

A detailed oil painting of Baruch Spinoza, showing him from the chest up. He has long, dark, wavy hair and a slight beard. He is wearing a dark, heavy robe over a white shirt with a large, ruffled collar. His right hand rests on a stack of papers on a desk. The background features a classical building with a dome and a landscape with mountains under a blue sky.

EDITED BY
MICHAEL
DELLA ROCCA

≡ The Oxford Handbook of
SPINOZA

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

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ABBREVIATIONS

COMMONLY CITED WRITINGS

By Spinoza:

- CM** *Cogitata Metaphysica (Metaphysical Thoughts)*
DPP *Renati Descartes Principiorum Philosophiae (Descartes's Principles of Philosophy)*
E *Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata (Ethics Demonstrated in Geometrical Order)*
Ep. Epistolae (Letters)
G *Opera Posthuma*, ed. by Carl Gebhardt. 4 vols. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925.
KV *Korte Verhandeling van God de Mensch en deszelfs Welstand (Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being)*
TdIE *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione (Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect)*
TTP *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (Theological-Political Treatise)*
TP *Tractatus Politicus (Political Treatise)*

By Descartes:

- PP** *Principia Philosophiae (Principles of Philosophy)*
AT *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery. 11 vols. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1983.

ELEMENTS OF SPINOZA'S GEOMETRIC WORKS

- a** axiom
app appendix
c corollary

d	definition
d	demonstration (when appearing after a proposition number)
da	definition of an affect
expl	explication
le	lemma
p	proposition
pref	preface
post	postulate
s	scholium

COMMONLY CITED ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

SPINOZA

The Collected Works of Spinoza. Ed. and trans. by Edwin Curley. Vol. 1. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

Spinoza: Complete Works. Ed. by Michael L. Morgan. Trans. by Samuel Shirley. Indiana: Hackett, 2002.

Most translations are from Curley. Translations for Ep. 29–84 and the *Political Treatise* are from Shirley, unless otherwise noted. The specific translations used for the *Theological-Political Treatise* will be cited by the individual authors.

DESCARTES

The Philosophical Writings of Descartes. Trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny. 3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–1991.

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

SPINOZA

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL DELLA ROCCA

At the beginning of an important paper in *Mind*, from 1985, the well-known historian of philosophy Ralph Walker could write, “Why should one study Spinoza? The question lacks any obvious answer.”¹ Walker went on to make a strong case for studying Spinoza. But in opening the paper this way, Walker gave expression to a sentiment, widespread at the time, in Anglo-American philosophy: Spinoza may in some ways be an important figure in the history of philosophy, but his standing as a philosopher worthy of engagement is at best precarious, and he is perhaps in danger of dropping out of the canon of great philosophers.

Confirmation of this hanging-by-a-thread status comes from some anecdotal evidence. I’ve known philosophers teaching survey courses in early modern philosophy who simply omit Spinoza—you know who you are!—in their forced march from Descartes to Kant. And I guess I can understand this decision. After all, one can’t cover everything; choices have to be made, and Spinoza is just too hard for students to deal with, and so on. I think I understand this, but my experience over many years of teaching such courses has been that despite or perhaps because of the challenges in understanding Spinoza, students—particularly the best students—are often captivated by Spinoza and are, in particular, drawn to his compelling and dramatic personal story, his philosophical rigor, and his unflinching boldness in philosophical exploration. For all these reasons, Spinoza, I believe, represents for many students a paradigm of what a philosopher can be. Students seem to get this point even if sometimes their esteemed professors do not.

The story has been and is different in some nonanalytic traditions, where Spinoza has always played a more central role. Yes, Spinoza was called a “dead dog” by Lessing, but that was only a prelude to the conflagration sparked by Spinoza that gave rise to German idealism; and, in part because of this central role in German idealism, Spinoza has

¹ Walker, “Spinoza and the Coherence Theory,” p. 1.

always enjoyed a vital status in much of the non-Anglo-American tradition. (In this connection, see especially the chapters in this volume by Boehm, Franks, and Goldstein).

But the neglect of Spinoza in Anglo-American circles is changing and is more or less a thing of the past. Indeed, it's hard to imagine a philosopher today voicing the question with which Walker opened his essay only thirty years ago—why should one study Spinoza? The change is reflected in the increasing flurry of excellent articles and books—many by younger scholars of Spinoza—and by the steady stream of students specializing in the history of philosophy in general and in Spinoza in particular, and by the increasing cooperation across philosophical traditions of philosophers interested in Spinoza. The spirit of this cooperation is on display in this volume in its truly international roster of contributors.

Why is there this welcome resurgence of interest in Spinoza among philosophers and historians of philosophy? Why is the profession finally catching up with students? As Spinoza teaches us, there must be a sufficient reason. Of course, this is not the occasion to give anything approaching a full explanation, but, part of the reason certainly comes from outside philosophy proper: recent, influential work in intellectual history portrays Spinoza's thought as deeply implicated in the development of the so-called Radical Enlightenment and crucial to the developing understanding of political liberty in the seventeenth century and, especially, the eighteenth century. Jonathan Israel's work is the centerpiece here, but there are many others working in this vein. Spinoza's newly emphasized bold ideas about the relation between religion and the state and about the importance of freedom of thought have made him a central figure in political thought, and this development has increased Spinoza's standing in other areas of philosophy as well.

Part of the reason for the resurgence of Spinoza also has to do also with developments internal to philosophy itself. For much of the twentieth century, philosophy was dominated by the analytical tradition. This tradition—intertwined as it was with logical positivism or logical empiricism—was hostile to displays of metaphysics, to a priori, rationalist investigation into the nature and structure of reality. In this setting, a philosopher like Spinoza—one whose whole system expresses a great confidence in the power of reason to articulate the structure of the world—could hardly thrive. Spinoza's starting points could—from this point of view—seem hopelessly misguided, and there would seem to be, as Walker expressed, little reason left—apart from purely antiquarian motivations—to study Spinoza.

However, the climate in philosophy gradually became less hostile to metaphysics. In many ways, this movement took shape in the 1970s with the development of the unabashedly metaphysical systems of philosophers, such as Saul Kripke and David Lewis, which gave new respectability to metaphysical endeavors. But, even so, the ground was not yet prepared for the return of Spinoza. This is because the new metaphysics at first did its best to obscure the extent to which the enterprise of metaphysics is an inherently rationalist one. In other words, there was not yet enough appreciation of the fact that the best reasons for the metaphysical views being advanced are ultimately rationalist reasons; that is, these reasons are responses to an explanatory demand—a demand for

intelligibility—that is the heart and soul of rationalism of the kind that Spinoza’s philosophy exhibits. This openness to rationalism—understood as the insistence on explanation—is completely compatible with empiricism which concerns the centrality of experience to those explanations. Philosophers have more and more recognized the rationalist core—the explanatory demand or the search for reasons—of even the most empirically minded approaches to metaphysics.

Thus, in what might be seen as a second wave of metaphysics, we see the movement beyond a consideration of the necessary connections among facts to a consideration of whether and how facts ground other facts, serve as foundations for other facts. With the return of grounding and metaphysical explanations, philosophy is finally ready for the return of Spinoza. And, in this light, it is not surprising that an important recent volume was devoted to Spinoza and monism—a mix of historical and contemporary works on the rationalist topic of monism.² In the same light, it is also not surprising that there is now great attention to Spinoza’s political philosophy and philosophy of religion, both of which have their underpinnings in Spinoza’s rationalism and his demand for metaphysical explanation.

Two features of Spinoza’s overall system make it ideally suited for engaging with and challenging philosophers working in this vein. First, there is the already mentioned commitment in Spinoza to some kind of rationalism, to some kind of explanatory demand by which we seek to answer the question of why things are the way they are. I defend this kind of rationalist reading of Spinoza in my book *Spinoza* and elsewhere.³ Spinoza’s commitment to seeking and finding this kind of explanation is perhaps unsurpassed in the history of philosophy. Second, and bound up with this rationalism, is a feature that makes Spinoza especially attractive to empirically minded philosophers: naturalism. Spinoza’s philosophy is an unsentimental philosophy that does not accord human beings a privileged place in nature. Instead, human beings and everything else play by the same rules: everything is law-governed; and the same laws apply to all beings, including human beings, who therefore don’t exhibit any nonnatural or supernatural qualities, such as freedom of the will or a rationality that is different in kind from the forms of reasoning enjoyed by other beings. Spinoza gives expression to this naturalistic viewpoint in the Preface to Part III of the *Ethics*.

On the twin pillars of this rationalism and his naturalism, Spinoza builds a vast philosophical structure. And so we have Spinoza’s metaphysics, his philosophy of mind, his moral psychology, his rationalist theory of the emotions, his philosophy of action, his moral philosophy, his political philosophy, his philosophy of religion, his theory of scriptural interpretation, and his account of the eternity of the human mind and the prospects for some kind of existence apart from the duration of the human body.

Spinoza’s philosophical range is unsurpassed, though not unparalleled (consider Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant, etc.). But the uncompromising and thoroughgoing way

² Goff, *Spinoza on Monism*.

³ For a debate regarding this interpretation of Spinoza, see the exchange between Daniel Garber and myself, found in Garber, “Superheroes,” and Della Rocca, “Interpreting Spinoza.”

in which he structures this vast system on rationalist principles is, perhaps, unparalleled. Further, this range for a philosopher whose quantity of philosophical output over his short life is relatively small is breathtaking. Page for page, Spinoza is one of the most influential philosophers ever (here, he is in the good company of Socrates and of Spinoza's kindred spirit, Parmenides).

One of the aims of the current volume is to present Spinoza's systematic thinking in each of these areas in keeping with the view of Spinoza as very much a living philosopher with relevance for—and the possibility of challenging—contemporary ways of thinking. At the same time, the volume seeks to articulate and analyze the ways in which Spinoza is indebted to previous philosophy, in particular to Descartes and to Jewish philosophy prior to the seventeenth century, and came to influence all of subsequent philosophy, down to the present day, in ways that set the stage not only for Spinoza's resurgence today but also for the return of Spinozistic ways of thinking to the philosophical mainstream. These dual themes—articulating Spinoza's significance for and challenge to contemporary ways of thinking and showing how Spinoza's philosophy grows out of earlier thought and gives rise to subsequent thought—are essentially connected. For Spinoza, things are individuated by their causal connections. What a thing is how it comes to be and how it acts. This general Spinozistic claim applies to his own philosophy no less than to other things. We can therefore best individuate Spinoza's philosophy and understand what it is by understanding something about how it came to be and about how it affected others, inside philosophy and outside philosophy. Thus while each of the chapters charts such connections, the volume contains a number of chapters devoted to the specific influences on Spinoza (see the chapters by Seeskin and Schmaltz) and to Spinoza's influence on other thinkers (see the chapters by Laerke, Della Rocca, Boehm, Franks, Yovel, Newlands, and Goldstein).

What follows is a guided tour of the chapters in this volume.

The geometrical method with which Spinoza presents his philosophy in the *Ethics* and elsewhere has always challenged and intimidated his readers. Bergson speaks of “that complication of machinery, that power to crush which causes the beginner . . . to be struck with admiration and terror as though he were before a battleship of the dreadnought class.”⁴ Nietzsche speaks of this method more derisively as “the hocus pocus of mathematical form with which Spinoza clad his philosophy . . . in mail and mask.”⁵ A crucial question surrounding Spinoza's puzzling virtuoso display is, how does Spinoza arrive at his starting points in the *Ethics*—the far-from-intuitive definitions and axioms concerning God, substance, attribute, mode, and causation? Is there a way on Spinoza's terms to justify these starting points, or must we see Spinoza as—disappointingly—regarding these opening moves as brute deliverances of some mysterious faculty? In his chapter, “The Virtues of Geometry,” Aaron Garrett offers an original and powerful suggestion: Spinoza's starting points correspond to innate ideas that the mind clarifies and

⁴ Bergson, “Philosophical Intuition,” p. 113.

⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 5.

sharpens through the process of carrying out deductions via the geometrical method itself. In this way, the demonstrations themselves provide justification for the starting points of the *Ethics*. Garrett pursues this original idea in a penetrating fashion and along the way offers insights into Spinoza's relation to Descartes, Hobbes, Pufendorf, Viète, and others on the topic of philosophical methodology.

Harry Austryn Wolfson famously labeled Spinoza “the last of the mediaevals,”⁶ and Spinoza was indeed an heir to a great tradition of medieval rationalist Jewish philosophers. Spinoza offers some backhanded praise of that tradition when he speaks of the oneness of thought and extension in God and says that “[s]ome of the Hebrews seem to have seen this, as if through a cloud, when they maintained that God, God's intellect, and the things understood by him are one and the same” (E2p7s). Here Spinoza welcomes the move toward unity between God and nature, which is adumbrated in the tradition and which Spinoza's monism took to an extreme. At the same time, as Kenneth Seeskin explains in his chapter, “From Maimonides to Spinoza: Three Versions of an Intellectual Transition,” Spinoza's rationalist predecessors did not embrace, as Spinoza did, the thoroughgoing intelligibility of all things including God. God's nature remained for Maimonides—who is the focus of Seeskin's chapter—in principle inaccessible to us. Drawing on Maimonides as well as other medieval Jewish philosophers, such as Gersonides, ibn Ezra, and Crescas, Seeskin explores this ambivalence among Spinoza's predecessors and the way in which Spinoza broke free of it.

Medieval Jewish philosophy and Descartes's philosophy were two of the largest influences that shaped Spinoza's thought. Like the medieval rationalists, Descartes had an ambivalent attitude toward universal intelligibility. Descartes's philosophy appeals at various points to the incomprehensibility of God and of God's actions and to the freedom of God's will in a way that Spinoza's less conflicted rationalism does not allow. As Tad Schmaltz explains in his chapter, “Spinoza and Descartes,” despite this disparity, there is at least as much of significance that is common to both. Descartes and Spinoza each insist on some kind of separation between the notions of thought and extension, the two notions that are fundamental to the rest of their respective philosophical systems. Most surprisingly, as Schmaltz explains, Spinoza is very close to Descartes with regard to two aspects of Descartes's voluntarist conception of God's activity. First, despite the fact that Descartes and Spinoza differ about whether God acts from freedom of the will, they agree that the kind of causation at work in God's causation of anything—including essences and eternal truths—is efficient causation. Second, Descartes and Spinoza agree—in contrast to more anthropocentric concepts of God's activity—that God produces effects simply in virtue of his power and without any regard for the perfection of those effects. In this second respect especially, Spinoza turns out to have generally unnoticed affinities, which Schmaltz analyzes, with Descartes's doctrine of the creation of the eternal truths.

⁶ Wolfson, *Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. 1, p. vii.

Spinoza's engagement with Cartesian metaphysics is also central to Yitzhak Melamed's chapter, "The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance, Attributes, and Modes." Spinoza is masterful at appropriating traditional notions and, as Melamed shows, making seemingly slight alterations that lead to revolutionary consequences. This adoption—and transformation—of traditional concepts is nowhere more evident than in Spinoza's treatment of substance, attributes, and modes. With care and flair, Melamed shows how Spinoza understands these notions and how he constructs his heterodox metaphysical system on their basis. Throughout the discussion, Melamed offers controversial new interpretations of Spinoza's pantheism, of the infinity of the attributes, of the role of the intellect in the definition of attribute, and of the nature of modes, including finite things, such as you and I, as not merely caused by but as inhering in substance. Melamed also insightfully challenges interpretations of Spinoza that would attempt to assimilate the relations of causation and inherence in Spinoza.

At least as shocking as Spinoza's view that finite things are mere modes or properties of God is his view that each thing that exists exists necessarily, or, in Spinoza's words, "[t]hings could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced" (E1p33). This thesis—Spinoza's necessitarianism—is at work not only in the *Ethics* but also in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. There has been much debate over just what form it takes. Does he hold that each thing that exists is absolutely necessary and that there is, in effect, only one possible world, instead of Leibniz's luxurious modal space of infinitely many possible worlds? Or, does Spinoza's necessitarianism amount only to some form of determinism according to which each finite thing is not absolutely necessary, but necessary only hypothetically, only given that certain other finite things exist? In "But Why Was Spinoza a Necessitarian?" Charlie Huenemann does an end run around this debate by inquiring why Spinoza should adopt the strong form of necessitarianism. Huenemann shows that neither Spinoza's substantive metaphysical views nor his ethical views nor his critique of religion requires that he be a necessitarian in the strong sense. Instead, Huenemann boldly offers, Spinoza's methodological commitment—expressed most vividly in the geometrical method and in his version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR)—to seeking an explanation for each thing inevitably leads to necessitarianism in its strong form. As Huenemann pithily sums up this reading, "[T]o explain is to render necessary." And so it's no wonder that a philosopher like Spinoza, wedded to the intelligibility of all things, is also moved to see all things as necessary.

In his contribution to this volume, "The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza", Martin Lin explores the underpinnings of Spinoza's rationalism and, in particular, the nature of his commitment to the PSR, the aforementioned principle according to which each fact or thing has an explanation. Lin shows how—in surprising and illuminating ways—this principle is expressed by or at work in nearly all the axioms of Part I of the *Ethics*. The PSR is thus, says Lin, "a defining feature of Spinoza's system." However, as Lin goes on to argue, the PSR is not *the* defining feature of Spinoza's system; despite its crucial background roles in reaching certain conclusions typically associated with Spinoza, such as the Identity of Indiscernibles, necessitarianism, the Principle of Plenitude, and

the existence of God, the PSR is not the sole or even the most important factor at work in establishing these claims. (With regard to necessitarianism, Lin's claim may be in some tension with one of the themes of Huenemann's chapter.) Lin's chapter is thus an important challenge to interpretations going back at least to Jacobi that see the PSR as driving Spinoza's entire system.

Like other early modern philosophers, Spinoza was steeped in the new science and was also to some extent a practitioner of it. Scholars tend to assume that, as Eric Schliesser says in his rich chapter, "Spinoza and the Philosophy of Science: Mathematics, Motion, and Being," Spinoza was a fellow traveler of the mechanical philosophy and, in particular, was fully on board with the then-widespread ambition to use mathematics to measure and understand both time and natural objects. Further, Spinoza's adherence to a mathematical approach to science is, for many, enshrined in his geometrical method. Schliesser, however, boldly argues that each of the above points is mistaken. Instead of regarding mathematics as making natural knowledge possible, Spinoza is deeply skeptical of our ability to achieve such knowledge, and he regards mathematics, when applied to nature, as offering, at best, imaginative inadequate ideas. Schliesser provides considerable textual evidence to document this Spinozistic skepticism, and he enriches his account with illuminating contrasts with many other natural philosophers of the period. Schliesser closes the chapter by exploring the possibilities Spinoza sees for a kind of nonmathematical adequate knowledge of things grounded in intuitive self-knowledge.

Although Schliesser's chapter suggests that scientific understanding is not as rigorous as we may have thought, Spinoza's naturalism does commit him in general to a science of the mind that is every bit as strict as the science of the physical. One of the reasons that a potential science of the mind has seemed elusive is that there does not seem to be a good account of how our ideas or mental states come to represent things and have content. The problems of providing a theory of content are exacerbated in Spinoza's case because the parallelism between thought and extension which he embraces for general metaphysical reasons stemming ultimately from the PSR seems to commit him to a pair of extremely implausible views: (1) all of our ideas are true and so error and misrepresentation are impossible and (2) we have a vast range of imaginative ideas including ideas of all the causal antecedents—no matter how remote—of the physical state that is parallel to a given idea. Such implausible results seem, as many have argued, to show that Spinoza's theory is completely unworkable. In his chapter, "Representation, Misrepresentation, and Error in Spinoza's Philosophy of Mind," Don Garrett aims to rescue Spinoza's theory and, in so doing, reveals the surprisingly compelling and modern resources available to Spinoza to solve the problems Garrett describes. The key, for Garrett, emerges if one invokes Spinoza's notion of striving, or *conatus*, and his view that each thing strives for self-preservation. Garrett powerfully shows how one can plausibly address the problems for Spinoza's theory by tying the representational content of ideas to an individual's self-preservatory activity. The content of an idea—whether or not it is erroneous—is a function of "the *manner* in which the idea directs or influences self-preservatory activity." This functional account of content in Spinoza is further evidence

of the role of teleological ways of thinking that, as Garrett has argued elsewhere, may have a surprisingly central role in Spinoza's philosophy.⁷

While Don Garrett focuses on important problems surrounding Spinoza's theory of the content of particular ideas, Ursula Renz, in her chapter, "Finite Subjects in the *Ethics*: Spinoza on Indexical Knowledge, the First Person, and the Individuality of Human Minds," addresses difficulties concerning Spinoza's understanding of what it is to be the subject of mental states in general. Many interpreters—including Hegel, some British idealists, and some more recent interpreters—have sought to cast Spinoza as denying the reality of finite subject. For Renz, by contrast, the major thrust of Spinoza's philosophy of mind is to affirm the reality of the finite and of finite subjects as such. Developing arguments from her award-winning recent book, *Die Erklärbarkeit von Erfahrung* (soon to appear in English translation), Renz contends that Spinoza's philosophy of mind is centered not on the relation between conscious states and physical states but, rather, on safeguarding the ontological status of distinct, finite subjects of experience. Here Renz draws an illuminating contrast with Averroist views, according to which there is a unified, singular intellect for all human beings. Compelling evidence for Spinoza's embrace of the reality of finite subjects comes, as Renz stresses, from the axioms of Part II of the *Ethics* which highlight what finite individuals feel and perceive, and Renz expands her argument by challenging the prominent view that ideas in the human mind are simply ideas that God has. Renz closes by characterizing the kind of rationalism that Spinoza's subjectivity-friendly view expresses, a kind of rationalism that is a nuanced alternative to more radically rationalist readings that may unnecessarily highlight intelligibility at the expense of experience.

Renz can be said to explore the epistemological underpinnings of Spinoza's metaphysics and philosophy of mind. Dominik Perler, in his chapter, "Spinoza on Skepticism," turns things around by exploring the metaphysical underpinnings of Spinoza's epistemology. This strategy enables Perler to argue convincingly that although Spinoza has seemed to many commentators not to grapple seriously with radical skepticism of a Cartesian variety in the *Ethics*, he does indeed have a sophisticated way of providing a theoretical—as opposed to therapeutic—diagnosis of skepticism. Spinoza's strategy consists in revealing that the scenarios the skeptic constructs presuppose certain controversial philosophical theses, including an antinaturalism according to which there can be an inexplicable gap between the realm of the mind and its contents, on the one hand, and the world as it exists apart from the mind, on the other. Spinoza also sees the skeptical scenario as presupposing a semantic atomism that regards the content of ideas as fixed in a piecemeal fashion instead of holistically. Perler shows that, in rejecting these presuppositions of skepticism, Spinoza relies on his rationalism and PSR-driven denial of inexplicability, and he thus attempts to shift the burden to the skeptic to defend her very controversial assumptions. For Perler, this attractive approach of turning the tables on the skeptic by focusing on what is required to explain the content of ideas bears

⁷ See Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza."

illuminating affinities to recent holistic strategies for defusing skepticism, strategies to be found in authors such as Donald Davidson.

Two of Spinoza's strangest theses—at least to the modern ear—are his view that different individuals can enjoy greater or lesser degrees of reality and that our highest perfection or reality consists in knowledge of God. We are inclined to respond that reality is an on-or-off matter, not something that comes in degrees, and to wonder why, even if there are degrees of reality, they are a function of the extent to which an individual knows God. These theses are not only strange, but are absolutely central to Spinoza's system, and, if we don't understand them, then at a fundamental level, we don't understand Spinoza. In "The Highest Good and Perfection in Spinoza," John Carriero sheds considerable light on these most challenging notions by understanding Spinoza in a historical context that stretches back to Aristotle and Aquinas and forward at least to Leibniz. Aristotle, in book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, grounds our perfection in contemplation of the good, and Aquinas calls this contemplation *visio dei*—"vision of God." Spinoza adopts versions of these claims. However, Spinoza—with his perhaps greater commitment to the intelligibility of things—allows, and indeed stresses, that we have knowledge of the essence of God, something we can grasp, for Aquinas, only with special help from God. This knowledge of God in Spinoza is the source of our knowledge of particular things each of which follows from God's essence and each of which is what it is because of its place in the network of causes and effects. Extending the contrast with Aristotle and Aquinas, Carriero explains how the activity of things that follow from God's nature is not fundamentally end-directed, but is to be explained by efficient causation in a plenum in which the whole is ontologically prior to the parts. Throughout the chapter, Carriero puts Spinoza into close engagement with Leibniz: Carriero shows how Spinoza, without compromising on intelligibility, denies that goodness and desirability play the fundamental role that they would later play in Leibniz's philosophy which is, in this respect, in the spirit of Aquinas's and Aristotle's systems. Carriero shows how, for Spinoza, there is a maximally real order that plays much the same role that Leibniz's best of all possible worlds plays, but without the fundamental role to be played by God's will and by teleology.

Although, as many of the chapters in this volume explore, Spinoza's philosophy of mind is indebted to Descartes's, there is at least one key respect in which Spinoza apparently completely overturns the Cartesian position. As Spinoza sees it, Descartes claims to be able to understand the human mind directly, as it were, and prior to appealing to knowledge of God. Thus, for Spinoza, Descartes accords epistemological priority to the finite mind, and he claims that I exist as a thinking thing before claiming that God exists, even though in some sense, as Descartes would agree, God is ontologically prior to my mind. However, as Olli Koistinen argues in "Spinoza on Mind," Spinoza's philosophy of mind can be said to be both epistemologically and metaphysically top down: in order to understand the human mind, we must first understand God and, in particular, God's intellect. Koistinen explores how Spinoza's parallelism between thought and extension is a result of God's having a true idea of himself. Along the way, Koistinen offers a new account of why thought, unlike, for example, desire, counts as an attribute

and of the way in which mind and body are one and the same thing. This claim, which is often interpreted as an identity claim, is actually, Koistinen claims in keeping with his top-down reading, most appropriately seen as a claim about the nature of mental representation in God's mind: when God thinks of the circle, he does so directly. The object of God's thought is not the idea of the circle but rather the circle itself. Koistinen closes by turning to one of Renz's themes: subjectivity and the first-personal perspective in Spinoza. For Koistinen, unlike Renz, certain subjective ideas are, surprisingly, neither adequate nor inadequate in Spinoza's technical sense of those terms.

Spinoza's uncompromisingly naturalistic philosophy of mind seems to collide head-on with his mystical-sounding claims about the intellectual love of God which is constitutive of human blessedness and salvation. How can Spinoza, the ardent naturalist, find a place for salvation in his system? Steven Nadler's chapter, "The Intellectual Love of God," seeks to show how Spinoza's doctrine, which explicitly comes on the scene in the *Ethics* only at the end, is not some kind of last-minute lapse into traditional religious dogma on Spinoza's part but rather intelligibly grows out of and indeed represents the culmination of Spinoza's views about the human mind, its knowledge, and its affects. Not only does Nadler elegantly account for and demystify all the key passages in which Spinoza discusses intellectual love, he offers an illuminating perspective on this notion by comparing it to Maimonides's treatment of the same topic. According to Nadler, the love of God is, for Maimonides as for Spinoza, an intellectual achievement of the highest level. However, for Maimonides, this intellectual love is restricted to the elite. Spinoza is characteristically more democratic on this point. And Maimonides's intellectual love is imbued with fear and awe in the face of the divine. For Spinoza, such passive affects have no place in intellectual love and are instead replaced by self-confidence and the awareness of our own power in our union with God.

The notion of the intellectual love of God is but one aspect of Spinoza's overarchingly intellectualistic account of our emotional life, of the ways in which we control and, more often, are controlled by our emotions or passions or what Spinoza calls our "affects." Lilli Alanen's chapter, "The Metaphysics of Affects or the Unbearable Reality of Confusion," offers a comprehensive treatment of the workings of the affects: how they develop, how they are related to physical states, and what role they play in human well-being. Spinoza's strict parallelism, Alanen argues persuasively, commits him to a science of the psychological that is as strict as the mechanistic, physical science that Spinoza endorses. Despite some important affinities between Spinoza's account of the mind and Davidson's famous "anomalous monism"—both of which reject certain kinds of explanation of mental phenomena in physical terms—Spinoza, unlike Davidson, holds out hope for law-like explanations in purely mental terms. Drawing on Spinoza's views on biblical interpretation, Alanen shows, however, that Spinoza "may have been prepared to settle for less than strictly adequate causal explanation in mechanistic terms when it comes to moral sciences, including psychology." Here the contrast Alanen draws between what she sees as two of Spinoza's projects is illuminating: the salvation project, which aims "at lasting self-contentment through adequate knowledge," and the political project, which centers "on practical action and communal life." At those points at

which Spinoza downplays the reality of the affects—and at which there may be an opening for overly rationalistic interpretations of Spinoza—the salvation project may seem to be ascendant in Spinoza’s thinking. But the realism of practical life is often at work in Spinoza, and when it is, Alanen argues, Spinoza’s political project dominates.

Nicely complementing Alanen’s treatment of the metaphysics of the passions, Karolina Hübner’s chapter, “Spinoza’s Unorthodox Metaphysics of the Will,” boldly explains how Spinoza’s metaphysical commitments—in particular, his naturalism—lead to his wholly nonteleological understanding of the will, appetite, and desire. Even though Spinoza’s panpsychism dictates that all things, even apparently inanimate objects, have appetites and wills, Spinoza claims that nothing acts for the sake of an end. Hübner argues, in opposition to many other leading commentators, that because of his naturalism, Spinoza does not allow for an exception to this general claim, even for human beings. As Hübner explains, Spinoza rejects any apparently end-directed behavior as a mere illusion to which we are subject because of confused ideas. Hübner insightfully articulates Spinoza’s reasons for not being swayed by common sense or by considerations of mere plausibility. The naturalistic, nonteleological account that Spinoza offers is so exceptionless that, as Hübner shows, for Spinoza even God can be said to strive and will. Hübner closes her chapter by raising and exploring the question of whether such an end-less account of even human behavior is capable of “honoring beliefs we value” and whether it deserves to be regarded as an ethics.

Taking on one of the most challenging notions in Spinoza, Chantal Jaquet’s succinct contribution, “Eternity,” explores how, for Spinoza, not only God, but also modes—both infinite and finite—can be said to be eternal. “Eternity,” as Jaquet says, “is no longer God’s prerogative” because, for Spinoza, even modes are such that their existence follows from their definition. Here Jaquet helpfully points out that Spinoza’s definition of eternity (E1d8) specifies that eternity is existence that follows from the definition of an eternal thing and does not say that the existence follows from the essence of an eternal thing. This focus on definition is significant because while a mode’s existence does not follow from its essence, its existence does follow from the mode’s definition. The definition of a thing, according to Jaquet, is broader than the thing’s essence and includes the thing’s causes. This close analysis of the definition of eternity enables Jaquet to explain how, for Spinoza, the body, as well as the mind, is in a sense, eternal. Jaquet closes the chapter by suggesting that the feeling of eternity that Spinoza says the mind enjoys is the feeling of certitude that comes with having adequate ideas.

Spinoza’s unorthodox views on the eternality of the human mind are but one way in which he engages with traditional religious thought. His attitude toward Scripture is another. As Carlos Fraenkel powerfully shows in his chapter, “Spinoza’s Philosophy of Religion,” from early in his career Spinoza felt the need to position himself with regard to a skeptical view that sees reason as subservient to Scripture and a dogmatist view that “subjects Scripture to reason” and sees Scripture, in its way, as articulating truths of reason. Much of Spinoza’s religious and political thought is in the dogmatist tradition. Indeed, Spinoza’s aim in this strand of his thinking is to provide a philosophical reinterpretation of Christianity and of Christ and to do so in a way that protects the

freedom to philosophize. However, Spinoza's version of dogmatism comes into conflict with his critique of religion, which, in the end, denies the truth of Scripture. In striving to preclude a skeptical view that reason is inferior to Scripture, Spinoza rejects the truth of Scripture. But since dogmatism, like skepticism, presupposes the truth of Scripture (though in different ways), Spinoza, in challenging skepticism by challenging the truth of Scripture, also undermines his own dogmatist view. This conflict may have been avoidable because, as Fraenkel argues, Spinoza's "political argument for freedom of thought and expression does not require settling the question of the truth of Scripture."

Spinoza's philosophy of religion is, of course, entwined with his political philosophy. This was certainly true of Hobbes as well, and, indeed, Spinoza's political philosophy is obviously indebted to Hobbes's. But there are many significant differences, as Michael Rosenthal highlights in his contribution, "Spinoza's Political Philosophy." Rosenthal's key insight is that instead of regarding Spinoza's thought through the prism of natural law theory or social contract theory or through a theory of interest politics, Spinoza's thought is most usefully seen as an instance of civic republicanism. His version of republicanism is evident in his view that monarchy is the least ideal form of government and in his preference—at least in *TTP*—for democracy. Civic republicanism also emerges in Spinoza's view that a state is more virtuous and stable to the extent to which there is greater participation and political engagement by citizens in general. This stability and participation is made possible by Spinoza's distinctive way of avoiding free-rider problems that plague other theories. Given Spinoza's theory of human psychology and, in particular, his account of the imitation of affects, which stresses the inherent sociability of human beings, citizens are led to cooperate not just through fear of punishment or injury but as expressions of their own natures. That Spinoza can achieve such a result is all the more remarkable in light of the fact that Spinoza—even more rigorously than Hobbes—assimilates right and power, and in light of the fact that, for Spinoza, there is thus no sharp distinction between the state of nature and the civil state.

Besides the many chapters in this volume that directly concern either the influences on Spinoza or the intrinsic character of his thought, this volume offers seven chapters devoted to the effects of Spinoza's philosophy on subsequent thinkers. As I suggested earlier, this strategy of the volume is in keeping with the view—endorsed by Spinoza—that meanings are best grasped in and constituted by a network of causes *and* effects. This series of chapters begins with one that focuses on the only one of these subsequent thinkers who actually met Spinoza (in 1676). The Spinoza-Leibniz connection has been the subject of much work both scholarly and popular (see in this connection, Matthew Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic*). But no work on this topic is as magisterial and definitive as Mogens Laerke's recent book *Leibniz Lecteur de Spinoza*. Developing some of the themes in that book, Laerke's chapter, "Leibniz's Encounter with Spinoza's Monism, October 1675 to February 1678," zeroes in on the period immediately prior to and after Leibniz's fateful meeting with Spinoza. At the outset of this period, during Leibniz's Paris years, Leibniz was surprisingly open to Spinoza's metaphysical views and seriously considered adopting a version of Spinoza's monism of substance. However, by 1678, when Leibniz was settled in Hanover and finally had the opportunity to read

Spinoza's *Ethics*, he had come to reject monism. Laerke explores both the contextual reasons—having to do with Leibniz's changing circle of acquaintances—and the philosophical reasons for this shift. In the latter connection, Laerke usefully distinguishes in Spinoza a unity theory of monism—according to which finite things are merely modes of the infinite substance—and an identity theory of monism—according to which there is a simple substance characterized by a multiplicity of fundamental attributes, including thought and extension. Despite his initial flirtation with both forms of monism, Leibniz comes to reject them. Laerke explains the rejection of the unity theory of monism by appealing to Leibniz's rejection of what he saw as Spinoza's conflation of causal implication and logical implication. The rejection of the identity theory of monism turns on Leibniz's more detailed characterization of the kinds of predicate that an attribute can and cannot be. Laerke's engaging and meticulous work thus sheds much-needed light, not only on Leibniz's philosophical development, but also on the metaphysical options available to Spinoza.

Unlike Leibniz, who is often regarded as having many natural affinities with Spinoza, Hume appears to be a committed opponent of Spinoza: Hume the extreme empiricist, Spinoza the extreme rationalist. Indeed, as I stress in my chapter, "Playing with Fire: Hume, Rationalism, and a Little Bit of Spinoza," Hume has the distinction of giving and emphasizing an extremely powerful argument against the PSR. In my chapter, I explore the roots of this antirationalism in Hume. In the course of this journey, I uncover some surprising rationalist sympathies in Hume: he regularly relies on principles that have, perhaps, their most natural home in a rationalist system driven by the PSR. At the conclusion of my investigation, I reveal—in the manner of a whodunit—the unexpected source of Hume's rejection of the PSR in his aversion to Spinozistic monism. This guiding rejection of monism may help to explain the famous dismissal of Spinoza late in Book 1 of Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* and also highlights possible internal tensions within Hume between the rationalist-friendly principles he often relies on and his promotion of a general argument against the PSR. Hume's engagement—both positive and negative—with Spinozistic rationalism thus helps to shed new light on Hume's system and clarifies the clash between rationalism and empiricism.

Hume, as Kant says, awoke him from his dogmatic slumber, and, as we've just seen, Hume engaged significantly with Spinoza. But did Kant similarly grapple with Spinoza? Traditionally, the answer has been that Kant did not. He rarely mentioned Spinoza and does not do so at all in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. On this standard view, only after Jacobi initiated the Pantheism Controversy that engulfed German intellectual life in the 1780s did Kant come, grudgingly, to consider the relevance of Spinoza to his own system. However, in his chapter, "Kant and Spinoza: Debating the Third Antinomy," which builds on his important recent book *Kant's Critique of Spinoza*, Omri Boehm makes a compelling case that before the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in it, and in Kant's subsequent work, Kant struggles with and argues against Spinoza's extreme rationalism and the constitutive role Spinoza accords to the PSR. Boehm's arguments rest on historical textual grounds as well as philosophical ones. Boehm makes Kant's third Antinomy the centerpiece of his chapter. In combating the position of the antithesis in the Antinomy—which

challenges freedom because of the PSR—Kant is usually seen as engaging with Leibniz. However, Boehm demonstrates that here Kant must have regarded Spinoza as his opponent, not Leibniz. And, further, once the Kantian position is seen in this light, the debate between Kant and Spinoza comes down to how one can have a grasp of an infinite whole that is prior to any parts it may have. Spinoza, of course, argues that we can have such a grasp, and Kant eventually comes to agree. However, Kant also argues that this grasp can only be in the form of an experience of freedom or of the sublime, a kind of experience Spinoza seems to deny to us. For this reason, Spinoza may have—according to Boehm—shut himself off from the kind of experience of the infinite that his system needs in order to be coherent.

A number of the chapters in the volume explore the extent to which the PSR may structure Spinoza's thought. In the interpretation of Spinoza in Hegel and in German idealism more generally, the version of the PSR that is seen as central to Spinoza is "nothing comes from nothing." And it is this version of the PSR that leads Hegel to attribute to Spinoza (somewhat misleadingly) the guiding principle that all determination is negation. In his chapter, "Nothing Comes from Nothing": Judaism, the Orient, and Kabbalah in Hegel's Reception of Spinoza," Paul Franks offer much philosophical and historical evidence to support the view that this interpretation of Spinoza can be understood against the background of Spinoza's possible connection to Kabbalah, a collection of Jewish mystical writings that, beginning in the late seventeenth century, had become available to a broader philosophical audience. For Jacobi, who spearheaded the revival of Spinoza in the late eighteenth century, the PSR led, in Spinoza, to the denial of the reality of the finite. This nihilistic view has its source, for Jacobi, in the philosophy of the Kabbalah, which, as Jacobi sees it, is "nothing but undeveloped or newly confused Spinozism." After exploring the links among Jacobi, Spinoza, the PSR, and Kabbalah, Franks takes on the puzzle of explaining why Hegel—whose reading of Spinoza was in many ways indebted to Jacobi—failed to discuss Spinoza's possible relation to Kabbalah. This omission is especially perplexing given that, as Franks stresses, there are "significant affinities between kabbalah and Hegel's own thought." For Franks, part of the answer lies in Hegel's dialectical interpretation of history, which led him to see Judaism and Kabbalistic thought as a precursor to Christianity. Kabbalah was thus, for Hegel, relegated to antiquity, and he saw Spinoza as a post-Jewish philosopher who prepared the way for Hegelianism.

Whereas Hegel sees Spinoza as a misguided philosopher whose thought was a necessary step that must be transcended on the way to Hegel's own philosophy, Nietzsche sees Spinoza as a kindred spirit whose thought has great affinities with Nietzsche's own but also sharply conflicts with it at crucial points. Nietzsche and Spinoza are thus, as Yirmiyahu Yovel aptly puts it in his contribution, "Nietzsche and Spinoza: Enemy-Brothers." Yovel's chapter—which is an updated version of his chapter on the two philosophers in his important book *Spinoza and Other Heretics*—explains how Spinoza and Nietzsche are united by their fundamental rejection of all transcendence, including any transcendent creator and any source of value over and above the natural world, and by their naturalistic rejection of all teleology. Each thinker calls for the affirmation

and, indeed, celebration of this naturalistic world. Spinoza expresses this affirmation as *amor dei*, the infinite intellectual love of God, and Nietzsche expresses it as *amor fati*, the love of fate. And here, Yovel shows, is where the differentiation between Spinoza and Nietzsche begins to emerge. For, according to Nietzsche, with Spinoza's talk of *amor dei*, Spinoza retains some "shadows of the dead God," some "longing to believe that in some way the old God still lives." This longing is evident in Spinoza's commitment to the rational world exhaustively governed by causal laws. While Nietzsche approves of Spinoza's rejection of teleology, Nietzsche views Spinoza's reliance on mechanistic causation, which replaces teleology and which characterizes the workings of the one, permanent substance as a manifestation of Spinoza's theological "hangover." Without what Nietzsche sees as the crutch of the appeal to permanence and rational order, the Nietzschean hero—the *Übermensch*—exhibits more agency, as Yovel shows, than his counterpart in Spinoza. Yovel closes his chapter by raising the compelling question of whether there can be a more rationalist Nietzschean, a thinker who embraces both finitude (without the appeal to permanence) and stability, and who also embraces reason.

Spinoza's philosophy and his character have been both an inspiration and a challenge to subsequent Jewish thinkers. Michael Morgan's wide-ranging contribution, "Spinoza's Afterlife in Judaism and the Task of Modern Jewish Philosophy," explores the varied features of this engagement. Morgan first considers the ways in which Spinoza was seen by Jacobi, Maimon, and others as indebted to kabbalah and the ways in which the nineteenth-century Jewish socialist thinker Moses Hess took Spinoza as a guide (though not necessarily with good reason—Spinoza could hardly be called a socialist). Morgan then explains how three significant twentieth-century Jewish thinkers—Strauss, Fackenheim, and Levinas—grappled with Spinoza's implications for modern Judaism. A key theme for Morgan is the manner in which Spinoza's thought provided an occasion for Jewish thinkers to navigate between, on the one hand, a pure Platonism—with its dualities of the eternal and the changing, of the spiritual and the material, of reason and emotion—and, on the other hand, a "Platonism of the streets" in which these dualities are much less rigid.

Samuel Newlands opens his penetrating and engaging chapter, "Spinoza's Relevance to Contemporary Metaphysics," by exploring ways in which a long-dead philosopher can be relevant to contemporary concerns in philosophy either as an outsider whose views—by virtue of their alienness—can open up new perspectives for us or as an ancestor whose views, as precursors to our own, make the philosopher well-suited to be a conversation partner with us. Newlands's own approach to Spinoza is a nuanced blend of both models. His chapter also manifests the conviction that, as he puts it, "there is no deep divide between studying philosophy and studying its history." This approach yields immediate benefits, for it enables Newlands to articulate ways in which Spinoza's systematicity and commitment to PSR-driven naturalistic explanation leads him to a distinctive form of monism in which the "One must give rise to the Many." Here, Spinoza's view that plenitude is a form of perfection is in play. The dependence of the Many on the One must, for Newlands, be a form of conceptual dependence that is more stringent than the kind of dependence now championed in many areas of contemporary metaphysics. This

invocation of a nonpsychologicistic type of conceptual dependence enables Spinoza to avoid the limitations of conventionalism and of idealism while also avoiding the inexplicabilities of a robust realism about modality that is attractive to many contemporary theorists.

Such is the richness of Spinoza's thought that it not only, as Newlands shows, helps to shape and provide insight into contemporary analytical metaphysics, but it also is a continuing source of inspiration for literary endeavors. As Rebecca Newberger Goldstein shows in her groundbreaking chapter, "Literary Spinoza," it is not simply Spinoza's philosophy that has fueled literary imaginations, but also the compelling example of Spinoza the person: renegade Jew, so-called moral saint, uncompromising rationalist, Enlightenment hero. Goldstein masterfully charts the ways in which Spinoza, for whom matters literary did not loom large, nonetheless became injected into the "literary bloodstream" through Jacobi's critical engagement with Spinoza, which had the perhaps unintended effect of inspiring many writers in the romantic movement, including, especially, Goethe, Hölderlin, and Novalis, to declare themselves Spinozists. Goldstein details various occasions on which Spinoza played the role of a literary muse for writers working in different genres, such as Coleridge, Wordsworth, George Eliot, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Malamud, Borges, and others down to the present day. Throughout her chapter, Goldstein grapples with the paradox that Spinoza the arch-rationalist, who abandons the "entanglement with particularity," should nonetheless have such a profound influence on literature whose "very substance" is precisely such an entanglement. This irony—also a theme of Goldstein's book *Betraying Spinoza*—is one of the many compelling reasons to engage with Spinoza's thought, as the contributors to this volume do in their many different ways.

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CHAPTER 2

THE VIRTUES OF GEOMETRY

AARON GARRETT

THE full title of Spinoza's *Ethics* is *Ethics Demonstrated in Geometric Order*. The *Ethics* was one of three geometrical works written by Spinoza. The unfinished *Tractatus Politicus*¹ appeared in Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma* along with the *Ethics* in 1677. *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy Demonstrated in the Geometric Manner* had appeared fourteen years before. One of Spinoza's very earliest works, the *Short Treatise*, had also included geometrical demonstrations. In Spinoza's very earliest letters (1661), Henry Oldenburg approved of Spinoza's "geometric style of proof" on the basis of a manuscript the contents of which corresponded to at least E1p5, E1p6, and E1p18 (Ep. 3/G 4:10). Since TP was the last work Spinoza wrote, KV one of the very first, if not the first work by Spinoza we possess, and DPP was the only work published under Spinoza's name in his lifetime, it is uncontroversial that the use of geometrical demonstrations in presenting his ideas was a constant over the course of Spinoza's philosophical career. Indeed, his consistent association with a single form of argument separated him from most of his peers, who were far more methodologically and stylistically eclectic—Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz, Malebranche, Gassendi, and Pufendorf, to name a few.

But from the consistent use that Spinoza made of geometrical demonstrations over the course of his philosophical career, it does not follow that he took geometrical demonstration to be synonymous with the one true philosophical method, or even that he took it to be the best method for all purposes. It does not even follow that Spinoza held that geometrical demonstration was a "method" in anything but a loose way of speaking. Spinoza sometimes referred to the use of geometrical demonstrations as an "order" and sometimes as a "manner," but never directly as a "method."² The Scholastic textbooks on

¹ I take that TP is meant to be *broadly* geometrical from TP 1.4, where Spinoza asserts that he will deduce from human nature in "the same unfettered spirit as is habitually shown in mathematical studies." I will discuss this further.

² The subtitle of the *Ethics* mentions "order," and *mos geometricus* is used by Spinoza fairly often (see E3pref for an example). Spinoza does indirectly refer to a geometrical method in the *Ethics*—"With this I have explained the cause of those notions which are called *common*, and which are the foundations of

which Spinoza drew distinguished between *order*—the arrangement or presentation of propositions—and *method*—an instrument for acquiring new knowledge.³ If geometrical demonstration is only an order or arrangement, then it might not be a method for securing new truths but a means to present truths acquired in some other manner.⁴

Even if Spinoza considered geometrical demonstration to be a method in the sense of a means for securing new truths, he might still have thought of it as only one stage in an overarching, multi-staged, philosophical method. Indeed, in the unfinished *Tractatus de Intellectu Emendatione*, Spinoza describes and argues for “a way of healing [or emending—AG] the intellect, and purifying it” (TdIE §16) that might precede geometrical demonstration. And TP, which Spinoza meant to follow the *Ethics* and also considered to be a geometrical work, is not argued from definitions and axioms set out at the beginning of each part (although Spinoza does define basic concepts and draw on definitions and demonstrations from the *Ethics*).

In line with a method of which geometrical demonstration is a stage or a part, Spinoza sometimes discussed philosophical method in very general terms: method is “reflexive knowledge,” and a true method “shows how the mind is to be directed according to the standard of a given true idea” (TdIE §38). If the true philosophical method is any method that shows how to direct the mind according to the standards given by true ideas, then there could be different forms of philosophical method, with geometrical demonstration as one way of ordering propositions (i.e., as following from axioms and definitions) and a particularly efficacious means to secure true propositions.

So, geometrical demonstration might be the one true method, a method, a part of method, a variant or one instantiation of a more general method, or not a method at all. However the method is construed, there’s a puzzle that dogs Spinoza’s philosophical method. Toward the end of TdIE Spinoza claimed that

the right way of discovery is to form thoughts from some given definition. This will proceed the more successfully and easily, the better we have defined a thing. So the chief point of this second part of the Method is concerned solely with this: knowing the condition of good definition, and then, the way of finding good definitions. (TdIE §94)

In the final paragraphs of TdIE, after offering a list enumerating those “properties of the intellect” that had been previously discussed and that he understands clearly (TdIE §108), Spinoza then turned to establishing “something common from which these properties necessarily follow, *or* such that when it is given, they are necessarily given, and when it is taken away, they are taken away” (§110). This formula was later

our reasoning. But some axioms, *or* notions, result from other causes which it would be helpful to explain by this method of ours” (E2p40s1/G 2:120).

³ Garrett, *Meaning*, p. 105.

⁴ By “only” I do not mean to diminish the importance of “geometrical order,” which is central to my argument.

used to define “belongs to an essence” in the *Ethics* (E2d2). It is clear that Spinoza means by “something common” a proper definition of intellect from which he can deduce the list of properties of the intellect he had enumerated, as well as other properties not yet discussed. A list is insufficient for a geometrical demonstration, and a definition is essential to unify to the properties on the list (and countless others) and for a successful method.

Unfortunately for the reader, no definition of the intellect or general procedure for acquiring true definitions is given. TdIE breaks off with the just-quoted sentence ending with “taken away.” The puzzle is, how does one acquire these definitions given that Spinoza stated that a central component of the method was setting out the means of finding them and that the success of the method depended on good definitions?

To provide an answer to this puzzle, I will first consider what Spinoza might have thought to be the advantages or virtues of geometrical demonstration. I will discuss transparency, force, security, scale, compactness, flexibility, generality, and sense-independence. Most of these virtues are not exclusive to geometrical demonstration—syllogisms are transparent and Cartesian analysis is sense-independent. But geometrical demonstration possesses all these virtues (and more that I have not discussed). I will then consider Spinoza’s relation to Descartes through the common distinction between analytic method and synthetic method, their different sense of geometrical order, and a further virtue: ease.⁵ I will conclude by arguing that the idea of an emendative method as outlined in TdIE provides a solution to the puzzle just outlined (though not to the historical puzzle of why Spinoza never finished TdIE).⁶ One warning, I will discuss Spinoza’s works other than the *Ethics* (particularly the nongeometrical TdIE and TTP) and the works of authors other than Spinoza more than I will discuss the *Ethics* itself. My hope is that these will shed light on why Spinoza makes the choices he does in the *Ethics*.

THE VIRTUES OF GEOMETRY

In DPP, Spinoza demonstrated in a geometrical manner what he took to be the main conclusions that Descartes had argued for in the first two parts and some of the third part of the *Principles*. Spinoza had not initially intended to make these demonstrations available to the public, they were written for the private use of his philosophical circle, but he was persuaded by his friends to publish on the condition that they would take care of all of the publication details. Notably, Spinoza did not even write the Preface to

⁵ The names of the virtues, the distinctions between them, and that they are referred to as virtues is my doing, not Spinoza’s (although I obviously think this is consistent with Spinoza).

⁶ There are substantial doctrinal differences between TdIE and the *Ethics*. In using TdIE to fill in lacunae in the *Ethics*, I am not denying this, but suggesting that the points of agreement are far more substantial than the points of disagreement.

his work; it was instead written by his friend Lodewijk Meyer.⁷ Given the circumstances of publication, Meyer's proximity to Spinoza, that the book appeared under Spinoza's name, and that Spinoza did not later repudiate the Preface or the work, it is safe to assume that Spinoza fully endorsed the Preface.

Meyer begins the Preface:

Everyone who wishes to be wiser than is common among men agrees that the best and surest Method of seeking and teaching the truth in the Sciences is that of the Mathematicians, who demonstrate their Conclusions from Definitions, Postulates, and Axioms. (G 1:127)

This passage equates Euclidean demonstration with a mathematical *method*. This passage is evidence that Spinoza thought of geometrical demonstration as some sort of method, although, as we have just seen, there are many possibilities for just how.

Although "everyone" was an overstatement, Meyer was correct that Spinoza was far from the only early modern philosopher who presented his arguments in a geometrical form. Hobbes, Descartes, Pufendorf, Samuel Clarke, and some who are less well known today, such as Descartes's critic Jean-Baptiste Morin⁸ and Leibniz's teacher Erhard Weigel, wrote whole works or passages of their works patterned on the axiomatic style of Euclid's geometry with definitions and rules or axioms, and then demonstrated propositions from the definitions.

For example, Pufendorf's *Elementorum jurisprudentiae universalis libri II* appeared in 1660, when Spinoza was writing his earliest geometrical works. Pufendorf had modeled it on Weigel's *Aristotelica ex Euclide restituta*, which had appeared two years earlier. Book I of *Elementorum*⁹ comprises twenty-one definitions of moral and political concepts, each definition subdivided into more precise definitions. Book II comprises two axioms and then five "observations," conclusions derived from the definitions and the axioms. The proofs and interconnection of definitions, axioms, and conclusions is much less precise and intricate than in Spinoza's *Ethics*, but the form of the demonstration is overtly Euclidean.

Pufendorf's *Elementorum* also allows us to distinguish another sense in which a method could be geometrical. In the course of his argument, Pufendorf literally applied geometrical figures and relations to elucidate moral and political concepts. For example, Pufendorf made geometrical computations of the quantity of sin in conjunction with the diagram of a "moral sphere."¹⁰ This was "geometrical" not only insofar as it used the demonstrative style of Euclid's *Elements*, but also by virtue of analyzing moral concepts

⁷ I presume that Spinoza subscribed to everything in the Preface since DPP was published in his lifetime and under his own name. I also assume that Meyer wrote the Preface instead of Spinoza because Spinoza gave it over to members of his circle for publication, not wanting to invest further time in it.

⁸ See Garber, "J.-B. Morin."

⁹ Given that the structure of Pufendorf's book is modeled on Euclid's *Elements*, the title seems quite consciously chosen.

¹⁰ Pufendorf, *Two Books*, book I, definition XVII.

as if they were geometrical figures. Many philosophers other than Pufendorf—including Spinoza and Hobbes—wished to treat questions in metaphysics, mind, and morals as if they were questions concerning geometrical figures. Notably, when Spinoza explained the different kinds of knowledge in KV and the *Ethics*, he used geometrical proportion to clarify the distinction (E2p40s2, and also see E1p8s). Here Spinoza was analyzing a problem not ordinarily thought to involve geometrical relations using a concept from geometry. Thus, it is evident that geometry was appealing to quite a few philosophers, even if Meyer exaggerated the ubiquity of its use. But what exactly was it that was so appealing? A good place to start in answering this question is with Hobbes's conversion to geometry as described in John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*:

He was forty years old before he looked on Geometry, which happened accidentally, being in a Gentleman's Library in . . . , a Euclid's *Elements* lay open, and 'twas the 47th Element liber I. He read the Proposition. "By G—," said he, "this is impossible." So he reads the Demonstration of it, which referred him back to such a Proposition: which proposition he read: that referred him back to another which he also read, and sic deinceps [slowly but surely], that at last he was demonstratively convinced of that truth. This made him in love with Geometry.¹¹

Aubrey describes Hobbes as finding himself convinced of the truth of a proposition he had initially thought to be impossible by first reading and understanding the demonstration of the controversial proposition, and then reading and understanding the demonstrations of the propositions on which the controversial principle rested and following back all the demonstrations to intuitively obvious definitions, axioms, and rules for the construction of geometrical figures. Hobbes was able to follow the argumentative links back to first principles, with all the argumentative links fully accessible, because geometrical demonstration possesses the virtues of *transparency* and *force*. Geometrical demonstrations make the justifications of all propositions (or the lack of justification of propositions) evident, easy to access, and easy to assess. And once accessed and assessed, the justifications possess great argumentative force insofar as they give compelling motivating reasons. If the argument is valid, there is no escape except by denying the premises or equivocating.

The transparency of geometrical demonstration further requires that the obvious definitions and axioms, on which the demonstrations and propositions draw for their justification, actually do provide a stable and sufficient foundation for the claims deduced. As Meyer put it, "since a certain and firm knowledge of anything unknown can only be derived from things known certainly beforehand, these things must be laid down at the start, as a stable foundation on which to build the whole edifice of human knowledge" (DPP Preface/G 1:127). A valid geometrical demonstration consequently exhibits the virtue of *security*: any proposition upstream, if validly deduced, is secure if it rests on a solid foundation.

¹¹ Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, pp. 427–428.

Transparency is not unique to geometrical demonstration. Individual syllogisms also make evident how and whether a conclusion is justified. A syllogistic argument is valid if it is in a valid syllogistic form and the conclusion follows from the premises by virtue of the demonstration. But, unlike geometrical deductions, syllogisms need not rest on axioms and definitions and are rarely interconnected in a long, transparent chain. Consequently, although syllogisms are transparent, the premises on which syllogisms rest are often more difficult to assess (and often less secure) than the definitions and axioms of geometrical deductions. Of course, a chain of syllogisms could lead back to self-evident propositions, in which case it could be part of a geometrical deduction. But, in practice, syllogisms are often unconnected enthymemes. Meyer saw this as a more general problem with non-mathematical philosophical arguments. Non-mathematical arguments intermix merely probable arguments with certain definitions and consequently foist “on the public a huge heap of huge books, in which you will find nothing that is firm and certain” (DPP Preface/G 1:128).

Scale, compactness, and flexibility are three further virtues that hold of geometrical demonstration. Geometrical demonstrations allow readers to take in large-scale arguments relatively easily in comparison with syllogisms, and to keep track of where they are presently in the argument and where they are headed. One reason that it is easier to keep track of large-scale arguments in a geometrical presentation is the *compactness* of the arguments. Propositions are built on previous propositions. Since the demonstrations of the previous propositions are secure and transparent, one need only refer to the conclusion of the previous demonstrations to know that the proposition being built on them is secure. This allows for highly compact arguments, which can be made less compact by following back the chain of demonstrations for each of the propositions on which a downstream proposition rests. To take a metaphor from Leibniz by way of Gilles Deleuze, each proposition is like a pleat or fold in a Baroque curtain, which, one realizes as one unfolds it, envelops bolt after bolt of pleated cloth. As each proposition is unfolded, longer and longer demonstrations and justifications emerge until the whole argument up to that point is like one long, seamless piece of cloth.¹² But at the level of the “pleats,” it is wonderfully beautiful and compact.

Also, though syllogisms come in a variety of forms and flavors, they do not allow much *flexibility* in argument. A philosopher working exclusively from syllogisms is limited to stringing together one or another of the syllogistic forms. The geometrical method allows flexibility in argument techniques (indirect proof, *reductio ad absurdum*, relatively complex arguments) that are not easily available in syllogisms without compromising the justificatory virtue of transparency it shares with syllogistic reasoning. Spinoza often makes use of each of these argument forms in the geometrical demonstrations of the *Ethics*.

Geometrical demonstrations also allow a philosopher to more naturally present corollaries and scholia to the main propositions. Some of Spinoza’s most important claims

¹² See Deleuze, *Fold*.

in the *Ethics* are in corollaries, scholia, appendixes, and the like. Because of the forceful, linear, and compact character of the deduction, geometrical demonstration is remarkably flexible in allowing side excursions without losing sight of the main argumentative flow. The use of corollaries, scholia, and so forth, was the historical legacy of Euclid's *Elements*, but the flexibility in allowing different sorts of digression owes to the structure of geometrical deductions.

Even more important than flexibility was the connected virtue of *generality*, which for Spinoza went hand in hoof with the crucial virtue of *sense-independence*. One of the main advantages of geometrical demonstrations as advocated by Hobbes and others was that they can be applied to *any* sort of subject matter, and the conclusions arrived at hold irrespective of the content. Euclidean demonstration was certainly not the only candidate for a universally applicable philosophical method. Bacon's *Novum Organum* was an attempt to construct a modern, universal canon of method. Descartes, in his *Regulae* and the *Discourse on Method*, argued for the importance of a *methodus universalis* in opposition to an Aristotelian order of topics¹³ that set the order and nature of inquiry by subject matter. Aristotle had claimed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that a philosophical inquiry should proceed in a manner appropriate to its content, and that the sort of clarity possible when one is discovering the cause of an eclipse may not hold of politics.¹⁴ Descartes argued that this led to the obscuring of the solutions to often only apparently difficult problems.

For example, when trying to solve a difficult geometry problem, if the proof strategy is dictated by the appearances of geometrical objects (the way that curves appear curvy to human eyes and human touch), then potential solutions drawing on non-phenomenal properties will be obscured by our tendency to concentrate on phenomenally attractive properties. In particular, we will fail to search for structurally important unifying elements that are not available through the senses. The more the method operates on common properties with common axioms, the less it will depend on anthropomorphisms and particular perceptual or psychological artifacts.

Euclid's *Elements* I:47 (which, as we saw earlier, made such an impact on Hobbes) is the now familiar theorem that the square of the hypotenuse in right triangles is equal to the sum of the squares of the two other sides. Hobbes found I:47 counterintuitive, but insofar as the demonstration was valid and the premises it rested on were true, he was forced to accept it. The conclusion of a geometrical demonstration is sometimes at odds with the ways in which we experience the sensible world and the intuitions and the unreflective inferences we generally draw from these orderings. Euclid showed a deep, simple, and certain structural relation between the sides of a class of plane figures that depended on relations between generic properties of figures.

If a geometrical proof can be so surprising and so at odds with our ordinary intuitions about the properties of visible objects, then when we move from plane figures

¹³ See Marion, *Sur l'ontologie*.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.3.

to metaphysics, mind, and morals, there is even greater potential for counterintuitive results and an even greater need to provide counter-ballast for our customary beliefs. Furthermore, this application of geometry has a leveling effect insofar as it shows that reason is applied generally and in the same manner regardless of the area of inquiry. In the Preface to Part III of the *Ethics*, Spinoza stated—clearly echoing a famous passage from Hobbes to be discussed later¹⁵—that he would treat the human affects in just the same way as planes, lines, and points. Spinoza was implying not just that one method was sufficient for all inquiries but also that the appropriate method when applied to an unfamiliar object would have the effect of critically undermining false beliefs about the human affects dictated by local concerns and interests.¹⁶ He was also implying, against the assumptions of many religionists, that the very same reasoning applied to God in Part I applied to the human affects in Part III.

Spinoza also emphasized *sense-independence* as a central virtue of geometrical demonstration¹⁷ related to generality. In a Scholium to his demonstration of Descartes's indefinite extension of matter in DPP, Spinoza criticized Zeno's paradoxes denying local motion, such as the paradox of Achilles and the hare. Drawing a distinction between his own criticisms and Diogenes the Cynic's attempt to refute Zeno by walking around the room, Spinoza concluded:

But here I should like my Readers to note that I have opposed my reasonings to Zeno's reasonings, and therefore I have refuted him by reason, not by the senses, as Diogenes did. For the senses cannot provide anything else to one who is seeking the truth except the Phenomena of nature, by which he is determined to investigate their causes. They can never show him that something is false that the intellect has clearly and distinctly found to be true. For so we judge. And therefore, this is our Method: to demonstrate the things we put forward by reasons perceived clearly and distinctly by the intellect, and to regard as negligible whatever the senses say that seems contrary to those reasons. As we have said, the senses can only determine the intellect to inquire into this matter rather than that one. They cannot convict it of falsity, when it has perceived something clearly and distinctly. (DPP2p6s/G 1:195–196)

In other words, sense experience can initiate a line of inquiry, but it can't provide a standard by which to distinguish truth from falsity. Spinoza's famous claim in the *Ethics* that "the eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes things, are the demonstrations themselves" (E5p23s) tacitly counterpoises the adequate eyes of the mind to the inadequate eyes of the body. Demonstrations provide the means by which the more universal eyes of the mind are freed to discover rare, surprising, and powerful truths. When the

¹⁵ Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, p. 5.

¹⁶ See Ep. 30A.

¹⁷ Although obviously not unique to geometrical demonstration insofar as Cartesian analysis, arithmetic, and many other procedures are sense-independent.

inadequate ideas of the body are relied on for fundamental truths, only partial, situated, easy, and often anthropomorphizing perspectives are offered.¹⁸

SYNTHESIS AND ANALYSIS: DESCARTES AND HOBBS

The generality and sense-independence of the method allow those utilizing it to acquire general and essential knowledge¹⁹ and help to undermine partial beliefs that impede proper understanding. If the knowledge acquired is sense-independent, it is independent of the particular contingent artifacts of our senses. If the method holds generally then it could provide demonstrations that utilize common notions and access essences. But, as I noted earlier, geometrical demonstration was not the only sort of method with claims to generality and sense-independence. Descartes outlined a method (or methods), first in his early works and then in the *Discourse and Essays* and the *Meditations*, that laid claim to generality, sense-independence, and many of the other virtues just outlined.

Many philosophers, mathematicians, and natural scientists were already analyzing problems in a manner similar to the way Descartes argued that mathematical and natural scientific problems should be tackled in the *Regulae*, *Discourse*, and in the *Essays*. At the time Descartes was writing, analysis was particularly associated with the breakthroughs in algebraic formalism in mathematics, in particular François Viète's *In Artem Analyticem Isagoge*²⁰ (1591) and the great advances in mathematical problem-solving by Viète and others, including Descartes himself.

"Analysis" in this context means breaking down what is to be known into simpler, more basic, constituent elements. The second of Descartes's four rules in the *Discourse* was "to divide each of the difficulties I examined into as many parts as possible and as may be required in order to resolve them better" (AT 6: 18). The parts that are arrived at through analysis might be metaphysically more basic or logically prior as such, or they might be more basic just for the needs of a particular problem. For example, certain units might be more amenable to mathematical reconstruction than others but not metaphysically simple, and vice versa. I will refer to an analysis that seeks the appropriate simples to successfully solve a problem as "methodological analysis" and to an analysis seeking metaphysically basic essences or logically prior simples as "metaphysical analysis." Of course, the two types of analysis might be identical or might overlap, or one

¹⁸ This does not mean that the eyes of the body are not useful, but that they must be regulated by the eyes of the mind.

¹⁹ One major difference between Hobbes and Spinoza concerns what sort of essential knowledge geometrical demonstration gives us access to.

²⁰ See Viète, "Introduction to the Analytical Art." On the relation between Viète and Descartes, see Smith, "Origins of Descartes' Concept of Mind," 3.1.4.4, pp. 169–175.

might be a subset of the other. For example, all successful methodological analysis might be, or at least might depend on, metaphysical analysis.

“Analysis” was normally contrasted with “synthesis” and the two were normally viewed as complementary, not as mutually exclusive. Hobbes’s method, for example, had both an analytic and a synthetic component and the two were sometimes mixed.²¹ Synthesis was the way in which the parts were put back together once analysis had been performed. And, just as analysis was by no means solely identified with Descartes, synthesis was not solely identified with Euclidean demonstration—syllogisms, for example, were commonly interpreted as a form of synthesis. Any demonstrative argument constructed from parts reached through analysis could be “synthesis.”

The first of Descartes’s rules was “never to accept anything as true” without evident knowledge that it was true (AT 6:18). In the *Discourse* and in the *Meditations*, Descartes identified this rule with the method of skeptical doubt. The method of skeptical doubt was a method of metaphysical analysis insofar as it took something large and complicated—our experience—and broke it down to reveal metaphysical simple natures. At least once in one’s life, one had to break through confused and unjustified sense experience and access clear and distinct simple natures in such a way that the truth and constitution of the simple natures was impervious to doubt and could act as a transparent foundation for future inquiry. For Descartes, this gave us knowledge of real essences, in particular the essence of the human mind and of bodies. One could only be certain of the knowledge acquired by methodological analysis if the methodological analysis rested on the proper foundation of metaphysical analysis.

Which is not to say that Descartes had no place for synthesis or geometrical reasoning. In the Synopsis of the *Meditations*, Descartes asserts that the work as a whole is in a *geometrical order*, by which he understood the exhaustive setting out of all the premises on which a conclusion depended before drawing conclusions (AT 7:13). Indeed, it was a (or even *the*) central principle structuring the work, and the geometrical order explained why an argument of the immortality of the soul does not directly follow the *cogito* argument—all relevant premises must be collected before educing the conclusion, even if they seem to be connected with radically different topics. The *Meditations* also contained numerous synthetic arguments drawing together elements discovered by prior analysis, and Descartes’s *Principles of Philosophy* was written entirely in a non-geometrical synthetic form of argument. Furthermore, in response to criticisms of the *Meditations* made by the author of the Second Objections, Descartes restructured some of the contents of the *Meditations* into geometrical definitions, postulates, and axioms, and then derived from them four propositions and one corollary²² that presented some of the most important results of the *Meditations*—that is, the proofs of God and the real distinction between mind and body. But Descartes cautioned that this geometrical

²¹ See Talaska, “Analytic and Synthetic.”

²² Meyer discusses this in G 1:129–30.

synthetic order was no substitute for the analytic *method* used in the main body of the *Meditations*—it was at best auxiliary.

In other words, synthetic order gave the reader no understanding of how the few important foundational ideas were acquired. Analysis was a *method* of discovery; it explained how confused ideas were to be chopped, doubted, and dissected so as to acquire or uncover new clear and distinct ideas. *Analytic order* was the order of discovery; that is, the sequence of the investigation was determined by the actual order in which concepts and propositions were rigorously discovered (in the *Meditations*, following hyperbolic doubt). This did not conflict with a *geometrical order* in Descartes's sense; the two were mutually supporting. Geometrical order guided the analytic order in a general way: we need to discover all relevant premises before setting out conclusions, but we need to do so in a way that reflected the actual analytic order of discovery that depended on the analytic method.

For Spinoza, though, geometrical order was not just a support to the analytic order and analytic method. Indeed, the subtitle of the *Ethics* is “*ordine Geometrico demonstrata*” and the geometric order is advertised as a primary commitment. What Spinoza understood by geometrical order was not just the exhaustive list of relevant premises but also the arrangement of definitions, axioms, or other propositions from causally and explanatorily “prior by nature” as such—not just for the purposes of a particular investigation—to causally and explanatorily posterior as such. Descartes's geometrical order was a methodological arrangement of premises in service of a metaphysical investigation. Spinoza's geometrical order was in addition a metaphysical arrangement of premises.

Geometrical order is evident in the sequence of the parts of the *Ethics*—from God to Mind to human affects, and, in the first proposition—“A substance is prior in nature to its affections.” Beginning with the more general and moving to the more specific was not unique to Spinoza's geometrical order; it was a basic assumption of Aristotelian science.²³ But this conflicts with Descartes's understanding in a non-trivial way. On Spinoza's interpretation of the geometrical or proper order, one cannot begin with the soul and move to God, as Descartes does in the *Meditations*, since this would be to move from a principle posterior by nature to one prior by nature.

This was of great importance for Spinoza since many of the ideas acquired early in an investigation were not sufficiently general to serve as a standard by which to evaluate ideas discovered later. For example, Descartes acquires the *cogito* early on in the investigation, and an analysis of the *cogito* leads to the discovery of the will, which becomes central to the subsequent arguments. But, if Descartes had already demonstrated a more general metaphysical thesis from definitions and axioms that were prior by nature that committed him to determinism, this would likely have restrained questionable voluntarist inferences about the nature of the human and

²³ Although this complemented the order of investigation from confused particular to general—see Aristotle, *Physics* I.1.

of the divine will. In other words, if the order of the investigation was determined by the order of discovery and a weak Cartesian notion of geometrical order, then one might, in absence of more general standards, be misled in ways that terribly skew the investigation. One might end up with a demonstrably false belief in a voluntarist God, for example.

The general criticism, then, is that the analytic order, when combined with the geometric order, in Descartes's sense, has insufficient metaphysical backbone; that is, has an insufficiently evident metaphysical structure of generality and priority or, put differently, is insufficiently guided by the principle of sufficient reason to prevent the investigator from being drastically and destructively misled in the investigation. Descartes could, of course, reasonably object that this metaphysical backbone is what is at issue; that is, it must be discovered as certain and evident and not presumed. But the fear that Descartes's order was insufficiently metaphysically strong to prevent him from being misled in his own investigation was a serious one.

And if Descartes himself could be misled, what about his readers?

But though a certainty which is placed beyond any risk of doubt is found in each way of demonstrating, they are not equally useful and convenient for everyone. For since men are completely unskilled in the Mathematical sciences, and quite ignorant, both of the Synthetic Method, in which they have been written, and of the Analytic, by which they have been discovered, they can neither follow for themselves, nor present to others, the things which are treated, and demonstrated conclusively, in these books. That is why many who have been led, either by a blind impulse, or by the authority of someone else, to enlist as followers of Descartes, have only impressed his opinions and doctrines on their memory; when the subject comes up, they know only how to chatter and babble, but not how to demonstrate anything, as was, and still is, the custom among those who are attached to Aristotle's philosophy. (DPP Preface/G 1:129)

As Meyer points out in this passage from DPP, even if Descartes had discovered his central philosophical arguments through analysis, this would not guarantee that his readers would be able to grasp his arguments when presented in the analytic order in which Descartes had discovered them. Furthermore, if readers of Descartes's analytic works were swayed by his standing as a great philosopher but unable to grasp the arguments because of their own failings or because of the argument's intrinsic difficulties, they would become Cartesian "enthusiasts" in the pejorative early modern sense: blind and uncomprehending zealots. Because synthetic arguments in Spinoza's geometrical order are relatively simple and clear; because they pretty much guarantee—or at least guarantee more closely than analysis would—that the reader will need to understand each step in order to go on; and, more important, because the metaphysical backbone is always evident and present, the reader will not become an enthusiast quite as easily. This worry that a little bit of knowledge of Descartes could be destructive was indeed what had motivated Spinoza to write *DPP*. The work was originally created for and dictated to Johannes Caesarius, a young member of Spinoza's circle. Caesarius was "more

anxious for novelty than for truth” (Ep. 9/G 4:42), and Spinoza was careful not to communicate any of the content of the *Ethics* to him for fear that it would be misunderstood. Spinoza must have thought that the synthetic order of the *Principles* was not sufficient to insure that Caesarius properly understood the Cartesian philosophy, which in turn was the precondition for understanding the *Ethics*. In addition to its other virtues, the ease of geometrical demonstration served the crucial purpose of undermining both enthusiasm and potentially destructive philosophical misunderstandings that neither analysis nor some other forms of synthesis adequately counter. This held for both writer and reader.

This insight is, at least in part, Hobbesian. Hobbes was clearly the major influence on Spinoza’s conviction that geometrical demonstration had the power to upend and undermine false beliefs (“this is impossible”), to convince the reader of the truth of counterintuitive propositions, and to progress in areas where schools and sects had done little good. A few years after his geometrical awakening, Hobbes wrote *De Cive*, his most widely read political work on the continent. In the Preface he argued that geometrical demonstration was not merely propaedeutic (i.e., for those incapable of analysis); rather it was capable of ushering in a millenarian age:

True Wisdom is simply the knowledge [*scientia*] of truth in every subject. Since it derives from the remembrance of things, which is prompted by their fixed and definite names, it is not a matter of momentary flashes of penetrating insight, but of right Reason, i.e. of Philosophy. For Philosophy opens the way from the observation of individual things to universal precepts. . . . In treating of figures it is called Geometry, of motion Physics, of natural law, Morals, but is all Philosophy; just as the sea is here called British, there Atlantic, elsewhere Indian, so called from its particular shores, but all is Ocean. The Geometers have managed their province outstandingly. For whatever benefit comes to human life from observation of the stars, from mapping of lands, from reckoning of time and from long-distance navigation; whatever is beautiful in buildings, strong in defense-works and marvelous in machines, whatever in short distinguishes the modern world from the barbarity of the past, is almost wholly the gift of Geometry. For if the pattern of human action were known with the same certainty as the relations of magnitudes in figures, ambition and greed, whose power rests on false opinions of the common people of right and wrong [*jus et iniuria*], would be disarmed, and the human race would enjoy such secure peace that (apart from conflicts over space as population grew) it seems unlikely that it would ever have to fight again.²⁴

This passage was almost certainly read by Spinoza.²⁵ On Hobbes’s account, the demonstrations used by geometers are Philosophy as such, applied specifically to geometrical figures. Philosophy can also be applied to other subjects, and the degree of rigor will

²⁴ Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, pp. 4–5.

²⁵ Spinoza owned the 1647 edition. See Anonymous, *Catalogus*, p. 24.

be that appropriate to the subject. If the same sort of demonstrations were consistently applied to other areas of human endeavor, the rest of human life would be transformed as rapidly as mathematics has been. The previously mentioned passage from the Preface to the third part of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza asserts that he will treat the human affects in just the same way as planes, lines, and points seems a direct extension of Hobbes's praise of geometry.

Philosophy for Hobbes, then, *just is* geometrical demonstration preceded by some sort of analysis appropriate to the objects or problems under investigation. The apparent differences in the method applied by Hobbes to different areas, from physics to psychology to politics, are not actually differences in method but differences in the rigor with which the method can be effectively applied. Since Spinoza's understanding of philosophical method was strongly influenced by Hobbes, this gives us a plausible answer to the question asked at the beginning of this chapter: is geometrical demonstration one among many true methods, the only true method, an application of a broader concept of method, or a stage in a method? If Spinoza is following Hobbes, then Philosophy provides causes or reasons between propositions that are ultimately secured by self-evident propositions or definitions or axioms. In politics, this is bound to be somewhat less precise than in physics. And in metaphysics, the degree of rigor can be very exacting, including explicit definitions and axioms and rigorous arguments that show these causal and rational connections, precisely because we are dealing with the most knowable sorts of propositions.

On this account, the geometrical demonstrations in the *Ethics* would not be synonymous with Philosophy in general but would be the most rigorous expression of Philosophy—that is, of causal explanation and demonstration in a proper geometrical order. This level of rigor would be appropriate to some subjects—that is, subjects we can know in a rigorous manner, such as metaphysics or mind—and would possess the virtues of geometry outlined in the previous section to the highest degree. The discussions of “true method” in TdIE would provide a broad characterization of Philosophy that then would take on different degrees of rigor appropriate to the content. But a true method would show “how the mind is to be directed according to the standard of a given true idea” (TdIE §38) whether the true idea was the definition of God and the showing via geometrical proofs, or definitions of the state and less rigorous demonstrations (i.e., the “unfettered spirit” of mathematics in TP 1.4).

This helps us to make further sense of Spinoza's apparently peculiar decision to order Descartes's synthetic *Principles* as a geometrical demonstration in DPP. The decision is apparently peculiar since Descartes's *Principles* are already presented in a synthetic order. But the peculiarity vanishes if we compare Descartes's *Principles* with Spinoza's “physics” after E2p13. Spinoza's physics is in the form of a rigorous geometrical demonstration with definitions and lemmas. Descartes's synthetic ordering is not nearly as transparent, compact, or secure. So Spinoza was translating a synthetic presentation that was insufficiently rigorous for the content being presented into a more rigorous and geometrical presentation, the sort of presentation with which he presented his own physics in the *Ethics*.

But the potential Cartesian objection remains a worry, a worry connected to the puzzle associated with TdIE with which I began this chapter. Does geometrical demonstration come after a presupposed stage of analysis or does it involve analysis, or not? If it doesn't come after analysis, then how can the definitions be evident and their priority understood in a clear and evident manner? If it *does* come after analysis, then what sort of analysis? In the passage from *De Cive* quoted earlier, the examples Hobbes gives of the wonders of geometry are all examples of construction, reform, and reconstruction. Lands and oceans are mapped by organizing them according to geometrical principles; and superior buildings, strong defenses, and marvelous machines are constructed according to geometrical principles. But in all these examples the geometer begins with a nominal definition or starting point—a geometer charts the sea and land and picks out particular points, sometimes arbitrarily, sometimes not, to serve as the elements in the construction and then analyzes the starting points to educe principles which can serve for a causal explanation. When a sailor is navigating the sea, he resolves the shifting sea into lines that are then used, to set the ship's path, in conjunction with lines used to coordinate information gathered from the stars. This would be a paradigmatic example of methodological analysis: the analysis solves a particular problem and the principles educed are justified pragmatically.

Or, put differently, not just any definitions or principles will do when one is attempting to provide demonstrations of metaphysical truths. As Spinoza stated in the concluding section of TdIE, we need to get at true ideas, essences, and real definitions. This was a main selling point of Descartes's metaphysical analysis: unlike synthesis, which only arranged previously discovered definitions, analysis got at the essences themselves and solid, indubitable foundations. Spinoza's use of geometrical demonstration seems to harmonize Descartes's and Hobbes's insights—that is, to advocate a Hobbes-inspired geometrical science of morals, politics, and the human mind but to build it on a metaphysical foundation and knowledge of the essences of things. But Spinoza did not provide any explicit metaphysical analysis, unlike Descartes. The whole of the *Ethics* is one geometrical demonstration that begins from definitions and axioms arranged in a geometrical order in Spinoza's sense, which at least appear to be essential definitions of basic metaphysical concepts and laws, and then adds more and more definitions and axioms but gives little or no explanation of how these definitions are acquired or how priority among them was established previous to the demonstration.²⁶ So, although we now understand Spinoza's method a bit better, we still have our puzzle.

²⁶ One might object that the metaphysical backbone itself needs justification. But insofar as it only treats philosophy in the order broadly set by the five parts of the *Ethics*, given the discussion above and the fact that we are moving from more a priori knowable and powerful to less, it seems relatively unproblematic given Spinoza's account of knowledge.

REPRESENTATION AND DEFINITION

There are at least three ways we might respond. First, we might just admit that this is a serious problem that Spinoza didn't think through. A strong piece of evidence for this view is that Spinoza never offers any explicit response to this problem. Given that he studied Descartes and Hobbes quite seriously and given the discussion in TdIE, though, it is overwhelmingly likely that he did think about it.

Or, we might hold that Spinoza did think the problem through but was unable to come up with any good solution. The fact that TdIE is incomplete and ends just at the point when Spinoza is about to explain how we get the true definitions that we will use in our geometrical demonstrations provides support for this view—perhaps the puzzle we have discussed was an unsolvable one for Spinoza. Indeed, the last line of TdIE is “we must now establish something common from which these properties necessarily follow, *or* such that when it is given, they are necessarily given, and when it is taken away, they are taken away” (TdIE §110). That seems like a failed search for a stable foundation for the definition.

Or, we can argue that Spinoza does have a solution to this problem, or that he at least has the resources to try to solve the puzzle. This does not mean that the solution is ultimately philosophically satisfactory; rather, the solution is consistent with other positions held by Spinoza throughout the *Ethics* and his other writings. This is the tack I will take, but it is perfectly warranted to conclude that Spinoza failed to solve the problem.

A good place to start is by asking whether there is analysis in Spinoza's writings or whether all his writings are synthetic. Two likely candidates for analysis are TdIE and TTP. TdIE is explicitly presented as a work preparatory to what would become the *Ethics*, and Spinoza engages in analysis in the opening passages of TdIE, where he sifts through his own life and tries to discover what is most important to him. But TdIE is more a work in philosophical methodology than an analysis insofar as the primary purpose of TdIE is to reflexively describe a procedure for acquiring true ideas and definitions and avoiding false ideas (as opposed to acquiring particular definitions, axioms, propositions, etc). I will return to this procedure in a moment.

Spinoza does engage in a lot of analysis, though, in TTP. He analyzes many passages from the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew etymologies, and works by Jewish medieval commentators and philosophers and tries to draw out the true meanings of these passages and the terms they employ. For example, TTP opens with an analysis—in the technical sense—of prophecy: “the sure knowledge of some matter revealed by God to man” (TTP 1/G 3:15).²⁷ Spinoza presents two conflicting interpretations of this definition held by opposed interpreters of Scripture. On one interpretation, prophecy includes natural knowledge; on the other, it excludes natural knowledge because natural knowledge

²⁷ All quotations from TTP are taken from the Shirley translation.

cannot be divine. Both interpretations appear to be consistent with the definition, but because they are directly opposed, only one of them can stand.

The authors of Scripture use the Hebrew word for “spirit” when they describe prophets being filled with the “spirit of God,” and interpreters of Scripture who hold that natural knowledge is not prophecy tacitly draw on “spirit” to support their positions. Together, what Scripture says about “prophecy” and about “spirit” are taken to imply that natural knowledge cannot be divine.

But, there is a wide range of interpretations of the definition of spirit. Those who deny that natural knowledge can be divine interpret spirit in such a way that the consequence—that natural knowledge cannot be divine—follows from it in conjunction with the definition of prophecy. Let’s call this interpretation “spiritX.”

To show that spiritX is an implausible interpretation of “spirit,” Spinoza fixes the extension of plausible interpretations of “spirit” by analyzing the contexts in which it occurs in Scripture. Untenable interpretations can then be ruled out by showing that they are not supported by any uses made of the Hebrew word for “spirit” in said contexts. This results in a restricted set of plausible interpretations of “spirit” that does not include “spiritX”—“since we find no mention in Scripture of any other means than these, it is not permissible for us to invent any” (TTP 1/G 3:28). Since “spirit” interpreted as “spiritX” was one of his opponent’s premises, we can conclude that they have not established that natural knowledge cannot be divine.

The crucial step in Spinoza’s argument is an analysis. Spinoza breaks down a tacitly invoked but confused use of the definition of prophecy into constituent elements and then clarifies the elements in order to restrict the extension of the definition and, consequently, to restrict the conclusions that could follow from it. Spinoza’s argument is negative, but there’s no reason that a similar procedure could not be used positively. Indeed, one is used positively in Spinoza’s arguments for the liberty to philosophize.²⁸

But there is an obvious problem in applying this procedure to the *Ethics*. The analysis was possible because of contextual definitions, which provided a clear, if not uncontroversial²⁹ way of restricting the extension of a definition when the total range of the definition has been stipulated. In this case, the range of the definition of “spirit” can’t extend beyond the contexts in which “spirit” occurs in Scripture. But, when we are not dealing with a stipulated or nominal definition with a fixed range, it doesn’t seem that this procedure will work. If we were trying to define “substance,” where would we look for contextual definitions, and what would justify these particular contextual definitions and not others? What principle could be used to limit the extensions of definitions? If we just looked to what philosophers said about substance; that is, if our domain were restricted to philosophers’ words, then we might be able to rule out some interpretations of substance as being inconsistent with what philosophers generally say. But that wouldn’t rule anything out as being true definitions of substance as such.

²⁸ Garrett, “Knowing.” I can’t justify the whole picture here but I refer the reader there.

²⁹ Spinoza’s opponents could, and likely would, reject Spinoza’s literalist interpretation of Scripture (although Spinoza has strong methodological grounds for this interpretation).

I would like to suggest that there is a special connection between deduction or demonstration and the restriction of interpretations of definitions. This is in turn connected with Spinoza's understanding of representation. In TdIE, Spinoza suggested that deduction or demonstration had a central role both in emending our confused but true ideas and in helping us to distinguish between false and true ideas:

When the mind attends to a fictitious thing which is false by its very nature, so that it considers it carefully, and understands it, and deduces from it in good order the things to be deduced, it will easily bring its falsity to light. And if the fictitious thing is true by its nature, then when the mind attends to it, so that it understands it, and begins to deduce from it in good order the things that follow from it, it will proceed successfully, without any interruption. (TdIE §61)

Spinoza here outlines two consequences of attending to fictitious ideas that depend on two sorts of fictitious ideas. There are ideas that are fictitious yet true by their nature and ideas that are fictitious and false by nature. I take the first sorts of fictitious ideas to be those where the object of the fictitious ideas is true in itself and the "fictitiousness" arises from confusion or fuzziness in the mind of the perceiver in attending to the true object. For example, the fuzziness or confusion in my idea of a scalene triangle is due to my confusions—my misperceptions, my incompetence at mathematics—and not to confusions in scalene triangles themselves. For Spinoza, both the mental state I have (*my* confused representation of a triangle) and its object in the attribute of thought (the idea of a triangle insofar as it is in God's intellect in the attribute of thought) are ideas.³⁰ The confused idea or mental state I have is a truncated form of the idea in the mind of God and confusedly represents its object—that is, the adequate idea in God's intellect.³¹

The confused mental state I have just described, which inadequately represents the true idea of triangle, is fictitious, but it is fictitious in a different way from the other class of fictitious ideas, ideas which are both fictitious and false. In a note to TdIE, Spinoza adds:

Afterwards, when we speak of fiction that concerns essences, it will be clear that the fiction never makes, or presents to the mind, anything new, but that only things which are in the brain or the imagination are recalled to memory, and that the mind attends confusedly to all of them at once. Speech and a tree, for example, are recalled to memory, and since the mind attends confusedly, without distinction, it allows that

³⁰ The term *mental state* is not Spinoza's. But Spinoza makes the distinction between a definition explicating "a thing as it is NS: in itself outside the intellect" and a definition that explicates "a thing as we conceive it." By the latter he means our mental activity or mental state considered independently of any object (Ep. 9/G 4:43). Consequently, I take Spinoza to be making this distinction, and for convenience, I use the expression *mental state* to stand in for "a thing as we conceive it."

³¹ For a far more detailed treatment of these issues, see Della Rocca, *Representation*, chapters 4–6. Thanks to Michael Della Rocca for clarifying this point (the phrasing in the sentence is his).

the tree speaks. The same is understood concerning existence, especially, as we have said, when it is conceived so generally, as being. Then it is easily applied to all things which occur in the mind together. This is very much worth noting. (TdIE §57, fn. x)

The “talking tree” in this example is the result of the happenstance connecting of images that the mind conceives confusedly. A mind forms a notion “talking tree” and then further confusedly judges that the talking tree exists. Importantly, there is nothing new added to my mental stock (nor to the world) by conceiving “talking tree.” “There is a talking tree” is just “talking” and “tree” conceived in a particularly confused manner. Both “tree” and “talking” can be conceived in a less confused manner, and then the idea might be fictitious—I might and likely will form confused ideas of “talking” and “tree.” These concepts, too, add nothing new, but they at least might represent true ideas (or they might not).

Certainly, though, my idea of a “unicorn” does not refer to the true idea of a unicorn in God’s intellect or have a unicorn as its object.³² The parts which make it up have to represent something, a horse, a horn, inchoate extended blob, and the questionable affect of wonder. But whatever my mental state “unicorn” might be said to confusedly represent, it is not in any way representing the true idea of a unicorn since unicorns are not real objects of my mental states. My idea is fictitious and false, and so it cannot be represented adequately or truly.

Our minds include more or less adequate or true ideas as well as fictitious and false ideas. We evaluate the false ideas using the standard offered by the true ideas. We seek, or at least we should seek, to have fewer false ideas and more true ideas. As we have just seen, fictitious ideas are divided into two classes that can be distinguished by their deductive consequences. When we try to deduce true propositions from fictitious and false ideas, either we are quickly led to contradictions or the demonstrations lead to dead ends. But Spinoza suggests that when we deduce from a confused idea which has a true object and in the *proper order* (beginning with the most fundamental first principles), we will be able to “proceed successfully, without any interruption”; and as we engage more and more in this sort of deduction, “the haste to feign things will gradually disappear” (TdIE §63).

This last point is crucial, since it implies that demonstration is a gradual corrective of or a mental discipline for hasty tendencies that result in the forming of both sorts of fictitious ideas. Deduction rids us of fictitious and false ideas and diminishes our tendency to form “new” ones in the sense previously described. And fictitious ideas with a true object, confused mental states that do represent, albeit poorly, are, unlike fictitious and

³² Earlier in TdIE, Spinoza states that the nature of a Chimera implies its nonexistence (TdIE §54). This suggests that the very concept of “chimera” entails a contradiction like “square circle,” and that chimera should be taken as a stock example of a contradictory thing. If chimaeras were possible but did not happen to exist, that would not be sufficient for the distinction he is attempting to draw (see TdIE §69).

false ideas, a crucial bridge insofar as we can adequately conceive their objects. More about this in a moment.

I suggest that demonstration has this effect through imparting some of the epistemic virtues I outlined in the opening section, and that the effect of geometrical deduction on the mind that Spinoza intends is wider than just not forming false ideas while engaged in a deduction. By engaging in geometrical deductions, we use the “eyes of the mind”—we take on an epistemic stance, a stance toward knowledge, that promotes these virtues more generally. Geometrical demonstration is causal demonstration in a geometrical order and offers an objective standpoint on the reasons for and causes of extended things and ideas.

Six of the virtues of geometrical demonstration—transparency, force, security, generality, sense-independence, and ease—seem particularly central to this process. Since the method is general and sense-independent, it holds independently of the particular biases of our experience. Because it has transparency and security, the grounds of evidence are always accessible, and so the importance of offering valid reasons is promoted. The method also provides some motivation. Because it has both force and ease, all but the most bigoted should be convinced (of course, in practice, that is rarely the case). One acquires these epistemic virtues by practicing deduction. Deduction teaches the deducer to see and know the world through the pre-eminence of the principles of sufficient reason and the principle of non-contradiction and conversely to avoid fictitious and false ideas from testimony, memory, and the senses as well as to avoid conceiving them in confused ways.

It is different from Descartes’s analytic order, which seems to be specific to the human understanding and faculties. Spinoza’s offers us, rather, a view from everywhere. In a footnote attached to the passage about deduction just cited, Spinoza added:

Although I seem to infer this from experience, and someone may say that this is nothing, because a demonstration is lacking, he may have one, if he wishes; since there can be nothing in nature that is contrary to its laws, but since all things happen according to certain laws of nature, so that they produce their certain effects, by certain laws, in an unbreakable connection, it follows from this that when the soul conceives a thing truly [*ubi rem verè concipit*], it proceeds to form the same effects objectively. (TdIE §61, fn. a)

This passage suggests that the order of deduction mirrors the order of nature insofar as the human mind is a part of nature and the laws that govern it are the very same laws that govern the rest of nature. And it further seems to suggest that the ability of the mind to produce effects depends on both how it conceives (truly or not) and what it conceives (a true idea or not). “Conceives a thing truly (*verè*)” again underscores that it is not just conceiving what is true, but conceiving in a particular adverbial manner, in line with the epistemic virtues that are part of the method.

I have suggested that we think of deduction as having a therapeutic effect in line with the method of emending and purifying the intellect described in TdIE. I would like

now to suggest that this therapeutic effect is connected with the problem of definition in Spinoza, that for Spinoza definitions are achievements, and as we achieve them, we purify and emend our minds.

As we saw before, there is a problem in applying the sort of analysis Spinoza practiced in TTP to metaphysics and to Spinoza's idea of a proper or geometrical order. Spinoza was able to rule out false beliefs about the extension and reference of "spirit" on the basis of an analysis of the contexts in which "spirit" occurred. But in the analysis in TTP, he fixed the reference or meaning of "spirit" nominally, or stipulatively. The extension of the "spirit" was fixed by the contexts in which it occurred in Scripture. Spinoza's analysis in this regard, and in other regards, is similar to Hobbes's. But when we want to know about triangles, we are interested in the true ideas of triangle, not the triangles we might read about in Euclid's *Elements*, only insofar as the triangles happen to occur in Euclid. For Spinoza, we are interested in the triangles we read about in the *Elements* because we believe that Euclid's demonstrations about them will tell us about triangles as such. Whether his method was able to make sense of them or not, Hobbes's shock at arriving at Euclid's proposition concerning the relations holding between the squares of the sides was not shock at the relations between the sides of a particular object discussed by Euclid, which was of great value in building fortresses and exploring the seas. It was shock that those relations held between the sides of triangles. We might have purely instrumental interest in knowledge of this or that triangle-shaped object, but somewhere upstream for Spinoza, this must rest on knowledge of the essences of triangles.

For Spinoza, Euclid's triangles adequately represent triangles as such, triangles insofar as they have a formal essence in the infinite intellect of God. When we follow Euclid's deduction, we conceive triangles truly, and we have less of a tendency to form false ideas. It might be reasonably asked, though, how do we know that Euclid's triangles do represent triangles as such? This is a crucial question that is closely connected with how Spinoza understands the role of analysis in metaphysics and in areas of philosophy closely connected with metaphysics.

Spinoza's answer rests on the premise that all human beings (and perhaps all things) possess true innate ideas. By "innate" is meant "acquired independent of the senses or of any sort of external cause"—our mental instruments and faculties are innate in this sense. Insofar as true ideas cannot arise from the senses or from external causes, all true ideas are innate by definition. This does not mean that we have at all times a clear grasp of all the true innate ideas we possess.³³ For example, Spinoza holds that all human beings have a true idea of God; but he also holds that most human beings have a faulty grasp on the idea of God. So, how can it be the case that we have innate, true ideas that we have only a confused grasp of?

³³ This doctrine is also familiar from Descartes's *Meditations* and the distinction he makes between knowing and grasping. I am not suggesting the distinction is wholly coherent. Spinoza has some resources to defend it, but doing so is beyond the ken of this chapter. For an excellent discussion of innateness and adequacy, see Marshall, "Adequacy and Innateness." Thanks to Eugene Marshall for help with this section.

We have a true and therefore innate idea of God in two senses. First, we have a true idea of God insofar as any confused mental state we have that refers to or represents God to any extent, refers to or represents God insofar as it refers to or represents the true idea of God in the infinite intellect (in just the same way any fictitious and confused idea of a triangle we have refers to the true idea of a triangle in the infinite intellect). So, if I have a confused mental state representing God as a “giant, all-powerful, pipe smoking, man,” that mental state is “of God” insofar as it refers, not to pipes, men, or even giant, but rather to “all-powerful.”

It is possible that some people might be completely deluded—by authority or society or sheer ignorance—such that what they refer to as “God” has no connection whatsoever with God as such. But Spinoza still wishes to assert that those people would have an idea of God insofar as they had those basic metaphysical concepts that allow us to make sense of the world. The deluded persons might not know that they possessed the idea of “God”, but they would possess it if they were at all rational or human. This is connected to a second sense in which we can be said to have an idea of God, a sense quite different from the way in which we have a true idea of a triangle. That we possess an idea of God is for Spinoza a necessary condition of possessing a true idea of a triangle in that the idea of God provides the “truth conditions” of the idea of the triangle.³⁴ Only if we possess an idea of God can we properly judge other ideas to be true or false. This is again because all the basic metaphysical and epistemic concepts that we use to ascertain the truth derive from the idea of God and can only be made sense of through it.³⁵ The unique status of the idea of God then anchors Spinoza’s confidence about how and that our mental states refer. And it explains why the geometrical order of the *Ethics* must begin with the definition of God.

In E1p8s2, Spinoza remarks that “if men would to attend to the nature of substance, they would have no doubt at all of the truth of E1p7 [“It pertains to the nature of a substance to exist”]. Indeed, this proposition would be an axiom for everyone” (G 2:50). The presumption is that those who hold that substance does not exist (or that there are multiple substances, or that substances are created or tangible, etc.) all have fictitious or confused mental representations of an object or idea that has a real nature or essence. If they attended to the essence of the object, and not to the many fictitious ideas we also have

³⁴ I put “truth conditions” in scare quotes because Spinoza could not possibly have meant truth conditions in a contemporary sense. I mean “the conditions which allow for an idea to be true.”

³⁵ Why this is the case goes far beyond a discussion of method, as do the details of truth and adequacy in Spinoza, but, *in breve*, basic metaphysical concepts, such as unity, identity, causation, and essence, are necessary to appraise the truth of any and all other concepts. Put differently, we need a certain amount of metaphysics to correctly ascertain whether a concept or state of affairs is true or false. For example, the ability to appraise the truth or falsity of an idea of a triangle depends on possessing this metaphysical machinery—to say that object *x* is triangular is to say that it refers to, corresponds to, and derives from TRIANGLE *X*, for example. To possess these metaphysical concepts, we need to have the true idea of God in that all these metaphysical concepts represent and derive from God. When we use these concepts to ascertain truth, we have, by default, an idea of God. So *that* we have true (or valid) metaphysical concepts that we use to appraise the truth of our many other concepts demands that these concepts refer to God and that we have a true idea of God.

which arise from the senses and testimony, ideas that impede us from drawing correct deductive conclusions, they would see that it was wholly evident that existence belongs to the nature of substance.

Spinoza assumed that his readers possessed background knowledge that was helpful (or even necessary) for understanding the arguments in the *Ethics*.³⁶ The intended audience of E1p7 was not philosophical geniuses who grasped the essence of substances but rather reasonably educated philosophers like Velthuysen or Henry Oldenburg or members of Spinoza's philosophical circle, who had a confused idea of substance and other basic philosophical concepts but were not hopelessly confused. As Edwin Curley has suggested,³⁷ Spinoza's main audience was no doubt Cartesians, and the definitions and axioms he presents at the beginning of Part I are familiar from the *Principles of Philosophy* and the *Meditations*. This is clearly right since Spinoza himself placed DPP in a geometrical order as preparation for the *Ethics*. My suggestion is that if Curley's insight is generalized, we can provide the more general justification for the method and the procedure in tandem with a reading of TdIE and TTP as suggested earlier.³⁸

In Ep. 2 to Oldenburg (1661), Spinoza presented Oldenburg with a definition of God "a Being consisting of infinite attributes, each of which is infinite, or supremely perfect in its kind" (G 4:7) and pointed to the arguments in a geometrical demonstration he had enclosed with the letter³⁹ which demonstrated a number of Spinoza's central claims about substance, including "that a substance cannot be produced, but that it is of its essence to exist" (G 4:8). Oldenburg objected to Spinoza's arguments:

When I reflect that definitions contain only our Mind's concepts, that our Mind conceives many things which do not exist . . . To be sure, from the mental collection of all the perfections I find in men, animals, vegetables, minerals, etc., I can form a conception of some one substance which really possesses all those virtues; indeed my Mind is capable of multiplying and increasing them to infinity, so that it can conjure up in itself a most perfect and excellent Being. But from this one cannot at all infer the existence of such a Being. (Ep. 3/G 4:10)

Oldenburg's suggestion of an inductive procedure for generating a true definition of substance would fail by the standards Spinoza set out in TdIE. Spinoza gave four criteria that needed to be satisfied by a real definition of an uncreated thing: (i) excludes all causes other than itself, (ii) leaves no room for the question, "Does it exist?", (iii) does not involve abstractions,⁴⁰ and (iv) requires that all its properties can be deduced from its definition. Oldenburg's definition would trivially violate (i) and (ii), and (iv) by extension, since (ii) could not be deduced from the definition.

