

# Infinity and Beyond? Learning How to be Finite

Jennifer Bunker  
Roehampton University

**Abstract.** This article discusses the newly added Chapter 16 and Chapter 17 of Adrian W. Moore's latest edition of *The Infinite* from 2019. The article interprets Moore's focus on metaphysical infinity and finitude via his triologue between Spinoza, Hegel, and Nietzsche. Then, it continues to examine Moore's mode of addressing nihilism, which consists of reckoning with the infinite as a concept we appeal to when trying to express the insights which sustain value and our moral lives. Following this discussion, four questions are posed to Moore: two regarding his interpretation of the history of philosophy, upon which his views are based; and two regarding his own views. One question focuses on differentiation in Spinoza. The second question concerns the interpretation of Nietzsche's Eternal Return. The third asks for a motivation for superseding Nietzsche's finitism. The fourth calls into question the strength of Moore's proposal of "reckoning with" the infinite.

**Keywords:** Spinoza, Hegel, Nietzsche, infinity, finitude, value, nihilism, Wittgenstein, Deleuze, Eternal Return, differentiation, delineation, negation, metaphysics, Adrian W. Moore.

## 1. EXPOSITION

In 2019 Professor Moore – Adrian – published the latest edition of his very first book, *The Infinite*. With this new, third edition came a new, third part named "Infinity superseded". One of the major conclusions of the earlier editions was that the concept of the metaphysically infinite is incoherent. It is something of which we cannot make sense, and it can have no application for us. Moore's central concern in the final chapter of those editions had been to consider the predicament of human finitude and our consciousness of it. These new chapters revisit those themes. Moore begins by looking again at the infinite, the transcendent, and the finite in the work of three figures: Spinoza, Hegel, and Nietzsche. He draws out the existential and ethical implications of this history and ends by outlining what legitimate role the infinite can continue to play in our thinking and practice.

Chapter 16, "Infinity reassessed. The history reassessed anew" is, then, advertently structured around this triologue between Spinoza, Hegel, and Nietzsche. It focuses on the metaphysics of infinity and finitude and is resolved in favour of Nietzschean finitism. Chapter 17, "Learning how to be finite", meanwhile, is guided by a more ambient, tacit dialogue between Deleuze and Wittgenstein. Though less explicit, this dialogue is by no means hidden – Adrian points us to it in his preface to the third edition. There, he commends Deleuze as a thinker who was absent from the first two editions but whose work Adrian now sees as pivotal to the subject of the infinite and to the challenge of negotiating finitude. This chapter builds on the closing reflections of the previous editions to advocate for the concept of the infinite. It is a concept we appeal to when

trying to express those insights which sustain our moral lives with the hope that value is real.

In very broad terms, I see the argument of the new section as unfolding in the following way. In Chapter 16, we have the dialogue between Spinoza, Hegel, and Nietzsche. We start with Spinoza, who offers an account of reality which is purely positive and has no room for negation, but which is static, lacking in dynamism. Hegel's world spirit, on the other hand, is characterised by movement. It develops purposefully towards the rational, and is fuelled by negation – the destruction of each finite thing by its opposite. With both thinkers, though, we can distinguish elements of transcendence. In Spinoza's case, the infinite nature of God or substance marks it as transcendent, almost in spite of Spinoza himself. Equally Hegel's Absolute, in its infinitude, is beyond our experience and understanding and therefore should be understood as transcendent, on Moore's construction of the term.

Nietzsche rejects the (metaphysical) infinite and with it, transcendence. Nor is there room for negation in this thoroughly affirmatory set-up. Being is replaced by becoming. Moore very plausibly suggests that Nietzsche, in denying the existence of a transcendent entity identified as the being of all other entities, took the step that Spinoza should have done, and was therefore better able to ward off the challenge from Hegel. Chapter 16 ends on an intriguing note. Moore considers our frustrated attempts to formulate Nietzsche's denial of entityhood to being and submits that they point to ineffable insights. This raises the prospect of a role for the infinite in our thinking after all.

Chapter 17 addresses the threat of nihilism. Naturalistic, relativist accounts of value like Spinoza's prompt the nihilist's question "so what?". Nietzsche responds to this challenge with the doctrine of Eternal Return, letting each 'so what?' be answered by a new creation of values. This cure comes at a price, however: it seems to demand the abandonment of our cherished ideas of humanity and the infinite. Moore undertakes a rescue in each case. He points us to accounts which outline a shared human nature without appealing to the concept of infinity. But he also maintains that we are entitled to use that concept – and its fellows, transcendence and God – though they have no application to reality, *though* our attempts to refer to them are nonsensical. In fact, Moore concludes, in learning to be finite we cannot do without the infinite.

