency was to animate them to actions of the most heroic magnanimity and most extensive benevolence.”⁴¹ That is to say, for true Spinozists, fatalism (or nihilism) does not follow necessarily from its doctrine of freedom, or its doctrine of necessity; in the right institutional and educational context it can also inspire great deeds.

As an aside, Boehm cannot object to such a consequentialist justification of a philosophical doctrine because in fact Kant too appeals to the analysis of a doctrine's effects in terms of the worthiness of freedom (of thought) in his essay “Was Heißt: sich im Denken orientieren?” (“What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?”).⁴² This notion of worthiness is understood both in terms of a doctrine's likely impacts on a wider public by way of what we might call “intellectual trickle down,” and its impact on other intellectual currents of thought (see esp. KCS 221–2). So, the Spinozistic doctrine of freedom need not be justified in terms of extra Spinozistic metaphysical principles if there is such a consequentialist justification. (This is, of course, not the only way to defend acting from reason, but it is one way that Kant is not allowed to block as such.)

Second, Boehm understands Spinozism in terms of hyper-rationalism. Although such an understanding is not wrong, it is worth noting that even in a Jacobi-inspired hyper-rationalistic Spinozism—in which the metaphysical version of the PSR does a lot of the intra-systemic work, and in which there is some ultimate ground (be it necessity, the ontological argument, *causa sui*, etc.)—a key feature of Spinoza's system (as Noa Shein taught me) is overlooked: the role of feeling.⁴³ Feeling is introduced in two axioms (numbers four and five) at the start of the second part of the *Ethics*. (It is clear from the preface to part five of the *Ethics* that whatever Spinoza means by “feeling,” it is not the Cartesian version.) The most prominent use of “feeling” in the *Ethics* is in the treatment of the mind's eternity (EVp23s).

The significance of feeling is this: rather than his anthropology conceiving of the best of us as cold, mechanical automata, under the guidance of the PSR, Spinoza insists that philosophy axiomatically requires feelings, and he relies on feeling for his most controversial doctrine. In particular, Spinozistic demonstrations must be felt: “The mind feels

those things that it conceives in understanding . . . for the eyes of the mind by which it sees and observes things, are the demonstrations themselves” (EVp23s).

Now, from the vantage point of Jacobi (and Boehm’s Kant), this may be thought of as an inconsistency in Spinoza (who is then a not quite pure metaphysical Spinozist). This is because in Jacobi, feeling is paradigmatically something incommunicable, which lacks rational support (KCS 202). Unsurprisingly, Spinoza’s use of the eternity of the mind is a quasi-mystical experiential doctrine that gets the name “intellectual love of God.” This experience is probably not that of Kant’s sublime, which justifies his notion of an infinite unconditioned (KCS 99), but it belongs, shall we say, to the same *species* of experience. So, if Kantians can appeal to the feeling of the sublime, Spinozists can appeal to the felt intellectual love of God.

Let me now turn finally to Boehm’s account of Spinoza on reason. I quote one of the most important passages in the book:

We believe that things could have been different because we demand that they ought to have been different. We ask why something happened despite the fact that it ought not to have happened. Our insistence that necessitarianism is false is thus grounded in a moral conviction, which is also a positive cause for demanding an explanation of the world—using the PSR. In the most authentic manifestations of the PSR, we do not ask “why” but we cry in moral outrage—outrage against an earthquake taking thousands of innocent lives, the premature death of a loved one, or the course of history, teaching us about the political evils generated by human society. We ask why the world is as it is because we demand justice from God or nature; we strive to theoretically understand the world with a commitment to changing it, bringing it to justice.

Of course, a rationalist like Spinoza believes that everything is just the way it is. Moral outrage against God or world is anthropomorphic.

Now the metaphysical proposition that everything is just the way that it is, as well as the success of rationalistic prescriptions for remedying anthropomorphic moral rebellion, depend on the PSR having shown that we know that things are necessary. This is an assumption that hasn’t been justified. In the final analysis, then, if deciding whether our moral outrage against the world is unfounded and illusory—or whether illusory is the thought that everything is known to be explicable—there is good reason to think it is the latter. In this point lies the deepest difference between Kant’s position and Spinoza’s, the reason that their philosophies need to be confronted. No philosopher strived like Spinoza to ground practical rationality in theoretical rationality: This is why a book that is so heavily metaphysical—a book that in fact collapses practical rea-

soning into theoretical-geometrical speculation—is called the *Ethics*. The Kantian project aspires to turn that philosophical enterprise on its head: It is not only that theoretical reasoning cannot override the practical; in fact, it is grounded in it. (KCS 183–5)