³⁶ Cf. the discussion of Caesarius.

³⁷ Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*.

³⁸ See also Garrett, *Meaning*, p. 170.

³⁹ This appears to be KV 1.2.

⁴⁰ Or contains "no substantives that could be changed into adjectives" (TdIE §97).

This is not very satisfying, though. Spinoza did give Oldenburg a more serious response in both Ep. 4 and particularly E1p11s. After criticizing those who “have been accustomed to contemplate only those things that flow from external causes,” Spinoza concludes that “things that come to be from external causes . . . owe all the perfection or reality they have to the power of the external cause . . . whatever perfection substance has is not owed to any external cause. So its existence must follow from its nature alone.” In other words, whatever perfection is to be found in the definition of substance generated by Oldenburg’s procedure will be no greater than the perfections of the animals, plants, and the like, from which it was derived.

Let’s return to the discussion of deduction in TdIE. According to Spinoza, we throw out false and fictitious ideas. It is helpful in this context to remember Spinoza’s response to the objection that there is a problem of infinite regress for the philosopher trying to find the true philosophical method, since she or he will need to already have a method in order to discover the true method (and a method for the method for the method, and so on). Spinoza responded that “the intellect, by its inborn power, makes intellectual tools for itself, by which it acquires other powers for other intellectual works, and from these works still other tools, or the power of searching further, and so proceeds by stages” (TdIE §31). True method is an intellectual tool or innate capacity in all human beings to make further mental instruments.

True ideas are similarly innate, but as we have discussed at some length, they are often conceived inadequately. We all have an adequate idea of God according to Spinoza, but that does not mean we all conceive it wholly adequately or truly. Spinoza claimed in TdIE that we can deduce with false ideas that are not fictitious ideas, but we gradually form fewer and fewer false ideas. I want to suggest that, conversely, we also more adequately conceive our true innate ideas.

The best example is the definition of God. Spinoza thought that when we read the *Ethics*, we would all roughly agree with his definition of God. That was because it was highly general, and could be interpreted in a variety of ways. We have evidence for this in Spinoza’s response to the early letter from Oldenburg. In the letter to Oldenburg, God is “infinite, or supremely perfect” (Ep. 2). This is also the definition of God in the early *Short Treatise* (KV 1.2/G 1:19). In the *Ethics* all mentions of perfection are gone from the definition. Spinoza appears to have removed “perfection” because it had proved to be misleading to an intelligent reader, Oldenburg (as evidenced in his objections to Spinoza’s definition of God). Spinoza *did* hold that God was “infinite, or supremely perfect” but in a nonstandard sense. God is characterized as perfect in E1p11s, but only after God’s existence has been proven without reference to perfection. So Spinoza did not remove something he took to be false; rather, he restructured the definition because it was found to be misleading and deduced the potentially confusing claim from it.

This did not mean that Spinoza then thought that the Oldenburg would read the emended definition and adequately conceive the idea of God. Rather, the definition would be a compelling starting point for Oldenburg to engage in the deduction because it would be in rough formal agreement with his own definition, with Cartesian definitions, and a host of others. The same can be said of the definitions built into the

definition of God—of substance, attributes, infinite, and so on. All these definitions are sufficiently formal and general that one could interpret them in a wide range of ways. Other definitions, such as *causa sui*, may not be initially assented to by readers but as readers follow the deduction, they will both come to understand the commitments of such a deduction better and understand how it is connected with definitions to which they assent unproblematically (at least initially).

I am, of course, suggesting a similarity in the handling of definitions in the *Ethics* to the many ways of interpreting “prophecy” and “spirit” in TTP. But, unlike definitions derived from Scripture, for which the uses of the terms in Scripture set their plausible extension, in metaphysics, the extension is gradually restricted by deduction (although the extension itself is given by Nature⁴¹). There are strong but plausible suppositions at work here: (i) that we all have an idea of God, (ii) that we all interpret it in our own more or less confused ways but it still represents God (in the sense described previously), and (iii) that all adequate ideas of God are wholly consistent or even identical.⁴²

This might provide a solution to the puzzle offered by TdIE that I used to motivate my discussion. If so, then the manner in which we restrict the extension of the definition is clear. By engaging in deductions with this and other similarly general and widely interpretable definitions, and axioms as well, we gradually rule out interpretations that do not allow us to “proceed successfully, without any interruption” and gradually restrict the extension. Or, put differently, a questionable interpretation of a definition or axiom will result in the reader being unable to see how a particular proof or demonstration follows. Only once the extension of the definition rules out whatever caused the confusion or contradiction will the demonstration go through.

This is the source of the feeling in reading Spinoza that Bernard Malamud refers to in his novel *The Fixer* as “a witch’s ride” and the “whirlwind at my back” (and that provides the epigraph for Deleuze’s *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*).⁴³ Reading the *Ethics*, one at first does not know where exactly one is going and why, just forward with a powerful deductive force. Gradually one begins to understand—“Oh, by substance was meant the one and only substance!”; “Thought is an attribute!”; “Oh, that’s what E1a4 means, and now I see how that demonstration works!”

At the same time, one is discovering the true, innate ideas that one already has of God, substance, and so on, just as Spinoza suggests in TdIE that mental instruments are innate and clarified through their exercise. I have suggested that there is an obvious problem with the *mos geometricus* that is avoided in Descartes’s metaphysical analysis, the problem of identifying a procedure for discovering foundational definitions and axioms.

⁴¹ In Spinoza’s final letter, composed shortly before his death and after the *Ethics* was completed, he wrote to Tschirnhaus that “simply from the fact that I define God as an Entity to whose essence existence belongs, I infer several properties of him, such as that he necessarily exists, that he is one alone, immutable, infinite, etc.” (Ep. 83).

⁴² This suggests that there are a number of consistent, substitutable ways of defining God. Obviously, any way of characterizing God would need to be deductively derivable from any other way in conjunction with the other axioms and definitions.

⁴³ Malamud, *The Fixer*, pp. 75–76.

What I have just now briskly described is Spinoza's metaphysical analysis or, quite literally, conceptual analysis. We separate out our false ideas and false and fictitious ideas from our true ideas as we deduce. And, gradually, we adequately conceive and hone in on the proper extension and intention of our innate ideas, now less obscured and confused by fictions. If the geometrical order and an appropriately rigorous geometrical method are observed, there is no need for a prior analysis in metaphysics because the extensions of our concepts are refined, and the true definitions, achieved through the application of the method.

One might reasonably wonder "how we can be engaged in both synthesis and analysis at the same time." The method is both analytic and synthetic, but we humans who engage with the method move back and forth between synthesis and analysis in applying the method. Each time we read the *Ethics* we have a better grasp on the definitions—which are our innate ideas becoming gradually clearer—and the deduction, and we have a better grasp when we've finished reading it than when we began. Our grasp is imperfect and so we read it again. I submit that this is the experience of reading the *Ethics*: "I don't know what this proposition means, but all of a sudden I have a better insight into one of the propositions I read last week!" The important point is that prior analysis is not necessary given our stock of concepts and the way in which deduction leads us to clarify and revise them. This, in turn, provides the solution to the puzzle of TdIE.⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ Thanks to Michael Della Rocca, John Grey, Bryce Huebner, Susan James, Eugene Marshall, Amelie Rorty, Nathan Smith, Sanem Soyarslan, Justin Steinberg, and the participants in my Spinoza seminars past, present, and future.

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CHAPTER 3

FROM MAIMONIDES TO SPINOZA

Three Versions of an Intellectual Transition

KENNETH SEESKIN

BECAUSE Spinoza's relation to medieval Jewish philosophy is controversial, it would be best to start with what is not in question. Like its Islamic and Christian counterparts, Jewish philosophy in the medieval period was heavily influenced by Neo-Platonized Aristotelianism. Although this tradition was anything but monolithic, in broad outlines, it was committed to a world ruled by a unitary and immaterial God who is engaged in pure intellectual activity. God is responsible for everything else either by way of a temporal creation or eternal emanation. Below God are nine heavenly spheres and ten intelligences. Below the tenth intelligence is the earthly realm, which is a composite of earthly matter and form. The goal of human life is to imitate God by perfecting the intellect and controlling or overcoming the impulses of the body.

Though it may seem that the Hebrew Bible presents a different picture of the world, the medieval philosophers argued this impression is the result of reading biblical passages literally. Properly interpreted, biblical passages that ascribe bodily characteristics to God are metaphors or allegories designed to reinforce the view just described. With the exception of Judah Halevi (1075–1141), most Jewish philosophers made no distinction between the God of philosophy and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

No one doubts Spinoza was familiar with this tradition and borrowed from it liberally.¹ In the Chapter 8 of TTP, he praises Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164) for suggesting that Moses could not have been the author of the Pentateuch. Though he is critical of Maimonides' (1138–1204) view of prophecy in Chapter 1 of TTP and biblical hermeneutics in Chapter 7, there are numerous similarities between the two thinkers both in style

¹ The best single source for Spinoza's debt to his Jewish predecessors remains that of Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*. The best account of Spinoza's Jewish education is Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, Chaps. 4–6.

and in substance.² Both make a sharp distinction between the imagination and the intellect and criticize popular religion for its reliance on the former.³ Both maintain that the ultimate happiness of the human race consists in the perfection of the intellect. For both thinkers, the perfection of the intellect culminates in the intellectual love of God, which is to say a selfless love that overcomes the attachment to perishable things and looks at the world *sub specie aeternitatis*.

It could be said therefore that both see philosophy as a way to demythologize religion. Gone is the deity who intervenes directly in human affairs, punishes vice and rewards virtue, seeks praise, and experiences emotion. Instead we have a deity the contemplation of which brings enlightenment to the mind and with it a cosmic perspective on the world. Citing Psalms 36:10 (“In your light we see light”), Maimonides wrote that through the overflow (emanation) of the intellect that overflows from God, we are able to think, receive correct guidance, draw inferences, and apprehend the workings of the mind.⁴ Though Spinoza did not accept emanation, it does not require a leap of faith to see how, after reading Maimonides, Spinoza could say (E5p36) that the mind’s intellectual love towards God is part of the infinite love by which God loves himself. In both cases, the process of demythologizing religion is intended to be therapeutic. It is not just that we adopt a more rigorous understanding of God but that, in doing so, we free ourselves from the passions and anxieties that afflict most of the human race.

But the story does not stop there. Maimonides’ intellectualism was taken up and given a more rigorous formulation by Gersonides (1288–1344). We will see, however, that unlike Maimonides, whose insistence on the limits of human understanding is never far from view, Gersonides was more optimistic. According to the latter, if the human race exhibits a natural desire for wisdom, it would be paradoxical for that desire to be directed to something that is in principle unobtainable.⁵ Spinoza was certainly familiar with Hasdai Crescas’ (1340–1410/1411) attempt to break free from Aristotelianism, in particular the view that there cannot be an actual infinite.⁶ Finally, his account of the intellectual love of God parallels that of Leone Ebreo (Judah Abravanel, 1465–1523), whose work, in turn, was heavily influenced by Maimonides.⁷

Still any account of medieval Jewish philosophy has to deal with the dominant position of Maimonides. From the time the *Guide of the Perplexed* was written, it became the focal point for nearly everyone who followed—not just to attack or defend, but to

² More will be said about the similarity between Maimonides and Spinoza below. For a thorough and accessible discussion, see Harvey, “A Portrait.”

³ On this issue, see Ravven, “Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides about the Prophetic Imagination: Part 1” and “Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides about the Prophetic Imagination: Part 2.”

⁴ *Guide* 2.12, p. 280.

⁵ Wars, vol. 1, Book One, Introduction, p. 96.

⁶ See Joel, *Don Chasdai Creskas*, pp. 21–25 as well as Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, Vol. 1, pp. 264–95.

⁷ See Dethier, “Love and Intellect,” pp. 362–78. For a previous study, see Gebhardt, “Spinoza und der Platonismus.”

interpret as well. I emphasize interpretation because as any reader of the *Guide* soon discovers, it is no ordinary book. Although it claims in the Introduction that its subject matter is physics and metaphysics, Maimonides makes clear that he is not going to write an ordinary treatise and has serious misgivings about putting his thoughts in writing.

The first reason for such misgivings is religious. After identifying physics with “The Account of the Beginning [creation]” and metaphysics with “The Account of [Ezekiel’s] Chariot,” he reminds the reader that Jewish law forbids one to discuss these subjects in public. He concludes that all he can do is provide hints or clues that point the reader in a certain direction. The second reason is systematic: these truths are speculative in nature so that, in his opinion, full knowledge of them is beyond the grasp of a finite intelligence. Thus no one can hope to clarify every issue these subjects raise. More troubling from an interpretive standpoint, Maimonides says he will not put everything he has to say about a subject in one place and goes on to say that he intends to contradict himself.⁸ This has led to centuries of debate on if, where, and why contradictions occur and whether they are intentional or unintentional.⁹

The result is that Maimonides appears in the history of philosophy under several guises: Aristotelian and critic of Aristotle, rationalist and skeptic, defender of creation and defender of eternity, pious Jew and heretic.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, people from all over the philosophic spectrum invoked Maimonides’ authority to support the view they were defending or set him up as a target of criticism. So the question of how Maimonides influenced Spinoza has to be preceded by the question “Which Maimonides?”

Those who read Maimonides as a metaphysician committed to the unity of the divine essence and the eternity of the world argue for a smooth transition from one thinker to another.¹¹ Along these lines, Warren Zev Harvey maintains that Spinoza’s radical break with Maimonides was not on a point of philosophy but on a question of popular religion: the utility of traditional Jewish law.¹² Those who see Maimonides as a pious Jew who did his best to defend traditional doctrines like the sanctity of the law and the creation of the world argue that Spinoza’s break with Maimonides was more decisive. It is in this connection that we can understand Harry Wolfson’s famous remark: “Benedictus

⁸ *Guide* 1, Introduction, pp. 17–20.

⁹ As indicated above, the subject of Maimonides’ esotericism is as old as the *Guide* itself. The universally acknowledged master of the esoteric view in the modern age is Leo Strauss, “The Literary Character.” For the history for the problem, see Ravitzky, “Samuel Ibn Tibbon.” For recent criticism of the esoteric view, see Ivry, “Leo Strauss”; Seeskin, *Searching*, pp. 177–88; Ravitzky, “Maimonides: Esotericism”; Manekin, *On Maimonides*; and Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*.

¹⁰ For the problems Maimonides’ rationalism created for medieval and early modern Judaism, see Dobbs-Weinstein, “The Maimonidean Controversy.”

¹¹ For this school of thought, see Roth, *Spinoza, Descartes, and Maimonides*; Pines, “Translator’s Introduction”; Harvey, “A Portrait”; and Fraenkel, “Maimonides’ God.” For criticism of this school, see Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, p. 445 and, more recently, Garrett, *Meaning*, Chap. 5. For an attempt to show that Spinoza’s ideas are “deeply consonant with the core themes of Mosaic thinking” (p. 21), see Goodman, “What Does Spinoza’s *Ethics*?”

¹² Harvey, “A Portrait,” p. 172.

is the first of the moderns; Baruch is the last of the mediaevals.”¹³ As Wolfson has it, Benedictus led a philosophic revolt against the philosophy begun by Philo and epitomized by Maimonides.

Although my sympathies are with Wolfson, my goal in this essay is to give each of these lines of interpretation a fair hearing. After that, I will present a third alternative that suggests that Spinoza had little patience with trying to decipher Maimonides’ inner thoughts and set out to put philosophy on a new footing more in line with the science of his day. Before getting to the body of the chapter, it is worth mentioning that Spinoza too leaves us guessing on a critical point. In his famous discussion of parallelism at E2p7, he says in the scholium: “Some of the Hebrews seem to have seen this, as if through a cloud, when they maintained that God, God’s intellect, and the things understood by him are one and the same.”

There is near universal agreement that this passage refers to *Guide* 1.68, where Maimonides asserts that God is the intellect, the intellectually cognizing subject, and the intellectually cognized object so that “those three notions form in Him . . . one single notion in which there is no multiplicity.” Moreover, this is true “in the case of everything that is cognized in actu.” Because God’s intellect is always active, this identity holds first and foremost of God. God, then, is identical with both his act of thought and with the object cognized in the act. The question is: How thick is the cloud that separates Maimonides and Spinoza on this point? Because Spinoza does not elaborate, we have no choice but to construct an answer on his behalf. Doing so will take us through a fair amount of Maimonidean scholarship and a number of ways to approach his relation to Spinoza. Let us first examine the claim that the cloud between them is flimsy at best.¹⁴

SPINOZA AS INHERITOR OF THE JEWISH PHILOSOPHIC TRADITION

The source of the doctrine presented at *Guide* 1.68, is Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1072b, 19-21: “Thought thinks on itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and the object of thought are the same.” The doctrine is also found in the Neoplatonized Aristotelianism of Al-Farabi and Abraham ibn Ezra’s commentary on Exodus 34:6.¹⁵ Maimonides presents it as an established fact both in the *Guide*, which was intended for specialized audiences,

¹³ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. 1, p. vii.

¹⁴ Cf. Fraenkel, “Maimonides’ God,” p. 206: “Spinoza, therefore, did not have to grind new lenses in order to apprehend *Deus sive Natura* clearly and distinctly. He only had to polish the lenses inherited from the medieval Aristotelian tradition in order to perceive God’s *essentia actuosa* not as thought alone but as thought *and* extension.”

¹⁵ Al-Farabi, *On the Perfect State*, 1.6, pp. 71–72.

and in the *Mishneh Torah*, which was not.¹⁶ In the case of divine cognition, thought, which is the highest activity, must take the best possible thing for its object—namely itself. So thought and its object are united in an act of perfect self-consciousness. But, as Maimonides indicates, the doctrine also applies to human cognition when the intellect is active. In this case, the intellect in action, the act of apprehension, and the intelligible form apprehended are identical. To take Maimonides' example, the doctrine does not mean that when a person cognizes a tree, his mind becomes identical with the tree considered as a composite of matter and form, only that his mind becomes identical with the intelligible form of the tree.

Not only does the doctrine have an excellent philosophic pedigree, from a religious standpoint, it would be nearly impossible for a person espousing monotheism to deny it. If, as Maimonides asserts in the *Guide* and *Mishneh Torah*, God is one from whatever angle we view him and in whatever way we consider him, a distinction between God and the object of his knowledge would be unacceptable.¹⁷ For Aristotle's God, who is conscious only of himself, and does not generate anything outside himself, the doctrine is relatively unproblematic. But once we move to a context where God is the source of things outside himself and aware of their existence, the relation between God and the object of his knowledge begins to raise questions. How can God be aware of external things if his awareness implies he is identical with them?

A passage from the *Mishneh Torah* tries to explain:¹⁸

Therefore he does not recognize and know creatures as we know them [externally], but rather he knows them by virtue of knowing himself. Therefore because he knows himself, he knows everything because the existence of everything depends on him.

To say that God's knowledge is not like ours is to say, as Maimonides does later in the *Guide* (3.21, p. 485), that there is no renewal, change, or multiplicity in what God knows "For through knowing the true reality of his own essence, he also knows the totality of what derives from his own acts." The matter is complicated because Maimonides insists repeatedly that our knowledge is so unlike God's that we cannot fathom how this identity comes about.¹⁹ It follows that God's knowledge is one even though it encompasses many things and is immutable even though it encompasses changeable things. But, again, Maimonides insists we cannot know how.

Maimonides' discussion is part of an ongoing debate in medieval philosophy on whether God has knowledge of particulars, imaginary objects, and future contingents—debates of which Spinoza must surely have been aware. Against Aristotle, who held that knowledge of human affairs is unworthy of God, Maimonides (*Guide* 3.21, p. 485) maintains that God's knowledge is all-inclusive:

¹⁶ *Mishneh* 1, Basic Principles, 2.10.

¹⁷ *Mishneh*, op. cit.; *Guide* 1.51, p. 113.

¹⁸ *Mishneh*, op. cit.

¹⁹ See, for example, *Guide* 3.20.

He who studies true reality equitably ought accordingly to believe that nothing is hidden in any way from Him . . . but that, on the contrary, everything is revealed to His knowledge, which is His essence . . .

But ambiguities remain. Does he mean that nothing *knowable* is hidden from God or that nothing *at all* is hidden? To put this in another way, does God know particulars *in their particularity* or only to the degree they exemplify universal and necessary laws? At *Guide* 3.18, Maimonides argues that divine providence does not watch over all individuals equally but is graded as their perfection is graded, i.e. to the degree that they actualize their intellect. Earlier (*Guide* 3.17, p. 471), he claims that he does not believe that one leaf falls from a tree sooner than another because divine providence watches over it and God has willed it so; rather, it is due to pure chance.

Gersonides accused Maimonides of being evasive and went on to say that God knows particulars to the extent that they are ordered but does not know them to the extent they are not.²⁰ If God does not know them, they are contingent. So God, who knows that human beings need nourishment to live, does not know what I will eat for dinner tonight. The reason for this is easy to discern: knowledge demands order or systematization. To the degree that particular things are unordered or chaotic, they are in principle unknowable. While it is questionable how different Maimonides and Gersonides are on this point, both thinkers subscribe to the view, common to Greek and medieval philosophy, that the world contains features that defy rational understanding. If so, to the degree that they are not part of God's knowledge, they are not contained in or implied by his essence. For philosophers in this tradition, then, God is not identical with the whole of nature but only that part that is ordered and determined. To return to the example of a tree, the only aspect of its existence that could be contained in or implied by the essence of God is its form.

According to Carlos Fraenkel, Maimonides is committed to two claims: (1) the form of the created world is contained in God's essence, and (2) God's activity, i.e. his act of knowing himself, is the form of the created world.²¹ More precisely, God's act of knowing himself, the intellectual cognition of all that follows from or is contained in God, and the form of the created world are identical. This also commits Maimonides to a version of divine immanence for if God is one with his essence, and his essence contains the entire form of the created world, God is an immanent rather than a transitive cause of that form.

Fraenkel concludes that like Spinoza's God, Maimonides' acts in nature with the same necessity by which he cognizes himself.²² This commits Maimonides to the eternity of the world because it would be impossible for God to act in a way different from how he has always and will always act. We can see this in another way by recognizing that if God is one from whatever angle we view him, God's knowledge must be identical

²⁰ *Wars*, vol. 2, Book Three, chap. 3–4.

²¹ "Maimonides' God," p. 187.

²² "Maimonides' God," p. 189.

with God's will. So God must will everything he knows and know everything he wills. It would therefore be impossible for God to choose one course of action from a range of alternatives. Because God's act of knowing himself is necessary and eternal, God's decrees are just as necessary and eternal, which means that God can never be the source of new or spontaneous action. It would also commit Maimonides to the denial of purpose in nature because, as he himself admits, it is pointless to inquire into the purpose of what exists by necessity.²³

This takes us to the doorstep of Part I of the *Ethics*. If we were to substitute thought and extension for matter and form, and agree that extension, as quantifiable, is knowable, we would be led directly to E1p15: "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God." Because God exists by necessity, everything flows or follows from God by the same necessity. And next E1p29: "Nothing in nature is contingent." It would then follow, as Spinoza points out in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*, that God does not act with an end in view and that nature has no purpose beyond or outside itself. One major obstacle stands in the way of this transition: while Spinoza is happy to say that extension is an attribute of God (E2p2), Maimonides and the other medievals would shudder at the claim that God is material for, in their view, matter is both finite and divisible.

Fraenkel responds by saying that if Spinoza had convinced Maimonides that a corporeal substance can be active, infinite, and indivisible, there is no reason why Maimonides would have refused to accept extension as an attribute of God. The transition from one thinker to another would then be smooth. We could view God's essence as *either* thinking *or* extended. No matter how we viewed it, we would be dealing with something that is infinite, necessary, and eternal. And because God is one from whatever angle we view him, the attributes of thought and extension would have to be perspectives on or expressions of one and the same reality. Put otherwise, the order and connection of ideas that follows from consideration of God under the attribute of thought would have to be the same as the order and connection of things that follows from consideration of God under the attribute of extension. In the end, the cloud separating Spinoza from his Hebrew predecessors would have all but vanished.

The trouble is that Fraenkel is assuming a big *if*. For all of his originality, Maimonides is still firmly committed to the view that matter is filthy, disgusting, and the source of corruption and death.²⁴ In his eyes, it is responsible for all our acts of disobedience and acts as a dark veil preventing us from apprehending the intelligible realm as it really is. Thus *Guide* 3.8, p. 433: "The commandments and prohibitions of the Law are only intended to quell all the impulses of matter."

It is worth noting that from Spinoza's perspective, Maimonides is partially right: matter considered as finite, i.e. matter as represented by the imagination, is divisible and therefore cannot be identical with God. It is only when we consider matter as substance,

²³ *Guide* 2.20, pp. 313–14.

²⁴ *Guide* 3.8–9.

i.e. matter as understood by the intellect, that we see it is infinite. To be convinced by Spinoza, Maimonides would not only have to agree there can be an infinite material object, he would also have to agree that matter is not in a perpetual state of deprivation. In other words, he would have to accept the view, which even Descartes did not, that it is of the essence of matter to be active and in motion.

In either case, Maimonides' revulsion to matter raises a serious question: If God is as separate from matter as Maimonides says, how is it that matter comes to exist? How can a God who is pure thought be the creator of something utterly unlike himself? How, that is, can we understand the material world *through* God if we agree that God is not material?

There is reason to think Maimonides was aware of the problem because at *Guide* 2.13, he represents the philosophic tradition as rejecting the possibility of a creation *ex nihilo*. Later, at *Guide* 2.22, he says quite clearly that form cannot proceed from matter or matter from form. Gersonides went so far as to say that matter is not created but exists alongside God as an eternal substratum for creation.²⁵ If anything like this is true, from Spinoza's perspective, matter would be completely mysterious. If God is not the cause, what is? Again, from Spinoza's standpoint, there are only two ways to answer this question. Either God is the cause of matter, and since a cause must have something in common with its effect (E1p3), God would have to possess a material component. Alternatively if matter, though separate from God, is self-caused, it would become a quasi-deity, sharing an important characteristic with God. Because the second alternative contradicts the central claim of monotheism, the first is the only reasonable option. On this reading, Spinoza saw through one of the major conundrums of Jewish medieval philosophy and took the only reasonable option: if material things exist, then matter must be an attribute of God. But it is time to view the relationship from another perspective.

SPINOZA AS CRITIC OF THE JEWISH PHILOSOPHIC TRADITION

The previous account took as its starting point the theory of intellection described at *Guide* 1.68. While this theory has much to recommend it, scholars have long noted that it flies directly in the face of Maimonides' negative theology, the crux of which is that God bears no resemblance to anything in the created order.²⁶ So convinced is Maimonides of this point that at *Guide* 1.35, he argues it should be taught to everyone along with the corollary that the difference between God and us is not one of degree. Faced with the objection that God must be more intelligent, better, more powerful, and more enduring than we are at *Guide* 1.56, he sticks to his guns, claiming: "The matter is not so in any respect."

²⁵ *Wars*, vol. 3, Book Six, cap. 17.

²⁶ See Fraenkel's recognition of the validity of this objection at "Maimonides' God," pp. 208–209.

It follows that for Maimonides words like *power*, *life*, *intelligence*, and *existence* are completely equivocal when applied to God and us.²⁷

The reason for Maimonides' strictness on this issue is his fear of anthropomorphism. If there is a basis of comparison between human perfection and divine perfection, we will fall prey to the tendency to conceive of God as a glorified version of ourselves. Maimonides therefore tries to show that we cannot get to God by starting with a finite object and extrapolating to superlatives. This raises the question of how—or if—we can conceive of God at all. Again Maimonides sticks to his guns, claiming that all people engaged in speculation admit that God cannot be defined.²⁸ If no definition, then by most accounts, no essence either. In fact, Maimonides argues (*Guide* 1.58, p. 135) that in speaking of God, the advantage negative attribution has over positive is that the former “do not give us knowledge in any respect whatever of the essence the knowledge of which is sought.” Thus “God does not lack knowledge or possess it in a way comparable to us” is a more accurate expression of what we know than “God is powerful” because it indicates that we have no idea what God's power is like.

Yet even this is not enough to satisfy Maimonides. Although negative attribution is preferable to positive, the two have something in common in the sense that they seek to provide some degree of particularization, by which he means they attempt to classify God.²⁹ In that respect, even negative attribution is objectionable. Maimonides concludes that the goal of negative attribution is not to express literal truth but to “give the mind the correct direction toward the true reality of the matter” or “conduct the mind toward the utmost reach that man may attain in the apprehension of Him . . .”³⁰ I take this to mean that any attempt at defining or describing God has at best a heuristic function in the sense that it puts us in a position from which we can see that all attempts to express God's perfection by means of subject/predicate propositions are bound to fail.³¹

Centuries of commentators from Aquinas and Gersonides to Shlomo Pines and Hilary Putnam have objected that Maimonides' negative theology leads to complete skepticism about God so that even he could not subscribe to it in the form in which it is presented.³² As early as KV 1.7, Spinoza objects that Maimonides' view presupposes the Aristotelian view according to which all definitions must proceed by genus and specific difference. Not only does he regard this view as false, but he argues that it leads to skepticism because it leaves us with no way to define the highest category. To the degree that the highest category is indefinable, so is everything else below it.

²⁷ *Guide* 1.56, p. 131.

²⁸ *Guide* 1.52, p. 115.

²⁹ *Guide* 1.58, p. 135.

³⁰ *Guide* 1.57, p. 133 and 1.58, p. 135.

³¹ For more on the limits of language, see *Guide* 1.57, p. 132: “For the bounds of expression in all languages are very narrow indeed, so that we cannot represent this notion [that God is one but not through oneness] to ourselves except through a certain looseness of expression.”

³² Aquinas, *Summa* 1.13.2; Gersonides, in *Wars*, vol. 2, Book Three, chap. 3; Pines, “Translator's Introduction,” p. cxxviii; and Putnam, “On Negative Theology.” Note however that Pines underwent a change of heart in, “The Limitations of Human Knowledge.”

Be that as it may, there is nothing in the passages just discussed to indicate Maimonides had reservations about negative theology. On the contrary, he goes on to describe theological skepticism as the highest human achievement. When asked how one can distinguish between Moses and a common fool if knowledge of God is denied us, Maimonides takes a Socratic stance according to which Moses excels all others by recognizing the extent of his ignorance.³³ For Maimonides, the only one who can apprehend God is God himself, from which it follows that the only legitimate response for us is to adopt a studied silence.³⁴

The contrast with *Guide* 1.68 could not be more striking. If God's essence is beyond our ability to understand or express, and there is no similarity in any respect between God and us, the most *Guide* 1.68 could do is serve as a guidepost along the way to silent reflection on the complete transcendence of God. Although the view expressed there would not be false in the way that "God is many" is false, neither would it provide the wherewithal to construct a metaphysics along the lines of Parts I and II of the *Ethics*. This is another way of saying that it too would be no more than a heuristic tool designed to conduct the mind to the true reality and induce a feeling of awe and reverence in the face of something beyond our comprehension. According to Maimonides (*Guide* 1.59), that feeling is captured by the 65th Psalm: "Silence is praise to Thee." From Spinoza's standpoint, silence is nothing but a euphemism for ignorance. Both in the *Short Treatise* and the *Ethics*, he not only objects to this kind of skepticism but offers a definition of God without the slightest hesitation.

Students of Maimonides will recognize that his skepticism extends beyond God to the heavenly realm and eventually to the creation of the universe. According to the standard medieval account, the universe proceeds from God in the following way. In God's awareness of himself, there is no distinction between thought and its object. If God is one and simple, and the effect must resemble the cause, what emerges from God is one and simple as well. Thus God generates the first heavenly intelligence. Because the first intelligence is aware of two things—itsself and God—it is capable of generating two things: the second intelligence and the outermost sphere of the universe. Although the outermost sphere is material, God's production of it is indirect; the immediate cause is not God but the first intelligence. The second intelligence generates the third intelligence and the sphere of the fixed stars. The process continues until we get the ten intelligences and nine primary spheres that make up the standard picture of medieval cosmology. By the time we get to the tenth intelligence or Active Intellect, the quality of thought is so diminished that it can no longer produce a pure intelligence or heavenly sphere. It is at this point that we get the generation of earthly matter.

According to Maimonides, there is no problem in saying that God, who is one and simple, generates the first intelligence, which is also one and simple, because this connection preserves causal similarity. But, he insists, if the originator of a causal sequence

³³ *Guide* 1.59, p. 139.

³⁴ *Guide* 1.59, p. 139; cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.5.6.

is one and simple, adherence to causal similarity would require us to say that everything else in the sequence must be one and simple as well.³⁵ Thus even if the sequence of emanation contained thousands of members, there would be no way to account for the generation of a material thing such as a sphere.

To make matters worse, not only do the proponents of emanation have to account for the origin of a celestial sphere, when we get to the inner spheres, they have to account for the stars or planets attached to the sphere. Stars and planets are also composites of matter and form. In fact, the matter of the stars and planets is different from that of the sphere in which they are embedded because stars and planets emit light while spheres do not. So even if we bracket the question of how earthly matter is generated, the proponents of emanation must explain how two forms of heavenly matter are generated by a single intellect. Not only does this violate the principle of causal similarity by saying that one thing is the cause of many, it also violates it by saying that matter proceeds from form.

Maimonides second line of objection to the emanationist doctrine is a version of the Kalam argument from particularity.³⁶ Simply put, this argument claims the world contains features that cannot be explained by scientific means. We saw that Maimonides rejects the idea that there is a scientific explanation for which of two leaves falls from a tree first. He now tries to show that there is no scientific explanation for something as regular as the motion of the heavenly bodies. Why do some regions of the sky contain clusters of stars while other regions are relatively empty? Why do some stars emit more light than others if all are embedded in the same sphere? Assuming, as most astronomers did, that the outer spheres impart motion to the inner ones, why do some planets close to the earth appear to move more rapidly than others comparatively far away? Keep in mind that according to medieval astronomy, there is no space or vacuum between one sphere and another. Why then do spheres adjacent to each other change speed and direction?

Maimonides himself admits to perplexity and concludes that, in the absence of an adequate explanation, there is no reason to think the phenomena in question are governed by necessity. If no necessity is involved, Maimonides argues they must be contingent. If contingent, it is reasonable to assume they must have been produced by a cause that exercises free choice. Accordingly (*Guide* 3.13, p. 452): “What exists, its causes, and its effects, could be different from what they are.” If so, we can either accept these phenomena as brute facts or say that God had a reason for making them one way rather than another. Maimonides chooses the second alternative (*Guide* 2.21, p. 316): “We affirm that all these things have been made by Him in virtue of a purpose and a will directed to this particular thing.”

In saying that God acted for a purpose, he does not mean that we know what that purpose is or that we can assure ourselves it is to enhance human existence. In his view, the

³⁵ *Guide* 2.22, pp. 317–18.

³⁶ For a classic version of this argument, see Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence*, pp. 12–46. For historical background to the argument, see Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, pp. 434–44.

universe is too vast and our position in it too small for us to know what purpose God has in mind. Because God does nothing in vain, we have reason to think there is *some* rationale for the movement of the heavenly bodies, but that is the most we can say.

Maimonides' medieval commentators were deeply split on how to interpret this argument. Samuel ibn Tibbon (1150–1230), who translated the *Guide* from Arabic to Hebrew, opted for an esoteric reading according to which Maimonides affirmed creation to satisfy traditional readers but was secretly committed to eternity.³⁷ A similar view was advanced by Moses of Narbonne (end of the thirteenth century—1362), a well-known Jewish Averroist. Why turn your back on scientific explanation just because there is no good explanation for heavenly motion at present? Along similar lines, Pines protested that while skepticism about astronomy is the only consistent and logical conclusion we can draw from Maimonides' discussion, "it would stultify all that Maimonides set out to accomplish . . ."³⁸ On the other hand, Joseph Albo (1380–1444) and Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508) accepted Maimonides' account of creation, arguing it is a central tenet of Judaism.³⁹

The truth is Maimonides had no problem with scientific explanations when they are supported by close observation and culminate in knowledge of the essential nature of things.⁴⁰ He admits that science can and has made progress. And he acknowledges that someone may find an explanation for what now seems puzzling to him.⁴¹ But the fact that science has enjoyed success in the sublunar realm offers no assurance it will enjoy success in the heavenly realm, where the objects under investigation behave differently, are of much higher rank, and are composed of an entirely different kind of matter.

If we assume, as Aristotle did, that whatever is eternal is necessary, any evidence for contingency will count as evidence against eternity and for creation.⁴² Maimonides admits that his arguments do not qualify as a demonstration but adds that they come as close to a demonstration as one can get.⁴³ So God brought the world into being in a single act and faced a choice in making it the way it is. On the question of how an immaterial God can create a material world, Maimonides can only say that creation is a unique act: the origin of a causal sequence rather than a connection within it.⁴⁴ On the issue of causal similarity, he suggests in two places that the relation between the will and the object willed need not follow the same pattern as the relation between a cause

³⁷ For a thorough discussion of ibn Tibbon's interpretation of the *Guide*, see Ravitzky, "Samuel Ibn Tibbon."

³⁸ Pines, "Translator's Introduction," p. cxi.

³⁹ Albo, *Sefer ha-Iqqarim*, 1:117 and *Abravanel, Principles*, pp. 34–36. For further discussion of Abravanel, see Feldman, "Abravanel on Maimonides' Critique."

⁴⁰ For a series of essays on Maimonides' view of science, see Kellner, *Science*, Part Three.

⁴¹ *Guide* 2.24, p. 327.

⁴² *On Generation* 338a1–4; *Physics* 203b 29; *Metaphysics* 1050b8–15.

⁴³ *Guide* 2.19, p. 303.

⁴⁴ This follows from his critique of the Aristotelian arguments for eternity at *Guide* 2.17.

and its effect.⁴⁵ In other words, a single act of will (e.g. the decision to write a book) can issue in a plurality of actions that bear no similarity to the original decision.⁴⁶ By analogy, God's decision to create the world could have resulted in a plurality of things totally unlike him.

One hardly needs to enumerate all the ways Spinoza objected to this picture. If all things exist in and are conceived through God, to say that God is beyond our comprehension implies that everything is beyond our comprehension. To say that God and creatures have nothing in common is to render both God's knowledge of and causal influence on creatures mysterious. Though some may feel awe and humility in the face of such a God, Spinoza would reply that to do so is literally to worship in the sanctuary of ignorance. In direct opposition to Maimonides, he proclaims (E2p47s): "God's infinite essence and his eternity are known to all." As for the critique of astronomy, Spinoza would no doubt reply that modern science does have an explanation for heavenly phenomena—even for which leaf will fall first from a tree—so that the arguments for contingency no longer hold water. For him (E1p33), a thing is called contingent for no other reason than the deficiency of our knowledge. Whether he was referring to the Jewish philosophic tradition or philosophy more generally, he would have seen in the new science a way to distance himself from the scientific guesswork that occupied so much of medieval thought and left its practitioners in a state of bewilderment.

Apart from the new science, Spinoza was also in a position to criticize Maimonides for failure to adhere to his own commitment to divine unity. On any reasonable interpretation of this principle, God cannot have two separate faculties: intellect and will. Although Maimonides claims they are the same thing in God—e.g. *Guide* 3.13, p. 456—on the whole he refers to will when talking about things for which science has no explanation and wisdom when talking about the order and structure of the world.⁴⁷ His lack of precision on this point opens the way for Spinoza to point out, as he does in Chapter 6 of TTP, that the identity of intellect and will in God implies that whatever necessity holds for one must also hold for the other. If it is necessary that God knows a thing as it is, it must also be necessary that God wills a thing as it is. From this it follows that the order of nature is necessary, and the idea that God created the world according to a free choice is absurd.

On this reading, Wolfson is essentially right: Spinoza marks the end of a tradition based on faulty science and unexposed contradictions. Though Spinoza could still credit that tradition with the insight contained at *Guide* 1.68, the cloud separating them would be thick indeed.

⁴⁵ *Guide* 2.18, p. 301 and 2.22, p. 317.

⁴⁶ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa*, 1.46.1

⁴⁷ Examples of the former are *Guide* 2.21, p. 316 and 3.13, p. 452–54. Examples of the latter are 3.25, p. 505 and 3.26, p. 506.

SPINOZA AS PURIFIER OF THE JEWISH PHILOSOPHIC TRADITION

Let us return to the central question of this essay: Which view of Maimonides had the greatest impact on Spinoza? If he was familiar with the course of Jewish philosophy after Maimonides, he could not fail to notice the difficulty people had trying to identify the master's views. This may well have been what the master intended. In the Introduction to the *Guide*, Maimonides compares the human condition to being in a dark night and seeing momentary flashes of light that illuminate the surroundings and then pass away, leaving everything hidden again.⁴⁸ Unlike the escaped prisoner in Plato's cave, we will never be able to look at the light directly. Even if we could, Maimonides insists that the task of communicating what we have seen is fraught with difficulty so that we would not be able to explain with complete clarity what we saw. In Maimonides' view, knowledge of the ultimate realities comes in bits and pieces, if at all.

The structure of the *Guide* reflects this. It begins with warnings and apologies about setting forth the secrets of the Torah in a book, moves to Bible commentary, and then argues for the uniqueness and unintelligibility of God. When it finally gets to establishing the existence and unity of God, it offers tightly worded demonstrations. But the majority of the book deals with subjects Maimonides thought were not susceptible to demonstration: creation, prophecy, providence, and human behavior. In these contexts, he has little choice but to proceed dialectically, presenting a variety of opinions, discussing their strengths and weaknesses, and trying to construct a reasonable alternative.⁴⁹ As with Aristotle in *Metaphysics* 7, the use of dialectical argument makes it difficult to determine precisely where the author stands.

There is no reason to think Spinoza was bothered by the question of where Maimonides stood and every reason to think he was put off by the resulting confusion.

Does the title of Maimonides' magnum opus not promise *guidance* on philosophic issues? What sort of guidance is it that leaves the best minds guessing as to the master's real intentions? Like Gersonides, Spinoza did not try to make a virtue of obscurity and recoiled at the suggestion that the goal of human life is to seek a God whose nature is hidden from us. More specifically, if the greatest striving of the mind, and its greatest virtue is to understand God by the third kind of knowledge (i.e. intuitive) (E5p25), it would be futile to claim that such knowledge is systematically beyond our grasp.

In view of this, we can imagine Spinoza coming to the conclusion that if the goal of philosophy is to expose the hollowness and futility of daily life and lead to the contemplation of something permanent and substantial, it must do more than provide a trail of hints and clues and hope for illumination to occur. In particular, it must reach necessary

⁴⁸ *Guide* 1, Introduction, p. 7–8.

⁴⁹ For more on Maimonides' use of dialectical argument, see Kraemer, "Maimonides' Use," pp. 111–30.

truths and present them in an orderly and systematic way. To accomplish that, it would be best to proceed in geometric fashion, stating clearly and succinctly how key terms are understood and what axioms are being invoked. It is in this sense that Aaron Garrett could say that what we have in Spinoza's *Ethics* is a real guide for the perplexed.⁵⁰

The change in method is consonant with a change in content. Monotheism is supposed to hold that God is the cause of all that exists. If God exhibits perfect rationality, how can it happen that there are things in the world whose natures are unintelligible? How can it happen that God's nature is unintelligible to all but God himself if God manifests infinite perfection? Simply put: there are no dark spots in Spinoza's universe and nothing whose nature is inherently unruly. To think otherwise is to labor under the prejudice that a whole aspect of existence—matter—is so unordered and chaotic that it is unknowable even to an infinite intelligence. How can this be if, like everything else, matter owes its existence to God? In a world without dark spots, reason demands necessity (E2p44), and necessity, in turn, demands systematic presentation.

What then is the relation between Spinoza and his Jewish predecessors? I suggest it is exactly what he describes at E2p7s. They saw that God is one and infinite. They broke free of anthropomorphism and sought God as a source of reason and enlightenment. While some of their arguments pointed to overcoming the distinction between God and nature, recognizing that God is one with the object of his knowledge, by and large they were unable to break free of the matter/form dualism they inherited from the Greeks. In that respect, their monotheism was tainted and stood in need of purification. If purified, it would have come to the conclusion that God knows the world as *both* thought *and* extension so that each expresses the infinite essence of God. It follows that the best way for Spinoza to describe his Jewish predecessors is to say, as he did, their vision of reality was blurred.

CONCLUSION

Because all three versions of this story contain a measure of truth, neither Baruch nor Benedictus alone does full justice to Spinoza's achievement as a philosopher. If the former extended the rationalism of his predecessors, the latter showed they failed to see the full nature of what such rationalism committed them to. Like Socrates' respondents, who became angry when their inconsistencies were exposed, many of those who were loyal to tradition accused Spinoza of heresy. It is interesting, however, that in one passage (*Sophist* 230b-c), Plato defends Socrates by saying that exposing inconsistencies relieves a person of "prejudices and harsh notions" thus allowing him to become gentle. I submit this is exactly what Spinoza thought he was doing by relieving people of the hopes and fears aroused by ignorance and superstition. His project culminates in a God

⁵⁰ Garrett, *Meaning*, p. 141.

who does not love or hate anyone (E5p17), and a love that bears no trace of envy or jealousy (E5p20).

The rationalist tenor of medieval Jewish philosophy suggests that Spinoza's predecessors sought the same God and the same kind of love. If, as they insisted, God does not experience emotion, the principle of *imitatio Dei* leads directly to the conclusion that we should subdue emotion and follow the guidance of reason. The problem is that for all their efforts to reconcile the Bible with philosophy, his predecessors wrote of a God who still retained a touch of mystery. Maimonides speaks of fear and trembling in the face of such a God, which are passive emotions, and admits that most theological questions cannot be resolved with certainty.⁵¹ For Spinoza mystery and uncertainty are nothing but synonyms for ignorance, and ignorance is the source of our difficulties. To the degree that ignorance remains part of the picture, the task of demythologizing religion is incomplete. Perhaps the best thing that could be said on Spinoza's behalf is that he took it upon himself to complete it.

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CHAPTER 4

SPINOZA AND DESCARTES

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IN order to illustrate the importance of Descartes for Spinoza, it suffices to point out that Spinoza's first published work—indeed, the only work he published under his own name during his lifetime—is the 1663 *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae Pars I & II*. This text is a reconstruction of portions of Descartes's 1644 *Principia Philosophiae* (though it also refers to other writings of Descartes). To be sure, Spinoza reports in a letter to Oldenburg that he agreed to the publication of this work only on the condition that there be “a short preface warning readers that I did not acknowledge all the opinions contained in this treatise as my own, *since I had written many things in it that were the very opposite of what I held*, and illustrating this by one or two examples” (Ep. 13/ G 4:63; emphasis added). This preface, composed by Spinoza's friend Lodewijk Meyer, does indeed contain this warning along with several examples. In the preface, however, Meyer also emphasizes that Descartes discovered “firm foundations for philosophy, foundations on which a great many truths can be built, with mathematical order and certainty” (G 1:128). From Spinoza's perspective, Descartes's defense of new foundations for philosophy revealed a better way to search for the truth, even if, as Meyer cautioned, “different foundations are required, if we wish our intellect to rise to that pinnacle of knowledge” (G 1:133).

The “firm foundations for philosophy” that Descartes discovered are revealed by the subtitle in the second (1642) edition of his *Meditations: In which the existence of God and the distinction of the human soul from the body is demonstrated*.¹ For Descartes, more specifically, philosophy is to be founded on the truth both of the necessary existence of God as infinite substance, and of the conceptual independence of mind and body that follows from the identification of body with an extended thing (*res extensa*), the nature of which can be conceived in terms of extension alone, and of mind with a thinking thing (*res cogitans*), the nature of which can be conceived in terms of thought alone.

¹ In the original, *In quibus Dei existentia, & animae humanae a corpore distinctio, demonstratur*. This replaced the subtitle in the first (1641) edition: *In qua Dei existentia et animae immortalitas demonstratum*.

Spinoza retained some version of these foundations, though of course his version differs, sometimes quite radically, from the version we find in Descartes.

In what follows, I focus on the relation between Spinoza and Descartes with respect to these new foundations for philosophy.² I begin with DPP and Meyer's preface to it. After setting this text and its appendix, the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, in the context of early receptions of Descartes, I consider the specific examples that Meyer provides to illustrate the differences between Descartes and Spinoza, namely, those concerning the will, the human mind, and claims that purportedly surpass human understanding.

In the remainder of this chapter, I examine issues beyond those raised by Meyer that concern the accounts of the new foundations for philosophy in Spinoza and Descartes. This examination will be divided into the three foundational issues I have mentioned: body as extended thing, mind as thinking thing, and God as infinite substance. In each case I will start with Spinoza's characterization of Descartes's position in DPP, but then consider the emendation of or deviation from this position in his later writings, primarily, though not exclusively, the *Ethics* (1677). We will find the differences between Spinoza and Descartes that the remarks in Meyer's preface lead us to suspect. But we will discover as well aspects of Spinoza's system for which these remarks do not prepare us completely, including some fundamental differences from Descartes's conception of extension and thought that go beyond what Meyer says, as well as some agreement pertaining to Descartes's doctrine—which for Meyer is a source only of disagreement—of the incomprehensibility of God.

DPP AND MEYER'S PREFACE

The Context of DPP

In the letter to Oldenburg mentioned previously, Spinoza indicates that DPP started as a series of lectures on the second part of Descartes's *Principles* that he dictated to his difficult student, Caesarius, "to whom I did not want to teach my opinions openly" (G 4:63).³ The friends in Spinoza's Amsterdam circle (including Meyer and Simon de Vries) asked for a copy of these lectures, along with a summary of the first part of the *Principles*, to prepare for publication. As we have seen, Spinoza agreed on the condition that Meyer prepare a preface that distances Spinoza from the positive claims in this text.

Spinoza's publication of a summary of Descartes's views was not without precedent. In France, Jacques Du Roure—who belonged to a circle of Cartesians associated with

² Cf. the discussion of the anti-Cartesian aspects of Spinoza's system in Yovel, "Spinoza: The First Anti-Cartesian."

³ Spinoza writes to De Vries that "no one is more troublesome to me" than his student Caesarius, and he warns his correspondent "not to communicate my views to him until he has reached greater maturity" (Ep. 9/G 4:42).

Descartes's literary executor, Claude Clerselier—published a version of the Cartesian system in his *La Philosophie divisée en toutes ses parties* (1654).⁴ Closer to Spinoza's home, the Dutch-educated Cartesian Johannes Clauberg published in Duisberg, in 1658, his *Paraphrasis in Renati Descartes meditationes de prima Philosophia*.⁵ Here the attempt was not merely to paraphrase the *Meditations*, but also to enter into a dispute over the issue of the role of methodical doubt in Descartes's system. This issue was particularly sensitive for Dutch critics of Cartesianism.⁶ Already during his lifetime, Descartes had been condemned in both Utrecht and Leiden for proposing in the *Meditations* a sort of doubt that undermines both a traditional Aristotelian scholasticism that starts with trust in the senses and an orthodox Calvinism that starts with faith in the authority of scripture and the testimony of the Holy Spirit. In his *Defensio cartesiana* (1652) and *Dubitatio cartesiana* (1655), Clauberg sought to defend Descartes against these charges by emphasizing the limited therapeutic role of doubt in removing unfounded philosophical prejudices.

In his prolegomenon to DPP, Spinoza also addresses issues pertaining to methodical doubt. In particular, he considers Descartes's response to the problem of the "Cartesian circle" that derives from his suggestion in the *Meditations* that he relies on the existence of God to guarantee the truth of clear and distinct perceptions, but also relies on the truth of his clear and distinct perceptions to prove the existence of God. However, in contrast to Clauberg, Spinoza is not particularly concerned to defend Descartes, as indicated by his comment that Descartes's response "will not satisfy some people," and by the fact that he continues by offering his own response to the problem (G 1:146–49).⁷ Indeed, in contrast to both Clauberg's *Paraphrase* and Du Roure's *Philosophie divisée*, DPP is not offered as part of a campaign to promote allegiance to Descartes's system.⁸

However, there is a sense in which the text appended to DPP—namely, CM—is in line with other post-Descartes promotions of Cartesianism. Despite the fact that Descartes wrote the *Principles* for use in the schools, the text itself does not cover the traditional scholastic curriculum, which was typically divided into logic, ethics, physics, and metaphysics. Even with respect to metaphysics, which is the focus of the first part of the *Principles*,⁹ Descartes failed to cover topics that were included in scholastic

⁴ A successor to this text, *Abrégé de la vraye philosophie*, was published in 1665.

⁵ In 1648, Clauberg, then a young student in the United Provinces, helped Frans Burman to compose the notes of Burman's interview of Descartes at his home in Egmond; these notes have come down to us as the *Conversation with Burman*.

⁶ For this point, see Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*.

⁷ Spinoza takes Descartes's response to be that doubt extends only to the memory of clear and distinct perception, and not to those clear and distinct perceptions to which we are actually attending. Spinoza's alternative response is that doubt of clear and distinct perception depends on an inadequate conception of God, and that this doubt can be removed once we form a clear and distinct idea of him.

⁸ For more on Clauberg and his contributions to Cartesianism, see the articles in Verbeek, *Johannes Clauberg*.

⁹ The part itself is entitled, "On the principles of human cognition" (*De principiis cognitionis humanae*), but it is clear that Descartes is here setting out the metaphysical foundations for the physics and cosmology sketched in the remainder of the *Principles*.

courses, topics such as being, existence, essence, the transcendentals (unity, truth, goodness), and the nature of the divine attributes. In his *Ontosophia nova* (1660), Clauberg already attempted to provide what we do not find in Descartes, a systematic theory of metaphysics as the science of “being *qua* being.”¹⁰ Similarly, in CM Spinoza offers a “scholasticized Cartesianism” that begins with a section on the nature of being and its division into beings whose essence involves existence and beings whose essence does not involve existence. There also is a second section devoted to the divine attributes and divine activity in creation and concurrence.¹¹ In his preface, however, Meyer is clear that in CM no less than in the text of DPP itself, Spinoza is concerned only to “set out the opinions of Descartes and their demonstrations, insofar as they are found in his writings, or are such as ought to be deduced validly from the foundations he laid.” Meyer’s conclusion is that though Spinoza “judges some of the doctrines are true, . . . nevertheless there are many that he rejects as false, and concerning which he holds quite a different opinion” (G 1:131). Now it is time to turn to the reasons Meyer provides for this conclusion.

Meyer on Spinoza on Cartesian Foundations

In the preface to DPP, most of Meyer’s praise of Descartes concerns the “mathematical method” he uses to derive conclusions “with mathematical order and certainty” (G 1:128). However, Meyer also notes that Descartes’s style of writing does not for the most part match his method. Appealing to Descartes’s remarks in the Second Replies, appended to the *Meditations*, Meyer distinguishes between an “analytic” order that reveals how one can discover the truth for oneself, and a “synthetic” order that “uses a long series of definitions, postulates, axioms, theorems, and problems,” in the style of Euclid’s *Elements* (G 1:128–29, citing AT 7:155). Though Descartes (reluctantly) provides a sample of a synthetic ordering of his system in the Second Replies,¹² Meyer praises Spinoza for taking this project further in rendering “in the synthetic order what Descartes wrote in the analytic, and to demonstrate it in a manner familiar to the geometers” (G 1:129).

Some commentators have argued that Descartes in fact took the *Principles* to be written in the synthetic order, and thus have charged that both Meyer and Spinoza were

¹⁰ This text, which itself is a revised version of Clauberg’s *Elementa philosophiae primae sive Ontosophia* (1647), which is based on his dissertation. A later edition of the text appeared as *Metaphysica de ente, quae rectius Ontosophia* (1664). For more on Clauberg’s *Ontosophia* and its relation to Cartesianism, see Carraud, “L’ontologie.”

¹¹ Somewhat oddly from a scholastic perspective, however, the second section ends with a consideration of the nature of the human mind and its distinction from body. Such a consideration no doubt reflects a more Cartesian understanding of metaphysics.

¹² Descartes notes in the Second Replies that analysis is “the best and truest method of instruction” and that synthesis “cannot so conveniently be applied to . . . metaphysical subjects” (AT 7:156).

confused in thinking that this text requires a synthetic presentation.¹³ But though it could be argued that the evidence for the charge of confusion is rather weak,¹⁴ what is most relevant to the issue of the relation between Spinoza and Descartes is not their style of presentation but rather their substantive conclusions regarding the “foundations of philosophy.” And with respect to such conclusions, Meyer’s emphasis, following Spinoza’s instruction, is on the differences between the two philosophers.

There are three main examples of these differences that Meyer provides. First, he mentions “what is said concerning the will,” namely, that it is distinct from intellect and endowed with freedom (G 1:132). Indeed, in DPP, Spinoza draws on Descartes’s views in the *Principles* in claiming both that the faculty of willing is distinct from the faculty of perceiving (DPP1p15s; cf. PP 1.32), and that the faculty of willing “is free to determine itself” (DPP1p15s; cf. PP 1.37). In CM, moreover, it is said that the mind has a power of affirming and denying that “is not so determined as if it were compelled by external things, but it always remains free” (2.12/G 1:277–78).

Meyer claims that Spinoza’s deviation from Descartes’s account of the will is linked to a further difference concerning the nature of the human mind. Whereas Descartes “assumes, but does not prove, that the human mind is a substance thinking absolutely,” Spinoza holds that the human mind “is not thought absolutely, but only a thought determined in a certain way according to the laws of thinking nature by ideas, a thought which, one infers, must exist when the human body begins to exist” (G 1:132). What precludes the freedom of the will is simply the fact that the human mind must be identified with a thought “determined in a certain way according to the laws of thinking nature,” and thus cannot be an undetermined source of action. In the preface to the third part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza indicates the importance of this difference from Descartes in noting that whereas some—and here Descartes is the named culprit—“conceive man in nature as a dominion within a dominion,” with “absolute power over his actions, and that he is determined only by himself,” he treats the mind and its powers as determined by “the laws and rules of nature, according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another” (G 2:137–38).

Meyer asserts that it follows from Spinoza’s account of the human mind that “the faculty of affirming and denying is a mere fiction” and that “affirming and denying are nothing but ideas” (G 1:132). In contrast to the case of undetermined human freedom, however, it is not entirely clear how it follows from the fact that the human mind is thought determined according to laws that all purported acts of will are “nothing but ideas.” As we will discover in §3, in order to understand this derivation, we need to

¹³ See, for instance, Gueroult, *Descartes selon l'ordre*, pp. 104–112, and Curley, “Spinoza: Expositor.” Some evidence for this reading is provided by the claim, attributed to Descartes in the *Conversation with Burman* (see note 5), that the procedure in the *Principles* is synthetic (AT 5:153).

¹⁴ As argued, for instance, in Garber and Cohen, “A Point of Order,” which stresses that the evidence from the *Conversation with Burman* is not confirmed by texts from Descartes’s own hand and confronts differences in style between the synthetic presentation in the Second Replies and the presentation in the *Principles*. Cf. the discussion in Siebrand, “Spinoza,” pp. 67–73.

consider differences that Meyer does not mention between the conceptions in Spinoza and Descartes of absolute thought and its relation to its modal determinations.

In motivating Spinoza's conception of the human mind, Meyer draws on an analogy to the relation of the human body to "absolute extension." He takes it to be obvious, from a Cartesian perspective, that a substance that is extended absolutely "is determined by no limits," and thus differs from a human body, which "is not extension absolutely, but only an extension determined in a certain way according to the laws of extended nature by motion and rest" (G 1:132). The assumption is that the human mind must be related to absolute thought in the same way, namely, as a thought determined by the laws of thinking nature to thought as determined by no limits. One could of course doubt that the human mind and the human body must be conceived in the same manner, though this constraint makes sense for Spinoza given his famous "parallelism doctrine" in the *Ethics*, according to which the "order and connection" found in thought is the same as the one found in extension.¹⁵ But there also is reason to doubt Meyer's suggestion that Spinoza adopts what from a Cartesian perspective is an uncontroversial view of the human body. I have indicated that there is reason to think that Spinoza and Descartes have different conceptions of absolute thought and its relation to its modal determinations. So also I hope to show in §2 that there is reason to think that they have different conceptions of absolute extension and its relation to its modal determinations.

In addition to the cases of free will and the nature of the human mind, Meyer offers as a third example of the difference between Spinoza and Descartes the fact that Descartes takes certain basic features of reality to be beyond our comprehension. In particular, Meyer says that the claim, "viz., that this or that surpasses the human understanding . . . must be taken in the same sense, i.e., as said only on behalf of Descartes. For it must not be thought that our author offers this as his own opinion" (G 1:133). Though Meyer does not cite the specific cases where Spinoza reports this claim on behalf of Descartes, perhaps the primary instance is in CM, where there is the claim, drawn from Descartes's *Principles*, that the reconciliation of the freedom of our will and of God's predestination "surpasses the human understanding" (CM 1.3/G 1:243; cf. PP 1.41). In defending this claim, Spinoza invokes the fact that "there are many things exceeding our grasp that we nevertheless know to have been done by God," such as "the real division of matter into indefinite particles" (G 1:244). There is the claim in the *Principles* that the indefinite division of particles is something "beyond the grasp of our finite minds" (PP 2.35), but interestingly, Descartes does not anticipate the point in Spinoza that this incomprehensibility is tied to the incomprehensibility of divine action. Moreover, the claim in DPP that "those things that depend only on [God's] good pleasure do not become known except by divine revelation" (DPP2p13s) is amplified by the claim in CM—which is not anticipated in Descartes—that it is impossible to know the nature of divine omnipresence since this depends on knowing "the inmost nature of the divine will, by which he

¹⁵ In particular, the parallelism proposition is that "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things" (E2p7). Spinoza draws from this proposition the result that "a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways" (E2p7s).

has created things and continually produces them,” which nature is evidently “beyond man’s grasp” (2.3/G 1:254).¹⁶

Nevertheless, it is clear that Descartes accepts the fundamental incomprehensibility of God. This is most evident in his pronouncements concerning his notorious doctrine of the creation of eternal truths. In the 1630 correspondence with Mersenne that introduces this doctrine, for instance, Descartes claims that

since God is a cause whose power surpasses the bounds of human understanding, and since the necessity of these [eternal] truths does not exceed our knowledge, these truths are therefore something less than, and subject to, the incomprehensible power of God. (AT 1:150)

It would seem that there could be no more dramatic difference from Spinoza. For Spinoza insists in his *Ethics* that “all things have necessarily followed from God’s given nature, and have been determined from the necessity of God’s nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way” (E1p33d, citing E1p16 and E1p29). Far from holding, with Descartes, that the necessity of the eternal truths derives from God’s indifferent will,¹⁷ Spinoza concludes that the divine nature is necessarily determined to produce all that it does produce.

There can be no denying that this is a stark difference, rendered even more stark by the fact that Spinoza emphatically rejects the position—on which Descartes’s doctrine of the creation of eternal truths depends—that finite and limited reality derives from the undetermined will of a transcendent being. In the *Ethics*, by contrast, God is the fully determined immanent cause of this reality, in which that reality exists and through which it must be conceived (E1p18d; cf. E1p15d).

Even so, by considering more carefully Spinoza’s reaction to Descartes’s doctrine of the creation of eternal truths, I think we can discern some respects in which his system is congenial to this doctrine. Before making this argument, however, I want to explore the conceptual framework that conditions Spinoza’s investigation of the reality that follows necessarily from the divine nature. This framework assumes a conceptual dualism between extension and thought that might seem to be straight from Descartes. However, there are differences concerning Spinoza’s conception of these attributes that go beyond Meyer’s emphasis on the distinction of the human mind from absolute thought.

¹⁶ However, in correspondence with More toward the end of his life, Descartes did become involved in difficulties concerning the relation of God’s essence to place, stating at first that God is everywhere in virtue of his power but not his essence (AT 5:343), and then conceding in response to More’s objections that God’s essence must be everywhere his power is (AT 5:403). For an interesting discussion of accounts of the spatial presence of God and other spirits in the work of Descartes and the later Cartesians, see Reid, “The Spatial Presence.”

¹⁷ Though some have interpreted the doctrine of the creation of eternal truths as rejecting the necessity of these truths (see, for instance, Frankfurt, “Descartes on the Creation”), Descartes in fact suggests that the truths are necessary when he claims that the fact “that God has willed that some truths should be necessary is not to say that he willed them necessarily” (AT 4:118).

BODY AND EXTENSION

The reports from Meyer and Spinoza concur on the historical point that the second part of Descartes's *Principles*, on the metaphysical principles of physics, was the first that Spinoza attempted to reconstruct for the benefit of Caesarius (cf. G 1:29–30 and Ep. 13/G 4:63). It is thus appropriate to begin a consideration of Spinoza's attitude toward Descartes's account of the two principal attributes of created substance, namely extension and thought, by focusing on the case of extension. With respect to this case, it might seem, as Meyer suggested, that Spinoza is sympathetic to Descartes's account. After all, Descartes was one of the primary defenders of what became known—due to the work of Robert Boyle—as the “mechanical philosophy,” and in a letter to Oldenburg in which he comments on the views of Boyle, Spinoza pays homage to the view of this new philosophy that “all tangible qualities depend only on motion, shape, and the remaining mechanical affections.” Indeed, Spinoza criticizes Boyle for attempting to establish the mechanical philosophy by means of experiment, when “it has already been more than adequately demonstrated by Bacon and later by Descartes” (Ep. 6/G 4:25). Moreover, in a later letter to Oldenburg, Spinoza takes Boyle to task for calling the rejection of a vacuum in space a mere “hypothesis,” endorsing the argument—to be found in Descartes—that the impossibility of any such vacuum “follows very clearly from the fact that nothing has no properties” (Ep. 13/G 4:65; cf. PP 2.16).

However, the argument against the vacuum actually broaches an important *difference* in the conceptions of extended substance in Descartes and Spinoza. In DPP, this argument is informed by the stipulation that body is the immediate subject of an extension that is divisible at least in thought (cf. DPP1d7 and DPP2d7). At one point in this text, Spinoza follows Descartes in appealing to the divisibility of body as extended substance in arguing that since divisibility is an imperfection, extension cannot be an attribute of God as a supremely perfect being (DPP1p16d).¹⁸

It is a different story in the *Ethics*, where, in contrast to DPP, Spinoza is speaking not for Descartes but for himself.¹⁹ In the former text he recognizes that his conclusion that everything, including extension, exists in God is controversial from a more orthodox Cartesian perspective, and indeed addresses the main Cartesian objection that since corporeal substance can be divided into parts, it cannot be identified with God as absolutely infinite being (E1p15s/G 2:57–58). Spinoza's response is that those “who deny that there is a vacuum”—in particular, the Cartesians—must deny that corporeal substance can be divided into really distinct parts, since if this substance could be so divided, “why could one of the parts not be annihilated, the rest remaining, connected among

¹⁸ Cf. Descartes's remarks in PP 1.23. Spinoza does add that “all the perfections of extension are not to be denied” God, and that “extension is to be rejected only insofar as its nature and properties involve some imperfection” (DPP1p9s). However, when speaking on behalf of Descartes—which is what he is doing in this text—Spinoza is reluctant to claim that extension is an attribute of God.

¹⁹ In this and the following paragraph, I am drawing on my discussion in “Spinoza on the Vacuum.”

themselves as before? And why must they all be so fitted together, so that there is no vacuum?" Since there can be no vacuum, it follows that the parts of matter "cannot be really distinguished, that is, that corporeal substance, insofar as it is substance, cannot be divided" (G 2:59).²⁰ In effect, Spinoza is here arguing against Descartes by invoking Descartes's own conception of a real distinction, on which two things can be really distinct only if they can exist in separation from each other (see PP 1.60).

Spinoza continues by admitting that we can conceive the divisibility of a certain body, such as water, but only "insofar as it is water, but not insofar as it is corporeal substance" (G 2:59). In particular, his view is that bodies are divisible into parts only insofar as they are modes of substance, and that all such parts are modes of "the whole of nature" conceived as "one Individual, whose parts, that is, all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole Individual" (E2le7s/G 2:102).²¹ At one point, Descartes in fact denied that bodily parts are modes on the grounds that parts have depth, whereas in the case of bodily modes "all depth is completely denied" (AT 7:433). Given the exhaustive nature of the substance/mode distinction, Descartes is committed to the conclusion that three-dimensional bodily parts are themselves substances rather than modes. By contrast, Spinoza argues, in effect, that the inability of bodily parts to exist apart from the infinite individual reveals, on Descartes's own account of the real distinction, that these parts are modes of that individual (itself a mode of extended substance) rather than substances in their own right.

The differences between Descartes and Spinoza on the nature of extension are not restricted to the issue of the divisibility of extended substance. This is clear from an exchange that Spinoza had toward the end of his life with one of his most perceptive critics, Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus. Tschirnhaus opens the exchange by asking how Spinoza can claim to demonstrate a priori the existence of bodies with particular shapes and motions given that "there is nothing of this kind to be found in Extension, taken in the absolute sense" (Ep. 80/G 4:331).²² Spinoza initially responds that it is in fact impossible to provide such a demonstration from "Extension as Descartes conceives it," which reveals that "the Cartesian principles of natural things are useless, not to say absurd" (Ep. 81/G 4:332). When Tschirnhaus then insists that individual bodies derive not from "inert matter" but in an inconceivable manner from "God as mover" (Ep. 82/G 4:334), Spinoza repeats that "Descartes badly defined matter through Extension," and claims that it must be defined instead "through an attribute that expresses eternal and infinite essence" (Ep. 83/G 4:334).²³

²⁰ Though I have consulted C in providing translations of the *Ethics*, I sometimes deviate from it, as in my translation here of E1p15s.

²¹ In correspondence with Tschirnhaus, Spinoza offers the infinite individual (which he there calls "the face of the whole universe" [*facies totius Universi*]) as an example of an infinite mode that is itself a modification of another infinite mode of extension, namely, "motion and rest" (Ep. 64/G 4:278).

²² Tschirnhaus no doubt has in mind the proposition in the *Ethics* that "from the necessity of the divine nature, an infinity of infinite modes (that is, all that can fall under infinite intellect) must follow" (E1p16).

²³ Spinoza ends the comment by noting that "perhaps, if life endures, [I] will some time discuss this with you more clearly" (G 4:334). In fact, Spinoza died seven months after writing this letter.

Spinoza is here drawing on his identification in the *Ethics* of God's substance with "the power by which he and all things are and act," a power that is "his essence itself" (E1p34d). In terms of this identification, the claim that all things other than God exist in the divine substance as modes requires that all such things derive from, and thus must be conceived in terms of,²⁴ God's power. In DPP, Spinoza insists on Descartes's behalf that by extension "we do not understand the act of extending [*actum extendendi*], or anything distinct from quantity" (DPP2d1/G 1:181). The passivity of mere quantity is revealed in the fact that motion cannot arise from extension itself, but requires an external source. Drawing on Descartes's remarks in the *Principles* (see PP 2.36), Spinoza claims that a transcendent God must act as a "principal cause" of motion in order for there to be any motion in the material world in the first place (DPP2p12/G 1:200).²⁵ In the *Ethics*, however, a particular body is said to be "a mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God's essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing" (E2d1). As the exchange with Tschirnhaus indicates, the fact that bodies express God's essence reveals that they involve something like an "act of extending" insofar as they are expressions of divine power.²⁶ On this view, God is not an external source of motion; rather, he causes motion by acting through the bodily modes that express his essence.

Even so, there is one important point of connection between the account of motion in Descartes and Spinoza. The first of Descartes's three "laws of nature" that serve as "secondary and particular causes of motion" is that "each thing, as far as it is simple and undivided, always remains in the same state, as far as it is in itself [*quantum in se est*], and never changes except by external causes" (PP 2.37). From this law derives a kind of principle of inertia, according to which a body in a state of motion (or rest) will by its own nature remain in motion (or at rest) if no external cause intervenes. This law is related to Spinoza's claim in the *Ethics* that "each thing, as far as it is in itself [*quantum in se est*], strives [*conatur*] to persevere in its being" (E3p6). For both Descartes and Spinoza, then, bodies have some sort of internal striving to persist.²⁷ In Descartes's case, this striving is supposed to lack any sort of teleological component, since final causes have been

²⁴ It must be so conceived, that is, given Spinoza's axiom that cognition of an effect depends on and involves the cognition of its cause (E1a4).

²⁵ There is some question of whether Spinoza assumes an "occasionalist" interpretation of Descartes's physics in DPP, according to which God is the only real cause of changes in motion due to body-body interactions. Such an interpretation may seem to be suggested by his argument in this text that God alone is the general cause of motion since "we do not clearly and distinctly understand any other cause except God" (DPP2p11s). However, Spinoza also speaks of motion as deriving from divine "concurus" (see DPP2p14d; CM 2.11/G 1:273–74), and for the scholastics God can concur only if there is some creaturely action with which he concurs. For more on scholastic concurrentism, see Schmaltz, *Descartes on Causation*, ch. 1. See also note 27.

²⁶ In the words of one commentator, Spinoza is offering in place of Descartes's appeal to inert extension an "ontology of power" (*ontologie de la puissance*) (Matheron, "Physique et ontologie").

²⁷ For the argument that this feature of Descartes's position requires the rejection of an occasionalist reading of his physics, see Schmaltz, *Descartes on Causation*, ch. 3. For further discussion of the relation between Descartes and Spinoza on the persistence of bodies *quantum in se est*, see Garber, "Descartes and Spinoza."

banished from his physics (see PP 1.28). However, the matter is less clear in Spinoza. For he appeals to the *conatus* of bodies primarily to explain not the fact that they persist in their same state, but rather the fact that they strive to increase their power.²⁸ Though we will discover in §4 that Spinoza's rejection of divine teleology is unequivocal, it is at least less clear that he intends to exclude teleology from the striving of the modes that express the divine nature.²⁹

MIND AND THOUGHT

In DPP, Spinoza follows Descartes's "synthetic" presentation of the *Meditations* in the Second Replies when he provides an account of mind informed by several initial stipulations. First, it is said that "under the name of *thought* [*cognitionis*] I include everything that is in us and of which we are immediately conscious [*immediate conscii*]," and that "by the name of *idea* [*ideae*] I understand the form of each thought through the immediate perception of which I am conscious of the thought itself" (DPP1d1–2; cf. AT 7:160). Thus, consciousness is the basic concept in terms of which the notions of thought and idea are to be understood. Then there is the stipulation that mind is "a substance in which thought is immediately" (DPP1d6; cf. AT 7:161). As in Descartes, these definitions are supposed to support the main conclusion that mind and body are "really distinct" since they are substances that can exist apart from each other (DPP1p8d; cf. AT 7:169–70).

Though Meyer himself did not mention it explicitly, one obvious way in which Spinoza deviates from the Cartesian line in DPP is by rejecting substance dualism on the grounds that thought and extension are both attributes of God as absolutely infinite substance. We have seen that he had to confront the objection that extension cannot be a divine attribute given that it has the imperfection of divisibility. The difficulty in the case of thought is rather that it seems that it cannot be attributed to God in addition to the attribute of extension. As Simon de Vries, a member of Spinoza's Amsterdam circle,

²⁸ See, for instance, E3p12, which admittedly focuses on the fact that the human mind strives to imagine whatever increases its power. However, Spinoza holds that the human mind is simply an idea of a certain body (see E2p13), and given his "parallelism doctrine" (see note 15), the body of which the mind is an idea must also have a striving to increase its power that matches that of its idea. It is interesting that whereas Spinoza repeats in DPP Descartes's claim that each thing "perseveres in the same *state* as far as it is in itself [*quantum in se est*]" (DPP2p14; emphasis added), his claim in the *Ethics* is rather that each thing "as far as it is in itself [*quantum in se est*] strives to persevere in its *being*" (E3p6; emphasis added), where it seems that perseverance in being can involve a striving to increase power.

²⁹ For more on whether Spinoza can and does allow for teleology on the level of modes, see Curley, "On Bennett's Spinoza" (a response to the view in Bennett, *A Study*, ch. 9, esp. §51), which argues that he can and does, and Bennett, "Spinoza and Teleology," which argues that he may but should not. More recent discussions of the issue include Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," which argues for modal teleology in Spinoza, and Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality," which defends the conclusion that Spinoza rejected any sort of final causality in nature.

expresses the argument in correspondence: “If I should say that each substance has only one attribute, and if I had the idea of two attributes, I could rightly conclude that, where there are two different attributes, there are two different substances” (Ep. 8/G 4:41).

Spinoza embraces the Cartesian assumption that the attributes of thought and extension are conceptually irreducible to each other. Thus, in response to Oldenburg’s protest that there is still some uncertainty whether thought is “a corporeal motion or a spiritual activity quite distinct from what is corporeal” (Ep. 3/G 4:10), Spinoza does not concede that thought is a corporeal act, and emphasizes that in any case “extension, insofar as it is extension, is not thought” (Ep. 4/G 4:13). But then the question of how one and the same substance can have attributes that differ from each other becomes all the more pressing.

In response to De Vries, though, Spinoza claims that “the more attributes I attribute to a being the more I am compelled to attribute existence to it” (Ep. 9/G 4:45). It may not seem to be entirely clear how this addresses the Cartesian objection that a substance can have only one main attribute. But Spinoza’s point is ultimately that we must be able to conceive a substance with more than one attribute since we can conceive of a substance that necessarily has all attributes within itself. In fact, Spinoza takes God to be precisely such a substance, stipulating in the *Ethics* that he is “a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses eternal and infinite essence” (E1d6). Since God is “absolutely infinite,” whatever “expresses essence and involves no negation” must also be an attribute of God (E1d6expl). But thought and extension, as “infinite in their own kind,” do not involve negation, and therefore are equally attributes of God as substance.

There has been a vigorous debate in the literature between a “subjective interpretation” of the distinction between Spinoza’s attributes, on which such attributes are only “subjectively” or “ideally” distinct, and an “objective interpretation” of the distinction, on which the attributes are distinct in reality, and thus objectively.³⁰ On the side of the subjective interpretation is the fact that Spinoza defines attribute as “what intellect perceives of substance, as constituting its essence” (E1d4), rather than simply as that which constitutes the essence of substance. Yet on the side of the objective interpretation is the fact that Spinoza takes it to be axiomatic that “a true idea must agree with its object” (E1a6), as well as the fact that he claims that we have a true and adequate idea of God’s essence, including the attributes that express this essence (see E2p46).

One way to start to settle this issue is by remembering that Spinoza’s real distinction between attributes amounts to a distinction between conceptually distinct aspects of one and the same thing. This explains the need for the reference in the definition of attribute to “what the intellect perceives of substance.”³¹ However, this conceptual distinction

³⁰ The *locus classicus* of the subjective interpretation is Wolfson, *Philosophy of Spinoza*, pp. 142–57. For a critique of this interpretation that defends the objective interpretation, see Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, p. 50. One commentator has claimed that “it is as certain as anything disputed in Spinoza’s *Ethics* can be, that Wolfson’s interpretation of these passages [concerning the status of the attributes] is mistaken” (Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 171, and n32).

³¹ Cf. the following passage from the draft of the *Ethics* that Spinoza quoted to De Vries: “By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, whose concept does not involve the

is not merely an artifact of our or any other mind; ultimate reality is such that it can be conceived in infinitely many self-contained ways, among which our mind can conceive only the two ways reflected in the attributes of thought and extension.³²

The view that the attributes of thought and extension are conceptually self-contained is reflected in Meyer's claim that the human mind is "a thought determined in a certain way according to the laws of thinking nature by ideas," just as the human body is "an extension determined in a certain way according to the laws of extended nature by motion and rest." Ruled out here are laws that govern causal interactions that involve both thinking and extended nature. In the preface to the fifth part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza singles out for criticism Descartes's characterization of the passions as "perceptions, or feelings, or emotions of the soul, which are particularly related to the soul, and which [NB] are produced, preserved, and strengthened by some motion of the spirits" (G 2:279, citing *Passions de l'âme* 1.27/AT 11:349). The "NB" designation indicates that what he finds particularly objectionable here is the implication that thought can be determined by the motion of bodily spirits. Since for Spinoza effects must be conceived in terms of their causes, thought would have to be conceived in terms of motion, and ultimately in terms of extension. But since thought is a conceptually self-contained attribute, particular thoughts can be conceived to be the effect only of something else conceived through that attribute. This is why the human mind must be a thought that is determined only according to the laws of thinking nature.

It is significant that Meyer takes the human mind to be thought determined only *by ideas*. In DPP, as we have seen, ideas are defined in terms of thought, and thought in terms of consciousness. But in the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines consciousness in terms of ideas: the mind is said to be "necessarily conscious of itself [*necessario sui sit conscia*] through ideas of the body's affections" (E3p9d). Indeed, the claim earlier in this text that the mind "only knows [*cognoscit*] itself, insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the body" (E2p23) seems to suggest that to be conscious through ideas of bodily affections is simply to have ideas of those ideas.³³

concept of another thing. I understand the same by attribute, except that it is called attribute in relation to the intellect, which attributes such and such a definite nature to substance" (Ep. 9/G 4:46).

³² For a more detailed consideration of the question of why Spinoza refers to the intellect in his definition of attribute, see Melamed, "The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics" (Chapter 6 in this volume). I take Melamed's answer to this question—namely, because the distinction between the attributes is made "by reason" but also has a foundation in reality—to be consistent with my own.

³³ The doctrine of *ideae idearum* is stated in the previous proposition: "The human mind perceives not only the affections of the body, but also the ideas of those affections" (E2p22). On the relation of this doctrine to Spinoza's account of consciousness, see Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, pp. 126–28. Wilson accepts that the doctrine is supposed to underlie his theory of consciousness, but argues against the claim in Curley's text that it provides an adequate basis for the distinction between conscious and unconscious minds (Wilson, "Objects, Ideas, and 'Minds'"). Nadler agrees that the doctrine of ideas of ideas does not provide an adequate basis for this distinction, but concludes that that doctrine is not supposed to provide a basis for a theory of consciousness (Nadler, "Spinoza and Consciousness"; cf. Garrett, "Representation and Consciousness"). However, it must be noted that the ideas of ideas doctrine need not have the implication that "all minds are equally conscious and in the same way" (contrary to what is stated in Nadler, "Spinoza and Consciousness," p. 585) since the ideas of ideas, as much as the

As Meyer indicates, Spinoza does draw a distinction between “absolute thought” that is “determined by no limits” and “thoughts determined in a certain way according to the laws of thinking nature by ideas” (G 1:132). But this is simply the distinction between thought as an attribute of substance, which “the intellect perceives of substance, as constituting its essence” (E1d4), and thought as a mode of substance, which as an affection “is in another through which it is also conceived” (E1d5). All thoughts as modes, in turn, presuppose ideas, since according to the third axiom of the second part of the *Ethics*

there are no modes of thinking, such as love, desire, or whatever is designated by the word affects of the mind, unless there is in the same individual the idea of the thing loved, desired, etc. But there can be an idea, even though there is no other mode of thinking. (G 2:85–86)

The axiom recalls Descartes’s distinction in the Third Meditation between ideas as “images of things” and “various additional forms” of thought beyond ideas, such as “volitions or emotions” (AT 7:37). It may seem that the axiom adds to this distinction only the claim that the presence of ideas is necessary for these additional forms. In fact, however, Spinoza takes the axiom to establish the stronger claim that “the idea is prior in nature” to all other modes of thought (E2p11d). That is to say, all other such modes must be conceived through ideas, and so, given Spinoza’s definition of mode (E1d5), be themselves modes of ideas.³⁴ Whereas for Descartes ideas and additional forms are two different aspects of particular thoughts, for Spinoza particular thoughts are ultimately ideas through which all other forms of thought must be conceived.

We are now in a position to understand Meyer’s claim on Spinoza’s behalf that Descartes’s account of human freedom is misguided insofar as acts of will are “nothing but ideas.” To be sure, Spinoza’s axiom does seem to show that affects involve modes in addition to ideas. However, the upshot of the axiom itself is that all such modes must be conceived through ideas. Contrary to Descartes’s position, then, volitions cannot involve a sort of action that is not simply a feature of ideas. Thus we have Spinoza’s own conclusion in the *Ethics* that “there is no volition, or affirmation and negation, except that which the idea involves insofar as it is an idea” (E2p49).

We have seen how Spinoza opposes Descartes’s purported view of “inert matter” by appealing to the fact that modes of extension are expressions of God’s essence, that is to say, divine power. So also, his opposition to Descartes’s view of ideas as passive states of mind can be related to the fact that such ideas also are expressions of divine power. In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes attributes ideas to the passive faculty of intellect, which he distinguishes from the active faculty of will (AT 7:56–57). In contrast, Spinoza defines

ideas themselves, can be more or less adequate (as argued in Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 72, in response to Wilson).

³⁴ For a further defense of this analysis of E2a3, see Della Rocca, “The Power of an Idea.”

an idea as “a concept of the mind that the mind forms because it is a thinking thing” and explains that he takes the idea to be a concept rather than a perception because the latter indicates passivity whereas the former “seems to express an action of the mind” (E2d3expl). Just as a particular body is a mode that “in a certain and determinate way expresses God’s essence insofar as he is an extended thing” (E2d1), and thus involves activity, so an idea must be active insofar as it is a mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God’s essence insofar as he is a thinking thing. Here we have applied to bodies and ideas the more general claim in the *Ethics* that since whatever expresses the essence of God in a certain and determinate way also expresses the power of God in such a way, from everything that so expresses the divine essence “some effect must follow” (E1p36d).

GOD AND ETERNAL TRUTHS

In DPP, Spinoza stipulates that God is “substance that we understand to be *per se* supremely perfect, and in which we conceive nothing that involves any defect or limitation of perfection” (DPP1d8/G 1:150). This stipulation essentially follows Descartes’s own definition of God in the Second Replies (at AT 7:162), adding only the claim—which Descartes would be hard pressed to reject—that God is supremely perfect *per se*. We have seen, moreover, that Spinoza is faithful to Descartes in DPP in concluding that God, so defined, cannot be extended insofar as the attribute of extension has the imperfection of divisibility.

Nonetheless, Spinoza’s conclusion in the *Ethics* that God is extended substance draws not only on his different account there of the attribute of extension, but also on a different definition of God. In particular, in this text God is said to be “a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essence” (E1d6). What is new here is the notion of God as *absolutely infinite*, which Spinoza contrasts with being “infinite in its own kind.” Whereas something infinite in its own kind must be conceived in terms of a single attribute, and thus cannot be said to have infinite attributes, in the case of something that is absolutely infinite, “whatever expresses essence and involves no negation pertains to its essence” (E1d6expl). This understanding provides the basis for Spinoza’s resistance to the Cartesian maxim, which De Vries invoked, that a substance can have only one principal attribute.³⁵ Insofar as both extension and thought can be conceived to involve no negation or (in Meyer’s terms) to be “determined by no limits,” both attributes must be attributed to God as absolutely infinite substance.

³⁵ For Descartes, it seems, the principal attribute of God is supreme perfection rather than what Meyer called absolute thought, that is, thought “determined by no limits.”

However, I have noted that the remarks in Meyer's preface to DPP draw attention to another respect in which Spinoza's account of God differs from the one we find in Descartes. In particular, Meyer emphasizes Spinoza's rejection of the claim in Descartes that "this or that surpasses the human understanding" (G 1:133). What is clearly in the background here is Descartes's claim to Mersenne—cited previously—that the divine will has a freedom to create eternal truths that indeed "surpasses the bounds of human understanding" (AT 1:150). This doctrine that God is the wholly free cause of eternal truths or essences (hereafter, the *eternal truths doctrine*) also is present in the appendix to DPP, where Spinoza emphasizes both that God "acts from absolute freedom of the will" (CM 1.2/G 1:238), and that the essences of created things "depend on the decree of God alone" (CM 1.3/G 1:241).³⁶ It is no wonder, then, that Spinoza allows in this text that "there are many things exceeding our grasp that we nevertheless know to have been done by God" (CM 1.3/G 1:244).³⁷

In CM, there is a further connection to something that Descartes takes to be an implication of his eternal truths doctrine. In his correspondence with Mersenne, Descartes claims that it is a corollary of this doctrine that "in God, willing and knowing are a single thing in such a way that by the very fact of willing something he knows it and it is only for this reason that such a thing is true" (AT 1:149). For Descartes, the eternal truths doctrine requires the elimination of any distinction in God between intellect and will. But this insistence on the unity of God's intellect and will is found also in CM, in which Spinoza writes that

God's will, through which he created things, is not distinct from his intellect, through which he understands them. So to say that God understands that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles is the same as saying that God has willed or decreed that the three angles of a triangle should equal two right angles. (2.4/G 1:257)

Moreover, just as Descartes warns in the Sixth Replies that we cannot conceive of the divine will in terms of our own given that nothing "can belong *univoce* to God and to creatures" (AT 7:433), so Spinoza holds in CM that those who "have attributed a human will to [God], i.e., a will really distinct from the intellect," have in fact "no knowledge at all of the nature of God's will" (2.7/G 1:261).

A remnant of this position survives even in the *Ethics*, where Spinoza argues at one point that if will and intellect could be attributed to God, those faculties insofar as they

³⁶ Though this passage emphasizes essences of creatures rather than eternal truths, Descartes himself noted in his correspondence with Mersenne that the essence of created things is "nothing other than eternal truths" (AT 1:152).

³⁷ On the other hand, Spinoza's claim in CM that the "being of essence" of creatures is simply "the manner in which created things are comprehended in the attributes of God" and that the "formal essences" in God are not themselves created (1.2/G 1:238, 239) seems closer to his view in the *Ethics*—which has no clear precedent in Descartes—that the "formal essences" of singular things are "comprehended in God's attributes" (E2p8&c).

constitute God's essence would have to differ entirely from our intellect and will, and could not agree with one another any more than do the dog that is the heavenly constellation and the dog that is a barking animal. (E1p17s/G 2:63)³⁸

Elsewhere in this text, however, Spinoza is quite clear that it is a mistake to suggest that anything that can be called intellect or will could be attributed to God insofar as he is considered the ultimate source of reality. Spinoza claims that any sort of intellect or will "must be referred to *natura naturata*, not to *natura naturans*" (E1p31), where the latter is "what is in itself and conceived through itself," that is "God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause," and the former is "whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature," that is "all the modes of God's attributes" (E1p29s).³⁹ In terms reminiscent of Meyer's remarks, Spinoza also indicates that God as "absolute thought" must be distinguished from the particular modifications that are conceived through such thought (E1p31d/G 2:72). Since both intellect and will are reducible to particular modifications of thought, and indeed to particular ideas,⁴⁰ they cannot be attributed to God insofar as he is conceived as the "infinite and eternal essence of thought." Spinoza's conclusion is that God "does not produce any effect by freedom of will"; rather, he determines all ideas that constitute particular minds "to exist and produce an effect in a certain way" (E1p32d&c1-2).

But this is not the end of the story. For Spinoza remains sympathetic to two implications of the voluntarist conception of God that informs Descartes's eternal truths doctrine. Both implications are reflected in Descartes's discussion of this doctrine in the Sixth Replies. The first implication is that the type of causality that pertains to God's production of both mathematical and metaphysical eternal truths is, as Descartes says, "efficient causality, in the sense that a king may be called the efficient cause of a law" (AT 7:436). So also, Spinoza claims in E1p25 that "God is the efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence." Admittedly, there remains the difference emphasized in Meyer's preface, since Descartes allows in the Sixth Replies that it "is unintelligible to us" how God produces the eternal truths from eternity (AT 7:436), whereas it is an implication of the fourth axiom in the first part of the *Ethics* that knowledge of the essences that God produces depends on knowledge of God, and thus that essences can be rendered intelligible only in terms of their connection to God.

³⁸ The interesting argument for this conclusion invokes the causal principle that "what is caused differs from its cause precisely in what it has from the cause" (G 2:63). Since God is the cause of both the essence and existence of our intellect and will, his intellect and will differ from our own with respect to both their essence and existence. For further discussion of this argument and the causal principle it employs, see Schmaltz, "The Disappearance of Analogy."

³⁹ As Michael Della Rocca has pointed out to me, there is a sense for Spinoza in which God can be said to have intellect and will, since these are after all modifications of God conceived as a thinking thing. However, what is relevant in the context of Descartes's eternal truths doctrine is a consideration of God as an entirely "free cause" of reality, and Spinoza is clear that, so considered, God cannot be said to have intellect or will.

⁴⁰ In E2p48s, Spinoza claims that "intellect and will are to this or that idea, or to this or that volition as 'stone-ness' is to this or that stone, or man to Peter or Paul" (G 2:129).

Nevertheless, for both Descartes and Spinoza, it is significant that God is the efficient cause of eternal truths or essences.

This similarity is related to the second implication of Descartes's doctrine, which is indicated by his claim in the Sixth Replies that there is "no good, or truth, or believing, or acting, or refraining, the idea of which is in the divine intellect prior to the [divine] will determining to make it such as it is" (AT 7:432). Admittedly, Descartes sometimes seems to qualify the claim here that God has no ends in acting, as when he proposes in the Fourth Meditation that God chooses to permit our errors in judgment since "there may in some way be more perfection in the universe as a whole because some of its parts are not immune from error, while others are immune, than there would be if all the parts were exactly alike" (AT 7:61).⁴¹ However, the logic of his eternal truths doctrine seems to lead to the radical voluntarist claim that ultimately God produces effects simply to manifest his power and without any regard to their perfection.

Such a claim is directly relevant to Spinoza's intriguing discussion in the second scholium to E1p33. The proposition itself states that "things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced." This proposition would seem to conflict with the voluntarist conception of God that Descartes's eternal truths doctrine requires. However, toward the end of the second scholium, Spinoza claims that

this opinion, which subjects all things to a certain indifferent will of God, and makes all things depend on his good pleasure, is nearer to the truth than that of those who maintain that God does all things for the sake of the good. For they seem to place something outside God, which does not depend on God, to which God attends as a model in what he does, and at which he aims, as at a certain goal. This is simply to subject God to fate. Nothing more absurd can be maintained about God, whom we have shown to be the first and only free cause, both of the essence of all things, and of their existence. (G 2:76)

The argument here that those who hold that "God does all things for the sake of the good" are committed to the absurd position that he is bound by a model external to himself has some basis in Descartes. For Descartes tells Mersenne in correspondence that it is necessary to hold that eternal truths depend on God since "they are not known by God in any way which would imply that they are true independently of him" (AT 1:149). For both Descartes and Spinoza, then, the only alternative to the view that eternal truths and essences depend on God's power seems to be that they are determined by something external to God.

⁴¹ Also problematic from a perspective informed by the eternal truths doctrine is Descartes's suggestion in the Sixth Meditation that the fact that our sensations are conducive to the preservation of the healthy mind-body composite "bear[s] witness to the power and goodness of God" (AT 7:87). For further discussion of the complications for Descartes's view of teleology, see Schmaltz, "Descartes's Critique."

Admittedly, there is a clear counterexample in the early modern period to the shared assumption in Descartes and Spinoza that this is the only option. Thus, in his *Discours de la Métaphysique* (1686), Leibniz insists that the divine will follows the rationalist rule that “all acts of will presuppose a reason for willing and that this reason is naturally prior to the act of will.” Yet he also notes that the reasons for God’s action are not external to him, but rather are only “consequences of his understanding” that do not “depend on his will.”⁴² The reasons for divine action have no cause, but are in fact uncreated aspects of the divine intellect.

Nevertheless, the case of Leibniz introduces some interesting complications, especially given Arnauld’s charge in a letter to Leibniz that on the view in the *Discourse*, everything that God produces “is obliged to happen through a more than fatal necessity.”⁴³ The suggestion here is that the Leibnizian claim that the divine will must be determined by “sufficient” reasons yields something akin to Spinoza’s conclusion in E1p33 that “things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced.” To be sure, Leibniz protests in response that when he is determined by reasons involving goodness, God acts only by “hypothetical” and not by “absolute” necessity.⁴⁴ However, one might wonder whether Spinoza would have found uncongenial the implication that there are sufficient reasons that necessitate divine production. Why should he not embrace the rationalist God of Leibniz rather than the voluntarist God of Descartes?

One reason for Spinoza to side with Descartes is in order to distance himself from the suggestion in Leibniz that God is akin to a human agent who deliberates by weighing reasons for action. In the appendix to the first part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza mercilessly attacks those who model the action of the gods on their own action and thereby conclude that since they seek their own advantage, the gods also must be directed by a desire to be worshipped by their subjects (G 2:77–81). Spinoza is particularly concerned to root out this sort of anthropomorphism, and to replace the vulgar conception of the gods with a philosophical conception of God that precludes not only the conceit that the gods act for our benefit, but also the possibility that a supremely perfect being can act for any ends at all.⁴⁵ Given this concern, it would be more useful for Spinoza to ally himself with Descartes’s voluntarist conception of God than with a Leibnizian sort of rationalist conception. To be sure, Spinoza is somewhat closer to Leibniz than to Descartes in denying that eternal truths derive from any sort of absolute will. However, what we may have in Spinoza is a point where radical versions of the voluntarist God of Descartes and the rationalist God of Leibniz meet: in a being that does not act as we

⁴² *Philosophical Essays*, p. 36.

⁴³ *To Leibniz*, 13 Mar. 1686; *Philosophical Essays*, p. 9.

⁴⁴ See e.g. Leibniz’s response to Arnauld of 12 Apr. 1686, in *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 13–14.

⁴⁵ See Spinoza’s argument in the Appendix that the doctrine that God acts for ends takes away his perfection since, given this doctrine, “he necessarily wants something he lacks” (G 2:80). I am indebted here to the discussion in Nadler, “Spinoza, Leibniz.”

do, but that also is (internally, and thus freely) necessitated to produce just what it does produce.⁴⁶

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⁴⁶ Thanks to Michael Della Rocca, Steve Nadler, and Sanem Soyarslan for helpful comments on this chapter.

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CHAPTER 5

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF SPINOZA'S METAPHYSICS

Substance, Attributes, and Modes

YITZHAK Y. MELAMED

INTRODUCTION

ONE of the major questions of metaphysics throughout its history has been: What *is*? Spinoza has an astonishingly brief answer to this question: *God*.¹ All that is, is just God² (and his qualities). The rest of this essay will be dedicated to the elaboration of Spinoza's answer.

Spinoza's God has infinitely many qualities that constitute, or are conceived as constituting, his essence, while the other qualities of Spinoza's God, though not constituting God's essence, follow necessarily from God's essence. Spinoza calls the former "Attributes [*attributa*]" and the latter "Modes [*modi*]." Following a clarification of Spinoza's understanding of Substance [*substantia*] in the first part of this essay, we will study in the second and third parts Spinoza's conception of attributes and modes, respectively. "Substance," "Attributes," and "Modes" are terms that have a very long history before Spinoza. This, of course, does not mean that Spinoza restricts himself to traditional explications of these terms. On the contrary, Spinoza instead draws bold and radical conclusions from a traditional, or almost traditional, understanding of these concepts.

¹ I am indebted to Mike Le Buffe, Colin Marshall, and Tad Schmaltz for very helpful comments on early drafts of this paper. Michael Della Rocca was, as usual, a source of inspiration and many generous advices.

² For the acosmist reading of Spinoza—according to which Spinoza denies the reality of the world ("cosmos") and of anything but God—see Batscha, *Salomon Maimons*, p. 217. Cf. my articles, "Salomon Maimon" and "Acosmism."

Though Spinoza's immediate answer to question, "What is?" is brief and simple, the proper elaboration of this answer could fill several thick volumes. Therefore, this short essay provides only a cursory sketch of Spinoza's main ontological terms, their interrelation, and the recent, major scholarly debates regarding their meaning and function in Spinoza's system.

SUBSTANCE

In the opening of the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines substance in the following manner:

E1d3: By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed [*Per substantiam intelligo id quod in se est et per se concipitur; hoc est id cuius conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei, a quo formari debeat*].³

The essential characterization of Spinoza's substance is its *independence*. Substance is both ontologically and conceptually independent. It is a thing that does not depend on anything else in order to be or be conceived. This understanding of substance follows traditional theories of substance, though, as we shall soon see, the slight (or apparently slight) changes Spinoza introduces into the concept of substance lead to radical and revolutionary conclusions. We begin with a concise overview of the historical background of Spinoza's discussion of substance, not only for the obvious reason that Spinoza was not working in a void, but also because the two competing theories of substance that were readily available to Spinoza—those of Aristotle and Descartes—suggest the two main ways of understanding Spinoza's own concept of substance. Due to the complexity of these matters, one can provide only a very general outline of these delicate issues.⁴

The two main *loci* for Aristotle's discussion of substance are the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics*. In the *Categories*, Aristotle discusses substance [*ousia*] while explicating the ten categories of being, of which *substance* is the first and most important. Aristotle defines substance as follows:

A *substance*—that which is called a substance most strictly, and most of all—is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject, e.g., the individual man or the

³ In his early letters, Spinoza provides two slightly different definitions of substance, apparently quoting from early drafts of the *Ethics*. In Ep. 4, Spinoza writes: "[B]y substance I understand what is conceived through itself and in itself, i.e., that whose concept does not involve the concept of another thing" (G 4:13.34). The definition of substance in Ep. 9 reads: "By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., whose concept does not involve the concept of another thing. I understand the same by attribute, except that it is called attribute in relation to the intellect [*respectu intellectus*], which attributes such and such a definite nature to substance" (G 4:46.20).