## 2. CHAPTER 16

Moore begins by expressing a wish to revisit certain material from the earlier editions, and to, as he says, "develop its arguments in what now seem to me important new directions". (238) He draws our attention to the near thirty-years that lapsed between the writing of the original work and this supplement. Though he notes that there will be very little in it he will retract outright, he starts with one aspect of the study about which he now feels uncomfortable: the account given of Spinoza in chapters five and seven.

In those earlier sections, Moore had emphasised the religious, even mystical, character of Spinoza's thought. While still affirming that, on appropriate construals of those terms, Spinoza *can* be understood as a theorist of the religious, the ineffable, and the transcendent, Moore now shifts focus to Spinoza's unorthodoxy, his naturalism, and his confidence in our capacity to understand. Moore's summation of Spinoza's project introduces what I see as a guiding concern of these two new chapters, and I quote it here (238):

Spinoza's aim was to provide a naturalistic basis for ethics. He wanted to make broad sense of our situation as finite individuals in an infinitely complex world, and to give an account, in those terms, of what our well-being consisted in.

Now, whether Moore himself ultimately endorses naturalism, or countenances the metaphysically infinite, we can hope to tease out as we read through this supplementary section. But it is sure that he approves Spinoza's aspiration to take stock of our nature as finite beings, *and* shares Spinoza's vital/animating interest in the question of how, in our finitude, we can live well.

Moore also wants to examine differences between Spinoza and Hegel which may have been elided in his earlier, briefer treatment of the two philosophers. First, he points out a fundamental divergence in their respective conceptions of God. "God", *per* Moore, is the name Spinoza gives to the being of entities, which he treats as an entity in its own right. God is identical to the one existing substance, to nature, or reality, as a whole. Hegel's God, as a person with purposes of his own, is less unorthodox. Other profound differences are canvassed, but the most significant divergency for Adrian's discussion concerns the two thinkers' treatments of the negative and negation.

For Spinoza, Being, God, is purely positive – negation has no role in being as such, though it does articulate the delineation of finite beings. Hegel derided Spinoza's Being as a 'dark, shapeless abyss' and charged him with reviving a kind of Eleatic monism which figured being as abstract and homogenous. According to Parmenides, being was indeed a unified and indivisible One, in which all apparent change and diversity was merely illusory. But Spinoza is not Parmenides. His One – God, or substance – *is* really differentiated. Neither, though, is Spinoza Hegel, because, Moore says, that differentiation is not to be understood in terms of negation, but in purely positive terms.

Meanwhile for Hegel, negation is "at work in being itself", as Moore puts it. (243) A finite being and its negation are *essentially opposed* to one another. Any finite thing must become its opposite and ultimately be destroyed as Being absorbs and eliminates falsity in its development towards truth. Such movement would not be possible without negation. For Hegel, then negation is part of Being, part of the infinite, part of what *is*. For Spinoza... negation *is* not!

There's one further concept Moore wants us to have in mind before Nietzsche enters the discussion: transcendence. Moore defines the transcendent as what lies beyond our experience and understanding. Given that Spinoza's goal is to find a

naturalistic basis for ethics, he might be expected to reject the transcendent entirely. But God is infinite, and therefore, according to Spinoza's epistemology, beyond our understanding – in other words, transcendent. Hegel, similarly, feels compelled to say that as finite beings we can only make sense of what is finite – which would suggest that his Absolute, in its infinitude, must also be transcendent. So thanks to their commitment to the infinity of being, we have, in both Spinoza and Hegel, what Moore calls “intimations of transcendence”.

Nietzsche's role here, as Moore sees it, is to transform Spinoza's ideas in such a way as to better keep Hegel at bay. First, Moore notes another development in his own thinking since the earlier editions, concerning the highly contested doctrine of Eternal Recurrence or Eternal Return. Moore comments that, while what he said about Eternal Return in Chapter 7 may have been strictly correct, he no longer stands by the most natural interpretation of it, which is that Nietzsche envisaged “an endlessly recurring cosmic cycle of many years” (246). Now Moore instead understands Nietzsche as suggesting that in each moment all *other* moments, both past and future, recur (*as* past and future), but reconfigured from the perspective of the new current moment. That, at least, is my understanding of Moore's understanding of Nietzsche's understanding of the Eternal Return! If Moore's reading of the doctrine is correct, he says, it “has a vital bearing on the dispute between Spinoza and Hegel” (246).

