



Deposited via The University of Sheffield.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/97865/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Stern, R.A. (2016) 'Determination is Negation': The Adventures of a Doctrine from Spinoza to Hegel to the British Idealists. *Hegel Bulletin*, 37. pp. 29-52. ISSN: 2051-5367

<https://doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2016.2>

This article has been published in a revised form in *Hegel Bulletin* [<https://doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2016.2>]. This version is free to view and download for private research and study only. Not for re-distribution, re-sale or use in derivative works. © The Hegel Society of Great Britain 2016.

Reuse

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND) licence. This licence only allows you to download this work and share it with others as long as you credit the authors, but you can't change the article in any way or use it commercially. More information and the full terms of the licence here: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

‘DETERMINATION IS NEGATION’: THE ADVENTURES OF A DOCTRINE FROM SPINOZA TO HEGEL TO THE BRITISH IDEALISTS

Robert Stern

Abstract This paper is a discussion of Hegel’s conception of the principle ‘*omnis determinatio est negatio*’, which he attributes to Spinoza. It is argued, however, that Spinoza understood this principle in a very different way from Hegel, which then sets up an interpretative puzzle: if this is so, why did he credit Spinoza with formulating it? This puzzle is resolved by paying attention to the context in which those attributions are made, while it is also shown that the British Idealists (unlike many contemporary commentators) were aware of the complexities in the Spinoza-Hegel relation on this issue. The paper also addresses some of the philosophical debates raised by this question, and the light it sheds on Hegel’s critique of Spinoza as a monist.

This paper concerns an interpretative puzzle, and also the philosophical lessons that can be learnt from it. The interpretative puzzle concerns Hegel’s use of the slogan ‘*all determination is negation*’, where this idea forms an important part of Hegel’s metaphysical thinking, and one that he is often said to have got from Spinoza, based not least on comments Hegel himself makes. But in fact, the way in which Hegel understands the doctrine seems to be the opposite of the way in which Spinoza understood it: roughly, for Hegel the negation that comes with determination is necessary for being in any genuine sense, whereas for Spinoza the negation that comes with determination is a privation of being, a way of not being – so while for Hegel such determination through negation is a necessary condition if being is not to collapse into nothing, for Spinoza it is a taking away of being. How, then, did this inversion come about; why didn’t Hegel make it clearer; and why has it been so frequently missed? And, philosophically speaking, what hangs on it, and what role does it play in Hegel’s critique of Spinoza?

In this paper, I want to examine what this difference between the Hegelian and Spinozistic ways of taking the doctrine amounts to, and how it is to be explained. I also want to explore the impact this difference had on the British Idealists. I will argue that several of the British Idealists (unlike several contemporary Hegel commentators) clearly saw the contrast between Spinoza and Hegel here, where some

(such as the Cairds) objected to Spinoza precisely because he failed to understand the doctrine in a Hegelian manner, while others (such as Bradley) used it in a more Spinozistic way, which then caused concern to the other British Idealists, and led to criticisms of his view.

The paper will proceed as follows. In Section I, I will present Hegel's own way of understanding the 'determination is negation' principle. In Section II, I will contrast this with Spinoza's conception of what it involves. In Section III, I will consider various accounts of how it is that Hegel came to associate his position with Spinoza's, where this can be seen to be very puzzling in the light of what has gone before. In Section IV, I will turn to the way in which the British Idealists viewed the doctrine, and the role it played in their disagreements. Finally, in Section V, I will consider how this discussion can help in understanding Hegel's critique of Spinoza, and what it involves.

1. Hegel on determination is negation

As is well known, the 'determination is negation' principle emerges at the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*, as part of the dialectical movement from pure being, to nothing, to becoming, to determinate being. Roughly speaking, here he argues that in order for what is to be anything more than an empty and abstract pure being (which is indistinguishable from nothing), and so be in a determinate manner, it must involve some negation – i.e. some sort of differentiation within it, whereby it contains some distinct elements that are heterogeneous in some way and so negate each other. The principle thus plays an important role within Hegel's ontological position, where it is crucial to his case against Parmenidean monism, which treats reality as a 'one', lacking in any element of difference; rather, Hegel argues, reality must incorporate some element of differentiation, of distinctions within being, where without these 'negations' it would not comprise determinate being, but would be no more than the nothingness of pure being.

Now, in putting forward this position, Hegel seems to strongly associate himself with Spinoza, and to credit the latter with influencing his views. Thus, in the *Science of Logic*, he writes:¹

¹ Unless stated otherwise, references to Hegel's texts are given first to the *Theorie Werkausgabe* edition, edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Marcus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969), by volume and page number, as well as section number

Determinateness is negation posited as affirmative - this is the proposition of Spinoza: *omnis determinatio est negatio*. This proposition is infinitely important. (5:121 (SL:113); translation modified)²

Similarly, in the *Encyclopedia Logic* we find the following:

We certainly also represent being as absolute riches, and nothing, on the contrary, as absolute poverty. But when we consider the entire world, and say simply that everything is, and nothing further, we leave out everything determinate, and, in consequence, have only absolute emptiness instead of absolute fullness.... The basis of all determinacy is negation (*omnis determinatio est negatio*, as Spinoza says). (EL §87Z and §91Z (8:187-8 (EL:140-1) and 8:196 (EL:147))

Not surprisingly, such comments have led to a common interpretation of Hegel's relation to Spinoza on this issue, namely that in developing his position, Hegel was following Spinoza's lead. Charles Taylor thus represents a widespread view when he starts by setting out Hegel's position along the lines I have suggested and then associates this with Spinoza:

if appropriate, and then to one of the following translations using the abbreviations below:

- EL *The Encyclopedia Logic*, translated by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991)
- HW *Heidelberg Writings: Journal Publications*, translated by Brady Bowman and Allen Speight (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- LHP *Lectures on the History of Modern Philosophy 1825-6, Volume III: Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, edited by Robert F. Brown, translated by R. F. Brown and J. M. Stewart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- PS *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977)
- SL *Hegel's Science of Logic*, translated by A. V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969)

² Cf. also 6:195 (SL:536): '*Determinateness is negation* – is the absolute principle of Spinoza's philosophy'.

Let us start with the simple notion of being and we shall see that it is inadequate. Nothing *is* simply without having some determinate quality. Simply being which was nothing but this, i.e., was neither animal, vegetable, nor mineral, etc., would be nothing. And this is the famous first argument of the logic: pure being turns out to be pure emptiness, nothing; and reciprocally, this nothing which is purely indeterminate is equivalent to pure being. Hence the notion of pure being frustrates its own purpose. We cannot characterize reality with it alone, and we are forced to move to a notion of being as determinate, as having some quality and not another. Being can only be thought as determinate.