⁴ Parts of this section of the article are adopted from my article "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance."

individual horse. The species in which the things primarily called substances are, are called *secondary* substances, as also the genera of these species.⁵

For Aristotle, the term “substance,” in the fullest sense of the word, applies only to particular things, such as a particular horse or a particular man. Whatever is not a particular thing can either be *said of* a particular thing, or *be in* a particular thing. To the first group belong the genera and species under which particular things fall (such as “man,” “animal,” etc). The second group includes properties such as “red” or “hot” that do not constitute genera or species. In broad terms, we can say that the distinction between *being in* and *being said of* a thing is a distinction between accidental and essential predication.⁶ Aristotle allows for the existence of secondary substances; these are the genera and species that are said of (but are not in) the primary substances. Hence, whatever is not a primary substance depends on a primary substance, since it must either be *in* a primary substance, or *said of* a primary substance.⁷

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle claims that the substratum [*hypokeimenon*] “which underlies a thing primarily is thought to be in the truest sense its substance.” The substratum itself is defined as

[T]hat of which the other things are predicated, while it is not itself predicated of anything else.⁸

The element that is stressed in the discussions of substance in both the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics* is the *predicative independence* of the substance. That is, primary substances do not depend on anything else upon which they are said to be predicated. Let us mark this understanding of substance as the *predication definition of substance*: A is a primary substance if and only if it is a subject of predication⁹ and it is not predicated of anything else.¹⁰

⁵ *Categories*, 2a12-2a17 (Ackrill’s translation).

⁶ The further question of whether what is *in* a substance (such as whiteness) is repeatable is a subject of major controversy among scholars. For two opposite views, see Ackrill (*Aristotle, Categories and De Interpretatione*), and Owen (“Inherence”).

⁷ For Aristotle, the relation *y is said of x* is transitive. Hence, the genus that is said of an individual’s species is also (transitively) said of the individual itself.

⁸ *Metaphysics VII (Z)*, 1028b36.

⁹ An interesting question, which I will not discuss here, is whether an Aristotelian substance must have properties. On the one hand, if the substance were to have no properties it would be unintelligible (in fact, it would be very much like Aristotelian prime matter). On the other hand, if a substance must have properties, the substance is then dependent (admittedly, in a weak sense) on its properties, which seems to conflict with the independence of substance. Spinoza would face a similar problem were he to explain why God must have modes. For medieval objections to the possibility of substance without accidents, see Normore, “Accidents,” p. 675. For Leibniz’s claims that the monad cannot subsist without some property, see *Monadology*, §21.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of the Aristotelian and Scholastic understanding of substance and its relation to Spinoza’s views, see Carriero’s excellent article, “On the Relationship.”

What is Descartes' conception of substance? Clearly the Aristotelian definition of substance was not alien to Descartes' contemporaries.¹¹ Descartes himself, in the Second Set of Replies appended to the *Meditations*, defines substance in terms that are quite close to Aristotle's view:¹²

Substance. This term applies to every thing in which whatever we perceive immediately resides, as in a subject, or to every thing by means of which whatever we perceive exists. By 'what we perceive' is meant any property, quality or attribute of which we have a real idea (AT 7:161).

Unlike Aristotle's characterization of primary substance, Descartes' does not stipulate that a substance should not be predicated of anything else.¹³ Yet it is clear that what makes something a substance is the fact that it is a subject of which properties are predicated. Following his definition of substance, Descartes defines God as "the substance which we understand to be supremely perfect, and in which we conceive absolutely nothing that implies any defect or limitation in that perfection" (AT 7:162). Although it renders God supremely perfect, this definition does not say that God is *more of a substance* than other, finite substances. Such a distinction between God, the only substance in the strict sense of the word, and finite substances appears in Descartes' most famous discussion of the topic, in Section 51 of the first part of the *Principles*:

By *substance* we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence. And there is only one substance which can be understood to depend on no other thing whatsoever, namely God. In the case of all other substances, we perceive that they can exist only with the help of God's concurrence. Hence the term 'substance' does not apply univocally, as they say in the Schools, to God and to other things; that is, there is no distinctly intelligible meaning of the term which is common to God and his creatures. [In the case of created things, some are of such a nature that they cannot exist without other things, while some need only the ordinary concurrence of God in order to exist. We make this distinction by calling the latter 'substances' and the former 'qualities' or 'attributes' of those substances.]¹⁴

¹¹ See, for example, Arnauld and Nicole's characterization of substance: "I call whatever is conceived as subsisting by itself and as the subject of everything conceived about it, a thing. It is otherwise called a substance" (*Logic*, Part I, Chapter 2, p. 30). "Subsistence by itself" is traditionally explained as not being predicated of anything. According to Eustachius of St. Paul "to exist or subsist *per se* is nothing other than not to exist in something else as in a subject of inherence" (*Summa*, I p. 97 IV. Translated in Rozemond, *Descartes's Dualism*, p. 7).

¹² Cf. Rozemond (*Descartes's Dualism*, p. 7) for a similar stress on the continuity between the Scholastic and Cartesian views of substance.

¹³ In fact, in the Sixth Set of Replies, Descartes explicitly allows for one substance to be predicated of another substance, though only in a loose manner of speaking (AT 7:435).

¹⁴ The passage in brackets appears only in the French version of the *Principles*.

Some scholars suggest that in this passage Descartes introduces a new definition of substance as an “independent being.” This is somewhat imprecise, since Aristotle also stresses the independence of substance. Descartes diverges from Aristotle in the way he explicates this independence. While Aristotle defines the independence of primary substance solely in terms of *predication*, Descartes stipulates that substance in the full sense of the word must also be *causally* independent. Hence, in addition to being self-subsisting, a full-fledged Cartesian substance must also comply with the *causal stipulation of substance*: “x is a full-fledged substance only if it is not caused to exist by anything else.” Created substances, according to the passage above, are self-subsisting, yet externally caused by God (they need “God’s ordinary concurrence”). As a result, they are *not* fully-fledged substances for Descartes.

This brings us to an interesting asymmetry between causation and predication in Descartes’ view of substance. While Descartes grants the title “substance” to things that *causally* depend only on God, he does not make the same compromise in regards to *predication*. Things that depend only on God in terms of predication (i.e. God’s attributes) are not recognized in this passage (or, as far as I know, in any other text of Descartes) as substances, even in the weaker sense of the word.¹⁵ This seems to indicate that even for Descartes, the *sine qua non* condition for substantiality is still independence in terms of *predication*. Only when this necessary condition is satisfied can the test of *causal* self-sufficiency distinguish between God, the substance in the full sense of the word, and finite, created substances (which depend on God in terms of causation, but not in terms of predication).

To return to Spinoza, he seems to have little patience for the Cartesian in-between category of “created substance.” If the title “substance,” in its strict sense, applies only to God (since God is the only entity that is not dependent on anything else in terms of both predication and causation), Descartes’ willingness to grant the status of “created substance” to things that “need only the ordinary concurrence of God in order to exist” may rightly seem a mere concession to popular religion and its demand to secure the substantiality (and hence everlastingness) of human minds.¹⁶

Spinoza does not *define* substance as causally independent, yet it takes him no more than five propositions to prove that, “One substance cannot be produced by another substance” (E1p6), and derive from this proposition the corollary that “substance cannot be produced by anything else” (E1p6c). Thus, substance must be causally independent

¹⁵ Of course, for Descartes, the distinction between substance and principal attributes is only a distinction of reason. Still, this does not make God’s attributes into substances (at least no more than the attributes of any *finite* substance).

¹⁶ Spinoza would allow for non-substantial things (such as human minds) to become more and more independent, and thus more and more approximate the substantiality of God. In fact, this process plays a central role in Spinoza’s attempt to lead man from bondage to blessedness in Parts IV and V of the *Ethics* (See Garber, “Dr. Fischelson’s Dilemma”). Yet, he refuses to mark a stable category of “second best” substance, which would aim primarily to secure or appease orthodox religion (“Why stop with ‘second best’ substances and not continue with ‘third best’ substances, etc.?” one might ask).

from anything else. However, for Spinoza, the causal independence of substance does not mean only that it is not caused by anything else, but also that substance is positively self-caused.¹⁷ Relying on E1p6, and on the implicit and crucial assumption that everything must have a cause,¹⁸ Spinoza proves in E1p7d that substance is “the cause of itself.” But what does it mean for a thing to be “cause of itself”?

Though the notion of *causa sui* seemed paradoxical to many of Spinoza's predecessors,¹⁹ Spinoza did not shy away from using, and even ascribing a central role to it. In fact, *the Ethics* opens with the definition of this very notion:

E1d1: By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing [*Per causam sui intelligo id, cujus essentia involvit existentiam, sive id, cujus natura non potest concipi, nisi existens*].

A *cause of itself* is a thing whose essence alone necessitates its existence and which cannot be conceived as non-existing.²⁰ The causal independence of substance leads Spinoza to the conclusion that substance must exist by virtue of its own essence—otherwise, the existence of substance could not be explained. Glossing this argument, Spinoza notes that we might be surprised by this conclusion since we use the term “substance” far too liberally without paying attention to the precise meaning of the term (E1p8s2). Were we to better grasp this concept, Spinoza adds, we would consider that the essence of substance involves existence as an obvious and indisputable “common notion” (G 2:50.4).²¹

Spinoza's substance has several other crucial characterizations, but presenting and discussing these requires an acquaintance with two other closely related concepts, attributes and modes. We turn now to the issue of attributes.

¹⁷ In Ep. 60 (1675) Spinoza argues that a proper definition of a thing must express its efficient cause. In this letter, he applies this stipulation to the case of God, indicating that God must have an efficient cause as well. Since God cannot be caused by anything other than itself, it must be the efficient cause of itself.

¹⁸ The claim that everything must have a cause is a variant or corollary of the Principle of Sufficient Reason; one can read E1a3 as stating this principle. On the pivotal role of the Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza's philosophy, see Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, Ch. 1.

¹⁹ Although, in the First Set of Replies, Descartes notably claims that God is the efficient cause of itself. Descartes characterizes the cause of itself in terms of independent existence, which differs little from his conception of substance (AT 7:108-9). For a nuanced study of *causa sui* in Descartes, see Schmaltz, “God as *Causa Sui*.” Cf. Carraud, *Causa sive Ratio*, pp. 266–87, pp. 295–302.

²⁰ Notice the dualistic nature of this definition that—like the definitions of substance and mode—defines the term in both ontological and conceptual terminology. On the nature of the ‘x involves y’ relation, see Melamed, “Spinoza's Deification of Existence,” §3.1.

²¹ Indeed, in Ep. 2—in which being “conceived through itself and in itself” is used to define attribute (not substance!)—Spinoza still claims that one of the main characterizations of substance is that, “it cannot be produced, but it is of its essence to exist” (G 4:8.9). See below. Interestingly, the concept of substance does not appear in one of Spinoza's major works, the *Theological Political Treatise*. The closest notion to substance in this work is the identity of essence and existence in God. See Melamed, “The Metaphysics of the *Theological Political Treatise*,” pp. 137–40.

ATTRIBUTES

Spinoza's famed definition of attribute (E1d4) reads:

By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence [*Per attributum intelligo id, quod intellectus de substantia percipit, tanquam ejusdem essentiam constituens*].²²

Following this definition, and the definition of substance previously discussed, Spinoza defines God:

E1d6: By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence [*Per Deum intelligo ens absolute infinitum, hoc est, substantiam constantem infinitis attributis, quorum unumquodque aeternam, et infinitam essentiam exprimit*].

Both definitions raise a number of important interpretative questions.

- (i) Does an attribute really constitute the essence of substance, or is it merely how *the intellect perceives* substance?
- (ii) If the former, why does Spinoza refer to the intellect at all in his definition of attribute?
- (iii) If the latter, does this mean that in reality the attribute does *not* constitute the essence of substance and is merely an illusion generated by the intellect?
- (iv) In what sense does God “consist of an infinity of attributes”? Are these attributes *parts* of God?
- (v) What does Spinoza mean when he ascribes to God “an infinity of attributes”?

Taking these questions more or less in order, let me first note a few important points regarding the background of Spinoza's discussion. In one of the early drafts of the *Ethics*, Spinoza presents a definition of substance (almost identical to the one in the published text of the *Ethics*) accompanied by the following comment:

I understand the same by attribute, except that it is called attribute in relation to the intellect, which attributes such and such a definite nature to substance.²³

No independent definition of attribute appears at this stage of the work (March 1663). Yet, oddly enough, an even earlier draft, quoted in Ep. 2 (September 1661), provides a

²² Notice that Latin does not have definite and indefinite articles. Hence E1d4 could refer equally to “an attribute” or “the attribute,” or to “an intellect” or “the intellect.”

²³ Ep. 9/G 4:46.20.

definition of *attribute* that is very similar to the definition of *substance* (!) in the final version of the *Ethics*.

By attribute I understand whatever is conceived through itself and in itself [*omne id, quod concipitur per se & in se*], so that its concept does not involve the concept of another thing.²⁴

Let me stress three key points regarding the concepts of substance and attribute in Ep. 2. First, being “in itself” and “conceived through itself” are the essential characteristics of substance (E1d3) in the final version of the *Ethics*, yet here these two crucial characterizations are used to define attribute rather than substance. Second, notice that in this early draft *there is no mention of the intellect in the definition of attribute*. Finally, notice that in this letter Spinoza does not at all define substance, but instead suggests three characterizations of *substance*, one of which reads: “[Substance] must be infinite, or supremely perfect of its kind.”²⁵ Strikingly, “being infinite in its kind” is the characterization of *attribute* in the final version of the *Ethics*.²⁶ Thus, it seems that between Ep. 2 and the final version of the *Ethics*, Spinoza virtually switched his concepts of substance and attribute. While the precise story of the development of Spinoza’s key concepts in the early drafts of the *Ethics* deserves a careful and detailed study that cannot be carried out here, I believe it is safe to conclude that (a) for Spinoza there was a very close connection between substance and attribute, and more importantly, (b) he experimented with various manners of conceptualizing these two notions and their interrelations. It is possible that at some stages in the development of the *Ethics* Spinoza considered either the concept of substance or that of an attribute less central to his system.²⁷

Spinoza had to experiment with various definitions of attribute, since the definition he found in Descartes’ text was extremely unstable. For Descartes, an attribute is the quality through which we know substance. Nothingness has no attributes. “Thus, if we perceive the presence of some attribute, we can infer that there must also be present an existing thing or substance to which it may be attributed.”²⁸ Descartes famously stresses that:

To each substance there belongs one principal attribute . . . Each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all other properties are referred. Thus, extension constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance. Everything else

²⁴ Ep. 2/G 4:7.24–28.

²⁵ G 4:10.1. Italics added.

²⁶ See E1d6expl. God, or the substance, is said to be *absolutely* infinite (in the final version of the *Ethics*).

²⁷ In Ep. 36, Spinoza does not use the terminology of attributes. Instead, he refers to Thought and Extension as things that are “indeterminate and perfect in their own kinds,” while God is said to be “absolutely indeterminate.”

²⁸ PP 1.52.

which can be attributed to body presupposes extension, and is merely a mode of an extended thing . . . By contrast it is possible to understand extension without shape or movement.²⁹

In this passage Descartes does not allow for the possibility of one substance having more than one *attribute*. All the properties of a substance other than its principal attribute are taken here as mere *modes*, depending asymmetrically on their principal attribute. But in the subsequent discussion of the three traditional sorts of distinction—*real distinction*, *modal distinction*, and *distinction of reason* [*distinctio rationis*] (which is here translated as “*conceptual distinction*”)—Descartes characterizes the third in the following manner:

*A conceptual distinction [distinctio rationis] is a distinction between a substance and some attribute of that substance without which the substance is unintelligible; alternatively, it is a distinction between two such attributes of a single substance. Such a distinction is recognized by our inability to form a clear and distinct idea of the substance if we exclude from it the attribute in question, or alternatively, by our inability to perceive clearly the idea of one of the two attributes if we separate it from the other.*³⁰

Descartes does not state explicitly in this passage whether the attributes he refers to here are *principal* attributes, but in order to avoid a flat contradiction with his claim in PP 1.53 that substance has only *one* principal attribute, we may charitably interpret PP 1.62 as referring to a plurality of non-principal attributes.³¹ Yet, our problems do not end here, since it is not at all clear how to reconcile the claims that (i) each substance has one *principal* attribute upon which all other properties of the substance *asymmetrically* depend (PP 1.53), and (ii) a substance may have several attributes, *each* of which is necessary (“without which the substance is unintelligible”) in order to render the substance intelligible (PP 1.62). According to PP 1.53, the non-principal attributes must be understood through the principal attribute, but *not the other way around*. Yet, according to PP 1.62, the principal attribute may depend on another attribute in order to be clearly perceived.³²

Another problematic element of Descartes’ account of the attributes is the rather unclean distinction he draws between modes and attributes. We have seen that Descartes sometimes refers to the non-essential qualities of a substance as modes (PP 1.53) and other times as attributes (PP 1.62). We have also seen that, in PP 1.53, modes are

²⁹ PP 1.53. Italics added.

³⁰ PP 1.62. Italics added.

³¹ Cf. Descartes’ claims that God—the infinite substance—has *many* immutable attributes (AT 8B:348), and that God has *countless* attributes beyond the ones we know (AT 3:394).

³² Assuming PP 1.62 refers to *non-principal* attributes, it should allow for a state of affairs in which a substance S has two attributes, A1 and A2, such that A1 is principal and A2 is not. According to PP 1.53, A2 should be referred to (i.e. conceived through) A1. Yet, according to PP 1.62, A1 does not suffice to render S intelligible. As a result, A1 and A2 seem to be mutually dependent, rather than A2 being subordinate to A1, as PP 1.53 suggests. On the symmetric dependence of attributes in PP 1.62, see Nolan, “Reductionism,” p. 135, and Hoffman, *Essays on Descartes*, p. 53.

taken to be asymmetrically dependent on the principal attribute. Yet, when Descartes provides his official explanation of the distinction between mode and attribute, he does not appeal to considerations of dependence, but rather to degrees of generality and changeability. Worse, in between attribute and mode, he adds a third category: quality.³³

56. *What modes, qualities and attributes are.*

By *mode*, as used above, we understand exactly the same as what is elsewhere meant by an *attribute* or *quality*. But we employ the term *mode* when we are thinking of a substance as being affected or modified; when the modification enables the substance to be designated as a substance of such and such a kind, we use the term *quality*; and finally, when we are simply thinking *in a more general way* of what is in a substance, we use the term *attribute*. Hence we do not, strictly speaking, say that there are modes or qualities in God, but simply attributes, since *in the case of God, any variation is unintelligible*. And even in the case of created things, that which always remains unmodified—for example existence or duration in a thing which exists and endures—should be called not a quality or a mode but an attribute.³⁴

According to this passage, attributes are more general than qualities, and qualities, presumably, are more general than modes.³⁵ Modes or qualities, but not attributes, are changeable, and therefore, God, being strictly unchangeable, has only attributes. This passage leaves several crucial questions unanswered: (1) At precisely what level of generality do modes turn into qualities, and qualities into attributes? (2) Why should one assume that the distinction drawn in PP 1.56 among the degrees of *generality* of attributes, qualities, and modes maps well onto the binary distinction spelled out in terms of *dependence* in PP 1.53?

Given these perplexities in Descartes' account of the attributes, it is easier to understand Spinoza's experiments, in the early drafts of the *Ethics*, with various conceptions of attributes and their relation to God or substance.³⁶ Spinoza did not inherit a ready-made, stable concept of attribute, and therefore had to design one almost from scratch. The notion of attribute is quite marginal in Spinoza's 1663 book on Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*. It appears about four or five times, two of which raise sharp criticisms of Descartes' claims regarding this notion.³⁷ In one of these texts, Spinoza confesses that he simply cannot make sense of Descartes' understanding of attribute, since Descartes'

³³ In *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet*, Descartes suggests a similar distinction, though in this text there are only two categories: attributes and modes. "We must take care here not to understand the word 'attribute' to mean simply 'mode,' for we term an 'attribute' whatever we recognize as being naturally ascribable to something, whether it be a mode which is susceptible of change, or the absolutely immutable essence of the thing in question." (AT 8B:348). Descartes' frequent warnings in his late work against confusing attributes and modes may reflect awareness of his own failure to do so in the *Principles*.

³⁴ PP 1.56. Italics mine.

³⁵ According to the passage, qualities, but not modes, designate the kind to which a substance belongs.

³⁶ It seems that in Ep. 2 the attributes are conceived primarily as the attributes of God, rather than the attributes of substance.

³⁷ See DPP1p7s (G 1:161.3-4 and G 1:163.4-35).

claim that one needs more power to create a substance than the attributes does not allow the attributes to be either qualities which constitute the essence of substance, or the properties that follow from the essence of substance.³⁸

We now return to the definition of attribute in the published version of Spinoza's *Ethics*. The central role the intellect plays in this definition—an attribute is “what the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence” (E1d4)—and the absence of any such role in Descartes' (and Spinoza's early) definitions, led some commentators to argue that for Spinoza, the attributes do not in fact constitute the essence of substance, but are only misleadingly perceived as such by the intellect. This reading of the definition of attribute can be traced back at least to Hegel, who also complained that Spinoza could not make the attribute depend on the intellect, since an intellect (whether finite or infinite) is a mere mode,³⁹ and (as seen shortly) a mode depends on its attribute and substance, and not the other way around.⁴⁰ Yet the most detailed presentation of the view, which denies that the attributes really constitute the essence of substance, appears in Harry A. Wolfson's 1934 monumental study:

If the expression “which the intellect perceives” is laid stress upon, it would seem that the attributes are only *in intellectu*. Attributes would thus be only a subjective mode of thinking, expressing a relation to a perceiving subject and having no real existence in the essence . . . According to [this] interpretation, to be perceived by the mind means to be *invented* by the mind.⁴¹

Wolfson's view of Spinoza as a follower of the medieval tradition of negative theology, which makes God's essence ineffable, motivates his interpretation of the definition of attribute.⁴² One important source provides *some* support for such a reading: in one of his letters, Spinoza replaces his common characterization of God as an “absolutely infinite” being with the similar, yet significantly different notion of “absolutely *indeterminate*.”⁴³ If God is truly indeterminate, then attributes, being determinations of God, should not really belong to him. Yet there is overwhelming textual evidence that Spinoza espoused a position diametrically opposed to negative theology. Consider, for example, Spinoza's bold claim in E2p47: “The human mind has an adequate knowledge of God's

³⁸ See DPP1p7s/G 1:163.4–35.

³⁹ “By intellect (as is known through itself) we understand not absolute thought but only a certain mode of thinking” (E1p31d). Cf. Ep. 9/G 4:45.32, where Spinoza stresses that even an infinite intellect belongs to *natura naturata* and not to *natura naturans*.

⁴⁰ Hegel, Lectures, vol. III, p. 260, pp. 269–70; *The Science of Logic*, p. 537. Cf. Melamed, “Acosmism.”

⁴¹ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. 1, p. 146. Cf. Caird, *Spinoza*, pp. 53–54.

⁴² “Substance is thus to Spinoza, like God to the medievals, absolutely simple, free from accidental as well as from essential attributes.” Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. 1, p. 116.

⁴³ “[I]f we suppose that something which is *indeterminate* and perfect *in its own kind* exists by its own sufficiency, then we must also grant the existence of a being which is *absolutely indeterminate* and perfect. This being I shall call God. For example, if we are willing to maintain that Extension and Thought exist by their own sufficiency, we shall have to admit the existence of God who is *absolutely* perfect, that is, the existence of a being who is *absolutely indeterminate*” (Ep. 36; italics added).

eternal and infinite essence,” and the even bolder statement in the scholium of this proposition: “God’s infinite essence and his eternity are known to all.”⁴⁴ If negative theology asserts that God’s essence is ineffable and unknowable, E2p47 seems to claim that it is impossible *not* to know God’s essence.⁴⁵

Many other crucial texts contradict Wolfson’s reading. First, consider E2p7s, in which Spinoza rephrases his definition of attribute, referring to an attribute as “whatever can be perceived *by an infinite intellect* as constituting the essence of substance” (Italics added).⁴⁶ Clearly, an infinite intellect (i.e. God’s intellect) does not have misperceptions or illusions. In fact, for Spinoza, the intellect, either finite or infinite, perceives things adequately, and it is only the imagination that is the sole source of error.⁴⁷ Thus, the intellect’s perception of attributes cannot be an error that fails to reflect the true nature of substance, or as Spinoza puts it: “What is contained objectively in the intellect must necessarily be in nature” (E1p31d).

Second, the definition of God in the final version of the *Ethics* asserts that God is a “substance consisting [*constantem*] of an infinity of attributes” (E1d6). This definition is not qualified by any disclaimer such as “God is *perceived as* consisting of infinite attributes.” We can and should ask how precisely God consists of the attributes, but I believe it is clear that if the attributes were *only* in the human mind, God would not, in reality, consist of an infinity of attributes.⁴⁸

Finally, E1p4d proves one of the most crucial propositions of the *Ethics*:

There is nothing *outside the intellect* [*extra intellectum*] through which a number of things can be distinguished from one another except *substances, or what is the same* (by E1d4), *their attributes*, and their affections (Italics added).

There are at least two relevant and important implications drawn from E1p4d: (i) The attributes of substance are also outside the intellect,⁴⁹ and (ii) the attributes are in some sense “the same” as the substance.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Furthermore, the force of Ep. 36 is undermined by the fact that the extant text is a mere translation of the lost original. In translation, “infinite” could be easily replaced by “indeterminate.”

⁴⁵ Insofar as the essence of God is self-caused, it does not presuppose or require the knowledge of anything else, and hence it is the easiest thing to know. For further discussion of E2p47 and Spinoza’s surprising views on the “order of philosophizing,” see my review of Ayers, ed., *Rationalism*.

⁴⁶ Cf. E2p4d: “An *infinite* intellect comprehends nothing except God’s *attributes* and his affections” (Italics added), and Della Rocca, *Representation*, p. 157.

⁴⁷ “Knowledge of the first kind is the only cause of falsity, whereas knowledge of the second and third kind is necessarily true” (E2p41). Knowledge of the first kind is “opinion or imagination” (E2p40s2).

⁴⁸ Cf. Spinoza’s use of “*constare*” in E2p13c.

⁴⁹ See Haserot, “Spinoza’s Definition,” p. 509. Another related consideration against the view of the attributes as illusory is that, in Ep. 6, Spinoza stresses that motion and rest, an infinite mode of Extension, “explicates nature as it is in itself,” and not as it is related to human perception (G 4:28.11–15). It would be very odd if motion and rest, the immediate infinite mode of Extension, which follows immediately from the “absolute nature” of Extension (E1p21), were real, while Extension itself were an illusion. For further criticism of Wolfson’s reading, see Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, pp. 441–47.

⁵⁰ Another closely related question is why the definition of attribute refers to the intellect’s *perception*, rather than *conception*. In E2d3expl Spinoza draws a distinction between *conception* and *perception*.

At this point, two of the questions posed at the beginning of our discussion of the attributes have been answered. The attributes truly constitute the essence of substance (question (i)) and are not illusory (question (iii)). We still have to explain Spinoza's reason for introducing the intellect into the definition of attribute, (question (ii)). I approach this question after addressing the two others posed at the beginning of this section.

(iv) *In what sense does God "consist of an infinity of attributes"? Are these attributes parts of God?*—Spinoza's God is strictly indivisible (E1p13). One of Spinoza's main mereological assumptions is that parts are prior to their whole.⁵¹ Since nothing is prior to God, God cannot have parts. Hence, the attributes cannot be parts of God. Instead, as I will shortly elaborate, Spinoza suggests that the attributes are distinct and adequate conceptions of one and the same entity, or as Spinoza puts it, "one and the same thing which is explained through different attributes" (E2p7s).

Here might be the place to stress that, insofar as the attributes are said to constitute the essence of substance, each attribute, like the substance, must be "conceived through itself" (E1p10s)—that is, each attribute and its features must be explained independently, without any appeal to another attribute. Thus, for example, the notions of *intellect* and *will* could not qualify as attributes for Spinoza because they are conceived through the attribute of Thought. Similarly, *motion* could not qualify as a Spinozistic attribute because it is conceived through the attribute of Extension. Since Spinoza thinks there is a tight connection between cognition and causation (E1a4), he concludes that the attributes (and their modes) must also be causally independent from each other (E2p6d). Thus, Spinoza erects a conceptual, as well as causal, barrier among the attributes.

(v) *What does Spinoza mean when he ascribes to God "an infinity of attributes"?*—Explaining his definition of God (E1d6), Spinoza distinguishes between the infinity of each attribute ("infinity in its own kind") and the infinity of God ("absolute infinity"). God is said to have infinitely many attributes, each of which is infinite in its kind. Yet, in Parts II–V of the *Ethics*, Spinoza discusses only two attributes, Extension and Thought, and in E2a5 he stresses that the human mind can know modes of only these two attributes. This led some commentators to argue that Spinoza did not really mean to claim that there are more than two attributes, and that by saying that God has *infinite*

The latter "seems to indicate that the mind is acted on by the object," the former an action of the mind. Since in Spinoza's theory of the mental, the activity of the mind is associated with adequate ideas, and passivity with inadequate ideas, one might be tempted to conclude that perceptions should be inadequate. This is clearly not the case, given numerous passages where Spinoza speaks of *true* perceptions. Consider, for example, E2p44d: "It is of the nature of reason to perceive things truly [*res verè percipere*], i.e., as they are in themselves." Cf. E2p43s/G 2:125.1. In E2p49s/G 2:133.26 Spinoza seems to identify "perceptions" and "the faculty of conceiving." Della Rocca suggests that in E1d4 Spinoza uses the "*percipere*" terminology in order to draw attention to the referential opacity of "contexts involving the notion of constitute" (*Representation*, p.166). While I find this suggestion helpful and essentially agree with it, I suspect Spinoza also uses "*percipere*" to indicate that the intellect serves as *reasoned reason*, and not as *reasoning reason*, i.e. that it does not create distinctions that have no foundation in reality. I will explain this point shortly.

⁵¹ CM 2.5/G 1:258.16-19; KV 1 Dialogue 1/G 1:30.10; Ep. 35/G 4:181.24-26; E1p12d.

attributes he merely means that God has *all* attributes.⁵² In support of such a reading, Jonathan Bennett argued that: (1) if Spinoza really meant that there are infinitely many attributes, he would have had to explain *why* we do not know the other attributes, but his attempt to explain the issue in Ep. 64 and Ep. 66 is completely unclear; (2) there was no philosophical or theological tradition that ascribes to God infinitely many attributes, and hence no traditional pressure on Spinoza to endorse it; and (3) Spinoza has no theoretical pressure to motivate this view.⁵³

A detailed clarification of this issue requires a separate study and cannot be carried out here. Yet, there is no doubt in my mind that Spinoza is strongly committed to the view that God has infinitely many attributes, and in the following I will respond very briefly to each of Bennett's arguments.

(1) Spinoza has a perfect explanation for the fact that one does not know *the nature* of any attribute other than Thought and Extension (though, as I will later show, we know that God must have infinitely many attributes other than Thought and Extension). According to Spinoza, the human mind is a complex idea (i.e. mode of Thought) whose object is nothing but a human body (a mode of Extension). One of the central and most famous doctrines of the *Ethics* asserts that there is a parallelism, or isomorphism, between the order of things and the order of ideas (E2p7). Things [*res*] for Spinoza are everything that is real, including bodies and ideas. We have just seen that Spinoza erects a causal and conceptual barrier among the attributes (E1p10). In Ep. 66, Spinoza relies on these two doctrines—Ideas-Things Parallelism and the barrier among the attributes—to prove not only that items belonging to different attributes cannot interact causally with each other, but also that mental representations of items belonging to different attributes cannot causally interact with each other. In other words, in addition to the barrier among the attributes introduced in E1p10, there is a *parallel barrier* in the attribute of Thought among representations (i.e. ideas) whose objects are items from different attributes. Thus, it is not only that my body cannot causally interact with a mode of the third attribute, but also that my mind (which is simply the idea of my body) cannot causally interact with any mind, or idea, which represents items of the third attribute. The *parallel barrier*, which is internal to Thought, does not allow any communication between ideas representing different attributes. Our minds (i.e. the ideas of our bodies) cannot communicate with the minds of items of the third attribute, and as a result these two classes of minds cannot know anything about each other, nor about the items each mind represents.⁵⁴

(2) There are clear philosophical and theological traditions that ascribe infinitely many attributes to God. In fact, once one rejects negative theology (and its rejection of the ascription of *any* attributes to God), the view of God as having infinitely many

⁵² In his discussion of Spinoza in his *Lectures*, Hegel seems to doubt that Spinoza really meant that God has infinitely many attributes. For a more recent presentation of this view, see Kline, "On the Infinity." Here I concentrate on Bennett's discussion since it has been the more influential.

⁵³ Bennett, *A Study*, pp. 75–78.

⁵⁴ For a detailed presentation of this issue, see Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, Ch. 4.

attributes becomes the most plausible option, since it is much more fitting for God to have infinitely many attributes than to have any limited number. One philosopher who ascribes to God infinitely many attributes is the late fourteenth century Jewish philosopher Hasdai Crescas (1340–1410), who developed this view as part of his defense of actual infinity and his critique of Aristotle’s concept of infinity.⁵⁵ Spinoza clearly knew Crescas’ views quite well, since he cites him approvingly in the course of his discussion of infinity in Ep. 12. Another philosopher who seems to ascribe to God infinitely many attributes (and with whom Spinoza was somewhat familiar) is none other than Descartes, who claims that God has “countless” attributes that are unknown to us.⁵⁶

(3) Spinoza has strong theoretical pressure to claim that God has infinitely many attributes. In E1p9, Spinoza argues: “The more reality or being [*esse*] each thing has, the more attributes belong to it.” The demonstration of this important proposition is shockingly brief: “This is evident from E1d4,” i.e. the definition of attribute. Yet, in the scholium of the following proposition (E1p10s), Spinoza provides a detailed explanation of his reasons for defining God as having infinite attributes:

So it is far from absurd to attribute many attributes to one substance. Indeed, nothing in nature is clearer than that each being must be conceived under some attribute, and *the more reality, or being [realitas aut esse] it has, the more it has attributes* which express necessity, or eternity, and infinity. And consequently there is also nothing clearer than that *a being absolutely infinite must be defined (as we taught in E1d6) as a being that consists of infinite attributes*, each of which expresses a certain eternal and infinite essence. [italics added]

This passage is in fact a reformulation of a very similar statement Spinoza makes in Ep. 9:

But you say that I have not demonstrated that a substance (or being [*sive ens*]) can have more attributes than one. Perhaps you have neglected to pay attention to my demonstrations. For I have used two: first, that nothing is more evident to us than that we conceive each being under some attribute, and that *the more reality or being [plus realitatis aut esse] a being has the more attributes must be attributed to it; so a being absolutely infinite must be defined*, etc.; second, and the one I judge best, is that the more attributes I attribute to a being the more I am compelled to attribute existence to it;⁵⁷ that is, the more I conceive it as true. It would be quite the contrary if I had feigned a Chimera, or something like that (G 4:44.34-45.25). [italics added]

⁵⁵ Crescas, *Or Ha-Shem [Light of the Lord]*, Book I, iii 3 (p. 106). For a discussion of this text and the Kabbalistic tradition, which ascribes infinitely many attributes to God, see Harvey, *Rabbi Hasdai Crescas*, p. 94.

⁵⁶ AT 3:394.

⁵⁷ Notice that for Spinoza it is only *reality*, and not *existence*, that is said to come in degrees. Existence is binary: either a thing exists or it does not. According to Ep. 9, we are “more compelled to attribute” existence to a thing the more attributes we attribute to it, but we do not attribute more existence.

In both passages Spinoza is responding to the Cartesians, who wonder how can a substance have more than one principal attribute, and in both texts Spinoza stresses that not only does God have more than one attribute, but in fact that he has *infinitely* many attributes. The underlying logic of both passages is that the quantity of attributes a thing has corresponds to the thing's degree of reality or being [*esse*]. Nothingness, or a Chimera, has no attributes. Finite things, having a finite degree of being, have a finite quantity of attributes. An infinite being must have infinite attributes. These passages make no sense under Bennett's reading, since if God were to have only two attributes, he would have the same quantity of attributes (i.e. two) and hence *the same degree of reality or being* as a finite thing, like a human being. Yet, Spinoza stresses time and again that God's and man's being [*esse*] and manner of existence are utterly different.⁵⁸ Thus, given the huge gap between the reality or being of God and the reality or being of modes, there must be a similar gap between the quantity of attributes each has.

Apart from the theoretical considerations pointed out above, there are numerous texts, both in the *Ethics* and outside it, in which Spinoza explains and proves various points regarding the unknown attributes. Consider, for example, Spinoza's claim in Ep. 56 that we do not know "the greater part of God's attributes" (G 4:261.13). In light of these theoretical and textual considerations, the view that Spinoza's God has only the two attributes of Extension and Thought is hardly defensible.⁵⁹

We turn now to the final question in this part.

(ii) *If an attribute really constitutes the essence of substance, why does Spinoza refer to the intellect at all in his definition of attribute?* We have seen that the attributes cannot be parts of God or of God's essence, but we have not yet explained precisely how the attributes relate to God, the infinite substance. To address this key issue, we should return to a notion we have already encountered—a *distinction of reason*. In one of his earliest works, the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Spinoza argues:

That God's Attributes are distinguished only by reason

And from this we can now clearly conclude that all the distinctions we make between the attributes of God are only distinctions of reason—the attributes are not really distinguished from one another. Understand such distinctions of reason as I have just mentioned, which are recognized from the fact that *such* a substance cannot exist without *that* attribute. So we conclude that God is a most simple being. (CM 2.5/G 1:259.3-8)

These claims of Spinoza's seem consistent with Descartes' view of a distinction of reason as obtaining either between a substance and its attributes or between two attributes of the same substance (PP 1.62). Yet, in the *Ethics*, Spinoza's view on the nature of the distinction between substance and attribute appears more complicated. The relevant passage appears in a scholium to one of most important propositions of the *Ethics*.

⁵⁸ See, for example, E2a1, E2p10 and Ep. 12/G 4:54.33.

⁵⁹ For further discussion of the Two Attributes interpretation, see Ariew, "The Infinite."

E1p10: Each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself.

Dem.: For an attribute is what the intellect perceives concerning a substance, as constituting its essence (by E1d4); so (by E1d3) it must be conceived through itself, q.e.d.

The main point of the proposition is to establish that each attribute, like the substance, must be conceived through itself, because an attribute is what the intellect perceives as constituting a substance's essence. Now comes the scholium:

From these propositions it is evident that although two attributes *may be conceived to be really distinct* [*realiter distincta concipiuntur*] (i.e., one may be conceived without the aid of the other), we still cannot infer from that that they constitute two beings, or two different substances [*duo entia, sive duas diversas substantias constituere*]. For it is of the nature of a substance that each of its attributes is conceived through itself, since all the attributes it has have always been in it together, and one could not be produced by another, but each expresses the reality, or being of substance. (Italics added)

Some commentators read this passage as stating that there is a *real distinction* between the attributes.⁶⁰ A *real distinction* [*distinctio realis*], in medieval and early modern philosophy, is a distinction between two things, usually substances,⁶¹ which can mutually exist without each other.⁶² In the *Principles*, Descartes suggests a *sign* that can tell us when two substances are really distinct:

We can perceive that two substances are really distinct simply from the fact that we can clearly and distinctly understand one apart from the other.⁶³

Oddly enough, in E1p10s, Spinoza seems to say that while the Cartesian sign for the presence of a real distinction between the attributes obtains (i.e. the attributes may be conceived without each other), we still cannot infer from that sign that the attributes really constitute two different substances. In fact, the phrase in the first sentence of the passage, “may be conceived as really distinct,” is quite ambiguous, meaning either a distinction of reason (a distinction related to our conception) or a real distinction. It is clear, however, that the passage *cannot* state that the distinction at stake is a real distinction, because if this were the case, the whole point of the demonstration of E1p10 would be completely undermined. Were a substance really distinct from its attribute,

⁶⁰ See Shein, “Spinoza’s Theory of the Attributes,” § 1.3. Eventually, Shein endorses a more nuanced view of the distinction between the substance and its attributes.

⁶¹ Sometimes, detachable accidents are also considered really distinct from each other and from their substratum.

⁶² See, for example, Spinoza’s definition of real distinction in his *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy*: “Two substances are said to be really distinct when each of them can exist without the other” (DPP1d10).

⁶³ PP 1.60. On real distinction in Descartes and the scholastics, see Gilson, *Index*, pp. 88–89.

we could not infer the self-conceivability of the attributes from the self-conceivability of substance, since things that are really distinct and independent from each other may well have different qualities.

Thus, we are left with the position already stated in Spinoza's early work, the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, according to which there is only a distinction of reason between the substance and its attributes. But does this position commit Spinoza to the view that the distinction between the attributes is generated *merely* by reason (or the intellect), and has no corresponding element in reality? Not necessarily. Consider the following passage from a letter by Descartes to an anonymous addressee. Descartes explains his understanding of distinction of reason:

In article 60 of Part One of my *Principles of Philosophy* where I discuss it explicitly, I call it a distinction of reason—that is, distinction made by *reasoned reason* (*ratiocinatae*). I do not recognize any distinction made by *reasoning reason* (*rationalitatis*), that is, one which has no foundation in reality—because we cannot have any thought without a foundation; and consequently in that article, I did not add the term *ratiocinatae*.⁶⁴

Descartes' use of the scholastic subdivision of the distinction of reason into *reasoning reason* and *reasoned reason* makes clear that, for him, a distinction of reason is not reason's invention, but rather the reflection of an element that obtains in reality as well. I believe that the same is true for Spinoza: the distinction between the substance and its attributes is a distinction made by *reasoned reason*, or the intellect,⁶⁵ and it has a foundation in reality. Spinoza never mentions the subdivision of the distinction of reason, yet it is highly likely that he was familiar with this division, which not only appears in Descartes and Suarez, but is also elaborated in great detail in the most popular and influential seventeenth century Dutch textbook of logic, Franco Burgersdijk's *Institutionum logicarum libri duo* (1626), which appeared in numerous editions during the century following its first publication.⁶⁶ A *distinction of reasoning reason* is a distinction that "has no foundation in reality and arises exclusively from the reflection and activity of the intellect."⁶⁷ The *sign* of a distinction of reasoning reason is simple identity statement, such as "Peter is Peter."⁶⁸ In this case, the intellect generates a diversity that has no foundation in reality. On the other hand, a *distinction of reasoned reason* "arises not entirely from the sheer operation of the intellect, but from the occasion offered by the thing itself on which the mind is reflecting."⁶⁹ This is a distinction in which "one and the

⁶⁴ AT 4:349–50. I altered the translation slightly, replacing "conceptual distinction" with "distinction of reason." Both are translations of *distinctio rationis*.

⁶⁵ Spinoza frequently equates intellect and reason. See, for example, E4app4.

⁶⁶ On Burgersdijk's *Institutiones* and its wide circulation, see van Rijen, "Burgersdijk." For Suarez's discussion of reasoning and reasoned reason, see *Metaphysical Disputations VII*, p. 18–19.

⁶⁷ Suarez, *Metaphysical Disputations VII*, p. 18. Cf. Burgersdijk, *Institutiones*, p. 91.

⁶⁸ Burgersdijk, *Institutiones*, p. 91.

⁶⁹ Suarez, *Metaphysical Disputations VII*, p. 18.

same thing is represented by different concepts [*una eademque res objicitur conceptibus dissimilibus*].⁷⁰

I believe it is clear that the distinction between Spinoza's substance and its attributes cannot be a distinction of reasoning reason, since, first, the attributes are radically different concepts (and thus "the thinking substance is the extended substance" is not a trivial identity statement), and second, as we have seen, the attributes cannot be a complete invention of the intellect. But if it is a distinction of reasoned reason,⁷¹ what is the foundation in the substance itself that is merely discerned by the intellect? According to Suarez, reasoned reason conceives the various *aspects* of one and the same thing.⁷² This suggestion could provide a good explanation for Spinoza's understanding of substance and attributes. Substance, in reality, has infinitely many aspects that are each infinite and independent of each other. These are aspects of one and the same indivisible and infinite entity. God is substance consisting [*constantem*] of infinite aspects (E1d6), but these aspects are not parts of God.⁷³ The intellect merely conceives these infinitely many aspects, or attributes, of the same entity: God.⁷⁴

There are many elements in Spinoza's account of the attributes that need further elaboration.⁷⁵ We have discussed neither the nature of the two attributes known by the human mind, Thought and Extension, nor Spinoza's rather problematic proof that Extension and Thought are attributes (E2p1 and E2p2). Nor did we discuss the important question of what God's essence is, an essence having the infinite aspects of Extension and Thought.⁷⁶ Finally, we have not discussed the nature of the "expression [*exprimere*]" relation that obtains between God's essence and the attributes.⁷⁷ We will have to leave

⁷⁰ Burgersdijk, *Institutiones*, p. 91.

⁷¹ The suggestion that the intellect in E1d4 functions as reasoned reason can also explain why Spinoza uses "*percipere*" (rather than "*concipere*"), indicating a certain passivity on the side of the intellect. The intellect in E1d4 is not active in the sense that it does not generate a distinction that has no foundation in reality. In other words, it is constrained by the nature of its object. See note 50 above.

⁷² Suarez, *Metaphysical Disputations VII*, p. 19.

⁷³ Similarly, Spinoza's claim in E2p13c that "man consists of mind and body [*hominem Mente, et Corpore constare*]" should be read as saying that mind and body are two aspects of one and the same thing, or one and the same thing conceived under different attributes (E2p7s). That "*constantem*" need not indicate a relation of proper part to its whole we can learn from E1p12d, where Spinoza discusses (and rejects) the possibility of a substance "consisting [*constare*]" of only *one* attribute.

⁷⁴ For further discussion of the attributes as aspects of one and the same thing, see Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, Ch. 5. Pollock also suggests that the attributes are aspects of the substance. See his *Spinoza*, p. 153.

⁷⁵ There is an intriguing element in Burgersdijk's account of distinctions of reason that I believe is closely related to Spinoza's understanding of substance and attribute, though I am still not sure precisely how. Burgersdijk notes that, for the scholastics, the term reason [*ratio*] or Logos refers to the commonality of intellect and the essence perceived by the intellect. The scholastics called the former "reasoning reason" and the latter "reasoned reason" (*Institutiones*, p. 91).

⁷⁶ A common view takes the essence of Spinoza's God to be power [*potentia*]. This view is particularly popular in contemporary French Spinoza scholarship under the influence of Deleuze's book, *Expressionism in Philosophy*. For an alternative view according to which God's essence is pure existence or eternity [*aeternitas*], see Melamed, "Spinoza's Deification of Existence."

⁷⁷ An account of Spinoza's understanding of expression is still a desideratum. While the term is widely used, I am not aware of any good account of this central notion.

these questions for another occasion, but we have made some significant progress in explaining Spinoza's understanding of attribute. We now move to the third and final part on Spinoza's concept of mode.

MODES

In the opening of the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines a mode:

E1d5: By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived [*Per modum intelligo substantiae affectiones, sive id, quod in alio est, per quod etiam concipitur*].

A mode is an affection (i.e. quality), which depends on its substance both for its existence (it is "in another") and for its conceivability (it is "conceived through another"). The first proposition of Part I of the *Ethics* states this dependence in terms of priority:

E1p1: A substance is prior in nature to its affections [*Substantia prior est natura suis affectionibus*].

Spinoza's concept of mode, like his understanding of substance and attribute, went through a few transformations. We have seen that, for Descartes, a mode is a changeable, specific (i.e. less general than attribute), property. In the early drafts of the *Ethics*, Spinoza uses the terms "mode" and "accident [*accidens*]" interchangeably:

By Modification, or Accident, [I understand] what is in another and is conceived through what it is in. From this it is clear that:

Substance is by nature prior to its Accidents, for without it, they can neither be nor be conceived.⁷⁸

This passage appears in a 1661 letter. Shortly afterward, Spinoza stops using the terminology of accident, since a mode necessarily depends on the substance in which it inheres while an accident does not.⁷⁹ The strict dependence of modes on their substances is a crucial feature for Spinoza. Indeed, just a few years later, Spinoza hesitates as to whether "mode" deserves a separate definition of its own, or whether to include it in the definition of substance.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ep. 4/G 4:13.34–14.2.

⁷⁹ See CM 1.1/G 1:237.2–5. On the rise and fall of "real accidents" (accidents that are not dependent on their substance), see Normore, "Accidents." For Spinoza's critique of real accidents, see CM 2.1/G 1:249.33.

⁸⁰ See Ep. 12/G 4:54.9–10.

In the final version of the *Ethics*, Spinoza distinguishes between two realms: *natura naturans* (roughly, naturing nature) and *natura naturata* (“natured nature”). The former is the realm of substance and attributes; the latter is that of modes. Spinoza characterizes each as follows:

Before I proceed further, I wish to explain here—or rather to advise [the reader] what we must understand by *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. For from the preceding I think it is already established that by *Natura naturans* we must understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, or such attributes of substance as express an eternal and infinite essence, i.e. (by E1p14c1 and E1p17c2), God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause.

But by *Natura naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God’s nature, or from any of God’s attributes, i.e., all the modes of God’s attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God (E1p29s).

The attributes and the substance belong to *natura naturans* since they are in themselves and conceived through themselves. Substance and attributes are also causally self-determined, and for that reason they are free, or they are “God insofar [*quatenus*] as he is considered as a free cause.”⁸¹ But why does Spinoza qualify this last claim with a *quatenus*? Can God be considered a non-free cause? In a sense, yes. God’s modes are not self-determined, since they follow from God’s nature (i.e., God’s essence) or from the attributes (see E1p16 and E1p21). Spinoza also stresses that things which belong to *natura naturata* (i.e., modes), are dependent upon *natura naturans*—they cannot be or be conceived without *natura naturans*.

Spinoza draws another crucial distinction between the substance and modes in one of his most important letters, Ep. 12, sometimes called “The Letter on the Infinite.” In this letter, Spinoza argues that the existence of modes is entirely different from the existence of substance:

[W]e conceive the existence of Substance to be entirely different from the existence of Modes.

The difference between Eternity and Duration arises from this. For it is only of Modes that we can explicate^[82] existence [*existentiam explicare possumus*] by Duration. But [we can explicate the existence] of Substance by Eternity, i.e., the infinite enjoyment of existing, or (in bad Latin) of being (G 4:54.33-55.3).

⁸¹ See Spinoza’s definition of freedom: “That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone” (E1d7), and E1p17c2: “God alone is a free cause.”

⁸² Here, I changed Curley’s translation from “explain” to “explicate.” Both are possible translations of “*explicare*,” but I do not think that in this case existence is explained by the modes. Rather, Duration and Eternity are two ways to explicate, or spell out, existence.

Strictly speaking, eternity is the existence of substance or of the thing whose essence and existence are one and the same (E1p20), while duration is the existence of modes or things whose existence is different from their essence.⁸³ There are, however, two distinct senses in which Spinoza allows even modes to be eternal, but we cannot address this delicate issue here.⁸⁴

After proving in E1p14 that God is the only substance, Spinoza argues in E1p15 that all things are *in* God:

Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be conceived without God [*Quicquid est, in Deo est, et nihil sine Deo esse, neque concipi potest*].

This claim earned Spinoza the title of a pantheist, for indeed he holds that all things, including ourselves and the objects of our daily experience, are in God. Notice, however, that Spinoza never claims that anything is *part of* God. Spinoza's substance and attributes are strictly indivisible (E1p12 & E1p13), and for him the part-whole relation obtains only between modes.⁸⁵ Spinoza takes parts to be prior to their whole,⁸⁶ and as a result he cannot allow for anything to be part of the substance or attributes—in such a case, the thing would be prior to the substance, which is impossible (per E1d3). Instead of saying that we are parts of God (and thus making us prior to God), he argues that we are modes of God (and thus posterior to and dependent upon God).⁸⁷ Thus, we should note that Spinoza's pantheism is a substance-mode pantheism and not a whole-part pantheism.⁸⁸

The claim that human beings, mountains, giraffes, and tables are all simply modes of God is clearly a bold and non-trivial claim. Indeed, many of Spinoza's cotemporaries found the claim utterly outrageous. Pierre Bayle writes in his famous entry on Spinoza:

It is the most absurd and momentous hypothesis that can be imagined, and the most contrary to the most evident notions our mind.⁸⁹

Bayle's complaints found an ear in an important work of contemporary Spinoza scholarship. In his 1969 book, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, Edwin Curley argues that considerations of interpretive charity should make us avoid ascribing to Spinoza this strongly

⁸³ A similar formulation appears in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* in a paragraph whose title is "What eternity is; What duration is": "From our earlier division of being into being whose essence involves existence and being whose essence involves only possible existence, there arises the distinction between eternity and duration" (CM 1.4/G 1:244.13-15).

⁸⁴ See Melamed, "Spinoza's Deification of Existence," §3.3.

⁸⁵ KV 1.2/G 1:26.8–16.

⁸⁶ See n. 51.

⁸⁷ Notice that for Aristotle, too, an accident is considered as that which is in a substance but not as its part. See Aristotle, *Categories*, 3a32.

⁸⁸ For further discussion of the distinction between these two kinds of pantheism, see Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance," pp. 63–65.

⁸⁹ Bayle, *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, "Spinoza," vol. 5, p. 208.

counterintuitive view according to which Spinoza understands “mode” in the traditional sense of the word, and thus holds that all things are qualities of God:

Spinoza’s modes are, *prima facie*, of the wrong logical type to be related to substance in the same way Descartes’ modes are related to the substance, for they are particular things (E1p25c), *not qualities*. And it is difficult to know what it would mean to say that particular things inhere in substance. When qualities are said to inhere in substance, this may be viewed as a way of saying that they are predicated of it. What it would mean to say that one thing is predicated of another is a mystery that needs solving.⁹⁰

In order to avoid ascribing to Spinoza the category mistake of considering things as qualities, Curley argues that we should understand the substance-mode relation in Spinoza as nothing but a causal relation.⁹¹ According to Curley, Spinoza does not consider finite things as qualities of God, but rather as effects of God (a view that agrees with most traditional theologies). One implication of Curley’s view is that Spinoza is not really a pantheist, since finite things do not inhere in God, but rather are effects caused by God.⁹²

Curley’s reading is an exciting and powerful challenge to the standard interpretation of the substance-mode relation. Yet, over the past four decades, it has been subjected to close scrutiny that pointed out deep and significant problems in his interpretation. In the following, I will summarize very briefly some of the most important problems noted by Curley’s critics.⁹³ (i) Spinoza defines modes as “the affections of substance” (E1d5). The Latin “*affectio*” denotes a state or quality. Had Spinoza thought that modes were merely caused by the substance, the wording of his definition of mode would be highly misleading. (ii) In several places in the *Ethics*, Spinoza refers to modes as God insofar [*quatenus*] as he is modified by a finite mode.⁹⁴ Thus, there is a sense in which modes are God, but according to Curley’s reading, God is merely the cause of modes, and thus there is no reason to call modes God in any sense. (iii) According to Curley’s reading, substance is *defined* as self-caused (since, for Curley, being “*in se*” is nothing but being self-caused). Yet, in E1p7 Spinoza *proves* that substance is self-caused. It would be very odd for a careful writer like Spinoza to attempt to prove his definitions. (iv) For Spinoza, we have knowledge by having ideas, and ideas are modes (E2a3). According to Curley, God merely causes ideas, but ideas are not states inhering in God. Thus, according to

⁹⁰ *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, p. 18 (Italics added). Cf. Curley’s *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 31

⁹¹ “[T]he relation of mode to substance is a relation of causal dependence, which is unlike the relation of predicate and subject,” Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, p. 40. Cf. Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 31.

⁹² In fact, Bayle had already suggested the outline of Curley’s revisionary reading of Spinoza in a remark he added to the second edition of his *Dictionary*. See Bayle, *Dictionary*, “Spinoza,” Remark DD, vol. 5, p. 220–21.

⁹³ For detailed critiques of Curley’s reading, see Carriero, “On the Relationship,” and Melamed, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics of Substance.”

⁹⁴ See, for example, E1p28d, E2p9 and E4p4d.

this reading, God himself has no ideas; i.e., he lacks any knowledge. Yet, Spinoza clearly ascribes knowledge, and in fact omniscience, to God (E2p3). (v) In November 1676, Leibniz met Spinoza for a long conversation. According to Leibniz's notes, Spinoza entertained a "strange metaphysics" according to which creatures are only "modes or accidents of God."⁹⁵ Had Spinoza thought that modes were merely effects of God, why would he mislead Leibniz to believe that he had a "strange metaphysics?" (vi) It is not at all clear that Curley's interpretation is as charitable as it claims to be. If Spinoza merely holds that God is the *cause* of modes, then much of the excitement about, and interest in, Spinoza's philosophy would seem to be unjustified. Holding that God is the cause of all things is a very standard theological view, and ascribing this view to Spinoza makes his philosophy much *less* interesting and challenging. (vii) Curley's claim that things and qualities belong to distinct logical types that cannot, and should not, be mixed was not widely accepted in medieval and early modern philosophy, nor is there a consensus on this issue in contemporary metaphysics.⁹⁶

In addition to the arguments summarized above, there is important textual evidence showing that, for Spinoza, modes are not only qualities or properties, but in fact a very specific kind of property. For Spinoza, modes are God's *propria*, i.e. properties, which follow necessarily from the essence of a thing. In order to establish this point we need to examine E1p16 closely.

E1p16: 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.) [*Ex necessitate divinae naturae infinita infinitis modis (hoc est, omnia, quae sub intellectum infinitum cadere possunt) sequi debent*].

Dem.: This Proposition must be plain to anyone, provided he attends to the fact that the intellect infers from the given definition of any thing a number of *properties* [*plures proprietates*] 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. . . . [emphasis added]

The key questions for our inquiry concern the character of the *properties*, which, according to the demonstration, the intellect infers from the *definition* of any thing, and how this inference relates to the flow of the infinite things in infinite ways from God's essence. Before we approach these questions, let me briefly clarify the proposition itself. On a first reading, this proposition may seem to claim that the *infinita infinitis modis*, which follow from the necessity of God's nature, are the infinite attributes. However, this cannot be the case. According to E1p29s, what "follows from the necessity of God's nature" is

⁹⁵ *Die philosophischen Schriften*, vol. I, p. 118. For a detailed presentation of arguments (ii)-(v), see Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance," pp. 31-43.

⁹⁶ For a discussion of the relativity of the substance-accident division in medieval philosophy, see Normore, "Accidents," p. 677. For discussion of the distinction between things and qualities in early modern and contemporary metaphysics, see Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance," pp. 71-74.

Natura naturata (i.e. the modes), while the substance and attributes are *Natura naturans* (i.e. God's essence). The attributes do not *follow* from God's nature or essence; they *are* God's nature. Hence, E1p16 must be read as dealing with the infinite infinity of *modes* that follow from God's essence (since only modes follow from God's essence or nature).

I turn now to the question of the "properties" that follow from "the given definition of any thing" in E1p16d. In order to understand the demonstration, we must first clarify Spinoza's criteria for the correctness of a definition. A detailed discussion of the issue appears in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, in which Spinoza stipulates:

To be called perfect, a definition will have to explain the inmost essence of the thing [*intimam essentiam rei*], and to take care not to use certain *propria* in its place (TdIE §95).

Indeed, Spinoza stresses in several places that a precise definition must specify only the essence of the thing defined.⁹⁷ But what are the *propria* that Spinoza warns us not to confuse with the essence of the thing? Here, Spinoza follows a common Scholastic (ultimately Aristotelian), threefold distinction among: qualities that make the thing what it is (the qualities that constitute the *essence* of the thing); qualities that necessarily *follow from* the essence of the thing, but do not constitute the essence itself (the *propria*); and qualities that are at least partly caused by a source external to the thing (termed "accidents" or "extraneous accidents").⁹⁸ Though a thing necessarily has both its essence and its *propria*, it is only the former that provides us with an explanation of the nature of the thing, and hence should be included in the definition. Spinoza explains that it is important for the definition to capture the essence of the thing rather than its *propria*, "because the properties of things [*proprietas rerum*] are not understood so long as their essences are not known" (TdIE §95). Notice that in this passage the word "*proprietas*" has the technical sense of *propria*, rather than properties in general. In fact, in his discussion of definition in §95-97 of TdIE, Spinoza explicitly uses the term "*propria*" only once (G 2:34.30). In all other cases (G 2:35.4, 35.6, 35.18, and 36.1), he uses "*proprietas*" (properties), but in the narrow sense of *propria*, rather than properties in general.

Following the stipulation that a perfect definition should explain the essence and not the *propria* of the thing defined, Spinoza provides an example of the distinction between essence and *propria*.⁹⁹ He proceeds to distinguish the requirements for the perfect definition of a created thing from the requirements for the perfect definition of an uncreated thing. However, Spinoza stipulates that in *both* cases, "all the thing's properties" [*omnes*

⁹⁷ See Ep. 8/G 4:42.30 and Ep. 34.

⁹⁸ "Extraneous accident" is the term Aquinas uses to designate these qualities (see Carriero, "Spinoza's Views," p. 69). Garrett simply uses "accidents" instead (see Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism," p. 201).

⁹⁹ "If a circle, for example, is defined as a figure in which the lines drawn from the center to the circumference are equal, no one fails to see that such a definition does not at all explain the essence of the circle, but only a property [*proprietas*] of it" (TdIE §95).

proprietas rei] must be inferred [*concludantur*] from the definition, insofar as the definition states the essence.¹⁰⁰

Let us return now to E1p16 and its demonstration. Since the definition of a thing states the essence or nature of a thing, it is clear that what follows from God's *essence* in E1p16 is what the intellect infers [*concludit*] from the *definition* of God in E1p16d. The "properties" in E1p16d cannot be God's attributes, since the latter *constitute* God's essence rather than follow from it. What follows from God's essence, or what the intellect infers from the definition of God are only the entities belonging to *Natura naturata*, i.e. the modes, which in E1p16d Spinoza explicitly terms "properties" [*proprietas*]. Properties that follow necessarily from the essence of a thing *must* be understood in the technical sense of *propria*. Indeed, modes stand in the same relation to God's essence as the *propria* of a thing to the thing's essence—they cannot be understood without God's essence (E1d5), and according to E1p16, all modes follow (or can be deduced) from God's essence. In other words, Spinoza's modes *are* God's *propria*.¹⁰¹

Before we conclude our discussion of modes, let me point out that Michael Della Rocca recently defended a view that has some crucial features in common with Curley's interpretation. Unlike Curley, Della Rocca believes that modes inhere in, and are states of, the substance.¹⁰² Yet, Della Rocca argues that the inherence relation (i.e. the "*in alio*" relation between modes and the substance) and the causal relation are strictly identical.¹⁰³ The ensuing view is a bold and odd notion of inherence that allows for one mode to inhere in more than one subject (just as an effect can be caused by more than one cause), and also allows for modes to inhere in subjects that do not exist simultaneously (just as an effect can be caused by a non-simultaneous cause).¹⁰⁴ Some of the major problems with this interpretation have been identified in recent literature.

Finally, let me point out that Spinoza introduces a new philosophical notion that could hardly be found among his predecessors: *an infinite mode*. The concept of infinite modes appears already in the very early works of Spinoza, yet it seems not to be ever fully worked out.¹⁰⁵ The main discussion of the infinite modes in the *Ethics* is in E1p21

¹⁰⁰ TdIE §96/G 2:35.19 and TdIE §97/G 2:36.1.

¹⁰¹ Spinoza uses "properties" in the technical sense of *propria* in at least three other places in the *Ethics* (E1app/G 2:77.22, E3da6expl, and E3da22expl), as well as in the fourth chapter of TTP (G 3:60.9) and in Ep. 60. It is also likely that E2d4 uses "*proprietas*" in the technical sense. Among modern translations of the *Ethics*, Jakob Klatzkin's extraordinary Hebrew translation (1923) stands out in its explicit and systematic detection of the technical use of "*proprietas*." Klatzkin translates "*proprietas*" in E1p16d (and in the other texts mentioned above) with "*Segulot*," which is the technical medieval Hebrew term for *propria* (I am indebted to Zeev Harvey for pointing this out to me). For reference to medieval Hebrew uses of this notion, see Klatzkin's *Thesaurus*, pp. 91–92. See also Curley's helpful discussion of *proprium* in the glossary to C, p. 652., and Garrett, "Spinoza's *Conatus* Argument," p. 156–57, n. 24. My account of E1p16d is indebted to Garrett's reading of this crucial text in his "Spinoza's Necessitarianism" and "Spinoza's *Conatus* Argument."

¹⁰² Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, pp. 62–64.

¹⁰³ Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, pp. 65–69.

¹⁰⁴ In my recent article—"Inherence, Causation, and Conceivability in Spinoza"—I point out some of the major problems with this interpretation.

¹⁰⁵ See KV 1.2/G 1:33.12, KV 2.5/G 1:64.9–14.

to E1p23. The infinite modes, like the attributes, are infinite, though unlike the attributes, they are *divisible*. Finite modes are parts of the infinite modes. Thus, for example, the human mind (a finite mode) is part of God's infinite intellect (an infinite mode) (E2p11c). The infinite modes follow from the attributes (E1p21), and their existence is not limited in time.¹⁰⁶ Within each attribute, each infinite mode brings about another single infinite mode. Thus, within each attribute, infinite modes are distinguished by the degree of their distance (i.e. number of intermediaries) from the attribute. The more distant an infinite mode is from its attribute, the less perfect it is.¹⁰⁷ An infinite mode cannot be the cause of a finite mode (E1p22). Spinoza provides several examples of infinite modes in Ep. 64 ("God's absolutely infinite intellect" in the attribute of thought; "motion and rest" and "the face of the whole universe" in the attribute of extension), yet the precise nature of these enigmatic entities, their role in Spinoza's system, and their relation to the finite modes are subject to scholarly debate.¹⁰⁸

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have studied three of the most basic concepts of Spinoza's metaphysics: substance, attributes, and modes. We traced some of the historical sources of Spinoza's understanding of these concepts and followed their development in Spinoza's works. We also discussed some of the major scholarly debates about Spinoza's understanding and use of these concepts and identified problems with some of the interpretations surveyed. Obviously, this was merely a cursory sketch of the landscape, but my hope is that by now, you, the reader, are sufficiently acquainted with these building blocks of Spinoza's philosophy to engage and experiment by yourself. Welcome to Benedict's Lego.

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¹⁰⁶ According to E1p21, the infinite modes are eternal. Whether this eternity is strictly atemporal or merely indicates an everlasting existence in all times is a subject of scholarly debate.

¹⁰⁷ See E1app/G 2:80.15–19.

¹⁰⁸ For further discussion of the infinite modes, see Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, pp. 309–324; Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, pp. 113–136; Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, pp. 54–74; Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, pp. 70–74; and Schmaltz, "Spinoza's Mediate Infinite Mode."

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CHAPTER 6

BUT WHY WAS SPINOZA A NECESSITARIAN?

CHARLIE HUENEMANN

He had the attitude of a geometrician and he wanted to be paid with reasons for all things.

—Pierre Bayle¹

SPINOZA certainly thought of himself as a necessitarian. He contrasted himself with those who believe that God somehow wills into being only a slice of what is possible, saying:

But I think I have shown clearly enough (see E1p16) that from God's supreme power, or infinite nature, infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, i.e. all things, have necessarily flowed, or always follow, by the same necessity and in the same way as from the nature of a triangle it follows, from eternity and to eternity, that its three angles are equal to two right angles. (E1p17s)

So *all* things, it seems, come into being not just with necessity, but with even *geometrical* necessity. And nothing is contingent, as E1p29 states:

In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.

Still, we might wonder, might the actual things—as necessary as they are—have come about in some other way? Or occur in some other arrangement? Nope:

E1p33: Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced.

¹ From the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, as translated in Klever, "Spinoza's Life," p. 20.

“[B]y these propositions,” Spinoza concludes, “I have shown more clearly than the noon light that there is absolutely nothing in things on account of which they could be called contingent” (E1p33s1). That sounds pretty definite.

Still, for all that, Spinoza left himself wide open to the charge that he confused causal determinism with necessitarianism. The difference is this. A causal determinist says that every event is made necessary by its causes. But the causal determinist does not go so far as to say nothing could be otherwise, since it remains true that *if* the causes had been somehow different, then the effects would have been different. A necessitarian takes this last step, maintaining that the causes could not have been otherwise, and so absolutely nothing could be otherwise. There is some reason for thinking Spinoza was at most a causal determinist, since, amidst all his declarations of necessitarianism, he also goes out of his way to demonstrate that singular things (finite particulars) do *not* follow from the absolute nature of God’s attributes, but from God’s attributes only insofar as they are modified by other singular things (E1p28). Each finite effect is necessitated by a finite cause, which is necessitated by another finite cause, which . . . and so on. According to the system he labors to establish, no finite particular follows immediately from God, or from anything else that follows immediately from God. This begins to sound like causal determinism, since it is not clear whether the total sequence of finite particulars could have been otherwise, or need to have existed at all. The lack of apparent answers to these questions has led some commentators to suspect that Spinoza in truth was only a causal determinist dressed up in necessitarian clothing.

This brings us to the central question among scholars debating Spinoza’s necessitarianism. The question has been how to reconcile Spinoza’s avowals of necessitarianism with the stubborn gap he inserts between God’s nature and the actual set of finite particulars. Some commentators have bridged the gap by adopting a kind of explanatory minimalism. They argue that once Spinoza has explained the necessity of God’s nature and the necessity of the causal laws following from that nature, and once he has explained the existence of each and every finite particular (namely, through the causal necessitation of other finite particulars), then he has explained the necessity of all finite particulars.² But we might think of this as “necessitarianism on the cheap,” since, as other commentators point out, there still is no explanation for why there are *any* finite particulars in the first place, nor why one entire set of finite particulars has become actual rather than some other entire set.³ And these questions seem like ones Spinoza, who prizes the principle of sufficient reason above all else, would want to be able to answer.⁴

But let us consider a prior question. *Why* on earth would Spinoza (or anyone, for that matter) want to be considered as a necessitarian? For the doctrine, in addition to being intuitively wrong, brings along notorious difficulties in its wake. For example,

² See Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics* and Curley & Walski, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism.”

³ See, for example, Garrett, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism” or Huenemann, “The Necessity of Finite Modes.”

⁴ For the importance of the principle of sufficient reason to Spinoza’s thought, see Della Rocca, *Spinoza*.

denying that anything nonactual is possible makes it hard to do good philosophy.⁵ Counterfactuals all end up being vacuously true, essential characteristics become indistinguishable from nonessential ones, and it is impossible to distinguish laws of nature from any “accidental” regularities. Also, as with determinism, the doctrine makes it hard to see why people should be held morally accountable for what they do—for no one can ever do otherwise. (Of course, one can still make sense of moral responsibility while being a determinist, if the compatibilists are right; but compatibilism was not obviously true in Spinoza’s day, as it is not obviously true in ours, so that non-obviousness must count as something of a difficulty for necessitarianism.) Finally, if we are religious in the way most of Spinoza’s contemporaries were, we will be bothered by necessitarianism’s lamentable tendency to make God directly responsible for everything that happens in the world—since everything, from apple blossoms and summer days to traffic accidents and birth defects, flows necessarily from God’s immutable nature.

Spinoza was aware at least of the latter two clusters of problems. (It is interesting that he never showed any awareness of the philosophical problems necessitarianism brings with it. What insight should we draw from this?) Indeed, his correspondents pestered him frequently with these complaints. In one exchange of letters, Oldenburg had urged Spinoza to temper some passages in his *Theological-Political Treatise* in which Spinoza seemed “to postulate a fatalistic necessity in all things and actions. If this is conceded and affirmed [Spinoza’s critics say], the sinews of all law, all virtue and religion are severed, and all rewards and punishments are pointless” (Ep. 74). But Spinoza did not flinch. He replied that his necessitarianism “is the principal basis of all the contents of the treatise” (Ep. 75). He went on to assert that “all things follow with inevitable necessity from God’s nature,” and quipped that “the evils that follow from wicked deeds and passions are not less to be feared because they necessarily follow from them.” He remained resolute in his necessitarianism in the face of all complaints and difficulties.

Of course, it seems impossible to imagine Spinoza, as we know him, countenancing anything other than a strict necessitarianism. His metaphysical vision, his ethics, his criticisms of traditional religion, and indeed the very form of the *Ethics* all are imbued with geometrical necessity. But perhaps by pressing each of these four areas with our basic question—“but why was he a necessitarian?”—we can gain a deeper view of just *why* it is so hard for us to imagine Spinoza being anything other than a necessitarian. What we will find is that necessitarianism was not something required or implied by his metaphysics, ethics, and religious criticism. It was instead part and parcel of his philosophical methodology, and motivated by his exceedingly severe standard for what counts as an *explanation*. It was his methodological approach that brought him to see all things as necessary, and even to *want* to see things that way.

⁵ Bennett, *A Study*, p. 114.

NECESSITARIANISM IN METAPHYSICS

Many commentators argue that if we consider Spinoza's metaphysical system carefully enough, we will find that (so to speak) it necessitates his necessitarianism. It certainly seems plausible at a hazy, general level to suppose that if there is only one substance, and the substance acts necessarily according to its own nature, then necessitarianism must follow. But to provide a more careful examination, we need to rehearse the outline of just how the world of finite particulars is supposed to issue from one substance. (Readers already familiar with this well-trodden ground may wish to skim the next five paragraphs.)

Let us begin at the top. God has infinitely many infinite attributes, each of which expresses an eternal and infinite essence (E1d6). By "eternity" Spinoza means "existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing" (E1d8). So when we are able to construct an ontological argument for the existence of a thing, unpacking its existence from its concept, then that sort of existence—the sort that can be demonstrated through conceptual analysis, the sort that is *de rigueur* in a Platonic realm—is eternity. It has nothing to do with time or duration, Spinoza explains, "even if that duration is conceived to be without beginning or end" (E1d8expl). Eternity, it seems, has more to do with the means by which a thing's existence is known—namely, through demonstrations. It follows as a consequence that eternal things are changeless, (E1p20c2) and that they cannot be in any way divided (E1p12 and E1p13).

Now the task is to see if there is some link—nay, an iron chain of necessity!—connecting the eternal, changeless, indivisible attributes of God with the motley finite particulars populating our familiar world. Breaking "the fall from Heaven to earth," as Samuel Alexander put it, are the infinite modes.⁶ Infinite modes either follow immediately from the absolute nature of God's attributes, or they follow from the attributes insofar as the attributes are modified by other infinite modes (E1p21–23). But Spinoza's demonstrations about these entities are as frustratingly obscure as is the role they are supposed to play. The gist of his first demonstration (E1p21) is that anything following from the absolute nature of an infinite and eternal attribute could not possibly be finite, since if it were, then that finite thing (FT #1) would not be following from the *absolute* nature of the attribute, but only the attribute insofar as it was limited in some fashion by something other than FT #1. Similarly, FT #1 could not exist in time ("cannot have determinate duration"), since if it did, there would be times when FT #1 did not exist, and so once again FT #1 would not be following from the *absolute* nature of the attribute. So the infinite modes following immediately from the absolute nature of God's attributes are necessarily infinite and eternal. For parallel reasons, anything following from the

⁶ Alexander, "Spinoza and Time," p. 71.

attributes insofar as the attributes are modified by infinite modes must also be infinite and eternal (E1p22). And there is no other way for infinite modes to arise (E1p23).

The apparent upshot of these high-altitude demonstrations is that one can modify God's attributes with infinite modes all the livelong day without ever generating anything finite or temporal. Indeed, the only way in which the presence of infinite modes brings anything new to Spinoza's metaphysical ontology is that there are now things whose essence does not entail their existence (E1p24). They exist only insofar as they exist *in* God. It is somewhat surprising, then, that Spinoza insists that the infinite modes are eternal, since he had previously defined eternity as existence itself insofar as it follows necessarily from the essence of a thing. The infinite modes' existence does not follow from their essence; but they are nevertheless eternal. So it seems one can inherit timelessness, if one's "ancestors" are eternal.

So far, the infinite modes bring us no closer to seeing why there should be any finite particulars at all. But, in any event, finite particulars brashly make their entrance at E1p25c, where we are told simply that they are nothing but modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate (read: finite and temporal) way. But, we should wonder, where did these finite modes come from? On this matter the *Ethics* is utterly silent, except to say that each one of them is born from another, which is born from another, *ad infinitum* (E1p28). Now this is truly puzzling. It is as if Spinoza has paved a golden path toward showing that nothing finite and temporal can *ever* come into being, and is ready to embrace the glorious Parmenidean conclusion that, in truth, there is neither time nor change, and all appearances to the contrary must be illusory. But then suddenly, with E1p25c, he blinks, and decides to side with appearances after all, and claim that they are just further modifications of God's attributes—despite the fact that he has set up roadblocks on all avenues leading toward their generation.

What is a good interpreter to do? Well, the next move on the part of those who wish to see necessitarianism embedded within Spinoza's metaphysics is to focus attention on Spinoza's one example of a *mediate infinite mode*. A mediate infinite mode is one that does not itself follow from the absolute nature of an attribute, but from the attribute only insofar as it is modified by another infinite attribute. In Ep. 64, Spinoza complied with Schuller's request for examples of infinite modes, and as an example of a mediate infinite mode he names "the face of the whole universe [*facies totius universi*], which, although varying in infinite ways, yet remains always the same," and he suggested that Schuller check Lemma 7 in Part II of the *Ethics*.⁷ In that particular lemma, Spinoza describes

⁷ "*Facies totius universi*" is an unusual and interesting phrase. One wonders whether Spinoza had in mind the Jewish notion of the *Shekinah*, which can be understood as the face or appearance of God. So, for example, when it is said that God dwells with his people or in the tabernacle (as in Exodus 25:8 and 29:45), it is the *Shekinah* that so dwells. Some rabbis have considered the *Shekinah* as playing a kind of intermediary role between God and the world: it is one way in which God can represent himself to humans. Since Spinoza, in Ep. 64, is answering Schuller's request for an example of a *mediate* infinite mode of God, it may be that the notion of the *Shekinah* is just the sort of thing he felt he needed to make his point, since both Spinoza's *facies* and the *Shekinah* are supposed to be, in their own ways, the nonpersonal manifestation of God in our world.

the whole of nature as “one Individual, whose parts, i.e. all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole individual.” The promise of these passages, one hopes, is that they will yield an infinite mode that somehow implies the existence of any, all, or even some finite bodies. But the promise holds only so long as we forget E1p22, which forbids anything finite and temporal ever following from any infinite mode (or, more precisely, from any attribute of God insofar as that attribute is modified by an infinite mode). The gap between heaven and earth may have narrowed a bit, but it is still there, stubbornly separating the “face of the whole universe” from all the things in it.

Now here is one (perhaps revisionist) way in which Spinoza might explain the emergence of time from an eternal infinite mode. He might propose that the face of the whole universe—the totality of all finite particulars, in causal and spatiotemporal relations with one another—is itself a timeless, eternal whole, while every element within that timeless whole is fated to perceive temporal change among its fellow members. To help make this distinction clearer, we can import McTaggart’s distinction between an “A-series” of events from a “B-series” of events.⁸ In an A-series, we inhabit some time, and we distinguish the events in our future from the events in our past. As time goes by, of course, what was in our future enters into our present and then recedes into our past. But in a B-series, events are placed into fixed and unchanging temporal relations with one another—“event 1 is two hours prior to event 2, which is two hours prior to event 3 . . .”—without any indication of where *we* are, or which of these events is in *our* present. The proposal on Spinoza’s behalf is that the face of the whole universe is a B-series, while each and every finite particular experiences an A-series. Seeing the passage of time as real is simply a consequence of being a finite particular within a static B-series. That, perhaps, is what time is: the price of being finite.⁹

In any case, let us suppose for the sake of argument that once the face of the whole universe shows itself, we have the existence of finite particulars, in all their jabbering insolence. Even this concession may not be enough to establish Spinoza’s necessitarianism, however, depending on *how many* logically possible finite particulars come to be actualized in the face of the universe. The available options, as we shall call them, are “all,” “many,” and “some.”

“All.” The cleanest possible route to necessitarianism would be to maintain that, according to Spinoza, *absolutely all* finite modes that are *intrinsically* possible (meaning: can be conceived without contradiction) become actual.¹⁰ Everything logically

⁸ McTaggart, “The Unreality.”

⁹ The attribution of this distinction to Spinoza is supported by E5p29s: “We conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature.” Note that McTaggart used this distinction in order to argue for the unreality of the A-series—arguing that temporal change, as we experience it, is illusory. To what extent is Spinoza committed as well to this conclusion? Joachim thought he was; see Joachim, *A Study*, pp. 119–122.

¹⁰ I am borrowing the term “intrinsic possible” from Griffin, “Necessitarianism.” He refers us to Sleight, “Leibniz on Freedom,” for a discussion of just how hard it is to formulate a general, strict, and accurate account of the term.

possible—red-striped zebras, golden chiliagons, you name it—becomes actual at some time and place or other. That is clearly necessitarianism, and there is some evidence for attributing such a view to Spinoza. Consider his response to those¹¹ who maintain that God, in order to be omnipotent, must create less than what is possible:

Indeed—to speak openly—my opponents seem to deny God’s omnipotence. For they are forced to confess that God understands infinitely many creatable things, which nevertheless he will never be able to create. For otherwise, if he created everything he understood [NS: to be creatable] he would (according to them) exhaust his omnipotence and render himself imperfect. Therefore to maintain that God is perfect, they are driven to maintain at the same time that he cannot bring about everything to which his power extends. I do not see what could be feigned which would be more absurd than this or more contrary to God’s omnipotence. (E1p17c2s).

So, Spinoza thinks, being omnipotent means creating everything that is creatable. The point is echoed at E1p33s2: “. . . no truly sound reason can persuade us to believe that God did not will to create all the things that are in his intellect, with the same perfection with which he understands them.”¹² If we assume (as seems quite plausible) that God’s intellect contains ideas of all intrinsically possible things, then this interpretation populates Spinoza’s universe with a dizzying infinitude of actual beings.

This is an extraordinary view for anyone to maintain—extraordinary even for a metaphysician as radically minded as Spinoza. It is *ontologically profligate*, let us say—and to such a degree that we should seriously question whether we have read him rightly. Also, we should bear in mind that there is one passage from an early work of Spinoza’s that speaks against this interpretation. In the *Metaphysical Thoughts*—where, note well, Spinoza makes the necessitarian claim that “a necessity of existing has been in all created things from eternity” (G 1:243)—he also claims that

. . . if we were to conceive the whole of nature, we should discover that many things whose nature we perceive clearly and distinctly, that is, whose essence is necessarily such, can not in any way exist. For we should find the existence of such things in nature to be just as impossible as we now know the passage of a large elephant through the eye of a needle to be, although we perceive the nature of each of them clearly. (G 1:241-42)

This indicates that there are some intrinsically possible beings (“whose nature we perceive clearly and distinctly”) that do not manage to squeeze their way into actuality

¹¹ Wolfson argues that Spinoza is criticizing Abraham Herrera; see Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. 1, pp. 314–316.

¹² Further support for this interpretation is suggested in the *Short Treatise*, where Spinoza responds (again) to those who argue that the claim that God cannot create more than what is created implies that God is not omnipotent: “. . . we acknowledge that if God could not create everything that is creatable, that would be contrary to his omnipotence; but it is not in any way contrary to it if he cannot create what is contradictory in itself [*in zig zelven strijdig*] . . .” (KV 1.2.14).

because their existence somehow is constrained by other restrictive elements in the whole of nature. This seems much more plausible, so far as it goes. But what might those restrictive elements be?

“*Many.*” The restrictive elements may be nomological. We should recognize that another role of the face of the whole universe in Spinoza’s system is to provide the foundation for Spinoza’s physics. Spinoza believes that bodies maintain their identity over time by maintaining a constant pattern (*ratio*) of motion and rest among their parts (E2le7). He further maintains that the whole of nature—the “face”—is an infinite individual, maintaining its identity by maintaining a constant pattern of motion and rest among all bodies in the universe. Thus the laws of nature arise from the necessary “metabolic” requirements of the universe as a whole. These requirements would constrain the range of possible finite modes that can arise in the universe. For example, a spontaneously accelerating billiard ball, while intrinsically possible, would be precluded by the nature of the mediate infinite mode of extension.¹³ Indeed, many things that we might have thought intrinsically possible will turn out to be metaphysically impossible, once the necessary features of God’s nature are brought into consideration.

But note that even with this constraint, the actual world still would contain a *whopping lot*—indeed, all beings which can possibly be created out of infinite matter in infinite motion, under the constraints of Spinoza’s laws of nature. In the terms of contemporary modal metaphysics: take all Spinoza-nomologically possible worlds, dump their contents into a single jumbo world, and the resultant world is the actual world. But let us not underestimate how huge and cumbersome the jumbo world is. Suppose we alter one fact about a finite thing in this world—any fact at all, such as the day on which Spinoza died. Make the necessary changes in *all* of the antecedent conditions leading to the original fact and in *all* of the consequences issuing from the original fact, in strict accordance with Spinoza’s physics. The result is another Earth, with another Spinoza, another past, present, and future, existing perhaps in some other distant galaxy or at some other remote time, where the other Spinoza dies a day later. And there is yet another Earth where another Spinoza dies a day earlier. *And so on, and on, with every finite fact.*¹⁴ It staggers the imagination, though all we are doing is filling out the range of Spinoza’s nomological possibilities. But could this really be what Spinoza had in mind? Without ever remarking upon it? Or might he simply have failed to see the full consequences of his view?

“*Some.*” So it is worth exploring whether the restrictive constraints are even more restrictive than this. Perhaps the only intrinsically possible finite modes which become actual are those which (a) are possible under Spinoza’s laws of nature and (b) are possible *given the actual finite causes present in the world*. This view, indeed, is expressed in E1p11d: “But the reason why a circle or a triangle exists, or why it does not exist, does not follow from the nature of these things, but from the order of the whole of corporeal

¹³ See Griffin, “Necessitarianism” for a fuller defense of this idea.

¹⁴ The idea here is the same as the one employed by Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, pp. 102–104.

Nature. For from this [order] it must follow either that the triangle necessarily exists now or that it is impossible for it to exist now.”¹⁵ The laws of nature alone will not determine whether the triangle exists now or not; the causation of other existent finite modes need to be brought into consideration.

Let us be clear about exactly what is being proposed. Spinoza thinks the face of the whole universe is itself necessitated by God’s eternal attributes, insofar as they are modified by immediate infinite modes. But when we ask why this triangle exists now, or why some feigned circle does not exist now, it does not help to point to the universe’s law-like “facial” features. Instead, we can only document the causes that led to this triangle, or the absence of causes leading to the feigned circle. We may choose to press the questioning further: why were those causes present, and why were the causes leading to the circle not present? Again, we document further causes and further absences of causes. But at last we are driven finally ask: why *that whole set of causes* instead of some other possible set?

Consider two possible strategies for answering this question. The first is to claim that Spinoza’s one substance, by its nature, brings into actuality the set of causes that is uniquely most perfect or most complete.¹⁶ Spinoza himself suggests this view in a couple of places.¹⁷ But it is difficult to square this hopeful Leibnizian claim with the general critique of our notion of “perfection” Spinoza provides in the preface to Part IV of the *Ethics* (“Perfection and imperfection, therefore, are only modes of thinking . . .”; G 2:207). It seems more likely that in the few occasions on which Spinoza writes of the perfection of the total set of modes issuing from God’s nature, he is only adopting the terms of his more traditional readers with the aim of showing that his view, in its results, is not all that different from theirs. It is hard to see that he has a robust enough notion of “perfection” in his system to do the work this interpretive strategy requires of it.

A second strategy is to argue that the question—“why not another set of causes?”—is illegitimate, since in fact there simply are no other possible whole sets of causes. Olli Koistinen argues that if another whole set of causes were actual, the mediate infinite mode would be otherwise, which would mean (ultimately) that another single substance would have existed, which we know (through E1p14) to be absurd. So, with the same necessity as God’s existence, there can be no other whole sets of causes. Koistinen writes:

We do not have at our disposal several alternative worlds but only one actual world, and that there should be alternatives to it is not something that is natural or self-evident. The question, why this rather than some other world, is discharged if it can

¹⁵ On the other hand, compare E2a1: “. . . from the order of nature it can happen equally that this or that man does exist, or that he does not exist.” I suppose that “order of nature” here includes only God and the infinite modes, while “the order of the whole of corporeal Nature” in E1p11d includes other finite causes as well.

¹⁶ See Garrett, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism”; and see Koistinen, “Spinoza’s Proof” for philosophical objections to this view.

¹⁷ See E1p33s2, and KV 1.4.7.

be shown that there are no alternatives to it, and [Koistinen's interpretation] gives a way to understand why apparent alternative possible worlds are merely apparent. ("Spinoza's Proof," p. 306)

Koistinen's point is deep and intriguing. If we start with a broad domain of possible worlds allowed by Spinoza's physics, and ask why this one becomes actual, we get nowhere. So we should not approach the question in this way. Instead, stay within the confines of Spinoza's system, which allows only one substance, whose nature indirectly necessitates our own world. It may seem to us, abstractly, that other worlds are possible. But this intuition is mistaken, according to Koistinen's Spinoza, and to disabuse ourselves of this intuition we should carefully trace out all the explanations that reveal that those other seeming possibilities are merely apparent. The baseline for our inquiries is that our world is the only possible one—this much is necessitated by Spinoza's system. And then we should let all vague "seemings" to the contrary be damned. If some seemingly possible finite thing does not crop up in the actual sequence of events, that itself is enough to show that the finite thing in question is not possible after all—in *any* sense. (So, in fact, this view ought to be listed under the "all" section, above; it is just that the range of possibles in this view turns out to be far, far more limited than what we initially suspected.)

Admittedly, this interpretation does fly in the face of what we would otherwise understand as intrinsic possibility: it requires us to change our minds radically about what counts as intrinsically possible, just so that Spinoza comes out as a necessitarian. And it does go against a couple of passages in TdIE that describe possible objects that never make it into existence (§69 and §72). Furthermore, if E2p8's reference to singular things "that do not exist" is interpreted to mean not just singular things that fail to exist right now, but things that never come to exist, then Koistinen's interpretation runs into problems with the *Ethics* as well. So it must be conceded that it is not completely smooth sailing for this interpretation either.

Thus there are problems with every attempt to answer the question of just how broad the range of beings included within the face of the universe is. But perhaps we should not be surprised at this. Spinoza himself admitted he had no answer to the question, when Tschirnhaus pressed him on the matter in Ep. 80 and Ep. 82. Tschirnhaus asked: how exactly do we get from the absolute nature of extension to the variety of finite particulars? The essence of Spinoza's reply was: "I have no idea. If you start with Descartes's conception of extension, I see no way. But I have not been able to articulate a better notion of extension." He seems to have made himself sure *that* our world is necessitated before having a very clear idea of exactly *how* it was necessitated.

So there remains that stubborn gap between the eternal, necessitating God and the causally-determined world of finite particulars in Spinoza's metaphysics. But what is especially telling is that the gap is there in the first place. Spinoza did not make explicit attempts to bridge it, and when pressed for details, he confessed that he had not worked out any. It really is as if Spinoza had two fields of vision that he could not bring into simultaneous focus: there is the world revealed by the eyes of the intellect, a dreamy

world in which eternal and perfect geometrical necessity reigns; and then there is the world shown by his waking eyes, a world ruled by happenstance and impenetrable causal complexity. His inability to connect these two worlds, in the end, splits his monolithic vision in two. No one has articulated the sense of this bifurcation more thoughtfully than Leszak Kolakowski:

Obviously, it often happens that humans can harbor contradictory desires. Spinoza, however, never pointed out that there is a contradiction here, let alone that it is anchored in the fundamental contradiction of his metaphysics. In fact, the roots of these two tendencies—to overcome the world in the act of mystical union and to affirm oneself in the world—lie in Spinoza’s inability to bring two world-views into agreement. On the one hand, the world appears as an indivisible, timeless substance, in which each difference is abolished; on the other, it is conceived of as *modus infinitus*, as the infinite mass of living-in-time, finite and destructible individuals. There is no synthesis of these worlds, and no transition from one to the other. (*The Two Eyes*, p. 25)

Spinoza was, as it were, instructed in two kinds of necessity by two stern masters, his intellect and his body. Intellect told him that all things must be as they are in geometry—timeless, changeless, and necessary. Body (through the imagination) told him that there is incessant change and death, which inevitably brings on more change and death. But the *kinds* of necessity insisted upon by these masters are irreconcilable with one another, one rooted in eternity and the other in change. And if this is true, then it would seem that his necessitarianism was *complicated* by his twin metaphysical visions, and not explained or required by them.

NECESSITARIANISM IN ETHICS

When we recall that the *Ethics* was entitled, after all, the “Ethics,” we may wonder to what extent Spinoza’s metaphysical conclusions were engineered with an eye toward the practical propositions he wanted to establish, and specifically what work his necessitarianism does for him in the practical sphere. Maybe, in short, he wanted to be a necessitarian for ethical ends.

Let us begin with the obvious: Spinoza’s account of human psychology, and the ethics raised upon it, is thoroughly deterministic. The two postulates introducing his account of human affects establish that our bodies are weakened, strengthened, and forced to undergo many changes by the incessant interference of the outside world. The body, in Spinoza’s view, is a bag of organs that tries to maintain its integrity while immersed in a jostling crowd of similar bodies; and its pliable nature allows it to retain impressions of previous encounters with bodies, which guide its subsequent behavior. (And the same goes for our minds, somehow, given psychophysical parallelism.) Spinoza himself marvels at the ingenuity of the body’s

construction, and admits that “the Body itself, simply from the laws of its own nature, can do many things that the Mind wonders at” (E3p2s/G 2:142). But nevertheless, the susceptible nature of our bodies and the habitual associations formed through random impressions land us in a sorry state: “From what has been said it is clear that we are driven in many ways by external causes, and that, like waves on the sea, driven by contrary winds, we toss about, not knowing our outcome and fate” (E3p59s/G 2:189).

If that were the end of it, Spinoza’s psychology would not differ significantly from Hobbes’s. But Spinoza also endows our minds with a capacity to be *self*-determined in our thinking by innate common notions, which somehow enables us to construct adequate ideas of ourselves and the world outside us.¹⁸ This should not betoken any lapse in his causal determinism, as the succession of ideas in our intellect is supposed to be as rigidly determined as the chains of ideas formed as the result of fortuitous encounters with bodies (E2p36). Indeed, Spinoza relies crucially upon determinism in order to explain both our capacity to reform our behavior in the light of adequate ideas, and also our all-too-frequent failures to do so.

Our main ethical task, as Spinoza sees it, is to put self-engineered sequences of ideas into competition with sequences of ideas that have been stamped upon us through random encounters with external bodies, trusting that the self-engineered ones will prevail. For the sake of illustration, suppose it is true that each morning you approach me with a stick and strike me harshly. I will naturally come to associate my pain, my loss of power, with the approach of you and your stick, and I will come to hate you for it. I do not know why you continue to do this, so there is some measure of uncertainty each morning over whether you will appear. I will soon develop a fear of your visits, and hope anxiously each morning that you will leave me in peace. But because of my reasoning abilities, I have the capacity to form a clearer understanding of you and your motives. I may discover that you strike me each morning because you are under orders to do so: for we are Spartans, let us say, and our general has asked you to do this, with the aim of having tougher soldiers. I now begin to understand that my breakfast beatings are part of a larger picture. As a result, I come to blame and hate you less, and I see my pain as largely unavoidable. I think of your visits as part of my training program, and not as some groundless bullying. I can even associate the beatings with a feeling of increasing strength (joy) as I understand that I am becoming a tougher Spartan soldier. So the resultant competition is between two chains of ideas: the first, which consists in my uncomprehending fear of your approach and my hatred of you, versus the second, which understands your actions as located within a broader network of causes aiming at my increased strength. The second triumphs over the first because, at my core, I strive after my own strength, and gravitate toward those ideas that portray me as increasing in strength (E3p12), and my reason, for its own part,

¹⁸ For difficulties in Spinoza’s account of self-determined ideas, see Huenemann, “Epistemic Autonomy.”

strives to persevere in any understanding it has reached, and only reluctantly sets it aside (E3p53).

Of course, the example could have been framed differently. Perhaps you are not a soldier under orders, and you beat me for no reason other than the glee of exerting your power over me. There is no advantage I can gain from it. Or perhaps I never come to understand exactly why you beat me each morning. It is for these sorts of cases—all too common, when you think about it—that Spinoza's necessitarianism, and not just his causal determinism, serves as a kind of cure-all. Even if I do not see any silver lining in my misfortunes, or I do not understand the matrix of causes surrounding me, I still can know through reason that everything is finally necessitated by God's nature, as surely as the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. So, even if there is no Spartan general ordering my morning beatings, there is an eternal substance whose nature somehow necessitates all particular facts, including my beatings, and there is no escaping that divine necessitation. Moreover, as I turn my attention to the nature of that one substance, the pathetic sequence of ideas involving my fear and hatred are put into competition with the self-produced sequence of my ideas involving substance, necessity, and immutable causality, and over the long run—if the business of life allows me sufficient time for continued philosophical reflection—my mind will strive to persevere in that loftier intellectual understanding, and dwell less upon any fears or any hopes for matters to end up otherwise.

Indeed, necessitarianism allows for the possibility of the intellectual love of God, which is our strongest and best remedy against the affects, a virtual panacea against all the troubles of being alive. It is only in very limited measure that we can arrange the things in our life so that our joys outweigh our sorrows, and our capacity to understand the determinate causes of all the forces affecting us is equally limited. It is the knowledge that all things are necessitated by the nature of the one substance that is the key for developing any lasting tranquility of mind in the face of our inevitable sorrow, decay, and death. No matter what it is, we can be assured that it is necessary. If somehow we are able to *see* this necessity in things—intuit them, “in one glance,” as Spinoza says (E2p40s2)—as rooted in God's nature, then we are filled with a supreme satisfaction for having gained this understanding (E5p27), and so feel an intellectual joy, and so experience the intellectual love of God (E5p32c). Mere causal determinism would not be enough for this. For if we trace through all the causes leading to a finite particular, and understand the causes of those causes, and their causes, and so on, we will never be able through all this tracing to reach God's attributes, and see in the necessity of the finite particular. For this we need some sort of necessitarianism; for only then can we possibly intuit immediately just how what we have experienced is metaphysically demanded by the nature of the one substance.

My aim here is not to elucidate Spinoza's obscure claims regarding intuitive knowledge or the intellectual love of God. It is rather to note the auxiliary role necessitarianism is playing in his ethical thought. For the bulk of Spinoza's ethical theory and therapy, causal determinism is sufficient, for it is only a matter of putting sequences of ideas into a kind of causal competition with one another under a strategy of minimizing any

harmful affects. But when it comes to the *highest* satisfaction of the mind—or, alternatively, what to do when the causal competition strategy fails—then we need full-blown necessitarianism, along with some ability to see just how finite particulars are necessitated by God’s nature. Clearly Spinoza need not have added the “necessitarian lobe” onto his deterministic ethical doctrine. He could have remained content with the portion of his ethics based on causal determinism, and he could have insisted vaguely that causal determinism holds even when we are not able to trace out all of the causal chains. And he could have left it at that. Instead, he went on to offer necessitarianism as a kind of generic prescription for trouble with the affects, and as a gateway to the intellectual love of God.

Let us then ask: what is attractive about necessitarianism, ethically speaking? As we know, many ethically minded individuals find it not at all attractive, as it seems to rob agents of the freedom required for just desert. But those who find it attractive do so, in a way, for precisely the same reason. When I regard everything as necessary, I make everything impersonal. The suffering that befalls me is all necessary, as is every boon. The only one I may hold responsible is the author of all things, whom Spinoza has made out to be as impersonal and blameless as the law of freefall acceleration. It is, in a way, a protective sheath around my vulnerabilities, as it turns to nonsense any thought of being beholden to anyone or of being responsible for anyone. To be sure, Spinoza does extol virtue and civic responsibility in all of his philosophical and political works; but notice that he does so only within the “causal determinist” portion of his ethical theory, which in this regard stands at odds with the “necessitarian” chunk: the first pits us individually against our causal competitors, or in concert with them against common enemies, while the second folds everything together into an intricate tapestry where nothing can stand against anything. Under necessitarianism, indifference, not engagement, is the order of day, even if it is accompanied by a private intellectual joy.

Perhaps it is here, more than anywhere else in his writings, that we gain a glimpse of Spinoza as a real person, and his own wounds, along with the intellectual distance he tried to put between them and himself. But many people are injured by the world, and not all of them reach for necessitarianism as a remedy. So we are left again to wonder: why did Spinoza reach for it?

NECESSITARIANISM IN RELIGION

As we saw earlier, when Oldenburg complained about the *Theological-Political Treatise*, he complained about its fatalistic necessitarianism. Spinoza felt he couldn’t change it or water it down, since it (as he wrote) “is the principal basis of all the contents of the treatise.” Why did Spinoza see “fatalistic necessity” as the principal basis of his critique of traditional religion? What is so important about it?

When we look to the preface of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, we find that from the first sentence on, the primary concern is over the human propensity toward superstition.