Moore's next step is to argue that Spinoza should not have countenanced the existence of a transcendent entity, the being of all other entities, as he did. Nietzsche, with, as Moore says, a naturalistic vision so similar to Spinoza's own, takes the step Spinoza should have done, and denies that the being of entities exists as an entity in its own right. Through the doctrine of Eternal Return, interpreted as discussed, Nietzsche replaces being as an entity with endlessly changing entities – that is, with becoming. Moore had concluded chapter 7 of this book by remarking on the infinite aspect of the Eternal Return. Now understanding Nietzsche in an avowedly Deleuzian way, Moore revises this. He submits that the self-affirmation of endless becoming leaves no room for any negation, any transcendence, or any infinitude. This is the step Nietzsche takes beyond Spinoza. Nietzsche's divergences from *Hegel* are far more marked. He repudiates Hegel's vision of a metaphysically infinite whole and the idea that it works through negation to realise its purposes and make ultimate sense.

Moore promises that his final chapter will consider the significance – in particular the ethical significance – of the differences between these three thinkers. First, and as the final move in this chapter, he revisits the discussion of the infinite and the ineffable in Part II of the book. He calls our attention to a problem which arises when trying to deny entity-hood to being itself. For Nietzsche, as Moore has put it, being should not be understood as a noun – being is not itself, as Spinoza had thought, an entity. Instead, being should be understood as a verb; but how do we express this? How do we refer to it? As Moore asks, “[h]ow can we *say* that there is no such entity as being, without – simply through our use of the word “being”... – committing ourselves to their being such an

entity?”<sup>1</sup> He notes that similar problems have arisen in his discussion of the infinite – for instance, the problem of expressing a denial that the truly infinite exists. It may be, Moore hypothesises, that these kinds of failed formulations point to failed attempts to put something ineffable into words. That is, something we are being *shown* about the nature of being but cannot express.

If this is right, then what could it be that we are being shown? What is the ineffable knowledge at stake in interpreting Nietzsche’s understanding of being? It could be, Moore suggests, knowledge of what it takes to be finite. But he asks us, if we are indeed being shown that, and are trying to put it into words, why can’t we say the same for the kind of talk Nietzsche disallows – why not the same for the infinite, the transcendent, and so on? Could we not also countenance this kind of talk as an attempt to put some ineffable knowledge, something we are *shown*, into words? This is the question with which Adrian leaves us at the end of Chapter 16.

### 3. CHAPTER 17

Moore starts this chapter with a section on the ethical import of the triologue expounded in the previous one. Spinoza’s naturalistic ethics maps the route to our well-being, especially through understanding what befalls us. Hegel, against Spinoza, denies that finite things make their own sense – they endure affliction in the process towards realisation of the infinite whole, the site of absolute value. For Spinoza value is relative – a Spinozan individual holds a thing good if it contributes to its well-being. At the same time, Spinoza advocates understanding reality *sub specie aeternitatis*, from the point of view of eternity. Moore’s concern is that this way of seeing the world may tempt us to nihilism, because, from this remote perspective, value is liable to appear illusory. All that seems to remain is endless, pointless activity, leaving the nihilist’s question: “so what?” unanswerable.

Nietzsche, once his Schopenhauerian years were behind him, sought to repel this nihilism, according to which all of our suffering seems pointless. He nonetheless rejected the Hegelian picture of suffering being for the end of something of infinite value. Value, for Nietzsche, was not objective, and suffering was indeed purposeless. He offers us resources for overcoming nihilism not by trying to make sense of our lives from an eternal perspective, but by making sense of things from within their midst. And precisely by *making* sense: not discovering but creating it, creating meaning and value through the living of our lives. But could the nihilists’ unanswerable “so what?” not be confronted once again by each of these created values, so that, ultimately, each can only be seen as “a senseless palliative to our senseless suffering?” (254) No, thanks to the doctrine of eternal recurrence. There *is* no ultimate perspective in this way, just an endless succession of new sense making, new perspectives on reality, new evaluations

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[1] This will also be true of any equivalent expression.

of it. Every time the question arises, it can be answered anew – eternally. Through the concept of eternity, mathematical infinitude plays a role, for Nietzsche, but the cost of all this is recognising *metaphysical* finitude. Not just that there is no God, it also follows that we ourselves are finite and more fragile than we like to think. Moore next turns to address these threats to religion and humanity.

Facing the former head on, he argues that the slogan ‘God is dead’ is best understood to be saying that a concept, a way of making sense, had run its course. As God lost his vitality he became emptier, transforming into the Kantian thing-in-itself. The solace of God was replaced by the solace of the rational individual. But that too cannot survive Nietzsche’s twilight of the idols. Our identities emerge out of our animal drives and are continually rewritten and contested. Our species identity, too, has vindicated Nietzsche by splintering as the distinction between human and non-human (whether that be animal or technological) became increasingly unclear.