But this means that being and non-being are joined together; for the only way to characterize determinate being is in terms of some property, and property terms can only be made intelligible by being opposed, contrasted to each other. In this sense Hegel takes up the Spinozan principle that all determination is negation. (Taylor 1975: 232)³

³ Cf. also Inwood 1992: 78: ‘Hegel endorses Spinoza’s claim that “determination is negation”...that is, that a thing or concept is determinate only in virtue of a contrast with other things or concepts, which are determined in a way that it is not’; and Brandom 2002: 178-9: ‘Hegel starts the line of thought I will be rehearsing with the everyday idea of how things are – the idea that there is some way the world is. Understanding how things are or might be is grasping a certain sort of *content*. And his first observation is that that content – the way things are or could be taken to be – must be *determinate*... Determinateness is a matter of identity and individuation. It concerns how one thing is distinguished from others...Hegel embraces the medieval (and Spinozist) principle *omnis determinatio est negatio*.’ It is not only contemporary commentators who take this line: cf. also Sigwart 1895: volume 1, 126-7: ‘...Spinoza’s well-known proposition ‘*Determinatio est negatio*’ has been made use of to express a view which goes so far as to transfer the negation into the nature of things themselves, thus ranking the negative judgment as the original expression of knowledge of these. Trendelenburg has rightly drawn attention to Thomas Campanella as one of the most decided supporters of the opinion that all things consist in yes and no, being and non-being; that everything is this particular thing only because it is not something else. ‘Man is,’ that is his affirmation. But he is only man because he is not stone, not lion, not donkey; hence he is at once being, and non-being. Spinoza has the same meaning when he says ‘*Determinatio est negatio*’; a figure is determined in so far as it is not the space surrounding it, and thus can be thought of only by the aid of negation – as a limitation, *i.e.* negation of the infinite... [But] it is only by a constant confusion between negation in thought and those real relations in being which are very imperfectly expressed by mere negation that the Hegelian logic succeeds in presenting it as a real power, and as the nature of things...’

In the secondary literature on Hegel, therefore, the idea that there is a positive connection between Hegel and Spinoza concerning this principle, notwithstanding their other differences, is well-entrenched.

But in fact, not everything is at it appears, where as we shall soon see, there are grounds for considerable doubt that Spinoza ever understood the principle in the way Hegel does. Now, of course, it has often been noted by Hegel scholars that he rewords the dictum, as Spinoza nowhere quite writes ‘*omnis determinatio est negatio*’ – but this is frequently just put down to Hegel’s notoriously sloppy habits in giving quotations, and so signifies little.⁴ Less frequently, some concern is expressed that perhaps Spinoza didn’t quite mean what Hegel means, but then this is not really explained or elaborated upon.⁵ And in just a few cases, it is pointed out in more detail that Spinoza’s position is the complete opposite of Hegel’s – where it is this view that I now wish to defend, but in a way which is more sympathetic to Hegel than those who normally propound this position, who generally see Hegel as blind to this fact, or if not blind to it himself, as deliberately trying to obscure it from his readers in order to make it easier for him to both co-opt and criticize Spinoza for his own purposes.⁶

2. Spinoza on determination is negation

Spinoza does not explicitly state the principle that determination is negation as such in his published writings, but in a letter to Jarig Jelles of 1674:

With regard to the statement that figure is a negation and not anything positive, it is obvious that matter in its totality, considered without limitation [*indefinitè consideratam*], can have no figure, and that figure applies only to

⁴ See e.g. the editors’ notes to EL, where they remark only that ‘This tag, which Hegel loves, is a misquotation’ (EL:326).

⁵ Cf. Moore 2012: 181-2, note 63: ‘At one point Hegel appropriates Spinoza as an ally, citing what he calls “the proposition of Spinoza” that ‘*omnis determinatio est negatio*’: all determination is negation... But it is far from clear, in what he goes on to say about Spinoza, that he is being faithful to him’.

⁶ Cf. Duffy 2006: 18: ‘Hegel not only changes the quotation to simplify it for his purposes, but in his interpretation he also distorts its Spinozistic meaning’.

finite and determinate bodies. For he who says that he apprehends a figure, thereby means to indicate simply this, that he apprehends a determinate thing and the manner of its determination. This determination therefore does not pertain to the thing in regard to its being; on the contrary, it is its non-being. So since figure is nothing but determination, and determination is negation [*Quia ergo figura non aliud, quam determinatio, et determinatio negatio est*], figure can be nothing other than negation, as has been said.⁷

Nonetheless, the doctrine is also implied elsewhere, for example in *Ethics* 1p8s:

As finite existence involves a partial negation, and infinite existence is the absolute affirmation of the given nature, it follows (solely from Prop. vii) that every substance is necessarily infinite.

What position is Spinoza putting forward here, and what is his argument for it?

A crucial background idea is to be found in Descartes, where he writes in his fifth set of replies that ‘all limitation implies a negation of the infinite’.⁸ With this in mind, we might set out Spinoza’s argument in the Jelles letter as follows:

When we apprehend a finite thing, we see it as having a shape or figure.

In so doing, we mark that thing off from other things, giving it a determination.

But it only has being as part of the infinite matter from which it is now separated.

So, its determination pertains to its non-being, not its being.

⁷ In standard catalogues of Spinoza’s correspondence, this is classified as Letter 50, where I am using the translation given by Yitzhak Y. Melamed in Melamed 2012. The letter can be found in Spinoza 1925: Vol IV, p. 240. The letter is one of the few Spinoza originally wrote in Dutch, where a Dutch version was printed in 1677 in Spinoza’s *Nagelate schriften* (the Dutch edition of the Posthumous Works); but since Spinoza’s Dutch was rather clumsy, this was revised by the editors. Still, it will be closer to what Spinoza actually wrote than the Latin translation given in the *Opera posthuma*, which Paulus took for his source text. The phrase *Quia ... determinatio negatio est* (‘as determination is negation’) correctly renders *Dewijl dan ... bepaling ontkenning is*. I am grateful to Piet Steenbakkers for this information.

⁸ Descartes 1964-76: 7:365.

So, as determination is a negation of being, and figure is a form of determination, figure is a negation.

It seems crucial to Spinoza's view, therefore, that determination is a negation in the sense that it is a privation or taking away of being, as we move from the infinite to the finite.⁹ This, certainly, is the point that is stressed by F. H. Jacobi, who did so much to generate interest in Spinoza in eighteenth century Germany:

Determinatio est negatio, seu determinatio ad rem juxta suum esse non pertinent [Determination is negation, i.e. determination does not pertain to a thing according to its being]. Individual things therefore, so far as they only exist in a certain determinate mode, are *non-entia*; the indeterminate infinite being is the one single true *ens reale, hoc est, est omne esse, & praeter quod nullum datur est* [this is the real being; it is the all of being, and apart from it there is no being]. (Jacobi 1785: §XII, p. 131; translated Jacobi 1994: 219-20)

But now we are faced by our puzzle, namely that Spinoza seems to take 'determination is negation' in a way that is opposite to Hegel: whereas he thinks determination through negation is necessary *for* being in any real sense, Spinoza thinks determination through negation relates to the *non-being* of what is determined in this way. Far from being at one on this issue, therefore, Hegel and Spinoza seem to be as far apart as possible. But if this is right, why did Hegel claim that *his* way of taking 'determination is negation' is 'the proposition of Spinoza'? – where it is Hegel himself who seems to have misled many of his commentators here, who not unnaturally have taken his word for how things stood in relation to Spinoza.