Indeed, one way to read TTP is as an investigation of what remains in Bible-based religion once it is purged of all superstitious thinking. Prophecy, miracles, and various implausible hermeneutical strategies are all stripped bare through Spinoza's application of the natural light of reason. What remains standing is a matter of ongoing controversy among the scholars, but on all accounts one thing remains clear: "Nothing happens in nature"—that is, physically, psychologically, textually, or historically—"that contradicts its universal laws; and nothing occurs which does not conform to those laws or follow from them. For whatever happens, happens by God's will and his eternal decree, i.e., as we have already shown, whatever happens, happens according to laws and rules which involve eternal necessity and truth" (TTP 6.3/G 3:83; Israel/Silverthorne translation).

In other words, there never is any magic. Everything in scripture can be explained naturally—either straightforwardly, or through a natural account of the psychology of its authors, or through the natural corruptions that typically accompany the transmission of historical texts. Natural knowledge and sensitive reading, alongside the relentless application of causal determinism, delivers the right interpretation of scripture. This approach brings a number of consequences that would be welcomed by Spinoza. First, it applies epistemic constraints upon anyone claiming to know the mind of God. Reading God's mind is less like reading the capricious thoughts of another finite individual, and more like the pursuits of science and metaphysics. Knowing God is understanding nature. Second, there are constraints upon what interpretations of scripture we take as authoritative: for we cannot ascribe to the authors of scripture any unnatural human abilities, or any knowledge that is manifestly implausible given the authors' time, place, and experience. Finally, there are metaphysical constraints upon what we should expect to see happening in the world, whether in the past, present, or future: again, there never is any magic. In short, all of the outrageously superstitious sects of religion and schools of theology—and Spinoza was no less surrounded by them than we are—are shown to be not simply wrong, but against the core themes of scripture, once (with Spinoza's guidance) it is correctly grasped.

These constraints clearly rely crucially upon Spinoza's naturalism, i.e. his causal determinism. But, again, it is less clear whether Spinoza's *necessitarianism* is required for them. It seems enough to believe that there is no "super-" natural causation. Knowing that in fact everything is necessitated by the divine nature may bring us to a clearer apprehension of the metaphysical truth, but Spinoza does not think such philosophical knowledge is required either for salvation or for a proper understanding of scripture. In his chapter on miracles, for example, Spinoza briefly gestures toward the necessitating one substance of the *Ethics*, but then indicates that he need not get into all that: "The same thing [namely, that the laws of nature are never violated] can also easily be shown from the fact that the power of nature is the divine power and virtue itself, and the divine power is the very essence of God, but this I am happy to leave aside for the time being" (TTP 6.3/G 3:83). Causal determinism is enough to get him the conclusions he seeks—and it was enough, it seems, to prompt Oldenburg's objection. But Spinoza need not have been a necessitarian for the purposes of his critique of traditional religion.

NECESSITARIANISM IN METHODOLOGY

Ultimately, it was the motivation behind Spinoza's methodology, I believe, that led him to necessitarianism. His methodology was motivated by a desire to provide the most thorough explanations that anyone could ever ask for or hope for, grounded either in immutable laws of logic or immutable laws of nature.

This desire led him to the geometrical form in which he decided to cast his *Ethics*, a form he first used in a work aimed at explaining and clarifying Descartes's philosophy. In the preface to that work, *Descartes's Principles of Philosophy*, Spinoza's friend Lodewijk Meyer took some pains to explain why Spinoza had selected the geometrical method. According to Meyer, many people had become followers of Descartes without truly understanding the arguments Descartes gave for his conclusions, and without being able to produce any arguments on their own: they "have only impressed his opinions and doctrines on their memory [and] when the subject comes up, they know only how to chatter and babble, but not how to demonstrate anything" (G 1:129). But now, with Spinoza's work in the geometric form, readers would be able to discern the foundations of Descartes's philosophy and see clearly how the whole of his philosophy is built upon them—and presumably they would be able to offer demonstrations and not merely chatter and babble.

But Meyer's chief aim was not merely to swell the Cartesian ranks with men parroting the demonstrations Spinoza provided. His hope in the end was to search out and propagate the truth, and to rouse men "to strive for a true and genuine Philosophy" (G 1:133). Indeed, Meyer could not have expected that Spinoza's work would convince everyone that Descartes's philosophy was true, since he pointed out that Spinoza himself disagreed with fundamental aspects of Descartes's philosophy. Rather, his view must have been that working through the geometrical demonstrations was itself beneficial, even if one did not embrace the conclusions. The aim, in other words, was to transform chatterers and babblers into reasoners, and not necessarily into Cartesians. The geometrical method served that end.

The geometrical method is a useful means to that end precisely because it makes as evident as possible *why* particular philosophical claims *have to be true* within a philosophical system. It provides (in the ideal case, anyway) a complete explanation and justification for those claims. Moreover, as I hope to show next, it is also a method that especially encourages seeing all things as necessary, when one employs that method for explaining one's own philosophy.

Consider what it is like to draft a philosophical work in geometrical form. You would begin with definitions, axioms, and postulates that seem important and capable of generating everything you want. You then would set out discovering what actually can be proven with them. There would most likely be some propositions you are especially keen to establish, and that desire would have guided your decision in what definitions and axioms to lay down. But along the way there would be surprises. Propositions you

were not sure of, or ones you had not even thought about, would turn out to be demonstrable. And there would be propositions that you were initially inclined to accept, but which turn out to be indemonstrable (unless you were to go back and revise, or sneak in an extra axiom or two). The geometrical method then is not just a manner of exposition. It is also a method of *discovery*, since by practicing it a philosopher attains deeper insight into what can be proven from a certain set of axioms, definitions, and postulates. And in the special case in which a philosopher *believes* those axioms and is trying to establish what is true, the philosopher develops a deeper understanding of *reality*. By framing Descartes's philosophy geometrically, Spinoza gained a more thorough understanding of Descartes's system, and by framing the *Ethics* geometrically, Spinoza gained a more thorough understanding of the *truth*.

Now consider the effect of having completed a substantial work in geometrical form, such as the *Ethics*. Supposing one has utter confidence in the demonstrations, one must feel as if the work really could not have turned out in any other way. Each proposition has been demonstrated painstakingly by careful employment of the foundational principles and the other propositions that have been established. Everything is proven, and no further axiom or definition is needed for anything. And when the axioms are accepted as foundationally true, and the system being worked out is one's own, then it means that *the world has been discovered*, and that it could not be otherwise than as it has been described. What has been established with necessity in the work has been established with necessity in reality. Anyone completing this monumental effort must eventually experience some extremely satisfying feeling of communion between the mind and the world. *As my mind is, so the world must be*. Is it then possible to imagine any philosophical geometer *not* being a necessitarian? Or is it possible to imagine any philosophical geometer not feeling the sort of intellectual rapture over this necessity that radiates from the last half of Part V of the *Ethics*?

What Spinoza found in the geometrical method was a form for expressing the sort of explanation he felt had to be available for the world. Any other kind of explanation—the kind that is grounded in obscure dogmas or in the inscrutable will of a divine being—is a way of confessing that, in the final analysis, there can be no explanation. He himself said as much in E2p44: “It is of the nature of Reason to regard things as necessary, not as contingent”—for to countenance irreparable ignorance is to introduce a contingency that just will not go away. So in empirical matters, he hunted down mechanistic explanations, and in metaphysical matters, where natural causality is out of place, he sought out conceptual or geometrical explanations. In both cases, to explain is to render necessary, either through the uncaring, basic forces of nature or through uncaring, basic metaphysical truths. It is only by rooting one's explanation in these basic uncaring structures that one can be sure that wishful thinking or human prejudice has not taken over—two weaknesses that would disqualify any philosophical account from meeting Spinoza's high threshold for understanding. Necessitarianism, it seems, was an inevitable consequence of the kind of approach Spinoza took toward philosophical explanation, as well as the kind of style he employed in conveying those explanations.

Who knows the ultimate psychological reason why Spinoza's threshold for explanation was set so high? Perhaps it was partially in answer to the endless religious disputes he saw around him, together with the promise of the new science that could serve as an impartial arbiter of disputes. Or maybe it was born of some unruly desire to upturn the applecart by adopting a more skeptical attitude toward traditions. Maybe the principle of sufficient reason was simply innate to his cognitive framework. In any case, he could not be satisfied with any explanation that did not end with the feeling that things could not have been otherwise.

And this, finally, may leave us to wonder whether Spinoza's demand for explanation implies an overall shortcoming in his philosophy. For the world as we know it is filled with remorseless contingency and brutal matters of fact. Perhaps the world itself is unable to meet Spinoza's demanding standards, and we should not expect to be paid in reasons for all things.

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CHAPTER 7

THE PRINCIPLE OF SUFFICIENT REASON IN SPINOZA

MARTIN LIN

SPINOZA is a metaphysical rationalist. He believes that everything has an explanation.¹ No aspect of the world is fundamentally unintelligible or incomprehensible. There is nothing brute. These claims each express what is often called the Principle of Sufficient Reason (the PSR hereafter). This does not mean that Spinoza thinks that human beings do or even could possess an explanation of everything. He allows that our cognitive capacities are limited. Thus there are certain things that we can never know or understand. His conviction is, rather, that a perfect intellect could (indeed, does) possess such explanations. This conviction is central to Spinoza's philosophy and can be seen as one of the fixed points around which his system revolves.

The PSR has been formulated in different ways by different philosophers: everything has an explanation, everything has a cause or reason, there are no brute facts, and so forth. Each of these statements of the PSR harbors ambiguity. For example, the statement of anything that might be justly called a version of the PSR must be universally quantified—that is, it must be a claim about *everything*. After all, only a very committed anti-rationalist would deny that *something* has an explanation. But what is in the domain of the quantifier “everything?” Most—and some would say all—uses of the universal quantifier are restricted, at least implicitly. Is Spinoza's understanding of the PSR restricted in some way, and if so, to what? Is it restricted to facts, events, substances, contingent truths, necessary truths—all of these and more?

There is also a question as to what counts as an explanation. Although it is widely agreed that explanation is one of the principal aims of inquiry, there is little agreement

¹ I am very grateful for helpful comments on drafts of this paper to Michael Della Rocca, Don Garrett, John Morrison, Tobias Wilsh, and the participants in my graduate seminar at Rutgers University during the spring semester of 2010.

as to how to analyze explanation. Is something explained when we have an account that specifies its causes, unifies it with diverse phenomena, subsumes it under law, or something else? The words that Spinoza most frequently uses to express something like the concept of explanation are “*ratio*” and “*causa*.” To fully understand Spinoza’s metaphysical rationalism, we need to know how Spinoza understands those terms.

I would also like to investigate the role of the PSR in Spinoza’s system. The PSR is often thought to entail a number of other significant doctrines. For example, it is often thought to entail necessitarianism, the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, the necessary existence of God, and the Principle of Plenitude. Spinoza commits himself to each of these doctrines but, in some cases, the arguments that he gives for them do not clearly cite the PSR. Does Spinoza himself see them as connected to metaphysical rationalism? If so, how?

1. THE PSR AND THE AXIOMS OF THE ETHICS

The only explicit statement of the PSR in Spinoza’s *Ethics* occurs in his argument for the necessary existence of God, given in E1p11d2, where he announces that there must be a cause or reason for the existence or nonexistence of a thing. If the PSR is one of Spinoza’s core philosophical commitments, why is it stated only so late in the *Ethics*? Why is it absent from the axioms, which presumably describe the fundamental metaphysical principles as Spinoza understands them? And why does Spinoza only explicitly state it in arguing for the necessary existence of God? Seen from this perspective, one might conclude that, although Spinoza believes the PSR and used it in his arguments for the necessary existence of God, he did not think that any other philosophically interesting propositions could be established by appealing to it. What is more, it might appear that the version of the PSR that Spinoza believes is a very restricted one. He says only that the existence or the nonexistence of a thing requires a cause or reason. Does this mean that he thinks that only existential claims require explanations? All in all, Spinoza may appear, at first glance, to subscribe to only a very moderate version of metaphysical rationalism.

The answer to why the PSR is absent from the axioms is that it is, in fact, not absent from them. Despite appearances, nearly all of the axioms of Part I of the *Ethics* either express or serve to clarify Spinoza’s metaphysical rationalism. Thus nearly every aspect of his philosophy that depends upon the axioms ipso facto depends upon the PSR. This is an important point because some of Spinoza’s axioms can seem poorly motivated and even arbitrary. Seen in that light, it is natural to ask, what possible interest could the systematic working out of the consequences of such a bizarre and counterintuitive set of axioms hold? But they are not ill-motivated. Rather they directly reflect his metaphysical rationalism. If they appear ill motivated, it is only because they are couched in Spinoza’s somewhat idiosyncratic technical vocabulary, which may obscure their true significance. This being so, we must first discuss some of the key concepts of Spinoza’s

philosophy: causation, conception, and inherence. These are some of the primitive notions in terms of which the definitions of Part I of the *Ethics* are stated and, consequently, they themselves are never explicitly defined. Nevertheless, we can perhaps recover something like implicit definitions of them from his uses of them.

Conception and inherence together define the relationship that a substance bears to its modes. Causation is another important undefined notion in Spinoza's ethics and, as we shall see, it is importantly related to both conception and inherence. Let us begin by considering inherence. According to Spinoza, substances are things that are "in themselves" whereas modes are "in substances."² What does Spinoza mean by "in itself" and "in a substance?" To begin with, the relation "x is in y" is not one of spatial containment. For example, modes of thought are in thinking substance but they do not have a location in space.³ Rather, when Spinoza says that one thing is in another, he means that one thing *inheres* in another. Inherence, according to an influential tradition that originates with Aristotle, is the relation that a predicate or property bears to its subject.⁴ It is thus reasonable to assume that Spinoza means that modes inhere in substance in something like the way that a predicate or property inheres in a subject. This is confirmed by the fact that he says that modes are affections of substance, which suggests that they are something like the ways that a substance is.⁵ Additionally, "*modus*" is Latin for *way*. Modes are the ways that substance is. This further suggests an adjectival relation between modes and substance.

Spinoza further claims that substances are *conceived* through themselves and that modes are *conceived* through substances.⁶ Spinoza's claim is controversial if modes are properties or qualities of substances. Some might find it more natural to think that substances are conceived through the properties or qualities that describe them than to think that properties are conceived through the objects that they describe. For example, some might find it natural to think that we conceive of Socrates through the attributes that characterize him: he is short, ugly, wise, and the teacher of Plato.

Spinoza's reasons for claiming that modes are conceived through the substances in which they inhere are perhaps easier to appreciate when we understand the way in which modes can differ from what we would typically call a property. The notion of a mode is ambiguous in Spinoza. He sometimes speaks of modes as particular or singular things and sometimes as affections of a substance. Things and affections belong, one might suppose, to distinct ontological categories. If this is so, then no *thing* is an *affection* and vice versa. The appearance of ambiguity is heightened by the fact that Spinoza often defines "mode" as God insofar as he is affected by some mode. Such definitions would be puzzling, to say the least, if "mode" were not ambiguous. Compare this definition to "a property is a substance insofar as it is affected by some property." It is hard to make

² E1d3, E1d5. Most English translations are taken from C, with occasional modifications.

³ E2p1, E2p6.

⁴ *Categories*, 1a20–1b9.

⁵ E1d5.

⁶ E1d3, E1d5.

sense of such statements without construing the reoccurring word as expressing different meanings with each occurrence.

I propose that we disambiguate the notion of a mode as follows. Modes understood as particular things are substance insofar as it is affected in some way. Modes understood as properties are the ways in which substance is affected. That is, “mode” has two senses: (1) God insofar as he is affected in some way and (2) a way in which God is affected.⁷ It is clear that these two are distinct. Consider a red rose. There is the rose itself insofar as it is red and then there is the redness of the rose. The rose insofar as it is red clearly cannot be identified with redness. The redness is exemplified by a particular but the rose insofar as it is red is not. The rose insofar as it is red is colored, but the redness is not. Singular things are God insofar as he is affected in some way. Thus Peter is God insofar as God Peter-izes, and Paul is God insofar as he Paul-izes. This notion of a mode is familiar. A dent is, for example, a tin can insofar as its surface is dented. A wrinkle is the carpet insofar as it is warped. A fist is a hand insofar as it is closed. Modes of God, on this understanding of the term, stand to God as dents, wrinkles, and fists stand to cans, carpets, and hands respectively. Thus there is nothing exotic about Spinoza’s conception of modes. What is innovative is Spinoza’s claim that all ordinary objects are modes of a single substance.

On this conception of a mode as a substance insofar as it is affected in some way, it is easier to understand why Spinoza thinks that modes must be conceived through the substance. Just as a smile, for example, must be conceived through the cat in which it inheres or a fist must be conceived through the hand in which it inheres, so too must all modes be conceived through the substance in which they inhere.

With respect to causation, Spinoza claims that substances are self-caused and that modes are caused by substances. This has several implications for the relationship between causation, conception, and inherence. First of all, Spinoza believes that causation and conception are coextensive.⁸ That is, for all x and all y , x is caused by y just in case x is conceived through y . What is it for one thing to be conceived through another? Spinoza is not as forthcoming on this topic as we might wish, but it is clear that he believes that for all x and all y , x is conceived through y just in case the concept of x involves the concept of y .⁹ Of course this raises the question of what it is for one concept to “involve” another. Spinoza never spells out an answer to this question either, but it appears that if one concept involves another then it is impossible to possess the first

⁷ It must be noted that Spinoza is not consistent in what he says about modes. He says, for example, in E1p25c that particular things are affections. But he also says, in E1p28d, that modes are substance insofar as it is affected in a determinate way. I do not know how to reconcile these two texts, and I think we must conclude that Spinoza is not as precise in his use of “mode” as we would have hoped. What I present here is an effort to clean things up a bit on Spinoza’s behalf.

⁸ E1a4, E1p25. Garrett argues that conception implies causation in his “Spinoza’s Conatus Argument,” p. 136. It is clear that Spinoza also believes that causation implies conception since he argues in E1p25 that God is the cause of the essences of things because otherwise there would be things that are not conceived through God, which contradicts 1p15.

⁹ E1d3.

concept without also possessing the second. Spinoza also thinks that if the concept of x involves the concept of y then x is understood through y .¹⁰ Since, by E1a4, the concept of an effect involves the concept of its cause, effects are understood through their causes.

Second, Spinoza believes that inherence entails causation so that, for all x and all y , if x inheres in y , then y causes x .¹¹ That is, a substance is the cause of all of its affections or modes. By the equivalence of causation and conception, the modes of a substance must be understood through the substance in which they inhere and which is their cause.

Now that we have some understanding of Spinoza's basic vocabulary, let us turn to the axioms of Part I. E1a1 states, "Whatever is, is in itself or in another." Because inherence entails causation, this entails that whatever is, is either self-caused or caused by another. This also means that whatever is, is understood through itself or understood through another. What this rules out is that there is something that is not understood or understandable. This clearly expresses a deep commitment to metaphysical rationalism and the intelligibility of everything. E1a1 thus states the PSR.

E1a2 states, "Whatever cannot be conceived though another, must be conceived through itself." This means that nothing is inconceivable, or, given Spinoza's understanding of conception, there is nothing that cannot be understood. By the equivalence of causation and conception, this also entails that everything has a cause. Nothing is unintelligible or uncaused. Once again, Spinoza lays his metaphysical rationalist cards on the table.

E1a3 says, "From a determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow." That causes necessitate their effects guarantees that causes provide sufficient reasons or explanations of their effects. That nothing happens or exists without a cause entails that everything has a *sufficient* reason or explanation.

E1a4 and E1a5, which read "The cognition of an effect involves and depends on cognition of its cause" and "Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, or the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other" respectively, do not themselves express Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism. However, they play an important role in establishing the relationship between causation, conception, and understanding, which in turn establishes the entailments from E1a1 and E1a3 to clear statements of metaphysical rationalism. It is on account of E1a4, which Spinoza interprets as meaning that the concept of the effect involves the concept of its cause, that causation is a necessary condition on conception. It is E1a5 that establishes that conception and understanding are coextensive—that is, x is conceived through y just in case x is understood through y . E1a4 and E1a5 together entail that causation and understanding are coextensive, that x causes y just in case y is understood through x .

¹⁰ E1p3d.

¹¹ This is because, as shown above, inherence implies conception and conception and causation are coextensive. See Garrett, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument," p. 137. See also, Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, pp. 15–16.

E1a6 and E1a7, alone among the axioms of Part I, have no discernible relation to Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism. E1a6 says, "A true idea must agree with its object." It expresses his commitment to a correspondence theory of truth. E1a7 says, "If a thing can be conceived as not existing, its essence does not involve existence." This axiom is an instance of a more general principle that Spinoza clearly believes: if something can be accurately conceived as not-*F*, then *F*-ness does not belong to its essence. This connects essence to conception, causation, and understanding in ways that have interesting consequences for Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism, but it is possible to consistently believe this principle and deny the PSR. For example, many philosophers today believe that conceivability entails possibility, but few of them endorse the PSR.

So we see, far from arriving late on the scene in E1p11d2, Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism is built into the very axiomatic structure of his *Ethics*. As Spinoza draws out the logical consequences of these axioms throughout the rest of Part I, he is articulating the doctrines to which his metaphysical rationalism commits him.¹²

We are also now in a position to start to answer some of the questions posed in the beginning of this paper. For example, we asked what is in the domain of the quantifier in the claim that everything has an explanation? All substances and modes have explanations. And apart from substances and modes, nothing else exists.¹³ So the domain includes substances and modes and nothing else. Does this mean that Spinoza denies the existence of the other entities often thought to be in the domain of the PSR, such as truths or events? It is not entirely clear. We can, however, say this much with confidence: if there are truths or events then they are either modes or substances. At first glance, it might seem natural to assume that modes and substances must belong to different ontological categories from truths and events. But, in fact, modes have many characteristics that facilitate an assimilation of truths and events to them. Consider truths first. Take some true statement *p*. It would not be implausible for Spinoza to claim that *p* is made true by God insofar as he is such that *p*. God insofar as he is such that *p* might strike some as a bizarre mode, but so long as we allow that being such that *p* is a way that God could be, there is no reason to suppose that no such mode exists. If this is so, then some modes are truthmakers.¹⁴ This suggestion is not to be confused with Curley's famous claim that, in Spinoza, modes are facts even though, on both of our interpretations, modes are truthmakers.¹⁵ As I have interpreted modes, they are not abstract and they can exist at specific times and places and so are dissimilar to facts in these respects.

¹² For an alternative reading of the connection between Spinoza's axioms and the PSR, see Garrett, "Ethics Ip5," pp. 101–103.

¹³ What about attributes? Although I shall not argue the point here, I do not think that Spinoza regards attributes as among the things that are. They are, if you like, of the wrong category to be in the domain of quantification.

¹⁴ The existence of truthmakers does not, without further assumptions, entail the existence of truths or the reality of the truthmaking relation. (I owe this point to Don Garrett.) But if we suppose that truths supervene on truthmakers and that supervenient beings are nothing over and above their bases, then we can easily make the necessary inference without deforming Spinoza's basic metaphysics.

¹⁵ Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, pp. 50–74.

We can further appreciate the difference between my interpretation and Curley's by noting that, on my interpretation, some modes might be events. Events and Spinozistic modes have much in common. Both are particulars, both are concrete, and both correspond to changes in a substance. So for example, a touchdown could be identified with God insofar as he is affected by a football player who scores a touchdown. A touchdown is clearly not a fact, so it is not the case, on my interpretation, that modes are facts.

I do not wish to suggest that Spinoza is committed to any of this, and I certainly do not mean to suggest that Spinoza carefully considered any of these issues. I merely wish to claim that if such questions were pressed on Spinoza, he could offer such answers without contradicting any of the metaphysical commitments that he does explicitly make.

2. THE IDENTITY OF INDISCERNIBLES

Moving forward from the axioms, we soon encounter a proposition that many have interpreted as expressing one of the alleged signature consequences of the PSR, the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles (the PII hereafter). In E1p5 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza seeks to establish that “[i]n nature there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute.” This clearly bears at least some resemblance to the doctrine that Leibniz will later name “The Identity of Indiscernibles,” which says that x and y are numerically distinct just in case they are discernible—that is, different with respect to some pure intrinsic property. But it is far from clear that E1p5 and the PII say the same thing. First of all, as Leibniz understands the PII, no two things can be indiscernible in *any* qualitative intrinsic respect, not just in respect of attribute or essence. Second, Leibniz applies the PII to bodies and minds. Spinoza thinks that bodies and minds are modes, not substances. E1p5 is about substances. So E1p5 does not apply to bodies and minds. Third, Spinoza thinks that a substance can have more than one attribute but that no two substances can have the same attribute. This goes well beyond the Leibnizian doctrine. That doctrine merely states that any two things must differ in *some* respect, whereas Spinoza appears to say that any two substances must differ in *every* attribute. But these further doctrines that serve to distinguish Leibniz's PII and E1p5 are introduced only after E1p5. Indeed, Spinoza argues for some of these later doctrines by way of E1p5, so the proper interpretation of E1p5 should not presuppose those doctrines. In any event, in this section, I shall simultaneously attempt to clarify E1p5's relationship to the PSR and explore its relationship to the Leibnizian doctrine.

Let us begin by explicating Leibniz's version of the PII since its connection to the PSR is explicit. Seeing how the PII is connected to the PSR in Leibniz's thinking may help us to see if Spinoza is committed to the PII by virtue of his metaphysical rationalism. As I have said, Leibniz holds that any two objects differ with respect to their pure intrinsic properties. Intrinsic properties are properties that are not extrinsic. An extrinsic property is a property that is possessed only if some non-reflexive relation holds. For

example, being a brother is an extrinsic property because possessing it entails that one is appropriately related to some other person.

A pure property can be understood in contrast to an impure property. An impure property is a property the instantiation of which entails the existence of a specific particular. For example, being fifty miles from Paris is impure since nothing has that property unless Paris itself exists. That Leibniz does not intend impure properties to be relevant to the individuation of substances is also clear from his rejection of cases where intrinsically alike substances differ with respect to their relations and relational properties on the grounds of the PII. If impure properties were allowed to individuate substances, then such cases would not violate the PII because the substances in question would differ with respect to their impure properties.

Not all pure properties are intrinsic, and not all extrinsic properties are impure. For example, being fifty miles from the capitol of the oldest nation state is both pure and extrinsic. Being identical to Socrates is both impure and intrinsic.

The restriction to pure intrinsic properties make sense given Leibniz's main argument for the PII.¹⁶ He says that nothing happens without a sufficient reason (the PSR) and so God does not create the world without a sufficient reason. If the world contained two individuals that were identical with respect to all of their pure intrinsic properties (but perhaps differing with respect to their extrinsic or impure properties), then God would have no reason to create the actual world rather than a world in which these two indiscernible individuals were switched with respect to their extrinsic relations. Therefore, there are no such indiscernible individuals. That extrinsic properties are irrelevant to individuation is clear from the fact that relations that one individual bears to its environment cannot provide the reason why it bears those relations and not the relations borne by its indiscernible counterpart. For example, if the world contained two indiscernible twins, Mary-Kate and Ashley, such that Mary-Kate was born first and Ashley was born second, God must have determined their birth order arbitrarily and so such a world violates the PSR. That impure properties are irrelevant comes from the fact that God's sufficient reason for creating the world is moral: this is the best possible world. Leibniz's thought is that impure properties are irrelevant to moral value. For example, if Mary-Kate and Ashley are alike with respect to all of their pure qualities, it would be absurd to think that Mary-Kate is virtuous and Ashley is vicious. What could account for this moral difference? The mere fact that Mary-Kate is Mary-Kate and Ashley is Ashley? Impure properties, Leibniz quite plausibly claims, are irrelevant to moral evaluation.

Before turning to Spinoza's argument for E1p5, it is worth noting that if his metaphysical rationalism leads him, like Leibniz, to the PII, it will be either a very different version of the principle or for very different reasons. This is because Leibniz's version of the PII is distinctive in its restriction to pure intrinsic properties, and the reason for these restrictions are found in the moral judgments guiding God's choice. Spinoza's God does

¹⁶ Leibniz presents several different arguments for the PII. The one discussed here, however, is the one characteristic of Leibniz's late or mature period as articulated, for example, in his correspondence with Clarke

not make moral judgments and does not choose. Nothing is good or evil from God's perspective, and God produces the world out of natural necessity, not choice.¹⁷ So either Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism does not motivate a restriction to pure intrinsic properties or it motivates them very differently than for Leibniz.

The first step in Spinoza's argument is to establish that things are distinguished from each other only by a difference in their attributes or in their affections or modes. If two things are distinguished from each other, Spinoza reasons, they must be distinguished by some difference. There are only substances and their modes. So only substances and modes can serve to distinguish anything. Spinoza quickly moves from only *substances* and modes can serve to distinguish to only *attributes* and modes can serve to distinguish. In making this move, he cites the definition of attribute as what the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of a substance. So substances can be distinguished only by essence or by accident.¹⁸ He continues by noting that if two substances are distinguished by attribute then we have no counterexample to the claim that there can be only one substance of the same nature or attribute. Furthermore, it is not possible that two substances are distinguished by their modes because substances are conceived through themselves whereas modes are conceived through the substances in which they inhere. Spinoza appears to assume that if one substance is distinguished from another by a kind of feature then that substance must be conceived through that kind of feature. Presumably, he thinks this because he thinks that one cannot conceive of something if one cannot distinguish it from other things. So if what distinguishes one thing from another are features of a certain kind, then it must be at least partially conceived through such features. For example, if two things are indistinguishable in all respects other than their spatial location, then they must be conceived, at least partially, through their spatial locations. Otherwise, nothing would make a thought determinately about one rather than the other. Spinoza concludes that, since neither attribute nor mode can distinguish substances of the same attribute, there cannot be two substances of the same nature or attribute.

On the face of it, Spinoza's reasoning is not cogent. As Leibniz—always a perceptive reader of Spinoza—points out, two substances could share some but not all of their attributes. Thus they could be distinguished by a difference in attribute although their attributes overlap. But, as Della Rocca has convincingly argued, Spinoza believes that each attribute must be, in itself, sufficient for conceiving of a substance. That is to say, suppose a substance has attributes F and G. Both F and G must be individually sufficient for conceiving of the substance. But if there were a second substance that was F but not G, conceiving of a substance as F would not be sufficient for conceiving of either of them. Thus there can be no two substances that share an attribute.¹⁹

¹⁷ E1app.

¹⁸ Assuming that since modes are nonessential ways of being a substance they can be accurately called "accidents."

¹⁹ Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Substance Monism."

We are now in a position to summarize the core of Spinoza's argument. His begins by assuming that: (1) if two things are different then they are conceived of differently, and (2) things are conceived through their essences. From (2) follows (3) conceiving an attribute that expresses the essence of a substance is sufficient for conceiving of that substance. So if there were two substances that shared an attribute, it would follow from (3) that each substance could be conceived through that attribute. But this would violate (1). So neither substance could be conceived through that attribute. This contradicts (3). From this it follows that no two substances share an attribute. None of Spinoza's assumptions appear to be closely related to the PSR. They relate instead to his theory of conception and essence. No doubt this theory has important consequences for the PSR, especially given Spinoza's belief that one thing is conceived through another just in case the one is understood through the other. But those consequences for the PSR are downstream from the assumptions of E1p5d. They do not feed forward from the PSR to E1p5d. Thus Spinoza's version of the PII, unlike Leibniz's does not derive from the PSR, at least in the demonstration of E1p5.

Della Rocca has argued that, although the demonstration of E1p5 does not explicitly depend upon the PSR, it is possible, nonetheless, to discern a connection. He says:

One can see that [Spinoza's version of the PII] turns on the notion of explaining non-identity and, as such, one can see its roots in the PSR. Non-identities, by the PSR, require explanation, and the way to explain non-identity is to appeal to some difference in properties. (Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 47)

Might the PSR lurk behind E1p5 as an unarticulated motivation? It is not entirely implausible since Spinoza clearly believes that everything has an explanation, and so we might infer that identities have an explanation. But there is, nonetheless, reason for skepticism. As noted earlier, universal quantifiers are rarely (if ever) unrestricted and not all metaphysical rationalists think that identities require explanation. We have already seen that, in Leibniz, the PII follows, in part, from the PSR but not because identities require explanation.²⁰ It is because God's choice of a world must be motivated and nothing could motivate God to choose between worlds that were indiscernible with respect to their qualitative features but discernible with respect to their non-qualitative features. Indeed, for Leibniz, the sufficient reason for a necessary truth is always an identity. He never suggests that the identities themselves require an explanation.

²⁰ One might point to "Primary Truths" as a text in which Leibniz does indeed claim that identities require an explanation. He writes that "in nature, there cannot be two individual things that differ in number alone. For it certainly must be possible to explain why they are different, and that explanation must derive from some difference they contain" (pp. 31–32). This text says only that nonidentities must have explanations. Perhaps one might think that if qualitative diversity explains nonidentity then qualitative sameness explains identity. But this would conflict with the rest of the essay in which Leibniz maintains that identities are primitive truths—that is to say, truths that do not rest upon other truths. In any event, the argument is weak, and Leibniz abandons it in favor of the argument for the PII discussed above.

What about Spinoza? Might his metaphysical rationalism have drawn him toward the PII? Let us pause to look more closely at how identities can be explained. The rationalist proponent of the PII plausibly holds that identities are explained by quality distributions. How are identities explained by quality distributions? Say that $a = b$. Why does $a = b$? Because (If (for all F s, a is F just in case b is F) then $a = b$) and (for all F s, a is F just in case b is F). We have explained an identity fact (that $a = b$) by a quality distribution fact (that for all F s, a is F just in case B is F). But what explains the quality distribution? Why is it the case that for all F s, a is F just in case b is F ? If $a = b$, then the only possible explanation of this coincidence of properties seems to be the identity of a and b . (Think of how scientists arrive at theoretical identifications. In the laboratory, it is determined that, for every property tested for, water, for example, is the same as H_2O . What could explain this coincidence? That water = H_2O !) To put the point slightly differently, why am I identical to myself? Because I have every property that I have. To deny this would be a contradiction. But it would be a contradiction only if I am self-identical. If I were not, then it would not be contradictory for me to have properties that I lack. But it cannot be the case that identities are explained by quality distributions and quality distributions are explained by identities. If both were the case, we would have a vicious explanatory circle. We must choose between explaining the identities by the quality distributions and explaining the quality distributions by the identities. The PSR offers us no guidance here.

One consideration that could decide the difference is the ontological priority that one assigns to objects and qualities.²¹ If you think that objects are somehow ontologically prior to qualities then you should prefer the explanations of quality distributions by identities. On the other hand, if you think that qualities are somehow more basic than objects (for example, if you are a bundle theorist) then you should prefer explanations of identities in terms of quality distributions. It would appear, however, that Spinoza thinks that substance and its attributes are ontologically on par. Substance cannot exist without its attributes and vice versa. Thus it appears that Spinoza's commitment to the PSR gives Spinoza no reason to think that identities must be grounded in quality distributions. But, in the end, the question is moot because we have already seen that Spinoza has altogether different reasons for holding his version of the PII that are not derived from his metaphysical rationalism.

Before turning to our next topic, I would like to consider briefly the question of the applicability of the PII to attributes, properties, and relations. Della Rocca has argued that Spinoza's commitment to the PII requires him to identify indiscernible properties and relations.²² What kinds of features could distinguish between two properties or relations? Perhaps they are distinguished by the second-order properties such as their extensions. Thus if two properties or relations were coextensive they would be identical. For example, this would mean that, since Spinoza believes that x causes y just in case x is

²¹ I am grateful to Ralf Bader for this suggestion.

²² Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 65.

conceived through y , he is committed to believing and indeed does believe that causation just is conception. That is, x causes y and x is conceived through y indicate the same relation. He thinks that if they were two different relations, there would have to be an explanation of their nonidentity. The only candidate explanation is a difference in their extensions. They have the same extensions. So if they were not identical, their nonidentity would be brute. Nothing is brute. Therefore, they are identical.

It is far from obvious to me that Spinoza would accept this line of reasoning. Spinoza's statement of the PII in E1p5 is explicitly in terms of substances, not properties or relations. But does Spinoza's reasoning generalize? Intuitively, triangularity and three-sidedness are different properties even though they are coextensive. There are, of course, philosophers who deny this. Might Spinoza be among them? It is unclear, but if he is, it is not because his metaphysical rationalism obliges him so. As I argued earlier, it is consistent with the PSR that identities are more basic than quality distributions and indeed explain those distributions. The same could be true of the identity of properties and the distribution of second-order properties. Just as basic identity properties are not obviously repellent to metaphysical rationalism, neither are quiddities, the intrinsic natures of a properties. Thus Spinoza might believe, consistent with his metaphysical rationalism, that attributes, properties, and relations are individuated by their quiddities.

3. THE NECESSARY EXISTENCE OF GOD

That God exists necessarily is another doctrine that is often thought to be entailed by the PSR. In this case, Spinoza clearly agrees. In E1p11d2, he both gives the first explicit statement of the PSR in the *Ethics* and attempts to deduce the necessary existence of God from it. Spinoza's argument is noteworthy because, among other reasons, it is not a variant of any of the traditional cosmological arguments usually associated with the PSR. Instead, he attempts to show that the nonexistence of God would be inexplicable and hence impossible.

In what follows, I propose to look at the details of Spinoza's argument with an eye toward specifying the role played by the PSR. I shall argue that the details of Spinoza's purported proof illuminate in interesting ways Spinoza's conception of both causation and explanation. I shall also spend some time evaluating the cogency of Spinoza's argument. By accurately appreciating what does and does not follow from the PSR, we shall acquire a better understanding of its strength and content.

Spinoza begins by saying that substances are the kinds of things that are self-caused, by which he means they have essences that involve existence.²³ They are self-caused in that given their natures, their existence does not call for further

²³ E1d1.

explanation. If you grasp the essence of substance, you cannot reasonably ask why it exists if it exists. So if a substance did not exist, there would, by the PSR, have to be an explanation of its nonexistence. But the cause of the nonexistence of God is either internal to God or external to God. If it is external, then it either shares a nature with God or it does not. If it shares a nature, then it is God, and so God exists. If it does not share a nature with God, then it has nothing in common with God so it can neither bring him into existence or prevent him from existing. So the cause of the nonexistence of God cannot be external. If it is internal, then God's nature is contradictory, but it is absurd to say that the nature of a perfect being is contradictory. So God necessarily exists.

There is much here that deserves comment. Let us start by examining Spinoza's understanding of a self-caused being. A self-caused being is one that satisfies the PSR without having an external cause for its existence. One way that a being might cause itself is by means of backwards causation or time travel. For example, a man could travel back in time and bring it about that his parents meet. So he is the cause of his own existence. This is not what Spinoza has in mind. A self-caused substance does not bring itself into existence by means of efficient causation. Rather a self-caused substance explains its own existence because its essence involves existence. This immediately calls to mind debates about whether existence is a property and so could partially constitute the essence of something. But Spinoza never claims that existence is a property, and it is not clear that when he says a self-caused substance has an essence that involves existence that "involves" means includes or is partially constituted by. Is there another way of understanding self-causation? Take the example of the empty set. It is not part of the definition of the empty set that it exists, but anyone who grasps the essence of the empty set and does not believe that sets are impossible will believe that the empty set exists. The existence of the empty set will not strike anyone as calling out for explanation. Its existence is not brute or in any way mysterious. Indeed, if someone asked why the empty set exists, it would be reasonable to doubt that she had fully grasped the concept of the empty set. So we see that existence might be metaphysically entailed by something's nature even though existence is not a property and is not a constituent of its essence or real definition. I do not know if Spinoza would view the existence of a substance as analogous to the existence of the empty set in this way. The letter of the text is compatible with both accounts.

Consider next, Spinoza's claim that the nonexistence of something requires a cause or explanation. This is, of course, just Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism. The nonexistence of something cannot be brute. There must be a reason why. Spinoza thinks that there are just two kinds of explanation for nonexistence. Either the nonexistence is explained by the thing's nature or by the action of some external cause. Spinoza gives the example of the nonexistence of a square circle to illustrate how a thing's nature could explain its nonexistence. The nature of a square circle (Spinoza appears to believe that there are natures of impossible beings) involves a contradiction, and this explains the nonexistence of them. The nonexistence of a tiger in my study, on the other hand, is not explained by the nature of tigers alone but rather by the prior state of the universe ("the

order of nature,” in Spinoza’s vocabulary). That prior state entails the current state, and the current state includes the nonexistence of a tiger in my study.

Could the nonexistence of God be explained by an external cause? Spinoza believes that if x causes the nonexistence of Fs , then x has something in common with Fs . He believes this because he thinks that causes must have something in common with their effects. He has two reasons to believe that. First, there is the common (although by no means universal) assumption in the seventeenth century that causation is something like a kind of property transference.²⁴ In order for the cause to transfer a property to its effect, the effect must be the kind of thing that can possess such a property. In other words, the essence of a thing must be compatible with the property. So the cause and the effect must both have the kind of essence compatible with the possession of the property the transfer of which is the causation. Spinoza assumes that if both the cause and the effect have the kind of essence compatible with possession of the transferred property, then they have the same essence or are modes of the same essence. This assumption is motivated by further assumptions about the structure of property space. Attributes are determinables and all modes are determinates of some attribute or are derived from such determinants. If you want to prevent something from existing, you have to block its causes. Since its causes share an attribute with it, and blocking is a causal relation, then anything capable of blocking its causes shares an attribute with it. But since substances are individuated by their attributes, the only thing that shares an attribute with a substance is itself.²⁵

This line of reasoning is somewhat puzzling. It seems most appropriate to things with external efficient causes. But the topic under discussion is God’s necessary existence. God is self-caused—that is, his essence involves existence. As we have noted earlier, it is not entirely clear how Spinoza understands self-causation, but what is clear is that it is not a kind of efficient causation by external causes. The story told above appears to be about external efficient causation. So it is unclear if it is relevant to our issue.

²⁴ Lin, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics of Desire,” pp. 31–33.

²⁵ Someone might object that I have needlessly saddled Spinoza with a doctrine that he never explicitly endorses and that his claim that causes and effects must share an attribute has an entirely different basis. Here is another line of reasoning that has some currency with readers of Spinoza. Effects are conceived through their causes—that is, to have the idea of the effect you must also possess the idea of its cause. Perhaps this is because the concept of the effect includes the concept of the cause. So you cannot have the idea of something caused by a mode of some attribute without an idea of that attribute. This does not, however, entail that causes and effects share an attribute. Suppose that the cause of some effect e falls under attribute F . So e is conceived through something that is F . Now, according to Spinoza, things are conceived through the attributes under which they fall. So if something falls under F , it must be conceived as such. So in order to conceive of e , we must also conceive of something that is F as F . This does not, however, entail that e is F . We must add the further assumption that, in order to conceive a mode of some attribute, it is unnecessary to possess the idea of any other attribute. Spinoza thinks that each attribute must be conceived through itself and that conceiving of a mode of an attribute in terms of some other attribute violates that constraint. I see this as compatible with and to some extent motivated by the theory of efficient causation discussed above. In any event, as we shall see, understanding Spinoza’s remarks as resting on this other basis does not clarify much.

I think the best way to make sense of Spinoza's remarks is to construe him as saying that the only way that an external cause could bring about the nonexistence of a thing is by blocking the causes that produce that thing. But a self-caused being has no such external causes, so the causes cannot be blocked. Thus no external cause can prevent something self-caused from existing. But since a self-caused being is such that its existence is explained by something other than efficient causes, could its nonexistence also be explained by something external other than efficient causes? Could there be an explanation of the nonexistence of a self-caused being that cited factors external to the nature of the thing? Take the case of the empty set. The notion of the empty set is not incoherent, so if it did not exist, its nonexistence would be explained, presumably, by something external. What could that be? Surely not an external efficient cause. Still someone might reasonably believe both that the empty set does not exist and that this nonexistence has an explanation. For example, it might be explained by the fact that everything that exists must be concrete. Since the empty set is abstract, it does not exist. The fact that only concrete things exist does not need to share an attribute with the empty set in order to explain its nonexistence since it is not achieving that via blocking the empty set's external efficient causes.

It is difficult even to formulate these questions in terms of Spinoza's metaphysics. Of what attribute is God insofar as he is such that the empty set does not exist a mode? Of what attribute is God insofar as he is such that everything that exists is concrete? Thought? Extension? Neither of these seem correct. Is this evidence that we have made a wrong turn? Would Spinoza then see our questions as somehow ill formed? On what grounds? It is far from clear what justification Spinoza has for his conviction that thought and extension are the only known attributes. And he himself holds true many statements that cannot be easily construed as being made true by a mode of either thought or extension. For example, Spinoza believes that whatever is must be in itself or in another. Is that made true by a mode of extension? A mode of thought? The problem is not that Spinoza does not recognize any ontological categories apart from substance and mode. Rather such difficulties arise from his insistence that all modes are modes of either extension or thought. In any event, the anti-platonist's claim that the empty set does not exist would not need to be explained by something blocking the external causes of the empty set's existence. So it is unclear why the factors that explain the nonexistence of the empty set need to share a nature with the empty set.

Before we turn our attention to Spinoza's argument for the claim that there can be no internal cause of God's nonexistence, we should pause to note that it is also not obvious that, even granting all of Spinoza's assumptions about efficient causation, in order to block God's existence, an external efficient cause would have to share God's essence *completely*. Partial overlap may suffice. God is by definition a substance with infinitely many attributes. So to have God's essence, a substance would have to have infinitely many attributes. But why could a merely extended substance, for example, not block God's existence? After all, there can only be one substance per attribute. So if a merely extended substance existed, that would, all by itself, preclude the existence of any other extended substance, including God. Some commentators have argued that Spinoza's

response to this objection can be discerned in the third and fourth arguments contained in E1p11.²⁶ Important and interesting issues pertaining to power, infinity, and reality as Spinoza understands them are raised by these arguments, but consideration of them would divert us from our topic, the PSR, so I shall set them aside in this paper.

Let us next consider Spinoza's argument for the conclusion that the nature of God cannot account for God's nonexistence. Spinoza's argument has two main premises. The first is that God, by definition, is a substance and all substances have essences that involve existence. In other words, substances are self-caused. So, by definition, if God exists, then God is self-caused—that is, his existence would call out for no further explanation. The second is the claim that it is absurd to think that a perfect being has a contradictory essence. These two premises purport to rule out the two ways that God's nature could explain God's nonexistence. The first way is by lacking the power to explain God's existence. The second is by being the sort of nature that cannot be exemplified. But defining God as a substance does not guarantee that he has a nature that does not explain his nonexistence. Something could be defined as self-caused and yet have a nature that explains its nonexistence without appealing to contradiction. Many things are impossible despite having coherent essences. Many philosophers doubt the existence of Platonic forms or Leibnizian monads without alleging incoherence. And if forms or monads do not exist, it is presumably not contingently so—that is, there is no external cause for their nonexistence. So Spinoza's claim that the only internal source of nonexistence is incoherence is tendentious. If some natures are unexemplified for internal reasons other than incoherence, then Spinoza must show that God's nature is not among them. Indeed, an orthodox Cartesian would regard Spinoza's God as metaphysically impossible insofar as Spinoza defines God as a substance with infinitely many attributes and Descartes thinks that substances cannot have more than one attribute.²⁷ The nature of Spinoza's God cannot be exemplified, according to the Cartesian, not on account of a contradiction contained in his essence. Rather, his nature cannot be exemplified on account of necessary truth about the category of substance.

What is more, Spinoza has not shown that the nature of God does not contain a contradiction. He merely asserts that it would be absurd to suppose that a being that is "absolutely infinite and supremely perfect" has a nature that involves a contradiction. Something like this is assumed by all ontological arguers prior to Leibniz (who correctly realized that it is necessary first to show that God is possible) but is far from obvious. For example, omnipotence is often thought to follow from supreme perfection, but it is not clear that omnipotence is a coherent concept.²⁸

So we see that the PSR does not entail the necessary existence of God without the aid of a whole host of highly controversial assumptions. Nevertheless, Spinoza's use of the PSR in E1p11d2 allows us to shed some light on one of the questions posed at the outset

²⁶ Garrett, "Spinoza's 'Ontological' Argument"; Lin, "Spinoza's Arguments."

²⁷ Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Substance Monism."

²⁸ I am thinking of well-known paradoxes indicated by questions such as, "Can God create a stone so heavy that even he cannot lift it?"

of this paper: what is a reason or explanation? Unsurprisingly, we will not get a complete answer to this question, and Spinoza himself never tackles it directly. But we have seen in the course of considering Spinoza's argument for the necessary existence of God from the PSR that Spinoza thinks that substances can explain their own existences and do so not by being their own efficient causes but by having natures that involve existence. There is much that is obscure in this claim, but we can infer that some explanations or reasons are not efficient causal explanations (of the sort favored by many philosophers today) but rather take the form of explicating a nature or essence.

4. THE PRINCIPLE OF PLENTITUDE

Another important doctrine often associated with the PSR is what Lovejoy calls the Principle of Plenitude (the PP hereafter). The PP says, in Lovejoy's words, that "no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled, that the extent and abundance of the creation must be as great as the possibility of existence and commensurate with the productive capacity of a 'perfect' and inexhaustible Source."²⁹ It is clear that Spinoza endorses the PP. He writes:

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)³⁰

The PP is often thought to be a consequence of the PSR, and some commentators have thought that Spinoza derives his commitment to the PP from his commitment to the PSR.³¹ It is far from clear that the demonstration of E1p16 supports this conclusion, although I shall argue that it is possible that the PSR plays some background role in Spinoza's thinking on the subject.

In the demonstration of this proposition, Spinoza reasons as follows: Properties follow from the definition or nature of a thing. The more reality the thing defined possesses, the more properties that follow from it. The divine nature is absolutely infinite. So infinitely many things follow from it.

The most noteworthy thing about this argument given our present purposes is that there is no explicit reference to the PSR in Spinoza's discussion. The only citation in the demonstration is to E1d6, the definition of God. But prior results are, unsurprisingly, assumed by the demonstration. For example, that God exists is obviously assumed. Since Spinoza argues for the existence of God by way of the PSR, to that extent at least, E1p16 assumes the PSR. But many have consistently believed that God exists without

²⁹ Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, p. 52.

³⁰ E1p16.

³¹ *The Great Chain of Being*, pp. 151–157.

believing the PP. And it is equally coherent to subscribe to the PP while denying the existence of God. So the existence of God alone leaves us far short of the PP.

Is it possible to discern the influence of the PSR behind any other assumptions or inferences made in E1p16? It is difficult to say with any confidence. The argument given in E1p16d is very quick and, indeed, invalid as stated. (That infinitely many things follow from the divine nature does not entail that every possible thing follows from the divine nature.) It is tempting to imagine that Spinoza reasoned that if something is absolutely infinite then it has infinite power. So there is no possible thing that it cannot bring into existence. If there is a possible thing that does not exist, its nonexistence must have an explanation. Since God is omnipotent, the explanation cannot be God's nature. So there must be an external cause preventing it. But no external cause can limit God. So every possible thing exists. This assumes, of course, that there are no necessary connections between modes such that if, for example, mode *m* exists then mode *m*₁ cannot exist.

I believe that Spinoza would have found the above line of reasoning congenial, but it is pure speculation to assert that he ever entertained it let alone endorsed it. It remains, therefore, entirely possible that the PP had no significant connection to the PSR in Spinoza's mind.

Before moving on to our next topic, necessitarianism, a couple of remarks on the connection between the PP and necessitarianism are in order. One might think that the PP is equivalent to necessitarianism. If there are no unactualized possibilities, then is the actual world not the only possible world?³² Not necessarily, because, for all the PP says, there might have been unactualized possibilities. There are, then, possible worlds in which there are unactualized possibilities and the actual world is not the only possible world. In other words, even if the actual world contains every possible thing, there may well be possible worlds that include fewer things (although not more things). Such worlds represent ways the world could have been otherwise. Necessitarianism is stronger than the PP. If necessitarianism is true, then there are no unrealized possibilities, i.e., the PP is true.³³

It might seem odd that Spinoza first tries to prove the weaker claim, the PP, and then tries to prove the stronger claim, necessitarianism. After all, the PP is not sufficient for necessitarianism but necessitarianism is sufficient for the PP. But Spinoza's focus in E1p16 is not the PP as such. He is much more interested in showing two different claims: first, that God acts out of natural necessity and second, that a diversity of effects is consistent with natural necessity. Both of these claims are controversial. A standard view among Spinoza's predecessors is that God is a voluntary agent as opposed to a natural agent. A natural agent is one who acts out of natural necessity—that is, the

³² Bennett draws this inference from E1p16 in *A Study*, p. 122.

³³ Of course, the necessity of the PP would be equivalent to necessitarianism. If every possibility is necessarily actualized, then there are no possible worlds in which fewer than all the possibilities are realized. Arguably, Spinoza thinks that E1p16 is an entailment of a necessary truth (that is, that the more reality a definition expresses, the more things the intellect infers from it). If this is so, he is committed to the necessity of the PP and thus to necessitarianism.

actions of a natural agent follow from the essence of the agent. A voluntary agent is one who deliberates and chooses her actions. So when Spinoza argues in E1p16 that infinitely many things follow from the nature of God, he is staking out the unorthodox position that God is a natural agent. It was also commonly assumed by Spinoza's predecessors that natural agents produce only one effect by nature. Spinoza argues on the contrary that an infinite natural agent will have infinitely many natural effects. Both of these claims are important for Spinoza's argument for necessitarianism, as we shall see in the next section.

5. NECESSITARIANISM

Another alleged consequence of metaphysical rationalism is necessitarianism. Indeed, this alleged consequence is sometimes cited as a refutation of metaphysical rationalism. But, as always, one philosopher's *modus tollens* is another's *modus ponens*: Spinoza believes that rationalism entails necessitarianism and so accepts necessitarianism.

At first glance, it might appear that Spinoza's argument for necessitarianism doesn't rely upon the PSR. He writes:

E1p29: In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things, from the necessity of the divine nature, have been determined to exist and act [*operandum*] in a certain way.

Whatever is, is in God (by E1p15); but God cannot be called a contingent thing. For (by E1p11) he exists necessarily, not contingently. Next, the modes of the divine nature have also followed from it necessarily and not contingently (by E1p16); and they either follow from the divine nature insofar as it is considered absolutely (by E1p21) or insofar as it is considered to be determined to act in a certain way (by E1p28). Further, God is not just the cause of these modes insofar as they exist (by E1p24c), but also (by E1p26) insofar as they are considered to be determined to produce an effect. For if they have not been determined by God, then (by E1p26) it is impossible, not contingent, that they should determine themselves. Conversely (by E1p27) if they have been determined by God, it is not contingent, but impossible, that they should render themselves undetermined. So all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature, not only to exist, but to exist in a certain way, and to produce effects in a certain way. There is nothing contingent, q.e.d.

The main idea here is that the nature of a necessary being necessitates or determines everything. (E1p16) What is necessitated by something necessary is itself necessary. So everything is necessary.

There is no explicit statement of the PSR in this text, and none of the axioms that express it are cited. Of course, E1p11, which states that God necessarily exists, depends upon the PSR, but no one thinks that the mere existence of God entails necessitarianism with no additional assumptions. But in fact, many of the premises of this argument presuppose the PSR. Let us start with E1p15, which says that whatever is, is in God. This is because of the conjunction of E1a1 and 1p14. Recall that E1a1 says that whatever is, is

itself or in another, which I have argued is, given Spinoza's understanding of inherence, tantamount to the PSR.

E1p26, which says that effects of the modes follow from the divine nature, also depends upon the PSR. The idea is that modes produce effects in virtue of their essences. The essences of things must be conceived through God because, by E1p15, everything is conceived through God. And we have just seen that Spinoza thinks that E1p15 is partially a consequence of the PSR.

In short, everything is conceived through or understood through God. This entails that everything is understood, which is just metaphysical rationalism. But what is understood through something necessary is, Spinoza concludes, itself necessary. Why Spinoza thinks so can be seen in two ways. The first is to note that Spinoza appears to think that to understand something is to possess an explanation of it. A complete explanation of something specifies its sufficient reason. If something necessary is sufficient for something else, then this too is necessary. This can be perspicuously framed in terms of possible worlds. What is necessary exists in every possible world. If it is sufficient for some x , then it cannot exist without x existing too. So x exists in every possible world, that is, x is necessary. The second is to note that one thing is understood or conceived through another just in case it is caused by it. So everything is caused by God. Causes necessitate.³⁴ God is a necessary being. So everything is necessitated by something necessary. This entails that everything is necessary for similar reasons. So, appearances notwithstanding, the PSR plays an indispensable role in Spinoza's argument for necessitarianism.

6. CONCLUSION

More than ever before, recent Spinoza scholarship has emphasized the importance of the PSR in Spinoza's thinking. This has trend has been, I believe, salutary and has led to a deeper understanding of Spinoza on a wide range of topics. It is my hope that this paper contributes to this effort in a number of ways. First, I have tried to elucidate the meaning of the PSR as Spinoza understands it by specifying the range of things to which the PSR applies and by partially explicating the notion of explanation at work in Spinoza's thought. I have also explored the place of the PSR in the axiomatic foundations

³⁴ It is, of course, common to distinguish causal necessity from absolute necessity. Causal necessity might appear too weak to entail Spinoza's conclusion. But those who think that causal necessity is weaker than absolute necessity typically think that the causes could be in place but that the effects could fail to follow because some further condition fails to hold. For example, the laws of nature might be different, but such a scenario is implausible in the context of E1p29. Because Spinoza presumably thinks that the laws of nature follow from God's essence in the same way everything else does, the laws could not be different unless God had a different nature, which is absurd. The same would go for any other additional condition.

of Spinoza's system as articulated in the *Ethics* as well as its role in Spinoza's arguments for some of his most important doctrines.

In some cases, I have nevertheless, argued for conclusions that go against the current trend, which tends to depict the PSR as *the* central idea driving Spinoza's thinking. For example, I have argued that Spinoza's version of the PII as articulated in E1p5 does not follow from the PSR but rather derives from other, unrelated assumptions. Moreover, I have argued against the idea that the PII can be straightforwardly applied to anything other than substances as some influential commentators have assumed. I have also argued that, in opposition to a well-established interpretative tradition, the importance of the PSR to Spinoza's Principle of Plenitude is far from clear.

In short, the picture of Spinoza that emerges from this essay is one of a deeply committed metaphysical rationalist whose philosophy nevertheless cannot be reduced to simply the systematic working out of the consequences of the PSR. Spinoza's thought is more variegated and multifaceted than that. I do not want to deny, however, that the PSR is a defining feature of Spinoza's system. I merely want to emphasize that is not the only one.

Finally, I must admit that the present effort only begins to scrape the surface of the topic of Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism. I have left unexplored the role of the PSR in Spinoza's philosophy of mind, his physics, his moral psychology, his ethics, and his political philosophy. Although the PSR is often thought of as a purely metaphysical doctrine, I believe that it is possible to discern its influence in these other areas of Spinoza's thought.³⁵ Consideration of such issues is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this paper. There is more work to be done.

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³⁵ See Della Rocca's *Spinoza* for a bold foray into the connection between these issues and Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism.

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CHAPTER 8

SPINOZA AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

Mathematics, Motion, and Being

ERIC SCHLIESSER

“Being finite is really, in part, a negation.”

(E1p8s1)

INTRODUCTION

THIS chapter argues that the standard conception of Spinoza as a fellow-traveling mechanical philosopher and proto-scientific naturalist is misleading.¹ It argues, first, that Spinoza’s account of the proper method for the study of nature presented in the *Theological-Political Treatise* points away from the one commonly associated with the mechanical philosophy. Moreover, throughout his works Spinoza’s views on the very possibility of knowledge of nature are decidedly skeptical (as specified herein). Third,

¹ As should be clear from what follows, this chapter is primarily devoted to Spinoza’s views on mechanics and what we would call philosophy of science. (For useful comments on the many ways science can be used in context of Spinoza’s life and works, see Gabbey, “Spinoza’s Natural Science.”) I remain largely silent on Spinoza’s contributions to the human and interpretive sciences. I defer to future research a thorough analysis of Spinoza through an optical lens.

When I started researching this paper I was very much a novice in Spinozistic matters. I am very grateful to Michael Della Rocca for his encouragement. On earlier drafts of this chapter and related works I have been privileged to receive detailed and thorough comments from a true community of scholars, including from Alex Douglas, Alan Gabbey, Don Garrett, Helen Hattab, Bryce Huebner, Michael Le Buffe, Charlie Huenemann, Monte Johnson, Mogens Laerke, Steve Nadler, Alison Peterman,

in the seventeenth-century debates over proper methods in the sciences, Spinoza sided with those who criticized the aspirations of the physico-mathematicians such as Galileo, Huygens, Wallis, and Wren who thought the application of mathematics to nature was the way to make progress. In particular, he offers grounds for doubting their confidence in the significance of measurement as well as their piecemeal methodology (see section 2). Along the way, this chapter offers a new interpretation of common notions in the context of treating Spinoza's account of motion (see section 3).

Scholarship on Spinoza routinely portrays him as a second-generation, fellow traveler of the so-called mechanical philosophy, that is, the intellectual movement that sees the world as a machine and aims to explain natural phenomena with reference to the size, shape, and motion of bodies.² Besides offering a very intelligent introduction to it in DPP, Spinoza was familiar with the aspirations of that program in the Royal Society (see Ep. 3). Descartes and Boyle are, despite their disagreements, often taken to be paradigmatic mechanical philosophers.³ Spinoza also thought of Bacon as one of the project's founders (Ep. 6). Within the mechanical philosophy, mathematical laws of motion and the rules of collision are the foundational explanatory principles. During Spinoza's lifetime, in 1669, Huygens, Wallis, and Wren rejected Descartes's foundational approach, and, despite some subtle differences in their metaphysical conceptions of space and motion, independently established a consensus concerning the proper mathematical formulation of the rules of collision; it was claimed that these had sufficient empirical confirmation. In the *Principia* (a decade after Spinoza's death) Newton hailed their breakthrough. Spinoza disagreed with at least one of Descartes's collision rules (the sixth), and he seems to have been unimpressed by Huygens's arguments and the empirical claims on its behalf (see Ep. 30A). This should alert us to realizing that Spinoza's relationship to the mechanical philosophy is not straightforward.

Moreover, in recent scholarship Spinoza is also nearly always treated as a kind of scientific naturalist. Spinoza's immersion and evident interest in the world of natural philosophy is illustrated by his correspondence with Henry Oldenburg, the

Sam Rickless, Don Rutherford, Noa Shein, Tad Schmaltz, Piet Steenbakkers, Kevin von Duuglas-Ittu, and, of course, Michael Della Rocca. I suspect all the folk just named will be disappointed that I stubbornly resisted adjusting the text in light of some of their most critical comments.

Finally, I should note the existence of two as of yet unpublished dissertations by Peterman, "Spinoza and the Metaphysics of Finite Bodies," and Douglas, "Spinoza's Vindication of Philosophy," who both explore Spinoza's critical distance from the way seventeenth-century Cartesian and Galilean physical sciences are being developed and offer many independent lines of argument in support of the main tenor of this chapter (although they should not be implicated in my mistakes).

² This claim is treated as uncontroversial by Morgan in his edition of *The Essential Spinoza*, p. 216. It can be found as well in Garber, "Descartes and Spinoza," p. 64; Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, pp. 192–93.

³ An intellectual biography of Spinoza would have to trace Spinoza's early embrace of the mechanical philosophy as demonstrated, especially, by Descartes (with Ep. 6 to Oldenburg as high point) to his mature rejection of Descartes's philosophy of nature (explicitly in Ep. 81 to Tschirnhaus).

secretary of the Royal Society, and (indirectly through him) Robert Boyle; by his proximity to and regular contact with the Huygens brothers; by the known reports of his experiments; by his adoption of terminology inherited from Cartesian mechanics; by his lens-crafting; by his knowledge of optics (and with it state-of-the-art knowledge of microscopy and telescopes);⁴ by his debunking of reported miracles as signs of epistemic ignorance (Chapter 6 of TTP and also Ep. 73, 75); by his attack on superstition and final causes; and by his library full of up-to-date works on natural philosophy. All these tend to suggest that Spinoza should be understood in terms of an arc that originates in Galileo, Bacon, Descartes, and Hobbes and that leads if not toward Newton or modern quantum field theory⁵ then at least toward Leibniz's dynamics.⁶ This reading fits seamlessly into the now discredited attribution to Spinoza of two short pieces on probability and the rainbow—two topics central to the new focus on the mathematization of nature and society.⁷ More recently, the standard reading has received indirect support and reinforcement from the tendency to read Spinoza as source of (radical) Enlightenment thought, which is taken to be “pro-science.”⁸

One problem the standard interpretation faces is Spinoza's near-complete absence in works on the history of science. Even the great Dijksterhuis, who was not shy about noting the Dutch contribution toward the mechanization of the universe, fails to mention Spinoza. This is by no means a fatal objection to the standard reading. After all, it requires not that Spinoza made contributions to the new science but that he was a fellow traveler in the program. In response, the defenders of the standard reading can point to Spinoza's authorship of what we may call a leading textbook introduction to Cartesian physics (DPP). Textbook writers need not be on the cutting edge of science. Moreover, DPP is no slavish summary of Descartes, but it offers genuine innovations

⁴ See, for example, the lovely research by Kevin von Duuglas-Ittu, a very creative independent scholar, at “Deciphering Spinoza's Optical Letters”; for more of his research on Spinoza, see <http://kvond.wordpress.com/spinozas-foci/>.

⁵ Jonas, “Parallelism and Complementarity”; see also the very influential Bennett, *A Study*, p. 92.

⁶ See, for example, Viljanen, “Field Metaphysic.” Viljanen offers a brilliant defense of Bennett's field metaphysic and sees Spinoza as solving the metaphysics required for motion.

⁷ As recently as 1985 Petry felt secure in attributing two anonymous pieces, *Stelkonstige reeckening van den regenboog* and *Reeckening van kansen*, published anonymously in 1687 to Spinoza in his edition of *Spinoza's Algebraic calculation of the rainbow*; & *Calculation of chances*. As Petry notes in his editorial introduction, there is considerable evidence that Spinoza composed and probably burned a short treatise on the rainbow, but there is no evidence that he ever composed a treatment on probability. The attribution of these pieces to Spinoza has been decisively refuted in De Vet, “Was Spinoza de auteur”; De Vet shows Salomon Dierquens is the most likely author in “Salomon Dierquens.”

⁸ Jonathan Israel is quite aware of the contrast between, say, Newton and Locke (the emblematic figures of so-called moderate Enlightenment) and Spinoza (the inspiration of the so-called radical Enlightenment), but he still closely identifies Spinoza with science, the scientific revolution and even “mathematical logic;” see Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 242. The whole of this chapter is meant as a challenge to Israel's views.

on Descartes's *Principles*.⁹ Moreover, there is evidence that Spinoza was collaborating with Johannes Hudde, then one of Europe's foremost mathematicians on building a very powerful telescope (see the closing paragraph of Ep. 36).¹⁰

Nevertheless, the standard reading has had to ignore some inconvenient evidence about the eighteenth-century reception of Spinoza; Newtonians were very eager to distance Newton from Spinoza and provided some of the most informed and detailed criticism of Spinoza's metaphysics and physics.¹¹ While the motives of these critics may have been religious or social (which explains some of the vehemence of their attacks on Spinoza) and their criticism may have been in some respects anachronistic (after all, Spinoza could not have anticipated Newton), the existence of the Newtonian rejection of Spinoza alerts us to the fact that at least one group of informed natural philosophers did not consider Spinoza as a fellow traveler at all. Of course, Newtonians objected to Cartesian physics more generally, so this criticism is in some respects to be expected. However as I argue here, some of their criticism alerts us to the shortcomings in Spinoza's conception of motion in particular.

1. KNOWLEDGE OF NATURE

In this section I analyze Spinoza's proposed, sophisticated method for empirical inquiry into nature. In particular, I characterize Spinoza's rather pessimistic stance on our ability to have knowledge of the physical world. In doing so I analyze what Spinoza means by *definition* and how it relates to empirical inquiry.

1A. Method: Empirical Inquiry into Nature

In a letter to Blyenbergh, Spinoza wrote, "Ethics, . . . as everyone knows, ought to be based on metaphysics and physics" (Ep. 38). Yet in the *Ethics* Spinoza is surprisingly terse about the nature of physics and its relationship to metaphysics and ethics. We learn little explicitly about their inner relationship and their methodologies. However, in Chapter 7 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza elaborates on scientific method, so I turn there first.

In the context of explaining his method of interpreting Scripture, Spinoza says:

[It] does not differ at all from the method of interpreting nature, but agrees with it completely. For just as the method of interpreting nature consists above all in putting together a history of nature, from which, as from certain data, we infer the definitions

⁹ See Gabbey, "Spinoza's Natural Science."

¹⁰ For discussion see von Duuglas-Ittu, "Spinoza's Lens-Grinding Equipment."

¹¹ See also Schliesser, "Newton and Spinoza."

of natural things, so also to interpret Scripture it is necessary to prepare a straightforward history of Scripture and to infer the mind of the authors of Scripture from it, by legitimate reasonings, as from certain data and principles. (TTP 7/G 3:98)¹²

This passage has attracted a lot of attention from people who wish to understand Spinoza's controversial reading of the Bible.¹³ But here I focus on what it implies about what Spinoza thinks about the study of nature.

At first, Spinoza suggests that the study of nature consists of two inductive steps. First we create a *history*, and second we infer from it the *definitions* of things. I discuss the meaning of these crucial terms in light of Spinoza's natural philosophy and metaphysics in turn. From what Spinoza says a few paragraphs down ("collect the sayings of each book and organize them under main headings so that we can readily find all those concerning the same subject") about how to approach Scripture we can infer that in the context of inquiry, by history Spinoza means creating lists or tables of natural events ordered by topic. As Alan Gabbey points out, this sounds like a step in the method of natural history Bacon promotes.¹⁴ From Ep. 2, we can infer that Spinoza had read Bacon's *New Organon*. If we take the strict analogy between the study of nature and the interpretation of scripture seriously, then Spinoza also means to imply that we carefully note the circumstances in which events are recorded and transmitted to use (cf. TTP 7/G 3:101).

Now it is easy to ridicule this extreme inductivism, but Spinoza offers a number of constraints on it. For example, "in examining natural things we strive, before all else, to investigate the things which are most universal and common to the whole of nature—viz., motion and rest, and their laws and rules, which nature always observes and through which it continuously acts and from these we proceed gradually to other less universal things" (TTP 7/G 3:102). Rather than making lists of everything, the inquiry of nature *should* focus on the study of motion and rest and their laws and rules because it is most universal and common. (In 3B I explore such common notions.) Two important points follow from this: first, the study of motion and of rest is foundational; second, if one were to know the laws of motion and rest one could use these to constrain subsequent research. These points make Spinoza appear to be a mechanical philosopher.

Moreover, to readers accustomed to thinking of Spinoza as offering a great deductive system, it must be tempting to go a step further and suggest, third, that Spinoza proposes we deduce all other phenomena from the laws of motion; in TTP he does not advocate this position unambiguously.¹⁵ Spinoza's *Political Treatise* suggests that there is indeed a deductive step after we have relied on experience (induction) to reach proper understanding of things (i.e., definitions; see TP 1.4; TP 2.1; TP 3.1). But there is no

¹² References to the *Theological-Political Treatise* are to the recently published Curley edition.

¹³ See, e.g., Popkin, "Spinoza and Bible Scholarship," p. 397.

¹⁴ Gabbey, "Spinoza's Natural Science."

¹⁵ TTP 7/G 3:103 is also ambiguous: "Once this universal teaching of Scripture is rightly known, we must proceed next to other, less universal things, which nevertheless concern how we ordinarily conduct our lives and which flow from this universal teaching like streams. For example, all the particular external actions of true virtue, which can only be put to work on a given occasion."

evidence that this deduction proceeds from the laws of motion or collision. In fact, in TdIE Spinoza insists that “from universal axioms alone the intellect cannot descend to singulars [*singularia*], since axioms extend to infinity, and do not determine the intellect to the contemplation of one singular thing rather than another” (TdIE §93). That is, the inductive and deductive steps are connected by and come together in “true and legitimate” definitions of created beings—not the laws of motion. In fact, TdIE is quite explicit that “we ought to seek knowledge of particulars as much as possible” (TdIE §98; *Unde cognitio particularium quam maxime nobis quaerenda est.*)¹⁶ Of course, TdIE appears as an incomplete work, but as I show there is little reason to think Spinoza changed his mind fundamentally on the main issues treated in this chapter.

Much ink has been spilled in relating Spinoza’s mechanical philosophy to Descartes’s program for the sciences.¹⁷ But it has been little noticed that Spinoza seems to have had no interest in articulating the laws of nature. In fact, when Spinoza deals with Descartes’s laws of nature in DPP he does not even label them laws!¹⁸ In Spinoza’s mature works there is no indication that he thinks of “laws of nature” as explanatory principles (or Cartesian “secondary causes”). If anything he seems to have been a nominalist about laws of nature (TdIE §101).¹⁹ Of course, some might see in Spinoza a nominalist of quite a general sort. However, despite Spinoza’s attacks on Platonic forms and Aristotelian universals (E2p40s1), Spinoza does believe that there are natures—for example, a *Causa Sui* has a nature (E1d1), and so do humans (E4p19). None of this is to deny that Spinoza often talks of the laws of nature. Yet on close inspection Spinoza uses law talk to convey the idea that nature is, first, without exception unchanging or immutable, and, second, necessary (TTP 6/G 3:86; TTP 6/G 3:83; TTP 4/G 3:58). Spinoza’s rejection of caprice in nature has mistakenly been read as a commitment to laws being foundational in one’s science.

However, as we have seen, the passage just discussed (viz. TTP 7/G 3:102) offers some evidence for the thought that in a restricted sense Spinoza is a mechanical philosopher—he, too, thinks that we should aim to understand the laws of motion and rest. In Ep. 6, he claims that they explain “nature as it is in itself” (and these laws are contrasted with ways of knowing nature derived from empirical study of nature, such as visible, invisible, warm, cold, and fluid). Moreover, in the same letter he appeals to the “proofs” supplied by “Bacon and later Descartes” in defense of the mechanical explanatory principles, that is, motion, shape, and size (to ridicule Boyle’s new experimental proofs).²⁰ But given what he says at TdIE §93, it’s clear one cannot deduce particular facts from the

¹⁶ Here I ignore a complication: in TdIE §98, Spinoza is talking of knowledge of essences, not definitions. I explain the relationship between essences and definitions later.

¹⁷ The best treatment is Lachterman, “The Physics of Spinoza’s *Ethics*.”

¹⁸ See DPP2p14–7. See Gabbey, “Spinoza’s Natural Science,” pp. 156–68, for discussion.

¹⁹ Some recent commentators have identified infinite modes with laws of nature; for discussion, see my treatment later of common notions.

²⁰ One reason to be skeptical about treating the mature Spinoza as a mechanical philosopher is that he never seems to point to (geometric) shapes of bodies as important explanatory principles.

laws of motion.²¹ (I return to the relationship between nature as it is in itself and empirical inquiry in a later section.)

Spinoza puts another constraint on the study of nature: “the definitions of natural things are to be inferred from the different actions of nature” (TTP 7/G 3:99). So in understanding nature we cannot rely on, say, revelation in interpreting it. In historical context this seeming throwaway line is an essential matter because it opens the door to, for example, the endorsement of Copernicanism on empirical grounds. In the previous chapter of TTP, in his treatment of the miracle of Joshua, Spinoza had already ridiculed the idea “that the sun moves, as they say, with a daily motion and that the earth is at rest” (TTP 6/G 3:92). It fits Spinoza’s more general aim to free philosophy from its role as handmaiden to theology.

For our present purposes the main significance of this remark lies elsewhere. In context Spinoza insists that definitions of natural things are arrived at *only* through studying how nature behaves.²² He offers his reader no Cartesian shortcuts through reason or divinely implanted innate ideas.²³ Indeed, later in the book in summarizing chapter 7 Spinoza insists that “the universal history of Nature . . . is the foundation . . . of Philosophy” (TTP 15/G 3:185). That is, the study of nature is, in significant part, an empirical affair in Spinoza.²⁴ Spinoza’s commitment to empirical inquiry is illustrated by Ep. 41 to Jarig Jelles, in which Spinoza describes an experiment he performed with two others to establish water pressure in a tube. It is no aberration because in Ep. 6 to Oldenburg Spinoza offers considerable *experimental* evidence against Boyle’s doctrines. From the letter it appears Spinoza had performed these experiments to test Boyle’s analysis.

In a letter to Simon De Vries Spinoza offers a sharp distinction between two domains of inquiry: (i) empirical inquiry is necessary when we are dealing with beings whose existence cannot be derived from their definitions (see also TP 2.1); and (ii) empirical inquiry is pointless when we are dealing with beings whose existence cannot be distinguished from their essence—in those cases existence can be derived from the given definitions.²⁵ Spinoza then adds, crucially, that experience cannot teach us anything about the essences of things (Ep. 10). Little wonder that Spinoza’s impact on Locke during his stay in Holland is fertile inspiration for speculation!²⁶ This raises interesting questions: for

²¹ This claim should not be overemphasized. In the terminology (and nominalism) of TdIE (unlike that of the *Ethics*) “fixed and eternal” things and “changeable” things are “singular.” I thank Don Garrett for pressing this point.

²² Nature is a notoriously slippery concept. Unless otherwise specified in this chapter I mean to be referring to the subject matters that are the object of contemporary natural sciences in the broad sense (Spinozistic *natura naturata*).

²³ For a contrary view see Marshall, “Adequacy and Innateness.” Nadler treats common notions as innate ideas in *Spinoza’s Ethics*, p. 175. Cf. James, “Spinoza on the Politics.”

²⁴ This is not said as evidence of Spinoza not being a mechanical philosopher (many of whom—Bacon, Boyle, Huygens—were very empirical). Even Descartes engages in important empirical research; see, for example, Buchwald, “Descartes’s Experimental Journey.”

²⁵ Cf. TTP 4/G 3:76.

²⁶ Klever, *John Locke*. (1632–1704). *Vermomde en Miskende Spinozist—Een Vergelijkende Studie*.

example, what is the exact relationship between, say, inductive inquiry into definitions of things and the presumably nonempirical study of essences of things? Moreover, what does Spinoza mean by *definition* and *essence*, and what is their relationship? In context Spinoza offers an interesting example of a nonempirical “eternal truth” — nothing can come into being from nothing—casually ruling out *ex nihilo* creation. In Ep. 10, Spinoza then insists that the things he calls “eternal truths” in accord with what he takes to be usual usage are not claims about the empirical world; rather “they do not have any place outside the mind.”²⁷ So an additional question arises about the relationship between eternal truths, definitions, and essences.

Unfortunately, in TTP Spinoza is almost entirely silent about how to infer definitions from these tables that list the actions of nature. One available strategy would be to take Spinoza at his word about the strict *methodological* analogy between the study of nature and scripture (recall TTP 7/G 3:98) and analyze how Spinoza infers true meaning (even if “contrary to reason”) from the text of Scripture (TTP 15/G 3:185) and then apply it to the methodology presupposed in the study of nature. It is only an analogy because while the study of scripture is concerned with “the true meaning” the study of nature is concerned “with the truth of things” (TTP 7/G 3:100).

Taking the analogy between biblical study and study of nature seriously does provide some more clues to Spinoza’s views on method. In particular, in his scriptural method Spinoza distinguishes what we may call data from noise—he discards inconsistent and unclear utterances (TTP 7/G 3:100; see also, e.g., TTP 7/G 3:109). Presumably, this will permit the removal of a lot of entries from the tables that make up the history of nature and will encourage a search for standard measures. Furthermore, the context and source(s) of data—the entries in one’s history—must be as transparent as possible (cf. TTP 7/G 3:100–101; see also TTP 7/G 3:109–12). Finally, if we push the methodological analogy to its extreme, it appears, perhaps, that Spinoza also thinks that one must have confidence that one’s data set is not merely uncorrupted but also complete (TTP 7/G 3:106). All of this suggests that inferring definitions from the history of nature is a constrained activity.

Furthermore, according to another remark by Spinoza, this inferring of definitions from history can be done by individuals who possess what he calls “the natural light.” By this (then common locution) he means nothing mysterious: “the nature and power of this light consists above all in this: that by legitimate principles of inference it deduces and infers things which are obscure from things which are known, or given as known. This method of ours requires nothing else,” (TTP 7/G 3:112; this is very Cartesian—see Meditation 3/AT 7:38). Unfortunately, this is not very helpful in explaining how we move from the facts to their definitions. Before I analyze Spinoza’s view about definitions and essences, I say a bit more about Spinoza’s views about the scope and limits of empirical inquiry.

²⁷ There is a further complication because Spinoza implies that modes are also eternal truths but that he avoids calling them by that name to avoid confusion. This letter provides evidence for idealist-friendly interpretations of Spinoza.

1B. The Scope and Limits of Empirical Inquiry

As we have seen, Spinoza clearly thinks there is an important role for empirical inquiry. We have also seen that Spinoza believes there is a method to empirical inquiry. In this section I analyze Spinoza's attitude toward empirical inquiry and discuss how he understands its scope and limits.

In the *Ethics* Spinoza writes, "There is no vacuum in Nature" (E1p15s). Spinoza was familiar with air pump experiments by Pascal, Boyle, and even Huygens. In a much studied controversy Boyle argued that he was able to produce a vacuum in nature.²⁸ Huygens repeated Boyle's experiments successfully, but in contrast to Boyle Huygens introduced an invisible fluid to account for the so-called air-free spaces inside the tube. This is a solid Cartesian strategy to explain away the empirical evidence. It may have tempted Spinoza, too, because in Part II of the *Ethics* he seems to posit such fluids (see E2a3"), but he does not mention if they are invisible. Elsewhere, in one of Spinoza's letters about Boyle to Oldenburg (Ep. 6) he seems to endorse the existence of such invisible fluids so that it is unnecessary (if not "absurd") to posit a vacuum. Boyle certainly read Spinoza this way (Ep. 11). Yet as Huygens's opponents in the French Academy, Roberval and Mariotte, remarked, this substitutes one mystery for another.²⁹

In his denial of the vacuum Spinoza also pursues a second and complementary Cartesian strategy. Where the imagination or the senses see an empty space, reason knows better; if we attend to quantity³⁰ "as it is in the intellect, and conceive it insofar as it is a substance . . . then . . . it will be found to be infinite, unique, and indivisible" (E1p15s).³¹ This distinction between intellectual and imaginative conception runs through the whole *Ethics* and Spinoza's other works (see the first corollary to E2p44 or the whole of E2p45), I quote an important passage: "We conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature. But the things we conceive in this second way as true, or real, we conceive under a species of eternity, and their ideas involve the eternal and infinite essence of God (as we have shown in E2p45&s)" (E5p29s). When I discuss Spinoza's reservations about the role of mathematics in inquiry, I return to this passage and the distinction between intellectual and imaginative (or imagistic) conception. For present purposes all that matters is that rational or intellectual conception does not rely on the senses.

Spinoza's treatment of the vacuum teaches us that according to Spinoza we are not allowed to simply trust empirical perception; intellectual conception is different from and more reliable than sensory perception. To put this in terms of a slogan, intellectual conception is a (further) constraint on the deliverances of empirical perception. TTP appeals to "reason and experience" a few times (TTP 2/G 3:29; TTP 3/G 3:48; TTP 5/G

²⁸ See Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*.

²⁹ See Bell, *Christiaan Huygens*, p. 164.

³⁰ An unpublished paper by Helen Hattab indicates that Spinoza may be relying on Gorleaus.

³¹ Schmaltz, "Spinoza on the Vacuum."

3:76; TTP 17/G 3:203; TTP 17/G 3:215; TTP 19/G 3:232; TTP 20/G 3:244; see also most of TTP 16).

In later generations Newtonians had great fun ridiculing Spinoza's denial of the vacuum.³² At first glance one cannot claim that the denial of the vacuum is a central issue in Spinoza's philosophy; in the *Ethics* he claims to discuss "the subject . . . elsewhere" (E1p15s), and he may have his earlier treatment at DPP2p3 in mind.³³ Nevertheless, its significance resides in the fact that it is just about the only place where Spinoza's *Ethics* is vulnerable to potentially straightforward empirical criticism.

In a late letter to Tschirnhaus, Spinoza admits that his "observations" on "motion" (i.e., mechanics) "are not yet written out in due order, so I will reserve them for another occasion" (Ep. 59). From the exchange we can discern that Tschirnhaus possessed a more or less complete manuscript of the *Ethics*.³⁴ From these facts we can infer that the *Ethics* does not pertain to mechanics, even though Spinoza says that his system is based on metaphysics and physics (recall Ep. 38). One could object that in Part II of the *Ethics* Spinoza does inject what one may call a short treatise "concerning the nature of bodies" (E2p13s), also known as the "physical interlude."³⁵ Moreover, shortly thereafter he insists that "all those postulates which [he has] assumed contain hardly anything which is not established by experience which we cannot doubt" (E2p17s). Spinoza's unfinished *Political Treatise* appeals to authority of experience throughout the opening pages (see also TTP 20/G 3:246).

Later in the chapter I offer an alternative interpretation of the physical interlude; here I focus on the status of experience in Spinoza. One should not be blind to Spinoza's appeals to experience (see also E2a4 and especially E5p23s),³⁶ but Spinoza's commitment to experience is undercut in the previous sentence: "it is sufficient for me here to have shown one through which I can explain it *as if* I had shown it through its true cause [*per veram causam*]" (E2p17s; emphasis added). For although Spinoza writes to Tschirnhaus that "the Cartesian principles of natural things are useless, not to say absurd" (Ep. 81), in this *limited* respect Spinoza shows himself a true Cartesian for whom causal explanations of nature are always merely hypothetical.³⁷ That is, for a Cartesian nature is often too complex to be knowable by human inquirers.³⁸

³² Schliesser, "The Newtonian Refutation."

³³ See Bennett, *A Study*, p. 99.

³⁴ For the exact details of the manuscript he probably possessed, see Spruit and Totaro, *The Vatican Manuscript*.

³⁵ See Lachterman, "The Physics of Spinoza's *Ethics*."

³⁶ For the importance of experience in Spinoza, see De Deugd, *The Significance*; Moreau, *Spinoza, L'expérience*. See also recent work by James, "Spinoza on Superstition"; James, "Democracy and the Good Life"; Klein, "Dreaming with Open Eyes."

³⁷ Savan, "Spinoza: Scientist," p. 114. My whole chapter is deeply indebted to Savan's pioneering treatment.

³⁸ This is not to deny that at the end of *Principles* Descartes offers an inference to the best explanation and consilience arguments to claim that his system has moral certainty.

This skepticism about empirical knowledge of nature is an important feature of a famous passage in a letter to Henry Oldenburg in which Spinoza illustrates man's lack of natural knowledge by comparing man's situation to that of a worm living in blood:

Let us conceive now, if you please, that there is a little worm living in the blood . . . it would live in this blood as we do in this part of the universe, and would consider each particle of the blood as a whole, not as a part. Nor could it know how all the parts of the blood are restrained by the universal nature of the blood, and compelled to adapt themselves to one another, as the universal nature of the blood requires, so that they harmonize with one another in a certain way. (Ep. 32)

Although in context Spinoza is describing a kind of natural harmony, which underwrites his general conservation law, we could label this passage (with a nod to Kant) as the Copernican revolution in Spinoza's thought. Man lives on a small globe within an "absolutely infinite" universe, whose "parts are restrained in infinite ways by this nature of the infinite power, and compelled to undergo infinitely many variations" (Ep. 32). In context it is clear that Spinoza compares man's situation to a worm to ridicule final causes that ascribe intentions to God.³⁹ In addition to the argument in this letter, Spinoza's attack on using the inductive and empirical argument from design is well-known from E1app. This suggests that, first, when he writes in TTP's chapter on miracles, first, that "we cannot know [God's] providence from miracles, but that all these things are far better perceived from the fixed and immutable order of nature" (TTP 6/G 3:82; see also TTP 6/G 3:86); and, second, when he identifies God's providence with "the order of nature" (TTP 6/G 3:89), he is not showing all his cards on the subject. Even in TTP his true views are not hard to discern, however. Near the end of the book, he remarks with delicious irony, "no traces of divine justice are found except where the just rule; otherwise (to repeat again the words of Solomon [Eccl. 9:2]), we see that the same outcome happens both to the just and the unjust, the pure and the impure. Indeed, this has caused doubts about divine providence among a great many people who thought that God reigns directly over men and directs the whole of nature to their use" (TTP 19/G 3:231).⁴⁰

Besides pertaining to the controversy over final causes, Spinoza's Ep. 32 to Oldenburg is significant because it shows that Spinoza thinks it is hopeless to expect to discover true causes in nature. As he writes, "For as to the means whereby the parts [of nature] are really associated, and each part agrees with its whole, I told you in my former letter that I am in ignorance." In context, Spinoza offers two connected arguments: first an epistemic argument—our partial vision of the universe is too

³⁹ von Duuglas-Ittu has called attention to *Kircher's Subterranean World*, which had been mentioned by Oldenburg in the previous letter that Spinoza is answering, as a source for Spinoza's image; Kircher had announced that worms could be found in the blood of fever victims (von Duuglas-Ittu cites Ruestow as his source). See von Duuglas-Ittu, "A Worm in Cheese."

⁴⁰ While Van Velthuysen may have misunderstood Spinoza on some matters, surely he got this right! (Spinoza does not challenge this aspect of Van Velthuysen's reading in his response.) See Ep. 42 Van Velthuysen to Ostens.

limiting; second, an ontological-methodological argument—to know the cause of any event on Earth we need to be able to situate that cause in the infinite chain of causes. To know anything we need to know everything.⁴¹ (This is not to deny that we do know *something*; apparently we know that there is a universal harmony of some sorts.)

This skepticism about the very *possibility* of empirical knowledge of nature runs through Spinoza's books.⁴² For example, in TTP he writes, "We are completely ignorant of the very order and connection of things, i.e., of how things are really ordered and connected" (TTP 4/G 3:58), and in E1app, "Since those things we can easily imagine are especially pleasing to us, men prefer order to confusion, as if order were anything in nature more than a relation to our imagination" (G 2:82). Here is a final example: "it would be impossible for human infirmity to follow up the series of particular mutable things, both on account their multitude, surpassing all calculation, and on account of the infinitely diverse circumstances surrounding one and the same thing, any one of which may be the cause of its existence or non-existence" (TdIE §100). Of course, this skepticism is compatible with a view that allows useful, local claims to be made with some probable confidence.

So this section has revealed six aspects of Spinoza's philosophy of nature:

- (i) Spinoza does not use empirical knowledge as a touchstone for true, rational knowledge. Rather, in the manner of Descartes, intellectual conception is a constraint on how deliverances of the senses can be interpreted.⁴³ This is not to deny that like Descartes Spinoza has some utility for empirical evidence. In TTP he explains, for example, that "experience cannot give any clear knowledge of these things, or teach what God is, and how he supports and directs all things, and how he takes care of men, still it can teach and enlighten men enough to imprint obedience and devotion on their hearts" (TTP 5/G 3:77–78).
- (ii) Spinoza associates empirical evidence with the imagination, that is, the first kind of knowledge (E2p40s2).⁴⁴

⁴¹ First, on some readings of E1a4 it might be taken to support the claim that according to Spinoza to know anything we need to know everything. But, as Della Rocca pointed out to me, all it can be made to say is the weaker claim that to know something one must know its cause and the infinitely many prior causes.

Second, at E3p1d, Spinoza quite clearly asserts that all human minds contain some adequate ideas. Regardless of the origin of these ideas, Spinoza does not claim that adequate ideas are "active" in everybody. The reference to E2p40s1 makes clear that Spinoza is thinking of common notions here.

⁴² Savan, "Spinoza: Scientist" p. 109.

⁴³ I have used the locution *intellectual conception* rather than *intellectual perception* because as Piet Steenbakkers first pointed out to me Spinoza sometimes tends to associate perception with the first kind of knowledge. By *intellectual conception* I mean to convey adequate cognition by the intellect.

⁴⁴ Cf. Bennett, *A Study*, p. 24, who argues that Spinoza makes room for "*experiential non vaga*" or controlled evidence, but acknowledges there is little textual evidence for this. I thank Alex Douglas for the pointer.

- (iii) Spinoza's tendency to associate empirical evidence with imagination offers some evidence for his reservations about empirical evidence; it should incline us to be more cautious about thinking of Spinoza as a fellow traveler of modern science. Of course, mechanical philosophers could also be mistrustful of empirical approaches to nature, so this is by no means conclusive.
- (iv) Spinoza is quite adamant that we should not read the *Ethics* as providing foundations for a mechanics. Even in the so-called physical interlude it is not Spinoza's "intention to deal expressly with body"; he admits he could "have explained and demonstrated these things more fully" (E2le7s).
- (v) Spinoza doubts that we can ever know true causes in nature.
- (vi) Spinoza repeatedly claims that we are ignorant of nature (e.g., "If they say that there are infinitely many things which we cannot perceive, I reply that we cannot reach them by any thought . . ." (E2p49s)), and given that we need to know everything to know anything there are good grounds to treat Spinoza as a skeptic about empirical knowledge of nature.

1C. Definitions and Essences

In TTP Spinoza is rather terse on what he means by definition.⁴⁵ But the second part of TdIE is devoted to articulating the meaning and method of discovery of definitions (TdIE §49 and §94). Here I focus only on Spinoza's views on definitions for things other than substance. A "perfect" definition explicates (*explicare*) "the inmost essence of a thing" (TdIE §95). Moreover, when it comes to noneternal, created things (*creata res*) "the perfect definitions must include the proximate cause" of the thing, and it must show how "all the things' properties [*proprietas*] can be deduced from the definition."⁴⁶ Such a definition must somehow exclude other entities (see also E1p8s2) so that only one thing and all its properties are deduced from the definition. We can summarize these requirements as saying that a true definition gives a recipe from which one *constructs* (or in Hobbesian terms, generates) a thing with all its properties and only that thing. That is, Spinoza focuses on something like what Hobbes would call a genetic definition.⁴⁷ Moreover, it's not merely a how-possible construction but also an actualizing

⁴⁵ The only useful remark is, "A law which depends on a necessity of nature is one which follows necessarily from the very nature or definition of a thing. . . For example, that all bodies, when they strike against other lesser bodies, lose as much of their motion as they communicate to the other bodies is a universal law of all bodies, which follows from a necessity of nature" (TTP 4/G 3:57–8). Cf. Descartes's third law of motion: "a body, upon coming in contact with a stronger one, loses none of its motion; but that, upon coming in contact with a weaker one, it loses as much as it transfers to that weaker body" (PP 2.40). But I will rely largely on TdIE because it offers more and clearer content on the matter.

⁴⁶ For the significance of *proprietas* as opposed to *propria*, see Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance."

⁴⁷ See De Dijn, *Spinoza: The Way to Wisdom*, p. 156.

construction: “every definition must be affirmative,” (TdIE §96 and E2p4d; on necessity, see E1a3).

So for Spinoza inductive empirical inquiry is aimed at the discovery of what entities are and how they are put together. On Spinoza’s account entities have essences from which all the properties follow and which require a cause in order to exist; except for the *causa sui*, this cause is in some sense not part of the essence.⁴⁸ This leaves two important issues unresolved. First, does Spinoza wish to distinguish between what we would call the intrinsic and extrinsic properties of thing? We can infer from some of Spinoza’s remarks that definitions deal only with intrinsic properties. For example, he writes, “No definition implies or expresses a certain number of individuals, inasmuch as it expresses nothing beyond the nature of the thing defined. For instance, the definition of a triangle expresses nothing beyond the actual nature of a triangle: it does not imply any fixed number of triangles” (E1p8s2). It seems extrinsic properties are excluded from a definition.⁴⁹

Second, because the proximate cause is itself an effect and part of an infinite chain (E1p28) an infinite regress threatens; for Spinoza “the knowledge of an effect depends on and involves the knowledge of a cause” (E1a4). Some commentators have wished to avoid this conclusion by denying that the “proximate cause cannot be an array of concrete causes of its existence.”⁵⁰ The only way to prevent an infinite regress is to claim that the proximate cause is God, who is, after all, “absolutely the first cause” (E1p16c3). But this argument saddles Spinoza with the implausible claim that every definition must explicitly include God.⁵¹ If Spinoza had intended this he could have claimed that about definitions, but he does not do so. In addition, his practice reveals otherwise: in the *Ethics* nearly all of Spinoza’s definitions do not include God. Moreover, E1p28s and its corollaries imply that God is the proximate cause of all eternal and infinite things and deny that God is a remote cause of singular things. By contrast, the existence of an infinite regress fits nicely with and reinforces the skeptical reading previously developed. It follows that no complete true definition exists capturing the actual essences of finite things (see also E1p33s1 and TTP 4/G 3:58 already quoted).

⁴⁸ In “some sense” is deliberately vague. Except for substance, no thing’s essence fully contains its own cause.

⁴⁹ The model seems to be the way formal causes work as sources of geometric construction in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century geometry. See Mancosu, *Philosophy of Mathematics*. On this matter, I am very indebted to discussion with Karolina Hübner.

⁵⁰ De Dijn, *Spinoza: The Way to Wisdom*, p. 151.

⁵¹ The problem is avoided if every definition is tacitly thought to include God (for example, if the essence of a thing is related to an essence of an attribute of God (as in the third kind of knowledge) or if the cause(s) described lead back to God, as Steve Nadler has suggested to me. E2p10 implies, however, that substance does not belong to the essence of man, so I see no reason to think that God should figure in the *definition* of a human or any other mode (even if nothing can be or be conceived without substance). However, I doubt there is evidence for the suggestion that there are two kinds of definitions (a partial one of particulars available to us, which we might label imaginative, and a complete one, which we might label rational), which was suggested to me by Tad Schmaltz.

One might think that there is a tension. For it looks as if on the reading developed here a thing's proximate causes involve extrinsic properties. Given that definitions include proximate causes this seems to violate the requirement that definitions exclude extrinsic properties. The apparent paradox looks like this: (i) proximate causes are contained in the definition of a thing; (ii) proximate causes involve extrinsic properties; (iii) definitions include essences; but (iv) extrinsic properties are not involved in the essence.

We can avoid paradox by noting an important peculiarity of Spinoza's project. By way of clarification, we must first note that Spinoza thinks much of what philosophers tend to say and think about what are often called "universal" notions is confused (E2p40s1). So we must be cautious here. Nevertheless, a way out of the apparent paradox is to realize that according to Spinoza essences are *not* located in space and time. This will take some explaining because there is a tendency to treat definitions and essences as corresponding to each other, but the key point is that Spinozistic definitions bring together two sources of being: essences and proximate causes. These do not (to speak metaphorically) occupy the same realm of being.⁵²

I quote one of Spinoza's most complicated passages: "God is not only the cause of things' beginning to exist, but also of their persevering in existing that is, in scholastic terms, God is the cause of the being of things (*essendi rerum*). For . . . so long as we attend to their essence, we shall find that it involves neither existence nor duration. So their essence can be the cause neither of their existence nor of their duration, but only God, to whose nature alone it pertains to exist" (E1p24c). This doctrine states that to say that God is the cause of things as they are in themselves is not to speak of their existence in space and time (see also E5p29s). Rather, it means that God is the (efficient) cause of their being or essence (see also E1p25).⁵³ So whatever essences of things are they are not, as such, located in space and time. This reading of E1p24c fits with other, more straightforward Spinozistic doctrine. For example, in the explanation to E1d8 Spinoza asserts that the essence of a thing is an eternal truth (and this seems crucial to the arguments at the end of Part V of the *Ethics*). And we have already seen in Ep. 10 to Simon de Vries that eternal truths "do not have any place outside the mind."

When we are dealing with definitions of finite things, we bring together two ways of being and of knowing. First, it involves knowledge of essence and its properties—this is purely intellectual knowledge.⁵⁴ Recall from the letter to de Vries that the empirical world provides us no information about essences. However, while intellectual conception can provide knowledge of particular things, these are not—for lack of a better term—instantiated materially in space and time. In more modern vocabulary, this is knowledge of types not tokens. So a straightforward way to avoid any tension is to claim

⁵² That is, it will involve a rejection or redescription of the second premise in the apparent paradox.

⁵³ This also means that God's immanent causation is not about the cause of singular things, that is, finite, determinate entities (located 'in' space and time), but about the cause of the essences of things (cf. E1p24c). So on my reading, the "in" part of immanence should not be understood spatially.

⁵⁴ In private communication, Alison Peterman has usefully pointed out that this is a kind of counterfactual knowledge of what an essence would necessarily cause in the absence of other things.

that a thing's proximate causes are to be found at this level. (See TdIE §101: "although these fixed and eternal things are singular, nevertheless, because of their presence everywhere, and most extensive power, they will be to us like universals, or genera of the definitions of singular, changeable things, and the proximate causes of all things.") This is not as strange as it sounds; every human has as a proximate cause, for instance, a father and a mother. Second, it involves our incomplete empirical knowledge of the machinery of the world, where individual things are to be located in space and time and where we can find the matter for their instantiation (as tokens) and the "external" causes for their destruction (E3p4). Spinoza explicitly distinguishes these two levels when he notes that "by the series of causes and of real beings I do not here understand the series of singular, changeable things, but only the series of fixed and eternal things," (TdIE §100; the remainder of the paragraph is also highly relevant).⁵⁵ Definitions bring together essences, which are fixed and eternal, and proximate causes, which belong to the world of changeable things.