But as we are now, all of us considering these questions, we are human, and our thinking – especially when practical – is fundamentally shaped by that. We can only carry out sense-making – Moore channels Wittgenstein here – from within a form of life: very roughly, a cultural context. And each of our forms of life, Moore proposes, are ineliminably human. So for us to no longer think about basic practical questions from a shared human viewpoint would take a radical transformation. “Ethics itself”, Moore writes, “would be called into question” (259). Moore suggests it is helpful to return to Spinoza - his idea of good was anthropocentric (concerned with the good for ‘us’, as humans) otherwise it would have been relativist in a dangerous way. Because there are dangers – that is *human* dangers – in wishing to leave behind a human evaluative viewpoint. We should tread carefully.

Assume rejecting the metaphysically infinite *does* mean we must discard a capital G God, or a concept of the metaphysically infinite in ourselves like the Kantian faculty of pure reason. It may mean leaving behind certain seductive models – humanity as a Platonic idea, the self as an independent Cartesian subject – but we should not go too far. There may, for instance, be models of human nature which do not invoke metaphysical infinitude.

The difficulty, though, is that we crave infinitude itself – particularly, something metaphysically infinite which transcends our finite world and gives it meaning. But that, for Nietzsche, is an illusion and seeking it is life denying. Can Nietzsche himself consistently insist that we must cast off theism forever? He surely can’t foreclose the possibility of God returning, reconfigured, as the endless movement of meaning making goes on. Again, look at Murdoch’s atheism, Moore recommends, (an area of philosophy/theology, which is currently attracting increasing interest) according to which, though God does not exist, his *idea* plays a critical role in our lives, and what leads us to conceive of God *does* exist and is experienced.

So do we need to live without the infinite? These examples suggest not entirely. Moore’s final subsection is entitled “Reclaiming the infinite”. And he had already

indicated two legitimate uses of it in section 15.3 – a regulative use and a use in “describing the attempt to put certain in expressible knowledge into words”. (263)

Consider our craving for the infinite as the only thing that can allow us to answer the “so what?”. We saw the problem arise because a naturalistic, relativistic account of ethics, such as Spinoza’s, cannot seem to ground value as *real*. Robert Adams, as Moore notes, goes further and argues that *any* account we give will remain open to question – no human account can ever settle the question of real value, and that is because value, the good, is transcendent. But, Moore asks, what can the appeal to the transcendent, understood as that beyond experience and understanding, do for us – can it even make sense?

Moore’s response may be a little shocking, but on the foundation of the earlier editions, it should not, perhaps, be surprising. An appeal to the transcendent may not make sense – but to quote the nihilist, so what? Its not making sense may not matter. In particular, its not making sense may not harm its capacity to overcome the nihilistic threat. As Moore sees it, the reason we cannot give an account of things that can secure real value is not because we’ve focused our accounts on the way things are in our finite experience instead of focusing on the infinite, transcendent reality. It is because, as he says, “real value is not a matter of *how things are* at all”. (264)

If we do have any knowledge of real value, then, it can’t be knowledge of how things are. It must instead, Moore argues, be inexpressible knowledge. But then, if we can be said to have inexpressible knowledge concerning real value, why can’t “appeal to the transcendent, or to the Infinite, or to God, be part of what we resort to, however nonsensically, when we try to express it?” (264). If we do indeed have this knowledge, it is not knowledge of how things are, and it is not knowledge that we can express. Perhaps, therefore, we are entitled to reach for concepts of the infinite and the transcendent – though they don’t themselves make sense – in our inevitably nonsensical attempts to express what cannot be expressed.

On Moore’s construction, it isn’t that we have insights into a transcendent or infinite reality which we can only express through nonsense (as the religious positivists would have it). Rather, we have insights, and we are liable to appeal to the infinite and transcendent in our nonsensical attempted expressions of them. Moore employs the terms “infinite”, “transcendent”, and indeed “God” to characterise the talk we engage in when we try to express our inexpressible insights, *not* to characterise the nature of those insights – of what they are *into*. So while it inevitably uses such terms, his account of this nonsense talk is not itself nonsense – “although it is of the essence of such nonsense that we cannot make sense *with* it”, he trusts, “we can nevertheless make satisfactory sense *of* it”. (265)

How can we legitimately employ the concept of infinity in our thinking, given that it doesn’t make sense? It depends on the who the “we” concerned is. We as humans, trying to understand value, being granted insights, trying to – as is impossible – express them, are liable to reach for such terms as “infinite” and “transcendent”. What we use

those terms to say will be nonsense, because we are trying to express the inexpressible. We as *philosophers* can use the same terms to describe those very attempts – hopefully what we say will not be nonsense!