I will now consider some possible answers to this puzzle.

3. Hegel and Spinoza on determination is negation

⁹ Cf. Letter 36 to Hudde: 'since determination denotes nothing positive, but only a privation in the nature of existence which is conceived as determinate, it follows that that which by definition affirms existence cannot be conceived of as determinate' (Spinoza 1925: vol IV, p. 184).

A first, and most obvious, answer is that perhaps Hegel just misread Spinoza, and just distorted the latter's meaning through ignorance. This, however, is not very plausible, for two main reasons.

First, Hegel was very familiar with Jacobi's writings on Spinoza, and as we have seen, Jacobi's account gets Spinoza's position on this matter right, so at the very least Hegel would have been exposed to an account very different from his own, rather than slipping into this through lack of awareness. Indeed, in his review of the third volume of Jacobi's *Works* published in the *Heidelberger Jahrbücher der Literatur* in 1817, Hegel comments on this principle in relation to Jacobi, suggesting that he would have been perfectly well aware of the latter's understanding of it.¹⁰

Second, and even more significantly, in many of *his own* writings on Spinoza, Hegel himself offers a reading of the principle that is closer to Spinoza's own – *and* moreover uses it to criticise Spinoza for thereby ending up with a monistic view of substance as a kind of Parmenidean one. This suggests that Hegel was perfectly well aware of how Spinoza meant the principle to be understood, as can be seen, for example, in this passage from the lectures on the history of philosophy:

With regard to the determinate, Spinoza established this thesis: *omnis determinatio est negatio*. Hence only the non-particularized or the universal *is*. It alone is what is substantial and therefore truly actual. As a singular thing, the soul or the mind is something limited. It is by negation that a singular thing is. Therefore [the singular thing] does not have genuine actuality. This on the whole is Spinoza's idea.... What differentiates and forms the particular is said to be just a modification of the absolute substance and nothing actual in its own self. The operation upon it is just the stripping away of its determination or particularity, so that it can be thrown back into the one

¹⁰ See 'Review of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's Works, Volume III', 4:434 (HW: 8-9). This view of the principle seems not to have been uncommon at the time, perhaps because of Jacobi's influence: see e.g. Schelling's reference to it in his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809), where again he argues that 'determination as negation' does not apply to an intelligible being, since the determinateness it has 'really is the essence in its being' (Schelling 1856-61: 385; translated Schelling 2006: 50).

absolute substance. This is what is unsatisfying in Spinoza. (Hegel 1986: 104-5 (LHP:121-2))¹¹

Hegel therefore shows himself to have been perfectly capable of offering a reading of the principle that was very different from his own way of using it, and of attributing this reading to Spinoza.

Moreover, in these discussions of Spinoza, where he sees value in the principle, it is not because he reads it his way, but because he reads it as Spinoza intended: so for Hegel, what makes the principle significant in Spinoza's hands is not in showing that it can be used as an argument against Parmenidean monism, but because it establishes that the finite is not itself absolute, but must relate to the infinite qua substance – where this is a view that Hegel himself endorses.¹² Of course, and as we shall discuss further, Hegel also thinks Spinoza gets this relation between the finite and infinite wrong in certain fundamental ways, in giving too much weight to the latter over the former – but still, where he deserves credit, and where the 'determination is negation' principle does good work, is in taking a step in the right direction:

This idea of Spinoza's must be acknowledged to be true and well-grounded. There is an absolute substance, and it is what is true. But it is not yet the whole truth, for substance must also be thought of as inwardly active and alive, and in that way must determine itself as spirit. Spinoza's substance is the universal, and consequently the abstract, determination... If thinking stops with this substance, there is then no development, no life, no spirituality or

¹¹ Cf. also 6:198 (SL:538-9), where Hegel compares Spinoza's view to that of 'the oriental conception of *emanation*', where the coming into being of what emanates from the absolute is seen 'only as a progressive loss'; and also 5:117 (SL:111), where although Spinoza is not mentioned by name, it is arguable that Hegel had him in mind: '...in *reality* as quality with the accent on *being*, the fact is concealed that it contains determinateness and therefore also negation. Consequently, reality is given the value only of something positive from which negation, limitation and deficiency [*Mangel*] are excluded. Negation as mere deficiency would be equivalent to nothing; but it is a *determinate* being, a quality, only determined with a non-being'.

¹² Cf. Hegel 5:172 (SL:154): 'The proposition that the finite is ideal [*ideell*] constitutes idealism. The idealism of philosophy consists in nothing else than in recognizing that the finite has no veritable being [*wahrhaft Seiendes*]'.

activity. So we can say that with Spinozism everything goes into the abyss but nothing emerges from it. (Hegel 1986: 104-5 (LHP:122))¹³

What is remarkable here is that Hegel sees the context for the principle not as refuting monism, but as something much more Spinozistic, again suggesting that he knew well how Spinoza intended it to be taken, and how this differed from his own approach. So it seems, we cannot hope to resolve our interpretative puzzle by holding that Hegel was unfamiliar with Spinoza's thinking in this area, and so got the attribution wrong through ignorance. In fact, our puzzle is now deepened yet further: given that he knew Spinoza's position perfectly well, why did he present his very different understanding of the principle as following in Spinoza's footsteps?

Here, a second answer might be offered: namely, that while Hegel thinks his own way of understanding the principle is a great insight, and while he recognized that it is very different from Spinoza's manner of taking it, nonetheless Spinoza's earlier conception of the principle made his own possible, which is why 'omnis determinatio est negatio' still deserves to be called 'the proposition of Spinoza', even though Hegel's view of it diverges from the one Spinoza himself adopted.

Now, as we have just seen, this approach might fit the discussions where Hegel is reading the principle in a Spinozistic manner, where (in a way that is characteristic of his attitude to his predecessors) Hegel does seem to acknowledge that Spinoza was on to something important about how the infinite relates to the finite, but was too 'one-sided' in how he viewed that relation. So in this context, it makes sense to think of Hegel giving Spinoza some credit as a trail-blazer.¹⁴ But, when Hegel is using the principle as part of his refutation of Parmenidean monism, to claim that being requires negation, this position just seems too distant from Spinoza's view to

¹³ Cf. also 6:195 (SL:536): '[I]t is sufficiently important that in this necessary notion [of Spinoza's substance], everything which to natural picture thinking or to the understanding with its fixed distinctions, appears and is vaguely present as something self-subsistent, is completely reduced to a mere *positedness*. *Determinateness is negation* – is the absolute principle of Spinoza's philosophy; this true and simple insight establishes the absolute unity of substance'.