The main thing that is left ambiguous in Spinoza's account is the epistemic relationship between these two levels. (The ontic relationship—what is the process by which essences get instantiated?—is also not easy to fathom but need not concern us here.) In particular, in TTP Spinoza seems to insist that our knowledge of definitions is in some sense inductive. Yet we have not merely seen how the intellect's knowledge is a firm constraint on the deliverances of the senses but also that knowledge of essences is not derived through the senses. The best way to make sense of the status of empirical inquiry in Spinoza is threefold. First, it can help the mind focus its attention on essences. Second, it helps uncover partial explanations. This is illustrated by Ep. 41, in which Spinoza describes an experiment he performed with two others to establish water pressure in a tube. He concludes his discussion: "The three of us were busy, to the best of our abilities, and we performed the trial with more precise results than before, but not as precise as I would have wished. Nevertheless, I got enough indication to draw something of a conclusion in this matter." And third, empirical inquiry alerts us to potential problems in the supposed deliverances of the intellect. In Ep. 26, Spinoza reports his conversations with Christiaan Huygens about recent discoveries with microscopes and telescopes.⁵⁶ Among these are empirical refutations of Descartes's views about Saturn (and its ring—unknown to Descartes, who interpreted it as satellites of Saturn). Although Spinoza ridicules Descartes, he does not treat this as a falsification of Descartes's principles. Rather, in context it's clear that Spinoza thought that Descartes misapplied his own principles. So we cannot use this example as an instance where empirical claims can correct principles derived from intellectual conception (nor can we use it as evidence for the claim

⁵⁵ TdIE §100 is often taken to claim that the fixed and eternal things just are proximate causes, but the reading developed here relies on the thought that would be more accurate to say that they are to us like proximate causes.

⁵⁶ For interesting context and material on the astronomical issues discussed, see von Duuglas-Ittu, "What Spinoza and Huygens Would Have Seen."

that Spinoza accepted Descartes's principles and merely objected to Descartes's articulation of them).

What these examples from the letters to Jelles and Oldenburg teach us is that Spinoza did not think one could always unambiguously derive knowledge of the actual machinery of nature from first principles. In his exchanges with Oldenburg about Boyle's experiments, Spinoza makes clear that by themselves the results of experiments can be analyzed and explained in various ways. Anticipating Duhem, Spinoza argues that Boyle has to add hypotheses (about invisible particles and their natures) to infer his favored interpretations of these experiments. An experiment is useless in proving something fundamental about nature (Ep. 6).⁵⁷ It yields mere probabilities.⁵⁸

In a letter to Hugo Boxel we can read in a simple way the upshot of Spinoza's methodology: "In practical life we are compelled to follow what is most probable; in speculative thought we are compelled to follow truth. A man would perish of hunger and thirst, if he refused to eat or drink, till he had obtained positive proof that food and drink would be good for him. But in philosophic reflection this is not so. On the contrary, we must take care not to admit as true anything, which is only probable. For when one falsity has been let in, infinite others follow" (Ep. 55). That is, Spinoza distinguishes sharply between useful, empirical knowledge, which is always merely probable, and durable and certain theoretical (or as I argue later) rational self-knowledge. It's the latter that is unabashedly promoted by Spinoza: "In life, therefore, it is especially useful to perfect, as far as we can, our intellect, or reason. In this one thing consists man's highest happiness, or blessedness . . . So, the ultimate end of the man who is led by reason, that is, his highest desire, by which he strives to moderate all the others, is that by which he is led to conceive adequately both himself and all things which can fall under his understanding" (E4app4).

2. SPINOZA'S CRITICISM OF MATHEMATICAL SCIENCE

This section argues that despite contrary appearances Spinoza was very critical of applying mathematics and measurement in understanding nature. I identify different strands and arguments that explain his concern. Moreover, I argue that from the fact that he (rhetorically) deploys a geometric method in his presentation of his views, we cannot infer anything about a privileged epistemic status for geometry (or mathematics more generally).

⁵⁷ It is unfortunate that we have no evidence for Spinoza's specialist reaction to Newton's early optical experiments and the controversy with Huygens they generated.

⁵⁸ My interpretation has been anticipated by Savan, "Spinoza: Scientist"; Savan also has a lovely discussion of Spinoza's use of models in empirical inquiry.

2A. The Letter on the Infinite

Spinoza's low expectations about the application of mathematics to nature will surprise many who think that the *Ethics' mos geometricus* must imply that Spinoza is a kind of modern mathematical physicist.⁵⁹ Moreover, Spinoza's library holdings at his death reveal a keen student of mathematics—among other things, he owns six volumes of *Diophantus*, a copy of the *Mathematical Works of Vieta* (1646 edition), and Van Schooten's *Geometry*, the leading textbook of Descartes's geometry.⁶⁰ In this section I argue that Spinoza is critical of both the very idea that the book of nature is written in the language of mathematics as well as the very possibility that measurement can be a guide toward truth about nature—both commitments were central to the developing practice of physico-mathematics.

Before I turn to Spinoza, I make a fivefold, strictly heuristic, and simplified distinction to capture attitudes toward the relationship between mathematics and nature among leading thinkers among the “new” philosophers in the first half of the seventeenth century. First, Galileo called mathematics the language of the book of nature.⁶¹ Second, Descartes insisted that extension has geometric properties.⁶² Third, Newton (post-Spinoza) claims that geometry just is the art of measurement.⁶³ Fourth, Hobbes thought that mathematics is conventional and thus based on proper (but not arbitrary) definitions (by wise legislators).⁶⁴ All these views imply that to know geometric truths means one has (privileged) access to claims about nature even if the epistemic status of geometry and mechanics differ. Moreover, fifth, starting from Galileo (especially via Huygens), theory-mediated measurement is privileged in the new science of motion. In practice, there are a lot of blended positions. There is no evidence that Spinoza accepts the first three attitudes; I argue there is good reason to believe he rejected these.⁶⁵ There is strong evidence he rejects the fifth. I now argue these points by articulating the details of Spinoza's views on the relationship between mathematics and knowledge of nature.

⁵⁹ A careless reading of the closing lines of the Preface to Part III may reinforce the first impression.

⁶⁰ Offenberg, “Spinoza's Library.”

⁶¹ See Galileo, *The Assayer*.

⁶² PP 2.23 and 2.64.

⁶³ “Geometry is founded in mechanical practice, and is nothing but that part of universal mechanics which accurately proposes and demonstrates the art of measuring.” Author's Preface to the *Principia*. For more sophisticated treatment see Guicciardini, *Isaac Newton on Mathematical Certainty*.

⁶⁴ This is a controversial reading of Hobbes. But see Hanson, “Reconsidering Hobbes's Conventionalism,” p. 642; Jesseph, *Squaring the Circle*, pp. 199–201.

⁶⁵ Obviously, my claim that Spinoza rejects the second is most controversial. Later, I quote from Spinoza's “Letter on the Infinite” to support the position. There is also indirect support for this claim. First, when Spinoza famously defends his application of the geometric method to “human vice and folly,” he is making clear that he is deploying a *topic neutral* method; this suggests he severs any special link between geometry and substance. Of course, this observation does not preclude the possibility that the features of extension are captured by geometry. Second, throughout his mature writings, Spinoza is very critical of Descartes's account of natural philosophy in general and Descartes's conception of extension in particular (see especially Ep. 83).

Here I focus on a remarkable passage in a justifiably famous letter to Lodewijk Meyer called the “Letter on the Infinite”:

From the fact that when we conceive quantity abstracted from substance and separate duration from the way it flows from eternal things, we can determine them as we please, there arise time and measure—time to determine duration and measure to determine quantity in such a way that, so far as possible, we imagine them easily. Again, from the fact that we separate the affections of substance from substance itself and reduce them to classes so that as far as possible we imagine them easily, arises number, by which we determine [these affections of substance].

You can see clearly from what I have said that measure, time, and number are nothing but modes of thinking, or rather, of imagining. So it is no wonder that all those who have striven to understand the course of nature by such notions—which in addition have been badly understood—have so marvelously entangled themselves that in the end they have not been able to untangle themselves without breaking through everything and admitting even the most absurd absurdities. For since there are many things which we cannot at all grasp by the imagination, but only by the intellect (such as substance, eternity, etc.), if someone strives to explain such things by notions of this kind, which are only aids of the imagination, he will accomplish nothing more than if he takes pains to go mad with his imagination. (Ep. 12/G 4:56–57)

The letter may have had a fruitful afterlife in nineteenth-century history of mathematics, but that does not concern us here.⁶⁶ First, the passage presupposes a distinction between (i) knowing things as imagining—confusingly to modern readers, in Spinoza’s vocabulary this can be a form of abstraction—and (ii) knowing things by way of the understanding, or rationally.⁶⁷ So it fits nicely with views we have already attributed to Spinoza (recall his treatment of the vacuum). (For warnings against abstraction, see TdIE §93.) Second, in Spinoza’s complicated epistemology, knowing things by abstraction is less adequate than knowing them by the understanding (E1p15s). For Spinoza to imagine something does not always mean it is false. But it can never yield adequate knowledge (see E2p49s).⁶⁸

Third, it follows from the text and these two points that Spinoza thinks that the use of measure and number do not reveal to us how substance and eternity are. Because measure and number are crucial in applying mathematics to nature one can say without hesitation that Spinoza thinks mathematics does not help us get at how reality really is but only at how we imagine it.⁶⁹ This does not mean that Spinoza thinks mathematics is

⁶⁶ Bussotti and Tapp, “The Influence.” I thank Kevin von Duuglas-Ittu for calling my attention to it. See also Savan, “Spinoza: Scientist,” p. 96, on Frege.

⁶⁷ It is tempting to think of the imagination and the understanding as different faculties or mental capacities, but this cannot be right. Besides Spinoza’s rejection of faculty language, it is clear that Spinoza thinks of imagining as a mode of thinking. Yet according to Spinoza imagining is about bodies and thus is not fully real or adequate thought. It is not my charge to explain this.

⁶⁸ De Dijn, *Spinoza: The Way to Wisdom*, p. 150, reads TdIE as claiming a distinction between intellect and imagination, “or the true idea from the fictitious, false.”

⁶⁹ See Savan, “Spinoza: Scientist,” p. 103.

fundamentally unreliable; presumably he thinks that geometry provides a reliable form of topic-neutral inference. (Later I recount more uses for geometry in Spinoza.) He has, rather, reservations about the *applicability* of mathematics. Number and measure do not reveal ultimate reality (e.g., the nature of substance, eternity); Spinoza also seems to have thought that nature has more conceivable parts than numbers we can assign to it (see Ep. 83).

Fourth, we should note how broad Spinoza's condemnation is. He is ruling out the science of motion as a privileged form of knowledge, for without "time and measure," assigning velocities, places, and trajectories is impossible.

Fifth, of course, one wishes to know what Spinoza's arguments are for his views. From this letter to Meyer we can infer that according to Spinoza when things are "determined" mathematically, we focus on things that have infinite number of relations with (infinite) other things; by applying measure we create what we may call a limitation of some part of the whole that is (without complete knowledge of the whole) arbitrary.⁷⁰ That is, when we use measure to "carve out" a part of nature (i.e., a mode) for close study we somehow are in no position to have adequate knowledge of the whole and, thus, of it (the mode). Recall from the treatment of the worm analogy that for Spinoza to know anything we must know everything. Spinoza seems to connect that principle with the limitations on the application of mathematics.

To be clear, this does not imply that Spinoza thinks applying mathematics to nature is without use,⁷¹ for, sixth, there is a hint of what he has in mind in Ep. 6, where he implies that without experimental testing one can infinitely divide bodies and calculate forces. Spinoza does not elaborate.

2B. Applied Mathematics and Measurement as Inadequate Knowledge

Now the passage in the quoted Letter to Meyer is not an isolated occurrence moment in Spinoza's writings. The distinction between inadequate imaginative knowledge (or belief) and adequate rational knowledge is very Spinozistic; as we saw in Spinoza's treatment of the vacuum in the *Ethics* on the rational side is undifferentiated substance, while inadequate abstraction is presupposed to locate things in (measurable) time and space. Besides the passage about the impossibility of a vacuum, there are other examples in the *Ethics*: "we can have only a quite inadequate knowledge of the duration of things (E2p31), and we determine their times of existing only by the imagination (E2p44s), which is not equally affected by the image of a present thing and the image of a future

⁷⁰ Another way to approach this issue is through Spinoza's remark in the *Ethics* that "being finite is really, in part, a negation" (E1p8s1). Negation can never lead to complete knowledge.

⁷¹ Spinoza also appears to think that mathematicians are confused about the nature of number, but that does not concern us here.

one . . . and the judgment we make concerning the order of things and the connection of causes, so that we may be able to determine what in the present is good or evil for us, is imaginary, rather than real" (E4p62s). The main point of this passage is unconnected to the application of mathematics (although the passage reinforces it), but the skepticism about adequate knowledge of the causal structure of nature is unmistakable; when we locate things at a time and place we are always in the realm of the imagination.

Spinoza's reservations about the application of mathematics to establish measure and time are especially striking in light of historical context. The towering figure of Dutch natural philosophy of the period, Christiaan Huygens (1629–1695), was well-known to Spinoza—they lived near each other during the 1660s through 1666, when Huygens moved to Paris. From Spinoza's correspondence we can infer that they spoke not merely about their shared interest in lens cutting and optics but also about many other topics. One of Huygens's main intellectual breakthroughs in developing Galileo's science of motion was to provide a mathematical analysis of isochronous (pendulum) clocks. Moreover, by having a mathematical analysis of the properties of a pendulum available, he was able to establish the speed of falling bodies, and thus the pull of gravity, with remarkable precision (up to four significant figures) and accuracy. Huygens's insight consisted of realizing that the pendulum itself can be both timekeeper and an experimental measure; the pendulum is a falling body, so the swinging pendulum contains within itself the theory-mediated measure of gravity.⁷² Spinoza knew of some of Huygens's work on the pendulum (Ep. 30A; Oldenburg repeatedly asked him about it), and he owned Huygens's 1673 masterpiece *Horologium Oscillitorium*.⁷³ While Huygens would not deny that such measures contained a margin of error, Spinoza's remarks suggest that he thought that even in principle mathematically designed clocks are unable to ever reveal adequate knowledge of the duration of things. More important, even if they were somehow error free they would still not capture the essential nature of things.⁷⁴ Clocks do not reveal the causes of why things go in and out of existence.

We can infer from his scattered remarks on the subject that Spinoza links the mathematical approach to nature with a kind of piecemeal understanding of it. If we read Spinoza as a Cartesian this would be baffling because by linking extension to geometry Descartes thought he had made secure knowledge of the machinery of nature possible. Because Spinoza is not shy about naming Descartes as the target of his criticisms, here he is best read as offering an informed interpretation of the new physico-mathematics pursued by Galileo and Huygens, who—to simplify—studied, for example, the pendulum as a closed system. Eighteenth-century Newtonians would praise the incremental, piecemeal approach to nature and would single out Spinoza's demand for systematicity as a form of intellectual hubris.⁷⁵ Of course, Spinoza's point generalizes to any incremental, piecemeal method that assumes a closed system for the sake of analysis.

⁷² See Yoder, *Unrolling Time*.

⁷³ See Offenberg, "Spinoza's Library."

⁷⁴ The allusion to Kantianism is deliberate, but this is not the occasion to pursue a historical argument.

⁷⁵ See Schliesser, "The Newtonian Refutation"; Schliesser "Newton and Spinoza."

2C. Mathematical Overconfidence

The Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics* is widely read and noted because of its attack on final causes. From our post-Darwinian perspective it is tempting to read Spinoza as “one of us,” especially because Spinoza goes well beyond Descartes’s cautious rejection of final causes in physics. Spinoza was deeply suspicious of final causes in general, and this much is accepted widely among scholars even by those who insist that Spinoza’s psychology or his treatment of the *conatus* doctrine still smuggles in teleological explanation. Spinoza rejected general final causes such as promoted by proponents of the argument from design or God’s providence (e.g., Boyle and after Spinoza’s death, Newton) and local final causes in the explanation of mechanism. An example of a local final cause is the Epicurean conception of gravity, where the body just knows which way is down. This doctrine is presupposed by Boyle in his exchange with Spinoza (see Ep. 11).⁷⁶ Spinoza ridicules final causes as the product of anthropocentric fears and aspiration, “those things we can easily imagine are especially pleasing to us, men prefer order to confusion, as if order were anything in things [*ordinem in rebus*] more than a relation to our imagination” (E1app/G 2:82). It is noteworthy how broad Spinoza’s attack is here—he seems to be claiming that all perception of order in nature is really a projection. In light of the skeptical strain we have already identified this should not surprise us.⁷⁷ Of course, this is not to deny that, perhaps, from God’s perspective there is order.

Some readers may be tempted to understand another remark in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics* as Spinoza’s endorsement of mathematics. It occurs in the context of explaining why despite the fact that the attribution of final causation is a natural fallacy. Spinoza writes, “if mathematics, which is concerned not with ends, but only with essences and properties of figures, had not shown men another standard of truth. And besides mathematics, we can assign other causes also (which it is unnecessary to enumerate here), which were able to bring it about that men would notice common prejudices and be led to true knowledge of things” (G 2:79–80).

Spinoza is making four points in this passage. First, of course, the invention of mathematics allowed humanity to develop a standard of truth other than one based on final causes. But note, second, that Spinoza explicitly *denies* that the invention of mathematics was a necessary condition to develop epistemic criteria that allow one to escape the

⁷⁶ Some readers attributed the Epicurean notion of gravity to Newton, who was eager to distance himself from it—see his famous “Letter to Bentley.”

⁷⁷ A very important proposition for much recent interpretation of Spinoza, E2p7, which underwrites what many people call Spinoza’s parallelism, may be thought to contradict the view I am articulating. In the context of this handbook I cannot articulate an interpretation that does justice to the complexity of the proposition, its corollary, and very long scholium, which Spinoza ends with a disarming, “I cannot for the present explain my meaning more clearly.” Spinoza’s remark suggests that no straightforward reading of the proposition is forthcoming.

reign of final causes.⁷⁸ This is not exactly a ringing endorsement of mathematics. Third, he tantalizes the reader with unnamed, “other causes” that could have had the same beneficial outcome. This deflates any argument for the special status of mathematics in Spinoza’s thought based on this passage.

Spinoza tends to associate mathematical figures with abstraction, so it would be surprising if he would praise mathematics highly. In fact, just a few lines down in the same Appendix Spinoza turns to thinly veiled criticism of mathematics: “there are men lunatic enough to believe, that even God himself takes pleasure in harmony; indeed there are philosophers who have persuaded themselves that the motions of the heavens produce a harmony” (G 2:82). This is a barb at Kepler’s and young Huygens’s astronomical Platonism (his 1659 *Systema saturnium* appeals to harmonic principles). While mathematics is not named, the perception of harmony is a consequence of the search for mathematical order in nature. Rather than being a reliable guide to nature as it really is, mathematics promotes the tendency to project harmony or beauty in nature where there is none.

Fourth, while few would defend the claim that Spinoza thinks experiments lead to fundamental natural knowledge, many think it is obvious that according to Spinoza mathematics helps us gain knowledge about physical bodies.⁷⁹ Spinoza understands mathematics as the discovery of essences and properties of figures, that is, the constructability of geometric figures. Thus, for Spinoza mathematical knowledge is a model for the content not so much of natural knowledge but of the form of knowledge; mathematics teaches us the importance of essences and properties.

2D. *Mos Geometricus*

I want to forestall a general objection to the reading presented in this chapter; it is based on Spinoza’s style of presentation in the *Ethics*.⁸⁰ The geometric method has tempted many commentators into thinking that Spinoza was a friend of the developing sciences of the period. Moreover, in the Preface to Part III of the *Ethics*, Spinoza writes, “Therefore, I shall treat the nature and powers of the affects, and the power of the mind over them, by the same method by which, in the preceding parts, I treated God and the Mind, and I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies” (G 2:138). Spinoza was clearly willing to present his views about human affairs as well as nonhuman things in the language of geometry.

⁷⁸ Spinoza is frustratingly silent on what alternative causes might be available, but I suspect that he believes the rule of law—with security of life and liberty—reduces terrors that promote search for final causes.

⁷⁹ See, for example, a footnote by a Dutch translator, Henri Krop, of the *Ethics* (note 46 to Part II, p. 539).

⁸⁰ In this section I go against the consensus view on Spinoza’s deployment of the geometric method. For a very learned and clear introduction, see Steenbakkens, “The Geometrical Order.”

To be clear he is not translating his views about God or human affairs in the language of geometry—rather, he is creating a mode of presentation that is analogous to the language of geometry.

Also, it is worth realizing that much of the *Ethics* is not composed *more geometrico*: this includes E1app and E4app; E3pref, E4pref, and E5pref; the definitions of the passions; and the many long commentaries attached to propositions. And new definitions are introduced in later parts; Spinoza leaves it ambiguous if these need to be applied retrospectively (this is a nontrivial matter with E2d2). Moreover, at several occasions Spinoza makes it clear that the *Ethics* is not a purely deductive work but has holistic qualities. For example, he writes, “For the present, I cannot explain these matters more clearly” (E2p7s), and “Here, no doubt readers will come to a halt, and think of many things which will give them pause. For this reason I ask them to continue on with me slowly, step by step, and to make no judgment on these matters *until they have read through them all*” (E2p11s, emphasis added). See also E2p49s with its explicit forward reference to part V and the brief Preface to Part II, which alludes to closing lines of the *Ethics*. This is all very different from how Spinoza presents how we ought to think about knowledge of nature.⁸¹

Furthermore, the choice for presenting his views *more geometrico* appears to be informed by substantive views about the kind of authorial persona Spinoza wishes to convey as well as his views about education. The most detailed account in Spinoza’s corpus of the virtues of the pedagogical virtues of the *Mos Geometricus* is supplied by Lodewijk Meyer in his Preface to DPP: it is said to be the safest and most secure method for teaching knowledge. In particular, this mode of presentation offers the student hope and security. The student learns how to become rational step by step. Rather than sowing doubts, it offers intellectual security. In this manner the student is elevated above the “vulgar.” (TTP 5/G 3:77 emphasizes that a few people wish to be taught in this fashion; see also TTP 13/G 3:167; see also the Second Set of Objections to Descartes’s *Meditations*.) This fits nicely with Spinoza’s view that the true teacher avoids discipleship but teaches to become an independent thinker (TTP 1/G 3:16, especially the note added in Spinoza’s hand).⁸² Spinoza appears to believe that this mode of presentation directs attention away from the author and to the work’s content (see TTP 7/G 3:111).

Meyer also claims that the geometric method helps avoid polemics. At the start of the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza calls attention to the value neutrality and independence that is supposed to be conveyed by this mode of presentation:

In turning my attention to political theory it was not my purpose to suggest anything that is novel or unheard of, but only to demonstrate by sure and conclusive reasoning such things as are in closest agreement with practice, deducing them from human nature as it really is. And in order to enquire into matters relevant to this branch of

⁸¹ My comments here do not touch another use for the geometric method, namely, to signal that truth has been arrived at apodictically. I thank Alan Gabbey for his critical comments.

⁸² For Spinoza’s concerns about discipleship, see Cooper, “Freedom of Speech.”

knowledge in the same unfettered spirit as is habitually shown in mathematical studies, I have taken great care not to deride, bewail, or execrate human actions, but to understand them. So I have regarded human emotions such as love, hatred, anger, envy, pride, pity, and other agitations of the mind not as vices of human nature but as properties pertaining to it in the same way as heat, cold, storm, thunder, and such pertain to the nature of the atmosphere. (TP 1.4)

3. THE METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

In this section I treat Spinoza's second and third kind of knowledge. I review these in light of their significance, if any, regarding Spinoza's views on natural science. I start, however, with an analysis of Spinoza's views on motion. Many of Spinoza's critics and not a few of his friends discerned serious problems with Spinoza's treatment of motion. I focus primarily on to what degree, if any, Spinoza's metaphysics lends itself to offering a foundation for mechanics. By contrasting Spinoza to Descartes, Huygens, and Newton, this will naturally lead to a revisionary discussion of the role of common notions. Their role is primarily as a stepping-stone to the third kind of knowledge. My treatment of intuition emphasizes its orientation toward self-knowledge.

3A. Motion and Conservation

In an important letter to Oldenburg, Spinoza formulates a general conservation law: "the relations between motion and rest in the sum total of them, that is [bodies], in the whole universe, remain unchanged" (Ep. 32). From the *Ethics* we discern that Spinoza's arguments in favor of this conservation law are conceptual, not empirical (E2le7s; via the proofs of E2le7, E2le4, and E2le1 Spinoza refers to E1p15s and the arguments for the denial of a vacuum in nature).

It is unclear if Spinoza has a compelling argument for his general conservation law because he admits that if he had wished to "deal expressly with body, [he] ought to have explained and demonstrated these things more fully" (E2le7s). It appears that his general conservation principle is founded on three deeply anchored Spinozistic principles. First, there is only one substance; from this it follows, second, that everything is systematically connected to each other, and third, that (despite the heterogeneity of the appearances) matter is homogenous.⁸³ With these principles one can guarantee that, given movement, the relationship between motion and rest must remain the same. But

⁸³ This is a core commitment of most seventeenth-century "new" philosophers. Newton finally abandons it by the second edition of the *Principia*.

these three principles do not guarantee that there is motion at all. Moreover, without an analysis of motion it is unclear why the appearances ought to be interpreted as in motion. (At one point Spinoza is clearly concerned about the issue because he has an extensive treatment of Zeno's paradox of motion in DPP2p6s.) Because Spinoza rejects Descartes's God, who sets the whole chain of motion in motion (E1p28; see also Ep. 73), there is an apparent lacuna in Spinoza's system.⁸⁴ It is not anachronistic to raise these issues because in Spinoza's criticism of Descartes he signaled awareness of the significance of the issues: "for matter at rest, as it is in itself, will continue at rest, and will only be determined to motion by some more powerful external cause; for this reason I have not hesitated on a former occasion to affirm, that the Cartesian principles of natural things are useless, not to say absurd" (Ep. 83).

A number of related issues here are worth exploring and distinguishing. First, Spinoza takes it as axiomatic that there is motion and rest in the world (E2a1'). Moreover, he seems to accept a distinction between "absolute" and (presumably) merely apparent motion (E2le2). So his rejection of the anti-Copernican position (recall section 1A), a rejection requiring that apparent motion can be distinguished from real motion, can be accommodated by his metaphysics. Also, motion is one of the individuation conditions of simple bodies (E2le3, especially the demonstration— "rest, quickness and slowness" are the other criteria). In fact, a compound individual is an entity (or nature) that maintains the same ratio of motion and rest among its parts (E2le5).⁸⁵ So motion plays a crucial role in Spinoza's fundamental metaphysics.⁸⁶

Yet, second, as even his admirer, Toland, noticed, Spinoza never defines what motion is.⁸⁷ Because Spinoza is so critical of Descartes on these matters, we cannot simply assume that he has taken over Descartes's definitions.⁸⁸ In fact, it is not easy to imagine

⁸⁴ DPP is more Cartesian on this score (see DPP2p11–2).

⁸⁵ In the Preface to Part II of KV, a ratio of 1:3 is mentioned (G 1:52), but it is unclear if it is Spinoza's position or an editorial addition. From the vantage point of this chapter, I offer two points: first, if Spinoza did once believe that there were fundamental equations in nature, he seems to have thought better of it as he matured; second, this ratio echoes, as von Duuglas-Ittu points out, Descartes's sixth collision rule—interestingly, the very one that Spinoza explicitly disavows in the letter fragment to Oldenburg. See von Duuglas-Ittu, "The 'Corporeal Equation' of 1:3."

⁸⁶ This is denied by Bennett, *A Study*, p. 106. Accordingly, Bennett distinguishes between "motion" at the "most basic level," where it captures a way of speaking about "alterations in space" and a more "ordinary sense" (pp. 106–7); shortly thereafter we learn that "Spinoza did not become perfectly clear about the difference between the ground floor and the next level up." Bennett's interpretation is far removed from the text.

⁸⁷ See Toland, *Letters to Serena*, especially chapter 4. I thank Dennis Des Chene for calling my attention to it. (It is unclear if motion even can be defined if it is a mode of extension. As Noa Shein pointed out to me it is hard to say in terms of what it could be defined.) Nevertheless, in chapter 5 Toland defends the (Spinozistic) doctrine of activity as essential to matter. Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 196, fn. 7, has pointed to the *conatus* doctrine as evidence that Spinoza rejects the passivity of matter, and that it has innate active powers. Diderot seems to have read Spinoza this way (see Wolfe, "Rethinking Empiricism"; Wolfe, "Endowed Molecules").

⁸⁸ A good thing, too, because as Newton demonstrated most clearly in his unpublished tract, "De Gravitatione," these definitions are defective in generating an even moderately useful treatment of motion.

what anything but a heuristic analysis of motion in Spinoza would look like. It would require introducing spatial and temporal notions into one's reflection on infinite extension; establishing velocity would require measurement. As we seen, all of these operations involve having an inadequate conception of reality according to Spinoza.

Third, even if we grant that we can supply Spinoza with a fruitful conception of motion, it is not obvious he could have a compelling story about the source of motion. In Ep. 83, Spinoza writes that "matter at rest . . . will persevere in its rest, and will not be set in motion unless by a more powerful external cause." Given that Spinoza's God is immanent (E1p18; Ep. 73), there is no "external" cause that sets the infinite chain of matter in motion. Matter at (absolute) rest generates no motion; therefore, this implies that according to Spinoza there must be motion in the universe from the "infinite start" (E1p28).⁸⁹ Now Spinoza offers sufficient reason for this at E1p16: "From the necessity of the divine nature [who has absolutely infinite attributes by E1d6] there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes."⁹⁰ From a human vantage point this does not offer sufficient explanation. Even if granted that there must be infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, this does not seem to explain why it is a feature of the necessary system that there is motion. The infinitely many things in infinitely many modes are all (to speak informally) possible things, and one might wonder whether motion is impossible. It certainly leaves the impression that the origin of motion is unaccounted for. Spinoza's critics starting with Henry More in the *Confutatio* (1678) were quick to notice the problem.

Fourth, Samuel Clarke noticed a peculiar feature of Spinoza's system. Spinoza treats the universe as a whole as an individual in which the proportion of motion and rest remains the same (E2le4, E21e7). But maintaining this proportion is compatible with the quantity of motion varying in the universe. Clarke draws a very important observation from this: "there might possibly have been originally more or less motion in the universe than there actually was."⁹¹ Thus, the proportion of motion and rest can remain the same while the quantity of motion can change. For example, if some parts move faster to accommodate the faster motion in other parts, then the proportion may remain the same even though the quantity of motion increases. That there might possibly have been more or less motion in the universe violates both the PSR as well as Spinoza's claim that "things could have been produced by God in no other way" (E1p33).⁹² Of course, in light

⁸⁹ Samuel Clarke thinks that E1p33 and E2le3 contradict each other on the origin of motion. It is not obvious what Clarke has in mind (see Clarke, *A Demonstration*, part VIII, p. 45). These are only in contradiction if God (as producer of motion) and God as the infinite chain of causes are in no sense identical (and this is not obvious one way or another, although it would require equating substance with an infinite mode). Even so, given that E1p33 treats God as *natura naturans*, while at E2le3 we seem to be in the realm of *natura naturata*, Clarke is probably onto a significant problem here. For more discussion, see Schliesser, "Newton and Spinoza."

⁹⁰ "Ex necessitate divinae naturae infinita infinitis modis (hoc est, omnia, quae sub intellectum infinitum cadere possunt) sequi debent."

⁹¹ Clarke, *A Demonstration*, Part VIII, p. 45.

⁹² A way to save Spinoza's adherence to the PSR is to distinguish between a strong version of the PSR, which governs all of nature, and a weak version, which governs only those entities that have full reality

of Spinoza's necessitarianism, Clarke's point is merely a conceptual possibility, but that is sufficient for his purposes.

Long before he completed the *Ethics*, Spinoza informs Blyenbergh: "I have never thought about the work on Descartes, nor given any further heed to it, since it has been translated into Dutch" (Ep. 38). We can only regret that Spinoza never wrote a treatise about mechanics.

3B. Common Notions (and Laws of Motion/Thought)

Recall that in TTP, Spinoza writes that "in examining natural things we strive, before all else, to investigate the things which are most universal and common to the whole of nature—viz., motion and rest, and their laws and rules, which nature always observes and through which it continuously acts and from these we proceed gradually to other less universal things" (TTP 7/G 3:102).⁹³ Spinoza alludes here to an important concept in his epistemology: so-called common notions. In handwritten note six that Spinoza added to TTP he makes clear that common notions are stepping-stones to adequate knowledge of God—in particular, that God "exists necessarily, and is everywhere" and that God's nature is presupposed in all things we conceive" (G 3:252–53).⁹⁴ While in this chapter I have been emphasizing a skeptical strain in Spinoza, this concept seems to offer a robust route to adequate knowledge of the second kind (E2p40s2). In particular, one might think that I have given far too much attention to the unattainability of the third kind of knowledge and the limitations of the first kind of knowledge within Spinoza while downplaying the presence of the second kind. Yet Spinoza writes that human minds contain adequate ideas (E3p1d) and refers to E2p40s2, so common notions seem available to all.

Now, given that motion and rest, and their laws and rules are said to be common notions, it is no surprise that many readers think that Spinoza is here asserting that we can have adequate knowledge of (Cartesian-style) physics.⁹⁵ But we have already seen that Spinoza's use of laws intends to convey the unchanging and deterministic nature of nature rather than any entity that figures into, say, a science of motion.

The fact that rules of motion and rest *are* common notions is more important. This does echo a Cartesian program of scientific explanation with laws of motion and/or rules of collision. But the similarity with Descartes is superficial, as reflection on the nature of common notions reveals. They are structural features that all modes *within* an attribute share: E2p38c appeals to E2le2, which in turns follows from the definition of a body (E2d1). Therefore, just as there are common notions of modes of extension, so

(eternal truths). Even "absolute" motion would not have full reality. But this is not the place to pursue such a controversial matter.

⁹³ This section draws on material that I have first articulated in Schliesser, "Angels and Philosophers."

⁹⁴ See Curley, "Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece (II)," pp. 118–19.

⁹⁵ See Curley, "Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece (II)," p. 119.

there must be common notions of modes of thought. To put the point metaphorically, the economy of thought is just as rule governed as the economy of extensional nature for Spinoza (a most un-Cartesian thought). Of course, given parallelism (and E2p39, more explicitly), this means that these laws and rules, whatever their content, are going to have a high degree of generality and relatively little specificity. So what are common notions?⁹⁶

First, common notions are about qualitative not quantitative properties of extension. The manner or magnitude of such properties is extrinsic and thus is not a common notion. This becomes clear by reflection on how Spinoza characterizes common notions: common notions are qualities that all bodies share regardless of their state (see, especially, E2p38–9; to be clear, Spinoza does not use qualities to describe common notions). Second, these properties do not just have a high degree of generality—they are common to all bodies (E2le2, cited in E2p38c)—but the manner in which they are present within each and all bodies is also equal (E2p39d).⁹⁷ The best way to make sense of common notions is, thus, to suggest that they are intrinsic properties of modes within an attribute (in Spinozistic terms they share an affection) and that they reflect the peculiar modal qualities of such a mode: for example, all bodies are equally capable of motion and of rest, of moving slower and quicker (E2le2), capable of being an efficient cause, of codetermining and terminating other bodies (E1d2, E1p28, E2le3).

This last feature certainly draws Spinoza very close to Descartes's laws of motion. For, example, Descartes's first law states "that each thing, as far as is in its power, always remains in the same state; and that consequently, when it is once moved, it always continues to move" (PP 2.37) a claim that is fairly close to Spinoza's corollary to E2le3: "a body in motion moves until it is determined by another body to rest; and that a body at rest also remains at rest until it is determined to motion by another." It is fair to say that Spinoza makes explicit what Descartes intended: that bodies are causes of each other's motion and rest. So Spinoza is Cartesian insofar that he accepts Descartes's *general* program by which observed changes in motion (or rest) encourage the search for other bodies that caused these changes.

Even so, there are interesting differences: Cartesian "inertial" *motion* is a *consequence* of the state-preserving power inherent in each thing, whereas Spinoza offers no such consequence relation in his lemma.⁹⁸ A more important difference is that Spinoza

⁹⁶ In the secondary literature one often finds the answer: "infinite modes" (and these are often thought to be scientific laws of nature). The evidence for this claim is remarkably thin (it requires reading E1p21–3 in light of Ep. 83). But even if one grants the equation among infinite modes, common notions, and laws of nature, this does not license the further inference that common notions are the building blocks of a science of motion, or mechanics.

⁹⁷ One might think that in E2p39d Spinoza is discussing a more restricted class of common notions, namely, those that are common only to the human body and the bodies with which it usually interacts. (By contrast the common notions of E2p38 would be universal.) But I see no other evidence to think that Spinoza thinks that there are bodies different in kind such that they would not share in the common notions of the bodies that can affect our bodies.

⁹⁸ When Spinoza does state his *conatus* doctrine later at E3p6–7 it is traced back to Spinoza's understanding of the expression doctrine (E1p25c), God's power (E1p34), what it means to be an

lacks the equivalent of Descartes's second law of motion: "all movement is, of itself, along straight lines" (PP 2.39). This is no trivial matter. It means that Spinozistic inertial motion can take any "shape" (e.g., circular, rotational, zigzagging). Intuitively, Spinoza's move makes sense: from the point of view of (say) eternity, it is not obvious why states (of motion) need to be preserved along a straight line. This requirement seems to introduce an arbitrary directionality and even geometry into mode continuation and preservation. Given that Spinozistic laws of extension and laws of thought are, in some important sense, the same, such directionality would probably make a mockery of the very possibility of finding rules of thought that are identical to rules of extension (and any other attribute). It is also by no means obvious how the directionality requirement can be derived or justified metaphysically.⁹⁹ While we do not tend to connect rectilinear motion with final causes, one can easily imagine that to Spinoza attributing some such "knowledge" of direction to a moving body must have reeked of superstition (akin to Epicurean innate gravity).

The downside of Spinoza's approach is that it is very hard to see how in the absence of a *detectable* body, B, acting as cause(s) on some body, A, we can ever say about some moving body, A, that it was in inertial motion or not. Given that E2a1¹ explicitly allows that the way bodies move each other (as causes) is potentially heterogeneous, the epistemic complications of using Spinoza's axioms and laws as foundations for a science of motion are only increased. So commentators that attribute to Spinoza the idea that his common notions enter into his science of motion saddle Spinoza with a decidedly unpromising physical science.

Now it is possible that Spinoza did not recognize any of the problems I have indicated. (Note, by the way, that I am not relying on later developments in physics.) It is possible, of course, that even after Christian Huygens published *Horologium oscillatorium sive de motu pendularium* (1673), which articulated how Galilean principles could be developed into a science of motion, Spinoza was unwilling to drop his alternative approach. But given that Spinoza has so many criticisms of mathematical physics, a more obvious interpretation presents itself. Spinozistic common notions are not the foundation of a Spinozistic physical science (analogous to Cartesian, Huygensian, Leibnizian, Newtonian) (mechanics). Rather, they capture secure knowledge of the modal qualities that are intrinsic to all modes of an attribute. This is the meaning of E5p4: "there is no affection of the body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct concept."¹⁰⁰ That

"essence" (E1p36), and a "determinate nature" (E1p29). Motion is strikingly absent in motivating or explaining the *conatus* doctrine.

⁹⁹ This is, I think, why E2a2' which does offer nontrivial directionality constraints on the way collisions proceed, is offered as an additional axiom. It is very hard to see what justifies treating it as a common notion. It is also very different from Descartes's third law of motion, which is supposed to govern collision (and from which the particular rules of collision are claimed to be derived). This is not the place to offer a substantive interpretation of it, but Spinoza may have thought it follows from some kind of least action principle. I thank John Grey, Rodolfo Garau, and Alison Peterman for discussion.

¹⁰⁰ The demonstration of E5p4 reads as follows: "Those things which are common to all can only be conceived adequately (by E2p38), and so (by E2p12 and E2le2) there is no affection of the body of which

is, common notions provide us knowledge of the nature of bodies (E2p16). This is not nothing, of course, and such common notions are significant because with Spinozistic metaphysics they provide hope that access to third kind of knowledge is available to mere mortals (E2p47s).

3C. Conception of Essences

As we have seen, for Spinoza knowledge is about intellectual conception of eternal essences.¹⁰¹ The third and highest kind of knowing “proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [formal] essence of things” (E2p40s2). Spinoza’s meaning here has puzzled generations of readers. The example that accompanies it does not help explain what he means by “formal essence of certain attributes” or by “formal essence of things.” In Part V of the *Ethics* Spinoza writes about this third kind of knowledge of (formal) essences: it is “eternal” (E5p31; see especially its demonstration). While building on this proof, Spinoza refers to E1a3, which insists on causal necessity (E5p33d). The necessity of causation is commonplace in the seventeenth century. Spinoza is, perhaps, a bit unusual in not accepting any exceptions to natural necessity either for God or for mankind. He rejects the conception of “man in Nature as a dominion within a dominion” (E3pref/G 2:137).

The third kind of knowledge is the source of “the greatest satisfaction of the mind: that is, . . . joy” (E5p32d). So it would be congenial to learn what it is knowledge of and how we obtain it. On the first point, I just quoted the mysterious passage (“proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [formal] essence of things”) from E2p40s2; on the second point, Spinoza writes in E5p31, “the third kind of knowledge depends on the mind, as on a formal cause, insofar as the mind itself is eternal.”

According to Spinoza the source of the third kind of knowledge is within the mind itself (e.g., E5p30). According to the proof of E5p31 this is the case because to be a formal cause is synonymous with being an adequate cause of the third kind of knowledge. The proof refers to the first definition of Part III of the *Ethics*. To be an adequate cause means that one acts from one’s nature, that is, one is acting from reason (E4p23–26) or that one understands something as necessary (E2p44). Helpfully, Spinoza clearly points out on four occasions that this does not involve what we tend to call knowledge of empirical nature. Beyond the

we cannot form some clear and distinct concept.” The inference makes perfect sense if common notions pick out the knowable modal qualities that are intrinsic to all modes of an attribute; if extrinsic qualities are thought to be included in an “affection of the body” then Spinoza’s inference begs the question. This interpretation fits how Spinoza implies that the non-affections of the human body are not known to the mind at E2p24.

¹⁰¹ While this is well-known in Spinoza scholarship, it gets ignored by folks when they assimilate Spinoza to the mechanical philosophy. This neglect may be partly motivated by disquiet about the fact that this is used as a complaint by a very hostile source, Albert Burgh (see Ep. 67).

cited passage about the denial of the vacuum, I would like to call attention to the demonstration to the second corollary of E2p44, the whole of E2p45, and most clearly E5p29s, which I quote: “We conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature. But the things we conceive in this second way as true, or real, we conceive under a species of eternity, and their ideas involve the eternal and infinite essence of God (as we have shown in E2p45&s).”

With fully adequate knowledge, the knower and the known object coincide and dissolve each other as distinct beings—this is why the mind becomes eternal (E5p40). What’s crucial for present purposes is that this third kind of (self) knowledge is contrasted with knowing something in relation to a certain time and place. To assign time and place to modes one must, as we saw in the passage about the denial of the vacuum (E1p15s), use abstraction or imagination to discern determinate and separable regions of pure quantity (see also E2p44c1s and E2p45s).

In a letter to Johannes Bouwmeester, Spinoza summarizes these complicated matters in simple fashion. I quote (in my own translation): “all clear and distinct ideas which we conceive can only be caused by other clear and distinct ideas, which are in us, and do not permit another cause outside of us. From this it follows that the clear and distinct ideas, which we conceive, only depend on our nature and her determined and fixed laws, that is to say, our absolute power, and not on chance, that is to say, from causes which, howsoever obeying determined and fixed laws, are unknown to us and outside our nature and power” (Ep. 37; see also E5p40s).

All of this implies that according to Spinoza when we conceive of things at a place and time we are dealing with our lack of power and thus imperfect, fallible knowledge. We learn from the opening pages of the unfinished *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* that unsettled things cannot make us happy. It is no surprise, then, that Spinoza is quite critical of mathematical natural science. His epistemic concerns fit with his moral aims. It is therefore a mistake to understand Spinoza as a fellow traveler of the scientific revolution.

When it comes to having adequate ideas, then, we are not perceiving things outside of us in spatial and temporal places or locations (i.e., things we are inclined to call knowledge of nature), but we are in possession of a special kind of self-knowledge. For Spinoza, godly substance is knowable (“with great difficulty”; E1p15s) through ourselves (E5p30). Of course, for Spinoza knowledge of mechanics is not a primary goal; for him physics is subservient to “knowledge of the human mind and its highest blessedness” (see E2pref).

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CHAPTER 9

REPRESENTATION, MISREPRESENTATION, AND ERROR IN SPINOZA'S PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

DON GARRETT

AXIOM 6 of Part I of Spinoza's *Ethics*, in the most widely used English translation, reads: "a true idea must agree with its object." Spinoza also claims in Part II of the *Ethics* that every idea has an object with which it is parallel in an "order and connection" of causes (E2p7, E2p11, E2p13)—and, indeed, with which it is identical or "one and same" (E2p7s, E2p21s).¹ Jonathan Bennett² has maintained that, because the parallelism and identity of idea and object entails their agreement, every idea must therefore be true for Spinoza—and, indeed, Spinoza explicitly states that all ideas, at least "insofar as they are related to God," are true (E2p32). Yet one of the primary purposes of the *Ethics* is to overcome the prevalence of *error*—a state that seems, at least for him, to involve assent to ideas that misrepresent how things are and so are not true but false. Is Spinoza in error about the possibility of error in his own philosophy of mind?

In what follows, I will first examine Spinoza's explicit statements about error and conclude that they approach but do not fully answer the question of how false ideas—that is, misrepresentations—are possible. In pursuit of a fuller Spinozistic answer to this question, I will then briefly explain his general theory of imaginative representation, and I will observe that it raises a complementary issue most forcefully formulated by Margaret Wilson³: just as it seems that no idea can represent what is *not* the case, so

¹ Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, offers a detailed account of this identity and of its relation to the specific identity of modes of extension with modes of thought. Marshall, "The Mind and the Body," argues that the relation of being "one and the same" should not be understood as numerical identity. Nothing in the present paper turns on whether Marshall's thesis is correct or not, with the exception mentioned in note 5.

² *Learning from Six Philosophers*, pp. 189–90.

³ "Objects, Ideas, and 'Minds.'"

too it seems that every idea of imagination will represent an implausibly vast amount of what *is or has been* the case. In considering Spinoza's possible responses to this latter charge, I will detail first the roles of confusion and causation in imaginative representation and then some of the various ways in which, on his account, we can imagine things and imagine them *as* being particular ways. These considerations, in turn, will suggest a promising way in which Spinoza could use his distinctive *conatus* doctrine—that is, the doctrine that “each thing, insofar as it is in itself, strives to persevere in its being” (E3p6)—both to delimit the otherwise vast extent of the imaginative representation of what is *and* to explain how imaginative misrepresentation (the representation of what is not) is possible. Thus armed with a Spinozistic account of misrepresentation and error—if not quite an account Spinoza himself spells out—I will return to the paradox of parallelism, identity, agreement, and truth with which we began.

SPINOZA'S ACCOUNT OF ERROR

Spinoza recognizes two kinds of ideas: those of the *intellect* and those of the *imagination*. The imagination includes, but is not limited to, sensation. Error arises, he holds, when an idea of imagination occurs in the absence of certain other relevant ideas:

And here, in order to begin to indicate what error is, I should like you to note that the imaginations of the Mind, considered in themselves contain no error, or that the Mind does not err from the fact that it imagines, but only insofar as it is considered to lack an idea that excludes the existence of those things that it imagines to be present to it. For if the Mind, while it imagined nonexistent things as present to it, at the same time knew that those things did not exist, it would, of course, attribute this power of imagining to a virtue of its nature, not to a vice—especially if this faculty of imagining depended only on its own nature, i.e. (by E1d7), if the Mind's faculty of imagining were free. (E2p17s)

Because Spinoza holds that “all ideas, as they are related to God, are true” (E2p32), it is important to him that error or falsity not consist in some positive feature of ideas considered in themselves (E2p33). Yet error also cannot be total ignorance or utter lack of ideas, for as he notes, bodies themselves (as distinguished from minds) cannot be in error, even though they can properly be said to lack knowledge. Hence, error must instead be “the privation of knowledge that inadequate knowledge of things, or inadequate and confused ideas, involves” (E2p35d). Spinoza offers two illustrations:

Error consists in the privation of knowledge. But to explain the matter more fully, I shall give [NS⁴: one or two examples]: men are deceived in that they think

⁴ “NS” indicates material included in translation from the *Nagelate Schriften*, the Dutch version of Spinoza's *Opera posthuma*.

themselves free [NS: i.e., they think that, of their own free will, they can either do a thing or forbear doing it], an opinion which consists only in this, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined. This, then, is their idea of freedom—that they do not know any cause of their actions

Similarly, when we look at the sun, we imagine it as about 200 feet away from us, an error that does not consist simply in this imagining, but in the fact that while we imagine it in this way, we are ignorant of its true distance and of the cause of this imagining. For even if we later come to know that it is more than 600 diameters of the earth away from us, we nevertheless imagine it as near. For we imagine the sun so near not because we do not know its true distance, but because an affection of our body involves the essence of the sun insofar as our body is affected by the sun. (E2p35s)

Yet how does an imaginative idea together with a mere *lack* of knowledge of the fact that *p* become the belief that *not-p* or some other belief incompatible with *p*? In approaching this question, it is useful to note that Spinoza, unlike Descartes, holds that an idea we form is naturally an affirmation of its content (E2p49). But while this can help to explain how an imaginative idea becomes a belief, it cannot by itself explain how that believed imaginative idea became a *misrepresentation*—a representation, contrary to fact, that (or entailing that) *not-p*.

Consider Spinoza's example of the sun—an example based on Descartes's claim that 200 feet is the limit at which binocular vision can facilitate distance perception. Although it is true that we are initially ignorant that the sun of which we form an image is more than 600 diameters of the earth away from us, we are of course equally "ignorant" (that is, lacking knowledge) of its being 200 feet away. So why, on some particular occasion, do we *imagine it as* 200 feet away *rather than as* more than 600 diameters of the earth away? Indeed, given that we cannot tell the *difference* visually between things at these two distances, why wouldn't it be *equally* true to say that we imagine other objects that really are 200 feet distant as being more than 600 diameters of the earth away? Perhaps better, why should we not say that seen objects more than 200 feet distant are imagined as being *at least* 200 feet away but not as being at any more specific distance? Similarly, to take Spinoza's other example, although human beings may often be ignorant of the actual causes of their actions, they are equally "ignorant" of their actions' *lacking* causes (which, according to Spinoza, they in fact do *not* lack). So why say that they "imagine" their actions as uncaused, rather than as caused, or neither as caused nor uncaused? These are the kinds of questions that Spinoza must answer if his theory of error is to be complete.

INTENTIONALITY AND IMAGINATIVE REPRESENTATION

In order to answer these questions, we must first understand Spinoza's theory of intentionality and its application to imaginative representation; and in order to do that, it is

helpful to contrast it with Descartes's. Like many scholastics, Descartes distinguishes between two ways in which a thing can have reality or being. It may have *formal* reality, corresponding to what we would ordinarily think of as its real existence as a thing in its own right, but it can also have *objective* reality that is present and contained *in an idea of the thing*. Intentionality is possible, on this account, because a thing can exist quite literally in two different ways in two different places. For Descartes, an idea that does this containing—that is, the idea having the thing as its “*object*”—has formal reality in its own right; in consequence, when that idea is in turn made a subject of thought, it will have objective reality that is contained in *another* idea. Although the identity between the thing existing formally and the thing existing objectively is meant to explain why thought can be about things, *how* exactly an idea is able to contain the objective reality of another thing is left largely unexplained in terms of anything else by Descartes: that is simply the kind of wonderful thing that ideas, as modes of thinking substances, can do.

Spinoza, in contrast, offers a simple, original, and radical explanation of how an idea can encompass the objective reality of a thing: it does so simply by *being* that objective reality itself, and hence by being *one and the same thing as* that whose objective reality it contains. The idea of each thing is thus not a separate container of its objective reality; rather it is just a twin aspect—the objective rather than the formal—of the thing itself. In reducing this kind of intentionality to an aspect of identity, he offers a kind of naturalization of intentionality within the context of his multiple-attribute substance monism.⁵

Spinoza applies his account of intentionality-through-identity-with-ideas not only to ideas of eternal things but also to the minds of individual singular things.⁶ For example, the human mind is the idea (the “awareness,” we might also say) of the human body, which is its *object* (E2p13): that is, the human mind is one and the same thing as the human body and thereby encompasses, by constituting, its objective reality. Similarly, an idea in the human mind is fundamentally an idea of the state of the body with which it is identical and which is its object. Moreover, “whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human Mind must be perceived by the human Mind, or there will necessarily be an idea of that thing in the Mind” (E2p12). Thus, the human mind perceives *every* affection (that is, modification, state, or event) of its body. But in this respect, Spinoza remarks, human beings do not differ in kind from *other* things in nature, for all things are “animate” in “different degrees” (E2p13s) and have minds that are the ideas of them (E3p1d).⁷

That every singular thing in nature—even trees and rocks—perceives everything that happens in its body is of course an initially shocking claim. Spinoza can mitigate the shock in at least two complementary ways. First, he can mitigate the scope of the

⁵ This is a fuller and more satisfying naturalization, I think, if being “one and the same as” is indeed understood as numerical identity. See note 1.

⁶ “Singular thing” and “individual” are largely overlapping categories. However, the “simplest bodies” are singular things but not individuals, while the “infinite individual” is not a singular thing. See Garrett, “Representation and Consciousness,” for a full discussion.

⁷ Spinoza’s reference in E3p1d to E2p11c makes it clear that the “other things” said to have minds include anything that can be perceived by the human mind. Note continued on next page.

phrase “everything that happens in” by emphasizing that it concerns not the “in” of spatial containment, but the “in” of inherence, the relation whereby states or events inhere in a subject. Thus, an individual thing need not perceive an event that occurs within its outer boundaries unless the event also constitutes a change to the self-preservatory mechanism—the distinctive “fixed pattern of motion and rest” (definition and lemmas 4–7 following E2p13s)—that constitutes its being as an individual. Second, he can mitigate the force of the term “perceives.” On his view, all ideas are conscious ones to at least some very minimal extent, but an idea’s degree of consciousness is equivalent or identical to the degree of its *power of thinking* [*cogitandi potentia*]⁸—that is, the force with which it is poised to contribute to the character and force of the striving for self-preservation, or *conatus*, of that thing whose idea it is. Many animals have sophisticated sensory systems that can capture, retain, and employ detailed images of external things, and the ideas of these images may, at least on those occasions when they are poised to guide self-preservatory behavior, be at a high level of consciousness. Their perceptions of other states of their bodies, in contrast, may be of very low consciousness. More rudimentary things, such as rocks and trees, have very little consciousness for any of their ideas. This is in keeping with what I have elsewhere called Spinoza’s *incremental naturalism*,⁸ according to which important features of mentality—such as consciousness, desire, and belief—do not suddenly appear at a particular level of complexity in nature but instead are present in rudimentary forms throughout nature.

The kind of intentionality described thus far is based on the identity between an idea and its object. However, Spinoza also recognizes a further, more merely representational, kind of mental content in connection with the imagination. Now, he clearly regards the perception of “whatever happens” within each thing’s body as imagination rather than intellection. As such, however, it always constitutes for him not *merely* perception of the internal state that is its object but *also* representation of an external cause.⁹ For in E2p16, Spinoza writes that “the idea of any mode in which the human Body is affected by external Bodies must involve the nature of the human Body and at the same time the nature of the external body”; and in E2p17, he adds that “if the human Body is affected with a mode that involves the nature of an external body, the human Mind will regard the same external body as present.” But in E2p17s, he defines this very condition of having “affections of the body whose ideas . . . present external bodies as present to us” as *imagination*.

It is worth noting that, by E2p19, the human mind perceives only the affections of the human body, and not the human body itself—of which it is, of course, nevertheless the idea. That is, while the human mind *is* the awareness of the human body, what stands in the *perceived-by* relation to it is limited to what is *in* that body, in Spinoza’s sense of that term.

⁸ Garrett, “Representation and Consciousness.”

⁹ Spinoza uses the term “*repraesentare*.” For present purposes, nothing turns on whether this is understood as *presentation* or *representation*, so long as the distinction between it and the intentionality by which ideas are “of” the objects with which they are identical is maintained. Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, calls the latter “direct representation” and the former “indirect representation.”

This schematic account offers at least a partial explanation of how imagination can represent the actual external causes of internal states—namely, through carrying or encoding information about the natures of those causes, on which the characters of the internal states themselves partly depend. However, we do not yet have any explanation of how imagination can misrepresent, or carry misinformation about, those causes. Moreover, the account so far raises a further problem, emphasized by Wilson. For any given internal state of the body has a very wide variety of external causes, both at any given time and through time. Consider, to adapt an example from the *Ethics*, the idea that Paul has in his mind of Peter's body.¹⁰ As we have seen, this idea will involve the nature of Paul's own body *and* the natures of the external causes of the corresponding internal affection of Paul. But these external causes will presumably include not only Peter's body but also the bodies constituting the intervening medium between Peter's body and Paul's sense organs; and not only these, but also, in the other temporal direction, the bodies of Peter's parents, and their parents, and of various bodies that have interacted with those bodies, infinitely far into the past. Thus, for Spinoza, Paul's mind includes representations of *all* of the causes, from the most proximate to the most remote, of his internal states. This seems, on the face of it, to be yet another highly implausible doctrine.

How can Spinoza respond to this second charge of implausibility? First, he can restrict to some extent both the *number* of things and the *aspects* of things that an idea of imagination need represent. An idea of imagination need not specifically represent *all* of the things to which its object is related by some backward-leading chain of causation. Only if a distant cause has affected a more proximate cause in such a way as to make a *difference* to the character of the internal affections of the object, so as to leave some specific trace of information about itself in the object, need he regard it as *specifically* represented in imagination. Many individuals that affect the proximate causes of an internal affection of a body will do so only by influencing features of the proximate cause that themselves have no influence on that internal affection. For example, imagination need not represent an external object that has dented only the unseen back surface of an object that is later seen. Even a direct but remote cause of existence—such as a far-distant ancestor—might leave no specific trace of its nature that endures through succeeding generations. In such cases, it seems, the most that might be represented would be that there was, at some distant point in time, *some* remote cause or other.

Second, however, Spinoza can insist that even a fairly vast scope for imaginative representation, when understood in the context of incremental naturalism about representation, is not as implausible as it might seem. Axiom 4 of Part I of the *Ethics* states that “knowledge [*cognitio*] of the effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause.” (The technical sense of “involve” employed here is roughly that of “implicate,” as in “he is implicated in the crime.”) There is no question that, for Spinoza, the intellect's

¹⁰ This example is adapted from E2p17s, where Spinoza distinguishes between the idea of Peter's body that is Peter's mind (and so has Peter's body as its object) and the idea of Peter's body that is in Paul's mind (which has an affection of Paul's body, partly caused by Peter's body, as its object).

understanding of an eternal infinite mode¹¹ requires a conception of what he regards as its causes. Understanding a particular law of nature as an infinite mode, for example, requires some knowledge both of the more fundamental laws from which it follows, and which he regards as its proximate causes, and (more remotely) of the nature of God under the relevant divine attribute, extension or thought. And there is no reason in principle why the imaginative cognition of finite durational things should be any different in this respect. The *appearance* of a difference, Spinoza may say, results from the fact that imaginative cognition, unlike intellection, is always *confused*—blurring different things together in such a way that they cannot be fully distinguished from one another. Thus, as Michael Della Rocca¹² has argued, imagination is confused at least partly because in it the mind typically cannot distinguish the contributions made by the nature of the body that is affected, the nature of the parts of the human body that is affected, and the nature of the external bodies that affect it. As I have argued elsewhere,¹³ imagination is also confused because in it the mind typically cannot distinguish among various potential causes of the affection of the body in question. For example, an auditory sensation is confused because we cannot distinguish whether it has been caused by a live human voice or a recording.¹⁴ But intricate and detailed human sensory perceptions must rank among the very *least* confused imaginative ideas; ideas of internal affections that are not produced through sophisticated and intricate sensory systems will almost certainly be *extremely* confused among a wide variety of potential external causes. It would not be surprising if such highly confused ideas—especially when nearly unconscious as well—should not appear to represent anything at all.

MANNERS OF REPRESENTATION

Nevertheless, it must be granted that Spinoza himself does not write of human beings or other singular things as representing in imagination *any* of the more remote causes of their current internal affections.¹⁵ What can explain this absence? Is it simply that an appropriate occasion to mention such objects of representation never arose? In response

¹¹ For a discussion of both laws of nature and formal essences as infinite modes, see Garrett, “The Essence of the Body.”

¹² *Representation*.

¹³ Garrett, “Representation and Consciousness.”

¹⁴ As the example suggests, the term “potential causes” refers in this context to things that, under the general laws of nature, are able to produce the effect under some circumstances. A plurality of “potential causes” in this sense is compatible with Spinoza’s strict necessitarianism.

¹⁵ Morrison, “Restricting Spinoza’s Causal Axiom,” makes this point forcefully. His solution to the problem involves a limitation of the scope of E1a4 to immanent causation (that is, a thing’s causation of its own modes) and a consequent limitation of the representational scope of imaginative representation. The discussion of this solution is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper.

to these questions, it will be helpful to consider briefly some of the manners of representation that Spinoza *does* recognize in the course of the *Ethics*.

Spinoza clearly recognizes imaginative representations that are specifically of particular things—for example, “the idea of Peter’s body that is in Paul’s mind” already noted. For Paul to have such an idea specifically of *Peter*, there is no requirement that he be able to distinguish Peter from *every* other individual who might resemble Peter, such as an identical twin of Peter who is unknown to Paul. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that Spinoza regards the direct causal relation between Peter and Paul’s idea as sufficient in this case to secure the reference of the idea specifically to Peter to the exclusion of other similar individuals.

On the other hand, Spinoza also explicitly recognizes that things can be imagined *as present, as past, and as future* (E4p10, E4p12, E4p13, E4p16), and this cannot always be a matter of causally secured reference to a specific individual. He suggests, at E2p44c1s, that the imagination of things *as* being at past or future times is accomplished through associative sequences of images either terminating or beginning, respectively, with the content of a present sensation. A past body that is imagined as past may, of course, easily be a direct cause of the affection of the body corresponding to and identical with the idea of that affection. But to say that we can imagine things as existing in the future—particularly, as Spinoza says, things in the “far distant” future, whose existence can be the object of hope or fear¹⁶—strongly suggests that we can also just imagine generally, or generically, *that an object of a given kind* will exist in the future, without specific causally secured reference to any particular individual of the kind. One can imagine meeting Peter next week; but one can also imagine meeting just some as-yet-unknown person ten years hence.

Presumably, Spinoza’s explanation for this capacity for general or generic imaginative representation lies in the *confusion* that characterizes the Spinozistic imagination generally. When an individual thing produces an internal affection in another thing in such a way that the mind cannot distinguish, from the information present, the actual cause from other potential causes, one may properly say that the idea of that affection represents the cause confusedly; but one might also say with equal propriety that the idea represents merely *that feature* of the actual cause—perhaps even a highly disjunctive feature—that it shares with the other possible causes that cannot be distinguished from it. For example, what is, considered in one way, an imaginative representation of a particular live human *voice* is, considered in another way, a representation of sound-producing *qualities* that this voice shares with some other voices and with some recordings. In many cases, the confusion of an image is partly the consequence of its retaining traces of *multiple* similar external causes; this kind of confused retention results in the “universal images” or “universal notions” described in E2p40s1. In the case of these ideas, Spinoza remarks, the mind has been “affected most forcibly by what is common”

¹⁶ It should be noted that the explanation of imagined time at E2p44c1s does involve a present individual, seen in the past, imagined as still existing in the future. Spinoza often describes hope and fear, in contrast, in terms of imagined objects and outcomes that have not yet come to exist.

to all the different instances; and the clear implication is that these ideas represent not merely the actual instances previously experienced but all things that resemble them. Such a general representation, associated with a particular time, could well serve to represent the existence of an object *of that kind* in the future.

Just as Spinoza writes of imagining things as past, present, or future, so too he writes of imagining them *as necessary, as contingent, and as possible* (E4p11, E4p12, E4p13, E4p17). As he explains it, to imagine something as necessary (as opposed to *conceiving it intellectually* as necessary) is evidently to imagine the thing, as the result of a frequent and uniform past experience, in a way that is tightly associated with the imagination of something else now present (as suggested by E2p44c1s). To imagine something as contingent but presently non-existent, in contrast, is to conceive the thing itself neither as necessary nor impossible from its own essence, while at the same time imagining something else as existing and incompatible with its present existence (E4p13d). To imagine something as possible is to imagine something as capable of producing the thing's existence (E4d4, E4p12d) without being certain whether it will do so or not. Any of these imagined producers or excluders, as well as the contingent and possible things themselves, it seems, can again be conceived either *generally* or *specifically*—and thus, either with or without any causally mediated reference to a particular thing that has caused the imagination in question.

What is the moral to be drawn from these examples? For Spinoza, it appears that the very same kind of image can in some circumstances be best understood as being specifically “of” some one particular external cause, while in other circumstances it can be best understood as being more generally “of” any one or more things of a given kind. What determines which is the best or most proper interpretation in a particular case? One very natural proposal is that the difference lies in the *functional role* that the image is playing. Although Spinoza does not explicitly offer this explanation, he is particularly well-positioned theoretically to endorse and deploy it. Wilson¹⁷ has objected that his philosophy of mind in effect replaces the relation of *representation* with the simpler relation of *being an effect of*, but Spinoza's distinctive philosophical commitments in fact allow him to hold a much more attractive theory of representation. On this theory,¹⁸ the idea of an internal affection of a body represents the external cause of the affection to the extent that something carrying information about the cause is also able to play a role in *determining the self-preserving behavior* of that thing.¹⁹ Spinoza's doctrine of the pervasiveness of mental representation throughout nature can then be understood to result not from the conflation of representation with causation, but rather from the addition

¹⁷ “Objects, Ideas, and ‘Minds.’”

¹⁸ This theory is discussed at greater length in Garrett, “Representation and Consciousness.”

¹⁹ It should be noted that the self-preservatory activity of human beings has both a physical (“extended”) aspect and a mental (“thinking”) aspect, and that for Spinoza effects within an attribute—extension or thought—are produced only by causes within that same attribute. The primary representational content of an idea itself is thus determined strictly by the functional role of the idea within the attribute of thought, although the object of the idea—which, as already noted, is “one and the same thing” as the idea—plays a parallel functional role within the attribute of extension.

of three further Spinozistic doctrines: (i) the *conatus* doctrine that each thing strives, to the extent that it can, to preserve itself in being (E3p6); (ii) that even at the level of very rudimentary things, each genuine affection of a thing has the capacity to play *some* role in the thing's self-preservatory behavior (E1p36, E3p8d); and (iii) that every affection involves and to *some* extent carries information about the nature of the external causes of that state (E2p16).

CONATUS AND CONTENT

Given this understanding of the character of Spinozistic imaginative representation, it is reasonable to say that any idea of an internal bodily affection “involves” and so in principle represents many or all of its external causes, at least confusedly. It is likewise reasonable to say that any idea of an internal bodily affection involves and so in principle represents, at least confusedly, the perhaps highly disjunctive qualities required to produce that affection—and thereby, at least indirectly, represents confusedly all of the *bearers* of those qualities as well. We may therefore describe *all* of these represented causes as elements of an idea's *minimal representational content*. But it is also reasonable to say that *some* ideas of internal affections—particularly those that constitute the relatively distinct and conscious products of sophisticated sensory systems—have in addition what we might call *primary representational content*. This primary content for the idea may be selected or determined from *among* the many elements of its minimal content by the *manner* in which the idea directs or influences self-preservatory activity. Suppose, for example, that an image derived from Peter's body largely guides and regulates Paul's activity relative to a person resembling that image *only* when Peter regards the person as having caused the image—so that similar men discovered by Paul *not* to be causally related to the production of his image would subsequently be ignored. Then Paul's idea will be *primarily* “of” Peter. If, on the other hand, the image largely guides and regulates Paul's behavior relative to *anyone* resembling Peter—so that any discovered evidence of lack of previous causal relation to Paul would itself be ignored—then Paul's idea will be *primarily* “of” Peter-like individuals generally.

One advantage of this two-level approach to imaginative representation is that it can further mitigate the implausibility of Spinoza's doctrine that internal affections represent a vast number of even quite remote external causes, while also explaining why Spinoza does not give any examples of ideas of imagination representing such remote causes. For while any idea of an internal affection will, in principle, *minimally* represent a vast number of its external causes—as well as shared qualities and even potential causes having those shared qualities—its *primary* self-preservatory function, if it has one at all, will much more likely be (at least in creatures like humans) to guide behavior relative to things that are more proximate causes. Yet these “target” primary causes need not be, and typically will not be, the *most* proximate causes—such as the bodies in the intervening medium between the perceiver and the distal stimulus. In romantic love, for

example, the lover thinks primarily of the beloved, while thinking a great deal less about the air and the light rays that were between them, and thinking a great deal less, too, about the beloved's remote ancestors.

Most importantly for present purposes, however, the approach allows Spinoza to give a plausible answer to our original unanswered question of what must be added to ignorance of *p* in order to get error about *p*. Thus, if one imagines the sun to be 200 feet distant rather than 600 diameters of the earth distant, this will be because the image will guide one to act *as though* it were 200 feet distant—meaning by this roughly that the image will guide the performance of the kinds of actions that would, *ceteris paribus*, be most conducive to self-preservation if the sun *were* 200 feet distant, rather than those that would be most conducive to self-preservation if it were 600 diameters of the earth distant. Suppose, for example, that one desires to alter the sun in some respect. Then under the influence of the image of it, one will be guided to look for materials to build a 200-foot ladder rather than a 600-earth-diameters-ladder, or to build a cannon with a 200-foot range rather than a 600-earth-diameter range. Similarly, to take Spinoza's other example, if we imagine our actions to be uncaused rather than caused, this will be because we are guided by images of those actions to behave, for each particular potential cause of the action, in ways that would be, *ceteris paribus*, more conducive to self-preservation if that occurrence were *not* the cause. At least at the level of primary representation, it is *potentially faulty guidance* that must be added to ignorance in order for an idea to misrepresent and so to be affirmed in error. In addition, however, at the level of minimal representation, *every* imaginative idea can be said to be minimally false at least insofar as it represents without distinction causes and potential causes that are in fact different from one another.

Of course, the interpretation of the primary representational content of imaginative ideas will necessarily prove to be a holistic affair on this approach; what actions one will try to perform under the guidance of an image will be partly a function of what other beliefs and desires one has at the same time. But at least one constraint on the interpretation of primary content is not contingent: an individual must be understood as at least an imperfect striver for self-preservation.

We have now seen an explanation open to Spinoza—and *prima facie* the only explanation open to Spinoza—of *how* one can misrepresent the distance of the sun. The explanation exploits his fundamental doctrine of *conatus* and is fully compatible with his main doctrines about representation and imagination. What has not been explained is specifically *why* human beings misrepresent the distance of the sun. But there is good reason for that. The explanation for the human tendency to act towards certain seen distant objects as if they were 200 feet away (rather than some other distance) is to be found, for Spinoza, only deep within the specific physiological (and corresponding psychological) structure of human beings as self-preservatory mechanisms. Other creatures with the same basic visual resources for distinguishing distances might nevertheless have been so constructed that they tended to act towards all objects 200 feet or more distant as if they were exactly 300 feet distant, or 900 feet distant, or 17 miles distant. The ultimate source of primary imaginative error lies in the imperfection of each finite

thing considered as a self-preservatory mechanism; but the particular kinds of errors to which a thing will be most prone is a function of where its own imperfections as a self-preservatory mechanism actually lie. Given the potential depth and persistence of such structural imperfections, sensory illusions may continue to prime faulty actions and so continue to *misrepresent*, despite the fact that sensory images cannot be *intrinsically* erroneous for Spinoza and even when the illusion comes to be well-understood and so, overall, ceases to deceive. In such a case, new and more accurate ideas countermand the tendency to faulty actions without entirely removing it.

THE PUZZLE OF MISREPRESENTATION AND ERROR RESOLVED

We began with a textual puzzle posed by Bennett: How is error possible if (i) true ideas agree with their objects and (ii) the parallelism-and-identity of all ideas with their objects entails their agreement with those objects? To resolve the puzzle, we must understand Spinoza's account of misrepresentation in the context of his overall theory of intentionality. But we must also observe that Spinoza uses two different terms, *ideatum* and *objectum*, that are often translated indifferently as *object*. For while a true idea agrees with [*convenire*] its *ideatum* according to E1a6, the human body is never described as the *ideatum* of the human mind, nor is that with which an idea is said to be "one and the same" ever described as its *ideatum*. This, I propose, is because (i) the *objectum* of an idea is simply the thing that it parallels and with which it is "one and the same"—and hence, on Spinoza's account, that whose "objective" reality it contains—while (ii) the *ideatum* of an idea is whatever it is "of" in a sense that is broad enough to include the contents of imaginative representation. An idea need not, therefore, comprehend the objective reality of its full *ideatum*.

For Spinoza, what is numerically the very same idea token can exist both in God and in one or more finite minds. Michael Della Rocca has argued that the representational mental content of an idea is relative to the mind in which it exists, so that the same idea can represent differently *as it is in a human mind* and *as it is in God*.²⁰ In particular, he suggests that in God ideas always represent *only* their own objects, whereas in finite minds some ideas also serve to represent imaginatively (and hence confusedly and inadequately) external causes as well. As applied to our distinction between *objectum* and *ideatum*, this might be taken to suggest that in God an idea's *ideatum* and its *objectum* are necessarily the same; the idea is "of" precisely the thing whose objective reality or being it contains by being identical with it; hence, in God every idea (i) is precisely of

²⁰ For example, Della Rocca writes: "Although in the human mind each idea is of its extended counterpart, in a great many cases, each idea is *also* of the cause of that counterpart. In God's mind, as we have seen, those very same ideas are *only* of their extended counterparts" (*Representation*, p. 46).

something that is the case, (ii) agrees with its *ideatum*, and (iii) is true. As the imaginative idea of a particular internal affection exists in the human mind, in contrast, it will be separated from God's adequate ideas of its causes and will acquire *additional* representational content beyond the intentionality that it possesses by having an *objectum*. Thus, the *ideatum* of an imaginative idea in the human mind will consist of more than simply its *objectum*, and the parallelism and identity of the idea with its *objectum* would not guarantee its agreement with its full *ideatum*. Where the additional representational content concerning the *ideatum* misrepresents reality, agreement will fail and the idea in question will be false.

This is a possible reading of Spinoza. However, the doctrine of E1a4 that cognition of effects always involves cognition of their causes suggests that it is preferable to continue to distinguish the *ideatum* of an idea from its *objectum*, even as that idea exists in God.²¹ Even in God, every idea will involve some thought "of" the causes of its *objectum*. This is not, to be sure, because God requires multiple different and distinct ideas of those causes, but rather because the ideas, like the causes and effects themselves, are not entirely distinct from one another: in thinking one, one is thereby also to some extent thinking of the other. On this interpretation, identity is a relation holding specifically between an idea and its *objectum*, while agreement is a broader relation sometimes holding between an idea and its full *ideatum*. As an idea exists in God, the full information provided by adequate and unconfused knowledge of all causes constrains the interpretation of the *ideatum* to precisely what is actually the case about it, rendering the idea true. Indeed, this same happy condition holds of an *intellectual* idea in the human mind as well: adequate and unconfused knowledge of the causes of its object likewise constrains the interpretation of its *ideatum* to precisely what is true. In the case of an imaginative idea in the human mind, however, such adequate and unconfused knowledge of causes is absent from that mind, and the idea can therefore misrepresent its *ideatum*. Error then becomes all too possible—and hence Spinoza's *Ethics* can properly seek to offer at least a partial remedy.²²

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²¹ In correspondence, Della Rocca has indicated that he, too, prefers an interpretation along these lines. Hence the previous reading, in which *ideatum* and *objectum* are always the same in God, should not be attributed to him.

²² I have benefited greatly from discussions of these topics with Michael Della Rocca, Martin Lin, John Morrison, Colin Marshall, Alvin Plantinga, Lynn Joy, Samuel Newlands, Ted Warfield, Michael Griffin, Howard Robinson, Tom Stoneham, Alison Simmons, Jeffrey McDonough, Michael Rosenthal, Ursula Renz, and audiences at the University of Notre Dame, Central European University, Harvard University, and the University of Washington.

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CHAPTER 10

FINITE SUBJECTS IN THE *ETHICS*

Spinoza on Indexical Knowledge, the First Person, and the Individuality of Human Minds

URSULA RENZ

SPINOZA is often said to have neglected or even annihilated the human subject in the *Ethics*. His philosophy is usually thought of as some kind of centerless monism that mirrors reality from a divine perspective. There are valid reasons for this, yet, there is something striking about it: If all that matters in philosophy is the conception of things under a divine perspective, why should we care about ethics? According to Spinoza, there is no good or bad for God, and the difference between these two predicates is meaningful only to sentient beings. Hence, if the perspective that finite subjects have on things was unreal or insignificant, the whole worry about morals would be pointless. It is then not intelligible why a system of philosophy that restricts itself to the reconstruction of the world as it is known by a divine intellect should be called *Ethics*.

It is against this background that I want to understand Spinoza's conception of the human mind in this chapter. My claim is, first, that in his definition of the human mind, Spinoza did not equate finite minds with God's ideas, but with the ideas certain beings have themselves of their own bodies.¹ My second assumption is that, using this definition, he did not seek a solution to the mind-body problem, but sought instead to do justice to the singularity of human minds. As I see it, Spinoza's conception of the human mind has less to do with the metaphysics of the mental than with the epistemological problem of how it comes that one's own subjective experience of the world differs numerically from that of other people, even though one individual's thoughts quite often deal with the same things as the thoughts of others. The issue behind Spinoza's

¹ Cf. Wilson, *Ideas and Mechanism*, pp. 126–40, for a reconstruction that points in the opposite direction.

identification of the human mind with the idea of the human body is thus the constitution of men as finite epistemic subjects.

Here, one might object that there are no specific characteristics in the *Ethics* that distinguish the finite mind of human beings from God's infinite intellect. Indeed, by defining both notions in terms of certain ideas, Spinoza does undermine the assumption of a *categorical* difference between the human mind and the divine intellect. They are of the same kind of being, they both represent reality, and so differ only in scope. This difference in scope is crucial, however. For, even though Spinoza does allow for human beings to take, in some rare moments, the stance of an infinite intellect, he does conceive of human minds as essentially determined by local and historical influences. By assuming that minds vary in their scope and, in consequence, represent different pieces of reality, he does not merely account for the epistemic restriction of our actual knowledge, but also tries to render it intelligible how the differences between subjective points of views are created.

In this chapter, I would like to elaborate on this view. To do so, however, I have to make several detours and discuss first the preliminaries necessary to grasp the point of Spinoza's definition of the human mind. The first section of this chapter will start the process with a short sketch of the historical background of the term "*unio*," which is used in E2p13s in order to summarize the results of the preceding passage. If one takes this background into consideration, one has to conclude that the passage ending with E2p13 is *not* concerned, as one might at first glance assume, with the metaphysical relation between the mental and the physical, but with the constitution of finite minds as irreducibly distinguishable individuals. In the second section, the distinction between the conceivability and the actual existence of particulars as introduced in E2p8 and E2p8c is examined, and its consequences for the concept of the human mind are discussed. As a final preliminary, I will have a look at the axioms of Part II of the *Ethics*, which also constitute important argumentative ground for E2p11 and E2p13.

These preliminaries already support my view. However conclusive evidence is provided only in the fourth section, which discusses Spinoza's argument for his conception of the human mind in E2p13d. It will be shown that, by equating the mind with the idea of the human body, he accounts for the numerical distinction between finite minds. Secondly, it will be argued that this problem is not to be solved by virtue of the knowledge implied in the infinite intellect. Instead, Spinoza has to assume that we ourselves have some knowledge by which we distinguish our own body from the bodies of other things. The final section presents a brief overview of the wider consequences of this. Here, I will argue that, while my interpretation of Spinoza's concept of the human mind does not run counter to the radical rationalist spirit of the *Ethics*, it does point to the need for empirical knowledge, as soon as we want to explain the existence of particular things. Spinoza's rationalist metaphysics amounts thus, in the end, to a rather Kantian view of knowledge.

Before going into the details, let me say a few more words about how the problem at stake here relates to other issues. First, one has to be aware that Spinoza's conception of the human mind does not provide a theory of consciousness, but an account of mental

singularity. If we find therefore that Spinoza, in his definition of his concept of mind, relies on phenomenological facts, then this need not be compared with contemporary arguments against physicalist accounts of the phenomenon of consciousness. In addition, one might wonder whether the qualitative differences of subjective experience do not matter even more for an understanding of Spinoza's account of moral issues than the problem of the numerical differences between minds. I agree that in order to account for subjective experience the constitution of qualitative differences is as important as the numerical difference. On the other hand one has to be aware that the fact that minds differ numerically is fundamental to the meaningfulness of any talk about qualitative differences. One singular mind can of course have several qualitatively different or even ambivalent states of mind. But we also know of cases in which the ascription of certain mental qualities to someone precludes the ascription of other mental qualities to the same person, though we can plausibly ascribe the same mental qualities to two different subjects. To say that the cup on my desk appears to be green and red at the same time only makes any sense if we presuppose the existence of different subjects looking at it. This shows that, in a monopsychic approach to the mental, the possibility of ascribing different qualitative mental states would be rather restricted. Bayle was quite right in his claim that, if the *Ethics* assumes merely one singular epistemic subject, then it amounts to absurdity.² The problem with this claim is merely that the antecedent is wrong.

SPINOZA'S ALLUSION TO THE UNION BETWEEN MIND AND BODY AND ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS

Philosophical concepts are seldom innocent. Usually, when a philosopher defines a concept, he does so against some historical background. This is also the case with Spinoza's definition of the human mind, which gives rise to the following statement:

From these [propositions] we understand not only that the human mind is united to the body, but also what should be understood by the union of mind and body. (E2p13s)³

This résumé is quite surprising. Previously, Spinoza never spoke of a "union of mind and body" in the *Ethics*, and one also cannot say that the claim of such a union adds anything

² *Choix d'Articles Tiré du Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, p. 1077.

³ The Latin text says: *Ex his non tantum intelligimus, mentem humanam unitam esse corpori, sed etiam, quid per mentis et corporis unionem intelligendum sit.* Gebhardt and Curley capitalize the words "mens" and "corpus" or, in Curley's translation, "mind" and "body." I do not follow them here, because the capitalization does not stem from Spinoza.

substantial to his metaphysical views on the relation between the mental and the physical, as it was set out in E2p7 and E2p7s. On the contrary, the very idea of such a union is an odd element in Spinoza's approach. In order to talk about two things being unified or united, one usually presupposes that they are originally different. But this is not the case in the *Ethics*; Spinoza considers mind and body as two modes of different attributes and, hence, takes them to be "one and the same thing" (E2p7s). The real challenge for him thus is not to show that mind and body are united, but to explain why we are so often mistaken about this. We can conclude that by speaking of a union between mind and body, Spinoza does not necessarily characterize his own views, but perhaps instead alludes to a well-known debate of his time that was usually discussed under the label of such a "union." So, the question is to determine to which particular debate Spinoza may be referring here and how he thinks his approach relates to it.

There are two possibilities. One suggestion is that Spinoza was thinking of Descartes' notion of the union between the soul and the body.⁴ The problem Descartes addressed with this notion was that of the *specific* relation between mind and body in one particular human being (as opposed to the relations that exist between mental and physical entities in general). Given substance dualism, there is no metaphysical reason why a particular mind should be related to one body rather than another. But if so, why should we feel the affections of our own bodies, but not those of somebody else's body? And why should we, as Princess Elisabeth claims in her letters to Descartes, be able to voluntarily move the limbs of our bodies, but not the ones of someone else's body?⁵ It is in answering these types of questions that Descartes, in his later work and letters, distinguishes between three kinds of primitive notions, i.e. thought, extension, and the union of the soul and the body. Spinoza was of course familiar with this controversy, as can be shown from E5pref, where he explicitly mentions the *Passions of the Soul* and polemically asks what Descartes understands by a union between mind and body. The mention of the union between mind and body in E2p13 might, therefore, be an allusion to the Cartesian primitive notions.

There is, however, another option that is no less illuminating. The claim that the mind is united with the human body also echoes a traditional scholastic argument that challenges the Averroist idea that there is only one singular possible intellect for all human beings. It was, for instance, by showing that even the rational soul is united with a particular body that Thomas Aquinas argued against the Averroist notion of a unified singular intellect for all human beings.⁶ In his *Summa Theologiae*, he not

⁴ That the Cartesian notion of the union between mind and body is an important background for Spinoza has been maintained by several scholars. Cf. Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 72f.; Levy, *L'automate spirituelle*, p. 86f.; or Jaquet, *L'unité*, p. 7f.

⁵ AT 7: 75f.

⁶ Thomas deals with the issue in several places, e.g. *Summa contra Gentiles*, II, pp. 59–81, and the *Summa Theologiae*, I, pp. 75–89. I rely in particular on the latter, q. 76, entitled *De unione animae ad corpus*. Related matters are also discussed in Thomas' commentary on Aristotle's *de anima*, the *Sententia libri De Anima*, III; the *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*, qq. 7–14; and in *De unitate intellectus*, a short treatise written in 1270, after the bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier, first condemned the thirteen theses,

only defends the idea that the whole mind including the rational soul or “*principium intellectivus*” is united with the human body as its form, but he also suggests that there are as many possible intellects as human bodies, and this is in turn essential for the ascription of knowledge to particular persons.⁷ Consequently, if we did not assume that even the rational soul was united to the human body, we would fail, according to Thomas Aquinas, to account for the fact that knowledge is usually ascribed to particular human beings.

One might wonder which of these two discussions Spinoza had in mind in E2p13s. As already mentioned, there is evidence that he knew the issue of Descartes’ three primitive notions. On the other hand, it is a well accepted assumption that Spinoza was familiar with the discussion about the Averroist notion of a unified intellect, and there is no reason to doubt that he also knew traditional arguments against it.⁸ Moreover, given the fact that this question was still discussed in seventeenth century scholastic philosophy,⁹ Spinoza could expect that his contemporary readers were also familiar with it.

Both debates are therefore possible contexts. But which one is relevant here? I do not think that we have to make a decision on this issue. It is possible that Spinoza thought of both the Scholastic and the Cartesian discussions. In fact, the very formulation of the statement even suggests this. It seems plausible that by claiming to have shown “not only that the human mind is united to the body, but also what should be understood by the union of mind and body,” Spinoza claims to have solved both problems with one stroke, the Scholastic question whether or not the whole mind is united with the human body *and* the Cartesian problem of the particular relation between singular minds and their bodies. If one takes into consideration that both debates were concerned with the singularity of human minds, this makes even more sense.

We can conclude that by defining the human mind as the idea of the body, Spinoza seeks to account for the singularity of human or, more precisely, finite minds, and he is thus no longer concerned with the metaphysical relation between the mental and the physical. It will be shown in the fourth section that this is the basis for an illuminating interpretation of the identification of the human mind with the idea of the body as well of the way it is argued for in E2p13d. Let us first, however, have a look at the notion of the actual existence of particular things and the axioms of Part II of the *Ethics*, which both constitute important premises for Spinoza’s conception of the human mind.

which Siger of Brabant maintained were heretical. Cf. Flasch, *Aufklärung im Mittelalter?*, and Schulthess and Imbach, *Die Philosophie*, pp. 207–13, for an exposition of this debate.

⁷ *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 76.

⁸ He might not have read Thomas Aquinas himself, but, as Nadler, *Spinoza’s Heresy*, reminds us, there were similar discussions going on in Jewish philosophy.

⁹ Averroism was not as big an issue in the seventeenth century as it had been in previous centuries, yet it was still debated in Late Spanish as well as Dutch Scholasticism. See e.g. Francisco Suárez, *Commentaria*, Disp. 2, q. 4, §2, § 12 and §14, and Heereboord, *Philosophia naturalis*, p. 24of.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE CONCEIVABILITY AND ACTUAL EXISTENCE OF PARTICULARS AND ITS EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

In E2p8c, Spinoza introduces a distinction between two ways in which singular things can be said to exist. On the one hand, they exist formally as comprehended in God's attribute. On the other hand, they can also be said to exist insofar as they are said to have duration. This distinction between two forms of existence, that is, between two ways of talking about the existence of things, corresponds pretty much to our ordinary modal intuitions. We can acknowledge the existence of things actually present to us, but we can also speculate about the existence of entities we do not really know of. In both cases we implicitly presuppose that there is a significant difference between the merely conceived, the possible existence of a particular thing, and its actual, real existence.

But, however plausible this distinction might appear to common sense, when one considers it in the context of the *Ethics*, it is quite surprising. Given the framework of Spinoza's modal metaphysics, one would expect Spinoza to challenge rather than to affirm our ordinary modal intuitions. In E1p29, e.g., it is categorically denied that there is real contingency in nature. Having this in mind, one is tempted to think that the distinction between merely conceived and actual existence is only alleged in E2p8c, in order to prepare for the ontological reduction of the first to the latter. However, if one looks closely at the text, nothing points to such a reduction. Likewise, the comparison with geometrical construction, by which the distinction between actual and conceivable existence is illustrated in E2p8s, affirms, rather than denies, our ordinary modal intuitions. It is one thing to say that a circle may contain an infinite number of rectangles, but it is another to take the segments of two intersecting lines actually drawn into the circle and to form two rectangles from them. In the first instance, we only make claims of possible construction, whereas in the second we actually construct two particular rectangles, and for this we rely on the actual existence of its constituents.

These observations have important consequences for Spinoza's metaphysics as well as for his epistemology and philosophy of mind. First, we have to assume that, notwithstanding the denial of real contingency in E1p29, the distinction between possible and actual existence is a meaningful one. So the denial of real contingency cannot be consistently meant to preclude any rational conceivability of alternative possibilities of what is actually the case. This suggests that the *Ethics* probably does not, as has often been assumed, rest on a strictly necessitarian theory of modality.¹⁰

¹⁰ Necessitarian reconstructions have been defended in particular by Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism" and Perler, "The Problem of Necessitarianism." A conclusive argument against necessitarian reconstructions of the *Ethics*, however, was put forward by Schütt, "Spinozas Konzeption,"

Secondly, a similar correction has to be made with regard to the epistemological consequences. In contrast to the famous claims of E1p33s, where Spinoza pretends that the appearance of contingency is merely the effect of a lack of human knowledge, E2p8c alleges a deficiency in what one would call divine knowledge. They both indirectly admit that it is impossible to derive the ideas of the actual existence of particulars from the idea of God or of his attributes. This is not to say that these ideas are not comprehended in the infinite intellect, but rather that having concepts that can be derived from the concept of an infinite intellect is not sufficient. Again, this can best be illustrated by a comparison with the geometrical construction used in E2p8s. It is a prerequisite of this comparison that both the actually formed as well as the infinitely many possible rectangles are contained in the circle. But in order to actually construct rectangles, we also need the two lines actually drawn into the circle. E2p8c therefore seems to imply that in order to have knowledge of actually existing particular things some additional requirements have to be met, which Spinoza's metaphysics have not yet dealt with. What precisely these additional requirements are is not specified in E2p8c, but it is clear what knowledge they have to provide: they have to provide knowledge of the givenness of those things that are prerequisites for the actual existence of the things in question. Though it is never claimed explicitly in the *Ethics*, Spinoza is indirectly committed to the concession that at some point any epistemic subject who wants to account for the existence of particulars relies on indexical knowledge or some kind of knowledge by acquaintance.

This has quite far-reaching consequences for Spinoza's conception of the human mind, since E2p11 emphasizes that the human mind is constituted by the idea of an *actually existing* singular thing, a claim that relies essentially on E2p8c. Seen in the light of the discussed epistemological implications of this corollary, this serves not only to reject the notion that human minds are immortal souls,¹¹ but it can furthermore be presumed that Spinoza thereby also wanted to undermine those interpretations of his account that take human minds to consist simply of some "bits of God's omniscience".¹² The fourth section will show how such a misinterpretation of Spinoza's approach is ruled out. But for now we can retain the idea that an essential part of the constitution of human minds must be played out by that kind of knowledge that only finite subjects can have.

an article that unfortunately has not been received in the Anglo-Saxon world. For a suggestion of how to deal with the seeming contradictions on this matter, see also my interpretation in Renz, "Explicable Explainers" and Renz, "Notwendige Substanz."

¹¹ This interpretation was maintained by Gueroult, *Spinoza II*, p. 118.

¹² This metaphor stems from Wilson, *Ideas and Mechanism*, p. 153, who uses it to reject a logical reading of the term "idea" in favour of a psychological reading. Consistent with this, but in opposition to my view, she assumes Spinoza identifies minds with "God's ideas of finite things insofar as they are finite," (*ibid.*, p. 126, emphasis Wilson).

THE AXIOMS OF PART II AND THEIR USAGE IN THE *ETHICS*

It is one of the striking points of Spinoza's philosophy of mind that, in the passage concerned with the definition of the concept of the human mind, the axioms introduced at the beginning of the second part of the *Ethics* are referred to several times. This is even more remarkable, since, with the exception of E2p49, it is only in the propositions E2p10, E2p11, and E2p13 that the axioms of Part II are used at all. By comparison, the axioms of the first part are used about three times as often as the ones of the second part, and this in all parts aside from the third. One can assume that the axioms of Part II are introduced to address the problems raised by the conception of the human mind, and it is therefore important to have a closer look at them and to discuss what kind of knowledge they provide.

To start with, there are two points to be mentioned here. First, the axioms of Part II all deal with specifically human concerns, i.e. with the very fact of our own existence as particular human beings (E2a1), the ways we have epistemic access to reality (E2a2, E2a4) as well as the epistemic restriction implied by that (E2a5), and finally the irreducibly representational character of our mental life (E2a3). Second, it is remarkable that several of the axioms express phenomenological facts; this is to say that they do not simply state certain truths about human life as such, but they present it as it is seen from the perspective of involved subjects. This can best be seen in E2a4, which says:

We feel that a certain body is affected in many ways.

Instead of putting forward the simple ontological truth that human bodies are necessarily subjected to physical affections, Spinoza appeals to the subjective experience we have of the affections of a certain body. A similar observation can be made in respect to the Dutch version of E2a2 contained in the *Nagelatene Schriften*, where the trivial statement that man thinks is elucidated with a supplementary sentence saying

or, to put it differently, we know that we think.¹³

Of course, these observations should not be overrated. It has to be maintained that Spinoza does not really examine the subjective perspective. Instead of exploring *how it is like* to feel the affections of one's own body, he takes it as an indubitable and self-evident truth *that* we actually feel them. This also explains to a certain extent why in E2a4 and in the Dutch version of E2a2 the first-person-*plural* form is used, and not the first-person-*singular*. Spinoza appeals to certain insights that he considers to be common ground,

¹³ C 448, Footnote 3.

and insofar as they are common ground they can also be accepted as reliable. Against the background of the rather simple formulations of those two axioms, one can even go one step further and presume that they are to be taken to be common just because they are not described in detail. Indeed, *that* we feel the affections of a certain body is an experience presumably all his readers share, though a closer inspection might show that there are considerable differences in the way in which we experience certain affections. The axioms of Part II do not amount to phenomenology i.e. no detailed description and no theoretical exploration of the subjective view is given. Instead the axioms simply affirm those basic phenomenological facts underlying all our experience and whose truth therefore nobody would ever deny.

So Spinoza displays quite an ascetic attitude towards phenomenology. But he nevertheless seems to be quite aware of the fact that he cannot dismiss all phenomenological facts. If this was not the case, it would not make any sense to reaffirm them explicitly. Furthermore, if one looks at how the axioms of Part II are used in E2p11d and E2p13d, one will find that they have a crucial argumentative function in the *Ethics*. This makes clear that the experience of finite subjects cannot amount to nothing, but it is as real as the metaphysical concepts by which an impersonal infinite intellect describes the world.

ARGUING AGAINST THE OBJECTION OF MONOPSYCHISM: SPINOZA'S CONCEPTION OF THE HUMAN MIND RECONSIDERED

We are now at the point where we can get a clearer understanding of the train of thought that consolidates Spinoza's identification of the human mind with the idea of the human body.¹⁴ To start with, let us have a closer look at the character of the passage in which this identification is argued for. Here, as in many other places, Spinoza does not simply expose his views by putting forward neutral and self-sufficient theoretical claims. Instead, he is involved in a kind of implicit argumentative dialogue that already addresses some of the objections an informed interlocutor might raise after having studied the *Ethics* so far. This is most obvious in E2p11s where Spinoza directly addresses his readers, conjecturing that they will "think of many things which give them pause" and asking them:

to continue on with me slowly, step by step, and to make no judgment on these matters until they have read through them all.

¹⁴ E2p13 does not speak of the idea of the human body, but simply of the or a body, lat. "*corpus*." As can be seen from later citations of E2p13, e.g. in E2p19d, Spinoza is thinking of the human body here; for a reason why he doesn't make this explicit in E2p13, see footnote 20.

From the interpretation of Spinoza's résumé of E2p13s developed in the first section of this chapter, we can assume that the problem at stake here is how the *Ethics* can account for the singularity of or, more precisely, the numerical distinction between human minds. Against the background of the metaphysics of Part I of the *Ethics* as well as of the claims put forward in the first seven propositions of Part II, it is not surprising that this problem arises. Spinoza is quite aware of this. So in E2p11d, he repeatedly refers to E2a3 emphasizing thereby that the ideas that are underlying all our passions "must be in the same individual" as the idea constituting the human mind. By this, he does not just maintain that things to which we ascribe emotions or other "*modi cogitandi*" must already have certain ideas.¹⁵ He also indirectly alleges that any being that is subject to passions has, or consists in, a mind that is numerically distinguishable from other minds.

In E2p11d however, the existence of numerically distinguishable singular minds is merely presumed. How the *Ethics* can account for it has not yet been explained in detail. Furthermore, in E2p11c, it seems to get even worse. Spinoza concludes here that the human mind is only "a part of the infinite intellect of God." This claim has often been interpreted as the very denial of the existence of finite and distinguishable minds. I think this is a misunderstanding. Admittedly, read against the background of the debate about Averroism, Spinoza at first glance seems to suggest such a denial. If one takes into account however, how this claim is elucidated in the sentences following it, one has to conclude that E2p11c is not concerned with the ontological status of the human mind, but with the constitution of its content.¹⁶ By saying that the human mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God, Spinoza hence does *not* claim that in reality there is only one singular epistemic subject, but he is pointing to the fact that, by identifying minds with ideas, he is also committed to semantic holism. Thus E2p11c is wrongly taken to put forward some kind of monopsychism, though the danger of being misunderstood in this way is of course there. Keep in mind, however, that it is just after this corollary where the readers are addressed and asked to abstain from drawing hasty conclusions. One has to presume that Spinoza was very well aware of this danger.¹⁷

¹⁵ One might question whether the term '*individuum*' does not refer rather to the infinite intellect than, as I interpret it, to any individual. I don't think that this is a valid alternative, for E2a3, which is the basis of this claim and which explicitly mentions emotions, "such as love, desire, or whatever is designated by the word affects of the mind." To assume, however, that the infinite intellect has these emotions, which are traditionally and by Spinoza conceived as passions, is not compatible with the conception of the infinite intellect.

¹⁶ My interpretation here goes in the opposite direction of Pierre Macherey's, which assumes that E2p11c is like E2p11 dealing with the "*esse formalis*" of the idea constituting the human mind (cf. Macherey, *Introduction*, p. 109). According to my understanding, in E2p11c Spinoza moves on to a discussion of its objective being and is subsequently concerned with the content of our mind. For a detailed reconstruction of E2p11c, see also Renz, *Die Erklärbarkeit von Erfahrung*, pp. 176–84.

¹⁷ It is likely that Spinoza's friends, with whom he discussed the *Ethics*, already confronted him with the same objections that were later formulated by critics like Nicolas Malebranche, Pierre Bayle, or the German idealists.

The question remains whether Spinoza can avoid the pitfalls of monopsychism at all. It is here where the identification of the human mind with the idea of the body comes into the game. Let's therefore have a look at how Spinoza argues for it:

... if the object of the human mind were not the body, the ideas of the affections of the body would not be in God (by E2p9c) insofar as he constituted our mind, but insofar as he constituted the mind of another thing, i.e. (by E2p11c), the ideas of the affections of the body would not be our mind; but (by E2a4) we have ideas of the affections of the body. Therefore, the object of the idea that constitutes the human mind is the body. . . .

Formally considered, this demonstration consists of a *reductio ad absurdum*.¹⁸ However, its point can best be illustrated by the following thought experiment.¹⁹ Let us assume, as suggested by a superficial reading of E2p11, that our mind consists merely of an arbitrary idea of any particular body, e.g. the idea of the postman who is just ringing my doorbell. In return, the mind of the postman consists of the idea of my body sitting at my desk. What would this involve for the mental states we would have? Well, nothing other than that the postman would feel the affections my body undergoes when I, hurrying to the door, hit myself against the edge of the table, whereas I myself would not notice a thing.

It is simply an abstract version of this scenario that is ruled out in the first half of E2p13d. Unlike in the example with the postman, though, Spinoza here discards two absurd assumptions with one stroke. So it can be precluded first that the human mind consists merely of the idea of any arbitrary particular thing. As indicated in E2a4 by the word "*quoddam*," only affections of a certain body can be felt, namely that body that we acknowledge as our own.²⁰ Otherwise we would run into the absurdities illustrated by the postman's case. As a second consequence, the interpretation according to which human minds consist of the ideas *God* has of human bodies can also be abandoned, for the assumption of a neutral knowing intellect simply would not do the job of ruling out the scenario of me mistakenly ascribing the affections of the postman's body to my body and vice versa. It is completely conceivable that *God* knows which body is affected, while the postman's feelings and mine go astray. This shows that the assumption of an

¹⁸ See Lévy, *L'automate spirituelle*, for the formal analysis of E2p13d.