These passages are Boehm's attempt to decisively shift the burden (on Kant's behalf) in the Kant versus Spinoza debate (which, recall, is really a debate between transcendental idealism and transcendental realism, or between regulative Spinozism and metaphysical Spinozism). For, while Boehm is right to suggest that Spinoza does not have the resources to convince somebody who ultimately denies Spinozistic premises that the ontological version of the PSR is true (*viz.*, “for every thing [*p*] that exists, there is a reason why *p* exists”), he has admirably shown that the Kantian also runs out of resources to decisively refute the Spinozist. Spinoza's ontological argument, the *causa sui*, and the (ontological) version of the PSR, are an interconnected package of commitments. In showing us this, Boehm has helped us to discern what the true philosophical landscape is from a Kantian perspective (even if Boehm often ignores further complications that are immanent in this landscape due to the more familiar contributions and challenges of Leibniz and Hume, and the not yet fully assimilated moves by Newton).

There is, however, a mistake in Boehm's account of Spinoza's conception of reason, which is not (in Kantian terms) purely theoretical. In the *Ethics*, at EIVp35, Spinoza ends up (by appealing to EIIIp3 and EIII d2) equating adequate ideas and his conception of agency, on the one hand, with living under the guidance of reason, on the other. Living under the guidance of reason, in turn, is understood as acting from virtue (EIVp24); reason is thus the foundation of morality (EIVp18s). That is to say, in Kantian terms, Spinoza treats practical and theoretical reason as roughly identical. (It is misleading to construe this as a “collapse” of one into another because there is no evidence that Spinoza privileges theoretical reason.) This is not a glitch in Spinoza's system; it is crucial to his account of the origin and nature of justice (that is, political order) in his political philosophy, both as presented in the *Ethics* (see EIVp35s2) and in the *Theological-Political Treatise* (see TTP chap. 16).

In the empiricist tradition, reason is a kind of content-neutral faculty or set of operations. As Don Rutherford has shown, Spinoza anticipates this in some sense because his notion of “acting from reason” also means picking out the causal power of reason on behavior (or the set of ideas that follow from it).⁴⁴ But, as Rutherford acknowledges, for Spinoza “reason” can have substantial content such that everyone who has it or is guided by it (or its maxims) will agree about the good (again

see EIVp18s1); that is, reason sets ends.⁴⁵ (This is why Spinoza can appeal to reason in his political writings.) Spinoza does not say enough to justify this latter claim as available within the (temporal) political order, although, as I have noted, our true, or authentic self is the self that acts from reason (even if it's a self that lacks a lot of individuality).⁴⁶ But if there is a criticism to be made of Spinoza in this regard, it is not one that helps the Kantian who is ultimately saddled with a similar problem to solve about the content of reason—it is no surprise that ultimately, Kantian practical reason becomes a kind of coherence requirement (one that the Spinozist can accept happily).

So, a Spinozist (who knows something about striving, after all) need not disagree with Boehm's Kantian claim that "we strive to theoretically understand the world with a commitment to changing it" (KCS 183). In Spinozism, this commitment to change the world comes for free without anthropomorphism. This is because, according to Spinoza, to act from reason is not a call to quietism (or fatalism, etc.), but is rather a call to be moved to aid one's (political) neighbor (EIIp49s). (Of course, it does not follow that Spinoza has no space for pure theoretical contemplation of the sort that Kant seems to rule out.) It is notable that Boehm's interpretation of Spinoza rests here on the *form* of the *Ethics*, not its textual content.⁴⁷ So, while there may be moral problems with Spinozism, Spinoza teaches us that we cannot demand justice from God or nature, but that in society it's up to us to strive to "do freely the things which are best" (ibid.).

NOTES

1. Omri Boehm, *Kant's Critique of Spinoza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. ix; henceforth KCS, followed by page number.
2. To avoid confusion, Boehm does restrict (from the vantage point of pure rationalism) what one might call the grounding and priority of the PSR by claiming that it depends on our moral commitment that things could have been otherwise.
3. Immanuel Kant, *The One Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, trans. Gordon Treash (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseyns Gottes*, ed. Paul Menzer, in *Vorfrüchtige Schriften II (1757–1777)*, ed. Paul Gedan, Kurd Lasswitz et al., vol. 2 of *Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Dilthey, vols. 1–9 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Prussian Academy of the Sciences (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1912).

4. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004), p. 108.
5. See my "Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750–1790*," review of *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750–1790*, by Jonathan Israel, *Æconomia: History, Methodology, Philosophy* 4:4 (2014), pp. 651–7.
6. See my article, "On reading Newton as an Epicurean: Kant, Spinozism and the changes to the *Principia*," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 44:3 (2013), pp. 416–28.
7. See especially the following papers by Ursula Goldenbaum: "Why Shouldn't Leibniz Have Studied Spinoza?" *The Leibniz Review* 17:1 (2007), pp. 107–38; "Mendelssohn's Spinozistic Alternative to Baumgarten's Pietist Project of Aesthetics," in *Moses Mendelssohn's Metaphysics and Aesthetics*, ed. Reinier Munk, vol. 13 of *Studies in German Idealism* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), pp. 299–327; and "Understanding the Argument through Then-Current Public Debates or My Detective Method of History of Philosophy," chap. 4 of *Philosophy and Its History: Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Mogens Laerke, Justin E. H. Smith, and Eric Schliesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
8. See, for example, Michela Massimi, "Kant's Dynamical Theory of Matter in 1755, and its Debt to Speculative Newtonian Experimentalism," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 42:4 (2011), pp. 525–43.
9. See, for example, Paul Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Catherine Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
10. On this point see Martin Schonfeld, *The Philosophy of the Young Kant: The Precritical Project* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 215ff. The review of the *Beweisgrund*, which I am attributing to Mendelssohn was published as, "Zwei hundert und achtzigster Brief: Prüfung der Schrift des Hrn. M. Kants von dem einzig möglichen Beweißgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseyns Gotte; Vergleichung der Definition des Daseyns des Verfassers mit der Baumgartenschen; Von der Erkenntnis der innern Möglichkeit der Dinge; sowohl in Absicht auf Gott, als die Menschen; Folgerungen aus dieser Möglichkeit auf das schlechterdings nothwendige Daseyn eines Wesens, insbesondere Gottes," *Briefe, die Neueste Litteratur betreffend* 18:1 (1764), pp. 69–86. The editors of the *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* called my attention to the fact that the online edition of the *Briefe* identifies Friedrich Gabriel Resewitz as the author of this review, rather than Mendelssohn. For a judicious treatment of the attribution issue, see Anne Pollok, *Facetten des Menschen: Zur Anthropologie Moses Mendelssohns* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2009), p. 223. Pollok ultimately concludes that there is not enough evidence to decisively attribute the review to either Mendelssohn or Resewitz. I thank Stefan Heßbrüggen for discussion of this issue.

11. I thank Boris Demarest for this point.
12. See, for example, Ted Sider, *Writing the Book of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
13. For example, Jonathan Schaffer, "Monism: The Priority of the Whole," *Philosophical Review* 119:1 (2010), pp. 31–76.
14. Michael Della Rocca, "PSR," *Philosophers' Imprint* 10:7 (2010), pp. 1–13.
15. It is odd that after claiming that "the human intellect genuinely grasps how one thing can cause another" (KCS 143), there is no mention of Locke and Hume, both of who undermine the intelligibility and appeal of precisely this mechanical conception.
16. All references are to Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. and ed. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin, 1996); hereafter E, followed by large roman numeral for part number, "p" for proposition number, "c" for corollary, "s" for scholium, and "app" for appendix.
17. The three propositions that Boehm cites all talk of God as "efficient cause," but he fails to explore how God's efficiency works. He tacitly assumes that God is part of, or initiates, the chain of causes like a cosmic billiard ball player. But this is Descartes' position; it is not Spinoza's.
18. See my "Spinoza and the Philosophy of Science: Mathematics, Motion, and Being," *Oxford Handbooks Online*, <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195335828.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195335828-e-020> (accessed November 2, 2015).
19. We can ignore here other debates about the role of teleology in Spinoza's system.
20. See Paolo Mancosu, *Philosophy of Mathematics and Mathematical Practice in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
21. See the seminal article by Karolina Hübner, "On the Significance of Formal Causes in Spinoza's Metaphysics," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 97:2 (2015), pp. 196–223. There is also an historical irony in that Boehm's Kantian rejection of *causa sui* echoes the Scholastic rejection of *causa sui* as they encountered it in Descartes (and Spinoza).
22. My unargued assumption here is that because Boehm accepts Della Rocca's conceivability-focused interpretation of the PSR, Boehm misses alternative ways to explore the issue.
23. See Samuel Clarke, "The Answer to a Sixth Letter," in *Sermons on Several Subjects: Eighteen Sermons on Several Occasions; Sixteen Sermons on the Being and Attributes of God, the Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*, vol. 2 of *The Works of Samuel Clarke*, ed. Benjamin Hoadly (London: John and Paul Knapton, 1738), pp. 751–4.