¹⁴ Cf. 6:195 (SL:536): '*Determinateness is negation* – is the absolute principle of Spinoza's philosophy; this true and simple insight establishes the absolute unity of substance. But Spinoza stops short at *negation* as *determinateness* or quality; he does not advance to a cognition of negation as absolute, that is, *self-negating, negation*; thus *his substance does not itself contain the absolute form*, and cognition of it is not an immanent cognition'.

count as something the latter saw, albeit dimly – on the contrary, as we have been emphasising, it doesn't seem to be Spinoza's view in any way at all.¹⁵ So, notwithstanding Hegel's fondness for finding a place for all his predecessors within the big Hegelian tent, it would seem implausible to claim that this was his intention in claiming that the principle used in Hegel's way is still somehow a descendent of Spinoza's understanding of it, for which Spinoza deserves acknowledgement.

It would seem, then, that to resolve our interpretative puzzle, a more radical suggestion is required, which I now want to put forward as the right one: namely, that while Hegel undoubtedly held the doctrine that determination requires negation and that being requires determination, nonetheless when he himself actually *refers to* the 'determination is negation' principle, he actually meant it *not* in this sense, but rather in Spinoza's – hence making it less surprising that he should attribute this principle to Spinoza, as in the contexts when he does so, he was employing it in Spinoza's way.

Clearly, to make this plausible, we need to look again at the places where Hegel mentions Spinoza in the context of his own arguments against pure being, and thus in a way that has suggested he thought that Spinoza understood the principle in his Hegelian manner; I will now argue that while Hegel does indeed mention Spinoza in these discussions, he nonetheless does so when using the principle in Spinoza's way, not his own, so that the puzzle can be dissolved by taking this approach.

The first and most important passage to be considered, therefore, comes from the *Science of Logic* which we cited previously, where the key sentence is: 'Determinateness is negation posited as affirmative – this is the proposition of Spinoza: *omnis determinatio est negatio*' ['Die Bestimmtheit ist die Negation als

¹⁵ This is my worry concerning the solution to the puzzle recently offered by Yitzhak Y. Melamed in his *Melamed* 2012: 176: 'That clause [at the end of Spinoza's letter to Jelles] was to be adopted by Hegel and transformed into the slogan of his own dialectical method: *Omnis determinatio est negatio* ("Every determination is negation"). Of further significance is the fact that, while Hegel does credit Spinoza with the discovery of this most fundamental insight, he believes Spinoza failed to appreciate the importance of his discovery'. But, as we have seen, Hegel's own understanding of the slogan is so different from Spinoza's, that it would just appear perverse for Hegel to claim that Spinoza deserves any credit for it, or that his own position is a development of Spinoza's in this respect. As Melamed himself notes 'the dialectical reading conflicts explicitly with some of Spinoza's deepest metaphysical principles', and so he is forced to claim that Hegel was 'unaware' of this (see p. 189); but this seems unlikely, for reasons give above.

affirmativ gesetzt – ist der Satz des Spinoza: *Omnis determinatio est negatio*’].¹⁶ Now of course, this could mean: ‘negation is something affirmative, something that enables things to be’, which would be the standard, non-Spinozistic reading, which then makes it hard to see how it can be called ‘the proposition of Spinoza’. But, I suggest, the sentence could also be read a different way, when we take into account the paragraph that comes before it. In that paragraph, Hegel has spoken about conceiving reality as ‘the absolute *power* in which everything determinate is absorbed’, and with it all negations, which is thus to have an affirmative view of reality itself according to which determinateness is treated as a privation. This, I suggest, means that we should read Hegel’s problematic sentence as saying that on Spinoza’s view of determinateness, negation can be viewed in conjunction with an affirmative view of reality and thus is posited by Spinoza in this manner, as it is taken as a deprivation of that reality qua absolute power, by being a limitation of what is. Thus, while on Spinoza’s view, determination is a negation, it goes along with an affirmative view of reality as such, for while it involves privation, it relates to a metaphysics of affirmation. This, then, which would give us a Spinozistic view of this sentence and hence make it unproblematic for Hegel then to say that this is a view of Spinoza’s, because it is.

What is to be said in favour of this reading? First, it resolves our interpretative puzzle. Second, it seems to fit Hegel’s actual words without torturing them. But there is also a third reason, which is that it makes sense of what Hegel says in the paragraph that immediately follows this sentence:

Of this proposition that determinateness is negation, the unity of Spinoza’s substance – or that there is only one substance – is the necessary consequence. *Thought* and *being* or extension, the two attributes, namely, which Spinoza had before him, he had of necessity to posit as one in this unity; for as determinate realities they are negations whose infinity is their unity. According to Spinoza’s definition, of which more subsequently, the infinity of anything is its affirmation. He grasped them therefore as attributes, that is, as not having a separate existence, a self-subsistent being of their own, but only as sublated, as moments; or rather, since substance in its own self

¹⁶ 5:120-1 (SL:113); translation modified.

lacks any determination whatever, they are for him not even moments, and the attributes like the modes are distinctions made by an external intellect. (Hegel 5:121 (SL:113))

Now, taking ‘determination is negation’ in the Hegelian way, it is hard to see how ‘the unity of Spinoza’s substance – or that there is only one substance’ could be the ‘necessary consequence’; for, the Hegelian way of taking this principle is just the idea that determination comes about through difference, where it is not at all clear why it should follow from this that a unified substance follows from it in a Spinozistic manner.¹⁷ However, if we take the principle *itself* as used here in an equally Spinozistic way, this claim makes much more sense, and in fact is in line with the passages from the lectures in the history of philosophy: namely, that if determination is the negation of a prior affirmative being, this affirmative being itself lacks any internal difference and determinacy, so there is no determinate difference between its attributes; they are therefore distinguished only by an external intellect and substance in itself remains an undifferentiated unity or one. The unity of Spinoza’s substance thus follows directly from the idea that determination is negation, *if* we take that idea in Spinoza’s way. The logic of Hegel’s discussion here therefore seems to require that

¹⁷ One commentator who does try to connect this paragraph to an Hegelian reading of the principle is Dean Moyar, where he glosses Hegel’s argument as follows: ‘When Hegel cites Spinoza on this point, he holds that an immediate inference from this claim is that there is only one all-encompassing substance, a totality within which everything can be determined by negation. This point too can easily be made intuitive, though its full metaphysical implications are obviously much harder to grasp. Negation only individuates something if we have an exhaustive grasp of the entities in question. Determining (classifying) something by negating all the things that contrast with it only succeeds if a complete negation is possible, which is the case only if we know what all the entities that stand in relation to the entity in question are. If the whole of the entities is not a closed system or totality, such individuation through negation will be impossible’ (Moyar 2011: 28-29). It is notable, however, that none of the argumentative moves Moyar makes here are in the text itself, particularly the thought that for us to classify something, these things must form part of a totality. Moreover, the argument itself seems weak: why should the individuation of a thing through negation require that *we* have an exhaustive grasp of it? Why couldn’t the difference between A and everything that is not-A make it the case that A is an individual, even if we lack full knowledge of all the things that make A different from what it is not? And of course, in attributing to Hegel a non-Spinozistic reading of the principle immediately before, Moyar walks straight into the interpretative puzzle we are trying to resolve, which he seems not to be aware of at all.

we read his use of the ‘determination is negation’ principle *in this context* as Spinozistic, even if elsewhere he used it for his own purposes in a different way.