¹⁹ I have previously used this thought experiment in Renz, *Die Erklärbarkeit von Erfahrung* and Renz, "The Definition of the Human Mind"

²⁰ One might wonder why E2p13 does not speak of our body, though it seems quite clear that this is what Spinoza has in mind. I can see two reasons for this. First, it can be presumed that Spinoza wanted to avoid talking in a phenomenological manner, although his arguments rest on phenomenological facts at this point. This explains to a certain degree why the term '*mens humana*' is used here in order to discuss the issue of the singularity of finite minds. Then why, one might question, did he not talk of the human body in E2p13 as he does later when referring to it? This can be answered in my second point. It is quite plausible to assume that he wanted to avoid introducing an essentialist view of what constitutes the body of persons. Though we can assume that usually this body consists of a human body, it is also possible that it consists of a body where several limbs are lacking or replaced by prostheses, etc., and, considering the background of Spinoza's physics, further scenarios can be imagined.

omniscient intellect is absolutely useless when the question arises how we know which body is concerned with certain affections.²¹ Spinoza does not really answer this question, but he seems to be quite aware that something more is needed than an appeal to the knowledge of an infinite intellect. One can at least assume that this is the reason why in E2p13d, he refers to E2a4 that claims that *we* feel that a certain body is affected in many ways.

We can conclude that, by identifying the human mind with the idea of the human body, Spinoza does not simply make a case for parallelism. Instead his definition of the human mind is intended to show that, by equating minds with ideas, he is *not* committed to that stance, which he has so often been accused to have taken. Spinoza's approach does not neglect the perspective of finite subjects. On the contrary, he deliberately relies on it when defining the human mind in terms of our knowledge of our own body.

THE LIMITS OF CONCEIVABILITY CLAIMS: SPINOZA'S RATIONALISM REVISITED

The interpretation given above has not only shown that Spinoza's conception of the human mind is going in another direction than often assumed, but has also argued that he is only successful because he relies on certain insights that his philosophy is often claimed to have neglected. Spinoza cannot rule out the objection of maintaining monopsychism unless he acknowledges certain phenomenological facts that are accessible only from the perspective of finite subjects. This fits quite well with the discussion of E2p8c in section two of this paper, according to which knowledge of actual existence of particulars presupposes indexical knowledge or some kind of knowledge by acquaintance. Both claims, the irreducibility of the subjective perspective and the necessity of knowledge by acquaintance, show that Spinoza's rationalism should not be taken as an attempt to derive all our knowledge from one singular concept or principle, for it obviously takes many things or facts as given. Furthermore, if we look at how these claims are used in later demonstrations, we can conclude that Spinoza was quite aware of the boundaries that even a radical rationalism cannot overrule.

However, the question of how rationalism can be restricted without being undermined might arise. The answer to this question depends quite a bit on the concept of rationalism that one applies. Before deciding upon Spinoza's being a rationalist, one has to specify the claims any rationalist is committed to. In epistemology as well as in the history of philosophy, rationalism is often rendered as the claim of the existence of at

²¹ One might object here that E2p13d is talking of the ideas of the affections of our body in God. Indeed, the phrase "in God" is often used for ideas human beings have. But "in God" is not the same as "by God." In traditional terms, one could say that Spinoza maintains *panentheism*, and not *pantheism*. It is difficult but crucial to read his conception of the human also in light of this differentiation.

least some innate ideas, whatever this means precisely. Unfortunately, it is not at all clear whether Spinoza would affirm this assumption. Looking, for instance, at how he discusses the example of Pegasus in E2p48s, which Descartes used in order to explicate the distinction between fictitious and innate ideas, one gets the impression that Spinoza does not consider the Cartesian classification of ideas as plausible. On the other hand, he suggests in several places that there is some true knowledge in all our ideas, a claim that comes at least quite close to the assumption of innate ideas.

A more promising understanding of Spinoza's rationalism can be provided if one looks at Late Scholasticism and defines rationalism in terms of the metaphysical commitment to complete intelligibility or, in more recent terminology, explicability of being. It has been convincingly argued that Spinoza is committed to the principle of sufficient reason, which roughly claims that everything or every fact is completely explainable. As Michael Della Rocca has recently put it, "there are no brute facts" according to Spinoza.²²

How apt is this view against the background of the reconstruction given in this chapter? No doubt, this metaphysical commitment captures the rationalist spirit of the *Ethics* better than the prevalent epistemological notion did. Spinoza indeed assumes that every fact can be explained, and in this sense there are no brute facts according to him. That he takes some things as given is, therefore, not to say that some things as such are inexplicable. Or in other words, there are no things or facts that are a priori *precluded* from being completely explained. The question remains whether the concept of explaining that underlies this metaphysical claim also requires that we can account for all things solely on the basis of conceptual truths.

The answer cannot be given straightaway. On the one hand, there are some insights in Spinoza that are presumed to be known merely by virtue of the conceptual truths developed in the first part of the *Ethics*, and those insights are fundamental to any metaphysical discussion. On the other hand, it is suggested in Part II of the *Ethics* that those phenomena that we most frequently encounter in our lives can be accounted for only if, in addition, we rely on the empirical knowledge provided by our own experience. This seems to suggest that, besides the rationalist principles underlying Spinoza's metaphysics, empiricist claims are quite important to the *Ethics* and in particular to those discussions concerned with human life.

The *Ethics* thus relies on both radical rationalist principles as well as irreducibly empiricist concessions. But how are they to be reconciled? At this point, recall how in E2p8s the contribution of our knowledge by acquaintance is illustrated by the difference between the mere containment of infinitely many rectangles in a particular circle and the actual construction of two particular rectangles out of two given intersecting lines. Taking this comparison as a metaphor for the requested reconciliation between the rationalist and the empiricist inspirations of the *Ethics*, one has to assume that the knowledge provided by our subjective experience does not challenge, but, on the

²² Della Rocca, "A Rationalist Manifesto," p. 75.

contrary, verifies the claim of complete explicability. Knowledge by acquaintance is needed merely when conceptual analysis is not sufficient.

We can conclude that Spinoza's rationalist commitment to the explicability of all things is never weakened or undermined. On the contrary, the empiricist concessions made in respect to the knowledge of actually existing particulars have to be seen as an attempt to support his rationalist ambitions. This also sheds some new light on the argumentative role of the principle of sufficient reason in the *Ethics*. On the one hand, it applies to every being and every property without exception.²³ In other words, taken as a claim that rules out scepticism, it prepares the ground for knowledge claims in respect to all kinds of beings. The principle of sufficient reason is thus of an unlimited validity. However, given the empiricist concessions mentioned above, one has to admit that the principle of sufficient reason has only a restricted explanatory power, since, with respect to the existence of particulars, conceivability is merely a necessary but not a sufficient condition. This indicates that the principle of sufficient reason is more like a transcendental claim rather than a descriptive law-like statement, which could justify an explanatory reduction of existence to conceivability. This is why, while we can rule out presumed facts that contradict the metaphysical concepts and principles involved in the concept of God or its attributes, we cannot account for the actual existence of things merely by making statements about conceivability. Therefore, Spinoza's account does not amount to a full-fledged idealist rationalism according to which existence is identical or even co-extensional with conceivability, but to a rather realist or Kantian conception of rationalism.

Some might regret this result, but in my view there is nothing to regret. Spinoza does not undermine his rationalism, and he does not break with the principles underlying it either. He merely shows that, if we say goodbye to the transcendent personal and essentially mysterious God that monotheistic religions have brought into philosophy, we also have to say goodbye to some of our epistemological hopes. We can, in particular, no longer expect an a priori account for phenomena that either have historical origins or that are irreducibly tied up with the experience of finite subjects. We cannot account, in other words, solely in terms of conceptual truths for particular events, for minds, and for the meaning that particular events have for minds.²⁴

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²³ See in particular Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 2f.

²⁴ I am greatly indebted to Michael Della Rocca, who not only invited me to contribute to this volume with this text, but also challenged me in the best way. Thanks also to Robert Schnepf, Eric Schliesser, Jeff McDonough, and Lisa Shapiro, as well as to the participants of several workshops in Ghent, at Harvard, and at Simon Fraser University.

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CHAPTER 11

SPINOZA ON SKEPTICISM

DOMINIK PERLER

I

We all have a vast number of beliefs, and it seems quite natural that many of them happen to be true. Thus, I am convinced that I am sitting at a table, and there is indeed a table in front of me. But how can I be certain that my belief is true? It could very well be that I am having a sensory illusion, a dream, or even a hallucination due to the influence of a pernicious drug. It is even conceivable that a malicious demon (or its modern cousin, an omnipotent neuroscientist) is making me have the belief that there is a table in front of me although there is no table. In all these cases of deception, I would have a very strong belief, perhaps even one that seems irresistible and compelling to me, but I would be mistaken. It is therefore not enough to have mere psychological certainty about one's own beliefs: there may always be a gap between psychological and epistemic certainty. How can this gap be closed?

Descartes made a well-known attempt to answer this tricky question. Beliefs consist of ideas, he claimed, and ideas are only to be trusted if they are clear and distinct. In order to have epistemic certainty, one simply needs to evaluate one's set of beliefs and retain those that consist of clear and distinct ideas. But what guarantees the truth of clear and distinct ideas? A benevolent God, Descartes unequivocally held. But how can we have epistemic certainty that there is such a God? We simply need to have a clear and distinct idea of God, Descartes responded, thus giving rise to a long and fierce debate about epistemic circularity.¹ On the one hand, God is supposed to close the gap between psychological and epistemic certainty by providing a guarantee for our clear and distinct ideas; on the other hand, we already need a clear and distinct idea in order to be able to

¹ It started with the objections presented by Mersenne (AT 7:124–25) and Arnauld (AT 7:214) and has not yet come to an end. For recent attempts to resolve the circularity problem, see Perler, *Repräsentation bei Descartes*, pp. 285–299; Murdoch “The Cartesian Circle” Broughton, *Descartes's Method*, pp. 175–186; and Della Rocca “Descartes, the Cartesian Circle.”

invoke this guarantee. There seems to be no way to break out of this circle. That is why our ideas are always exposed to doubt. As long as we have no independent guarantee for their truth, we seem to be utterly unable to go beyond mere psychological certainty.

Like every attentive reader of Descartes, Spinoza was familiar with this skeptical challenge. In his early commentary on Descartes' *Principles*, he presented a detailed exposition of the epistemic circle.² But in his later works, he seems not to have worried about the problem that we ought to establish an independent guarantee for the truth of our ideas. In the *Ethics* he simply affirms: "He who has a true idea at the same time knows that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing" (E2p43). This statement hardly looks like a sophisticated answer to the skeptic. Spinoza seems rather to be making a dogmatic claim: a true idea is self-evidently true and does not require further justification. We therefore do not need to look for a special guarantee, neither in God nor elsewhere. We simply need to accept a true idea as it is, and every doubt will disappear—end of the skeptical debate.

Given this apparently dogmatic claim, it is hardly surprising that Spinoza is sometimes seen as a philosopher who simply ignored or dismissed the skeptical challenge.³ Some commentators even think that he did not fully realize the threat of this challenge. Thus, J. Bennett harshly remarked: "I think that Spinoza is muddled about skepticism."⁴ He is muddled, one may say, because he does not see that psychological certainty about one's own ideas does not amount to epistemic certainty. My ideas may be so firm and irresistible that I do not have the slightest doubt about their truth. This, however, does not warrant the conclusion that they are in fact true. One may even have the impression that Spinoza is not interested in establishing a rational method for establishing epistemic certainty. He seems rather to adopt some kind of "mystical attitude" by claiming that truth reveals itself and that we simply need to open ourselves to this revelation. In a well-known passage, he holds: "What can there be which is clearer and more certain than a true idea, to serve as a standard of truth? As the light makes both itself and the darkness plain, so truth is the standard both of itself and of the false" (E2p43s). Hence, we only need to look at a true idea and we will immediately realize that it is in fact true. Nothing else is required.

Clear and simple as this recommendation may appear, it raises more questions than it answers. How does a true idea reveal its own truth? Why can we trust this revelation? Why is a true idea also the standard of the false? How and to what extent does it enable us to distinguish between truth and falsity? There is no anti-skeptical section in the *Ethics* that would straightforwardly address these questions. It is therefore quite understandable that most commentators detect no response to Cartesian skepticism in this work.⁵ If they

² See DPP Part 1, Prolegomenon (G 1:146–49).

³ See, for instance, Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, pp. 65–67, and Cook, *Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 82.

⁴ Bennett, *A Study*, p. 176.

⁵ A notable exception is Della Rocca, "Spinoza and the Metaphysics" (see also Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, pp. 127–34), who argues that the Principle of Sufficient Reason, the guiding principle in the *Ethics*, leads Spinoza to reject Cartesian skepticism. For a short account, see also Steinberg, "Knowledge," pp. 159–60.

find an attempt to deal with skeptical questions at all, they locate it in the earlier *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, where Spinoza delineates the conditions for reaching clear and distinct ideas.⁶

However, there is a serious anti-skeptical strategy in the *Ethics* as well—a strategy that neither appeals to dogmatic claims nor to a “mystical attitude.” But there are different ways of adopting such a strategy. One can not only take the skeptical challenge as it is and try to refute it, one can also question the challenge itself and give a diagnosis of its origin. When choosing this second strategy, one can come up with two different kinds of diagnosis, as Michael Williams pointed out when discussing more recent attempts to deal with skepticism.⁷ One can provide a *therapeutic* diagnosis, treating skeptical problems as pseudo-problems that are generated by misuses or misunderstandings of language. When seen in this perspective, skeptical questions do not really make sense. They disappear as soon as the misuses of language are detected and corrected. But one can also present a *theoretical* diagnosis, conceding the seriousness of skeptical problems but questioning their naturalness. This kind of approach aims to show that arguments in favor of skepticism are much more complex and theory-laden than their proponents admit: they rely on a number of unacknowledged presuppositions and theses. This is why they need to be located in a theoretical framework that is far from being self-evident or self-explanatory. In attacking this framework and in showing that there are alternatives, one can then make clear that skepticism is avoidable.

In the following, I would like to show that Spinoza adopts an anti-skeptical strategy by presenting a theoretical diagnosis. In his view, Cartesian skepticism is the product of a theory that uncritically accepts certain assumptions about the structure and origin of ideas. As soon as one questions these assumptions, one realizes that the theoretical framework is not as natural as it might seem at first sight, and that it would be inadequate to accept it, merely trying to refute skeptical arguments that arise within it. Rather, one needs to look at these arguments from the outside, reconstructing the entire framework and replacing it by a more promising one that does not create skeptical puzzles.

II

The first question that must be addressed when one constructs the framework for a theory of ideas concerns the very definition of an idea. As is well known, Spinoza presents the following definition: “By idea I understand a concept of the mind which the mind forms because it is a thinking thing” (E2d3). Innocent as this statement may appear, it contains two crucial points. First, an idea is not a mind-independent, abstract entity

⁶ See Doney, “Spinoza on Philosophical Skepticism”; Bolton, “Spinoza on Cartesian Doubt”; and Delahunty, *Spinoza*, pp. 25–30.

⁷ See Williams, *Problems of Knowledge*, p. 146. For a more extended discussion, see Williams, *Unnatural Doubts*, pp. xv–xvii.

(like a Platonic idea or a Fregean thought), but something a particular mind forms. Using modern terminology, one could say that it is a mental token that always needs to be evaluated insofar as it is given in this or that mind. Second, this token is a concept and therefore has representational content. Like Descartes, Spinoza sometimes uses traditional scholastic terminology, attributing “objective being” to an idea (E2p8c).⁸ He thereby does not simply state that an idea exists, objectively speaking or seen from an objective point of view, but that it represents an object. Since several people can have representations of the same object, there can be ideas in several minds that have the same objective being. That is why one always needs to distinguish between two aspects when talking about an idea. One can take it as a mental token and count as many ideas as there happen to be mental acts or states, or one can take it as the content of an act and talk about one and the same object that is represented in many acts.

But how is the content of a mental act to be understood? It is in his response to this question that Spinoza corrects the Cartesian framework on an important point. He does not simply focus on isolated ideas and their representational content. Right from the beginning, he makes clear that one needs to look at ideas insofar as they are related to each other. There is always an “order or connection of ideas” (E2p7), just as there is an order of material things, and Spinoza spells this connection out in causal terms. If one intends to explain the content of an idea in a specific mind, one needs to examine how it is causally connected to other ideas. It is precisely this kind of connection that accounts for the crucial difference between adequate and inadequate ideas.⁹ If a mind has adequate ideas, it grasps not just an isolated idea but all the causal antecedents of this idea. By contrast, if a mind has inadequate ideas, it grasps only some of its causal antecedents. But what does it mean that an idea has causal antecedents? Surely an idea is not caused in the same way as, say, a human being is caused by his or her parents; there is no material cause on the mental level. An idea rather stands in an inferential relation to other ideas, i.e. it follows from other ideas.¹⁰ If an idea is adequate, it perfectly follows from other ideas; they function like premises from which a conclusion can be drawn. If, however, an idea is inadequate, there is no inferential relation; one or more premises are missing. Spinoza makes this clear by saying that someone with inadequate ideas has ideas that are “like conclusions without premises” (E2p28d). Such a person does not know how a

⁸ See also TdIE §34 and §41. In E1p30d he refers to “what is contained objectively in the intellect.”

⁹ Spinoza explains this difference in E2p11c rather than in the official definition of adequate ideas in E2d4. For a detailed exposition, see Della Rocca, *Representation*, pp. 53–57 and Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics*, pp. 161–73.

¹⁰ In more recent terminology (see Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, pp. 97–102), one could say that there is a relation of material and not just formal inference because anyone who grasps this relation can spell out the content (and not just the logical form) of an idea, saying what it amounts to and how it differs from another content. Spinoza gives an illuminating example in Ep. 60 to Tschirnhaus (G 4:270–71) where he says that someone having the adequate idea of a circle is able to express its cause and to indicate its properties, for instance that all the radii drawn from the centre to the circumference are equal. Obviously, spelling out the content does not amount to indicating any properties, but the *essential* ones. Therefore, a person having an adequate idea can explain the essence of a thing.

given idea is inferentially related to other ideas. Consequently, he or she only has a dim understanding of its content.

Let me illustrate this point with an example. Suppose that I have an idea of a horse and that I relate it to other ideas. In this case I can draw some inferential relations, saying, “If this is a horse, it has four legs and a tail” or “It cannot have wings if it is a horse.” I am even able to locate the horse in a historical perspective, saying, “If it is a horse, it has certain ancestors in the evolutionary history.” If I had an adequate idea, I could perfectly draw all inferential relations, thus indicating all the features of a horse and distinguishing it from other animals. I would have, as it were, a mental map that perfectly matches the world—a map on which not only horses and their ancestors are indicated, but also cows, cats, and many other things with all their differences with respect to horses. Unfortunately, I am not in this ideal situation. Given that most of my ideas are inadequate, I have a very limited mental map. I may be able to say that horses, unlike birds, typically have four legs, but I am utterly ignorant as far as their systems of procreation and digestion are concerned. A veterinarian could say much more about horses and spell out most of their typical properties as well as their relations to other animals. His idea would be less inadequate. That is why one ought to consider an idea as a mind-relative item, i.e. as a representation related to other representations in this or that mind. If ideas are related to God’s mind, they are all adequate because in God there is a perfect connection of all ideas. Or to put it more precisely, God considered under the attribute of thinking is nothing but the perfect connection of all ideas—the complete set of all conclusions with all premises.

Given this emphasis on the connection of ideas, it is clear that ideas are not just representational atoms but parts of an all-embracing representational system. In order to acquire adequate ideas, one does not need to come up with single new ideas that are, as it were, little islands and perfect in themselves. Nor does one simply need to actualize this or that inborn idea. Rather, human beings need to connect ideas with each other in the right way, thus establishing more and more inferential relations, so that they know what a thing is and how it came about. It is also in paying attention to these relations that one can evaluate whether an idea is true, because all adequate ideas are true (E2p34).¹¹ That is, if an idea is perfectly inferentially related to other ideas, it indicates all the features of a given thing and only these features—it is the perfect map matching a thing. This is the reason why Spinoza emphasizes that “that which makes the form of a true thought is to be sought in the thought itself, and it is to be deduced from the nature of the understanding.”¹² The important point is that one should not look for something outside the realm of ideas if one is searching for the “form” of their truth. Should there be a true idea of a horse in my mind, I would have representations of things with four legs, with a certain system of digestion, with the capacity of neighing, with a certain evolutionary history, etc., and I would combine these representations in such a way that they fit together,

¹¹ See also Ep. 60 to Tschirnhaus (G 4:270).

¹² TdIE §71.

characterizing the animal in every detail and distinguishing it from all other things. It would not be a comparison of my idea with a material horse or with other things, but an evaluation of the coherence of all the inferentially related ideas that would enable me to tell whether I have a true idea.

This emphasis on the interrelation of ideas shows that Spinoza makes two crucial assumptions when correcting the Cartesian framework. First, he subscribes to *holism*. Using a modern slogan, one could say that he defends the principle “One idea is no idea.” It is only its manifold relations to other ideas that provide an idea with a well-defined content for a given mind, and it is only in looking at these relations that one can tell whether an idea is true. Second, Spinoza appeals to *coherentism* when claiming that one needs to evaluate to what extent an idea is inferentially related to other ideas. Only a perfectly related idea turns out to be a true idea because only such an idea enables someone to give a detailed explanation of a thing. Once one has an idea that is perfectly embedded in a system of ideas, it would be pointless to ask for a special guarantee of its truth because it is precisely its coherent connection with other ideas that provides this guarantee. So if I can tell a detailed and perfectly coherent story about all the features of a horse and its entire evolutionary history, it would be a sign of complete misunderstanding if someone were to ask me: “But are you sure that you have a true idea of a horse?” The very fact that I can tell a story that has no explanatory gaps proves that my idea is true. This is the main reason why Spinoza claims that only someone who treats an idea as something “mute, like a picture on a tablet” (E2p43s) casts doubt on the certainty of a true idea and looks for a special guarantee. Such a person does not realize that a true idea speaks, as it were, for its own truth: in enabling a person to give a detailed explanation of a thing, it manifests itself as a correct and exhaustive representation.

The fact that only an idea standing in a perfect coherent order with other ideas manifests itself as being true has a consequence that may look strange at first sight: an idea can appear more or less true, depending on the degree of its coherence with other ideas. Perfect coherence is possible only if an idea is related to the divine mind because it is only in this mind that all the inferential relations are fully given. Strange as this gradual conception may appear, it is not that implausible. For if I have an idea of a horse, I relate it to some other ideas, thereby grasping some horse features and some differences between horses and other animals. But it is clear that the inferential relations I establish are far from being complete—I have no clue about many anatomical and physiological features and can therefore tell only a partial explanatory story. A veterinarian is capable of relating his horse idea to many more ideas, thus giving a much more detailed account of typical horse features. But even he is not aware of all the features and therefore needs to do substantial research. Perhaps he also needs to revise some inferential relations he made earlier. In any case, what distinguishes him from me is the fact that in his mind the horse idea is related to more ideas so that he can better spell out what the idea of a horse amounts to—there is a higher degree of coherence. The smaller the degree of coherence, the higher the chance that there will be a false idea because falsity “consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate, or mutilated and confused, ideas involve.” (E2p35) Thus, I have a false idea of a horse if I have only a confused understanding of its system

of digestion or if I cannot say whether or not it is a cloven-hoofed animal. Given my very limited capacity to establish inferential relations, I do not know precisely what follows from the fact that something is a horse. But no matter how many features I ignore, and no matter how many erroneous features I attribute to a horse, I grasp at least some features, be it only the simple fact that a horse is an animal. There is always a small degree of coherence in my limited system of ideas, and therefore some appearance of truth.

At this point, it becomes clear how Spinoza could react to a skeptic. If he were asked: “But could it not be that you are wrong in everything you are attributing to a horse and that all your beliefs are false, including the simple belief that a horse is an animal in the material world?”, he could answer: “Admittedly, many of my beliefs are false in the sense that they consist of mutilated and confused ideas; they only partially indicate what horses really are. That is why my ideas strongly differ from those in the divine mind that are perfectly interrelated and perfectly indicate all the features of a horse. But it is impossible that my ideas indicate no horse features at all, not even the most basic ones, and that they completely miss their target. My horse idea, which is clearly a consistent idea of a physically possible thing, stands in a representational relation to a certain type of animal in the material world. The decisive question is not whether I represent such a thing, but how accurately I represent it, and this depends on how coherently all my representations fit together.”

Yet it is clear that a skeptic would not be satisfied with this answer. He could immediately respond that it does not resolve the crucial problem. The main question is not whether we have many interrelated ideas that perfectly represent all the features of a thing in the material world. The crucial question is whether our ideas are linked to material things at all. What guarantee do we have that they point to something outside our mind? If Spinoza assumes that a basic idea like that of a horse inevitably represents something in the material world and that it does so by indicating more or less of its typical features, he presupposes what needs to be demonstrated, namely that an idea “hooks unto” the material world. But how can we be certain about this basic fact? In addition, the skeptic could point out that an appeal to a coherence of ideas and a gradual scale of adequacy does not resolve the problem because coherence in no way guarantees correspondence between ideas in the mind and material things outside the mind. It could very well be that we have a complex, fine-grained system of ideas that is completely detached from the material world—a system that is encapsulated in our mind or even implanted there by a malicious demon.

One may indeed have the impression that Spinoza’s emphasis on the connection of ideas and his famous rejection of a direct causal link between ideas and material things straightforwardly leads to an extreme form of coherentism. It is therefore hardly surprising that some commentators saw in him the first thoroughgoing defender of a coherentist theory of truth.¹³ But if he were indeed a coherentist, he would, as it were, throw out

¹³ Walker, *The Coherence Theory*, p. 53, argues that for Spinoza truth is nothing but “an internal relationship within the rational system of beliefs.”

the baby with the bath water. His response to the question of how we can have epistemic (and not just psychological) certainty that we have true ideas representing things in the material world would then be: we do not need to worry about this certainty because it is not the alleged correspondence between ideas and material things that matters, but the relation between ideas. The better we can detect a high degree of coherence between our ideas, the more we can be certain that they are true—truth consists in nothing but coherence. No relation to something outside the system of ideas needs to be taken into account.

However, Spinoza is far from giving such a radical (and devastating) answer. In one of the first axioms he unmistakably holds: “A true idea must agree with its object” (E1a6).¹⁴ And in his definition of adequate ideas he does not claim that correspondence with things in the world does not matter at all. He differentiates only what is intrinsic to an idea, namely that it has certain inner properties and that it is related to its causal antecedents, from what is extrinsic, “namely, the agreement of the idea with its object” (E2d4expl). Given this clear commitment to a correspondence theory of truth, one should carefully distinguish Spinoza’s explanation of the *nature* of truth from his account of the *criterion* of truth.¹⁵ Should someone ask in what the truth of a horse idea consists, the answer should be: in its perfect correspondence with a material horse—the idea indicates all the features characteristic of a horse and only these features. But should someone then ask how we can find out whether or not a given horse idea is true, the answer should be: not by comparing the idea to a material horse (there is no neutral point of view from which such a comparison could be made) or to the archetype of a horse (there is no such abstract entity), but by evaluating the inferential relations in which this idea stands. If it turns out that it fits perfectly into an entire system of ideas and that it is coherently related to other ideas so that it has a well-defined content, indicating all horse features, we have a reliable criterion for its truth. No further criterion is necessary. But coherence does not constitute truth; it merely indicates it. Correspondence is what makes an idea true in the first place. But how can we be certain that there is in fact a correspondence? How can we rule out the possibility that an idea is simply the product of a malicious demon and not anchored in a material world?

III

The key to an answer to these questions lies in Spinoza’s metaphysics. As is well known, he defends not only the thesis that there is a connection of ideas but also the further

¹⁴ This is confirmed in E2p32d, where Spinoza explains that all divine ideas are true because “all ideas which are in God agree entirely with their objects.”

¹⁵ At least in the *Ethics*, Spinoza unequivocally defends a correspondence theory. In his earlier works, he is inclined to accept a coherence theory, though a version that substantially differs from the main contemporary versions of that theory, as Curley, “Spinoza on Truth” convincingly shows.

thesis that the “order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things” (E2p7). Given this parallelism, there needs to be a horse corresponding to the idea of a horse. There cannot be some kind of free-floating idea that has no material counterpart. However, the fact that there is in principle a parallelism between ideas and things does not guarantee that each and every idea in a human mind has an actually existing material counterpart. Spinoza is well aware of the fact that we have ideas of many things that no longer exist, that do not yet exist, or that even cannot exist. In fact, he pays particular attention to ideas of fictitious things, warning the reader that sometimes “we regard as present things which do not exist” (E2p17s). This warning should be taken seriously, because parallelism alone does not remove all skeptical problems. The metaphysical fact that each idea has a counterpart under the attribute of extension guarantees only that there is a parallelism *sub specie aeternitatis* and that in the divine mind, which is something like the perfect mental map for all actual as well as possible things, each idea has a corresponding thing. But how then can we be certain that our ideas, which are far from providing us with a perfect map, are related to things in the material world?

Spinoza tackles this problem in his detailed exposition of the acquisition of ideas. In his view, a human being acquiring ideas is not a composition of two distinct substances, as Descartes, Malebranche, and many of his contemporaries claimed, but one thing falling under two attributes, namely thinking and extension. That is why every mode of thinking has a corresponding mode of extension, or to be more precise, every mode of thinking is identical to a mode of extension. The two modes are really one thing “expressed in two ways,” not two really distinct items (E2p7s).¹⁶ Thus, when I am thinking about a horse and having a certain idea, this idea (a mental state with a content) is numerically identical to a corporeal state, most likely to a brain state. This state, in turn, does not arise *ex nihilo* but is caused by a material thing acting upon the body and bringing about certain affections. Therefore, an idea is always related to a material thing through corporeal affections. Spinoza makes this point clear: “The human mind does not perceive any external body as actually existing, except through the ideas of the affections of its own body.” (E2p26) So when a horse is running by, it affects my visual system and causes visual and other sensory inputs, which give rise to a brain state. And this item cannot be considered only under the attribute of extension but also under the attribute of thinking. Taken under this second attribute, it is nothing but a first idea of a horse. Therefore, whenever a brain state is caused, an idea shows up—no additional causation is required.

The decisive point is that I do not get this first idea simply by introspection or by means of an actualization of an inborn horse idea, but only by being in empirical

¹⁶ Consequently, a human mind consisting of many ideas is identical to the body: mind and body are “one and the same individual” (E2p21s). It is important to note that Spinoza does not simply defend parallelism (i.e. a coexistence of two different types of states) but an identity thesis. For a detailed discussion, see Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, pp. 67–70, and Della Rocca, *Representation*, pp. 118–40.

contact with a horse. It is a particular horse—having a number of visual, tactile, and other sensible features—that makes me have corporeal horse affections. And whenever I have such affections, I also have an idea or even many ideas because of the token identity between modes under the attributes of extension and thinking. Admittedly, these first ideas are quite crude and do not provide me with much information about the typical features of a horse. They are highly inadequate and merely represent the horse as, say, something brown and neighing. To get more adequate ideas, I need to link the sensory ideas to many other ideas, and I ought to do empirical research that goes far beyond merely seeing and hearing a horse. In addition, there is the danger that my first ideas represent many features that do not belong to the horse but to my body. As we have seen, Spinoza explicitly says that the human mind first has “ideas of the affections of its own body.” Thus I quite spontaneously think about something brown when seeing a horse, a property not to be found in the horse itself (as a material thing it can only have geometrical and kinematic properties), but only in myself as the perceiver affected by the horse.¹⁷ This is why Spinoza cautiously remarks that “the ideas which we have of external bodies indicate the condition of our own body more than the nature of external bodies” (E2p16c2). A simple sensory idea points, as it were, in two directions: at our own body affected by the external thing and at the thing itself. And it does so in such a confused way that we are unable to tell which properties are in our own body and which can be found in the external thing. But no matter how poor and confused the first sensory idea may be, no matter how inadequate it is, it is linked to a horse in the material world. If there were no horse to start with, there would be no corporeal affection and, consequently, no idea that stands in a relation of token identity to this affection.

Two points are noteworthy in this line of argument when it is assessed against the background of radical skeptical arguments. First, it excludes from the outset the kind of scenario one finds in Descartes’ First Meditation. A question like “Could it not be that I am so radically deceived that I can only be certain about the existence of my own thoughts, but not about the existence of my own body and of material things surrounding my body?” would make no sense for Spinoza. A thought, i.e. an idea, is identical to a corporeal state and therefore *necessarily* related to the body. Hence, whenever someone has an idea, he or she can be certain about the existence of his or her own body. It simply makes no sense to conceive of an idea as something detachable from a bodily state. Doing so would amount to introducing an inexplicable gap between two different

¹⁷ Like most of his contemporaries, Spinoza thinks that it is only a special ratio of movement and rest that can be found in material things (E2le1), not a color or a smell. Such a sensible quality is the product of a thing acting upon a perceiver. Unfortunately, we often fail to distinguish what it is in the things themselves from what is caused in us by them. That is why we often give misleading descriptions of them (E1app/G 2:82). On Spinoza’s physical assumptions, see Adler, “Spinoza’s Physical Philosophy.” On his explanation of perceptual misdescriptions and false judgments, see Perler, “Verstümmelte und verworrene Ideen.”

realms.¹⁸ And since a corporeal state does not arise *ex nihilo* but is caused by an external thing acting upon the body, this person can also be certain about the existence of a thing outside of his or her body.¹⁹ Of course, errors are still possible. It may still be (and in fact often is the case) that one has false ideas of external things, for instance because one thinks of them as having properties (like color) that are only affections in the body, or because one thinks of them as actually existing while they have ceased to exist.²⁰ But falsity in these cases can be nothing more than falsity in the privative sense, the kind of falsity already mentioned in Section II. One simply has a “privation of knowledge” (E2p35) if one thinks of the horse as being brown because the sensory idea is confused and mixes up information about the horse with information about one’s own bodily affections. Likewise, one has very limited knowledge if one thinks of Caesar as still living. In this case, the idea of Caesar is only indirectly related to Caesar (through books, reports, etc.) and lacks a relation to ideas of the historical setting of this figure. It is incomplete and mutilated. But no matter how confused and mutilated our ideas may be, they are always linked to things in the external world. For this reason, there can be no *global* error; i.e. it cannot be the case that all our ideas completely miss their target and do not represent anything in the material world. All we should worry about is *local* error, i.e. error in the way an idea represents this or that particular object. But this second type of error can be corrected if we acquire more and more ideas and relate them in a more detailed way so that they become more and more adequate.²¹

The second point to be noted concerns the nature of causal relations with things in the material world. It is crucial for Spinoza that one should never appeal to causal relations between items falling under two different attributes. That is why one can never say that a horse directly causes the idea of a horse. Nor can one say that a brain state directly causes this idea. Causal interactions between material and mental items are ruled out (E3p2). But one can nevertheless speak about a relation between these items because a material thing can bring about corporeal affections that give rise to brain states, and these states

¹⁸ Should one assume that there is an inexplicable gap, one would violate the Principle of Sufficient Reason: there must be an explanation for *every* fact unless it is self-explanatory. On the methodological importance of this principle, see Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, pp. 4–12.

¹⁹ To be sure, Spinoza concedes that not all changes of corporeal states are directly caused by external things. When we try to overcome a passion like sadness, it is the corporeal counterpart of an idea that immediately changes the corporeal side of that passion. But Spinoza insists that a passion cannot be altered unless “we form a clear and distinct idea of it” (E5p3), and such an idea does not arise *ex nihilo*. It rather presupposes a coherent order of ideas that go along with corporeal states caused by external things.

²⁰ It may also be that one takes them to have properties we simply imagine. Spinoza mentions the case of the sun that we imagine to be two hundred feet away from us (E2p35s). We are simply ignorant of its true distance and therefore falsely take an apparent property to be real. Nevertheless, we are in contact with the sun, and in making a false attribution we refer to the sun outside our mind.

²¹ However, it can never be fully corrected. As long as we are bound to our affections, we cannot have fully adequate ideas of external things (E2p25). To be more precise, we cannot have such ideas of particular things, i.e. of finite modes existing in time and space. However, we are capable of having adequate ideas of infinite modes, i.e. of common properties such as movement and rest. For a detailed analysis of this limited capacity, see Marshall, “Adequacy.”

are numerically identical to ideas. Therefore, it is legitimate to say that ideas arise whenever material things are present. Corporeal affections caused by these things and ideas are, as it were, two sides of the same coin; whenever one side shows up, the other side is present as well. This is important for answering the following question: could it not be that an idea arbitrarily or randomly shows up in a mind? Spinoza would not hesitate to give a negative response. There needs to be a causal link with an external thing, be it only through a corporeal affection, so that a particular idea can arise in a mind and indicate a particular thing, no matter how confused and false (in the privative sense of falsity) this idea may be. It is therefore important to look at ideas from an externalist point of view and not to assume that the mind is encapsulated, merely bringing about ideas that are internally fully given.

This point can be illustrated with a thought experiment that is often adduced in contemporary debates. On this earth we are in contact with horses, which have a certain structure and cause in us certain affections that go along with ideas of horses. Should we live on a twin earth where there are twin horses, animals that are quite similar to horses but have a different structure, we would be affected by twin horses and would therefore have ideas of twin horses, not of horses. The ideas we have depend on the environment in which we live and, consequently, on the environment-relative affections we have. Of course, the things in our environment do not endow us with detailed ideas that immediately represent every feature of these things. We therefore need to work on them. Thus, only when connecting my first idea of a horse with ideas of animal, mammal, ruminant, etc. am I capable of saying precisely what this idea is about. It is something like a raw diamond that needs to be grinded so that it sparkles—only then does it gain its full representational splendor and indicate all the features of a horse. This kind of splendor is exactly what can be found in the divine mind where an idea is fully related to all other ideas and fully represents all the features of a thing. Although we are far away from this situation, our ideas represent at least some features of their counterpart in the material world and are anchored in it thanks to our corporeal affections.

Now a skeptic might still be unimpressed and reply that all this talk about external causes and relations between ideas, corporeal affections, and material things presupposes that there are causal relations. But how can we be certain that there are such relations at all? Who knows? Perhaps I have never been in contact with a horse. Perhaps I have simply been “spinning out” an idea of my mind without there being any corporeal affection. Or if there is a causal link, it might not relate me to a material world. Perhaps it is a malicious demon who has implanted the idea of a horse in my mind. Coherence between this and other ideas will not be enough to rule out this possibility, as has already been pointed out, because there may be a perfectly coherent system of ideas without any causal link to a material world. If the malicious demon is omnipotent, he can easily create such a system.

Spinoza does not address this problem by presenting a proof for the existence of an external world. Unlike Descartes, he does not appeal to a benevolent God who guarantees the existence of a material world as well as causal relations to this world. Rather, he assumes from the beginning that there are such relations. Thus, he affirms in one of the

axioms: “We feel that a certain body [NS: our body] is affected in many ways” (E2a4). In light of this statement that merely appeals to personal experience, one may have the suspicion that an anti-skeptical position is only professed but is unsupported by argument.²² But it would be inadequate to accuse Spinoza of naively positing causal relations with a material world. If one looks at the methodological framework he uses for explaining the actions of human beings and their relations to other things, it becomes clear that he is far from being naïve. What is crucial for this framework is his unmitigated commitment to naturalism. He repeatedly points out that a human being is not a special thing standing outside the natural order or having a special place inside this order. In fact, he even argues that it does not make sense to see a gap between human beings that are ruled by a certain set of laws and an external world having its own set of laws. If one intends to explain things and events in the world, one should always speak about *one* world and *one* set of laws ruling all things. In one of the most famous passages of the *Ethics*, Spinoza affirms:

. . . Nature is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere one and the same, that is, the laws and rules of Nature, according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are always and everywhere the same. So the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same, namely, through the universal laws and rules of Nature. (E3pref/G 2:138)

If one takes this uniformity seriously, it does not make sense to speak about human beings who may or may not be in contact with an external world. All things, human beings as well as horses and cats, belong to one single world and one causal order. If, for instance, human beings change their local position, they do this mostly for the same reason as horses and cows, namely because they are acted upon by other things. This basic principle also applies to their acts of thinking. Whatever they think, i.e. whatever ideas show up in their minds, happens because they are in contact with other things. They are permanently exposed to external influences and therefore also to a change of their physical states that inevitably goes along with a change of thoughts. Anyone who denies this has to explain how there can be a causal order for things in a material world and another, completely different causal order for human thoughts.²³ It does not help to appeal to a special order as long as one cannot make it intelligible, explaining its relation to the causal order governing the rest of the world. If one fails to provide this explanation, one simply introduces an unexplained explainer: something that is merely postulated in order to guarantee the special place of human thoughts but that cannot be understood. Nor does it help to appeal to a malicious demon who produces all thoughts in human

²² This is the traditional objection made, for instance, by Hubbeling, *Spinoza's Methodology*, p. 35.

²³ Not only would such critics need to explain the character of each causal order, they would also have to make intelligible why there should be two distinct orders. What reason can there be for a causal bifurcation? As long as no reason is provided, the Principle of Sufficient Reason is violated. This is the main metaphysical reason that motivates Spinoza to reject “primitive bifurcation,” as Della Rocca, “Spinoza and the Metaphysics” shows in detail.

minds. This, again, would amount to simply invoking an unexplained explainer. As long as one does not spell out how a malicious demon acts and how his acting fits into an all-embracing causal order, one cannot make sense of his actions. Talk about this demon will be a mere verbal game.

If one understands Spinoza's appeal to bodily affections and other causal relations in this way, namely as being part of his naturalist strategy, it becomes understandable why he never sets out to prove that there are in fact such relations between human beings and a material world. He shifts the burden of proof to the skeptic. It is not the naturalist philosopher but the skeptic, pretending not to make any dogmatic claims, who needs to explain how he can make sense of the hypothesis that a human mind is completely detached from the material world and of the further hypothesis that a malicious demon acts in complete disregard of a natural order. Simply positing a detached mind and a demon outside the natural order does not suffice to make the skeptical strategy understandable.

IV

What kind of anti-skeptical strategy emerges from this line of reasoning? At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that Spinoza presents a theoretical diagnosis when dealing with Cartesian skepticism. I hope it has become clear what this diagnosis amounts to. Spinoza intends to show that we should not uncritically accept the skeptical hypothesis that all our ideas might be false, standing in no relation with external things, and that we ought to test each of them, evaluating whether it is clear and distinct. We should rather ask on what theoretical assumptions the skeptical hypothesis relies. When closely examined, this hypothesis turns out to presuppose three quite substantial theoretical principles: atomism (each idea has its own content and can be evaluated individually, no matter how it is related to other ideas), dualism (each idea belongs to an immaterial mind that is distinct from the body and is therefore only contingently related to a bodily state), and anti-naturalism (each idea can be caused in a special, non-natural way that has nothing to do with the causal order in the material world).²⁴ It is precisely in rejecting these assumptions that Spinoza intends to destroy the foundation of the skeptical hypothesis and, consequently, of the entire skeptical enterprise. In his view, we can avoid all the absurdities that follow from this enterprise if we start with the following assumptions: holism (each idea is connected to other ideas and should be evaluated with regard

²⁴ Strictly speaking, the skeptic does not need to endorse these principles. In fact, a radical skeptic (e.g. the Cartesian skeptic as he is presented in the First Meditation) makes no claim at all. He argues in a non-dogmatic way, pondering a number of possibilities. For instance, he does not claim that ideas and bodily states are really distinct but introduces the possibility of a real distinction. Merely pondering this possibility gives rise to serious doubts. One should therefore distinguish between endorsing principles and merely presenting or considering them in order to generate skeptical hypotheses.

to the degree of coherent connection), anti-dualism (ideas and bodily states are the same modes, simply expressed in two ways, and can therefore not be separated), and naturalism (ideas belong to a single natural causal order that applies equally to all things, human as well as non-human, and are not regulated by special laws). If one works with these assumptions, one realizes that we quite naturally come to have ideas that more or less correctly represent things in the material world. Simply having a coherent set of ideas will show that they are in fact true.

If one pays attention to this crucial shift of theoretical assumptions, one can understand some of Spinoza's statements that look puzzling and almost mystical at a first sight, above all his statement that "truth is the standard of itself" and that it manifests itself "as the light makes both itself and the darkness plain" (E2p43s). Put in more sober terms, this amounts to the following: if we have a coherent set of ideas, which is grounded in our causal contact to material things, we do not need to look for a special truth warranty—neither in God nor elsewhere. The simple fact that our ideas are well connected and that they enable us to explain all (or at least most of) the features of things in the world, is warranty enough for their truth. And if we fail to give a full explanation, we have indication enough that our ideas do not yet perfectly match the things. We then simply need to acquire more ideas and, above all, we need to establish more inferential relations between them. But we should not look for something beyond the ideas we happen to have.

This insistence on the coherence of ideas and the rejection of a special truth warranty has a striking parallel to the strategy chosen by Donald Davidson in his way of dealing with the skeptical challenge. Davidson also thinks that it simply does not make sense to suppose that all our ideas or beliefs may be false, no matter how coherently they are related to each other:

What is needed to answer the skeptic is to show that someone with a (more or less) coherent set of beliefs has a reason to suppose his beliefs are not mistaken in the main. What we have shown is that it is absurd to look for a justifying ground for the totality of beliefs, something outside this totality which we can use to test or compare our beliefs.²⁵

If I have a large number of beliefs about horses and if they all fit together, if they enable me to distinguish horses from cows and other animals, and if they even allow me to make predictions about horse behavior, it would be absurd to assume that they are all false. It may only be that some of them need to be revised or completed, or that some need to be better related to others. Likewise, it would be absurd to look for special meta-beliefs that somehow stabilize the entire set of beliefs and provide a justifying ground for them. There is no meta-level. The only justifying ground lies in the beliefs themselves: the better they complement each other and form a coherent set, the more we can be sure that they are true.

²⁵ Davidson, "A Coherence Theory," p. 146.

It is on this line that Spinoza is rejecting the Cartesian claim that one needs to appeal to a benevolent God in order to have a guarantee that our clear and distinct ideas are true. Should one make such an appeal, one would inevitably be confronted with three equally unpleasant options. (1) One takes it for granted that the belief that God guarantees the truth of clear and distinct ideas is a self-evident belief. But then one simply ends up with a dogmatic claim. Why should this belief be more self-evident than all other beliefs? (2) One admits that this belief is not self-evident and needs justification. But then any additional belief, adduced in support of this belief, also needs justification unless it is taken to be self-evident, and one ends up with an infinite regress of justification. (3) One tries to avoid this regress by claiming that the belief that God provides the truth guarantee is justified by the fact that this belief is grounded in a clear and distinct idea of God. But then one is caught in a circle: the belief that clear and distinct ideas are true is supported by the belief that God guarantees their truth, and the belief that God guarantees their truth is supported by the belief that one has a clear and distinct idea of God. It is precisely this classical problem of justification (sometimes called “Agrippa’s Trilemma”)²⁶ that Spinoza successfully avoids when he refrains from appealing to a special justification for the truth of ordinary beliefs. The truth guarantee lies in the ideas or beliefs themselves, or to be more precise, it lies in the coherence of the system of ideas. The robustness and explanatory power of this system, not something transcending it, is “the standard of truth.”

Should Spinoza confine himself to pursuing this line of argument, he could easily be misunderstood as a radical coherentist who does not care about the correspondence of ideas with things in a material world. But he does not neglect this relation, as has been argued in section III. He rather insists that the entire system of ideas is anchored in bodily affections. Here again, there is a striking parallel to Davidson, who also points out that a coherent set of beliefs is anchored in a material world through causal relations:

What stands in the way of global skepticism of the senses is, in my view, the fact that we must, in the plainest and methodologically most basic cases, take the objects of a belief to be the causes of that belief.²⁷

That we have a fine-grained system of beliefs that hangs, as it were, in the air, is excluded by the simple fact that we acquire our most basic beliefs through sense perception. And the causes of our perceptual states are, at least in normal cases, also the objects of our basic beliefs. Misperception, hallucination, and sensory illusion do not speak against this fundamental principle because they show only that there may be cases of local error and, consequently, grounds for local skepticism. We can (and sometimes even should) worry whether a particular belief about an object is in fact caused by that object, and we

²⁶ See Williams, *Problems of Knowledge*, pp. 61–65. It was well-known in the seventeenth century thanks to the rediscovery of Sextus Empiricus who referred to it in his “five modes.” See *Outlines* I, 15 [164–69].

²⁷ Davidson, “A Coherence Theory,” p. 151.

can also worry whether it captures all the features of that object. But if it then turns out that the belief was caused by another object (e.g., the belief that a horse is passing by was caused by a mule) or that it does not accurately indicate all its features, we only need to correct this local error. In Spinoza's terms, this means that we need to make the inadequate idea more adequate by better linking it to its causal antecedents and therefore having a less confused understanding of its content. But no matter how much we need to improve our idea, we can always be certain that it is rooted in some material object acting upon our body. This is why Spinoza thinks that the Cartesian scenario of global skepticism is out of the question. Someone who ponders the possibility that his mind is equipped with an entire system of ideas that has no relation whatsoever to his own body and to an external world simply betrays a misunderstanding of what having ideas amounts to. Even worse, such a person does not know what having a mind amounts to. In the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza remarks that people who take global skepticism to be a serious threat, even after they have been told how one can build up a reliable system of ideas, should not be taken seriously. In his view, "one should consider them like automata which are completely deprived of their mind."²⁸ This is not just a polemical remark or a superficial dismissal of radical skeptical arguments. This harsh judgment is rather the consequence of what could be called (in Michael Williams' terms) a theoretical-diagnostic approach to global skepticism.²⁹ If one corrects all the misleading theoretical assumptions of the skeptic, if one explains to him that one cannot have a system of ideas unless one also has bodily states caused by external things, if one does everything to make him understand that his own mind is nothing but such a system of ideas linked to a material world, and if he then still responds: "But could it not still be that my ideas have no relation whatsoever to a material world?", there is nothing more one can do. A person who obstinately sticks to skepticism, despite all explanation, simply does not know what his own mind is. He is uttering words like an automaton, not comprehending what they erroneously presuppose.

But now a skeptic could still refuse to be defeated and come up with a last defense: "Admittedly, if I accept your theoretical framework and subscribe to holism, anti-dualism, and naturalism, I have no choice and need to admit that global skepticism does not make sense. But why should I accept your framework? Are your theoretical assumptions not as disputable as mine? And does your entire anti-skeptical strategy not collapse as soon as one gives up one of these assumptions?" How could Spinoza react? First, he could point out that he gave detailed arguments for his theoretical assumptions, which are not just ad hoc claims in a skeptical debate. They are embedded in an entire metaphysical system. Any reader who has studied the first two parts of the *Ethics* should be familiar with this system and with the arguments adduced for, say, the claim that ideas are not detachable from bodily states. If the skeptic wants to challenge this claim,

²⁸ TdIE §48.

²⁹ See note 7.

he needs to enter into a dispute about the metaphysical status of ideas, and he ought to provide arguments for the mere contingent relation between ideas and bodily states.

This could lead Spinoza to a second remark. The radical skeptic pretends to be someone who makes no dogmatic claims and simply casts doubt on his opponent's claims. But this attitude is far less innocent than it appears. For even though the skeptic presents himself as someone who abstains from all theoretical principles, his own arguments make sense only against the background of deep assumptions. One cannot argue that one's ideas may be distinct from one's bodily states unless one assumes that there is only a contingent, and not a necessary, relation between mental and bodily states. Furthermore, one cannot argue that one's ideas may be caused in a non-natural way by a malicious demon unless one assumes that there can be a non-natural, as well as a natural, causal order. Whether the skeptic admits it, he makes crucial assumptions. Therefore, he has the burden of proof; that is, he needs to come up with convincing arguments for his theoretical claims. By contrast, Spinoza is in a default position.³⁰ He only needs to come up with additional arguments if inconsistencies or explanatory gaps turn up in his metaphysical system. It would therefore be inadequate if a skeptic were asking for more and more arguments without presenting arguments for his own (explicit or implicit) assumptions.

Finally, Spinoza could give a third answer that appeals to his methodological procedure. In presenting axioms and definitions and in deducing from them a number of propositions, he uses a hypothetico-deductive method. That is, he suggests that if we accept a number of basic principles and hypotheses, we are able to construct a complex metaphysical and epistemological system that blocks skeptical arguments. But, of course, this system is not without alternatives. Nor is it self-evidently true. Whether it looks convincing depends on its consistency and its explanatory power. All Spinoza can do to convince the skeptic that it is indeed the right system is to explain to him its inner structure and its power to give an account of a large number of facts, above all an account of our ability to bring about a coherent set of ideas. Metaphorically speaking, the system is like a sophisticated machine, and Spinoza can invite the skeptic to inspect this machine, showing him all its features and its structural design. He can also demonstrate all the fabulous things the machine is capable of doing. Should the skeptic continue to resist touching the machine, he cannot be forced to use it. One cannot impose on him an explanatory system that would enable him to overcome his skeptical worries. One cannot do better than make him an offer: if he changes his theoretical framework and if he is willing to work with a number of basic assumptions (among them holism,

³⁰ On the "default and challenge structure" of a skeptical debate, see Williams, *Problems of Knowledge*, pp. 148–57. The important point is that there must be good reasons for a challenge. It is not enough to point out to a naturalist philosopher like Spinoza that all ideas could be false. The skeptic has to present "appropriate defeaters"; i.e. he has to make clear why Spinoza's explanation of the reliability of our ideas, which is embedded in an all-embracing metaphysical theory, fails

anti-dualism, and naturalism), then he will realize that global skepticism will evaporate. But it is up to him to accept or to reject this offer.³¹

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³¹ This paper is based on an earlier German version (Perler, "Spinozas Antiskeptizismus"). I am grateful to Michael Della Rocca, Steven Nadler, and Valtteri Viljanen for helpful comments on drafts of the English version.

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CHAPTER 12

THE HIGHEST GOOD AND PERFECTION IN SPINOZA

JOHN CARRIERO

MARGARET Wilson, in her 1983 paper “Infinite Understanding, *Scientia Intuitiva*, and *Ethics* I.16,” drew attention to an important connection between Proposition 16 of Part I of the *Ethics* and doctrines developed in Parts IV and V, one of which concerns human felicity. An important thesis later in the *Ethics* is that our felicity is bound up with *scientia intuitiva*, or intuitive cognition, of God. Proposition 16 lays the groundwork for that cognition, for there Spinoza establishes that things follow from God’s nature in a way that is accessible to intellect.

I would like to develop Wilson’s insight in two ways. First, I would like to place Spinoza’s account of human felicity in its general historical context. Doing so will not only make it seem less odd, but will also help us appreciate what is distinctive about it. Second, I want to flesh out Spinoza’s picture of how modes flow from God’s essence. Although this is a crucial aspect of Spinoza’s metaphysical system that intersects with several other key doctrines, commentators have had difficulty in seeing how the modes follow from God, especially how the transition from God’s infinite modes to the finite modes works. This is unfortunate because it leaves a major commitment of the *Ethics* blank.

FELICITY (*FELICITAS*) OR HAPPINESS (*BEATITUDO*)

Parts IV and V of the *Ethics* contain an account of the best thing available to beings like ourselves. Part of that account involves controlling our passions, which are often destructive and unsettling, pulling us (or even dragging us) in different directions. One goal of the *Ethics* is to provide a technique to free us from such emotional disturbance,

bringing about tranquility of mind. This reining in of the passions is essentially negative in character—a removal of obstacles or impediments. But it is, in fact, a propaedeutic for something more positive. As Spinoza tells us in E4p28, “The mind’s highest good is the knowledge of God, and the mind’s highest virtue is to know God.” Securing an appropriate cognitive relation to God is a dominant theme in Spinoza’s metaphysical and ethical writings, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, the *Short Treatise On God, Man, and His Well-Being*, and the *Ethics*. This position seems alien to contemporary sensibilities. That our highest good should consist in *that* and that *alone* strikes many modern readers as quite odd. For that reason, I think, many contemporary scholars have shied away from this aspect of Spinoza’s thought, focusing instead on what he has to say about controlling the emotions, which seems more familiar.¹ But doing so sidesteps something of central importance for understanding Spinoza.

The emphasis Spinoza puts on the cognition of God in his account of our highest good places him squarely in an important tradition in high philosophical theology. We might think of this tradition—I will use Thomas Aquinas as its spokesperson—as the victory of the conception of the good as contemplation, found in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, over the more pluralistic conception found in the middle books. Of course, noticing that Spinoza’s view has this pedigree does little by itself to help us understand the position. But it does give us a starting point. Perhaps if we understood how the traditional view works, we might be able to achieve a more sophisticated appreciation of Spinoza’s position.

Aquinas understands human felicity or happiness to consist in the *visio dei*, thereby giving first importance to the Book X conception. He does try to reconcile, in effect, the two *Nicomachean Ethics* pictures by explaining how someone who possesses the *visio dei* does not have any unfilled desire, including desires associated with civic life (for courage, honor, glory, and wealth), desires we share with animals (for delight or pleasure), or desires common to all things (for self-preservation); but the cognitive good dominates.²

Let me sketch Aquinas’s position.³ We are intellectual beings. Our intellect is our highest power (our other powers are ordered to it). So, our end is an exercise of intellect.⁴ To exercise our intellect is to understand. Our intellect operates well to the extent that it understands well. The higher our intellectual functioning, the closer we come to realizing our ultimate end. But when is one intellectual operation, one act of understanding, more perfect than another? In the Aristotelian tradition, operations are individuated

¹ See, for example, Bennett, *A Study*, chs. 14 and 15, and Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, ch. 3. Della Rocca and Nadler devote considerable attention to Spinoza’s views on immortality but less to his conception of felicity. See Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, ch. 7, and Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics*, ch. 9. Wilson signals the importance of *scientia intuitiva* for Spinoza both in “Infinite Understanding” and in “Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge.” See also Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, ch. 4.

² In *Summa Contra Gentiles* (SCG) III, 63.

³ This paragraph is based on SCG, III, 25, “That to Understand God is the End of Every Intellectual Substance.”

⁴ The exercise or operation of power is the movement from first to second actuality or perfection, in Aristotelian metaphysics.

and evaluated by their ends or “objects.” An act of understanding is an act of understanding some object, and, *ceteris paribus*, one act of understanding is more perfect than another if its object is more perfectly intelligible than the other. But God is the most perfectly intelligible object. (This means in part that there is more to understand in God than in other things; it also turns out that understanding other things ultimately involves understanding God.) So we reach our highest end—our intellect functions at its highest level—when we understand God.⁵

We can make this last point more intuitive. What every intellectual substance desires is to *understand*, to know *why* things are the way they are, to know the *causes* of things.⁶ (It is not as if what every intellectual substance wants more than anything else is to get a perfect score on the true-false test that covers everything in the universe. Perhaps that ability comes with this special sort of cognition, but that ability is not what such cognition is about.) But God is the ultimate cause or principle of the universe, both of the essences of things and of their existence. So intellectual beings naturally seek to understand God.⁷

⁵ From SCG III, 25:

3 Again, the proper operation of a thing is an end for it, for this is its secondary perfection. That is why whatever is fittingly related to its proper operation is said to be virtuous and good. But the act of understanding is the proper operation of an intellectual substance. Therefore, this act is its end. And that which is most perfect in this operation is its ultimate end, particularly in the case of operations that are not ordered to any products, such as the acts of understanding and sensing. Now, since operations of this type are specified by their objects, through which they are known also, any one of these operations must be more perfect when its object is more perfect. And so, to understand the most perfect intelligible object, which is God, is the most perfect thing in the genus of this operation of understanding. Therefore, to know God by an act of understanding is the ultimate end of every intellectual substance

⁶ From SCG III, 25, 11:

Besides, there is naturally present in all men the desire to know the causes of whatever things are observed. Hence, because of wondering about things that were seen but whose causes were hidden, men first began to think philosophically; when they found the cause, they were satisfied. But the search did not stop until it reached the first cause, for “then do we think that we know perfectly, when we know the first cause” (Meta. 983a25). Therefore, man naturally desires, as his ultimate end, to know the first cause. But the first cause of all things is God. Therefore, the ultimate end of man is to know God.

⁷ What does the *visio dei* enable us to understand? Aquinas explains in SCG III, 59, “How Those that See the Divine Substance May See All Things.” There Aquinas argues that this cognition reaches to “whatever things pertain to the perfection of the universe,” which includes “the nature of species and their properties and powers” as well as some cognition of “the individuals existing under these species” (how far Aquinas thinks this cognition of individuals extends is unclear to me). It does not reach, Aquinas says, to things that God could do but does not, because a full understanding of this would require that we comprehend God’s power. It also does not reach to a full understanding of God’s reasons for doing what he does, because this would require that we comprehend God’s goodness. Finally, it does not reach to things that depend solely on God’s will, such as “predestination, election, justification, and other similar things which pertain to the sanctification of the creature.”

Since our ultimate desire is to understand, happiness is not the result of just any cognition of God. For example, the knowledge *that* God exists, which Aquinas thinks is readily available in this life upon a little reflection, does not bring about beatitude. According to Aristotelian tradition, we understand best when we cognize things in an “inside-out” way, that is, from causes, grounds, or essences, to their effects, consequences, or properties (that is, when we cognize in an *a priori* manner, in the traditional, pre-Kantian sense of “*a priori*”). For example, I understand *why* a human being is mortal when I see *how* this follows from its essence (e.g., according to the Aristotelians, because matter is part of its essence, and material elements tend to return to their natural places over time). Similarly, I understand *why* a triangle’s three angles sum to two right ones when I see *how* this property flows from the triangle’s essence. If, then, our cognition of God is going to satisfy our deepest intellectual desire, our desire to understand the ultimate reason for things, we are going to need to cognize specifically God’s *essence*, that is, to know or understand *what* God is. As Aquinas puts it, “Final and perfect beatitude can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence.”⁸

How does the *visio dei* come about? According to Aquinas, no creature can attain cognition of God’s essence through its own power. What knowledge we can acquire of God in this life, through our natural resources, falls well short of cognition of what God is. In Aquinas’s view, the knowledge of God we have in this life is based on various nominal characterizations of God (the so-called Divine Names) and does not reach to his essence. Relying solely on the resources of natural reason, we can demonstrate *that* God is, but we cannot, on the basis of those resources, come to know *what* God is. Further,

⁸ In, *Summa Theologica* (ST) I-II, Q. 3, A. 8, when Aquinas asks, “Whether Man’s Happiness [*Beatitudo*] Consists in the Vision of the Divine Essence [*Essentia*]?” he answers affirmatively, as follows:

I answer that, Final and perfect happiness [*beatitudo*] can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence. To make this clear, two points must be observed. First, that man is not perfectly happy, so long as something remains for him to desire and seek: secondly, that the perfection of any power is determined by the nature of the object. Now the object of the intellect is what a thing is, i.e. the essence of a thing, according to *De Anima* iii.6. Wherefore the intellect attains perfection, in so far as it knows the essence of a thing. If therefore an intellect attains perfection, in so far as it knows the essence of some effect, whereby it is not possible to know the essence of the cause, i.e., to know of the cause what it is; that intellect cannot be said to reach that cause simply, although it may be able to gather from the effect the knowledge of what the cause is. Consequently, when man knows an effect, and knows that it has a cause, there naturally remains in man the desire to know about that cause, what it is. And this desire is one of wonder, and causes inquiry, as is stated in the beginning of the *Metaphysics* (i. 2). For instance, if a man, knowing the eclipse of the sun consider that it must be due to some cause, and know not what that cause is, he wonders about it, and from wondering proceeds to inquire. Nor does this inquiry cease until he arrive at a knowledge of the essence of the cause.

If therefore the human intellect, knowing the essence of some created effect, knows no more of God than that He is, the perfection of that intellect does not yet reach simply the First Cause, but there remains in it the natural desire to seek the cause. Wherefore it is not yet perfectly happy. Consequently, for perfect happiness the intellect needs to reach the very Essence of the First Cause. And thus it will have its perfection through union with God as with that object, in which alone man’s happiness consists, as stated above (AA. 1, 7; Q. 2, A. 8).

faith cannot make up the difference between knowing that God is and knowing what God is. Aquinas likens what we get from faith to what we hear from another without really understanding, as opposed to what we see (and understand) for ourselves (SCG III, 40). In order for a creature to know God's essence, God must provide special assistance. God must specially illuminate the created intellect with the so-called "light of glory."

The *visio dei* is, then, the ultimate end of a human being, as it is the ultimate end of any intellectual being.⁹ But the ultimate end of an intellectual being is its felicity (*felicitas*) or happiness (*beatitudo*). So the *visio dei* is our felicity or happiness:

Now, the ultimate end of man, and of every intellectual substance, is called felicity [*felicitas*] or happiness [*beatitudo*], because this is what every intellectual substance desires as an ultimate end, and for its own sake alone. Therefore, the ultimate happiness [*beatitudo*] and felicity [*felicitas*] of every intellectual substance is to know [*cognoscere*] God.¹⁰

When we have the *visio dei*, we have what we ultimately desire, the very thing for the sake of which we want everything else we want. Since the *visio dei* perfects our intellectual operation, when we have the *visio dei* we are functioning at the highest possible level open to us—our "second perfection," in Aristotelian parlance, is as good as it can get. And to have this—or, better, to operate in this way—is felicity or happiness.¹¹

One hears a close echo of this view in Descartes, Spinoza's most important early modern predecessor. Descartes, too, thinks the happiness we look forward to in the next life is a certain cognitive relation to God. In a striking passage at the end of the Third Meditation he writes:

. . . I should like to pause here and spend some time in the contemplation of God; to reflect on his attributes and to gaze with wonder and adoration on the beauty of this immense light, so far as the eye of my darkened intellect can bear it. For just as we believe through faith that the supreme felicity [*felicitatem*] of the next life consists solely in the contemplation of the divine majesty, so experience tells us that this same contemplation, albeit much less perfect, enables us to know the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life. (AT 7:52)

⁹ There are differences among *visiones dei*: "one being is able to understand God more perfectly than another." In order for a created being to cognize God's essence, God must illuminate that being, and "it is possible for there to be different degrees of participation in this light, and so one intellect may be more perfectly illuminated than another. Therefore, it is possible that one of those who see God may see Him more perfectly than another, even though both see His substance" (SCG III, 58, 1).

¹⁰ SCG III, 25, 14.

¹¹ In particular, we shouldn't think of felicity or happiness as the subjective accompaniments of operating well. A closer candidate might be pleasure, but even here I believe the grounds of the pleasure or delight are built into the picture of pleasure: a delight *in* operating well, not to be pried apart from the operating well itself—as opposed to a delight "*quale*" that is merely contingently associated with operating well.

Although Descartes's association of our supreme felicity with the contemplation of God is in line with Aquinas's thesis that our felicity or happiness consists in the *visio dei*, this passage signals an important departure from standard medieval Aristotelian philosophical theology. Descartes implies that we already have in this life a foretaste of that felicity, a foretaste of the light of glory ("so far as the eye of my darkened intellect can bear it"). This is, I think, because Descartes, unlike Aquinas, holds that the idea we have of God in this life already makes available to us God's *essence*.¹² If we have this sort of cognition of God, then it would seem that we already have a foothold in the *visio dei*. Descartes appears to be intimating as much in the passage.

Spinoza follows Descartes in thinking that what Aquinas thought was possible only through some supernatural assistance (the "light of glory"), namely, cognition of God's essence, is available to our natural powers. But Spinoza goes a step further. Descartes still adheres to the traditional view that something better—perhaps a fuller understanding of God's essence—awaits us "in the next life." Spinoza thinks there is no higher form of *scientia intuitiva* awaiting us in another life: rather, he holds that to the extent that we achieve intuitive cognition of God here and now, we are in greater contact with what might be thought of as the eternal aspect of ourselves. (It is important to realize that the point of eternity for Spinoza is not to open up temporal space for the enjoyment of felicity. In fact, he sharply distinguishes eternity from everlasting duration. His point is rather that the more perfect an individual is, the greater its share in the atemporal (non-durational) permanent order.¹³)

Let's detail Spinoza's conception of felicity. Although his early *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* is often seen as primarily a work in logic or methodology, he begins it by announcing a search for "the true good . . . which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity,"¹⁴ which Spinoza says affords the

¹² This view of Descartes is intimately connected with his famous endorsement in diametric opposition to Aquinas of the so-called ontological argument: that argument requires that we have some understanding of what God *is* (not merely knowledge of what the word "God" *means*), an understanding that makes clear to us that God by his very nature must exist. For fuller discussion, see Carriero, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 176–82 and pp. 317–37.

¹³ To judge from Spinoza's difficult Ep. 12, modes "flow" from eternity, and "measure, time, and number" are merely "beings of reason," aids to the imagination (which, if we are not careful, can lead us to "separate" modes "from substance"). I believe the way the modes "flow" primordially, as it were, from eternity is atemporal, in the way that having three angles that make up a straight line "flows" atemporally from a triangle's essence, and that time and duration enter the picture at a subsequent stage when a (finite) mind tries to get a cognitive grip on the modes. (Since the atemporal flowing of modes gives rise to duration, we might think of it as pre-temporal or pre-durational.)

The idea that felicity and delight could take place in a non-durational setting takes them out of the sphere of the sensuous in a way that can be puzzling to a modern reader, but would not have been as puzzling in a context where thinkers attributed happiness and delight to God, who was not viewed as being in space or time. For an instructive account of how Kant works out the ideas of happiness and pleasure in the context of God, see Elizondo, "Moral Agency as Rational Agency," chs. 1 and 2. I am grateful to Elizondo, and to Janelle DeWitt and Peter Myrdal, for helpful discussion of this topic.

¹⁴ TdIE §1:

After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile, and I saw that all the things which were the cause or object of my fear had

highest felicity [*summa felicitas*] (TdIE §2). After rejecting wealth, honor, and sensual pleasure as candidates for providing the highest good or highest felicity, he advances the following thesis:

But since . . . man conceives a human nature much stronger and more enduring than his own, and at the same time sees that nothing prevents his acquiring such a nature, he is spurred to seek the means that will lead him to such a perfection. Whatever can be a means to his attaining it is called a true good; but the highest good is to arrive—together with other individuals if possible—at the enjoyment of such a nature. What that nature is we shall show in its proper place: that it is cognition of the union that the mind has with the whole of Nature [*nimirum esse cognitionem unionis, quam mens cum tota natura habet*]. (TdIE §13)

Spinoza's thought is this. We consider the greatest perfection of which beings such as us are capable—the greatest “nature” that nothing prevents us from acquiring. (An analogy may be helpful: I might hope to run a six-minute mile, but not a two-minute mile. Nothing seems to prevent me from “acquiring such a nature” as to run a six-minute mile.¹⁵) That provides us with a conception of the highest good; true goods are things that contribute to our reaching this highest good.

Spinoza says this “highest good” is bound up with our cognition, specifically, the “cognition of the union that the mind has with the whole of Nature.” What is this cognition? A remark near the end of the *Treatise* is helpful:

As for order, to unite and order all our perceptions, it is required, and reason demands, that we ask, as soon as possible, whether there is a certain being, and at the same time, what sort of being it is, which is the cause of all things, so that its objective essence may also be the cause of all our ideas, and then our mind will (as we have said) reproduce [*referet*] Nature as much as possible. For it will have Nature's essence, order, and unity objectively [*Nam et ipsius essentiam et ordinem et unionem habebit obiective*]. (TdIE §99)

Spinoza is working with the medieval Aristotelian (and Cartesian) idea that cognition involves the thing cognized coming to exist “objectively” in one's cognition, so that our cognition of the universe involves a second existence or reproduction of the order of universe in the mind.¹⁶ This second existence or reproduction of the

nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as [my] mind was moved by them, I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which would be the true good, capable of communicating itself, and which alone would affect the mind, all others being rejected—whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity [*in eternam fruerer laetitia*].

¹⁵ Not without being destroyed and changing into something else. See the passage from the end of E4pref discussed in n. 32.

¹⁶ Spinoza uses the word *objective* fairly frequently in TdIE (see §33–36, §41, §70, §85, §91, and §108) and occasionally the *Ethics* (see E1p17s, E1p30, E2p7c, and E2p8c). See also Ep. 32.

universe is, I take it, the union referred to in the “cognition of the union that the mind has with the whole of Nature,” which cognition Spinoza identifies with the highest good.¹⁷

But how does cognition specifically of *God* enter Spinoza’s picture of our highest good? Well, it is clear that the “certain being” that is “cause of all things,” and whose “objective essence” is the “cause of all our ideas,” referred to in TdIE §99, is God. Moreover, this passage comes in the middle of a discussion of *definition*. So reproducing Nature “as much as possible” turns out to be primarily a matter of *defining* this being correctly (where definition here is what an Aristotelian would have called a “real definition,” that is, an account of the *essence* of the thing) and then seeing what follows from that definition. In other words, what Spinoza is saying here is that reaching our highest good is a matter of cognizing God’s essence well and seeing how things flow from that essence. This just is what the traditional *visio dei* was supposed to be: a cognition of God’s essence that affords us the greatest possible understanding of the universe available to us. So we find in TdIE a version of the traditional thesis that our highest good and perfection (§13) and supreme felicity (§2) consists in understanding God’s essence and how things flow from that essence.

The same project frames the *Ethics*. At the beginning of Part II, Spinoza announces he will limit his treatment of the mind to those things we need to know in order to reach *beatitudo*:¹⁸

I pass now to explaining those things which must necessarily follow from the essence of God, or the infinite and eternal Being—not, indeed, all of them, for we have demonstrated (E1p16) that infinitely many things must follow from it in infinitely many modes, but only those that can lead us, by the hand, as it were, to the knowledge of the human Mind and its highest happiness [*summae beatitudinis*]. (E2pref)

¹⁷ The tradition connects cognition of God and union with God. For example, Aquinas writes of intellectual substances:

[2] The ultimate end of each thing is God, as we have shown. So, each thing intends, as its ultimate end, to be united with God as closely as is possible for it. Now, a thing is more closely united with God by the fact that it attains to His very substance in some manner, and this is accomplished when one knows something of the divine substance, rather than one acquires some likeness of Him. Therefore, an intellectual substance tends to divine knowledge as an ultimate end. (SCG III, 25)

There is a general principle at work here, namely, the better a creature reflects God’s glory, the more closely it is united to God, and I believe that it is this general principle that is behind what Spinoza is saying in TdIE §99. (See also Leibniz’s development of a similar theme in the *Monadology* §83-84.) Aquinas extends this principle even to noncognitive beings, who reflect God’s glory in their own way: “even things which lack knowledge can be made to work for an end, and to seek the good by natural appetite, and to seek the divine likeness and their own perfection” (SCG, III, 24, 6). According to Burman’s report, Descartes holds that even things like stones have “the image and likeness of God” (AT 5:156).

¹⁸ Spinoza uses the word *beatitudo* (happiness) more frequently than *felicitas* (felicity), but he (like Aquinas) uses the two words more or less interchangeably.

He returns to this theme at the end of Part II:

It remains now to indicate how much knowledge of this doctrine is to our advantage in life. We shall see this easily from the following considerations:

Insofar as it teaches that we act only from God's command, that we share in the divine nature, and that we do this the more, the more perfect our actions are, and the more and more we understand God. This doctrine, then, in addition to giving us complete peace of mind [*animum omnimode quietum*], also teaches us wherein our greatest felicity, or happiness [*summa felicitas sive beatitudo*], consists: viz. in the cognition of God alone, by which we are led to do only those things which love and morality advise. (E2p49s/G 2:135-36)

In the Preface to Part IV, Spinoza sets up things as he did in TdIE §13. He says he is going to provide a model [*exemplar*] of human nature, a model embodying the highest perfection open to beings like ourselves. We can use that model to provide (I take it, nominal) definitions of good, bad, and imperfection. As I will explain in the next section, the model is not constitutive of us, but remains "external" to our nature. That is, it is not meant to provide a real definition of our essence or nature. For Spinoza, any such definition would have to be given, in the case of my body, through a specification of the *ratio* or pattern of motion and rest that characterizes my body, and, in the case of my mind, through an account of the "object" of the "idea" that, according to Spinoza, is my mind (that object turns out to be my body, so the specification of the *ratio* turns out to be the primary ingredient in Spinoza's account of my whole essence). By way of contrast, the model Spinoza intends to develop in Part IV of the *Ethics* merely affords a picture of the highest degree of perfection or reality open to a being like me.

As with TdIE, the pinnacle of human perfection in the *Ethics* is rooted in the cognition of God. So, in the Appendix to Part IV, Spinoza offers something that reads to me as a real definition of felicity or happiness:

In life, therefore, it is especially useful to perfect, as far as we can, our intellect, or reason. In this one thing consists [*consistit*] man's highest felicity or happiness [*felicitas seu beatitudo*]. Indeed, happiness [*beatitudo*] is nothing but that satisfaction of mind [*animi acquiescentia*] that stems from [*oritur*] the intuitive cognition of God. But perfecting the intellect is nothing but understanding God, his attributes, and his actions, which follow from the necessity of his nature. So the ultimate end of the man who is led by reason, i.e., his highest Desire, by which he strives to moderate all the others, is that by which he is led to conceive adequately both himself and all things that can fall under his understanding. (E4app4)¹⁹

¹⁹ One thing that might trip us up here is that in the second sentence Spinoza indicates that our highest felicity or happiness "consists" in the perfection of our intellect or reason, whereas in the third sentence he goes on to say that happiness is "nothing but" an *anima acquiescentia* that originates from the intuitive cognition of God. Now, *acquiescentia* is a species of *laetitia*, which is Spinoza's most general term for pleasure. This can feel like a momentous shift to a modern reader, a slide from something "objective" (the perfection of the intellect) to something "subjective" (some species of feeling).

This special cognition of God that gives us felicity or happiness is intuitive cognition of God (see also E5p31), that is, the third of three grades of cognition that Spinoza discusses in E2p40s2. In order to explain what *scientia intuitiva* is, I will draw on TdIE, which covers the same ground covered by E2p40s2 but in somewhat more detail.

The first grade is associated with imagination;²⁰ the second and third are associated with reason. One way²¹ that the second and third grades differ is that the second

However, I believe there is less here than meets the eye. The important thing to bear in mind is that *laetitia* is not some free-standing *quale*, but rather has, we might say, a metaphysical backside. For Spinoza *laetitia* is the cognition of something, namely, something that increases our power of acting. We should, then, think of *animi acquiescentia* not as something separate or detachable from our perfection, but rather as simply the recognition of our perfection. And the shift between the second and third sentences is only the difference between saying that our felicity is the perfection of our intellect and saying that our felicity is our recognition of the perfection of our intellect. I believe that, strictly, it is the perfection that matters, so the second sentence is technically more accurate than the third; but I also think that these things come closely together for Spinoza (you can't recognize that your intellect is perfect unless it is perfect, and, conversely, if your intellect is perfect, you will recognize that it is perfect), so it is understandable enough how he slides from what he says in the second sentence to what he says in the third.

Aquinas faces similar issues in developing his view. According to him, the *visio dei* is accompanied by delight. He thinks of delight as a sentient being's recognition that it has achieved some end, the recognition of its "resting" or "reposing" in some end (see *In X Ethica*, n. 2038, ST I-II, Q. 31, A. 1 and ST I-II, Q. 35, A. 1). He goes to some lengths to emphasize that what matters, and what motivates, is the end itself (in our case, the *visio dei*) and *not* the repose that accompanies the securing of the end—just as the natural inclination of a rock, a nonsentient being, is to *be* in its natural place, and not to *repose in the satisfaction* of its inclination to be in its natural place, let alone the recognition of this repose, i.e. the delight (SCG III, 26, 15). Nevertheless, since the same metaphysical structure that is responsible for our seeking an end is also responsible for our delighting in the end once achieved, Aquinas is willing to allow that in some contexts "It comes to the same whether we desire good, or desire delight, which is nothing else than the appetite's resting in good: thus it is owing to the same natural force that a weighty body is borne downwards and that it rests there" (ST II-I, Q. 2, A. 6, ad 1).

²⁰ Imagination includes sensation and memory for Spinoza.

²¹ Spinoza also suggests through the mathematical example that is found in both texts (having to do with different ways in which one might cognize an arithmetical relationship: by rote, by demonstration, immediately) that the third grade of cognition involves an immediacy that the second grade lacks. In the case of the third grade, we "see in one glance [*uno intuitu videmus*]" that there is a certain relationship; the second grade, in contrast, requires that we discursively trace the relationship to its ground.

His association of *a priori* reasoning with a "single" intuition and *a posteriori* reasoning with discursive reasoning will strike many as odd today. This is because nowadays we tend to think of reasoning in terms of deductive proofs, and so think of *a priori* reasoning (in the old sense) as something like a movement from axioms to conclusions and *a posteriori* reasoning (in the old sense) as a movement from conclusions to axioms. Both seem equally "intuitive" and equally "discursive." But Spinoza, like Descartes, is not working with a picture of formal reasoning in the background. Rather, he is working with the idea that the better I grasp the essence of something, the more things I can immediately see following from that essence (in the way that many more things are obvious or immediate to a mathematician than are obvious or immediate to me). As I trace consequences back to grounds—at first slowly and haltingly and, if all goes well, later fluidly and confidently—I become better acquainted with the ground and what was previously discursive for me, becomes second nature or immediate. At least I think this is Spinoza's picture.

In any case, I believe Spinoza thinks of fully intuitive cognition as in some way atemporal or eternal. In Part V, when considering those aspects of the mind that have to do with the body taken not as something

corresponds to a posteriori reasoning (in the old sense), and the third is closely connected with a priori reasoning (in the old sense).²² In the Aristotelian tradition, a posteriori reasoning is reasoning from an effect, consequence, or *proprium* (property) to a cause, ground, or essence. Here is how Spinoza characterizes in TdIE what corresponds to the second grade of cognition in the *Ethics*:

There is the Perception that we have when the essence of a thing is inferred from another thing, but not adequately. This happens, either when we infer the cause from some effect, or when something is inferred from some universal, which some property always accompanies. (TdIE §19)

And here is how he characterizes in TdIE what corresponds to the third grade of cognition:

Finally, there is the Perception we have when a thing is perceived through its essence alone, or through knowledge of its proximate cause. (TdIE §19)

Like the *visio dei* for Aquinas, *scientia intuitiva* of God is an “inside-out” form of cognition that works from God’s essence to other things. In this way Spinoza’s account of the special sort of cognition of God that grounds our happiness is continuous with Aquinas’s.

PERFECTION

Spinoza regards perfection as an absolute notion. It works somewhat like extension. I have the extension that I have and you have the extension you have, and one of us has more extension than the other. There is also a rough-and-ready fact about how small

extended through time, but as a quasi-mathematical structure (that is, the “body under a species of eternity”), Spinoza writes:

There is, as we have said, this idea, which expresses the essence of the body under a species of eternity, a certain mode of thing, which pertains to the essence of the Mind, and which is necessarily eternal. And though it is impossible that we should recollect that we existed before the Body—since there cannot be any traces of this in the body, and eternity can neither be defined by time nor have any relation to time—still, we feel and know by experience [*sentimus experimurque*] that we are eternal. For the Mind feels those things that it conceives in understanding no less than those it has in the memory. For the eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes things, are the demonstrations themselves. (E5p23s)

I think Spinoza has specifically intuitive cognition in view at the end of this passage. I conjecture that it is this (in Spinoza’s view) atemporal character of intuitive cognition that is supposed to intimate to us that we have an eternal aspect.

²² Both Wilson, “Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge,” pp. 116–19, and Gueroult, *Spinoza II*, pp. 388–90, understand the distinction along these lines.

or large either one of us can get without going out of existence—without our *ratio* of motion and rest being destroyed. Similarly, I have the perfection I have and you have the perfection you have. One of us has more perfection than the other. There is also a rough-and-ready fact about how much perfection either one of us can get without being destroyed.²³ According to Spinoza, our perfection can be measured by the extent of our involvement with *scientia intuitiva* of God. Whether we recognize this is, of course, another matter: a wise man, I take it, does (see E4p26–p28), but a greedy man does not (see E3p39s).

Now, this absoluteness may seem at odds with some of the things Spinoza says about good and perfection. I have in mind especially the Preface to Part IV of the *Ethics*, where he says “good and evil . . . indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another” (G 2:208).²⁴ But Spinoza’s attitude toward good and evil (and imperfection) is different from his attitude toward perfection. For Spinoza, *good* is not in the nature of things, the way perfection or reality is, which is why the definition mentioned in the last section can be only nominal. In general, good, bad, and imperfection are second-class notions for Spinoza, and, in order to read his texts correctly, it is important to understand why.

Spinoza’s misgivings about good and imperfection go back to his views about causation and essence, and, in particular, to his rejection of an “ends”-dominated conception of causation and essence. Let me explain.

Spinoza differs with the Aristotelian tradition over the nature of causation, over what it is for something to be a cause.²⁵ For Aquinas, causation (within the created world) is fundamentally a local phenomenon. For him, the causal history of the world is built up out of transactions between individual substances. For Spinoza, causation (within the world of produced things) is fundamentally a global phenomenon. The entire geometrical/kinetic causal nexus is primary,²⁶ and through it, motion, time, and causation are understood. In principle, the entire nexus can be involved in any causal transaction, although, in general, the more remote two occurrences are in space and time the less causally relevant they are to each other.

The locality of causation in Aquinas is reflected in his endorsement of the Aristotelian causal framework, according to which there are four causes, the material, formal, efficient, and final. In that framework, the final cause or end plays the preeminent role. For Aquinas, the final cause is the first in the order of causality, in that it makes the other

²³ I take this to be implied at the end of E4pref, cited in n. 32.

²⁴ See also KV 1.10.

²⁵ Since there is an intimate connection between understanding and causation—roughly, to understand is to know how things are caused—Spinoza’s conception of causation has ramifications for his picture of what it is to understand the universe, as we will see in this section.

²⁶ I focus on extension because this is the only attribute besides thought that human minds have access to. I assume that Spinoza believes something analogous happens within each of the other attributes. In particular, in the case of cognition, what Spinoza calls “the idea of God” occupies a similar place to the entire geometrical/kinetic causal nexus in the case of extension.

causes be causes;²⁷ the final cause, we might put it, fills out the idea of a causal actor. The ends determine the actor's sphere of activity. The final cause determines the actor's ends, which, in turn, determine the activities the actor engages in, which, in turn, determine the actor's powers or faculties, which, finally, serve to characterize the actor's essence.²⁸ Ends are local in that an actor's sphere of activity is set independently of the activity of the other actors. This is not to deny that other beings can be required for an actor's activity. For example, a predator requires prey; without prey a predator cannot exercise its (let us suppose) stalking, pouncing, clawing abilities. But the predator's relation to the hunt is different from its prey's. Hunting is *its* activity and not the *prey's* (nor is it somehow a cooperative activity). To sort out which activities belong to which actors, we look to ends that determine the actor's powers and abilities. Actors are fully formed prior to their entry in the causal nexus; their ends and corresponding powers specify what they bring to the causal table; the causal nexus is posterior to them and the exercise of their powers.

There is in scholastic Aristotelianism a close connection between the idea of thing's *end* and a thing's *good*. Since a thing's ends are suitable or appropriate to it, they are its good. For Aquinas, actors do not just act toward ends, but act for the sake of ends. Something is *good* only to the extent that it is *desirable*, and something is *desirable* only to the extent that it contributes to its *perfection*, that is, to the realization of its ends.²⁹ So Aquinas moves back and forth freely between E's being A's end, and E's being A's good.³⁰ When a Thomistic causal actor acts for an end, it acts for some good.

Now, Spinoza allows that, in a certain sense, things tend toward their perfection. They strive to persevere in being, and being, for Spinoza, is close to perfection. Spinoza rejects, however, the views that a thing's causality is prior to its place within the causal nexus, that a thing's causality should be understood through its ends, and that a thing's ends provide a route to the characterization of its essence.

Rather, Spinoza holds that a thing's causality is intertwined with the causality of the rest of the causal grid, the rest of the plenum. For example, the causality of a system of matter in motion—a pattern or ratio of motion and rest—is given through the plenum's causal matrix, rather than the matrix being constructed out of independently specifiable (or ontologically prior) parts. Accordingly, Spinoza rejects the idea that causality of an individual is to be understood through locally specifiable ends. As opposed to grounding a thing's efficient causality in its ends, Spinoza grounds a thing's ends in its efficient causality, that is, its motive tendencies or "appetites." In E4d7, he writes that "by the end for the sake of which we do something I understand appetite" and in the Preface to Part IV, he explains:

²⁷ *De Principiis Naturae*, Ch. 4.

²⁸ This is the Aristotelian methodological principle that in understanding natural beings we proceed from objects (ends) to acts to powers to essence (see Aquinas, *In II De Anima*, Lect. 6, n. 308).

²⁹ See ST I, Q. 5, A. 1 (for good, desirability, and perfection) and A. 4 (good and final causality). Spinoza would be happier with the first set of equivalences than with the last one.

³⁰ See SCG, III, 3, 2.

What is called a final cause is nothing but a human appetite insofar as it is considered as a principle, or primary cause, of some thing. . . . So habitation, insofar as it is considered as a final cause, is nothing more than this singular appetite. It is really an efficient cause, which is considered as a first cause . . . (G 2:207)

In folding the notion of final cause into that of an efficient cause, Spinoza is denying the Aristotelian thesis that ends come first in the order of causality. For Spinoza, a corporeal thing is a pattern of—a “*ratio*” of—motion and rest. We might think of this *ratio*/pattern as a quasi-geometrical or mathematical form (in the way that you might think of a hurricane as a complex mathematical form). We look to the motions encoded in that pattern to determine what it is for such a system to flourish or decline, what the system’s “ends” are (or what its “good” is) and not the other way around: we don’t begin with the system’s end or good and work backwards from there to some account of the powers it has for achieving that end or good. The powers come first; what ends there are, come in the wake of the powers.

Spinoza holds that each thing has a *conatus* (striving, appetite, tendency) to persevere in its being. It is natural to wonder whether there might be a whiff of final causality in that doctrine, and commentators have held different views about this. I think that the point of Spinoza’s remarks identifying final causes with efficient causes is that claims of the form A does E because E is A’s end are explanatorily empty. To claim that E is A’s end is, for Spinoza, at bottom, simply another way of saying that A tends to (has an appetite for, strives to) do E. So, while Spinoza does say that all things strive to persevere in being, he never says that they strive in being because persevering in being is their “end.” He does not say that they act for the sake of persevering in being, for this would be to court pseudo-explanation, by treating the persevering in being as in some way causally prior to striving. (Cf.: Although a species behaves in such a way that the relative frequency of its traits increases over time—we may think of this as part of its persevering in being—this is *not* to say that the species *acts for the end* of increasing the relative frequency of favorable traits.³¹)

Spinoza wishes to make another point in the extracts cited above, signaled by the “considered as a principle, or primary cause” and “considered as a first cause” in the extracts. This “considering” embodies a mistake: it involves focusing on some of the more conspicuous aspects of the situation and neglecting the more subtle causal influences, which enmesh the system’s causality in the causal nexus. This neglect creates the impression that final cause is a sort of absolute starting point, a first cause in a series that is cut off, in particular, from temporally prior happenings from the series, rather than (as Spinoza thinks) emerging from the causal nexus. This is one of the ways, I take it, that Spinoza thinks what is fundamentally a global phenomenon gets misconstrued as a collection of local phenomena. (One might try to combine an ends-first conception with a global conception, by allowing for the ends themselves to encode global information. Leibniz seems to

³¹ For further discussion, see Carriero, “Conatus and Perfection.”

have taken such a tack. His position is idiosyncratic enough that it is not surprising that Spinoza does not discuss that tack.)

Spinoza's attitude toward ends, as one might expect, affects his attitude toward good. A thing's good, like its ends, emerges from its efficient causality, from the *ratio* of motion and rest that it is, and the appetites or motive tendencies that it involves. Good is posterior to appetite; desirability is posterior to desire. Moreover, since evaluations of good are judgments about ends, our judgments about good cannot be prior to the motive tendencies that ultimately ground ends, but rather must track those tendencies: "we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything *because* we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good *because* we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it" (E3p9s, emphasis added). A theory of good, for Spinoza, must emerge from our appetites in more or less the same way that "ends" emerge from our efficient causality, from the *ratio* of motion and rest that counts as the human body or the idea of that *ratio* that counts as the human mind.

It is important to observe that it is an open question how these basic structural facts about the nature of causation intersect with our own sense of ourselves as actors. That is, it is hard to say how revisionist Spinoza is with respect to our everyday understanding of things like ends, goals, or purposes (or "intentions"). Does our ordinary sense of ourselves as agents require that our ends be prior to our appetites in the way the Aristotelians thought, or is it relatively indifferent to this thesis? E.g., is our ordinary sense of our agency compatible with the thought that a conscious end is an especially conspicuous motive tendency? I don't find the answer obvious; in any case, I believe that this question can be set to the side for present purposes.

There are two reasons these points about ends and the good are important for the topic at hand.

First, they show that Spinoza and Aquinas will understand the claim that the *visio dei* or *scientia intuitiva* is our highest good or ultimate end in different ways. For Aquinas, this thesis comes out as that the *visio dei* represents the realization of the end to which our powers are subordinated: we were made in order to reflect God's glory in that special way, a function that is written into our nature, and, if granted the *visio dei*, we have realized our *raison d'être*. For Spinoza, cognitive systems (or the cognitive side of us) naturally tend toward understanding—this is what they do, where their *conatus* leads them. As we make our way toward understanding, we become stronger (our power of acting is increased) and our level of perfection or reality is increased. We make the most progress along these dimensions to the extent that we have *scientia intuitiva* of God. In this sense, *scientia intuitiva* is the best thing open to beings like us,³² and that is what Spinoza means when he indicates that in it consists our felicity and beatitude.

³² I am not sure whether the "like us" is necessary. There are some indications that this result holds good of cognition as such for Spinoza. See, for example, E2p45-p47, culminating in "The human Mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence" (E2p47). Although these propositions are specifically about the human mind and its ideas, the argument Spinoza gives seems general. Against this, Spinoza warns toward the end of the Preface to Part IV.

Second, we need to separate Spinoza's misgivings about good (and ends) from his views about perfection (and reality). Although Spinoza's readers, going back to Leibniz, sometimes lump his views on good and perfection together,³³ good is a secondary and derivative notion for Spinoza, whereas perfection is basic. Moreover, Spinoza thinks there are serious misconceptions surrounding the notion of good, connected with the ends-first conception of causation. No such misconceptions attend the notion of perfection. *Im*perfection is a different matter, of course, since thinking of something as imperfect involves measuring it against a standard, and Spinoza regards all such standards as external, whereas the Aristotelians regard certain standards (mistakenly in Spinoza's view) as constitutive.

For modern readers, the claim that one thing has more perfection than another is difficult to understand. In the remainder of this section, I would like to examine Spinoza's remarks concerning the level of reality enjoyed by the human body and the human mind. In the next section, I will consider Spinoza's commitment to the idea of perfection more generally. In Part II of the *Ethics*, after presenting his account of the mind, and before a short treatment of the nature of physical systems ("bodies"), Spinoza offers a brief explanation of the "excellence" of the human body and the human mind:

However, we also cannot deny that ideas differ among themselves, as the objects themselves do, and that one is more excellent [*praestantiorem*] than the other, and contains more reality [*realitatis*], just as the object of the one is more excellent than the object of the other and contains more reality. And so to determine what is the difference between the human Mind and the others, and how it surpasses them, it is necessary for us, as we have said, to know the nature of its object, i.e., of the human Body. I cannot explain this here, nor is that necessary for the things I wish to demonstrate. Nevertheless, I say this in general, that in proportion as a Body is more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once [*ad plura simul agendum, vel patiendum*], so its Mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once. And in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, and as other bodies concur with it less in acting, so its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly. And from these [truths] we can know the excellence of one mind over the others . . . (E2p13s/G 2:97)

But the main thing to note is that when I say someone passes from a lesser to a greater perfection, and the opposite, I do not understand that he is changed from one essence, or form, to another. For example, a horse is destroyed as much as it changed into a man as if it is changed into an insect. Rather, we conceive that his power of acting, insofar as it is understood through his nature, is increased or diminished. (G 2:208)

These remarks, coming as they do before Spinoza offers his account of the best thing for us, could be taken to suggest that thing is specific to our "essence" or "form." I find this hard to say. It could, for example, be his view that the best thing for every cognitive being/system is *scientia intuitiva* of God, and that what is specific to us are the various things (society with one's fellow human being) that increase our *scientia intuitiva* of God and the various things (destructive affects) that impede *scientia intuitiva* of God. See also n. 40 below.

³³ See Adams's discussion of Leibniz, in "Moral Necessity," pp. 183–84, and the texts he cites there. (Adams does not express a view one way or the other as to the accuracy of Leibniz's reading.)

Spinoza notes two dimensions along which one body has more reality than another. One dimension, the ability to do many things at once and to be acted on in many ways, has to do with the complexity of one's body. This is correlated with perceiving many things at once, which is contrasted with understanding, or at least with understanding distinctly. It is hard to say exactly what Spinoza has in mind here. Perhaps he was thinking about sensory perception (the "being acted on" suggests this), making a point that the more complex one's perceptual apparatus is, the better one's cognition is.³⁴ Perhaps his thought is that a being with very sharp vision receives more information from the environment and is capable of "perceiving many things at once." But it is also possible that Spinoza is thinking along more intellectualist lines: someone whose brain (let us suppose) has acted on and been acted on by a great many things is, other things being equal, able to theorize about a great many things at once. (This would be congruous, I think, with E2p40c, "the Mind is the more capable of perceiving many things adequately as its Body has many things in common with other bodies.")³⁵

A second dimension, Spinoza indicates, is connected with distinct understanding. This dimension has to do with the independence of activity, with what we might think of as relative autonomy. (Distinct understanding, as opposed to the cognition involved in the previous paragraph, does not involve our "being acted on.") What Spinoza has in view is perhaps less obvious here.³⁶ It helps to observe that Spinoza thinks of understanding as a form of cognition that is independent of the vagaries of the interactions with one's local environment (where one's local environment may be taken inclusively to include what one has bumped into the past and not just what is impinging on one now).³⁷ In E2p18s, Spinoza says that such interactions shape one's cognition in a random and occasional way—according to what Spinoza calls the "order and connection of the affections of the human Body." The ideas of such affections "involve both [the human Body's] nature and that of external bodies." This is imaginative cognition. By way of contrast, when I work out a geometrical argument concerning a triangle, my cognition

³⁴ If Spinoza has sensory perception in view here, and if this is supposed to fall under "doing many things at once," then what Spinoza may have in mind is his view, put forward at E2p17c2, that the image resulting from a sensory interaction is more a product of the body's condition than of the sensed thing. (In any case, the idea that our body is not, like wax impressed by a seal, completely passive when we sense seems natural enough.) But, as Lilli Alanen has pointed out to me, it is not clear that Spinoza is claiming in this passage that there is an active side specifically to my sensing.

³⁵ This paragraph is indebted to discussion with audiences at the University of Toronto and at the University of Turku. See also Wilson, "Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge," p. 101.

³⁶ Why should physical autonomy go with understanding? Perhaps Spinoza's thought is this: understanding is a matter of getting the universe to exist objectively in one's mind; to the extent that one's mind becomes structured universe-wise, it becomes, in a certain sense, self-contained, free of external impingements in that the universe itself is self-contained, free of external impingements. Perhaps, further, when one works through a geometrical argument, one gets a small taste of this: one's mind becomes (more or less) ordered triangle-wise, without external impingement (at least to the extent that one is not distracted).

³⁷ This is loosely put, because strictly, according to Spinoza, the physical environment does not shape any form of cognition. Rather, the environment shapes the body, and because the mind is the idea of the body, there is a corresponding change in the mind.

becomes structured in the same way as the triangle: we might say it becomes structured “trianglewise.” (The similarity in structure is so close that in TdIE §33, Spinoza feels the need to remind the reader that “a circle is one thing and an idea of the circle is another.”) When I understand, the linkages among my ideas do not reflect my body’s local environment, but are “according to the order of the intellect, by which the Mind perceives things through their first causes” (E2p18s).³⁸ Such cognition, by reflecting the order of the universe, brings about the union of mind with the whole of nature discussed in Section 1. And just as a more excellent mind operates according to the order of the intellect, in a manner relatively independent of ideas external to the mind, so too a more excellent body operates in a manner relatively independent of its local environment.³⁹

Spinoza is working here with natural, pre-theoretical data, data that have been interpreted in a certain way in the context of Aristotelian metaphysics, and reinterpreting them within the context of his metaphysics. That is, both he and the Aristotelians are starting from the general thought that there is, for example, something *more* to me than to a cat, and something *more* to a cat than to a squid, something more to a squid than to a rock, and that this something more comes out, in turn, in what I can *do* (the extent of my “power”), that is, the sorts of things I can do and the cat cannot, and the sorts of things that the cat can do and the squid cannot, and the sorts of things the squid can do and the rock cannot.

One can imagine, of course, responding to the data with a certain amount of skepticism. “A squid can do as many things as a human can: it can live underwater, can sting prey, has a very flexible body, and so on. So it is a tie.” Or, “A hurricane can do as much (if not more) than a human can. It can uproot trees and knock down houses. It is all a matter of how you measure power.” One can imagine targeting this sort of skepticism specifically at the two dimensions of excellence that Spinoza calls attention to—ability to do and undergo many things at once and ability to act in (relative) independence of one’s environment: the hurricane can do many things at once—e.g. knock down trees and walls and move lots of water—and it does what it does with relatively little assistance from its local environment (the surrounding air masses, let us suppose).