Perhaps this seems a rather undistinguished ending for the venerable concept of the infinite and its fellows. Moore, however, turning to the concept *God* in particular, encourages us that it can play a truly meaningful role in our lives. He had ended the earlier editions by examining what it would mean to live by what we were *shown*, he summarises it now as follows: “[M]y accepting what was still possible and what was no longer possible; my hoping that the most important possibilities would never be closed off; and my hoping that the possibilities with which I was still confronted were enough to give my life sense”, now adding “my trusting that we do well to think about the most basic practical questions of life from a human point of view”. (266) These hopes are supported by ideas of the infinite, the transcendent and of God used regulatively to sustain our values. Such a usage of the idea of God does not require that his existence should be credible, or even intelligible. The very fact that it transcends understanding and experience may indeed qualify it to anchor value in this way.

Moore’s conclusion, then, is that “nothing should tempt us into abandoning the concept of the infinite altogether, not even a clear demonstration that the concept has no direct application to reality”. (267) To say that the infinite doesn’t exist, even that it doesn’t make sense, is not to say we should do without the concept. Our most fundamental practical questions relate to what surpasses the finite. To make sense of ourselves, we must reckon with our own finitude, which must itself be understood in relation to what surpasses it – that is, the infinite.

#### 4. INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

I’ve rather loftily called this section “interpretation and analysis” but I’m really just taking it as an opportunity to ask for a bit of a masterclass from Adrian, if I may! Adrian’s writing is known for its clarity, and these chapters are no exception to that rule. They do, though, cover much fascinating and difficult material, and I would be interested to hear more from Adrian on many of the ideas and arguments addressed. I’ve limited myself, after some internal wrangling, to four questions: one about Spinoza, one about Nietzsche and two about Moore’s own propositions.

##### *A Question About Spinoza... Negation and Delineation*

This concerns what is, of course, a deep and intractable problem in Spinoza scholarship, but should only be a fairly quick question to start us off here. That is, in a nutshell, does Adrian, do you, hold that there are two kinds of differentiation at work in Spinoza’s *Ethics*?

There is a history of Spinoza’s commentators claiming that he is unable to account for real individuation. Hegel, as we saw, was of that party. He identified Spinoza’s



metaphysical picture with Eleatic monism, in which individuality disappears. Moore differentiates Spinoza from Parmenides because Spinoza differentiates: there is differentiation both within and between God's attributes, according to Spinoza.

Moore notes that Spinoza's God is purely positive – Spinoza, he says, stipulatively aligns positivity with whatever *is* and God is another name for being – for what is. The only role for negation is in the delineation of what is finite, Moore says. (239) To take Moore's example, a house and a garden each have positive existence in their own right, but the house *is not* the garden, it "lacks being in the garden outside it", as he puts it (241).

When distinguishing Spinoza from Parmenides, though, as a philosopher who *does* allow for differentiation, this doesn't seem to be the model of it that Moore has in mind. He says that for Spinoza, this differentiation "had better not be understood... in terms of negation" but rather in a "purely positive way". (240) Hence my question of whether there are two different kinds of differentiation here – or perhaps better, is there *delineation* (which distinguishes a finite being negatively from what it is not) and *differentiation* which is purely positive?

If so, the further question arises of how – in virtue of what – this purely positive differentiation is possible.<sup>2</sup> Moore gives the examples of a finite body being distinguished from its surroundings and of bodies being distinguished from ideas. Perhaps the first of these would be explained by Spinoza's claim that bodies are distinguished from one another in terms of motion and rest.<sup>3</sup> Or, perhaps what Moore has in mind here is a thing's conatus, its striving to persevere in its being, which Spinoza calls its actual essence. Each of these concepts is examined in *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*. The second example is the differentiation of a mind from a body on the basis of the differentiation of the attributes as distinct essences of God. Can a pattern of motion and rest be picked out other than by negation, by what it is not? Can an essence – whether an essence of an individual, or an attribute *as* an essence of substance? In summary, my questions to Adrian are simply do you understand the delineation of the finite through negation to be one thing and distinct from the second, purely positive kind of differentiation? And how do you characterise the latter, in order to safely navigate Spinoza between the Scylla of an amorphous unity and the Charybdis of negation?

### *A Question About Nietzsche... Eternal Return*

Moore outlines Nietzsche's concept of eternal return very succinctly in chapter 16, though it recurs in 17, so I shall take up his invitation to look to his fuller discussion of the topic in *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*. There, he describes the dispute

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2] Moore mentions differentiation within and across attributes (the former of which "allowed finite bodies to be distinguished from their surroundings" (240) so differentiation presumably isn't distinguished from delineation simple in terms of the kind of things it individuates).

3] And further, that an individual can be identified by a maintained pattern of motion and rest among its parts. Moore refers to the relevant Definition and Lemmas of EIIP13 in *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*.

as to what the status of the eternal return idea is: whether it is meant as a genuine, metaphysical doctrine or rather as a sort of ethico-existential thought-experiment to test what a person is capable of affirming. Moore illuminatingly points out that this dispute overlays another about what, in either case, Nietzsche is saying the eternal return *is* (*what* returns? In what way does it *return*?).