Indeed, not only does this following paragraph seem to require this approach; so does the sentence which follows Hegel’s reference to the principle, which goes like this:

Determinateness is negation posited as affirmative - this is the proposition of Spinoza: *omnis determinatio est negatio*. This proposition is infinitely important; only, negation as such is formless abstraction [nur ist die Negation als solche die formlose Abstraktion].

I would suggest that the clause ‘only, negation as such is formless abstraction’ again fits with my reading, as a warning against the Spinozistic approach suggested in the first sentence, namely, that for Spinoza *on his way of taking the principle*, negation is treated as no more than a formless abstraction, while on Hegel’s way it is not – again signaling that Hegel is intending the principle to be read here in a Spinozistic manner, not his own.

Hegel’s other main discussion of Spinoza in the *Science of Logic* may also be handled in a comparable way.¹⁸ Here, after writing that ‘*Determinateness is negation* – is the absolute principle of Spinoza’s philosophy’, Hegel goes on: ‘this true and simple insight establishes the absolute unity of substance’. Again, as in the earlier discussion, this second remark only really makes sense if we take Hegel’s understanding of the principle here to be the Spinozistic one, as it is only from that that the ‘absolute unity’ of Spinoza’s substance really follows.¹⁹

¹⁸ See 6:195 (SL:536).

¹⁹ The same may be said of Hegel’s reference to this principle in his Jacobi review, where Hegel argues that if we are to avoid a ‘motionless’ and monistic Spinozistic substance, ‘Everything depends here on a correct understanding of the status and significance of negativity’. If we follow Spinoza, and negativity is ‘taken only to be the determinateness of finite things (*omnis determinatio est negatio*)’, then ‘negation fails to be seen as *internal to the infinite* or *internal to substance*’, where I would understand Hegel’s position here as follows: if negation is taken in Spinoza’s way, as a deprivation belonging to finite things, then the infinite cannot be conceived of as differentiated, in a way that Hegel criticizes Spinoza for in the previous paragraph; this only becomes possible if negation is understood in the manner that Hegel himself proposes, as ‘an internal principle of separation in substance itself’, whereby it gives

We may also look at the troublesome passage from the *Encyclopedia Logic*, which again I suggest can be dealt with in a similar manner. The crucial sentence from §91Z is ‘The basis of all determinacy is negation (*omnis determinatio est negatio*, as Spinoza says’. While standardly read as making the claim that Spinoza shares Hegel’s view regarding the relation between determination and negation, the sentence that follows in fact suggests otherwise: ‘Unthinking opinion considers determinate things to be merely positive and holds them fast in the form of being’. This, it seems, is making a Spinozistic point, against ‘unthinking opinion [das gedankenlose Meinen]’, which mistakenly holds that ordinary finite entities are all that is real and are ‘positive’ in their own right, without (like Spinoza) recognizing that they are in fact a negation of a larger totality, where it is this Spinozistic point that is taken up in Hegel’s claim that ‘the finite is ideal’. Here again, then, the context of Hegel’s reference to the ‘determination is negation’ principle suggests that here he was using it in a way similar to Spinoza – which then of course dispels the mystery that he should refer to Spinoza at just this point, notwithstanding his *different* take on the principle when it is used elsewhere.

It seems, then, that a solution to our interpretative puzzle has been found.

4. The British Idealists on determination is negation

I now want to turn to consider the way in which the British Idealists understood the position of Spinoza and Hegel on these issues, as I think this also sheds an interesting light on the puzzle we have discussed.

As we shall see, many of the British Idealists referred to the principle, and of course many of them were familiar with the work of Spinoza as well as Hegel.²⁰ As we shall also see, it also turns out that the principle is relevant to a significant divergence within British Idealism between monists (such as F. H. Bradley) and critics who accused British Idealism of monism or anti-individualism (such as Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison), and those who defended a more holistic position (such as John and Edward Caird). For, if the principle is taken in a Spinozistic way, it can provide an argument for monism, by suggesting that the finite is no more than a

itself being, rather than having it taken away. See ‘Review of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi’s Works, Volume III’, 4:434-5 (HW: 8-9).

²⁰ For some background discussion, see Parkinson 1993 and Mander 2011: 69-73.

‘falling away’ from the fundamental reality of an infinite being, which is itself undifferentiated. On the other hand, if the principle is taken in a more Hegelian way, it can provide a defense against this same monism, by suggesting that in lacking in negation it would also like in the determination necessary to distinguish it from nothing; but at the same time, the principle still allows for the infinite to be related to the finite in a dialectical manner of some sort, leading to a kind of dynamic holism, of the sort famously suggested in Hegel’s suggestion in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, that the absolute needs to be conceived not only as substance, but also as subject.²¹

Now, precisely because different readings of the principle were used to defend different positions, the British Idealists fully recognized that when Spinoza used the principle, it was not in defense of the Hegelian position that being requires determination, and thus that the latter view should not be taken as a Spinozistic doctrine. As a result, therefore, metaphysical holists like the Cairds treated Spinoza’s use of the principle as problematic, much as Hegel himself does in his lectures, as we have seen. So, they argue, while there are some tendencies in Spinoza that pull against this, in the end Spinoza must end up in an excessively monistic position that ultimately renders his position unstable and the tensions will less monistic aspects of his thought unresolved – so that in the end, his position needs to move into a form of more stable and satisfactory Hegelianism.