It is not clear to me how philosophically attractive it would be to dismiss the data. Many today would regard living things as somehow “more advanced” than nonliving things in ways that they would find difficult to articulate, and some living things “more advanced” than others, however that inchoate thought is ultimately to be worked out (perhaps in terms of evolutionary history, or organizational complexity, or along some other lines). Be that as it may, Spinoza gives no evidence in his texts of dismissing the data. He never argues, for example, with respect to extension, that, at the end of the day, it is all “just” matter in motion—and how can one system of matter in motion have more reality than another? It is true that his treatment of perfection is highly schematic—in the passage we are considering he simply points to a couple of dimensions that he finds

³⁸ Wilson calls attention to this distinction in “Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge,” p. 103.

³⁹ Only relatively because I must, for example, breathe while I understand.

particularly salient for his purposes. In this respect, his treatment of this topic is analogous to his treatment of bodies in the surrounding text on the complexity of bodies, as *rationes* or patterns of motion and rest. While more detailed, this treatment is still fairly sketchy—no more than a very rough first cut, really.

Finally, an Aristotelian might harbor doubts about Spinoza's position for a different reason. She might wonder, whether having jettisoned the ends-first methodology, Spinoza will be able to offer a credible account for the data. A careful exploration of this important question is beyond the scope of the paper, though I think it is worth keeping in view the sorts of evaluations that Spinoza is making at the level of cognition: having one's cognition structured according to the order of the intellect as opposed to the affections of the human body (see E2p18) increases the intellect's perfection and strength, and the more *scientia intuitiva* of God one has—that is, the better purchase one has on the ultimate principle of the universe and how the universe flows from that principle—the more perfection one's intellect has. It is not clear that these sorts of comparisons require an ends-first methodology.⁴⁰

PROPOSITION 16 OF PART I

In Part V of the *Ethics*, Spinoza defends the optimistic view that we already have here and now, in this life, a share of the happiness that Aquinas thought was possible only through the special assistance of God in the next life. Essential to this optimism is Spinoza's conception of the relation of God or substance to the rest of the universe. In fact, a primary goal of the *Ethics* is to provide us with the ground for this special cognition. In the first part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza develops something like a real definition of God, that is, an account of God's essence.⁴¹ Then, in the remaining half of Part I, Spinoza indicates how everything else causally flows from, or emanates from, this being. Proposition 16 anchors this stage of the discussion. And our cognitive grip on the way in which things flow from God is central to Spinoza's conception of the *scientia intuitiva* of God that is supposed to provide felicity (a point that Wilson emphasizes in her paper).

Although E1p16 plays this fundamental role both in Spinoza's account of the metaphysics of the universe and in our ability to cognize that metaphysics, many readers

⁴⁰ Spinoza's view may be that *scientia intuitiva* of God provides a uniform dimension along which the perfection of all cognitive systems may be compared, rather than thinking of different cognitive systems as having their own distinctive perfections. If so, his view would be similar to Leibniz's position that the perceptions of different monads can be compared in terms of their distinctness. As individuals are all thought of lying along a uniform continuum, the kind or species they belong to seems less fundamental than it was for the Aristotelians. I discuss some of the consequences of this for Leibniz in "Substance and Ends," pp. 138–39. It seems to me that analogous remarks may apply to Spinoza.

⁴¹ Here, I am in broad agreement with Gueroult's thesis (*Spinoza I*, ch. 1) that the account of God that Spinoza provides through the first fifteen propositions of the *Ethics* is substantive, not stipulative (a "real definition" of God).

have been uncomfortable with Spinoza's account. They have been willing to allow that Spinoza might be able to explain the procession of certain invariant features—what Spinoza calls the infinite modes—of the universe from God, but they have had trouble seeing how Spinoza proposes (or, indeed, whether he proposes) to get from these invariant features to particular finite things. And without some reasonably satisfactory picture of how this aspect of Spinoza's story goes, we are left with a black hole in the middle of his metaphysics and account of human felicity.

I think we can do better. Let us begin by reviewing some basics. According to Spinoza, there is a being that necessarily exists through itself (that is, through its own resources rather than being necessitated by something else). This being—call it God—is responsible not only for its own existence but also for the existence of everything else. Nothing else exists or acts unless this being determines it to exist or act. All of this is standard philosophical theology. It is true that Spinoza follows Descartes rather than the medieval Aristotelian tradition on some important points, so that, for example, he thinks of this being as self-caused rather than uncaused. Still, the basic idea that there is a being that exists necessarily in its own right, on which everything else depends, was relatively uncontroversial.

Which things does God determine to exist? Well, Spinoza holds that in general a thing produces as much reality as it is capable of producing; efficient causes never hold back. A fire, for example, radiates as much heat as it is capable of producing (external circumstances may impede it, of course, but *it* is always doing as much as it can). God, moreover, is unlimited in his reality (this is supposed to follow from, for example, God's having the wherewithal to be responsible for his existing as opposed to lapsing into non-being: such power seems to be unlimited); God is (to use terminology that to the best of my knowledge Spinoza himself does not use) the *ens realissimum*, the being whose reality is absolutely unlimited. Such a being will produce as much as can be produced. According to Spinoza, it will produce the modal order (in the sense of the order of modes) that has unlimited things in unlimited ways.⁴²

The preceding is my understanding of the reasoning behind E1p16, the proposition where Spinoza explains the causal relation between God and the rest of things. The proposition's brief demonstration simply notes that the more reality found in the essence of a thing, the more properties (*proprietas*) intellect will be able to infer from the thing's definition. Now, a definition, in this context, is simply an account of a thing's essence, and I take properties here to be realities, in the Aristotelian sense of *propria* (*propria* are supposed to add reality or perfection to the things they belong to). So what Spinoza is saying here is that since God's essence is absolutely unlimited in its reality, intellect will be able to infer, from the definition of that essence, the modal order richest in reality or realities. In other words, intellect will be able to see how this modal order flows from such an essence.⁴³

⁴² That there should be only one such order of modes is not obvious. See n. 59.

⁴³ Why the move from essence and what follows from essence, to definition and what an intellect infers from definition? I take it, following a suggestion made by Wilson in "Infinite Understanding," that

All of this is too abstract to be of much help. Let us try to flesh out this picture in the context of the attribute of extension. The only two of God's attributes that we have cognition of are extension and thought, and much of what Spinoza says about thought is parasitic on what he says about extension. So detailing his picture of how the modes of extension follow from God is our most promising avenue into Spinoza's general thinking about this topic.

Now, Spinoza holds that the physical world is an extended plenum; this plenum is carved up into individuals (bodies) through the introduction of motion. Physical individuals in the plenum are helpfully thought of as complex patterns of motion—what Spinoza terms *rations* of motion and rest. Spinoza's plenum is not built up out of pieces but rather consists of pervasively interwoven systems of motion. It is more like a tapestry than a quilt.⁴⁴ A pattern or *ratio* of motion and rest can no more be extracted from the rest of the plenum than the jet stream can be plucked out of the atmosphere. I think we can make intuitive for ourselves how Spinoza is thinking about the interconnectedness of things—in one way, by considering the so-called butterfly effect, where subtle differences in one part of a system (the flap of a butterfly's wings), because of the way things are interconnected, bring about momentous differences at another place and time (a hurricane); and in another way, by considering Newton's law of universal gravitation, which has every piece of matter exercising a physical attraction on every other piece.⁴⁵ In Spinoza's plenum, systems continually interact and interlock with other systems, which interact and interlock with other systems, and so on. Smaller systems combine to form larger systems, which in turn combine with other systems to form still larger systems. If we continue along this path of progressively more complex and embracing systems, we come to see the entire plenum as a single, all-embracing system. In the material on physics after Proposition 13 in Part II of the *Ethics*, Spinoza tells us that the whole physical order counts as a single individual:

But if we should further conceive a third kind of Individual, composed [NS: of many individuals] of this second kind, we shall find that it can be affected in many other ways, without any change of its form. And if we proceed in this way to infinity, we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one Individual, whose parts, i.e., all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole Individual. (E2le7s)

This one individual that preserves its integrity throughout all the changes in its parts is what Spinoza terms in Ep. 64 “the face of the whole universe, which, although varying in infinite ways, yet remains all the same” (G 4:278).⁴⁶

Spinoza is thinking ahead to Part V: Salvation or happiness has do with the ability to cognize through God's essence, so it is worth bringing out this aspect of the relationship back in E1p16.

⁴⁴ I borrow this metaphor from Sarah Coolidge, who uses it in a related context.

⁴⁵ My point is not that Spinoza endorses a Newtonian principle of gravity. He doesn't. Rather, my point is that the pervasive physical interconnectedness of things is not as wild a view as it might seem.

⁴⁶ Spinoza refers his correspondent to the scholium from which the above extract is taken.

Motion, as it were, etches a complete, overarching, and systematic modal structure—what Spinoza calls the face of the whole universe—into extension. The resulting thing—“en-motivated” extension—is the “whole Individual” that retains its integrity throughout the local changes. I do not think we should take this to be a trivial claim along the lines of “the universe will always be the universe.” Rather, we should understand Spinoza’s claim in the spirit of his remarks in Ep. 32, about the worm in the blood. Although the individual particles in the blood (the lymph particles, the chyle particles, etc.) are constantly changing, there is an overall structure that remains the same.⁴⁷ Finite physical individuals (bodies), *rationales* or patterns of motion and rest, are doubly parasitic on something larger: finite patterns of motion depend on the “whole Individual,” the face of the universe, that is, extension as modified by motion and rest, into which they are woven; as noted above, they can no more be abstracted from the rest of the system than the jet stream can be abstracted from the atmosphere or the global conveyor belt from the ocean. At a more primordial level, finite regions of extension draw their being from (“exist in”) and intelligibility from (“are conceived through”) unlimited extension, in a way analogous to the way that a described region of Euclidean space is what it is through its relation to the whole space.⁴⁸

Keeping this basic picture in view will help us make headway with three basic aspects of Spinoza’s metaphysics system that are otherwise hard to understand.

⁴⁷ In Ep. 32, Spinoza explains why things seem otherwise to us, that is, we tend to view what are, in fact, parts of a larger whole, as themselves wholes. He compares our perspective on the universe to that of a worm in the blood. The worm thinks of particles of lymph, chyle, etc., as wholes because it does not appreciate that they are part of the blood system, which provides background regulation; if it did, it would recognize that these wholes are fundamentally parts of a larger system. The same is true of the bodies surrounding us:

Now all the bodies in Nature can and should be conceived in the same way as we have here conceived the blood; for all bodies are surrounded by others and are reciprocally determined to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate way, the same ratio of motion to rest being preserved in them taken all together, that is, in the universe as a whole. (G 4:172–73)

⁴⁸ In Ep. 32, Spinoza writes:

Now [a] since the nature of the universe, unlike the nature of the blood, is not limited, but is absolutely infinite, its parts are controlled by the nature of this infinite potency in infinite ways, and are compelled to undergo infinite variations. However, I conceive that [b] in respect to substance each individual part has a more intimate union with its whole. For, as I endeavoured to show in my first letter written some time ago when I was living at Rijnsburg, since it is of the nature of substance to be infinite, it follows that each part pertains to the nature of corporeal substance, and can neither be nor be conceived without it. (G 4:173)

I think we can discern two different ways in which finite Individuals are posterior to something larger. First, they are posterior to the entire en-motivated Individual in that a subpattern is dependent on the overall pattern; I take this to be what Spinoza refers to in [a]. The en-motivated Individual is not substance, but substance (extension) as modified; at this level, infinite extension (substance) is prior to any finite extension in roughly the way that Euclidean space is prior to its regions: We begin with space as a whole and demarcate the regions; we don’t cobble the space together out of its regions.

First, there is an assumption implicit in E1p16 to the effect that there is a unique modal order with the most reality, a modal order richest in reality. Such an assumption, while hardly uncontroversial, seems more natural when we are working with a single individual, extension, and thinking of it as receiving an overall structure, becoming en-motioned. It becomes plausible to think that there is some such maximal structure, a way of en-motioning extension so that the result has more reality (a richer array of activities) than any other way of doing so.⁴⁹ By way of contrast, if we think of the physical order as simply the collection of more or less autonomous and prior physical individuals, it becomes harder to see how there could be such a maximum. It would seem that for any such collection, we could achieve more reality simply by adding new things to it.

Second, Spinoza holds that everything that is and acts, is and acts necessarily. It is easier to make sense of this view if we think of individuals as falling out of their place in the plenum as patterns or *rationes* do. (That the modal order necessarily flows from God eases the way for the thought that it is thoroughly intelligible: there is in the tradition, at least going back to Aristotle, a strong connection between what can be understood and what is necessary. Spinoza gives this theme an interesting twist at E2p44.) The idea that things could not have been different from the way they are is less natural in a world where the whole is built up from the prior parts. If the parts are prior to the whole, it is hard to understand, for example, why it is necessary for a given tree to have exactly the number of leaves it has or to have the precise location that it does. Why could a tree with fewer leaves not have played its role instead, and why could it not have been positioned a few millimeters closer to a neighboring tree than it was? However, if the tree is a *ratio*, a pattern of motion and rest, interwoven in the plenum with other patterns, it begins to appear that tinkering with its number of leaves or exact position would call for far-reaching adjustments, extending possibly throughout the entire plenum (here we might think of the butterfly effect). In other words, because of the interconnectedness of things, it is not obvious that we can make any small adjustments in one region without in the end engraving a strikingly different motion-structure onto extension, without radically altering “the face of the universe.” Further, if there is something about the actual modal structure—my suggestion is that it is the richest modal structure—that privileges it from the point of view of what God by nature determines to exist, then for this new, pervasively different modal order to exist, it would appear that God would have had to have a different nature from the one which he in fact has. This is the gist of what Spinoza argues in E1p33 and E1p33s2.

Finally, this general picture helps, I think, clear up the mystery many commentators have found surrounding the transition in Spinoza’s metaphysics from infinite modes, which follow (either immediately or mediately) from God’s “absolute nature,” to finite modes.⁵⁰ If we see individuals as coming into existence through motion’s engraving

⁴⁹ Roughly, it becomes as plausible to think that there is a maximally perfect order as to think that there is a best of all possible worlds. See Carriero, “Spinoza’s Views on Necessity,” §5 and §6.

⁵⁰ See Wilson, “Infinite Understanding,” p. 172 and the authors and works cited on p. 176 (n. 15); Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, p. 46 and the authors and works cited on p. 166 (n.1); and Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 151 (n. 60).

the face of the universe into extension, it becomes less puzzling how finite individuals arise: if you carve a face, you thereby make eyes, a nose, ears, and a mouth. When Spinoza discusses infinite modes in Part I of the *Ethics* (Propositions 21–23), I believe he is explaining how the overall global structure gets put into place. When he discusses finite modes (Proposition 28; possibly Propositions 26 and 27 as well), the point he wants to emphasize is that the various local structures come as a whole: each finite mode is ontologically and causally interwoven with others (determined to exist and act by others), which are ontologically and causally interwoven with others, and so forth. One interpretation has it that infinite modes are akin to the laws of motion and the finite modes are akin to initial conditions; and the point that Spinoza is making in this stretch of the *Ethics* is that laws of nature are necessary, since they follow from God's absolute nature, but finite modes are not, since they do not follow from God's absolute nature but rather must be explained by other finite modes.⁵¹ Although this sort of reading has the advantage of making Spinoza's position congenial to a modern outlook, I believe it is seriously mistaken. To be sure, global structure is to be understood through its relation to "absolute nature," and local structure needs to be understood through its relation to other local structures. But as Spinoza indicates after E2p13s, we can take a progressively more encompassing view of the local structure until we arrive at "the whole Individual." This infinite mode that follows from God's absolute nature is the (determinate) face of the universe (and not just, say, the laws of motion); and fixing this global structure determines all of the local structures along with it.

If we understand Spinoza along the lines I have been suggesting, his position turns out to be in certain respects remarkably like Leibniz's.⁵² Leibniz, too, thought there was a privileged order of produced (or, in his case, created) things, what he calls the best possible world. Further, with Spinoza, Leibniz holds that God is such that he will ineluctably bring the privileged order into being. I do not think it is an accident that Spinoza and Leibniz held similar views. It is clear that Leibniz read Spinoza carefully and thought very hard about him. They were also responding, in large part, to the same change in worldview, namely, the newfound priority that the plenum as a whole holds over individual physical systems ("bodies") in their physical picture, and the way that

Curley argues in the latter that Spinoza does not hold that the particular sequence of things follows from God and suggests, plausibly, that Bennett reads Spinoza similarly in *A Study*, §27 I disagree with such an interpretation. To maintain that the question of which particular sequence of finite things exists, is not settled by God would make for a quite radical a break with traditional theology—too radical, in my view, to go unremarked upon by Spinoza. While Spinoza does sometimes depart from traditional theology in profound ways, he articulates and defends those departures (see, e.g. E1p15s, E1p17c2s, E1p33s).

⁵¹ Curley and Bennett seem to hold a view like this. See previous note.

⁵² I believe that where the two positions are similar has to do both with the fact that they were responding to a similar conception of the physical world, and that Leibniz studied Spinoza and took him seriously. It is not a debt that Leibniz could have comfortably acknowledged; I am not sure to what extent he was aware of it, but it is there nonetheless.

finite physical individuals get to be what they are through their situation with other systems in the plenum.

For Leibniz, things are complicated, of course, by the fact that the physical order is the phenomenal appearance of a more basic psychological (monadic) order. But an individual—be it a physical system or a psychological monad—gets to be what it is through perfectly reflecting in its own way God's overarching, systematic plan for the universe, which reflection includes every detail about that universe.⁵³ In a sense, then, the systematic plan comes first, and the individuals come afterward, through the plan. But, in Leibniz's case, this priority of the whole over the individuals is ideal—it falls out of how God thinks about the universe as he puts it together—and not real and ontological, as it is for Spinoza. For Leibniz, the individuals ontologically come first, in that the universe is ultimately made up of individuals, monads. Spinoza, by way of contrast, does not “phenomenalize” the physical order; he takes the priority of the whole physical plenum to the physical systems within it at face value.

For Leibniz, as for Spinoza, the priority of the whole helps to support the idea that there is some privileged order of produced or created things—according to Leibniz, a “best” order. If, for example, the goodness of the universe were a strict additive function of the goodness of its denizens, then every monad would exist. But since it is not, the overall structure of the universe matters. And so Leibniz thinks that there is one overall, maximal, best scheme of things (reflected in each inhabitant of the world) in a way that is analogous to Spinoza's thesis that there is one overall, maximal, modal structure containing the most reality.

And once this privileged maximal order of goodness or reality is on the scene, both Leibniz and Spinoza agree that there would be a deep incoherence—something irrational and inexplicable—if that privileged order were not realized. They differ in that Spinoza thinks that the ineluctability with which that order flows from God's unlimited essence counts as necessitation and Leibniz thinks that it does not. He thinks that the determination of God to make this world runs through God's will and intellect and God's responsiveness to good, and that this is enough to make that determination different from necessitation. It is ironic (or perhaps confirmation of Kant's view that human reason is condemned to antinomy when it takes up such matters) that Spinoza's and Leibniz's readers have often felt that each is entitled only to the other's view here: that Leibniz cannot make room for contingency and is committed, despite himself, to necessitarianism; and that Spinoza cannot defend necessitarianism, and should have acknowledged contingency in his system.

On the reading presented here, reality does for Spinoza some of the same philosophical work that goodness does for Leibniz. The idea of reality needs to have enough content for Spinoza to make intelligible why God determines this modal order rather than any other one, just as the idea of the goodness of the world must have enough content

⁵³ It is not clear to me whether Spinoza takes the interconnectedness of things quite that far.

for Leibniz to make intelligible why God creates this world rather than some other. So, I think we must attribute to Spinoza a reasonably robust conception of reality.

One might doubt this. One might think that either Spinoza is not seriously committed to the idea that one thing (or one group of things) has more or less reality than another, or that, to the extent that he is wedded to some such idea, he has a much flatter conception of reality, more reductionist in spirit. For example, one might think that, to the extent that Spinoza takes reality seriously as a category, he limits comparisons of reality between entire modal orders to claims of the form that if one collection of things in one modal order, B, is a proper superset of the collection of things in another order, A, then B has more reality than A.⁵⁴ And one might think, in a similar vein, that what claims Spinoza is willing to make about the reality or perfection of an individual, for example, that a pattern or *ratio* of motion in the plenum has more or less reality, boil down to facts about the individual's stability and ability to persist: e.g. the hurricane has more "reality" when it is powerful and less when it begins to dissipate, because when it is intense it can knock more things out of its way and survive longer. After all, what else could it mean to say that one pattern or *ratio* of motion and rest has more reality than another, if not that the one system is relatively stable and powerful, the other relatively wobbly and impotent?

I believe that Spinoza is committed to a richer notion of reality than this. For Spinoza, comparisons between modal orders involve their overall structure, not just some additive function of the individuals that are inventoried in them—an odd suggestion, at any rate, given the way in which individuals are derivative of the one whole individual, the face of the universe. And as suggested above in connection with the special case of the human being, Spinoza does not think an individual's level of reality is simply a matter of its stability or ability to hang around, but rather has to do with the sorts of things it can do, the kinds of activities it engages in. Let me develop my position further by reviewing how reality surfaces in the texts of the *Ethics*.

Reality shows up in E2d6: "By reality and perfection I understand the same thing." The point of the definition seems to be to reduce perfection to reality, and, in particular, to divorce perfection from its etymological and traditional sense of completeness. To think of a thing's perfection as involving completeness involves placing it in a canonical genus or species that provides the thing's "boundaries" and the standards for its being "finished." Spinoza rejects this picture of perfection in the Preface to Part IV. Things simply have what reality or "power of acting" they have; some have more reality than others, but there is no particular level of reality or power of acting that a thing ought to have on

⁵⁴ If one reads Spinoza (as Leibniz does) as holding that the maximal order is a (the?) collection of all possible individuals, one might think that this fact alone is enough to connect God to the order of modes that he produces. But reading Spinoza in this way is not without its costs. For one thing, it is not obvious, as Leibniz points out, that all possibilities cannot be put into the same world; it is not clear that not everything that is possible is compossible. And if they are compossible, it is not clear that there is only one way to assemble the collection into a world, and so some account of which assemblage is produced would be needed.

pain of being incomplete or imperfect. Does this reduction of perfection to reality show that Spinoza has flattened out reality or power of acting? Does power of acting reduce to something like stability or ability to persist? Well, toward the end of the Preface to Part IV, Spinoza remarks:

Finally, by perfection in general I shall, as I have said, understand reality [*realitatem*], i.e., the essence of each thing insofar as it exists and produces an effect, having no regard to its duration. For no singular thing can be called more perfect for having persevered in existing for a longer time. (G 2:209)

Clearly, Spinoza's separation of perfection or reality from duration does not sit well with a picture where a thing's level of reality is primarily a function of its ability to hang around.⁵⁵

Other things that Spinoza says about perfection and reality suggest that he is committed to a robust notion. To begin with, at the end of the Appendix to Part I, Spinoza takes up a version of the problem of evil. According to Spinoza, "all things have followed from the necessity of God's most perfect nature." If so, the objector wants to know, "why are there so many imperfections in nature?" Spinoza makes two points in response. First, judgments of perfection should not be relative to us:

For the perfection of things is to be judged solely from their nature and power; things are not more or less perfect because they please or offend men's senses, or because they are of use to, or are incompatible with, human nature. (E1app/G 2:83)

I don't take this to be a rejection of the notion of perfection; rather, consistent with what we have seen from the Preface to Part IV, it is a relocation of it to reality and power ("insofar as it exists and produces an effect"). Well, should we understand the base notions of existence and power in terms of notions like stability and ability to persist, or should we, consonant with what we saw earlier concerning the excellence of the human being, understand Spinoza to be working with a richer notion of power or activity? The continuation of this passage suggests the latter:

But to those who ask "why God did not create all men so that they would be governed by the command of reason?" I answer only "because he did not lack material to create all things, from the highest degree of perfection to the lowest [*ex summo nimirum ad infimum perfectionis gradum*];" or, to speak more properly, "because the laws of his nature have been so ample that they sufficed for producing all things which can be conceived by an infinite intellect" (as I have demonstrated in E1p16). (E1app/G 2:83)

Spinoza seems to endorse here, albeit mutedly, some version of a principle of plenitude. However, it would be hard to know what to make of the hierarchy on a flattened-out

⁵⁵ Here I follow Youpa, "Spinozistic Self-Preservation."

picture of reality or power. God produces every possible level or degree of stability? I think it makes more sense to align the position Spinoza stakes out here (as he is, in effect, inviting us to do) with the plenitude found in more traditional conceptions. One reason, he suggests, that there is what looks like local imperfection (e.g. the existence of human beings not governed by the command of reason) has to do with the perfection of the overall scheme of things; the overall scheme is enhanced by the plenitude.⁵⁶ To be sure, Spinoza has important disagreements with the tradition as well. There is no *imperfection*, only more and less reality or power. Also, the plenitude is there not because the plenitude is good and God chose it because it is good, or even because another order would be *imperfect* in some way (there is no amount of perfection or reality any world “should” have), but rather because this is what a being with unlimited reality or power simply does—i.e. produce the richest possible order of modes. This is a crucial difference between Spinoza and the tradition, and will come back to it shortly. But for now, it is striking that Spinoza appears to accept the premise of the objection (namely, lack of perfection in the product, the modal order, would point to lack of perfection in the nature of the cause, God) and that he avails himself of a traditional answer to the objection (human beings who have less power, perfection, or reality than those who are governed by reason exist because the overall reality of the modal order is increased by their existence).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The first part of the response is this: There is no such thing as local or intrinsic imperfection, so one can raise a problem for E1p16 only if one can point to something that shows that the order of the modes of the universe is not the richest possible. The second part of the response is that, given the variety (the “plenitude”) one expects to find in the richest modal structure, we should not be surprised to find human beings that “are not governed by the command of reason.”

Such human beings are not, of course, intrinsically imperfect—there is no “privation” here—so there is no special problem that they prevent. If we compare what Spinoza is doing here to what Descartes is doing with error in the Fourth Meditation, we see that Spinoza thinks the problem is already solved in the fourth paragraph of the Fourth Meditation, because he does not recognize the distinction between privation and negation that Descartes needs to keep the discussion going: “But this is still not entirely satisfactory. For error is not a pure negation, but rather a privation of some cognition which somehow should be in me [*in me quodammodo esse deberet*]” (AT 7:55). For Spinoza, we cannot make out that “should”: everything is what it is supposed to be. (For further discussion of Descartes, see Carriero, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 232–37.)

⁵⁷ There is one more text that might be entered in this discussion. Although the terms “reality” and “power” do not appear in it, the issues that surface seem close enough to be germane to our topic. In E3p2s, Spinoza considers an objection to his thesis in E3p2 that “the mind cannot determine the body to motion, to rest or to anything else (if there is anything else)”:

They will say, of course, that it cannot happen that the causes of buildings, of paintings, and of things of this kind, which are made only by human skill, should be able to be deduced from the laws of nature alone, insofar as it is considered to be only corporeal; nor would the human Body be able to build a temple, if it were not determined and guided by the Mind. (G 2:142–43)

The idea behind the objection is that a certain amount of reality or perfection in an effect requires a certain amount of reality or perfection in its cause. The objector’s point is that there is too much reality found in certain artifacts to believe that they could have been produced without the mind’s guidance of the body.

The idea that the world is deeply intelligible inasmuch as it ineluctably issues forth from a necessary being that is itself rationally structured is, it seems to me, the shared core of Leibniz's and Spinoza's rationalism. Some may worry that my account makes Spinoza *too* close to Leibniz. Both start from the idea of a necessary first being that is causally responsible for the rest of the world. Both see a kind of priority of the whole produced world to the individuals that inhabit it; in both cases, I think, this felt holism originates with reflection on the way physical systems are interwoven in a plenum physics.⁵⁸ Both hold that this whole admits of being rationally ordered in various ways, that one way of doing so provides more order than any other, and that God is such that he will ineluctably bring into being the privileged rational order.⁵⁹ Despite this common core, there are very significant differences, but they occur at the next level down, so to speak.

Let us start with Leibniz's side. Leibniz is offering a reinterpretation of a medieval Aristotelian universe. The causal mortar that holds together such a universe is

Now, one way in which Spinoza might have responded to this objection would have been to say that there aren't different amounts of reality or perfection within the plenum, that it is all "just" motion and matter. In other words, there is *less* to the temple than you might think, and it is only one pattern or *ratio* like all the others (perhaps more stable than some, less stable than others, but that is not what is bothering the objector). However, this is not how Spinoza replies. Rather, he responds that there is *more* to the causal power of motion and extension than you might think:

But I have already shown that they do not know what the Body can do, or what can be deduced from the consideration of its nature alone, and that they know from experience that a great many things happen from the laws of nature alone which they never would have believed could happen without the direction of the Mind—such as the things sleepwalkers do in their sleep, which they wonder at while they are awake.

I add here the very structure of the human Body, which, in the ingenuity of its construction, far surpasses anything made by human skill—not to mention that I have shown above, that infinitely many things follow from nature, under whatever attribute it may be considered. (E3p2s/G 2:143)

Particularly interesting for our purposes is the end of the extract, "not to mention that I have shown above, that infinitely many things follow from nature, under whatever attribute it may be considered," an allusion to E1p16. This would seem to indicate that when one is considering, for example, local causal transactions within the plenum, it is hard to see a "given amount of reality in the effect/at least the same amount of reality in its cause" principle at work. This may be because there are no purely local causal transactions: no finite thing is ever the complete cause of any other finite thing. However, when we step back and ask why the laws of (extended) nature suffice for the production of something as complex and intricate as the human body, we get the E1p16 answer, because God (or, now, nature) is unlimited in its power and so unlimited richness of modes follows (I think this is what "infinitely many things" comes to in this context).

⁵⁸ As noted earlier, Spinoza and Leibniz work out this holism differently: for Spinoza it is ontologically based—the individuals derive their being from the whole—and for Leibniz it is ideally—individuals in the same universe reflect in a certain way, from a certain point of view, a single plan for the world.

⁵⁹ I develop this approach further in §5 and §6 of "Spinoza's Views on Necessity." Newlands arrives at similar conclusion in "The Harmony of Spinoza and Leibniz" (see especially §2.2 and §3.2). If I understand him correctly, he thinks that some of the work that I take to be done by the plenum physics is accomplished instead simply by appeal to the principle of sufficient reason. I believe it is hard to motivate the idea that there is a privileged order of produced things (a maximal order of reality in the case of Spinoza or a best order in the case of Leibniz) without something like the plenum physics.

desirability. Since *good* is traditionally characterized as the appetible or desirable (that is, as the object of an appetite or desire), good occupies a fundamental place in such a universe. The goodness of what is desired is prior to the desire; the final cause or end is first in the order of causality. So, according to this tradition, causation is fundamentally a matter of an individual actor seeking some good. Noncognitive actors (rocks, trees) do this through natural appetite that does not involve cognition; sentient, but not intellectual, actors (animals) have some cognition of the good, but do not understand why the things they are aware of as good are good; and intellectual actors have cognition both of their ends and of why those ends are good. Leibniz reinterprets this hierarchy in terms of the clarity of the perceptions of monads: bare monads act for the apparent good through confused perceptions without sensation or memory; animals have somewhat more focused perceptions and so have sensation and memory, but still lack understanding of what they are doing; and minds pursue the good in reflective awareness of what they are doing. Desire, in the case of an intellectual being, works through will. God in particular exercises his causality through his will: he produces the most appetible order of things,⁶⁰ that is, the order with the most goodness, the best of all possible worlds. Good or desirability or appetibility is, then, the mortar that links God to what he does and each created being to what it does. Indeed, unless things were antecedently good, appetible, or desirable, nothing would happen: the universe would be inert.

Accordingly, *intelligibility* assumes a certain shape in Leibniz's universe. For Leibniz, nothing happens without a reason; all the goings-on in the universe can be understood. Each local activity happens through individual actors seeking what appears best to them. That my computer is where it is on my desk and not a couple of millimeters closer to the edge is the result of each of innumerable many actors striving, each in its own way, for what appears best to it. If one presses still further for an answer to the deeper, global question—why this series of strivers and strivings rather than some other?—the answer will again be framed in terms of what appears best—this time, to God, the omniscient and benevolent author of the series. Thus, when we work through the reasons for what happens, and try to understand why what happens happens in the way in which it does, we ultimately are led to God's plan for the universe and the goodness found in it.

The place of good and desirability in the fabric of Leibniz's universe colors what it is like to live in that world. God exercises providential concern for his creation as a whole.⁶¹ Rational beings like us hold a special place in the goodness of the created order, and so God shows particular concern for them in the construction of the plan for the universe: the fact that minds are images of God's divinity makes them "capable of entering

⁶⁰ From *Discourse on Metaphysics* §1, "We can say that the more enlightened and informed we are about God's works, the more we will be disposed to find them excellent and in complete conformity with what we might have desired" (p. 35).

⁶¹ This, of course, is a very traditional idea. For example, there is a path—as marked out in Aquinas's Fifth Way—from the fact that natural things that lack intelligence "acting always, or nearly always in the same way, so as to obtain the best result" to the existence of an intelligent being directing these activities (ST I, Q. 2, A. 3).

into a kind of society with God, and allows him to be, in relation to them, not only what an inventor is to his machine (as God is in relation to the other creatures), but also what a prince is to his subject, and even what a father is to his children” (*Monadology* § 84). In a special way, God looks out for the welfare of his rational beings. In such a universe, for example, I am assured that there is a reason for every misfortune or suffering that I undergo: that the suffering contributes to some larger good. I am also assured that God will deal with me as an individual in a nonarbitrary manner; it is part of the overall harmony of the universe that there will be a last judgment at which (individual) accounts will be settled. All of this comes under God’s providential concern for his world insofar as it applies to an intelligent and reflective being.

In marked contrast, good and desirability are decidedly *not* the mortar for Spinoza’s universe. For Spinoza, everything that happens at the fundamental level happens without planning, out of, as Spinoza emphasizes, a geometric (or quasi-geometric) necessity:

But I think I have shown clearly enough (see E1p16) that from God’s supreme power, or infinite nature, infinitely many things in infinitely many modes/ways, i.e., all things, have necessarily flowed, or always follow, by the same necessity and in the same way as from the nature of a triangle it follows, from eternity and to eternity, that its three angles are equal to two right angles. So God’s omnipotence has been actual from eternity and will remain in the same actuality to eternity. (E1p17s/G 2:62; my change from “modes” to “modes/ways” in order to mark the ambiguity of the Latin)

For Spinoza, each being simply always does as much as it can: God or substance generates as much reality as it can; each individual mode seeks to preserve the level of being or reality (or perfection) it has.⁶² Good does not enter Spinoza’s universe in a fundamental way. Good shows up at a subsequent stage, in Spinoza’s account of the human being and the names that we give various things. (Oversimplifying, but only a bit, we call good what our antecedent motive tendencies point us toward.) Power, reality, and perfection run the show.

There is no providence in Spinoza’s universe; the powers that be do not look out for us. In the Appendix to Part I, Spinoza ridicules the idea that Nature looks after us as an anthropomorphic fairy tale. This difference in outlook is reflected in our standing as agents. For better or worse, we find ourselves in a certain sense on our own, hostage to fortune, without any assurance that our sufferings will be recompensed or any prospect of a last judgment at which accounts will be settled. Right and wrong, reward and punishment are deeply important to human beings and the way they go about their affairs, but they arise only in the context of human institutions through settled human convention. This is a very different way of thinking about God than is prevalent in the

⁶² I believe that a mode does this by increasing, where it can, what Spinoza calls its power of acting, so that an increase in one’s power counts as a preservation of one’s being, but the point is delicate—see E3p7 and E3p11. See Carriero, “Conatus and Perfection.”

Western tradition, with its strong emphasis on each human being's individual relationship with God.

Leibniz characterizes the kind of necessity found in Spinoza's system as "brute" or "blind," and that make it seem as if he thinks of Spinoza's universe, lacking the structure afforded by a providential plan, as less intelligible.⁶³ But things are no less intelligible in Spinoza's universe than in Leibniz's. It is just that the model of understanding or intelligibility is different. There is no mystery, no brute fact, about why the laptop is where it is on my desk. The laptop's position is a product of various motive tendencies in the universe, that is, a product of what Spinoza calls "the order of the whole of corporeal Nature" (E1p11d2; see also the mention of "the order of causes" in E1p33s1). And if we ask why the order of the whole of corporeal Nature is as it is rather than some other way, the answer is that that is the richest modal order and the richest modal order necessarily flows from a being who is unlimited in its reality and power—and all of this happens in the same unmysterious, rationally transparent way that having three angles that make up a straight line flows from being a triangle. If Spinoza is, in the words of the poet, a god-intoxicated man, that intoxication does not derive from a sense of wonder at the providential concern that nature has evidently bestowed on her world, but rather from wonder at the pervasive mathematical order one finds in things—before that order was pulled out of the world by Kant, I think, and made dependent on the mind—as in the attitude embodied in the old joke, " $e^i\pi + 1 = 0$, therefore God exists."⁶⁴

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⁶³ *Theodicy*, §174 and §349 respectively. In §174 Leibniz explicitly refers to Spinoza; §349 does not mention Spinoza, but the characterization would seem to apply to his view. I am indebted to Adams, *Leibniz*, p. 21, for these references and to his discussion there. See also his "Moral Necessity," pp. 183–84. Marleen Rozemond has pointed out to me that since the source of Leibniz's complaint is that Spinoza denies a role for God's intelligence and choice (see Adams, *Leibniz*, p. 21, and "Moral Necessity," p. 183), it would not follow from Leibniz's charge that the necessity found in Spinoza's universe is blind or brute that Leibniz took Spinoza's universe to be lacking in intelligibility.

⁶⁴ I would like to thank the editor, Michael Della Rocca, and Lilli Alanen, Joseph Almog, John Brandau, Paul Hoffman, Karolina Hübner, Sean Kelsey, Yitzhak Melamed, Marleen Rozemond, and Stephan Schmid for their helpful comments and suggestions.

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CHAPTER 13

SPINOZA ON MIND

OLLI KOISTINEN

INTRODUCTION

THE second part of the *Ethics* bears the title “Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind.” Although difficult, Spinoza’s treatment of the mind has been often seen as making real advances in the way mind and its relation to body should be conceived. Descartes’s dualism from which Spinoza’s theory of mind develops has been criticized for being mysterious in its explanation of the human being as a union of two really distinct substances. The problems in Descartes’s theory are well known. How is it possible that two distinct substances to unite that they form one individual with some kind of functional unity? In particular, how is it possible that a non-material and non-extended mind stands in causal interaction with an extended substance; i.e. with the human body? The root of the problem seems to be that a non-extended substance cannot be anywhere in space and cannot, so to speak, be in the same world as an extended substance. Spinoza himself was rather satisfied with his conception of the union of mind and body. After having argued for his view, he comments on it at E2p13s:

From these [propositions] we understand not only that the human mind is united to the body, but also what should be understood by the union of mind and body.

As is often emphasized, Spinoza somehow identified the human mind with the human body; in such an identification, the nature of the mind-body union would not arise because the human being should not be seen as a union. When philosophers have tried to give an account of this kind of identification, they seem to have in mind something that resembles what is currently called double aspect theory. In a double aspect theory, it is assumed that one and the same entity can have both mental and physical properties. So, some event can be with truth described both as mental and as physical. For example, my belief that the moon is smaller than the sun is a state of mine that also allows

that physical properties are predicated of it. Thus in Spinoza's world the human being could be seen as such an event or process in God which has both mental and physical properties.

Prima facie, it seems that attributing such a dual aspect theory to Spinoza is right. In Spinoza's monism, thought and extension as infinite attributes are both conceived through themselves but are still attributes of one and the same being: God. There also are places in the *Ethics* where he seems to infer from this dual nature of God to the dual nature of human beings (E3p2s). So the basic picture of the dual aspect theory as applied to Spinoza could be characterized as follows. As infinite attributes, thought and extension are basic features of reality that are as it were everywhere in the universe. Thus, every bit of universe has to be both mental and physical. One might compare this to saltiness and warmth penetrating a quantity of water so that everything in that quantity is both salty and warm. So a thing that is mental (salty) is necessarily identical with a thing that is extended (warm) and vice versa. In this kind of theory, mentality and physicality are just two different aspects of an underlying reality.

The most difficult problem in any double aspect theory is to give an account of the interdependence of mental and physical properties, given that such a theory purports to explain the nature of mind-body union. That mental and physical properties can be attributed to one entity does not by itself tell anything about how they are connected. In double aspect theories, mental and physical properties are seen as distinct from each other and one wonders what bridges these. Why is it the case that C-fibers firing is connected with pain? Why is it the case that, when I feel thirsty and desire to drink some water, my body moves with the result that there is water in my mouth? To appeal to causation between mental and physical seems to be here as mysterious as it is in substance dualism. Moreover, emergence or its successor supervenience do not solve the conceptual mystery: once mental and physical properties are kept as ontologically distinct basic ways of being, there is no door open for any relation that would explain, instead of only stating, the dependence between mental and physical.

It is my view that Spinoza made a fresh start in the endeavor to understand the mind and its relation to body. The basic question for him was not how this or that mental event is related to this or that physical event. Instead his main objective in the beginning of Part II of the *Ethics* where the relation between mind and body is in focus is to explain the possibility of understanding in general. The physical world or the world of extension is a world of which we, finite beings, have some understanding; and so our mind and the extended world work together. Rather surprisingly, it is the possibility of understanding that provides the key for comprehending the mind-body union.

This chapter consists of two parts. The first part focuses on the idea of God that Spinoza speaks about in E2p3. It will be claimed that there is a sense in which Spinoza's so called parallelism between mental and physical realms can be treated roughly as a corollary to there being an idea of God. Spinoza started his thinking about the relation between thought and extension from above; i.e. from the infinite idea of God and its relation to infinite extension and then descended to particular minds and their relation to particular bodies, and this is why any investigation of mind-body relation has to start

from God's mind or intellect.¹ The infinite idea of God, instead of being just an aggregate of ideas about everything there is, is a true idea. Truth, as we will see, implies an order for Spinoza and when this is connected to Spinoza's central, although neglected, view that ideas are ontologically dependent on their objects, even so closely that the object of an idea can be treated as a constituent of the idea, thought becomes locked to extension in an orderly way. So, God's understanding himself—i.e. having a true idea of himself—requires that infinite thought is united with infinite extension and that there is an intelligible order in the universe or God.

In addition to God, there is room for finite intellects or thinkers in Spinoza's world. In the second part of the chapter, these finite thinkers and their relation to modes of extension are investigated. Spinoza's grand view is that the durational existence of these finite thinkers is dependent on a subset of God's ideas of actual bodies. Thus, for Spinoza any mind is the idea of its corresponding body. In Spinoza's view of things, mind is conceptually related to its object, i.e. to human body, because the human body is a constituent of the human mind. If Spinoza is right, then there is no problem how the mind is united to the body or how interaction between mind and body is possible.²

SPINOZA ON MENTALITY AND UNDERSTANDING

What Spinoza purports to do in E2p1-2p13 is to show why there is such thing as mentality or thought at all and how human minds are generated from this mentality. As we have already seen, this should also explain the nature of the mind-body union. There are, thus, two different problems Spinoza tackles in the beginning of the second part of the *Ethics*. The first could be called the general problem of mentality, which is the problem of explaining why there is mentality at all in the world, and the second is the problem of particular minds. True to his top-down strategy, Spinoza starts from the general problem and afterwards descends to particular minds.

The Origin of Mentality in General

In Part I of the *Ethics*, Spinoza shows that there is just one substance with an infinity (where infinity entails totality) of attributes. Thus, to give mentality a place in nature,

¹ Sometimes Spinoza's tendency to think that in philosophy one always has to start from the nature of God before considering finite things has been called his top-down strategy. In E2p10s, Spinoza claims that, in the order of knowledge, the divine nature is prior to everything else.

² In this chapter, I am not commenting on the work of other authors. However, I believe the reader might benefit from consulting Wilson, "Objects, Ideas, and 'Minds'"; Gueroult, *Spinoza II*; Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (chapter 3); and Barker, "Notes."

the only thing Spinoza needs to show is that thought is an attribute of God, and in E2p1 Spinoza claims that to be the case. He demonstrates E2p1 in two ways—in addition to E2p1d also in E2p1s:

E2p1d: Singular thoughts, or this or that thought, are modes which express God's nature in a certain and determinate way (by E1p25c). Therefore (by E1d5) there belongs to God an attribute whose concept all singular thoughts involve, and through which they are also conceived. Therefore, thought is one of God's infinite attributes, which expresses an eternal and infinite essence of God (see E1d6), or God is a thinking thing, q.e.d.

E2p1s: This proposition is also evident from the fact that we can conceive an infinite thinking being. For the more things a thinking being can think, the more reality, or perfection we conceive it to contain. Therefore, a being which can think infinitely many things in infinitely many ways is necessarily infinite in its power of thinking. So since we can conceive an infinite being by attending to thought alone, thought (by E1d4 and E1d6) is necessarily one of God's infinite attributes, as we maintained.

The proof given in E2p1d is a bit complicated. It proceeds from singular thoughts to thought being an attribute. Singular thoughts are according to E1p15 in God and hence they are modes of God, but as modes they have to be conceived through God; i.e. they get their reality from God. Thus, God has to have the power to bring them about, which means that God possesses the power of thinking and is, then, a thinking thing, which means that thought is an attribute of God. The difficulty with this proof is that a similar argument can be constructed that shows something that does not hold of Spinoza's God. Consider the following: "Singular desires are modes of God. Thus they have to be in God and must be conceived through him. Therefore, God must have the power to bring about particular desires. Thus desire is an attribute of God." However, this argument cannot be right. Because desire signifies a lack, Spinoza's God as a perfect being does not desire anything. I am not quite certain what a Spinozistic response to this objection could be, but I assume E2a3 might help us to find an escape. According to that axiom, desires are modifications of ideas and thus modes of modes. In order to understand the proximate cause of desires, we do not have to go all the way down to the substance. In fact, a desire for Spinoza is an idea of an action that gives pleasure to the agent, and thus its nature can be explicated without directly referring to God's nature. This point may become still clearer when attention is paid to Spinoza's definition of attribute (E1d4). According to this definition, an attribute is that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence. In order to understand the proximate cause of desire, we do not have to think of it as being directly brought about by something that constitutes the essence of substance; we can understand the nature of desire through ideas, which as modes do not pertain to God's essence. The proof given in the scholium to E2p1 is much more straightforward. Here Spinoza operates with notion of infinity, and implicitly seems to refer back to E1p8 where attributes are said to be infinite. Even though E1p8 as such does not license the move that any action or property

that allows of infinity is an attribute, Spinoza relies on that move when in E2p1s he says that thought is an attribute of God because we can conceive an infinite being by attending to thought alone.

In E2p2, Spinoza gives extension the status of an attribute of God, but instead of giving a detailed proof he is content to say that the demonstration proceeds in the same way as the demonstration of E2p1. The proof, then, has to go something like this: there are modes of extension. Some of them, like the particular shapes of bodies, are modes of bodies and thus can be understood through them. However, bodies as such are no more modes of other bodies and thus they have to be conceived through a substance having a power to produce them, which means that extension has to be an attribute of God.

Here, it is worthwhile to consider the function of E2p2, which is surprisingly placed second in a series of propositions purporting to deal with the origin of the human mind. What I suggest is that, by locating E2p2 here, Spinoza begins to show concern about the objects of God's thought. In having thought as an attribute, God has an infinite power of thought, but if there were no objects to think about, that power would stay unrealized. It is God's infinite extension that offers an infinite material for thought; in fact, that thinking does not produce objects of its own is a fundamental feature in Spinoza's philosophy of mind. We can call this feature of God's thought *the principle of the incompleteness of thinking*:

Any idea of an object of an attribute X is ontologically dependent on the attribute of X.

This could also be expressed as saying that ideas are individuated through their other-attribute objects.³

³ It might be objected that the principle of the incompleteness of thinking violates the conceptual barrier between different attributes. Each attribute, Spinoza claims in E1p10s, is conceived through itself. However, I do not believe that this means that ideas cannot have objects of other attributes as their constituents. As I interpret Spinoza, I see him intend by E1p10 primarily that thought is a different expression of God's force or essence than that of any other attribute. That God thinks of everything that is possible does not derive from any other attribute, and thus God's power of thinking is conceived through itself. An idea for Spinoza can be interpreted either thinly or thickly. When an idea is conceived thinly, the act by which God takes an object (*ideatum*) from some other attribute is meant. This explains why Spinoza in E2d3 emphasizes the action-like character of ideas. When an idea is conceived thickly, it is rather like the result of the act and has the object as its constituent, and in the principle of the incompleteness of thinking, thick ideas are referred to. This distinction helps us to understand why Spinoza denies that there is causal flow between the attributes. The acts of thought (i.e. thin ideas) by which the mind takes modes of other attributes as its objects are not caused by those objects—one might want to say that these objects give God the occasion to think about them. In discussion, Alan Nelson suggested to me years ago that Spinoza's ideas need an object in order to be full ideas. However, he did not treat these objects of ideas as existing modes of extension but as some kind of intentional objects in thought. Nelson's suggestion has shaped the way I think of mind and body in Spinoza.

God's Idea

What has been demonstrated in E2p1 and E2p2 is that in the universe there is an infinite power of thought as well as something to be thought in infinitely many ways: the attribute of extension is in its infinite diversity a worthy companion to God's infinite thought. In E2p3, Spinoza begins to speak about the idea of God:

In God there is necessarily the idea both of his essence and of everything that necessarily follows from his essence.

This is an extremely important proposition. Much of what Spinoza says about the relation of mind and body (or mentality and physicality) can be taken, as we will see, as a corollary to it. Spinoza proves this proposition by referring to E1p16 and E1p35. First, E1p16 entails that God can form the idea of his essence and everything that follows from it whereas E1p35 shows that God realizes everything that is in his power. Thus, there is an idea in God both of his essence and everything that follows from it.

There is much that is packed into the idea of God. First, this idea is the first consequence of God's being an infinite thinking thing (E1p21d). It is an immediate infinite mode of God, to use the vocabulary of Part I of the *Ethics*, which means that it is not an idea that is formed from other ideas; it follows directly from God's existence that there is in him an idea of his essence. Second, it has richness in it: an infinity of things follows from it. Because for Spinoza infinity entails totality, ideas of all things in God are contained in it. Third, this idea includes both eternal and durational ideas. God's infinite power of thought is sufficient for him to conceive all things at once, and thus there is in God's intellect an eternal idea of the universe; God's idea of himself presents the world *sub specie aeternitatis*. However, Spinoza does not see anything illusory in duration and in things coming into being and going out of existence and, of all these durational, contingent things, there also are durational ideas in God. Fourth, this idea is the intellect of God, and thus the ideas contained in it are true.⁴ So when Spinoza gives thought the status of an attribute, it involves much more than that there is some kind of all pervading mental stuff. The point in attributing infinite thought to God is that there is a thinker who truly understands everything.

While the first two characteristics of the idea of God follow directly from Part I of the *Ethics*, the third and fourth need special consideration. As has been suggested above, God's idea can be divided into God's eternal idea of himself and into God's durational idea of himself. God's eternal idea of himself contains ideas of things under the species of eternity and, because of the close connection Spinoza sees between the idea and its object, the objects of these eternal ideas have to be eternal, too. Because this kind of

⁴ It should be emphasized already here that, even though all ideas are in God and hence are true for God, this does not mean that all ideas are true for everybody. Falsity, as we will see later, consists of isolation.

eternal idea may be felt to be a bit obscure, let us start the investigation by focusing on it and on the objects of its constituent ideas.

Objects of God's Idea

The objects of the eternal ideas about finite modes are essences (see especially E2p8 and E5p23). Quite often Spinoza calls essences formal essences in order to distinguish them from actual essences, which are forces that are needed to actualize a formal essence. To get a grip on Spinoza's notion of essence, a look at Spinoza's early writing "Cogitata Metaphysica" is necessary. There in Part 1, Chapter 2, he first characterizes essence by saying that

being of Essence is nothing but that manner in which created things are comprehended in the attributes of God. (G 1:238)

And in a similar way, in E2p8 Spinoza states that the (formal) essences are comprehended in the attributes of God. The point Spinoza is after in saying that essences are comprehended in the attributes of God is to leave room for the possibility of an essence being non-actual and for the ability to think of such a non-actual thing. One can think of an ellipsoid, even if such a thing is not actual, because the nature of extension allows us to think about it. So in thinking of an ellipsoid, I am thinking something that exists (space) as having a local ellipsoidal modification: in thinking of an ellipsoid, I do not have to think of it as existent. However, if I think of space I no more can think space as a modification of something that is more fundamental, and thus I cannot think space or extension as non-existent: extension cannot be grounded on anything else.⁵

Spinoza also claims that in God essence cannot be separated from existence because God's essence cannot be conceived without existence. However, the essence of a created thing is different from its existence because the essence of any created thing can be conceived without existence.

Spinoza gives a helpful analogy of the way in which essences are contained in the essence of God at the end of CM 1.2:

Finally, if any Philosopher still doubts whether essence is distinguished from existence in created things, he need not labor greatly over definitions of essence and existence to remove that doubt. For if he will only go to some sculptor or woodcarver, they will show him how they conceive in a certain order a statue not yet existing, and after having made it, they will present the existing statue to him. (G 1:239)

This analogy makes perfect sense from the viewpoint of the second part of the *Ethics*, too. The wood or the stone these artisans need could be compared to God as an

⁵ This is the basis for Spinoza's ontological argument at E1p7.

extended thing, or maybe better, to space. As the stone or the wood before the artisans' work contains the possibility of innumerable different statues, so does space contain the possibility of an infinity of subspaces or figures.⁶ The material for the possibilities, be it stone, wood or extended substance itself, places some constraints on the possibilities. From a stone one cannot make a wooden statue nor a statue whose volume exceeds that of the volume of the stone, etc. The figures in Spinoza's space have to obey the three-dimensional structure of Euclidean space, but in spite of that the space offers an infinite material for possibilities to be realized, and in this sense it contains the formal essences of all bodies. For Spinoza a body is just a limited area of God's extension expressing God's force in a determinate way. (See also Ep. 81 & 83.)

In the *Ethics* the notion of formal essence is first used in E1p17s:

If intellect pertains to the divine nature, it will not be able to be (like our intellect) by nature either posterior to (as most would have it), or simultaneous with, the things understood, since God is prior in causality to all things (by E1p16c1). On the contrary, the truth and formal essence of things is what it is because it exists objectively in that way in God's intellect. So God's intellect, insofar as it is conceived to constitute God's essence, is really the cause both of the essence and of the existence of things. This seems also to have been noticed by those who asserted that God's intellect, will and power are one and the same.

At first sight it might look that this passage is not of much value because Spinoza does not think that intellect pertains to the nature of God. In fact, in the *Ethics* he even places the infinite intellect in *natura naturata*; i.e. on the created side of God. However, the passage makes it clear that Spinoza first deliberately makes the false hypothesis about intellect pertaining to the nature of God, and then he adds to this two premises that he accepts in order to draw the conditional conclusion he thinks as being the correct one. The two premises he seems to endorse are: (1) E1p16c1 and (2) that the truth and formal essences are what they are because they exist objectively in that way in God's intellect, and in this latter premise he identifies the objects of God's intellect with the formal essences of things.

To summarize the theory of (formal) essence, let us consider Messi and Zanetti. As an actual existent, Messi is possible. Moreover, his possibility has been there as it were always. However, the possibility of Messi is not, in the way Spinoza looks at things, dependent on the existence of the durational world at all; i.e. we do not have to think the eternal possibility of Messi as a sempiternal possibility. The possibility of Messi is contained in the nature of God. This kind of talk leads quite easily to the view that

⁶ Here Spinoza seems to anticipate Newton. In a passage brought to my attention by Pasi Vaparanta, Newton writes: "... there are everywhere all kinds of figures, everywhere spheres, cubes, triangles, straight lines, everywhere circular, elliptical, parabolical, and all other kinds of figures, and those of all shapes and sizes, even though they are not disclosed to sight. For the delineation of any material figure is not a new production of that figure with respect to space, but only a corporeal representation of it, so that what was formerly insensible in space now appears before the senses" ("De Gravitatione," pp. 22–3).

the formal essence of Messi is nothing but the world having the potentiality to realize Messi in the same sense that we might assume that the geometrical space has the potentiality to contain a sphere with a diameter of 5,000 miles. But once it is assumed that there is an idea about Messi, the question that distinguishes the idea about Messi from the idea about Zanetti becomes acute. Both these ideas are ideas about the world and its potentialities, but what distinguishes these ideas from each other? The former is focused on Messi, the latter on Zanetti. To make sense of this and similar differences, the notion of formal essences is introduced. It seems much like an ad hoc entity, but I believe meditation on this reveals that it need not be quite so. Suppose there is an existing particular sphere. In some sense, we can say that its geometrical shape is eternal. It has eternally determined the place that has now been filled with matter, and we can call this part of the geometrical space the formal essence of that sphere. In a similar way, there is something eternal in God that when filled with matter constitutes Messi's flesh and blood existence. In short, all possibilities have their foundation in God's eternal and infinite essence.

The actual durational existents, as we have already seen, are closely connected to the formal essences. Any actual existent is a realized formal essence. This realization is due to God's infinite force, which is responsible for the existence of matter. To get a grip on this, a geometrical analogy Spinoza himself uses may be of some help:

The mind can determine in many ways the ideas of things that the intellect forms from others—as, for example, to determine the plane of an ellipse, it feigns that a pen attached to a cord is moved around two centers, or conceives infinitely many points always having the same definite relation to some given straight line, or a cone cut by some oblique plane, so that the angle of inclination is greater than the angle of the cone's vertex, or in infinite other ways. (TdIE §108)

The first way listed above is most helpful for our purpose here. The eternal idea of the essence of the ellipse becomes determined through a mechanical procedure, and here the formal essence becomes actual or gets materialized. Spinoza wants to see the whole order of nature as following a similar pattern. Formal essences in God's infinite idea become real or actual through the acts of finite modes, and the durational part of God's infinite idea consists of those ideas that keep track of this process while the object of this idea is formed by the process and its durational or contingent products.

Truth

Spinoza holds that there is a truth about things and that truth is in God's intellect. In the *Ethics* Spinoza does not directly speak too much about the notion of truth. He lays it down as an axiom (E1a6) that

A6: A true idea must agree [*convenire*] with its object [*ideatum*].

However, there is much more about truth in TdIE where Spinoza (at §72) writes:

To investigate this, therefore, let us consider some true idea, of which we know most certainly that its object depends on our power of thinking, and that it has no object in nature. For it is clear from what has already been said that we shall be able more easily to investigate what we wish to in such an idea. E.g., to form the concept of a sphere, I feign a cause at will, say that a semicircle is rotated around a center, and that the sphere is, as it were, produced by this rotation. This idea, of course, is true, and even though we may know that no sphere in nature was ever produced in this way, nevertheless, this perception is true, and a very easy way of forming the concept of a sphere.

Now it must be noted that this perception affirms that the semicircle is rotated, which affirmation would be false if it were not joined to the concept of a sphere, or to a cause determining such a motion, or absolutely, if this affirmation were isolated. For then the mind would only tend to affirm of the semicircle nothing but motion, which neither is contained in the concept of the semicircle nor arises from the concept of the cause determining the motion. So falsity consists only in this: that something is affirmed of a thing that is not contained in the concept we have formed of the thing, as motion or rest of the semicircle.

In this latter passage, Spinoza goes on to emphasize that falsity and isolation of an idea go together. Moreover, he holds that an affirmation is not isolated if what is affirmed is contained in the concept of the thing of which the affirmation is made.⁷ But what does Spinoza mean when he claims that something is contained in the concept of a thing?

For Spinoza, things are conceived through other things or they are conceived through themselves. God is the only thing that is conceived through itself whereas modes of God are conceived through other things. So, in the concept of God, nothing is included that refers beyond him, so to speak. Such conceivability in itself means that God is somehow self-explanatory or that the idea of God shows its own truth. Modes Spinoza divides into infinite and finite ones so that finite modes are elements in an infinite causal process whereas infinite modes follow from the essence of God. The infinite modes, which include the formal essences, are such that they can be inferred from the essence of God and, thus, their truth is in God: we see them as being contained in the true, self-explanatory, essence of God.

Once we think of an actual singular thing, i.e. a finite mode, as an actualization of a formal essence, truth about the idea of it has to have a reference to its finite cause. Here the example of the sphere becomes relevant: concepts of finite things that are not conceived through themselves must look back to their causes. Some action or occurrence in nature is made intelligible or true once we see how it actualizes a formal essence. In this

⁷ This seems to come close to Leibniz's conceptual containment theory of truth.

way ideas of actual occurrences in nature can be said to be true. So an idea of the intellect can, from the durational perspective, be defined with the help of the cause that determines that idea, i.e. whose occurrence actualizes the formal essence.

As has already been stated, E1a6 says that a true idea must agree with its object. In the light of the considerations above, this agreement can be taken in three ways. When the object is God's essence, the idea *reveals* its own truth; when the object is an infinite mode of God, the idea shows or includes the way in which it is *contained* in the essence of God; and when the object is a finite mode, the idea shows how the actualization of its essence is *generated* from a finitely modified causal process.

The following summarizes the considerations on the idea of God in E2p3. That God is an infinite thinking thing entails that there is an idea of God. This idea of God contains the truth of all things. Truths are of two kinds. First, there are ideas that are eternally true and have as their objects God's essence and everything contained in it, i.e. infinite modes including the formal essences of things. The ideas of infinite modes are ultimately understood as true through the essence of God whereas the essence of God reveals its own truth. There is some sort of conceptual order among the infinite modes so that ideas of them conceived in that order are true. God's essence, as Spinoza emphasizes in Ep. 83, also contains motion and rest. This means that there is, given Spinoza's belief in universal causality, an eternally ongoing causal process in which formal essences are realized. God's infinite intellect follows this process and so forms true ideas that look back to their causes in the same intelligible way as the mind can be said to form a true idea of the sphere from the rotation of a semicircle.

Uniqueness of the Idea of God

In E2p4 Spinoza says that the idea of God from which infinite things follow in infinite ways must be unique. The purpose of this proposition is to emphasize that in God's infinite mind there is no room for alternative worlds, so to speak. The demonstration shows that such an assumption is contradictory because the ideas God would form would need other objects than those offered by God's essence and his affections. So here, Spinoza's fundamental assumption about ideas being ontologically dependent on their objects is at work. If an idea of an alternative world were possible from God's viewpoint, that would require some other substance to provide the material for such thought and, of course, in Spinoza's scheme of things there can be no other substance but God. It should be noted in passing that also the way and order the finite things are determined to exist in the actual world is unique. The conception of another order would involve the conception of another substance or God as Spinoza explains in E1p33s:

if things could have been of another nature, or could have been determined to produce an effect in another way, so that the order of Nature was different, then God's

nature could also have been other than it is now, and therefore (by E1p11) that [other nature] would also have had to exist, and consequently, there could have been two or more Gods, which is absurd (by E1p14c1).

Thus, this uniqueness of the idea of God can be seen to exclude the possibility left open by E2p3, viz. that even if it were true that there is in God an idea of everything in the actual world, there still could be in an infinite intellect ideas of alternatives to the actual world.

Causal Isolation

While Spinoza saw thought and extension as closely connected even to the point that ideas are ontologically dependent on their objects, it may come as a surprise that in E2p5 he states that ideas have a causal origin that stays within the attribute of thought, and in E2p6 he generalizes this result to modes of other attributes. An actually existing mode of an attribute X can be caused to exist only by God insofar as he is X. This means that any finite mode of an attribute X can be caused to exist only by another finite mode of that attribute, whereas the infinite modes of that attribute follow from God only insofar as he is considered under that attribute.

Spinoza gives two demonstrations of E2p5. The first demonstration cites only (the demonstration of) E2p3. There Spinoza claimed that the fact that God is an infinite, thinking being is sufficient for him to form the idea of everything. Thus, the existence of any idea needs no other power than that of thought.⁸ The second proof casts some light on causation in Spinoza. In an idea, God's essence is expressed only as a thinking thing and, because the cognition of an effect involves the cognition of its cause, God can be the cause of an idea in no other way than as a thinking thing. Proposition E2p6 does nothing more than generalize E2p5. A mode of any attribute is caused by God only insofar as he is considered under that attribute. These two propositions, then, seem to divide the universe into distinct, independent, attribute-specific layers.

However, to see Spinoza's universe as a layered structure is wrong. I have already emphasized that for Spinoza thought does not produce its objects but that they are given from elsewhere. Even true ideas of non-existent things have to be founded on something that exists, and for us this means that our ideas of non-existent things have to be founded on space or on God considered as an extended thing. For Spinoza, space plays much the same role as it does in Kant's transcendental idealism. Space is a necessary condition for our having any cognitions at all, but Spinoza does not hold space as an ideal thing as Kant does. In being locked onto space, thought is united with something that has real existence.

⁸ Here ideas should be interpreted thinly. See footnote 3.

Sameness of Order and Connection

With this as background, it is time to turn to E2p7, which has deserved an enormous amount of attention in Spinoza scholarship:

E2p7: The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.

Before going deeper into Spinoza's proof, some preliminary remarks are in order. As the subsequent uses of E2p7 show, the things in E2p7 at least involve durational or contingent singular things—finite modes in Spinoza's terminology. It follows directly from God's being an infinite thinking thing that, besides the eternal ideas of formal essences, God also has ideas of these durational things. Thus God has an idea of everything that happens in him. So if a singular thing *e* is caused to exist by another singular thing *c*, then there exist ideas of *c* and *e*, *I(c)* and *I(e)*, which have the same duration as *c* and *e*. These actual ideas cannot exist without the things that are their objects and, in fact, Spinoza even seems to claim in E2p8c that the durational features of ideas are based on the durational features of their objects.⁹ Thus, it seems that the causal order of ideas has to be the same as the causal order of things. But it seems that something is missing here. Even if it were granted that when *c* causes *e* there are *c*- and *e*-cotemporal ideas *I(c)* and *I(e)* respectively, it does not, of course, follow that *I(c)* and *I(e)* are causally related to each other. However, Spinoza clearly wants to see a kind of causal relation hold between ideas (cf. E2p7s and E2p9d), and to see why he thinks so let us turn to the demonstration of E2p7.

The demonstration is disappointingly short:

This is clear from E1a4. For the idea of each thing caused depends on the knowledge of the cause of which it is the effect.

⁹ In E2p8c Spinoza writes: "And when singular things are said to exist, not only insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, but insofar also as they are said to have duration, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration." I take this to support the reading that the durational features of ideas are grounded in the durational features of their objects, but I admit that this is not inconsistent with a reading that sees only a correlation between ideas and their objects. However, in referring to E2p7c at E2p11c, Spinoza claims that an idea can be said to exist only when it is an idea of an existent thing. This suggests, given the content of E2p7c, that the durational existence of an idea is *based on* its object having a durational existence. Moreover, in a somewhat cryptic passage from the *Short Treatise* (1.1.5), Spinoza appears to say that the temporal movement of the understanding is based on something external to the understanding: "... a finite intellect can understand nothing through itself unless it is determined by something external. For just as it has no power to understand everything at once, so it *also has no power to begin by understanding this before that, or that before this*. Not being able to do either the first or the second, it can do nothing." (Emphasis mine.) Here Spinoza speaks of determination, but I believe that is not quite accurate. Because "determination" no more occurs in E2p8c, it is safer to use the "based on" relation to explicate E2p8c.

The axiom, E1a4, on which the demonstration is based is multifaceted, as has been pointed out in the literature. Here we should bear in mind that we are still investigating God's mind in which all ideas are true and should try to understand E1a4 from that perspective. As the axiom is used here, it can be read as saying that all ideas of effects are generated from the knowledge of their causes. Even though this may sound odd, instances of such knowledge are already familiar to us. To form the concept of a sphere, we need to think of a semicircle rotating around its axis. It is the knowledge of this kind of causal process that leads us to the concept or true idea of a sphere, and here it is clear that this kind of true idea is dependent on the knowledge of its cause. What is being claimed in E2p7 is that God, in forming the ideas of actual durational singular things, follows a similar process as we do when we construct ideas of geometrical entities. The ideas of formal essences then do not give God a complete understanding of the world because such complete understanding also requires knowledge of the way these formal essences become realized. God's mind moves from one state of the world to another in such a way that this process is as intelligible for him as is for us the process in which the semicircle, by rotating around its axis, produces a sphere.

In the interpretation proposed, E2p7 should be read as saying that there is a rational order the universe follows. What this means is that the way the world changes is intelligible and that the effects really can be seen to stem from their causes so that the natures of effects are, as it were, readable from their causes. In this process, formal essences become realized in a way similar to the way in which we can see certain processes realizing eternal geometrical ideas. If the ideas of the formal essences were realized haphazardly, the order and connection of ideas would not be the same as the order and connection of things. It has been rightly emphasized that Spinoza abandoned all final causes from his philosophy, but on the other hand, I think it would be a mistake to substitute this with the model of "blind" efficient causation borrowed from the natural sciences. Spinoza himself quite explicitly says that the model of explanation of mathematics is the substitute for explanation through final causes:

So they maintained it is as certain that the judgments of the gods far surpass man's grasp. This alone, of course, would have caused the truth to be hidden from the human race to eternity, if mathematics, which is concerned not with ends, but only with the essences and properties of figures, had not shown men another standard of truth. (E1app/G 2:79)

In the corollary to E2p7, Spinoza says that E2p7 also proves that "God's power of thinking is equal to his actual power of acting. That is, whatever follows formally from God's infinite nature follows objectively in God from his idea in the same order and with the same connection." In the interpretation proposed here, this should be understood as follows: God's actual power of thinking is concerned with the realization of the formal essences. But because God understands himself, God knows things truly (or in an

orderly fashion), i.e. in the sense of truth elucidated in TdIE §72. However, E2p7 shows that the true order of things is also the order nature follows.

After this explication of E2p7 and its demonstration, it is rather straightforward to see why Spinoza thought that the rational order is a causal order. When God's mind moves in an infinite causal process from the object of an idea to another, he cannot but accept the resulting idea. The true ideas, or true beliefs he has necessarily lead him to other true ideas that look back to the causal history of their object. There is no logical inference involved here, the intelligible, rational process, which intuitively or sees the extended process, is also a causally determined process, but determined in a way that reveals the truth.¹⁰

To conclude the investigation of E2p7, I will consider how the famous identity claim in E2p7s should be interpreted. There Spinoza claims that ideas and their extended objects are identical. This is often interpreted as saying that, for Spinoza, mental events are identical to bodily events, but it seems to me that at least Spinoza's aim here is not to present a psychophysical identity theory. What causes confusion is that idea may mean, as Descartes has pointed out, either the object of thought or the modification of the mind. If I think of a circle, then the idea may mean either the mental event of thinking it or the circle as it exists in my mind when I think of it. In the latter case, the circle can be described as the intentional object of my thought. What Spinoza wants to say in this scholium is, it seems to me, that God does not think actually existing things through intentional objects but that the objects to which God's mind is directed when he thinks about the world are just the actual objects themselves. Spinoza writes in the scholium:

For example, a circle existing in nature and the idea of the existing circle, which is also in God, are one and the same thing, which is explained through different attributes.

It is incomprehensible to me how this passage should be read to make it support, or even to be in accordance with, the psychophysical identity theory. It cannot be the case that when God thinks of circles his acts of thought are circles. Rather, the point is that God thinks of the circle directly without any intermediaries.¹¹ So nature can be explained in

¹⁰ Thus, God's knowledge is intuitive non-conceptual knowledge.

¹¹ In my interpretation, the identity of extended substance with the thinking substance is a bit different from the identity of a mode of extension and the corresponding mode of thought. While the extended substance is strictly identical with the thinking substance so that these descriptions have the same referent, this is not true about a mode of extension and the corresponding mode of thought. In E2p7s Spinoza, however, claims that these identities are closely connected to each other: "... whatever can be perceived by an infinite intellect as constituting an essence of substance pertains to one substance only, and consequently ... the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that. *So also* [sic etiam] a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways." (Emphasis mine.) This is a puzzling passage, and I am not certain if it has ever been treated adequately in the literature. One way to make it consistent with

two different ways—either rationally so that we see God’s intellect following the way of truth or as just causal happenings in the extended world. The crucial points are that the rational order has as its objects the things in the causal order of extension and that the intellect follows quite literally the path of the causal order. This tells much about how Spinoza sees the relation of the causal relation; the transformation of cause into the effect is necessarily accompanied by an intelligible transformation of God’s idea of the cause into the idea of its effect. It is not only so that the order of ideas in God only follows what happens in the extended world but also so that this following, without any addition, is also an intelligible process. Adequate or true understanding does not require any laws. The world itself through its very nature is intelligible.

After E2p7, one naturally wonders about the relation between the eternal idea of God and the durational idea that follows nature as things happens there according to the order of truth. The eternal idea includes ideas of things that do not exist now, and thus the objects of those ideas cannot be those things as actual. The function of E2p8 is to give an explanation of that. In the demonstration of E2p8, Spinoza just states that this proposition according to which:

The ideas of singular things, or of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended in God’s infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of singular things, or modes, are contained in God’s attributes

is evident from E2p7. There is nothing very dramatic about this. While granted that God does not think objects through any non-physical intermediaries, his thought about non-existent individuals is directed, in the case of extension, to the formal essences of things that are real features of extension, while in thinking about actual existents, God thinks of the formal essence as realized or as filled with matter.

my interpretation is to suggest, as I have done above, that Spinoza is here using idea in one of the senses in which Descartes uses it, i.e. in the sense of being the object thought about. Thus, the identity claim would highlight the direct realism in Spinoza’s theory of ideas, and of course in my interpretation this direct realism is the ground of the possibility of Spinoza’s mind-body union. One problem in E2p7s is posed by *sic etiam* (of this, see Bennett, *A Study*, p. 142). Does it only offer an analogy between the identities of the extended substance and thinking substance on the one hand and of the idea and its object on the other hand, or does Spinoza mean that the identity between extended substance and thinking substance somehow supports the identity between the idea and its object? I believe that the latter is the case. In the beginning of the first part of the *Ethics* at E1p2, Spinoza argues that substances having different attributes have nothing in common. So, if thinking substance and extended substance were different substances, they could not be really united for the simple reason that it would make no sense to say that two things are united but have nothing in common. Thus, the ground of the possibility of the mind-body union lies in the identity between the thinking substance and the extended substance. It seems that in the *Short Treatise* (1.2.17), Spinoza sees monism supporting the mind-body union in a way that is in line with my interpretation. While justifying his view that all attributes in nature are one single being, Spinoza gives as the second reason the following: “Because of the unity which we see everywhere in Nature; if there were different beings in Nature, the one could not possibly unite with the other.”

HUMAN MINDS

In Spinoza, the relationship between God's infinite mind and finite minds is very difficult to spell out. The generation of God's mind and God's intellect is in its main features anchored well to the first part of the *Ethics*. It also is understandable, in light of the preceding, why there is an idea of everything in God and why those ideas have a kind of identity with their objects. But the big question is what small human minds are and how they are generated from God's mind.

In E2p9 and its demonstration, Spinoza goes on to draw what could be seen as a corollary to E2p7, viz. that any actually existing idea must be caused by another idea. While all ideas, of course, are in God, to be faithful to his agent causationist way of talking, Spinoza puts the point by saying that any idea must be caused by God insofar as he is affected by another idea. What is important, from the viewpoint of the generation of human minds, is that in the corollary to E2p9 Spinoza points out that ideas reflect completely what happens in their objects. This, of course, is a natural and an analytic or conceptual consequence of ideas being directly related to and individuated through their objects. Spinoza also emphasizes that such knowledge cannot be in God insofar as he is infinite but insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea of another individual thing. Also this should be evident from what has been said before. God's knowledge of what happens in individual things is dependent on his knowledge of the causes of those changes.

Human beings or men make their entrance in the *Ethics* at E2p10, where Spinoza makes a negative thesis about men by denying that they are substances. Spinoza formulates this denial in two ways: first, substance does not pertain to the essence of man and second, substance does not constitute the form of man. The demonstration of this proposition is very straightforward. For Spinoza, substances are eternal necessary existents, but men have a limited durational existence. The positive characterization of human beings is given in the corollary where Spinoza argues by method of elimination that men have to be either modifications of God's attributes or substances; because men are not substances, their essence has to be grounded on the modifications of God's attributes. By relying on his Cartesian axiom E2a2, "Man thinks," Spinoza in E2p11 states that the actual being of mind is nothing but an idea of an actually existing thing. The human mind is "not the idea of a thing which does not exist. For then (by E2p8c) the idea itself could not be said to exist" (E2p11d). Moreover, this object has to be finite because for Spinoza infinite things have necessary existence. Spinoza has already argued that, because of the direct relation ideas have to their objects, any change in the object has to be matched by a corresponding change (or cognition) in the idea. For this reason he goes on to say in E2p12 that everything that happens in the object of the idea constituting the human mind must be perceived by the human mind. Even though this may sound odd, it is I think something that is almost self-evident. If there were changes in what is supposed to be the object of a certain idea that

were not at all reflected in the idea, that would just mean that the object of the idea has been conceived too widely.

In the corollary to E2p11 Spinoza makes a claim that is one of the cornerstones of his philosophy:

From this it follows that the human mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God. Therefore, when we say that the human mind perceives this or that, we are saying nothing but that God, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is explained through the nature of the human mind, *or* insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human mind, has this or that idea; and when we say that God has this or that idea, not only insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human mind, but insofar as he also has the idea of another thing together with the human mind, then we say that the human mind perceives the thing only partially, *or* inadequately.¹²

That the human mind has to be part of God's intellect is rather straightforward. According to E2d3, all ideas there are are ideas in God's intellect, and because the human mind, by E2p11, is an idea, the human mind has to be part of the infinite intellect of God.

It is, of course, rather wild to see our minds as being parts of the infinite intellect of God. It seems inescapable that you and I perceive something. It is as if we were different subjects having different ideas. And now Spinoza wants to claim that, in fact, there is only one subject having all these different perceptions. Does this mean that I am somehow wrong in claiming that I am perceiving a tree right now? In E2p11c, Spinoza clearly anticipates this problem. His claim is that when we say that

1. A finite subject S perceives this or that. This may mean either 2 or 3:
2. God, insofar as he constitutes the essence of the mind of S, has this or that idea.
3. God, insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human mind and also has the idea of another thing together with the human mind, perceives this or that.

One point behind these "insofar" qualifications is, no doubt, to leave room for several distinct subjects. My mind is a complex idea of God's that has a certain actual thing as its object, and your mind is another complex idea of God's that has some other actually existing thing as its object. In this way, God can be said to constitute the essence of our minds. The actually existing thing that is an object of a given mind is constantly changed by external causes, and the mind keeps track of these changes. So we perceive these external causes through their affecting the actually existing thing that is the object

¹² The characterization of inadequate knowledge in E2p11c resembles what Spinoza says in TdIE §73 after having presented his theory of truth: "For when we affirm of a thing something not contained in the concept we form of it, that indicates a defect of our perception, or that we have thoughts, or ideas, which are, as it were, mutilated and maimed. For we saw that the motion of a semicircle is false when it is in the mind in isolation, but true if it is joined to the concept of a sphere, or to the concept of some cause determining such a motion. But if it is—as it seems at first—of the nature of a thinking being to form true, or adequate, thoughts, it is certain that inadequate ideas arise in us only from the fact that we are a part of a thinking being, of which some thoughts wholly constitute our mind, while others do so only in part."

of our mind. But our mind is locked into this object and cannot perceive the process whereby the changes in the object are brought about by external things. Thus, our sense perceptions are, as Spinoza puts it, conclusions without premises, and the ideas involved in them are not adequate or true. However, God himself as having only adequate ideas is in a truth-conducive way aware of the causal process from the external cause to the effect in the object of our mind. So in sense perception, at least, a finite subject's perceiving this or that is an instance of 3 above.¹³ Of the instances of 2 it is appropriate to speak after the nature of the object of the human mind has been investigated.

What we have learned now is that the object of the human mind is a finite thing that has a temporally limited duration. We also know that there are bodies. This we know because extension is an infinite attribute of God and is, therefore, diversified into an infinity of bodily shapes. But what Spinoza has not yet shown is the individuality of the object of the human mind, i.e. what is the object of the idea that constitutes a human mind. As one might expect for Spinoza that *object is a particular body*:

E2p13 The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else.

The proof of this proposition goes as follows:

For if the object of the human mind were not the body, the ideas of the affections of the body would not be in God (by E2p9c) insofar as he constituted our mind, but insofar as he constituted the mind of another thing, i.e. (by E2p11c), the ideas of the affections of the body would not be in our mind; but (by E2a4) we have ideas of the affections of the body. Therefore, the object of the idea that constitutes the human mind is the body, and it (by E2p11) actually exists.

Next, if the object of the mind were something else also, in addition to the body, then since (by E1p36) nothing exists from which there does not follow some effect, there would necessarily (by E2p12) be an idea in our mind of some effect of it. But (by E2a5) there is no idea of it. Therefore, the object of our mind is the existing body and nothing else, q.e.d.

Central to the argument is E2a4:

We feel (*sentimus*) that a certain body is affected in many ways.

¹³ Spinoza's view of adequacy and truth as presented here has an interesting conclusion. It is often thought that we cannot have adequate ideas of finite things because having them should require an infinity of ideas. This is because any idea of a singular thing exists according to Spinoza in an infinite causal series of finite ideas, and understanding a thing adequately requires, in the line of thought we are considering, the ideas involved in its whole causal history. However, Spinoza does not, as far as I am aware, ever make such a requirement for an adequate idea. In the passages we have been considering, the lack of adequacy in a perceptual idea is due its *proximate* cause not being within our reach. For the adequacy of a non-self-evident idea, it suffices to have an idea of something that reveals how the object of that non-self-evident idea is generated. For example, the adequacy of the idea of a sphere is in no way affected by somebody's being ignorant of the cause of the rotation of the semicircle.

Now the thing which is identified as the object of my mind is the body I feel to be affected in many ways.

What is emphasized in the proof is a direct consequence of E2p9c, viz. that there is in God an idea of the affections of the body insofar as God constitutes our mind. But now if the object of the human mind were not a certain body but some other thing, i.e. a mode from some other attribute, then the idea of the affections would be in God insofar as he constitutes the mind of that other thing. Thus the ideas of the affections would not be in our mind. But we have ideas of the affections of the body. The point in this proof seems to be that because God has ideas of the affections insofar as he constitutes our mind, we have ideas of those affections (E2p9c). However, the only ideas of the affections we have are of a body and, therefore, a certain body has to be the object of the human mind.

The proof of E2p13 contains a very surprising and neglected feature: it seems that Spinoza leaves room for ideas that are neither adequate nor inadequate. As I understand Spinoza's characterization of an inadequate idea, the human mind has an inadequate idea when God has that idea together with another idea so that the objects of these ideas are causally related to each other. However, this does not rule out that some of our ideas are such that God has them only insofar as he constitutes our mind. And, in fact, for there to be room in God for finite perspectives to the world, i.e. for God to have ideas insofar as he constitutes the essence of a human mind, it is necessary that there are ideas that are neither adequate nor inadequate. As an infinite being, God has only adequate ideas. So when God as an infinite being has an idea of some object, he sees this as an element in an intelligible causal process. Thus, he does not have the idea of this object as being cut off from other things. There simply is not that kind of isolated finite perspective in God when he is considered as infinite. If I think of a cone as being produced by a right-angled triangle rotating around one of its sides, I am not having in addition to this intelligible causal process isolated ideas of the rotation and the cone. These ideas are fused into each other. For Spinoza's God, the idea of the whole world is like my idea of the cone-producing process. So it seems that a subjective finite perspective requires that there are ideas that are outside the web of God's ideas insofar as God is considered as an infinite being. These ideas, I suggest, are ideas of the affections of the body, and they are in God *only* insofar as he constitutes the essence of our mind.

Of course, it has to be a controversial claim that there is conceptual room for ideas that are neither adequate nor inadequate. However, what Spinoza aims at is to preserve a familiar feature of our conception of us and our experience, viz. the subjectivity of sensations. Spinoza seems to treat E2a4, according to which

We feel [*sentimus*] that a certain body is affected in many ways. [*Nos corpus quoddam multis modis affici sentimus.*]

as equivalent with

We have ideas of the affections of a [certain] body. (E2p13d)

So the ideas of a certain body are closely connected to, and I assume identical with, sensations or feelings. If this is granted, then seeing ideas of the affections of the body as neither adequate nor inadequate ideas seems not that mysterious at all. Sensations or feelings as such do not seem to be true ideas in any of the senses given to “true” idea above. Moreover, it is very difficult to understand how these sensations could be turned into adequate ideas by knowledge of their causes—and such transformation should be possible because all inadequate ideas in us are adequate in God. There is no way, Spinoza seems to think, how the present feeling of coldness could be made intelligible by attending to motion in the extended world as the idea of a sphere can be made intelligible to me by my attending to the motion of a semicircle around its axis.

It is, of course, a rather well-known doctrine in philosophy that sensations are somehow private and incommunicable, and because of this they also defy attempts to make them intelligible.¹⁴ We cannot give constructive explanations of sensations in the sense that we can give constructive explanations, of say, some figures. An ellipse can be made intelligible by describing a procedure that determines it, but a person who has never tasted wine cannot learn the taste of wine by being taught its causal history.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, Spinoza’s view of mind-world relation has been investigated. It has been argued that, for Spinoza, what is primarily in need of explanation is how understanding the world is possible. Spinoza takes for granted that we understand something about the world, but how is that possible? This led Spinoza to the thought that understanding is closely connected to physical space. By relying on the material of the first part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza argued that there must be in God an idea of everything that happens in the physical world—an idea in which all the happenings in the physical world are connected in an intelligible way. The changes in the physical universe are not Humean changes, where isolated events follow each other, but rather like the processes involved in the production of solids of revolution. Even though Spinoza was a substance monist, he was a dualist of a very peculiar sort. Ideas have physical objects that are their constituents, but the power of thinking of these objects is different from God’s power of thinking. What is important is that, for Spinoza, mental and the physical realities do not form different layers of reality but are united in a very deep way, i.e. in the way idea and its object are united to each other. Spinoza uses the global union between God’s mind and the physical universe as the basis for explaining local unities such as human beings. The mind of a human being is basically an idea of a particular region of God that

¹⁴ In her contribution to this volume, “Finite subjects in the *Ethics*: Spinoza on Indexical Knowledge, the First Person and the Individuality of Human Minds,” Ursula Renz gives an account of the possibility of finite, first-person perspectives in Spinoza that is consistent with my view.

is constantly affected by other objects. These kinds of affects give rise to feelings that are essential to the subjectivity of experience.¹⁵

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¹⁵ I am very much indebted to Joseph Almog, John Carriero, Michael Della Rocca, and Valtteri Viljanen for their comments.

CHAPTER 14

THE INTELLECTUAL LOVE OF GOD

STEVEN NADLER

THE final doctrines of Spinoza's *Ethics* have certainly come in for rough treatment over the years. Scholars have found them a disjointed, impenetrable, and frustrating ending to this monumental treatise, one that they have trouble connecting to the metaphysics, epistemology, psychology, and moral philosophy of the earlier parts of the work. One commentator, offering perhaps the harshest judgment, claims that the latter half of Part V is simply “rubbish which causes others to write rubbish.”¹ He insists that the doctrine of the intellectual love of God in particular is “lame” and contains nothing but “error and confusion,” and he concludes that “this part of the *Ethics* has nothing to teach us and is pretty certainly worthless.”²

It is true that Part V contains some of the most difficult ideas in a dense and difficult book. But it is not right to say that its forty-two propositions are worthless or unconnected with what has preceded them. Indeed, the doctrines of the eternity of the mind and of the intellectual love of God, as opaque as they are, represent the culmination of Spinoza's views on virtue, knowledge, happiness, and freedom.

Part of what makes these doctrines so puzzling is that they seem to introduce a religious, even mystical, element to the arch-rationalist philosophy of the *Ethics*. After being told that God is nothing but Nature, and not some anthropomorphic judge before whom we should adopt an attitude of worshipful awe; and after learning that traditional religious dogmas are grounded in superstitious beliefs and give rise only to the harmful passions of hope and fear, the reader is not expecting Spinoza to start discussing blessedness, eternity, salvation, and the love of God. Some commentators suggest that Spinoza has, by the end of the *Ethics*, fallen back into a religious mode, one grounded in his own personal experience. The final doctrines are, on this view, “the

¹ Bennett, *A Study*, p. 374.

² Bennett, *A Study*, p. 372.

philosophic expression of certain religious and mystical experiences which Spinoza and many others have enjoyed and which seem supremely important to those who have had them.”³

In fact, Spinoza has not gone soft on us in the final part of the *Ethics*. Just as he provided “God” and related theological concepts with a naturalistic and rationalist reading in the metaphysics of the earlier parts, so the eternity of the mind (understood to be nothing but the eternity of the ideas or knowledge that we acquire in this lifetime) and the intellectual love of God—doctrines that, to be sure, are found in earlier religious thought—are given a proper Spinozistic interpretation in Part V and, it can be argued, shorn of any deeply (traditional) religious⁴ content.

This chapter will focus on Spinoza’s understanding of the intellectual love of God. In particular, we will consider its relationship to Spinoza’s view of knowledge and the passions, and see how it differs from the ordinary affect of love, passionate or otherwise, including that which is also directed at God. Moreover, the concept of the intellectual love of God is not something peculiar to Spinoza’s philosophy. There is a long pedigree for this doctrine, extending back through medieval philosophy. In Spinoza’s case, the most important predecessor is Maimonides, the great twelfth-century rabbi and philosopher. Thus, understanding Spinoza’s doctrine will require us to look as well at what Maimonides meant by the intellectual love of God.

LOVE

Spinoza’s account of the emotions, including love, begins with the power or striving to persevere that constitutes the essence of any individual—what he calls the individual’s *conatus*. While always “on” and steady, this striving does not remain unmodified throughout a person’s lifetime, but is constantly subject to change. In particular, the power can enjoy an increase or strengthening or it can suffer a decrease or diminution. (A complete extermination or even radical transformation of the power is, of course, death.) Any such change in an individual’s power of acting, for better or for worse, is what Spinoza calls an “affect.”

E3d3: By affect I understand affections of the body by *which* the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time the ideas of these affections [in the mind].

³ Broad, *Five Types*, p. 15. See also Pollock, *Spinoza*, p. 308.

⁴ I use the term “religious” here as it is related to the theological, eschatological, and spiritual tenets of the Abrahamic religious traditions. However, Spinoza’s use of the concepts certainly does have a “religious” import in the Spinozistic sense of the term, namely, what is conducive to proper moral behavior and human flourishing.

It is important to note—and Spinoza himself stresses this—that an affect is not the cause or the effect of the change; rather, it is the transition itself from one condition to another. One experiences or undergoes an affect. It is, he says, “a passage [*transitio*]” (G 2:191). An affect is either the move from a better condition to a worse condition or the improvement to a better condition; it is not what initiates the move nor is it the end result of the move. In the case of the mind, it can move to a greater or lesser power of thinking. Given the materialistic tenor of Spinoza’s metaphysics of the mind, we know that what this means is that the mind, as the idea of the body, thereby expresses the body’s transition to a greater or lesser power of acting. “The idea of any thing that increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our body’s power of acting, increases or diminishes, aides or restrains, our mind’s power of thinking” (E3p11). Or, as he puts it more directly at the end of Part III, “when I said above that the mind’s power of thinking is increased or diminished, I meant nothing but that the mind has formed of its body (or of some part of it) an idea which expresses more or less reality than it had affirmed of the body” (G 2:204).

What does it mean to speak of the mind or the body experiencing an “increase [or decrease] in its power of acting”? Spinoza is referring simply to an improvement or deterioration in its condition, including the strength of its *conatus* or ability to preserve itself and resist outside forces. In the case of the body, this could be a weakening of its powers brought on by injury, sickness, ageing, or any of the myriad minor ways in which the body becomes less capable of doing things. Or it could be an improvement that comes about through training or nutrition, activities that make the body stronger, more flexible, more resistant to external powers seeking to weaken it—in general, more able to be “affected in a great many ways or . . . capable of affecting external bodies in a great many ways” (E4p38). Because the mind’s capacities reflect those of the body, it too will experience correlative improvements or diminutions in its functioning as a thinking thing. These will include changes in its cognitive capacities, its activity or passivity, and its striving to pursue the knowledge that represents its highest good. “The human body is composed of a great many parts of different natures, which require continuous and varied food so that the whole body may be equally capable of doing everything which can follow from its nature, and consequently, so that the mind may also be equally capable of conceiving many things” (E4app27).

Increases or decreases in an individual’s powers can come about either through the action of external things or from within. A passive affect, or passion, is a change in the individual’s power whose adequate cause lies not in the individual itself but partly in external things. Passions are modifications in power that an individual undergoes or suffers. An active affect, on the other hand, is a change in the individual’s power whose adequate cause lies wholly in the individual itself (E3d3). If one is improved or harmed by one’s interaction with other people or objects, then the transition one suffers is a passion. If the improvement in one’s condition comes about wholly through one’s own resources and because of one’s knowledge of what is good, then the transition one experiences is an action.

Spinoza believes that there are three primary affects, and that all of the other affects are functions of or can be derived from the primary ones. The primary affects are joy,

sadness, and desire. Joy (*laetitia*) is “that passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection” (E3p11s), or the passage to a greater power of acting (often caused by something outside the individual). It is the feeling of having one’s condition improved. The corresponding affect in the mind/body composite is “pleasure [*titillatio*].” Sadness (*tristitia*), on the other hand, is “that passion by which [the mind] passes to a lesser perfection.” It is the feeling of having one’s condition caused to deteriorate, in this case always by another thing. The corresponding mind/body affect is, as one might expect, “pain [*dolores*].”

This brings us to love. All of the secondary affects either have joy or sadness at their core or are variations on joy or sadness. This is most clearly the case with love (and its opposite, hate). Spinoza defines love as nothing but joy accompanied by a conception of the object that is the cause of the joy. One loves the object that brings about an improvement in one’s condition or the person who benefits one. Hate, similarly, is sadness accompanied by a conception of the object that is the cause of sadness. One hates the object that brings about a deterioration in one’s condition or the person who causes one harm (E3p13s). These passions result in a corresponding modification of the individual’s striving. Desire becomes focused on possessing (and, in some cases, possessing uniquely) the object or person that is loved or destroying the object or person that is hated.

LOVE OF GOD

The love of God (*Amor Dei*)—or, to put it in the terms of Spinoza’s first formulation, the “love toward God [*erga Deum Amor*]”—first appears in E5p15, and derives directly from Spinoza’s discussion of the means toward moderating the passions and reducing our bondage to them.

Spinoza begins Part V by reminding the reader of a central tenet of his metaphysics of mind and body: because the mind is the idea of the body, and because the order and connection of the modes of Thought is the same as the order and connection of the modes of Extension (E2p7), the order and connection of ideas in the human mind is naturally and necessarily correlated with the order and connection of affections (or images of things) in the body, and vice versa (E5p1). It follows from this that if one can effect a change in the order and connection of one’s ideas, there will necessarily be a concomitant change in the order and connection of affections of the body. It is not that the one change *causes* the other; rather, reconfiguring one’s ideas just *is* to have one’s body undergo a certain change in its condition. Spinoza will show us how we can use this basic metaphysical fact to our own advantage and achieve a higher degree of self-control and resistance to external forces.

The initial therapeutic step in moving toward a more rational existence, one less troubled by the passions, is to diminish the strength of those passions by changing one’s beliefs about their causes. Ordinarily, a person’s love (or hatred) is directed at

a single object, because of his belief that it is that object that has brought about some improvement (or change for the worse) in his condition. But to focus all of one's attention on just that one object—and thus suffer a correspondingly intense emotion—is to be guided by inadequate knowledge, since that object is just one finite link in an infinitely extended chain of finite causes. It is, at most, only a partial factor. Spinoza says that

if we separate emotions, or affects, from the thought of an external cause, and join them to other thoughts, then the love, or hate, toward the external cause is destroyed, as are the vacillations of mind arising from these affects. (E5p2)

It may appear that Spinoza is here recommending that one completely separate the idea of the affect from *any* external cause whatsoever and think of it only in connection with other ideas in the mind. This would seem to have the result that thoughts and desires so transformed cease altogether to be outwardly directed; and since love (and hate) are so often directed at external things—the presumed causes of joy (and sadness)—they would consequently disappear. Passions would thereby be replaced by knowledge. This transformative reading is often suggested by Spinoza's language: he speaks on occasion of the "removal" of a passion (E5p20s), or of an affect "ceasing to be a passion" (E5p3).

However, it sometimes seems that what Spinoza is saying is that one should separate the affect from the idea of any *single* external cause and look at it in the grander causal scheme of things. In this way, the intense love or hatred that is directed at one thing becomes more diffuse and weaker as it is spread out over many things. "If an affect is related to more and different causes which the mind considers together with the affect itself, it is less harmful, we are less acted on by it, and we are affected less toward each cause, than is the case with another, equally great affect, which is related only to one cause, or to fewer causes" (E5p9). In this case, the affect remains a passion but has been dissipated or weakened.

The remedy against strong passions that Spinoza is proposing is thus the pursuit of an adequate knowledge of those affects. He argues, in E5p3, that "an affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it." When one perceives adequately and truly what the causes of an affect are and why one is experiencing it, a partial, accidental, and passive cognizance of one's own condition is replaced by fuller insight, and a feeling is replaced by understanding. Where one once was undergoing a passion, one is now active, since knowledge (adequate ideas) represents a condition of activity. "The more an affect is known to us, then, the more it is in our power, and the less the mind is acted on by it" (E5p3c). This transformation in our condition is something we can do with any passion. "There is no affection of the body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct concept" (E5p4). What Spinoza is recommending here is that instead of allowing ourselves to be passively affected by things, we should take the initiative and transform ourselves into active beings by striving for a knowledge of ourselves, especially of the ways in which our bodies (and, correlatively, our minds) respond to and are affected by things.

The result of such a process is a reordering of our ideas. They are no longer connected according to the order of random experience, but instead reflect the true causal order of things.

E5p4s: We must, therefore, take special care to know each affect clearly and distinctly (as far as this is possible), so that in this way the mind may be determined from an affect to thinking those things which it perceives clearly and distinctly, and with which it is fully satisfied, and so that the affect itself may be separated from the thought of an external cause and joined to true thoughts. The result will be not only that love, hate, etc., are destroyed (by E5p2), but also that the appetites, or desires, which usually arise from such an affect cannot be excessive (by E4p61).

Instead of a mind filled with ideas set by the “common order of nature,” there is a mind in which ideas have a rational ordering, what Spinoza calls “the order of the intellect.” Spinoza says that “we can devise no other remedy for the affects which depends on our power and is more excellent than this, which consists in a true knowledge of them. For the mind has no other power than that of thinking and forming adequate ideas” (E5p4s).

More particularly, the kind of knowledge that Spinoza has in mind as a remedy for the passions is essentially the deep causal understanding of nature that can be presented through the second and, especially, the third kinds of knowledge (reason and intuition, respectively). He reiterates this point at E5p25: “The greatest striving of the mind, and its greatest virtue is understanding things by the third kind of knowledge.” He also reminds the reader (at E5p24) that “the more we understand singular things, the more we understand God.” What he means by this is that as one moves toward adequate knowledge of things, the sensory and imaginative perception of their apparent, haphazard connections to each other gives way to a cognition that relates them to their true and highest causes, the attributes of God or Nature and the infinite modes that derive from these. Adequate ideas thereby situate things within the most universal causal framework. Thus, the more one understands oneself, the more one knows the body and its affects, as Spinoza’s therapy for the passions demands, the more one relates these to the idea of God, since the body just is a finite mode of one of God’s attributes (Extension), as are all the bodies that affect it. “The mind can bring it about that all the body’s affections, or images of things, are related to the idea of God” (E5p14). The result is a concatenation of ideas in the mind whose logical ordering mirrors the true causal ordering of things in the world, with (the idea of) God anchoring the order as the ultimate cause.

This perception of things in their causal relationship to God (essentially an application of the lessons of Parts I and II of the *Ethics*)—and, in particular, the clear and distinct knowledge of one’s own body and its affections brought about by external things—generates in a person a love of God. As one comes to understand oneself and one’s own affections clearly and distinctly, the ideas of the body and its affects are detached from the ideas of external causes (E5p4s) and attached to the idea of God (i.e. the attribute of Extension and its infinite modes). When ideas in the intellect are properly ordered, the idea of God is the ultimate and adequate ground of all the other ideas,

that is, it is the cause of our knowledge itself. But such an improvement in one's knowledge is an improvement in one's *conatus* or striving; it is an increase in one's powers as a rational being. It is, thus, a joy. And this joy is accompanied by the idea of God as its cause, insofar as the idea of God is the foundation of the adequacy of the knowledge. But joy together with an awareness of the object that is the cause of the joy is a love of that object. Thus, knowledge of oneself leading toward knowledge of God brings about a love of God.

E5p15: He who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly loves God, and does so the more, the more he understands himself and his affects.

Dem.: He who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly rejoices (by E3p53), and this joy is accompanied by the idea of God (by E5p14). Hence (by E3da6), he loves God, and (by the same reasoning) does so the more, the more he understands himself and his affects, q.e.d.

Passionate love directed at transient and mutable finite things is a love that fosters hopes and fears, and it is frequently subject to disappointment and such harmful emotions as envy, jealousy, etc.⁵ "Sickness of the mind and misfortunes take their origin especially from too much love toward a thing which is liable to many variations and which we can never fully possess" (E5p20s). By contrast, the love of God is stable. It is a "love toward a thing immutable and eternal which we really fully possess," and is thus "the most constant of all the affects" (E5p20s). The love of God does not fluctuate in the way that so many emotions, directed as they are to ephemeral things, do. Nor does it give rise to envy and jealousy; it is something that can be shared equally by all, and thus should be universally encouraged (E5p20). It also "must engage the mind most," in so far as the idea of God is, in adequate understanding, joined to the ideas of all the affections of the body (E5p16).