Historically, the doctrine has widely been treated as a revival of the pre-Socratic idea of a repeating cycle of history.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps, then, it was in part out of charity – to avoid attributing this absurdity to Nietzsche as a literal, metaphysical claim – that so many commentators glossed the eternal return as simply a thought experiment, offered as a test of affirmation. Must we give up on a metaphysical reading of the eternal recurrence? Deleuze proposes a new version. We should not be looking for the return of something that is the same. Instead, it is the eternal return itself that provides the “sameness” element. “It is” as Moore explains “the inexhaustible renewal of the ever-differing moment of becoming”. (TEOMM 402) Deleuze is saying that the moment repeats endlessly, but what flows through it is endlessly changing and new.

Moore – quite rightly, I think – feels a bit short-changed by Deleuze’s account, in as much as it seems to miss the idea of something returning. There is the repetition of the always-different moment, but nothing which itself comes back, which surely is what the idea of eternal *return* connotes. However, Deleuze’s interpretation does help to inspire Moore’s own, and both maintain that we should conceive of the eternal return as a real feature of the world. Moore argues that the eternal return is the amalgamation of two Nietzschean ideas: that ‘everything is knotted together’ and that “change is ceaseless” (402). Because of the knotting together of everything, change in anything means change in everything. In the ceaselessly changing moment, everything else, both past and future, come together, also changed. Moore summarises it as “the eternal return of all things, but ever different”. (403)

Now, is this reading rather minimalist or rather radical? When Moore writes, “[w]hat happens at any moment, on this account, happens at every moment – albeit at some moments as future, at some moments as present, and at some moments as past” (403) this might not be saying much more than that, at any given moment, there is a past and a future, so that as each moment passes and is replaced with a new moment, again there will be a past and an endless future of moments that, in a sense, come with it.

I think it *is* more than that – the past and the future are also *changed* with each passing moment, on Moore’s account. But again, I think this could be interpreted in either a more modest or a more radical way. To take the more radical first, does it imply that 1) the past and future actually exist in some concrete way and 2) they also *change* at every moment, as the present ceaselessly changes? This seems somewhat

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4] There is a more subtle variation on the cosmological interpretation: that given finite resources and infinite time, every configuration that has existed will eventually recur. Moore has it (citing arguments from Richard Schacht) that even this version is easily refuted.

metaphysically liberal. However, Moore follows the quotation just given with this: “each moment affords its own different perspective on the whole, its own different point of view from which to interpret the whole”. (403) Again, this perhaps suggests a more modest interpretation: that the past and future are simply understood differently with each changing moment. But understood by whom?

In fact, Moore refers to interpretation rather than understanding, and suggests that the agent making these reinterpretations is the will to power: “[e]ach moment enables the will to power to make an associated sense of things”, Moore continues. He concludes the passage with the following quotation from *The Will to Power*: the world has “a different aspect from every point; its being is essentially different from every point”. Even Nietzsche’s two separate clauses here may suggest quite different interpretations. To say that the world, or that the past and future, has a different aspect from every point is one thing, to say that they are essentially different seems to specify this in a way that makes a substantial metaphysical commitment.

I think, perhaps, what all of this really amounts to is that I would like to get a bit clearer on the change involved in the eternal return. If change, here, consists in reinterpretation, does that merely imply that, subjectively, past and future are seen in different ways at each moment? Or rather that, objectively, the will to power reconfigures them? I suspect that, in the end, the answer may well be that the distinctions shaping my questions here – between perspective and essence, between subjective and objective – simply break down with respect to a concept like the will to power.

### ... And Two Quick Questions About Moore

#### 1. Is Nietzsche Enough, Or Do We Need Mo(o)re?

My question is, simply, does Nietzsche’s affirmation of value creation, as you have described it, offer a live, viable alternative to your own answer to the nihilist? Why did we need to move on from Nietzsche? Nietzsche’s response might seem to have an advantage in that it is thoroughly immanent and concrete: we create new values, to eternity, in the face of the nihilist’s “So what?”. He insists, as Adrian explains, that hankering after transcendent values while denigrating the this-worldly is itself nihilistic.