24. Samuel Clarke, "Answer to Butler's Third Letter," in *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*, ed. Ezio Vailati (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 105.
25. I use scare quotes around "cause" here because this notion of cause is not really different from substance (hence *causa sui*).
26. I am here inspired by Daniel Schneider's still unpublished work on the ontological argument.
27. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz to Samuel Clarke, December 1715, in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Samuel Clarke, *Correspondence*, ed. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), p. 9.
28. Isaac Newton, *Newton's Principia: The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Motte, ed. Nathaniel W. Chittenden (New York: Daniel Adee, 1846), p. 80; *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (London: S. Pepys, 1686), p. 9.
29. I am relying here on my treatment in "Newton's Philosophy of Time," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Time*, ed. Heather Dyke and Adrian Bardon (Oxford: Wiley, 2013), pp. 87–101.
30. Isaac Newton, *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. Bernard Cohen and Anne Whitman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 941–2; henceforth P, followed by page number.
31. There is also rich scholarly literature on Newton's manuscript *De Gravitatione* (unknown to Kant), where Newton both recognizes the infinite/indefinite distinction that he associates with Descartes' fears about being accused of atheism, and offers an emanative account of the relationship between God and space. For my treatment and survey of the literature, see my "Newtonian Emanation, Spinozism, Measurement and the Baconian Origins of the Laws of Nature," *Foundations of Science* 18:3 (2013), pp. 449–66.
32. Isaac Newton to Richard Bentley, 25 February 1693, in Isaac Newton, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Andrew Janiak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 102.
33. Immanuel Kant, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens, or Essay on the Constitution and the Mechanical Origin of the Entire Universe, according to Newtonian Principles (1755)*, trans. Olaf Reinhardt, in *Kant: Natural Science*, ed. Eric Watkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 215; *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels*, ed. Johannes Rahts, in *Vorkritische Schriften I (1747–1756)*, ed. Johannes Rahts and Kurd Lasswitz, vol. 1 of *Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Dilthey, vols. 1–9 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Prussian Academy of the Sciences (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1910), p. 247.
34. See also my paper, "Newton's Substance Monism, Distant Action, and the Nature of Newton's Empiricism: Discussion of H. Kochiras 'Gravity and Newton's Substance Counting Problem,'" *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 42:1 (2011), pp. 160–6.

35. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 85.
36. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 427; A471/B499.
37. See my paper, "On Reading Newton as an Epicurean."
38. My former colleague Dan Schneider had already taught me a version of this, and I hope his version appears in print before long.
39. There is a minor oddity in Boehm's book. In the preface, he recognizes that he shares with Leo Strauss an interest in nihilism's origins; Boehm and Strauss also happen to agree (although Boehm is not explicit about this agreement) that the fact/value distinction (as understood post-Weber or Moore) is a problematic feature of the contemporary intellectual landscape (such that the problem of worldly meaning/teleology must appear unresolvable). Unusually among analytical philosophers, Boehm also speaks admiringly of Strauss' work on Mendelssohn and the *Pantheismusstreit*, but Boehm seems to think that his own defense of (Kantian) rational faith is somehow extremely far removed from Strauss' position. This is odd because it is the recognition by Strauss that Athens and the Enlightenment are ultimately grounded in a form of faith (one that takes itself to be uniquely rational) that makes Strauss think that the debate between Jerusalem and Athens can and must be re-opened. This is, of course, not Boehm's opinion, but he seems to miss that if his regulative Spinozism can defeat metaphysical Spinozism, the path to Strauss' position is also available.
40. We may say of Kant, to paraphrase an expression of Spinoza's, that he makes man "an empire within an empire" (EIII preface).
41. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, vol. 1 of *Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. Ronald L. Meek, David D. Raphael, and Peter Stein (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 293. To be clear, Smith is aware that the Stoics embrace providence. But his discussion has hints of Spinozism: "The necessary connection which Nature has established between causes and their effects" (*ibid.*).
42. See Immanuel Kant, "What does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" trans. Allen Wood, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 7–18; "Was Heißt: sich im Denken orientieren?" ed. Heinrich Maier, in *Abhandlungen nach 1781*, ed. Heinrich Maier, Max Frischeisen-Kohler, and Paul Menzer, vol. 8 of *Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Dilthey, vols. 1–9 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Prussian Academy of the Sciences (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1923), pp. 133–47.
43. Outside of analytical philosophy, a Deleuze-inspired affective Spinozism can be traced to Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988).
44. See Donald Rutherford, "Spinoza and the Dictates of Reason," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 51:5 (2008), pp. 485–511.

45. Ibid., pp. 505ff.
46. See my article, "Angels and Philosophers: With a New Interpretation of Spinoza's Common Notions," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 111:3 (2011), pp. 497–518. Again, see Rutherford's article for an excellent, and somewhat more optimistic discussion.
47. I have argued elsewhere that the form of the *Ethics* signals neither an embrace of mathematical physics nor that Spinoza rests his case on pure theoretical reason. See my paper, "Spinoza and the Philosophy of Science."