This approach can be seen clearly in the following passage from John Caird:

[Spinoza’s] philosophy is not a completely homogeneous product. It may rather be said to be the composite result of conflicting tendencies, neither of which is followed out to its utmost logical results...There are parts of his system – such as the reduction of all finite individuals to modes or accidents of the absolute substance, and the assertion that all determination is negation – in which the idea of the infinite is so emphasised as to leave no place for the finite, or to reduce nature and man, all individual existences, to unreality and illusion. There are parts of his system, on the other hand...which seem to give to the finite an independent reality that leaves no room for the infinite, or

²¹ Cf. 3:22-3 (PS:9-10): ‘in my view, which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*’.

reduces it to an expression for the aggregate of finite things... [T]he opposite tendencies by which his mind is governed seem to receive alternate expression; but to the last they remain side by side, with no apparent consciousness of their disharmony, and with no attempt to mediate between them. (J. Caird 1888: 3-5)

Caird takes Spinoza's approach to the doctrine of 'determination is negation' as symptomatic of Spinoza's underlying difficulties:

Spinoza is often greater than his method. There are parts of his system which it is impossible to reconcile with the categories that in general guide him... One of these points is his identification of the infinite with the purely affirmative, of the finite or determined with the negative. [Then quotes letter 50, and related texts]... In these passages the influence of what may be termed a geometrical conception of the universe is obvious. When we withdraw the arbitrary limits which distinguish the finite from the infinite, what we reach is simply that which is free from all limits or determinations, the absolutely indeterminate; and as determinations are merely negations, the removal of all negations leaves us in the presence of non-negation, or of pure, absolute affirmation. As the very essence of the finite is *non esse*, privation or negation of being, so the essence of the infinite is simply pure Being, that which *is*, or that which cannot be conceived save as existing, seeing its very nature is one with existence. We see, therefore, in so far as this part of his system is concerned, the narrowing influence of Spinoza's method. The conception of things on which that method is based excludes any other alternative than that of determination or indetermination. It excludes, in other words, another possible alternative – viz., that of self-determination, that is, of an affirmation which does not simply annul, but subsumes and includes negation. Yet the way to this alternative lay open to Spinoza when he had reached the last result which his method could yield. For an affirmation which is reached by negation, cannot ignore it. Apart from negation pure affirmation has no meaning. A negative element enters into its very essence. In itself, like the conception of pure space on which it is based, it is a mere abstraction; it needs the negative or determinate as its correlate. And when we have reached this

point, we have got beyond the contradictory elements of negation and affirmation to an idea which includes both. Thus the infinite, in the highest sense of the word, must be conceived not as the simple negation of the finite, but as that which at once denies and affirms it... Had Spinoza taken this further step, it would have implied the reconstruction of his whole system. (J. Caird 1888: 120-4)

Other Idealist commentators on Spinoza take a similar view, such as Edward Caird and H. H. Joachim.²² So, for several of the British Idealists with interests in both Hegel and Spinoza, they recognized how Spinoza's principle that determination is negation should be understood within the latter's philosophy, rather than reading his position in Hegelian terms as many contemporary commentators do; and they also argued that precisely *because* of this, it causes problems from an Hegelian

²² Cf. E. Caird 1889: vol 1, pp. 75-6:

The principle already laid down by Descartes, but seen in its full bearing only by Spinoza, that *omnis determinatio est negatio*, i.e., that all definition and determination is the limitation of a presupposed positive being by a negation or an unreality, led directly to the conclusion that the only thing real in the proper sense of the word is that being which is absolutely indeterminate, without distinction or limit; and that the only truth which is unmixed with illusion is the thought which apprehends such being... Spinoza struggles against this result... But he never saw the distinction between these two conceptions of the ultimate unity... To see things *sub specie aeternitatis* is simply to forget a difference which is found to be as hard and insoluble as ever, when we return to it again. It is like a Sunday confession that the things of the world are naught, while we treat them as absolute realities all the other days of the week.

and

Joachim 1901: 104-5:

[T]he moments of the conception [of God], as Spinoza defines them, are irreconcilable – that there is an inner contradiction in his conception of God. God is conceived by him as absolutely positive because absolutely real: as excluding all negation from his being. And this exclusion of negation or determination conflicts with the conception of God as comprehending all the ultimate characters of affirmative being within himself. This is the general conclusion to which, I think, we must come...

perspective, by leading Spinoza into a Parmenidean monism, no matter how much other aspects of his thought may have meant that he wanted to resist this.

On the other hand, other British Idealists who were apparently attracted to something resembling such monism, or who weren't but nonetheless feared that idealism must succumb to it, tended to view the Spinozistic conception of the principle as the right one to adopt.

A case in point is Bradley. While he doesn't cite the principle or refer to Spinoza in this context, it is arguable that he was close to Spinoza's way of understanding the doctrine, in holding that all differentiation is a form of falsification of the underlying unity of the whole. Of course, for Bradley this doesn't mean that this underlying unity is a mere 'one', as he also wants to allow that it contains some diversity. However, Bradley's critics such as Pringle-Pattison feared that he could not consistently maintain this position, any more than could Spinoza. This point emerges clearly when Pringle-Pattison writes:

On this whole side of [Bradley's] thought, he seems to me to reproduce in essence, and often almost in expression, the Spinozistic doctrine of 'imagination,' which reduces finite existence to a species of illusion. No doubt there are two tendencies at strife in Spinoza also. But his dominant thought is, 'all determination is negation'; and therefore all determinations are devoured, like clouds before the sun, in the white light of the *unica substantia*. (Pringle-Pattison 1897: 173)

Thus, while Pringle-Pattison accepted that Hegel 'dug philosophy' out of the 'pit of undifferentiated substance', Bradley's closeness to Spinoza on this issue meant that (despite himself) he put philosophy back in it again.

We have seen, then, that unlike some contemporary commentators, the British Idealist had a nuanced view of this issue, and one that seems to reflect the truth of the situation, concerning the differences between Spinoza and Hegel. We have also seen how some of them sided with Hegel himself in using this issue to criticize Spinoza's apparently monism, together than of Bradley. In the final section, I now turn to assessing the cogency of that critique.

5. Determination is negation and the problem of monism

It is clear that Hegel's central objection to Spinoza is that he ends up in a Parmenidean position, with a conception of pure being as an undifferentiated and therefore empty one. But how is this Parmenidean reading of Spinoza meant to work, and is it fair? Some recent commentators on Spinoza have sought to defend him against Hegel's charge, such as Yitzhak Melamed and Samuel Newlands.²³ How one sees this issue depends on what one takes Hegel's argument to be, where this then depends on the role one sees for the 'determination is negation' principle within that argument. Having discussed the complexities of that principle, the hope now is that this can provide us with a helpful background in analyzing and assessing Hegel's argument.

One common way to understand that argument, is as an argument to monism from acosmism, where (following Maimon)²⁴ this is taken to be the denial of the reality of finite things (qua cosmos), where that denial is then based on Spinoza's version of the determination is negation principle. How, more precisely, might this argument be said to work?

A first way of setting it out might be as follows:

- (1) All determination involves negation, in Spinoza's sense – i.e. a deprivation of being
- (2) Finite things are determinate
- (3) Therefore, finite things involve negation as a deprivation of being
- (4) Therefore, because they involve determination and hence negation, they lack being
- (5) Therefore, finite things do not exist
- (6) Therefore, there is no universe of finite things (acosmism)
- (7) Therefore, the infinite lacks any differentiation
- (8) Therefore, the infinite is a Parmenidean one

So, because the determination is negation principle leads Spinoza to deny being to finite things, he ends up with acosmism and hence monism.