Now, I doubt that Adrian’s account is guilty of this. He notes Robert Adams’ claim that the only successful response to the “So what?” question posed by the nihilist is to cast value as transcendent. Moore’s own response is rather more complex: we have inexpressible insights into “the value of things” – when we try to put these into words, we are liable to talk, though nonsensically, of a transcendent reality. (264) Nonetheless, concerning the idea of God Moore does remark that it may be able to uphold value in the way he suggests “because it is an idea of something that both transcends and sustains all that (merely) exists”. Does this escape Nietzsche’s critique of nihilistic focus on the transcendent? Maybe so, since Moore is referencing a regulative idea rather than

a constitutive belief and because it is one that sustains our action and living in this world, rather than denigrating it.

But if Moore's account doesn't have the cost Nietzsche thinks it essential to avoid, does Nietzsche's view have the cost about which Moore is concerned? And more importantly, is it a cost at all? It is when discussing the idea of post-humanism that Moore leaves Nietzsche behind and nails his own colours, somewhat circumspectly, to the mast of humanity. Now, this post-humanism isn't *prima facie* part of the eternal return and its role in the response to nihilism as expressed by Moore, though it may well be implicit elsewhere in Nietzsche's work. More important, though, is the question of whether it really constitutes a *cost*. Moore maintains 1) that those of us reading his work, those of us considering these questions, are human, and that our thinking – especially when practical – is fundamentally shaped by that. Moreover, 2) that for us to no longer think about basic practical questions from a shared human viewpoint would take a radical transformation, and again, 3) that ethics would be called into question, so we should tread carefully. Moore suggests it is helpful to return to Spinoza whose idea of good was anthropocentric (concerned with the good for 'us', as humans) rather than relativist in a dangerous way. Because 4) there are dangers – that is *human* dangers – in wishing to leave behind a human evaluative viewpoint.

These may indeed sound like serious risks, but perhaps they can be understood in a way that makes them seem less threatening. As regards point 1), it is very natural to call ourselves human, if we imagine that the alternatives are to be animal, alien, or artificial. But it may not seem absurd to imagine that *The Infinite* could find readers who were post-human in the sense of being technologically enhanced, or even who were *übermenschen*, in Nietzsche's sense. On point 2) the transformation might be radical, but it could – Moore himself says it *would* – be gradual and piecemeal rather than revolutionary. (259) To respond to point 3), is it not, for Nietzsche, an aspect of *our* flourishing to overcome (our) humanity? That is, isn't his vision also, like Spinoza's, directed to 'our' good? This, of course, depends on the idea that though we are human, we – the readers of Nietzsche and Moore – may not only be such. Perhaps not all of our interests are identified with our humanity – we may have goods relative to our other identities too. Adrian also warns that we need to consider the dangers – including perhaps non-human dangers – of undue conservatism. (260) I would be intrigued to hear whether you had in mind the dangers that might threaten things other than "we" humans, or whether you countenance the possibility of an "us" that is other than human?

## 2. A Worthy Fate for the Infinite?

If the infinite has no direct application to reality, if the truly infinite does not exist, if it can only be spoken about through nonsense, can we really say that the concept remains important for us? And say the same for the concept of God? Certainly, Adrian

holds them to be so. They constitute our response to insights into real value, they frame our most fundamental practical questions and are essential to reckoning with our own finitude. It is worth investigating how, precisely, the concepts play these roles – on a first look, one suggestion may appear a little underwhelming and the other a little under-supported.

To take the former, Adrian suggests that the idea of God, with its connotations of steadfastness and constancy, could be put to regulative use to sustain my ability to make sense of things. But consider that this usage does not even require God's existence to be intelligible. Is it satisfying – even possible – to use an idea in this way if it is neither credible nor intelligible? Moreover, the contradiction of these regulative ideas of God and the infinite could conceivably play exactly the same role for me. I could be shown, as Adrian puts it, that God exists, or equally that God does not exist. This might seem to further diminish the role of the infinite and of God. However, it is of the nature of regulative ideas that they are used, regardless of truth values, in order to sustain and make our moral lives meaningful and coherent. Adrian therefore has Kant on his side in holding this to be a substantial and dignified role for the idea of God.

Adrian concludes this section by submitting that we need to reckon with the infinite as we negotiate how to be finite – the concept remains necessary to us and we must not abandon it. This is the claim that I suggest might strike us as a little under-argued, as it appears in these final two paragraphs of the section. Compared to the first, this claim seems rather stronger, the language a little vague. Let us look briefly at what is offered, in these final paragraphs, to persuade us that the concept of the infinite remains vital to our ethical and existential reasoning.