²³ Melamed 2010 and 2012b; Newlands 2011.

²⁴ Cf. Melamed 2010: 78 note 4, and Melamed 2012a: 177-8.

But, if Hegel's argument against Spinoza is taken in this way, it would seem that it can be resisted fairly easily. First of all, there is a problem with the move from (1) to (5). For, even if determination involves some privation of being, this doesn't mean that what is determinate ends up not existing at all – the 'privation' involved need not be full non-existence, but could just be a form or degree of reality that is somehow less than that pertaining to what is prior to such determination. Secondly, even it is right that Spinoza is an acosmist in some sense, and so denies the reality of finite entities (so (5) is established), there are also problems with the move from (5) to (8), as monism can be avoided by attributing a plurality of properties or modes or attributes to the infinite instead, as is arguably Spinoza's position. It seems, then, that this way of taking Hegel's critique is of dubious cogency.

There might, however, be a second way to take Hegel's argument which is more successful. This argument would focus on Hegel's claim that he fails to properly derive or deduce plurality from his conception of the infinite, in a way that leaves the status of that plurality questionable or problematic. For example, in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel remarks: 'Spinoza does not indicate how these two [attributes, of thought and extension] proceed from the one substance...nor does say why he speaks only of two'.²⁵ So perhaps this idea could provide a key claim that can be used by Hegel to convict Spinoza of monism?²⁶

²⁵ Hegel 1986: 108 (LHP: 158). Cf. also 6:197 (SL:538): 'These three [absolute substance, attribute, and mode] are only enumerated *one after the other*, without any inner sequence of development'; and 5:98 (SL:94-5): '[W]ith Parmenides as with Spinoza, there is not progress from being or absolute substance to the negative, to the finite'.

²⁶ This is Newlands's view, who reject the first argument, but thinks there is some merit in this one:

[Hegel's] fundamental charge is that Spinoza cannot prove that his substance admits of a diversity of attributes or finite modifications except by definitional substitution or by an appeal to an external source – mental relations – whose role cannot be justified by Spinoza's own principles... Hence, Hegel concludes, Spinoza fails to show how his perfectly unified substance gives rise to any real internal diversity. Spinoza may want the One *and* the Many, but he ends up stuck with just the One, and empty unity that 'swallows up' all diversity and determinate content. (Newlands 2011: 106)

However, I also think this form of argument is not terribly convincing. Firstly, Spinoza does provide *some* account of how this link is meant to work, even if perhaps it isn't very satisfying. So, he writes at *Ethics* 1p16:

From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect).

Dem.: This Proposition must be plain to everyone, provided he attend to the fact that the intellect infers from the given definition of any thing a number of properties that really do follow necessarily from it (i.e. from the very essence of the thing); and that it infers more *properties* the more the definition of the thing expresses reality, i.e., the more reality the essence of the defined thing involves.

Secondly, while Hegel does make this point concerning an absence of proof in Spinoza, it is not clear that he is worried here about the monism issue; it seems more likely that he is making a different objection which he commonly raises against other philosophers, that a decent philosophical position can't just take things for granted, which he seems to think Spinoza does here, in giving a weak argument for why the infinite must have a plurality of properties.²⁷ But then, his focus is on the way in which Spinoza's position is not fully satisfying from the perspective of a speculative science, not with worries about its monism per se – so the concern seems somewhat misplaced?

In view of these misgivings, therefore, I therefore want to offer a third Hegelian argument, which turns more on the 'determination is negation' principle itself, and what we have learned about it so far. The central claim of this argument is this: precisely *because* Spinoza takes the principle *his* way, he therefore does not take it *Hegel's* way, where the claim is that this way of taking it is necessary to move from pure being to determinate being, and thus to 'escape' the monism of the former. Thus, Spinoza is stuck at the level of pure being, with Parmenides, exactly because he thinks determination involves a privation of being, rather than seeing it (with Hegel)

²⁷ For a very helpful discussion of what we might take Spinoza's argument to be, which would imply that Hegel is wrong about this, see Melamed 2014.

as a necessary condition for being. Thus, for Hegel, what leads Spinoza into monism is the same as what leads Parmenides into monism: both have a purely affirmative conception of being, from which negation is excluded (along the lines of Spinoza's version of the principle), and so conceive of being as pure being rather than determinate being (for which one must accept Hegel's version of the principle).

I think this way of taking Hegel's position is suggested by Stephen Houlgate when he writes:

For Parmenides...[t]rue being is thus purely affirmative with no trace of negation or indeed change in it; it is thus 'uncreated and imperishable'. This conception of being as purely affirmative continues to cast its shadow over subsequent philosophy right up to the modern period. It is to be seen, for example, in Spinoza's assertion that 'the definition of any thing affirms, and does not deny, the thing's essence,' ... [But] According to Hegel's account, the category of being proves to harbor within itself the moment of negation in several forms: the concept of reality entails negation in the form of determinacy and difference; being something entails negation in the form of otherness and finitude; and infinite being also contains negation insofar as it lives in and through self-negating, finite beings. (Houlgate 2006: 43-4)

The argument may therefore be put as follows:

- (1) Spinoza holds that determination is a privation of being
- (2) He therefore holds that being itself is purely affirmative, lacking in any such determination through negation
- (3) But Hegel holds that being requires such determination
- (4) So for Hegel, Spinoza's purely affirmative being is indistinguishable from nothing
- (5) Therefore, for Hegel, Spinoza's being cannot contain any differentiation, and must just be an empty Parmenidean one

Thus, on this account of the debate, it pivots precisely on the different views each has of the 'determination is negation' principle, in steps (1) and (3) respectively. In the end, then, on this account Hegel's critique of Spinoza turns out to depend on which of them is right in their understanding of the principle – is determination through

negation a privation of being as Spinoza holds, or a condition for it, as Hegel maintains?

Moreover, this third way of taking Hegel's argument strengthens his hand in the earlier two. For, because Spinoza does not think that being gets to be at all through differentiation, there is no argument for why there should be a plurality of properties belonging to the infinite substance and not just one (cf. the second argument), where it is not possible for there to be just *one* property of substance with no negation, so this substance would be left propertyless, and hence an empty one (cf. the first argument). We have seen, then, how the debate between Hegel and Spinoza turns on this issue, and what work the 'determination is negation' principle can be taken to do.