The following quotations all come from page 267, the final half-page of our section. First, we have “in trying to make sense of ourselves, we are trying to make sense of the infinite”. In the very last line, we have “we shall never know how to be finite if we do not reckon properly with the infinite”. Now of course, *actually* making sense of the infinite is impossible to achieve. It is not that an understanding of the infinite helps us to understand ourselves and our finitude and teaches us how to live with it. All we have to support these vital endeavours is a “trying to understand” and a “reckoning with”. In between these two claims, we get a third “[w]hat all the most basic practical questions of life come back to” is “how we, in our finitude, relate to what surpasses that finitude”. This might also raise an eyebrow, assuming “what surpasses” finitude to be understood as the infinite – can it really be said to underlie all of our most basic practical questions? The problem, I suggest, is that talk of “reckoning with” and “relating to” the infinite looks rather weak, while the claims that this is vital to learning to be finite and all our most fundamental practical questions seem rather strong.

Of course, though, these concluding statements are founded on all that has gone before. I submit that we can best parse the reasoning which supports them by reminding ourselves of the following two points in particular. First, the model of using ideas regulatively might dispel the concern that notions of “trying to understand” and

“reckoning with” seem underpowered. The concept of the infinite is not something we can understand or make sense of, but this doesn’t undermine its power to shape our understanding and actions as a regulative idea. Merely keeping it in play, merely reckoning with it, is sufficient. Second, the need to secure value against the nihilist’s “so what?”, I think, gives us the link between our most basic ethical concerns and the concept of the infinite, along with its fellows, God and the transcendent. If “most basic” mean those that have to do with the reality of value, and if the infinite is among the concepts we reach for to keep the possibility of enduring value alive, then it does indeed underpin our fundamental practical concerns. I’m aware I’m going out on a bit of a limb in suggesting these last questions might demand a response and I’m doing the same in my attempt to answer them. It may well be that Adrian himself had other parts of his argument in mind as supporting these final claims for the infinite.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The section we looked at, building on a book stuffed full of intricate arguments and an embarrassment of historical sources is, of course, extremely rich, and there are many more questions that I would have loved to have asked. One concerned whether Spinoza’s concept of *natura naturans* (counterbalances the understanding of God as the being of entities and) offers any prospect of explaining God’s transcendence in terms of aspects rather than parts. A second, related to why Adrian adopted the expression “being shown” rather than “seeing”, and what the relationship and ordering is between using the idea of God regulatively and being shown something, such as the idea “God exists”. However I’m well aware that I might have worn your patience, and even more so Adrian’s, very thin by now, so I will draw to a conclusion. The majority of the questions I did ask centred on issues of the correct interpretation of Spinoza or Nietzsche. Of course, this sort of detailed historical reconstruction is not the object of “Infinity Superseded”, and I want to finish by returning to what I consider to be the real achievement of what we have read.

*The Infinite* offers a masterly historical analysis of the title topic, detailing its mathematical technicalities and philosophical profundities. Not content with that, Adrian does as Spinoza did, and puts metaphysics into the service of ethics.<sup>5</sup> In spite of the seriousness with which he takes the paradoxes of the infinite, Kant’s injunction on the limits to what we can know, and Wittgenstein’s dictum on what is beyond expression, he is able to offer a genuine response to the nihilist’s challenge to value. In these last two chapters in particular, Adrian addresses some of our deepest and most important concerns. While respecting what we might call the bounds of sense as he has mapped them, he nonetheless makes an original and subtle proposal as to how we can best negotiate our finitude. In particular, he indicates how the possibilities of meaning

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[5] “Metaphysics in the Service of Ethics” – the (sub?)title of AWM’s Spinoza chapter in EOMM.

and value might be kept open, how profound but inexpressible insights can shape our lives, how God may play a role in that and why the infinite remains a legitimate and indeed vital concept to reach for.

Perhaps this is what is most remarkable and significant about “Infinity Superseded”: the case it makes for why the infinite and its ungraspability matters to us existentially and ethically. But in these two chapters alone, that case is built on philosophical history and analysis of huge erudition and brilliance. We are offered profound and often novel studies of Spinoza, Hegel, and Nietzsche, reasoning shaped by Adrian’s authoritative knowledge of Kant and Wittgenstein and benefiting too from his openness to take on and absorb a new approach in the work of Deleuze. I have already mentioned the parallel with Spinoza’s mission, but I hope Adrian won’t mind me adding that these qualities reflect his own character as I experienced it too: brilliant, mindful of human needs, and always ready to listen to a new argument.

I have to finish by mentioning one other trait Adrian is well-known for – his sense of humour! Perhaps we can even detect a hint of irony in this new section’s title, ‘Infinity Superseded.’ It might as justly have been named ‘Infinity Triumphant’ - or rather, ‘Infinity Resurrected,’ reflecting this section’s work to rehabilitate the infinite after consignment to the death of senselessness and inapplicability. Indeed, I enjoyed Adrian’s own slightly mischievous allusion to the possible resurrection of God following Nietzsche’s announcement of his death. Maybe likewise, reports of the infinite’s death have been greatly exaggerated.

*J.Bunker@roehampton.ac.uk*