Nonetheless, it could be argued, even when Hegel's case against Spinoza is understood in these terms, it is still problematic. For, some commentators have argued that Hegel makes a further important error in his handling of Spinoza's position here.²⁸ The error is not to mistake his Hegelian conception of the principle for Spinoza's, but rather to take Spinoza's principle to apply to *all* determination, and so to treat *all* determination as a privation of being – which of course leaves being determinateless and 'empty' in the way Hegel suggests. However, the claim is that Spinoza in the letter to Jelles is only talking about figure and perhaps by extension finite bodies as involving negation in his sense, but not about other aspects of substance, such as its attributes, which therefore need involve no such privation but can be viewed affirmatively. As a result, therefore, it can be argued that Spinoza does not have to view *all* determination as negation in a privative sense, but can in fact accept that some determination applies to substance, and so save it from being an empty one.

²⁸ The main proponent of this view is Macherey 1979/2011, esp. Chapter 4. See e.g. 2011: 129: 'What causes a problem here is the notion of determination. It is evident that the way it operates in *Letter 50* to Jelles, it does not apply to any type of reality whatsoever. It obviously does not concern the attributes, which are themselves unlimited and whose essence contains no negation at all; we have explained well enough that they do not limit themselves in relation to one another, which is the consequence of their own infinity, and the condition of their substantial character; on the other hand, it would be absurd that they would limit themselves and be limited within themselves'. For further discussion of Macherey's view, see Bienenstock 2007: 510-33, and also Duffy 2006: 33-42.

Now, to fully deal with this issue would require an almost complete account of Spinoza's entire philosophy, to exactly gauge where his sympathies may be said to lie – and obviously this is not possible here. But let us grant for the sake of discussion that this criticism of Hegel is right, and that he is thus perhaps too quick to generalize from the letter to Jelles and even other related remarks of Spinoza's,²⁹ and thus too quick to conclude that Spinoza's infinite substance must remain indeterminate – what would follow from this? Of course, one thing that would follow would be that Hegel's claim to have somehow uncovered a fundamental difficulty with Spinoza's thinking would be put in jeopardy, and so too would his related claim to have 'got beyond' Spinoza. But conversely, it could be argued, at a purely *philosophical* level (rather than an interpretative one) it would now rather look as if Hegel and Spinoza are broadly thinking along similar lines – namely, both would seem to agree that being cannot be a Parmenidean one, and that without some degree of differentiation, what is would be indistinguishable from what is not.³⁰ Perhaps, then, the lesson really to be learned from this tangled history is to see where these two great metaphysical thinkers ultimately converge, rather than what fuels their apparent disagreements.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to show the complex way in which Spinoza's dictum 'all determination is negation' is taken up by Hegel and the subsequent British Idealist tradition – where modern Hegel commentators have perhaps lost sight of that complexity. I have also tried to show how Hegel's misgivings about Spinoza may possibly be strengthened when his full understanding of the dictum is taken into account, even if in the end these misgivings turn out to be misplaced.³¹

²⁹ As Jacobi seems to have added the mischief making 'omnis' here, perhaps he should be treated as the culprit in leading Hegel astray?

³⁰ It might perhaps be said that an important difference still remains: namely, that Hegel thought this determination came about through *negation* or limitation, whereas Spinoza does not. But even this is not so clear, as later in the dialectic of the *Logic*, the way in which the finite gives determination to the infinite (for example) is not *qua* limit, so that arguably at this early stage of the *Logic*, Hegel's account of determination is not fully complete, and later comes much closer to Spinoza's once again.

³¹ I am very grateful to a number of people and audiences who have helped to improve this paper. In particular, I would like to thank Paul Franks for first drawing

Bibliography

- Bienenstock, Myriam (2007), 'Selbstbestimmung bei Hegel', in Rüdiger Bubner and Gunnar Hindrichs (eds), *Von der Logik zur Sprache*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, pp. 510-33.
- Brandom, Robert B. (2002), *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Caird, Edward (1889), *The Critical Philosophy of Immanuel Kant*. Glasgow: James Maclehose.
- Caird, John (1888), *Spinoza*. Edinburgh: William Blackwood.
- Duffy, Simon (2006), *The Logic of Expression: Quality, Quantity and Intensity in Spinoza, Hegel and Deleuze*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Descartes, René (1964-76), *Oeuvres de Descartes*, edited by C. Adam and P. Tannery, revised edition. Paris: Vrin/CNRS.
- Hegel, G. W. F.: for abbreviations see note 1.
- (1986), *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, Teil 4, Philosophie des mittelalters und der neueren Zeit* (vol 9 of *Vorlesungen: Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*), edited by Pierre Garniron and Walter Jaeschke. Hamburg: Felix Meiner.
- Houlgate, Stephen (2006), *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.
- Inwood, Michael (1992), *A Hegel Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jacobi, F. H. (1785), *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*. Breslau: Löwe.
- (1994), 'Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn', translated by George di Giovanni in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel 'Allwill'*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, pp. 173-52.
- Joachim, H. H. (1901), *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Macherey, Pierre (1979), *Hegel ou Spinoza*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.

my attention to the puzzle with which this paper is concerned, and for subsequent discussions: the paper would not have existed at all otherwise.

- (2011), *Hegel or Spinoza*, translated by Susan M. Ruddick as *Hegel or Spinoza*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mander, W. J. (2011), *British Idealism: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Melamed, Yitzhak Y. (2010), 'Acosmism or Weak Individuals? Hegel, Spinoza, and the Reality of the Finite', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 48: 77-92.
- (2012a), "'Omnis determinatio est negatio": Determination, Negation and Self-Negation in Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel', in Eckart Förster and Yitzhak Y. Melamed (eds), *Spinoza and German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 175-96.
- (2012b), 'Why Spinoza is not an Eleatic Monist. Or Why Diversity Exists?', in Philip Goff (ed), *Spinoza on Monism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 206-222.
- (2014), 'Hasdai Crescas and Spinoza on Actual Infinity and the Infinity of God's Attributes', in Steven Nadler (ed), *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 204-15.
- Moore, A. W. (2012), *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moyar, Dean (2011), *Hegel's Conscience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Newlands, Samuel (2011), 'Hegel's Idealist Reading of Spinoza', *Philosophy Compass*, 6: 100-8.
- Schelling, Friedrich (1856-61), *Sämmtliche Werke*, edited by K. F. A. Schelling. J. G. Cotta: Stuttgart.
- (2006), *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, translated by Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Parkinson, G. H. R. (1993), 'Spinoza and British Idealism: The Case of H. H. Joachim', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 1: 109-23.
- Pringle-Pattison, Andrew Seth (1897), 'A New Theory of the Absolute', reprinted in his *Man's Place in the Cosmos and Other Essays*. Edinburgh: William Blackwood, pp. 129-225.
- Sigwart, Christoph (1895), *Logic*, translated by Helen Dendy, 2nd edn. London: Swan Sonnenschein.
- Spinoza, Baruch (1925), *Opera*, edited by C. Gebhardt. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.
- Taylor, Charles (1975), *Hegel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.