Moreover, because the idea of God in us cannot be anything but adequate and perfect, it can never be the source of a decrease in our powers, of sadness. In so far as we know God, we are active and enjoying an increase in *conatus*. Thus, as Spinoza says in E5p18, "no one can hate God." Spinoza considers the objection that if God truly is the ultimate cause of everything, then God must therefore be the cause of any pain or sadness that one may suffer. He responds that in so far as we conceive God as the cause of the sadness, or of a decrease in our power, we thereby achieve an adequate understanding of that affect and it therefore ceases to be a pain and a passion. "In so far as we understand God to be the cause of sadness, we rejoice" (E5p18s).

In E5p17, Spinoza demonstrates that one's love for God must necessarily remain unrequited. This is because God's loving someone would be tantamount to that person being a cause of joy in God, that is, of an improvement in God's power. But God's power cannot suffer increase or decrease. "God can pass neither to a greater nor a lesser perfection

⁵ In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza eloquently describes "the poison and the evil that lie hidden in the love of [corruptible] things" (KV 2.5/G 1:63).

(E1p20c2); hence (by E3da2&3) he is not affected with any affect of joy or sadness.” Therefore, “strictly speaking, God loves no one, and hates no one. For God (by E5p17) is not affected with any affect of joy or sadness. Consequently (by E3da6&7) he also loves no one and hates no one.” In E5p19, Spinoza concludes, as well, that the person who loves God “cannot strive that God should love him in return,” since this would be to desire that God not be God.

THE INTELLECTUAL LOVE OF GOD

Spinoza concludes the series of propositions in Part V devoted to the “love toward God” by stating that this love “is the highest good which we can want from the dictate of reason (by E4p28)” (E5p20d). It represents an important achievement for beings endowed with the capacity to understand themselves and the world around them, and thus to recognize and appreciate the true order of things and its ground in a universal cause. There is a seeming finality to his discussion here, as he says in E5p20s (“This love toward God cannot be tainted by an affect of envy or jealousy . . .”) that “with this, I have covered all the remedies for the affects, or all that the mind, considered only in itself, can do against the affects.” Presumably he is now moving on to another topic.

It is therefore initially somewhat surprising to see Spinoza return to the love of God in a series of later propositions:

E5p32: Whatever we understand by the third kind of knowledge we take pleasure in, and our pleasure is accompanied by the idea of God as a cause.

E5p32c: From the third kind of knowledge, there necessarily arises an intellectual love of God. For from this kind of knowledge there arises (by E5p32) joy, accompanied by the idea of God as its cause.

E5p33: The intellectual love of God, which arises from the third kind of knowledge, is eternal.

Why is Spinoza bringing this up again? What is added by now calling it an “intellectual” love of God? After all, the ordinary love of God is also an intellectual condition and involves knowing God as an eternal cause. Is Spinoza not simply repeating what he had established in E5p14–20?

As a matter of fact, and despite the similarities, he is not. The clue lies in a cryptic little statement that comes at the end of E5p20s, after Spinoza has shown that the love of God is “a love toward a thing immutable and eternal, which we really fully possess, and which cannot be tainted by any of the vices which are in ordinary love.” This is where Spinoza says: “With this I have completed everything which concerns this present life . . . so it is now time to pass to those things which pertain to the mind’s duration without relation to the body.” Such a statement is puzzling, both because it seems inconsistent with Spinoza’s mind/body parallelism (how can something of the mind persist without

a corresponding relation to the body?), and because, despite the suggestion contained in this statement, there would seem not to be room within Spinoza's metaphysics and moral philosophy for any doctrine of personal immortality.⁶ But the statement also tells us that the love of God that he has been discussing up to this point is something that pertains to us only insofar as we are temporal existents who, in this present life full of affective interactions with other bodies, are in bondage to the passions. The ordinary love of God is about moderating the emotions we experience as durational beings and thus fostering a temporal increase in power. The intellectual love of God, on the other hand, is something that transcends this immediate therapeutic project, and the benefits that attend it are superior to the relief of current emotional turmoil.

In E5p23, Spinoza reminds us once again of the most basic metaphysical fact about the human mind: it is nothing but the finite mode in Thought corresponding to the finite mode in Extension that is the human body. The mind, that is, is the *idea* of the body. In part, what this means is that the mind, as a collection of ideas, is a reflection in Thought of the various modes and affections of the body. However, there is a permanent core element to the mind, one that is distinct from the transitory ideas that correspond to the body's interactions with (and affections by) other bodies—namely, the idea of the *essence* of the body. This is what makes a mind the individual mind that it is.

The essence of any body is the formula specifying a particular, relatively stable ratio of motion and rest among parts of matter (definition after E2a2"). As an essence, this formula takes no account of whether or not that body actually exists. A body's essence is simply a possible way of being extended, and thus it is found eternally within the attribute of Extension as one of its modes. Corresponding to this eternal essence in Extension is an eternal idea of it in Thought.

E5p22: In God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human body, under a species of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*).

E5p23s: There is, as we have said, this idea, which expresses the essence of the body under a species of eternity, a certain mode of thinking, which pertains to the essence of the mind, and which is necessarily eternal.

The eternal idea of the (eternal essence of the) body that constitutes the essential core of the human mind, like all ideas, has its ultimate foundation in God (or, more precisely, in God's attribute of Thought). Through the third kind of knowledge (*intuitus*)—which "proceeds from an adequate idea of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things" (E5p25d)—the human mind intuits this foundation and perceives that the adequate idea of the essence of the body is connected to the adequate idea of God's attribute. But this is to conceive both the mind and the body from an atemporal perspective, *sub specie aeternitatis*, through their eternal relationship to God. It is also,

⁶ As I show elsewhere, Spinoza argues against personal immortality in Part V; see Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy*.

therefore, to understand God, since “the more we understand things in this way, the more we understand God” (E5p25d).

What a person achieves as he grasps his mind and his body through the third kind of knowledge is an eternal, divine perspective on things. More precisely, he sees an eternal truth about his relationship to God or Nature. “Insofar as our mind knows itself and the body under a species of eternity, it necessarily has knowledge of God, and knows that it is in God and is conceived through God” (E5p30). This is the highest knowledge possible for a rational agent. “The greatest striving of the mind, and its greatest virtue is understanding things by the third kind of knowledge” (E5p24). Indeed, it is the supreme achievement for a human being. “He who knows things by this kind of knowledge passes to the greatest human perfection” (E5p27d). But this means that the third kind of knowledge is also accompanied by the greatest joy or “satisfaction of mind” possible (E5p27), since it represents the peak condition of one’s power or striving.

Because this highest joy consists in understanding (primarily of oneself and of God), and because God is recognized as the cause of this understanding, it follows that one knows that the true cause of this joy is God. Thus, one loves God.

E5p32s: From the third kind of knowledge, there necessarily arises an intellectual love of God (*Amor Dei intellectualis*). For from this kind of knowledge there arises (by E5p32) joy, accompanied by the idea of God as its cause, i.e., (by E3da6) love of God, not insofar as we imagine him as present (by E5p29) but insofar as we understand God to be eternal. And this is what I call intellectual love of God.

There is certainly some vagueness as to what is going on here for Spinoza, as commentators have complained, particularly with respect to God’s role.⁷ It seems possible to read it in two ways. On the one hand, God is the cause of the knowledge that constitutes our perfection in the sense that the idea of God renders our ideas of the body and of the mind adequate by serving as their ultimate explanation; thus, God’s role is an epistemic one, with the idea of God providing completion and adequacy for other ideas and thereby furnishing true knowledge. On the other hand, the text sometimes suggests that in the third kind of knowledge, whereby the idea of (knowledge of) the body that constitutes the mind is shown in its true and eternal causal relationship to God, God is thus seen as the cause of the mind itself, that is, as the cause of its power or activity and thus of its joy.

E5p36d: This love the mind has must be related to its actions (by E5p32c and E3p3); it is, then, an action by which the mind contemplates itself, with the accompanying idea of God as its cause . . .

⁷ This may be what leads Alquié to say that “it seems difficult to derive from Part V of the *Ethics* a coherent conception of the love of God” (*Le rationalisme de Spinoza*, p. 321).

The tension between these two readings is eased, however, when it is recalled that the mind for Spinoza is itself nothing but an idea or knowledge (of the body). It may be, then, that God's causal role with respect to the mind and its power (of thinking) is identical to the epistemic role by which God renders knowledge possible.

E5p36s: Because the essence of our mind consists only in knowledge, of which God is the beginning and foundation (by E1p15 and E2p47s), it is clear to us how our mind, with respect both to essence and existence, follows from the divine nature, and continually depends on God.⁸

What is clear is that this condition of the mind is a purely intellectual one (although it must have an affective component; otherwise it would have no potency against other affects). It does not involve perceiving the body's present actual existence and condition (E5p29), which would introduce a sensory element; nor does it involve conceiving (or, rather, "imagining") God "as present" (E5p32c), as Spinoza here suggests is the case with ordinary love of God.⁹ Rather, it is a matter of conceiving the body, the mind, and God *sub specie aeternitatis*, without "any relation to time" (E5p23), with the essence of the body and of the mind perceived "to be contained in and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature." While the ordinary love of God, as we have seen, also involves an intellectual or adequate knowledge of an eternal God ("and especially that third kind of knowledge whose foundation is the knowledge of God" [E5p20s/G 2:294]), what is so perceived is a current affective condition of the existing body and its (presumably) present causal connection to God.¹⁰ With the intellectual love of God, it is the essence of the mind itself that is grasped from an eternal perspective. While there is a sense in which both the ordinary love of God and the intellectual love of God are one and the same love, Spinoza says that the former "is related to the body" while the latter "is related only to the mind" (E5p20s).

Moreover, the intellectual love of God is something that pertains to the mind essentially, simply by virtue of the mind's eternal nature, and thus regardless of what may or may not be happening in the body and the mind in duration. "This intellectual love of God follows necessarily from the nature of the mind insofar as it is considered as an

⁸ This reading is reinforced by Spinoza's close linkage of causal connections and conceptual connections at the beginning of the *Ethics* in E1a4.

⁹ The contrast drawn in E5p32c appears to have the upshot that in the ordinary love of God (as opposed to the intellectual love of God) "we imagine him [God] as present." On the other hand, in the ordinary love of God, one has an adequate understanding of the relevant affect, which would imply that it does *not* involve the imagination (which is not a source of adequate knowledge). I am uncertain how to resolve this apparent inconsistency. However, it may be that what E5p32c is contrasting the intellectual love of God with is not what Spinoza understands as the ordinary love of God, but rather the love of God that is encouraged by sectarian religions; with their anthropomorphic (and thus superstitious) conceptions of God, these certainly do require us to "imagine God as present." See also Matheron, "L'amour intellectuel de Dieu."

¹⁰ It is unclear to me how the adequacy of knowledge involved in the ordinary love of God can be reconciled with Spinoza's claim that such love involves the imagination ("imagining God as present").

eternal truth, through God's nature" (E5p37d).¹¹ The knowledge of the eternal essence of the body and, through intuition, of its relationship to the idea of God is the eternal essence of the mind. "Insofar as [the mind is eternal], it has knowledge of God, knowledge which is necessarily adequate" (E5p31d). Consequently, unlike the ordinary love of God, the intellectual love of God is eternal. It is not a matter of the joy that arises from converting an episodic passion or inadequate idea into an adequate one, a process that occurs in duration. In the intellectual love of God, there is no passage from a lesser condition to a superior one (although Spinoza says that "for an easier explanation and better understanding of the things we wish to show," he will pretend "as if it were now beginning to be, and were now beginning to understand things under a species of eternity" [E5p31s]).¹² The ideas involved in the intellectual love of God are eternal, and thus so is the knowledge and the resulting joy and love. "The intellectual love of God, which arises from the third kind of knowledge, is eternal . . . the mind has had eternally the same perfections which, in our fiction, now come to it, and [they are] accompanied by the idea of God as an eternal cause" (E5p33&s). Although this knowledge and the eternal joy and love it generates may be obscured by the onslaught of inadequate ideas that so occupy the mind in this lifetime, Spinoza insists that "we nevertheless feel that our mind, insofar as it involves the essence of the body under a species of eternity, is eternal" (E5p23s).

All this should make it clear that with the intellectual love of God we are on a very different plane from the ordinary love of God.¹³ The intellectual love of God is not merely a remedy for the passions of which one might (or might not) avail oneself; rather, it is a fundamental feature of what the human mind is. And the pleasure that grounds this love is not something that arises in a person as he pursues an increase in knowledge, but is generated from one's appreciative contemplation of oneself, of one's power of acting, and of the eternal cause of this. For this reason, it should be seen as a variety of self-esteem (*acquiescentia in se ipsa*), or the joy that comes as a person considers his own virtues or his own power of acting (E3p55s; E3da25).

It should also be clear why the intellectual love of God is not a passionate love, albeit one that, because of the nature of its object, would not be subject to many of the disadvantages that plague most passive affects. The love of God is indeed affective, since it is tied to an increase (or, more accurately, a perfection) in one's power. But because it is associated with knowledge, it constitutes an active, not a passive, affect. There is a pleasure involved in this love, but one that is grounded in knowledge and the intellect, not the senses. To be sure, God is the cause of the joy accompanying the third kind of knowledge. But remember that, with respect to the human mind, God is not an *external* object. The human mind *is* God, conceived not absolutely but through one of its finite modes (of the attribute Thought). Thus, an individual endowed with the third kind of knowledge will indeed perceive God as the cause of that knowledge, but will thereby perceive

¹¹ See Alquié *Le rationalisme de Spinoza*, pp. 333–34.

¹² As Garrett puts it, it is "not merely a transition to greater perfection, but perfection itself" (*Spinoza's Ethical Theory*, p. 284).

¹³ For an illuminating discussion, see Alquié, *Le rationalisme de Spinoza*, pp. 320–21.

God not as outside the mind but as that of which the mind is but a finite expression. The maximization of one's power of acting represented by the third kind of knowledge has its adequate cause in the mind itself.

Given these characteristics of the intellectual love of God, a person who experiences this species of love, unlike someone who feels the ordinary love of God, can legitimately expect it to be requited . . . in a sense. Since the intellectual love of God is an action and not a passion, there is no reason why it cannot belong to God. "God loves himself with an infinite intellectual love" (E5p35). But, it might be objected, would not attributing to God love of any kind, and especially a love of human beings, be tantamount to reintroducing into God just the kind of psychological life that, Spinoza believes, engenders superstition and for which he castigates traditional religious conceptions? How can Spinoza's anti-anthropomorphic metaphysics of *Deus sive Natura* leave room for a God who "loves"?

Spinoza says, however, that God's love of a person is identical with that person's intellectual love of God.

E5p36: The mind's intellectual love of God is the very love of God by which God loves himself, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explained by the human mind's essence, considered under a species of eternity; i.e., the mind's intellectual love of God is part of the infinite love by which God loves himself.

Because the human mind just *is* God—albeit not God in its absolute essence but God as modified by a particular finite mode in Thought—it follows that the human mind's love of God is, ultimately, the same as God's love of itself. Thus, "God's love of men and the mind's intellectual love of God are one and the same" (E5p36c). There is nothing here that requires attributing to God any kind of person-like psychological states or moral characteristics.

Spinoza concludes his presentation of the intellectual love of God by stating that it constitutes human "blessedness [*beatitudo*]" and "salvation [*salus*]." In the scholium to E5p36, he notes that from the conclusion that the intellectual love of God is the same as God's love of a human being, "we clearly understand wherein our salvation, or blessedness . . . consists, viz. in a constant and eternal love of God, or in God's love for men. And this love, or blessedness is called Glory in the Sacred Scriptures—not without reason."

The talk of "salvation" and "blessedness" should, like the discussion of the love of God itself, seem discordant with the overall rationalist message of the *Ethics*. After all, this is very traditional religious language. But insofar as blessedness and salvation are a function of God's love of a human being, they too are identical to the human being's intellectual love of God. And the intellectual love of God, as we have seen, is simply to have a deep intellectual understanding of oneself and of one's place in Nature, to appreciate joyfully how this understanding represents the perfection of our rational powers, and to recognize (in the light of Spinoza's conception of God) that such an understanding has its ultimate source in Nature's highest causal principles—that is, in the unique, eternal, universal system of Nature to which we belong as a finite mode. In other words, to be

blesSED or saved—to be loved by God—is, therefore, nothing more than to experience the highest form of knowledge available to human beings and to revel in the strength this affords us.

SPINOZA AND MAIMONIDES

The love of God is a prominent feature of medieval Jewish and Latin philosophy.¹⁴ Bahya ibn Paquda, for example, devotes the final chapter of his work *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart* to “the true love of God.” He distinguishes among three different varieties of such love. The first two are self-interested, and are based on the hope for divine reward and the hope for divine forgiveness, respectively. But the highest species of love of God, he says, is a “pure” love for “His own sake, His own honor, and to celebrate His greatness.”¹⁵ Bahya insists, moreover, that such love must be preceded by a fear of God—indeed, he suggests that fear and reverence are a part of the love of God and a necessary condition for it.¹⁶ In the Christian tradition, Thomas Aquinas also offers a tripartite division of the love of God. In contrast with the “natural love” of the divine, which exists in all created things, animate or otherwise, and with the “sensitive love” of God, which belongs to all animate beings, God is also the object of an *amor intellectualis*. This supreme love is reserved for rational beings alone, and it is grounded in knowledge and not feeling.¹⁷

The most interesting and important precedent for Spinoza’s conception of the intellectual love of God—as he is for Spinoza’s views on many other issues as well—is, without question, Maimonides (Moshe ben Maimon). Spinoza’s conception of the *amor Dei intellectualis* owes a good deal to the great twelfth-century rabbi and philosopher. Spinoza is no uncritical disciple, however, and there are some apparent differences between these two major Jewish rationalists on the intellectual love of God that may reveal much about the distinctive nature of Spinoza’s philosophical and religious project.

The love of God (*ahavat ha-kadosh-baruch-hu*) appears in many of Maimonides’ writings, including his *halakhic* or legal works. In the *Mishneh Torah*, a monumental compendium of Jewish law, Maimonides insists that one should serve God not in order to receive any blessings or avoid any punishment for doing so—that is, not out of self-interest or the desire for some benefit—but out of a pure dedication to observing the divine commandments for their own sake. The wise person (*hakham*) does what is right

¹⁴ For a discussion of both the love of God and the intellectual love of God in and before Spinoza, see Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. 2, pp. 274–325.

¹⁵ Bahya ibn Paquda, *The Book of Direction*, p. 429.

¹⁶ Bahya ibn Paquda, *The Book of Direction*, p. 427.

¹⁷ See *Summa Theologiae*, Prima Secundae, Q. 26, art. 1, and Q. 27, art. 2; Secunda Secundae, Q. 26, art. 3. Wolfson (*The Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. 2, p. 305) suggests that Thomas’s distinction was the source for a similar distinction in Judah Abravanel (Leo Hebraeus).

solely for the sake of wisdom and righteousness. His motivation, that is, is not fear (of evil consequences) or hope (for reward) but love. Moreover, it is an obsessive love, one that occupies the entire mind of the wise person.

What is the proper [degree] of love? That a person should love God with a very great and exceeding love until his soul is bound up in the love of God. Thus, he will always be obsessed with this love as if he is lovesick. [A lovesick person's] thoughts are never diverted from the love of that woman. He is always obsessed with her; when he sits down, when he gets up, when he eats and drinks. With an even greater [love], the love of God should be [implanted] in the hearts of those who love Him and are obsessed with Him at all times as we are commanded [Deuteronomy 6:5: "Love God . . .] with all your heart and with all your soul."¹⁸

Maimonides insists, however, that such a love of God can arise only on the foundation of knowledge. Indeed, the degree of one's love of God is proportionate to one's intellectual achievement. And what one is supposed to have knowledge of is God Himself.

One can only love God [as an outgrowth] of the knowledge with which he knows Him. The nature of one's love depends on the nature of one's knowledge. A small [amount of knowledge arouses] a lesser love. A greater amount of knowledge arouses a greater love.¹⁹

This same view informs Maimonides' philosophical masterpiece, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, wherein he provides deeper insight into the nature of the knowledge that grounds this love of the divine. In the *Guide*, Maimonides never actually uses the phrase "intellectual love of God" (neither in the Arabic original nor in the Hebrew translation by Samuel Ibn Tibbon that he supervised).²⁰ Moreover, in the *Guide*, the terms *mahab-bah* (Arabic) and *ahavah* (Hebrew) eventually give way to *'ishq* (Arabic) and *hesheq* (Hebrew), indicating a more "intense and passionate" species of love—indeed, "an excess of love, so that no thought remains that is directed toward a thing other than the Beloved."²¹ But it is clear that for Maimonides, much like Spinoza, the love that constitutes a human being's supreme perfection is, nonetheless, an intellectual condition, a state of knowing.

Maimonides insists that one of the two primary goals at which the Law aims is the perfection of the soul.²² And such spiritual perfection consists in the intellect being rational *in actu*, being an actual knowing intellect. Maimonides defines this as "knowing

¹⁸ *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Teshuvah, X.1–3.

¹⁹ *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Teshuvah, X.6.

²⁰ This suggests that Maimonides may not be Spinoza's immediate source for the terminology of this concept. Perhaps a more likely source is Judah Abravanel, who does explicitly refer to "intellectual love" and whose *Dialoghi d'Amore* Spinoza owned in a Spanish translation.

²¹ Part III, chapter 51, Maimonides, *The Guide*, p. 627.

²² The other goal comprises bodily health, social and political well-being, and moral character, all of which provide the necessary conditions for the pursuit of intellectual knowing.

everything concerning all the beings that it is within the capacity of man to know in accordance with his ultimate perfection.”²³ The Law contributes to this goal by communicating “correct opinions” about the Creator and His creation, culminating in the understanding of both natural things (the “Science of Nature”) and, finally, God (the “Divine Science”). Maimonides rules out any knowledge of God’s essence; what God is in Himself is, in principle, unknowable. But it is possible for human beings to acquire a knowledge of God’s ways or actions, particularly as these are manifest in His governance of the world in the form of the laws of nature.

Especially fortunate, however, are those whose intellectual achievements surpass even the true beliefs that are communicated by the Law. Their great knowledge is a result of the “divine overflow,” that is, of the wisdom that derives from God, passes through the separate intellects of the celestial spheres, and is received by properly prepared minds in this terrestrial realm—primarily philosophers and prophets. One who is “connected” to the divine overflow and has reached this supreme level of understanding enjoys a formidable cognitive union with God, a union that, under the best circumstances, occupies the whole mind and leads to proper worship (and even to the enjoyment of divine providence).

There are those who set their thought to work after having attained perfection in the divine science, turn wholly toward God, may He be cherished and held sublime, renounce what is other than He, and direct all the acts of their intellect toward an examination of the beings with a view to drawing from them proof with regard to Him, so as to know His governance of them in whatever way it is possible . . . [These men] have set their thought to work on God alone after they have achieved knowledge of Him, as we have explained. This is the worship [*avodah*] peculiar to those who have apprehended the true realities; the more they think of Him and of being with Him, the more their worship increases.²⁴

Maimonides speaks of the “bond [*dibuk*]” that such a person enjoys with God. It is clear, though, that this bond is an epistemic and intellectual one. “If you have apprehended God and His acts in accordance with what is required by the intellect, you should afterwards engage in totally devoting yourself to Him, endeavor to come closer to Him, and strengthen the bond between you and Him—that is, the intellect [*ha-sekheh*].”²⁵ To so unite oneself to God, Maimonides continues, is the true meaning of one of Judaism’s central commands: “To love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might.”

For Maimonides, then, the love of God is an intellectual relationship. “Love is proportionate to apprehension . . . the exhortation always refers to intellectual apprehensions, not to imagination . . . Thus it is clear that after apprehension, total devotion to Him and

²³ III.27, Maimonides, *The Guide*, p. 511.

²⁴ III.51, Maimonides, *The Guide*, p. 620.

²⁵ III.51, Maimonides, *The Guide*, p. 620.

the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving Him should be aimed at.²⁶ If love is an intense, focused union with an object²⁷, then the epistemic condition that is the philosopher's or prophet's intellectual understanding of God is itself the highest form of love attainable by a human being. It is an intellectual love insofar as the love consists in the cognitive union itself.²⁸

Despite the metaphysical and theological differences between the philosophies of Maimonides and Spinoza—particularly in their conceptions of God and of His relationship to the world—there are clear resonances between their respective accounts of the (intellectual) love of God. This is not surprising, because Spinoza's philosophy is, in many respects, Maimonidean, and the two thinkers share some basic rationalist assumptions about *eudaimonia* and human perfection.²⁹

On the other hand, Maimonides' account is much narrower than that of Spinoza. For Maimonides, the intellectual love of God is attained only by an elite few, those who have not only perfected their moral character and, more importantly, their intellects, but who have also tapped into the divine overflow. If Plato believes that only philosophers should become kings, Maimonides thinks that only philosophers and prophets can enjoy the love of God.³⁰ Spinoza offers, at least in principle, a much more inclusive and liberal picture. His *amor Dei intellectualis* is present essentially and eternally in every mind. To be sure, in this durational life of the passions, it is extremely difficult to become fully aware of this native endowment. As Spinoza says at the end of the *Ethics*, "all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare." But it is at least in principle possible for each and every person to attain the blessedness that such a condition represents.

Moreover, in Maimonides, the intellectual love of God is accompanied by fear, dread, and awe. This is because these represent the natural response for someone who is in such close and constant proximity to God. When one is conscious of being in God's presence—as the perfected individual is—one cannot but feel that God is standing in judgment.

²⁶ III.51, Maimonides, *The Guide*, p. 621.

²⁷ At one point, Maimonides calls the love of God an "intense and passionate love" (III.51, Maimonides, *The Guide*, p. 628).

²⁸ Kellner disputes the idea that for Maimonides the love of God and the knowledge of God are identical ("Spiritual Life," pp. 290–93). For other discussions of Maimonides on the love of God, see Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*; Lamm, "Maimonides on the Love of God"; and Seeskin, *Searching for a Distant God*.

²⁹ For discussions of Spinoza in a Maimonidean context, see Harvey, "A Portrait"; Ravven, "Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides About the Prophetic Imagination, Part One," and "Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides About the Prophetic Imagination, Part Two"; and Fraenkel, "Maimonides' God."

³⁰ See, however, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance (Hilchot Teshuvah), X: "Hence, when instructing the young, women, or the uneducated generally, we teach them to serve God out of fear or for the sake of reward, until their knowledge increases and they have attained a large measure of wisdom. Then we reveal to them this secret [that there is no divine reward and punishment in the traditional sense] little by little, and habituate them to it slowly until they have grasped and comprehended it, and serve God out of love." This suggests that Maimonides may have a more inclusive, less narrowly elitist account of the love of God. I am grateful to Carlos Fraenkel for suggesting this point to me.

Just as we apprehend Him by means of that light which he caused to overflow toward us . . . so does He by means of this selfsame light examine us; and because of it, He, may He be exalted, is constantly with us, examining from on high . . . Understand this well. Know that when perfect men understand this, they achieve such humility, such awe and fear of God, such reverence and such shame before Him, may he be exalted—and this in ways that pertain to true reality, not to imagination—that their secret conduct with their wives and in latrines is like their public conduct with other people.³¹

Notice that fear and awe before God are here not the kind of fear and awe that result from conceiving God through the imagination—which ordinarily gives rise to illusory beliefs about God, such as the idea that God has a body and emotions (like rage and jealousy)—but belong to someone who has perfected his intellectual understanding, and thus are not grounded in any misconceptions about God. “Some excellent men obtain such training that they achieve human perfection, so that they fear, and are in dread and awe, of God.”³²

For Spinoza, by contrast, fear, dread, and awe of God result only from conceiving God inadequately, through the ideas of the imagination, which lend support to an anthropomorphic notion of God. Spinoza’s God is no judge and does not possess the personal psychological life or moral characteristics with which traditional religious conceptions endow Him. For Spinoza, the intellectual love of God is the key to dispelling fear and hope, not generating them. Such love is certainly not the kind of religious feeling, mixed with dread and awe, encouraged by traditional sectarian faiths.³³ It involves not passivity but activity and an appreciation of one’s own powers and their cause. It is, in Spinoza’s view, the proper accompaniment of virtue. Spinoza’s naturalistic reduction of all things religious seems, at this point, to be complete.³⁴

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³¹ III.52, Maimonides, *The Guide*, p. 629.

³² III.52, Maimonides, *The Guide*, p. 630.

³³ It may be, of course, that Maimonides’ conception of the fear and awe experienced by the sage is not indicative of a more traditionally “religious” attitude on Maimonides’ part, but rather is something for which he can provide a reductive, intellectualist explanation in keeping with his general rationalism; see, for example, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws Concerning the Foundations of the Torah (Hilchot Yesodai ha-Torah), II.1–2. This, however, is a matter for a different essay. Be that as it may, there is no counterpart—not even a nominal one—in Spinoza to Maimonides’ account of the fear and awe experienced by the philosopher and prophet before God.

³⁴ My thanks to Michael Della Rocca, Yitzhak Melamed, Allan Nadler, and Carlos Fraenkel for their very helpful comments on an early draft of this essay.

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CHAPTER 15

THE METAPHYSICS OF AFFECTS OR THE UNBEARABLE REALITY OF CONFUSION

LILLI ALANEN

THIS chapter is concerned with Spinoza's account of the nature and reality of the affects—his term for emotions—and the role accorded them in his emancipation project. He distinguished two kinds of affect, passive and active, and famously opposed his new account of the nature of affects to that of the Stoics and Descartes, whose conception of reason's mastery of the passions through its power of free assent he did not cease to ridicule. He proposed instead that we regulate the passive affects through knowing their causes and effects, considering them as natural phenomena subject to the laws of nature. Spinoza's theory also served a grander project aiming at freedom from their "bondage." His ethical project moves in bewildering ways between these two goals: a realistic and mundane modern naturalistic approach that aims at mastering the passions for practical and political purposes, and an ambitious philosophical salvation project that aims at self-sufficiency and undisturbed peace of mind that can come only from freedom from their bondage. So we are, on the one hand, supposed to come to terms with our passions—through knowing their causes and effects, accepting and managing them as natural phenomena that we have to live with and that serve important functions in our lives. On the other hand, since the passive affects are by definition confused modes of thinking interfering with reason, they are obstacles to true knowledge. So we are supposed to free ourselves from the externally caused passive affects by transforming them into self-caused active affects, whose origin lies in adequate reasoning and whose object is truth.

This transition from what looked like a radically naturalist psychology into an extreme rationalist salvation project gives one pause.¹ The nature, role, and even the reality of the passive affects seem to vary depending on which project one takes to be primary: the political project centering on practical action and communal life, or that of eternal salvation aiming at lasting self-contentment through adequate knowledge.² The passive affects may, qua transient and confused cognitive states, be dispensable from the point of view of the latter, but there is no way of eliminating them from practical life and its striving to persist in being. Or so I shall argue.

In the first two Sections of the chapter, I discuss Spinoza's general definition of the passive affects in the light of the metaphysical and epistemological doctrines on which it is based. I argue that, although the passive affects are by nature confused representational states, they are not merely representational but have, qua natural phenomena, the same degree of reality as any other transient modes and are objects of study on a par with other things in nature. Section III discusses some of the problems Spinoza's strict attribute dualism and commitment to a mechanistic conception of extended nature pose for his notion of a science of the mind and its affects as continuous with a science of nature. The last Section (IV) reflects on the consequences of Spinoza's conception of explanation for his salvation project and on the differences between Spinoza's proposal for mastering the passions and those of his predecessors.

Spinoza's doctrine, I argue, leaves little room for the kind of self-caused activity (or action in his strict sense of adequate causation) that salvation requires. If one takes action in a weaker sense, and allows that activity and the adequate cognition it presupposes are matters of degree, the best one can hope for is increasing one's autonomy in a relative sense, increasing thereby also one's dependency on favorable circumstances (e.g. the creation of a community of free men). Salvation ultimately requires a radical switch of perspective from that of a finite mode to that of the infinite intellect, which does not seem compatible with the former, more mundane project. Whether or not it supports his ethical goals, Spinoza's account of the dynamics of the soul is an important forerunner of later naturalist accounts of human passions—not least that of Hume, who does not hesitate to turn reason into their humble slave.

¹ Yirmiahu Yovel has argued that Spinoza's salvation project requires nothing less than the creation of superior human beings, in contrast to other secular emancipation projects of a more realistic bent like Freud's, which merely aspires to cure pathologies and to restore the person such as she is to cope with normal life. See his *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Adventures of Immanence* in part p. 154ff. But the model of the "free man" offered in Part IV of the *Ethics* can also be seen as just that—a model that we can set for ourselves and follow as long as it serves our purposes, e.g. peaceful coexistence. See Rosenthal, "Tolerance as a Virtue."

² I discuss some of the problems with self-identity and self-cognition that Spinoza's account poses in my "Spinoza on Passions."

I.

Degrees of Cognition and the Reality of Confusion

There are three distinct claims in Spinoza's definition of the passive affects—the passions—and I have given the claims letters for separate discussion:

(a) An Affect that is called a Passion of the mind is a confused idea, (b) by which the Mind affirms of its Body, or of some part of it, a greater or lesser force of existing than before, (c) which, when it is given, determines the Mind to think of this rather than that. (E3gen.da)³

(a) Passive affects are dynamic, transitional states of mind that keep it focused on some object or other. In explaining why passions are *confused* ideas, Spinoza refers to E3p3, where he recalls that the idea constituting the form or essence of the mind has the actually existing body as its object and is composed of as many ideas as there are parts and states of the body. Some of these ideas are adequate, and some are inadequate. Among the former are what he calls “common notions” (E2p38c): ideas of properties common to all extended bodies that are said to be equally in the part and in the whole, like extension, motion, rest, and what follows from these (E2le2). Force or power is not listed here but would presumably be included, and with it the capacity of particular bodies to act and be acted on by other bodies. Since the bodily properties that are the objects of these notions are common to all bodies, they are instantiated also in the body whose idea constitutes this particular mind. So they are found within the mind itself, and whatever adequate ideas are deduced from these depend in this sense on the mind and its own actions.⁴

³ The definition quoted above is presented as a General Definition of Affects but concerns in fact passive, not active affects. See also E3d3. For a clarifying account of Spinoza's terminology see Beyssade, “*Nostris Corporis Affectus*.”

⁴ Force or power comes up for discussion in Part III, but when common notions are introduced later Spinoza refers back to E2le2, where all bodies are said to agree in certain respects, for example, in involving the conception of one and the same attribute, i.e. extension, so the respects they agree in are that they all are (understood) as spatial, having a certain size and figure, and moreover “in that they may move at varying speeds” (E2le2d). Although force or power is not mentioned here, Spinoza presumably thinks that it can be determined or measured in terms of quantity of motion. Individual bodies are distinguished from one another in respect of motion and rest and the speed of their motions, and their quantity of motion or rest is determined through the motion of other individual bodies acting on them (E2le1&3) which are determined by others and so on ad infinitum. Composite bodies like the human body are distinguished through some certain ratio of motion and rest among their parts, which constitutes their form (*forma*) or nature, and which is preserved as long as this certain ratio of motion and rest is preserved (E2le4-7). I agree with Martin Lin that the ratio in question cannot be any simple numerical proportion, and should be understood more like a general plan or pattern of “dynamic organization” of the individual body persisting over time. That plan can still have a mathematical

Inadequate ideas do not originate from within the mind itself, but depend on many different causes acting on the body from the outside that are not distinctly perceived or grasped. Things external to the individual mind are perceived or imagined only through their effects on the body, which is its primary object of perception, and they are never cognized apart from how they happen to affect the body, something that depends as much on its actual constitution at that time as on the external causes affecting it. For this reason the ideas of affects are mutilated or truncated and confused. Whenever the mind is acted on by external causes it has inadequate or confused ideas, and since it is constantly acted on by external causes, the mind is always to some extent passive.

Spinoza explains what he means by saying (b) that the mind, by these confused ideas, affirms a greater or lesser power of existing of its body as follows:

[I] say by which the mind affirms of its body or of some part of it a greater or lesser force of existing (*existendi vim*) than before. For all the ideas that we have of bodies indicate the actual constitution of our own Body (by E2p16c2) more than the nature of the external body; and that which constitutes the form (*formam*) of the affect, must indicate or express the constitution that the Body (or some part of it) has because its power of acting (*agendi potentiam*), or force of existing (*existendi vis*), is increased or diminished, aided or restrained. (E3gen.da.expl, transl. altered.)

Passive affects as a subclass of ideas of affections are confused ideas.⁵ We feel or sense (*sentimus*) the body to be affected in many ways (E2a4), and nothing can happen in the body without its being perceived (*percipiatur*) by the mind (E2p12). This (according to E2p13s) holds generally and “applies to men no more than to other individuals,” so all things are animate and perceive to some degree, although the degree to which a mind perceives varies with the body’s capacity to act and be acted on by other bodies. There is a continuum of perception from extremely confused perception (e.g., the idea of the stone as perceived by the stone) to distinct understanding (the idea of God itself, i.e. of the whole universe). The more a body’s actions depend on itself and “the less other bodies concur with it in acting, the more apt it is to understand distinctly (*aptior est ad distincte intelligendum*)” (E2p13s). Understanding too comes in degrees, and distinct

expression. See Lin, “Memory.” This seems to give the laws of motion—including the law of inertia—a central role among Spinoza’s laws of nature. Some, e.g. Alan Donagan, take many of the terms of Part I of the *Ethics* to stand for things that are common to all in the sense of following from some attribute constituting God’s essence. (Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 136) If so, common notions could include laws of thought, and not just laws of adequate thinking but laws governing the association of ideas in finite minds, the basis of which is laid out in Part II and which are developed in Part III.

⁵ As Peter Myrdal points out to me, it is not clear that there are any affections that would not affect the conatus in one way or another. Leibniz did not see any difference here other than in degree (see, e.g. *Discourse on Metaphysics* §33; *New Essays* II.20, p. 162; and *New Essays*, Preface, p. 53). Yet one might want to single out affects, as Spinoza does, as affections that have a strong enough effect on a beings striving to shape its striving so as to cause a conscious appetite, i.e. a determinate desire. See also E3post1.

understanding occurs at the higher end of this continuum of cognitive acts.⁶ Full understanding (*intellectio* or *conceptio*), as Spinoza uses these terms, presupposes distinct and adequate ideas. The term perception (*perceptio*), on the other hand, is usually reserved for confused and inadequate ideas.⁷

Adequate and Inadequate Cognition

This terminology stems largely from Descartes, but Spinoza's use of it differs from Descartes's in important ways.⁸ There is one difference in particular to be noted here. Clarity and distinctness famously are for Descartes criteria for truth: clear and distinct ideas are the basis for true judgments. Descartes distinguishes complete from adequate cognition and explains to Arnauld that distinct knowledge can be complete without being adequate. Since adequate cognition must, in addition to being clear and distinct, "contain absolutely all the properties which are in the thing that is the object of knowledge," only God, who put them there, can know that he has adequate knowledge (AT 7:220-21). Adequacy cannot be, for Descartes, as it is for Spinoza, a requirement for true knowledge.

Spinoza asserts as an axiom that "a true idea must agree with its object" (E1a6) and claims that an idea is adequate when it, "considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations of a true idea" (2d4). It is intrinsic because it is understood through itself—i.e. it is self-explanatory or self-evident. One cannot have a true idea without knowing that one has it (E2p43d). This has to do with his doctrine of cognition explained in terms of ideas of ideas, which are

⁶ Don Garrett gives a nice account of this in his "Representation and Consciousness." I would be more hesitant though than Garrett is in using the term consciousness, which Spinoza so seldom uses, or in equating degrees of consciousness with degrees of power of thinking. The former may be a precondition for the latter, but they are not identical. "Consciousness" has a flair of passive registering of perceptions whereas thinking involves conceptual and inferential activity. See note 7.

⁷ From the fact that all things are animate and perceive to some degree it does not follow that all things think. If thinking is taken to involve at least some degree of understanding or conception that for Spinoza manifests activity—i.e. the capacity of *forming* adequate ideas and using them to infer other adequate ideas (cf. also TdIE/G 2:38-39)—then, it seems to me, humans may be the only finite singular things that can properly be said to be thinking (Cf. E2d3 and E2a3). Actively formed ideas are called "concepts" (E2d3), a term which Spinoza thinks is more suitable than "perception" because "perception" seems to indicate that the mind is passive (E2d4). But throughout Parts III and IV of the *Ethics*, Spinoza uses "idea" for the mental counterpart of affections too, and these ideas are, by definition, inadequate, passive perceptions. So he seems to use idea in two senses: idea-concepts and idea-perceptions. The human mind, in forming concepts, is active, whereas its ideas, which he also calls images and which are sensory impressions, are always passively received in the body. On activity and passivity cf. end of sect. 2.

⁸ A perception for Descartes is clear when "present and accessible to the attentive mind," like an object of vision present to and stimulating the eyes with "a sufficient degree of strength and accessibility," and it is, in addition, distinct, when it is also "so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear" (AT 8-A: 22). A confused perception may be clear in the sense of being vivid and manifest to the mind, without being distinct.

merely distinct from the ideas they are of by reason (E2p20), but the fundamental point is that it is essential to being an intellect or having the capacity of understanding that one knows the truth when one sees it.

Spinoza seems to agree with Descartes that fully adequate ideas of things require infinite knowledge. Thus an adequate idea of any singular thing, say the form of this human body, presupposes a complete science (adequate ideas) of the infinite chain of its causes and effects (that is of the whole universe), something a finite mind cannot have—except, perhaps, intuitively, through what he calls the third kind of cognition (*Scientia intuitiva*). It proceeds from “the adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things.” (E2p40s2) Common notions, however, are always adequate and are accessible to finite minds, providing a resource for acquiring some distinct understanding or explanation of the general nature of things based on their shared properties. They form the basis of reason or the second kind of (adequate) cognition, which is contrasted to the confused and mutilated cognition Spinoza refers to as “cognition of the first kind” or “opinion” based on casual experience and imagination that is always inadequate (E2p40s2). Can we then have adequate cognition of singular things?⁹ We may, perhaps, through the third kind of cognition, intuition, whatever that is, and whatever it is, it does presuppose knowledge of the second kind and reasoning from adequate common notions.¹⁰ So apart from intuitively grasped essences of singular things, we have only inadequate ideas of all the objects acting on our senses. They are represented as adequate ideas by God’s mind, just as my mind—the idea of my actually existing body—is. But while God adequately represents this idea along with the ideas of all the things causing its affections, the perceptions of my finite mind are confined to this body of mine and its affections that involve only confused ideas of their causes so represent them inadequately. (E2p29)

“Affection” is Spinoza’s term for sensory impressions, and more generally, for externally conditioned modifications of the body and its parts. Their ideas are inevitably partial, confused, and inadequate, because the mind in perceiving the affections of the body does not perceive the things causing them distinctly or separately (E2p11c), but only the impressions they make in the body’s fluid parts (E2p17d2).¹¹ The ideas of these impressions—called “images”—are said to “involve” but not “explicate” the nature of the things causing them (E2p18s): they do not come with their full causal stories and the properties of these things on their sleeve. On the contrary, they are subjective in representing things only as they affect one’s body. Spinoza compares them to conclusions without premises: they appear on the mental screen disconnected from the chain of causes acting on the body whose affections they are. (E2p28d) It is noteworthy that inadequate ideas, although confused, are not characterized as false. They are merely partial

⁹ See the convoluted E2p34d.

¹⁰ See Wilson, “Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge,” and Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 51 and p. 13.

¹¹ Cf. the discussion the difference between God’s idea of Peter and Paul’s idea of Peter in E2p17s.

and inadequate, and in so far as they “involve,” confusedly, the nature of their causes, they have some truth or formal reality.¹²

The Form or Reality of Affects

Let us consider the last two claims (b-c) in the definition of affects more carefully. Passive affects form a special subclass of affections because of the impact they have on the body’s force of existing (*conatus*). This force or power constitutes “its actual essence” (E3p7), and is the basic striving or appetite determining it to persist in its being, and so to pursue what supports its essential being. In the case of human beings, thinking is essential to them (E3a2), and so preserving and strengthening one’s capacity to think matters more than merely keeping the heart and the blood circulation in shape.¹³ “Appetite,” which can be of the body or the mind, is called desire (*cupiditas*) in so far as it is conscious, and will (*voluntas*) when it refers only to the mind (E3p9s). Whatever affects our desire, i.e. our awareness of what we desire, will affect our thought and behavior in some ways. The perceptual system of a caffeine addict detects the smell of freshly ground coffee, and right away she desires to have some; she cannot put this thought out of her mind till she gets a cup, unless the idea of some even more urgent desire comes up, like that of attending to the child, responding to the phone call, or catching the bus. While *any* ideas of affections of the body make the mind (the idea of the body) cognizant of itself to some extent (E2p23), the ideas of the affects are of and make it aware of particular changes occurring in its essential striving. Since affects are confused ideas said to affirm a greater or lesser force of existing in the body than before, what constitutes their form (*formam*)¹⁴ or actual being “must indicate or express a constitution of the body or of some part of it” that displays a greater or lesser power of acting than the body (or its parts) had before. Spinoza explains that this is not a matter of comparing it to its earlier constitution:

¹² See E2p17s and 2p35d&s. Some contexts (e.g. E2p34, E2p41d, E2p43d) indicate that Spinoza is committed to the view that truth is coextensive with adequacy and falsity with inadequacy. This holds for God’s ideas, but it is hard to apply it to ideas in the human mind. Della Rocca suggests that there are two strands in Spinoza’s thinking about truth and falsity, and that truth, according to one of the strands, is mind-relative (*Representation*, pp. 108–10). I cannot discuss this here, but as I read Spinoza, all confused ideas, although inadequate, are not false. Ideas of imaginations, i.e. images, present the thing imagined as existing, and whenever what it so presented exists, e.g. the pain I feel or the sun that I see, no matter how confused their sensory ideas are, are true at least to the extent that what they present exists and has some formal reality. Such ideas as A. Donagan describes them are “materially true.” An idea is materially true when it has at least some propositional counterpart that is true. (See the discussion in his *Spinoza*, pp. 44–45) This is not the case with dream images, fictions or omens. See Ep. 17, cf. also Ep. 56 on knowledge that is true without being complete, e.g. I can know some true property of a triangle without knowing others. Cf. E2p17s.

¹³ Spinoza’s example with the Spanish poet supports this: his body lived on but he ceased to be the same person—the same thinking being when he could not recognize the poems he had written anymore. See E4p39s.

¹⁴ Translated by Shirley as “specific reality,” in Spinoza, *The Ethics and Selected Letters*, p. 151. I comment on this terminology in note 26.

But it should be noted that, when I say a greater or lesser force of existing than before, I do not understand that the Mind compares its Body's present constitution with a past constitution, but that the idea which constitutes the form of the affect affirms of the body something which really involves more or less of reality than before. (E3gen.da.expl)

The increase or decrease of the body's power to exist is (by necessity) expressed in the very idea that constitutes the form of the affect. The fluctuations in the body's power of acting or force of existing are not merely accompanied by fluctuations of the degree of reality of their corresponding ideas; these ideas themselves *are* fluctuations in the mind's power to think, and as such they affirm, or confirm as it were, the change occurring in the body's power to persevere. Now how can ideas express and in expressing them, affirm transitions in power or degrees of reality?

Consider my state of mind, that is, the idea of my body, as it lies on the ground after an unexpected fall. Think of the fall as occurring in the middle of some challenging exercise that filled my mind with pleasant and invigorating impressions of agility and an exhilarating sense of increased power, and here, all of a sudden I lie helpless in pain and a state of shock, unable to move my limbs, not knowing the extent of the injury or the chances of my recovery. I am overcome by pain, self-pity, humility, fear, regret (why did I have to do this?), which are so many ideas expressing on the level of thought the very same affects that the physical changes caused by the injury to my body express on the level of extension. These ideas involve, but are not merely confused or inadequate, representations of my injured limbs and their causes; they instantiate the specific impairment or loss of the power of thinking that went with what, before the accident, was a wholesome and well-functioning body, and the confusion instantiating the loss of power on the mental level also enforces it. Once I get going on feeling sorry for myself and all the reasons for being pitied, the images of my sad state hold my mind, and with it my body, captured. I am now stuck with obsessing about my injuries and the fall that caused it, desperately thinking also of how to get out of my predicament.

Here's another case. Joy is defined as a transition from a lesser to a greater degree of power or "state of perfection" (E3da2), and its opposite, sadness, as a transition from a greater to a lesser power or perfection. That joy and sadness are transitions from one degree of perfection to another is essential, for "If a man were born with the perfection to which he passes, he would possess it without an affect of Joy" (E3da3expl). Lack of perfection, likewise, does not in itself cause sadness. For although Spinoza persistently opposes any form of teleology based on some presumed objectivist hierarchy of values, he takes over the identification of perfection with reality (or goodness with being) and with it the idea that reality or being comes in degrees.¹⁵ Lack of perfection is simply a

¹⁵ E2p13s. Spinoza moreover is the only thinker I know of who without hesitation embraces Descartes's view that the content of ideas, i.e. their objective reality, reflects the degree of reality that their object or cause possesses actually or formally. In his exposition of Descartes's Principles, he presents it as acknowledged by everyone, although misapplied by many, and he explicates it with original examples of his own, see DPP1a9.

lack of being, so it is nothing. Suppose you were born with some “imperfection,” say deprived of sight or mobility. You would bear it without sadness or regret, because there is nothing for you to regret—unless you start imagining what others like you who are not impaired in this way can do, or what you yourself could do if you were not handicapped. Such thoughts make you sad and envious. The sorrow, pain, and envy you now feel diminish your power of thinking and are reflected in a corresponding loss of your body’s power of acting. Things go from bad to worse, or, rather, what was nothing to fret about (an absence of being) now appears as a real loss of being or perfection, and by so appearing, it becomes one.

Imagination, with its confused and truncated ideas, clouds your formerly serene or contented mind, hindering it from using whatever resources it can find within itself for rational, adequate thinking. The power of the mind is measured by the adequacy of its ideas, and only in so far as it understands the true causes of a given effect can the mind be active with respect to that effect, as opposed to being conditioned by external causes. In understanding, the mind relies on itself and its common notions for its activity. So the more adequate ideas it can form, the less it is acted on by external causes and the freer or more self-determined it is.

I have discussed the original sense of agency and freedom on which this view is based elsewhere, but it is worth summarizing briefly here. Action, agency, and freedom presuppose adequate causation, which is defined in terms of understanding the causes of a given effect; passivity again depends on ignorance of the causes of what one undergoes. By adequate cause Spinoza means one “whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it.” To perceive something clearly and distinctly is to perceive adequately, and understanding (*intelligere*) consists in adequate perception. So a cause is said to be “partial, or inadequate, if its effect cannot be understood (*intelligi*) through it alone.” (E3d1) It is only “when something happens, in us or outside us, whereof we are the adequate cause” that we can be said to act properly, whereas “we are acted on when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause.” (E3d2) Thus activity or passivity do not depend on the number of effects a thing may seem to cause, but solely on whether those effects can be explained through the thing itself or through another. A mind is active when thinking adequately, i.e. when drawing adequate conclusions from adequately understood premises, or when fully understanding the causes of a given effect. A mind is being acted on and so is passive (*patitur*) whenever it has inadequate ideas (E3p1), and qua finite modes our minds are bound to have inadequate ideas.

Activity, when speaking of the human mind, is thus at best partial and relative—a matter of more or less, and is restricted to its limited understanding. This is a very strong and counterintuitive sense of action, but it is the only form of action, strictly speaking, that finite agents can aspire to in Spinoza’s universe. It follows that we are patients rather than agents in whatever we do under the influence of passive affects, which involve inadequate ideas. Even those passive affects that, like ordinary loves

or pleasures, may render us stronger (and hence, for the time they last, more active in a weaker and more ordinary sense of action) do in fact increase our passivity and dependence on external causes.¹⁶

Yet there are good reasons to distinguish between a stronger and a weaker sense of action in Spinoza's actual use of the terms. The former is the one defined in terms of adequate causation. The latter is used in some contexts by Spinoza for any kind of causing (including partial and inadequate causation) of some effect. Thus, in dismissing the idea of free will as nothing but ignorance of the causes of one's "actions" in E2p35s, action is used in the weaker sense.¹⁷ One must not forget however that only the former, activity in the strong or strict sense, counts as genuine agency and autonomy.

Are Affects Mere Representations?

Some commentators take Spinoza's account of emotions to represent an extremely rationalist view in which affects are nothing but representations.¹⁸ While I agree that his road to salvation is that of an extreme intellectualist, his view of affects is not. To the extent that affects, as just argued, are transitions from one grade of power of acting to another, their ideas (which are the same thing considered under different attributes) must be something more than mere representations—unless one radically alters the notion of representation to include dynamic, conative states in addition to merely cognitive states.¹⁹

One argument for defending a representationalist reading is that if affects were not representations they could not be rationally evaluated but would be mere inner feelings or qualia, perhaps ultimately reducible to physical states.²⁰ But qualia do not figure into Spinoza's account.²¹ If by qualia one means phenomenal states accessible only to subjective consciousness, affects cannot be qualia since affects are bodily too. Nor can they be reduced to bodily states, since they are ideas—mental

¹⁶ Alanen, "Spinoza on Passions."

¹⁷ See Della Rocca, "The Power of An Idea," Sect. 2. Cf. Schrijvers "The *Conatus*."

¹⁸ Della Rocca has recently argued that the affects are inadequate representations of successive states of the body. Not only are they representations, they are nothing but representations. See Della Rocca, "Rationalism Run Amok." But see also Bennett, *A Study*, Chapters 11 and 14, and Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*.

¹⁹ This is in fact what Della Rocca seems to do in his insightful and challenging "The Power of an Idea." According to that reading, all ideas for Spinoza "are live psychic forces" in so far as they all come with their own affirmations (p. 212). This reading brings Spinoza's account of ideas, developed to refute Descartes's view that assent to or affirmation of an idea depends on a separate act of the will, close to that of Hume, for whom ideas or beliefs come with their degrees of force or vivacity, which is what determines which beliefs we hold on to.

²⁰ Della Rocca, "Rationalism Run Amok," p. 32.

²¹ I agree with Jonathan Bennett that qualia do not play any significant role in Spinoza's account of emotions. See Bennett, *A Study*, ch. 11.

expressions—of such states. If again by representations one means propositional states that have truth-values, and so are subject to rational assessment, then affects do not seem reducible to representations either. Affects may involve representations but are never exclusively representational in this sense. Even Della Rocca, who defends an extreme representationalist reading, qualifies his claim in writing that “there is nothing more to an affect than a representation of some state of affairs *together with the relevant transition between such representations*” (“Rationalism Run Amok,” p. 32, my italics). The transition or passage from one representation to another is more like a kind of brute fact and does not, to that extent, enter into the space of reasons any more than *qualia* do.

But what place can there be for brute facts in the doctrine of someone as committed as Spinoza to defending the principle of sufficient reason and the full intelligibility of all of nature?²² Since discussing this question is beyond the scope of this chapter, I shall focus instead on the consequences of taking Spinoza’s affects to be merely representational. If they were false representations, and truth and reality converge, there would hardly be any ground for thinking that they have any reality at all.²³ If they were unreal, we would be left with unexplainable transitions in power of thinking, unless these transitions are unreal too. To sort this out more has to be said about Spinoza’s metaphysics of ideas and representing, which unavoidably requires another digression into the general background of his account.²⁴

II.

Power Monism and Conceptual Dualism

There is one substance, so one causal power, God or Nature, of whom all particular things are affections or modes. God is a self-causing, infinite substance consisting of infinite attributes (E1p1–11), each of which expresses God’s infinite essence in its own kind (E1p16), and each of which can be conceived only through itself (E1p10). So particular things are “nothing but affections of the attributes of God; that is, modes

²² See e.g. Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, and Della Rocca, “Rationalism Run Amok,” pp. 33–34. In Della Rocca’s reading, it is the PSR that drives Spinoza’s account of affects as merely representational. Both seem to take representation as propositional, equating it with the mental.

²³ Della Rocca bases his argument on the principle of sufficient reason, which as Spinoza applies it entails that to be is to be explained or intelligible. He does not however think that affects are false ideas simpliciter, but that they qua inadequate are false to some degree, and hence unreal to that same degree. A thing, as he puts it, that is only partly intelligible, only partly exists (Della Rocca, “Rationalism Run Amok,” pp. 36–37).

²⁴ Others have presented detailed discussions of various aspects of Spinoza’s doctrine in this volume. My aim here is to offer a minimal summary of those of his views that are at work specifically in his definition of the affects and its explication of it.

wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way” (E1p25c). Particular things—modes—are determinate expressions of the eternal substance: they express the power of this substance in determinate ways. Attributes are what “the intellect perceives of a substance as constituting its essence” (E1d4). The human mind perceives finite things, like particular bodies or particular thoughts, which are “affections of the attributes of God” (E1p14c2). God being the efficient cause of all things, whatever exists expresses God’s (causal) power, and so whatever exists, has some determinate effect (E1p36): it has, or rather, it is, a determinate degree of causal force. Each individual thing strives to persevere in its being with a determinate degree of force, whether it is considered as a mode of thinking or of extension, and this force or power constitutes its essence (E3p7). There can be no change in its force that is not manifested at once both as a change in its idea or modes of thinking and in its bodily constitution or modes of extension. I will call this sameness of power doctrine *power monism*.

So particular things—you, me, my fear of heights, the state of his liver, the ticking of grandpa’s clock, your love for Henrietta, the candidate’s pride in being elected, Spinoza’s proof that there is only one substance, the highjacking of the ship, the earthquake—are so many determinate expressions of nature’s causal power, dynamic forces acting (i.e. producing their effects) in specific determinate ways. These are examples of what in Spinoza’s terminology are called individual bodies and modes of body, and “minds” and modes of mind, or ideas.²⁵ Whatever effects any of these produce are caused by their striving to persist in being, and they will do so as long as other causes concur with them and they are not stopped in their endeavor by stronger opposing forces.

Although thought and extension are two attributes of the same substance, hence expressions of the essence of one thing or power, attributes are conceived through themselves separately and independently of each other (E1p10). This is *the conceptual independence thesis*. It entails that “the modes of any attribute involve the conception of their own attribute, and not that of any other.” Their causes and effects are likewise conceivable only under that same attribute (E2p6d). This yields Spinoza’s famous metaphysical monism in combination with conceptual and explanatory dualism:

When I said [NS: before] that God is the cause of the idea, say of a circle, only insofar as he is a thinking thing, and [the cause] of the circle, only insofar as he is an extended thing, this was for no other reason than because the formal being of the idea of the circle can be perceived only through another mode of thinking, as its proximate cause, and that mode again through another, and so on, to

²⁵ The former are finite and determinate modes of God or nature or infinite power considered as extended (E2d1), and the latter, “minds” and modes of mind, are the very same units of power considered under the attribute of thought. Thought is an attribute of God, and so is extension: God or nature acts as thinking and as extended. God or nature considered qua thinking involves all individual thoughts there are as modes expressing its power in a “definite and determinate way” (E2p1).

infinity. Hence, so long as things are considered as modes of thinking, we must explain the order of the whole of nature, or the connection of causes, through the attribute of Thought alone. And insofar as they are considered as modes of Extension, the order of the whole of nature must be explained through the attribute of Extension alone. (E2p7s)

Forms or Actual Essences and Formal Essences

The formal being of the idea of the circle is the actual essence of the circle conceived under the attribute of thought, which can only be explained through other ideas. The circle itself also has formal or actual being as extended. It is then considered as a determinate mode of extension that can only be conceived and explicated through the series of finite and determinate extended modes that brought it about and that it in its turn affects in determinate ways, and which express God's causal power considered under the attribute of extension.²⁶ The formal being of the idea of the circle cannot, however, be explained through modes of extension or the series of physical causes and effects conditioning its actual being qua extended, only through other ideas or modes of thinking (cf. E2p5 and E2p7s). If this holds generally for singular things and the ideas of these things, it holds, presumably, for any ideas in a singular human mind that have actual formal being of their own as long as the finite body whose idea constitutes this mind is affected in certain ways by other ideas or modes of thought. Thus there is an idea of this imperfect circle just drawn on the blackboard with its particular size and segments. The picture of the circle has a certain, determinate degree of actual reality, as long as it is not erased, and similarly, its corresponding idea possesses a corresponding degree of being or actual reality as a mode of thought. Moreover, this idea of the circle, in so far as it is—more or less distinctly—represented in the mind of the person drawing it also has a kind of actual reality or formal being of its own as long as it is contemplated (imagined) by her, that can neither be reduced to nor explained through the physical instantiation of the circle on the blackboard or the impressions it causes in her sense organs. Its content or being qua actual object of thought in this particular mind depends on the other ideas affirming themselves in that same mind, including obscure ideas of affections or imagination, as well as adequate common notions, e.g. those of geometrical figures, definitions, theorems, and the proof, ideas which the circle she drew were supposed to illustrate and that are perceived by her intellect. The context determining the actual being or essence of any idea in a particular mind, briefly, is the whole set of

²⁶ The "form" of a particular body considered as a mode of extension is defined through a certain proportion of motion and rest, and this seems to concern the human body too. See E2p13s and E4p39d&s and note 4 above. In E3p7 Spinoza speaks of the "the striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being" as its "actual essence." The form or actual essence of the mind is the idea of this actually existing body, which idea, as follows from power-monism and attribute dualism, has its own striving as a mode of thought, expressing in definite and determinate ways the power of god or nature whose mode it is the under the attribute of thought. I discuss this in more detail in Alanen, "Spinoza on the Human Mind."

finite and determinate more or less imperfect ideas that form the idea constituting the singular mind contemplating it.²⁷

The circle as conceived in the mind of the person drawing it has, one might say, being “objectively,” i.e. as the object thought of or represented, which Spinoza following Descartes distinguishes from its actual or formal reality as an extended figure on the blackboard.²⁸ Ideas of affections likewise are caused by other ideas of affections, and hence can be understood through the ideas causing them, not through the bodily processes whose ideas they are (E3p3). So we should not look for the causes of the confused ideas that constitute the passions of the mind in the affects of the body (the transitions of its power of striving) but in the same mind’s other inadequate and confused ideas determining their content and effects on its power of thinking. This I

²⁷ There is a difficulty in understanding the notion of actuality here. Spinoza, as Margaret Wilson notes, works with “two senses of ‘existence’ or ‘being actual’” (“Infinite Understanding,” p. 170). One of them, which for Spinoza is the more important, is “the very nature of existence” mentioned in E2p45s. E2p45 asserts: “Any idea of any body, or singular thing, existing in act, necessarily involves the eternal and infinite essence of God.” In the scholium, Spinoza makes a point of distinguishing this from existence in duration, and calls it, in the case of singular things, their “existence itself . . . as they are in God.” The latter, their temporal existence, is here described as “existence as it is conceived abstractly, and as a certain kind of quantity,” and is said to be determined by other singular modes, yet “the power, by which any thing perseveres in existence, follows from the eternal necessity of God” (E2p45s). Spinoza refers here to E1p16 and E1p24c. The latter text seems to suggest that one can consider the essence of things without their existence, but one cannot consider their actual being or existence (in itself or in duration) without God’s. The existence or actual being of a thing does not flow from its eternal essence but from God “to whose nature alone it pertains to exist” (E1p24c).

²⁸ Objective reality or being, as I understand Spinoza’s use of it, is the being of a thing qua object of thought, which corresponds to or replicates the thing qua formally existing. See, e.g. E1p30d, E2p7d and TdIE §33–34; KV App 2/G 1:117. Cf. also Spinoza’s explication of Descartes’s use of the term in DPP14a; DPP1a9, and CM 1.2/G 1:238).

So things, whether they actually exist in duration or not, have these two forms of being: they have *objective being* as objects of God’s eternal thinking (Ep. 32 and TdIE §99), and they also have *being formally*, i.e. as part of God’s infinite and eternal essence. Singular things exist eternally qua formal essences included in God’s essence, moreover, whenever these essences are instantiated in duration, they also exist qua temporal and contingent (E5p29s, E2p8c), with their corresponding temporally determined actual essences (see e.g., E2p11d, E3p3d, E3p7, E3p9d). How exactly formal and actual essences relate to each other or what exactly Spinoza means by non-existing formal essences mentioned in E2p8&c is a very controversial issue. For different takes on it see, e.g. Wilson, “Infinite Understanding”; Donagan, “Spinoza’s Proof of Immortality”; Koistinen, *On the Metaphysics*; Matson, “Body Essence”; and more recently Garrett, “Spinoza on the Essence.” I myself do not see any gap between the formal essence and the actual being of a thing in duration, but take the latter as a finite temporally definite instantiation of the former that is determined by the infinite eternal whole in which it exists and from which its essence flows necessarily (E1p16). I find Koistinen’s defense of Spinoza’s necessitarianism (op. cit.) and John Carriero’s reading of how to understand the relation between the infinite and finite modes particularly helpful here. See Carriero, “The Highest Good and Perfection in Spinoza” (this volume). What is important for my purposes here, however, is to note that for Spinoza, ideas of things have a form of (objective) reality of their own which calls for a causal explanation within the infinite series of ideas, not things. Physical laws may provide an explanation of what produced the circle but would not tell us anything about the properties that follow from its form or definition or about the determinate way the idea of the circle—its objective being—is instantiated in a particular mind at a particular time, and what other ideas it generates in that mind.

take to be an application of what I called the conceptual independence thesis, which is often stated but not so often respected by commentators (not even by Spinoza himself at all times who may seem to give explanatory priority to the order of physical-mechanical causes—perhaps for no other reason than that it is easier for us to conceive distinctly). This raises questions about the kinds of laws or regularities that govern our affects, the knowledge of which should help us master them and to which I will return shortly.

Adequate ideas are self-explanatory and generate only other adequate ideas and hence cannot cause or explain inadequate ideas. To the extent that the latter can be explained at all, their explanation must invoke other inadequate ideas. Spinoza proudly offers his account of imagination (developed in E2p17-41) and the principles of association (derived in Part III of the *Ethics*) as an explanation of what could be called the “mechanics of inadequate ideas.” Understanding their general causes does not turn the inadequate ideas into adequate ideas, but merely accounts for their order of occurrence, so does not eliminate them, in spite of what Spinoza suggests in demonstrating that we can form clear and distinct ideas of our affects (E5p3-4). At best it increases our awareness of the regularities and complexities of the infinite chains of causes that, in affecting our body and its striving, affect our desire (our idea or awareness of this striving). To understand the ideas of these affections, we need to look to the other inadequate ideas in the mind that concurred in determining their content and form—the specific reality or force with which they assert themselves.

The strivings of human beings and their ideas unfold in temporal existence or duration. In Parts III and IV of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza explains the passive affects that hold us in bondage, he is concerned with actual things existing in time. The modes of thought (ideas) that constitute human minds, including their affections, also have their determinate duration and location; i.e. they unfold within a determinate time-span and at definite places in the natural history of thinking beings. Actually existing things and their affections belong to what Spinoza calls the “ordinary” or “common” course of nature, and it matters to keep this order distinct from that of eternal being or formal essences, because it is not clear if the phenomena we are interested in—the affects (passive or active)—turn up with their definite actual or formal reality in the perspective of God’s eternal intellect and infinite essence from which the formal essences of things follow. For those who may be tempted by idealist readings of Spinoza and take him to identify the order of existence with that of intelligibility, and being with being understood or fully explained, only the latter order seems to count. Whatever does not show up among the things that can be adequately explained is not fully real.²⁹ We have already seen that no inadequate ideas can follow from adequate ones. That means we cannot have adequate cognition of inadequate ideas that seem to exist only *qua* partial and mutilated, and come disconnected from their true causal

²⁹ E.g. Della Rocca, “Rationalism Run Amok,” p. 50, and the citation there given from H. H. Joachim.

history. It does not follow however that affects, because they cannot be fully understood, do not exist.

The formal essences (the objects of the third kind of cognition that Spinoza calls intuition) are included in the infinite attributes of God considered under the aspect of eternity. The order of things existing in actual (temporal) reality, however, is comprised in the idea of God considered not absolutely but as affected by the (infinite) series of finite determinate causes.³⁰ The ideas of individual things existing in actuality are caused by God not *qua* infinite but *in so far as* God is (considered as) affected by another idea of an actually existing thing, which in its turn is caused by God considered as affected by a third idea and so on ad infinitum. (E2p9d) This is what Spinoza calls the common course or order of nature, in which the confused ideas of passive affects have no more and no less actual reality than any other causally effective affections of the body or their ideas can have. Thus, if the nature and properties of things governed by the laws of nature have any reality, so must the human passions and other confused thoughts have, something that Spinoza confirms by treating them as objects as worthy of study as any other natural phenomena:

I consider men's affects and properties just like other natural things. And of course human affects, if they do not indicate man's power, at least indicate the power and skill of nature, no less than many other things we wonder at and take pleasure in contemplating. (E4p57s)³¹

III.

Studying Affects: Laws of Nature and the Science of the Human Mind

The passive affects of human minds, with all their crippling and unbearable confusion, are a source of wonder that indicate the power of their cause. We may wonder at them but, one may ask, can we, who suffer them, actually understand and explain them? Moreover, can we, in understanding them, change them? The laws of nature operate on things in the common course of nature, and whatever follows from any particular affect follows as necessarily as it follows from the nature of a triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles. Take extreme pride (*superbia*), which is defined as “a joy born of a man’s false opinion that he is above others” (E4p57s). Pride is not constituted by this

³⁰ See E2p44-45. So there are for Spinoza these two kinds of actuality, or rather, as I understand it, two ways of considering the very same actual reality of things: (1) their essences that exist eternally *qua* objects of God’s thought as part of the infinite idea of God (or his infinite modes), and (2) *qua* actually existing “in so far as they have duration” (E2p8c).

³¹ Compare E3pref.

false opinion, but by the joy, i.e. the increase of power caused in the mind of the vainglorious by its accompanying idea—namely the thought of oneself as superior. A person confusedly imagines herself as, say, smarter and quicker in wit than others. This causes her to envy and hate anyone equal to her in other respects who she imagines is considered brighter and wittier than she is. Envy and hate cause sadness, and so weaken her power of thinking. According to a psychological law stated in E3p12, a person strives by nature to imagine those things that increase her power of acting. This drives her to look out for mistakes and weaknesses, imagined or real, of those whom she envies, to seek pleasure in thinking of their failures (E3p23) and in putting them down, or when that does not work, in ignoring them and surrounding herself with others whose flattery strengthens her false sense of superiority (E4p57 and E4p58s). Such passive affects, including the desires they cause, with their consequent fluctuations in mental power, are said to follow one another with the same necessity as the Pythagorean properties follow from the nature of the triangle. (E4p57s) Is this to say that the laws of nature, including those of the mind, are somehow analogous to laws of logical or mathematical deduction?

Since God's power of thinking equals his power of acting and creating, "whatever follows formally from the infinite nature of God, . . . follows from the idea of God as an object of thought in God according to the same order and connection." (E2p6c and E2p7c) The things God creates (that follow from his nature and are effects of his power) are objects of God's thought, i.e. ideas in God's mind. These ideas follow from the infinite idea of God according to the same order and connection that things follow from his infinite nature. (E2p7c) There is, on the one hand, the series of finite things considered under the attribute of extension—physical things including my body—and there is, on the other hand, the order and connection of (adequate) ideas or thoughts in God's eternal and infinite intellect, including the (adequate) idea of my mind, i.e. the idea of this actually existing body (with all the causes and effects of its past, present and future states). There is the physical-mechanical order of causes governed by the laws of nature on the one hand and the logical order of deductions on the other, and they famously coincide. My aim here is not to discuss this grand story of Parts I and II of the *Ethics*, but to understand how the account of affects and the psychological theory of Parts III and IV fit in with it.

Anomalous Monism

There are many different ways to understand Spinoza's proposal. One of the most helpful is that of Donald Davidson, whose own view on the relation between the mental and the physical comes close to Spinoza's. Davidson lists the assumptions that Spinoza might have been guided by and that create the cluster of problems his identity-theory is supposed to answer. The first assumption is (1) the existence of a closed deterministic system of physical nature where everything happens according to the laws of nature and

is fully determined by the previous state of the universe.³² The second is (2) the reality of both thoughts and extended things defined so that the world of thought “cannot interact with the physical” (“Spinoza’s Causal Theory,” p. 99). This assumes the thesis of conceptual dualism: “our conception of thoughts, of desires, of memories and of reasons . . . does not include the defining properties of physical objects such as precise location in space, shape, physical texture, and chemical composition.” As a consequence, the physical system that explains causal interactions in terms of physical properties “leaves no room for mental events” nor can mental events be caused by or cause events in the physical world.³³ Yet, this is the third assumption: (3) human perception and action require a very close relation between the mental and the physical, since we perceive or feel what goes on in our body, and since our thoughts are expressed in the physical motions of the body (*op. cit.* p. 98).

Spinoza’s ontological monism in combination with his conceptual dualism saves the above assumptions because it entails two independent ways of understanding the same world. It saves the deterministic physics without giving up on the mental since it is possible at least in principle to have a complete physicalist account of the world that makes no mention of the mental yet includes the mental, which is identical with the physical, in the world. Nevertheless, it is hard to understand this counterintuitive proposal, which excludes any causal interaction between mental affects and physical events or between thoughts in the mind and events in the body. It leads some scholars to downplay Spinoza’s dualism in favor of materialist monism (Curley) and others to overemphasize his dualism. (Davidson follows Curley in citing Donagan as an example, but I doubt this does Donagan’s reading justice.) Some insist on the difference between Spinoza’s and our own notions of explanation and causality.³⁴

Davidson himself seeks to understand the doctrine in terms of an ideal of explanation that Spinoza shares with modern science, which presupposes not only that the system of

³² This reading grants that Spinoza’s ideal of scientific explanation is similar to ours: “Since everything that can affect the system is included in it, every natural event can be fully explained by the laws of nature and any total prior state of the universe.” Davidson, “Spinoza’s Causal Theory,” p. 98.

³³ They are individuated in terms that have nothing in common with physical terms, and their contents can only be determined holistically: “Mental events such as perceivings, rememberings, decisions, and actions resist capture in the nomological net of physical theory” (Davidson, “Mental Events,” p. 207). “There is no assigning beliefs to a person one by one on the basis of his verbal behavior, his choices, or other local signs no matter how plain or evident, for we make sense of particular beliefs only as they cohere with other beliefs, with preferences, with intentions, hopes fears, expectations, and the rest. It is not merely, as with measurement or length, that each case tests a theory and depends upon it, but that the content of a propositional attitude derives from its place in the pattern.” (“Mental Events,” p. 221)

³⁴ Stuart Hampshire, for instance, argues that Spinoza’s ideal of explanation is purely deductive and mathematical and hence distinct from our modern concept of experimental and empirical science. See Hampshire, *Spinoza*, p. 35. For references and discussion of these proposals see Davidson, “Spinoza’s Causal Theory,” pp. 100–102.

explanation is complete but also “that there is a preferred vocabulary in terms of which the laws are stated and the relevant causal conditions can be described” (*op. cit.* p. 102). The ideal of a comprehensive vocabulary of physical science does not rule out the possibility of another irreducibly different vocabulary describing the very same events in mental terms and providing an equally complete but independent system of explanation. Ontological monism, as Davidson has argued, is compatible with definitional and explanatory irreducibility. Token identity, “the fact that each particular that can be identified in the physical vocabulary can also be identified in the mental vocabulary,” does not entail nomological reduction. Indeed, the mental vocabulary cannot be reduced or eliminated since it classifies the particulars differently—in different classes—even though each particular taken individually is identical to one identified in physical terms (*op. cit.*, p. 103).

This monism, which is *anomalous* because it excludes lawful, explanatory relations between the mental and the physical, helps us to see Spinoza’s denial of mind-body interaction in new light. When Spinoza says that “the Body cannot determine the mind to think” and vice versa (E3p2), we should understand him as saying, in Davidson’s words, “that we cannot infer from a cause described in physical terms that a specific mental event will ensue as an effect,” thus denying that “a full and adequate explanation of an event described under one attribute can be given by appeal to a cause described under another attribute” (*op. cit.* p. 104). We need not, Davidson argues, take him as denying that physical events can cause, in some less restricted sense of cause, mental events, but only as denying that they can *explain* them in terms of general causal laws. The physical event of the fire causes my sensation of heat and my visual perception of the fire, as the presence of the person you love causes you joy and contentment. But my belief that the wood is burning cannot be adequately explained in physical terms or by appeal to the laws of nature, nor can your contentment be explained in physicalist terms as a state of your body caused by another body.³⁵ We can still understand the first event as causing the latter, but what we understand as the mental effect cannot be distinctly or adequately explained through

³⁵ Consider Spinoza’s account of the essence of love, and his subtle and interesting correction of Descartes’s definition of love. Love is defined as “a joy (*laetitia*), accompanied by the idea of an external cause” (E3da6). Spinoza explains: “This definition explains the essence of Love clearly enough. But the definition of those authors who define Love as a will of the lover to join himself to the thing loved expresses a property of Love, not its essence.” By the will to join oneself to the other which is a property of Love one should understand neither “a consent, or a deliberation of the mind, or free decision (for we have demonstrated that this is a fiction in E2p48). Nor do I understand a Desire of joining oneself to the thing loved when it is absent or continuing in its presence when it is present. For Love can be conceived without either of these Desires (*Cupiditate*). Rather, by will I understand a contentment (*Acquiescentiam*) in the lover on account of the presence of the thing loved, by which the lover’s Joy is strengthened or at least nourished” (E3da6expl). The contentment in the mind corresponds to a state in the body all right, but it cannot be accounted for merely by the physical presence of the object loved, but by the particular idea or belief in the mind that accompany its presence, e.g. the idea of the presence of this object as beneficial, and which in its turn depends on many other ideas (beliefs) in that same mind about the object and its relation to it.

the cause described in physical terms. Adequate explanations are, as Davidson puts it, “necessarily intra-attribute” (*op. cit.* pp. 104–105).

The concept of explanation Davidson takes Spinoza to share with modern science allows for different degrees of explanatory adequacy. That we do not have access to the full story does not mean there is none. The fact that our knowledge of the cause and effect of some event, say the San Francisco earthquake, may be inadequate does not entail that there is no causal connection: we may correctly identify the cause “even though our knowledge of that cause, and hence our understanding of the earthquake, are partial.” We may even lack the appropriate vocabulary for specifying the cause or effect in a way that would permit their instantiating a law (*op. cit.* pp. 102–103). We can live, qua rationalists, with partial and inadequate explanations of natural events, trusting it is in principle possible to discover the complete story, knowing that it is all spelled out in God’s infinite intellect. We can live with what appear to be brute facts on our cognitive screen as long as we know there is a Principle of Sufficient Reason at work on the level of the grand scheme of things.³⁶ But what are we to do with our passive affects that by definition elude adequate explanation? Davidson gave up on a strict science of psychology continuous with natural science whose laws would be reducible to laws of physics and settles for causal generalizations that fall short of ideal precision and exactitude. It does not seem likely that Spinoza would go along with such a compromise,³⁷ and the question of how to fit human psychology in Spinoza’s grand story still awaits an answer.

IV.

Salvation and Adequate Explanation

Davidson’s analysis of Spinoza’s conceptual dualism and its implications insofar as the project of a naturalistic science of psychology is concerned helps to articulate some worries concerning Spinoza’s salvation project. Finite, human minds do not have access to the order of deduction of ideas in God’s mind. They are entrapped in the limited perspective of their actually existing bodies and those inadequate ideas of bodily affections that make their way to the limited and confused field of cognitive awareness that their

³⁶ Davidson’s reading accounts for the precise parallel between the order of thoughts and that of physical things and events on a global level, so that if the world of thought consists of all the truths about the physical universe including its history, then, Davidson writes, “there is a clear sense in which ‘the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things’ (E2p7). The connection of ideas is that of deduction: a proposition describing one state of the universe may be deduced from a description of an earlier state of the universe by appeal to the laws of nature. The order in which one state of the universe may be inferred from a prior state is the same as the temporal sequence of events it predicts and explains.” “Spinoza’s Causal Theory,” pp. 98–99.

³⁷ Cf. Della Rocca, *Representation*, p. 154.

mind instantiates. (E2p11)³⁸ What is worse, it appears that the full explanation of those ideas would mean explaining away the very phenomena, namely, the inadequate ideas with their particular form or reality. Yet these ideas “follow by the same necessity as adequate, or clear and distinct, ideas,” something we know if we understand Spinoza’s demonstration of E2p36:

All ideas are in God (by E1p15); and, insofar as they are related to God, are true (by E2p32), and (by E2p7c) adequate. And so there are no inadequate or confused ideas except insofar as they are related to the singular Mind of someone (see E2p24 and E2p28). And so all ideas—both the adequate and the inadequate—follow with the same necessity (by E2p6c), q.e.d.

Confused ideas, it seems, are real only from the limited and partial point of view of the human mind, which lacks the adequate knowledge God has *qua* affected by the infinite chain of things affecting the human body and its component parts (E2p24d). This adequate knowledge, however, “is not in God in so far as he is considered as affected by the human mind, but in so far as he is affected by other ideas” (E2p28d&s). God, after all, is not all light and order. God or nature can be considered in many ways, from all actual points of view. Considering God from one of them, God *qua* affected by a human mind, God *is* this human mind, so has all its inadequate and partial ideas including its lack of self-knowledge. To this extent then, the affects and their ideas as well as the partial perspective to which the human mind is bound are as real as can be: they have their particular determinate causes and effects within the larger common order of things that expresses God’s infinite nature.

The mind in suffering passive affects, which it necessarily does as long as it “perceives things after the common order of nature,” has only a “confused and fragmentary” knowledge of itself, its body, or external bodies. Its self-cognition consists of all the ideas of the partial and confused ideas of any of its bodily affections, which are just as confused as are the ideas of the affections constituting their object. By the idea of the idea, considered from the point of view of the human mind, Spinoza means, as I understand this, the awareness of the perceiving or its form, considered as a mode of thought without relation to its object, and which is as confused as is the inadequate perception itself. (E2p21s).

Spinoza, however, does not think we are condemned to perceiving things confusedly as they appear to us in the common order of nature where we are affected by them. E2p29s holds out another possibility, which is to so dispose one’s mind so that it is determined not externally “to regard this or that,” but internally, “from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and

³⁸ Cf. E2p29: “I say expressly that the Mind has, not an adequate, but only a confused [NS: and mutilated] knowledge, of itself, of its own Body, and of external bodies, so long as it perceives things from the common order of nature, i.e., so long as it is determined externally, from fortuitous encounters with things, to regard this or that, . . .”

oppositions.” Being conditioned internally in this way is seeing things clearly and distinctly (E2p29s) through reason. Only when a mind is determined internally is it determined by adequate ideas to recognize and see what follows from them necessarily.

What then does this reordering of ideas amount to? Of the two kinds of adequate knowledge Spinoza recognizes, intuitive knowledge of things through their individual essences and rational knowledge based on common properties or notions, he must have the latter in mind. But how does it apply to the ideas of affects?

The series of inadequate ideas of affections, i.e. the beliefs we live by and act on, are confused ideas of images imprinted by external things on the fluid parts of the sentient and thinking body. Their order and connections are not governed by anything like logical or rational laws. They are compared to conclusions without premises, although it is not clear whether this is because we do not know their premises or they do not have any from which they could be adequately deduced. Yet they are supposed to contain common notions, from which distinct knowledge of their nature and concatenations can be derived. Based on these notions and our limited experience, we may discover some general laws of nature and get glimpses of the true properties and connections of things. Insofar as motion and rest are central to these laws, they must be mechanical-mathematical laws of physics. If rational understanding based on common notions means understanding things and events in terms of mechanical-mathematical laws of nature, then affects and their ideas are among the things to be thus explained and understood. Spinoza’s account in Part II of the *Ethics* of how the body *qua* extended is affected through impact from surrounding bodies, and how it in its turn can affect, through impact, other bodies does suggest that mechanistic physics holds the key to understanding also the mechanics of the ideas of the affects. He seems to place great hopes on this new science of the passions that is on a par with geometry (E3pref), and as many commentators think, he took psychological laws to be derivable from (and perhaps ultimately reducible to) the general laws of nature.³⁹

What this mechanistic program actually can do for psychology is however deeply problematic given Spinoza’s commitment to conceptual dualism and the ensuing view of passive affects as confused ideas that can be individuated and identified only through other confused ideas. Taking conceptual dualism seriously means that even though bodily states and motions in the brain may be causally related, in some rough sense of the term, to ideas in the mind, since there are no bridging laws connecting the two, the former cannot adequately explain the latter. Spinoza himself gives laws of the association of ideas in the human mind that are derived from the conatus principle, which is supposed to hold generally for all things in nature.⁴⁰ But insofar as we are concerned with connections of ideas, their linking or associations in the individual mind depend

³⁹ Yovel, in his *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason*, holds that Spinoza believes not only that “everything occurs by external transient causes obeying the laws of nature” and that the mechanistic paradigm applies to all sciences (p. 165), but also that the (mechanistic) laws of nature are grounded in the infinite modes of God (p. 158). See also Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*.

⁴⁰ See Della Rocca, “Spinoza’s Metaphysical Psychology.”

not merely on the fortuitous order in which external things affect us, but on the current set of ideas in the singular mind and their contents.⁴¹ Common mechanical properties of bodies or brain states (the physical images or imprints in the body's fluid parts) cannot help us pick them out or explain their contents.

Geometrical Method and Human Sciences

To conclude from all this that Spinoza was simply deluded about the explanatory power of mechanistic physics and geometrical method⁴² would be to presume that he was committed to a nomological-deductive ideal of scientific explanation in all domains of knowledge. His naturalistic program, however, requires it only insofar as his ideal of science excludes anything less than strict laws formulated in the vocabulary of physics. In spite of his geometrical method and metaphors, it is not farfetched to think that he may have been prepared to settle for less than strictly adequate causal explanation in mechanistic terms when it comes to moral sciences, including psychology. Consider his naturalist approach to the Scriptures and biblical exegesis. As he explains in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, in interpreting a text we try to follow a method similar to what we use in investigating nature, but he does not present this as an application of the same laws or same pattern of explanation. He writes:

Now in examining natural things, we first of all try to discover the things that are most universal and common to the whole of nature, namely, movement and rest and their laws and rules that nature always follows and according to which it constantly acts (*agit*); then, from there we gradually proceed to others that are less universal things. And similarly, starting with the historical knowledge of the Scripture, one must first search for what is most universal and is the basis and ground of the Scripture, and what, finally, is recommended by all the prophets as the eternal and most useful doctrine for all human beings . . .⁴³

What is important is finding in a given field the most general principles relevant for making sense of the things to be explained, and then proceeding from there to more particular things. The level of precision can vary with the context of inquiry. Historical knowledge of the Scripture, for instance, of the circumstances in which and by whom it was written, serves as a starting point for its interpretation, which must also be guided by general inductively discovered religious, political, and moral principles or ideals. Similarly, the set of ideas constituting the human mind with their general patterns of

⁴¹ See, e.g. E2p18s, E3p51d&s.

⁴² Davidson seems to suggest as much in arguing that the vision of a scientific psychology paralleling physics in precision and comprehension yet respecting the autonomy and holism of the mental must be deemed illusory. "Spinoza's Causal Theory," pp. 107–109.

⁴³ Spinoza, *Oeuvres III: Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, p. 288, and Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, p. 90 (I have altered the translation).

association have their historical and sociopolitical contexts too, which must be taken account of before proceeding to consider the ideas, prejudices, and the individual life stories determining the contents and associations of the passive affects in the particular minds to be explained. If, as suggested above, Spinoza uses action in a non-strict relative sense, he may as well have accepted that explanations can come with different grades of distinctness. Where we cannot have complete adequacy we must live with more or less brute connections, and finding that they follow some regular and general patterns will help us to do that.

What, then, would the function of the deductive model used by Spinoza be? Is there anything that the deductions presented in Parts III and IV of the *Ethics* really can tell us about our affective life that we could not have learned from our own confused life experience and the testimonies of our fellow human beings, including the traditional philosophical literature on the subject? Consider, e.g. the definitions of love and hate and the desires accompanying them in E3p13s.⁴⁴ Does Spinoza's apparatus of propositions and proofs really help us, as Curley suggests, to "understand why a lover necessarily strives to have the thing he loves, the thing which causes him joy, present"?⁴⁵ Perhaps the main role of the deductive model is the less ambitious one of hammering in the dire general insight that there are unavoidable connections between external causes, affective states, and behavior? Learning that our confused affects follow from their (mostly unknown) causes with the same necessity as conclusions follow from the axioms of a geometrical proof should help us keep in mind, for instance, that in harming or benefiting each other we do it not out of our free will but because our actions are necessitated by an infinite series of causes that we can not encompass and control.⁴⁶

Spinoza's salvation project assumes that there is a completely adequate explanation that we can understand at least in part. The freedom it promises can come only from adequate understanding of the true causes of the affects and the laws governing them. Such understanding however does not eliminate them, nor did Spinoza ever think it would. Knowing their mechanisms and laws and being able to predict them may bring pleasure and consolation but only, I surmise, to those whose greatest desire is already to detach themselves from the here and now that matters to common mortals, in order to perfect their understanding (*intelligentia*) without distractions and disturbances.⁴⁷ A telling expression of this attitude is found in Spinoza's letter to Henry Oldenburg,

⁴⁴ Cf. note 35 above.

⁴⁵ Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 116.

⁴⁶ Most of us may have experienced how knowing that one's affects instantiate general regularities or a common story, one that is shared by many individuals with similar natures in similar conditions, can help loosen their hold on one. What seemed unique and overwhelming starts to look uninteresting and trivial, freeing one's mental energy for active thinking that then in its turn may help endure, if not alleviate them.

⁴⁷ Spinoza describes the intellect as the "best part of us" (E4app23) and does not, in spite of having banned good and bad from nature, hesitate to place the highest virtue in the exercise of theoretical reason that he also saw as the source of highest contentment (E4app2-5).

where he comments on the bloodshed during the Second Anglo-Dutch War 1665–67 and its possible outcome. He refers to “that famous scoffer” Democritus, who, if he were alive, would “surely be dying of laughter.” As for himself, he writes:

[T]hese troubles move me neither to laughter nor again to tears, but rather to philosophizing, and to a closer observation of human nature. For I do not think it right to laugh at nature, and far less to grieve over it, reflecting that men, like all else, are only part of nature, and that I do not know how each part of nature harmonises with the whole, and how it coheres with other parts. And I realise that it is merely through such lack of understanding that certain features of nature—which I thus perceived only partly and in a fragmentary way, and which are not in keeping with our philosophical attitude of mind—once seemed to me vain, disordered and absurd. But now I let everyone go his own way. Those who wish can by all means die for their own good, as long as I am allowed to live for truth. (Ep. 30)

Knowing that people as part of nature are all governed by the same laws helps Spinoza bear and tolerate what he used to find painfully disordered and vain: let warriors go to war and get killed, for there is no way of hindering them from acting on their desires whenever external forces concur with these. But he can tolerate this only as long as it will not interfere with his own way of life, devoted to the search for truth, and to understanding the necessity of events.

Being Active and Affected

I will end with some brief remarks on the kind of consolation the understanding Spinoza holds out as a remedy against the passions can bring. Affects should be understood, accepted, and put to good use, but they should not rule our lives, at least not to the extent that they depend not on us, but on causes external to us. Learning about their nature and origin is learning about oneself and one’s place in nature—what one can do to help preserve one’s essential force of existing and whatever degree of autonomy one can have amidst forces one depends on but cannot control. Spinoza proposes neither indifference nor resignation, as Stoic teachings may seem to do, nor does he share Descartes’s optimism about the power of the will. But if Spinoza ridicules the belief that reason can oppose passive affects directly through willpower, his own faith in reason and the blessings of true understanding may still be seen as going beyond that of his most optimistic predecessors.

I have argued that inadequate ideas like those of the affects have reality, and this is precisely why it matters to come to terms with them. They cannot be ignored, and they do not, anymore than affections in general, go away just by knowing their causes. We continue to imagine the sun just as inadequately as we always did, at some two hundred feet distant from us, even when realizing its true distance.

For even if we later come to know that it is more than 600 diameters of the earth away from us, we nevertheless imagine it as near. For we imagine the sun so near not

because we ignore its true distance, but because an affection of our body involves the essence of the sun insofar as our body is affected by the sun. (E2p35s)

The affection caused by the sun in my sense-organs involves the sun's essence, but it does not transparently present the essence of the sun with its true size and distance from the point of the earth where I observe it. In seeing the sun, I perceive it as it affects me, not as it is in itself, and no adequate knowledge will change this. Passions, likewise, will continue to assail me all the same even when I realize how confused and misleading they are. I will continue to rejoice in my illusion that this person I've recently gotten attached to really is my friend who cares for my good and benefits me, as long as images of her with all her charms occupy my thoughts, and this will go on as long as I am under their spell even though I'm shown all sorts of evidence of her knavery and ruthless behavior.

Yet knowing the true distance to the sun clearly matters for the rest of our science, as does knowing about one's passions for our practical action, taking action now in its ordinary sense, not in Spinoza's strong sense of adequate causation. It matters for how we lead our lives that we can learn, even partially, about the accidental and obscure ways our affective attachments, loves, hates, hopes, and fears are caused. That we should be able to act more rationally on that basis, and even change, through reconditioning (exposing one's body to new patterns of connections between bodily impressions and ideas) accidental associations we come to see as harmful, was an idea introduced by Descartes with his principle of "Natural institution" (e.g. AT 11:407). Spinoza, however, rejects the idea that thoughts can cause or change bodily motions, and also denies that we could change the train of our ideas by mere decision of the will, which we cannot control (E5pref). The power of the mind is defined by understanding alone, so the true remedy for the affects lies not in directly manipulating them but in the knowledge of the mind and the reordering of its ideas. (E5pref, cf. E5p20s). But is what Spinoza proposes as an alternative to the Cartesian therapy in the end at all more realistic?

The will, as he defines it, is man's basic conatus or appetite considered only in relation to the mind, and, considered apart from the body, there is only one conatus or appetite in the mind, which is to understand. The will can cause no effects other than increased understanding, which is increased power, hence joy and love for the object of understanding. Reason by itself does not change any affects, which can be changed only by stronger affects (E4p7c), but reason, Spinoza argues, can *cause* affects that are stronger than any of those originating from external causes (E5p7). Thus love and joy that comes with understanding are stronger than any passive affects. Why the intellectual love and joy should be stronger than any other affects is not well explained. Spinoza apparently thinks it has to do with the greater constancy and steadiness of this active affect, which being self-caused is always at hand. Moreover, its ultimate object, God or nature, is superior to (more perfect than) any particular object. The love of God protects us against contingencies and can therefore prevail over unstable affects that depend on fortuitous external causes and contingencies. We protect ourselves against the external forces that

hold us in bondage by (as it were self-caused) actions of our mind. The cause of the activity in our minds is, however, adequate ideas, which are related to God's mind.⁴⁸

Whether, in the end, activity or passivity comes to prevail, in the bundles of ideas (psychic forces) that constitute us, must depend on the proportion of adequate to inadequate ideas in our minds. We read in E3p39 that the mind, whose essence is made up of adequate and inadequate ideas (E3p3), strives to persevere in being insofar as it has both clear and distinct ideas and confused ideas and, moreover, "that it is conscious of this striving that it has." My mind is a mixture of distinct and confused thoughts asserting themselves according to their force of persisting (E3p36) and the desires they cause. So inadequate and confused ideas follow upon one another according to their respective force with the same necessity as adequate, clear, and distinct ideas do. My "decisions" will not affect my trains of thought in the least, but at best will show what turns they take and my ignorance of what caused them. (Belief in free decision, remember, is a paradigm case of confused thinking.) I can, it would seem, increase my own activity only if my body happens to be already in a state of optimal equilibrium (e.g. when all its parts are equally affected as in cheerfulness [E3p11s]), or in some state in which passive affects do not oppose, but instead concur with the mind's own striving, i.e. with its will (E5p10). For passive joys and pleasures do help increase one's power, strengthening thereby the desire for increased perfection (understanding), if nothing else by helping resist external forces opposing it, distracting and weakening one's mental capacity.

Spinoza's disillusioned analysis of passive affects and the mechanisms whereby they enslave us gives good reasons for wanting to regulate them. It also shows that some of them are useful confusions, like those that strengthen our power to exist (in particular, cheerfulness E3p11s and E3da2). Yet externally caused affects, even when they concur with our own power, are always bad, because they hinder us from being on our own, which we are only in understanding, that is, in taking part in God's eternal thinking. Since that is not a point of view we, *qua* finite modes, can sustain for very long, we have to depend on our confused ideas of affects. They make us aware of how external things act on and affect us, and when properly managed help us resist forces working against us. By studying their causes and effects, we may determine which affects are truly useful and which are not (the joys of rational company, seeing a good comedy, hearing a concert, and having a good meal are truly useful, while the pleasures derived from opiates or other addicting things, worthless flattery, and worldly pursuits are not). All of this seems like good sense. But we get few clues as to how those of us who were born and raised with more vices and weaknesses than (intellectual) virtues can get as much as started on the project of freeing ourselves from the excessive bondage of passions. In his more

⁴⁸ God, who is the sum of all ideas, has only adequate and true ideas. It is only insofar as ideas are related to a singular mind that they are inadequate and confused (E2p35s). Only singular minds suffer from confusion; only singular minds are subject to passive affects. In understanding, i.e. working from adequate ideas, we transcend our particular human perspective, it seems, to see things from the point of God, or eternity. I discuss this in Alanen, "Spinoza on Passions" and Alanen, "Spinoza on the Human Mind."

realistic moods, Spinoza may be resigned to the fact that since there is not much to be done about this, the best we can do is learn to tolerate, without harming, one another. This gives primacy to the political project and requires that those who are less rational or self-governed are kept from interfering with those who strive to combat their passive affects through intellectual pursuits that alone can warrant that lasting comfort and contentment Spinoza set as his aim in the early *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*.⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ TdIE §1 and Ep. 30.

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CHAPTER 16

SPINOZA'S UNORTHODOX METAPHYSICS OF THE WILL

KAROLINA HÜBNER

1. DEDUCING A MORAL PHILOSOPHY

SPINOZA'S claim in the *Ethics* is to have constructed a philosophical system that allows him to rigorously deduce moral doctrines from purely metaphysical foundations—ultimately from an account of God's essence—without help from irreducibly and distinctively moral premises.^{1,2} This procedure results in an extremely close-knit relationship between his metaphysics and ethics. And this in turn has at least two noteworthy consequences. In the first place, the overarching moral-philosophical objectives of Spinoza's treatise dictate which metaphysical doctrines Spinoza emphasizes and develops in greater detail.³ (As he himself puts it, God's essence has an "infinity" of consequences, but Spinoza's concern is with those that bear on our mind's "blessedness [*beatitudo*]" [E2pref].) In second place, the close-knit relationship between metaphysics and morals creates a formidable pressure within Spinoza's system also in the opposite direction: namely, Spinoza's metaphysical commitments profoundly circumscribe his potential moral commitments. Perhaps the most obvious example of this concerns Spinoza's metaphysical commitment to necessitarianism. In ethics, this thesis rules out the possibility of a "free" . . . i.e. uncaused . . . will, championed for example by Spinoza's most

¹ I am immensely grateful to Donald Ainslie, Michael Della Rocca, Marleen Rozemond, Donald Rutherford, and Clinton Tolley for comments on earlier drafts of this article.

Terminological note: for the purposes of this paper I will use interchangeably (1) "ethics" and "moral philosophy"; (2) "end," "final cause," "purpose," and "teleology." The term "phenomenon" is intended in a non-technical, generic sense.

² Cf. Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory," p. 270, 285. Cf. Hobbes's classification of ethics as the science of "Consequences from the Passions of Men" belonging to the general science of natural bodies (*Leviathan* 9). Cf. also Locke, *Essay*, 3.11.16, 4.3.18.

³ As has been noted by Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory," p. 268.

influential predecessor, Descartes (cf. E3p2s). This in turn greatly complicates the task of assigning moral responsibility, praise, and blame for actions.⁴

The problem on which this article focuses is a related one. It concerns ways in which Spinoza's metaphysical doctrines fundamentally shape his understanding of the nature of three closely related phenomena of moral agency . . . "will [*voluntas*]," "desire [*cupiditas*]," and "appetite [*appetitus*]" . . . as well as his understanding of their relation to the "good."

In the early modern period, these concepts figured prominently in numerous controversies about agency, moral responsibility, freedom, and objectivity of the good.⁵ So when Spinoza places them—alongside "passions"—at the center of his own moral theorizing, he is certainly firmly in the mainstream of the moral-philosophical tradition of his time. His conception of the nature of the "good" would likewise raise few eyebrows. For example, he grants that will and desire are directed at what is good (E3p9s); he also endorses the traditional contrast between the merely apparent goods of the ignorant "multitude"—the volatile joys of "wealth, honor, and sensual pleasure" (TdIE §3)—and genuine good. And he endorses a whole panoply of traditional names for the latter: blessedness, understanding, tranquility, virtue, salvation, right "way of living [*vivendi ratio*]," happiness, freedom, "love of God."⁶ Finally, as was also common at the time, Spinoza adopts a number of Stoic ethical doctrines, as well as the general Aristotelian principle that ethics as such is concerned with "virtue" and "perfection."⁷

Yet such undeniable continuities between received moral-philosophical traditions and Spinoza's own doctrines are only part of the story. As we shall see in what follows, the initial, rather orthodox appearance of Spinoza's ethics belies a number of quite

⁴ Likewise, Spinoza's doctrine of the identity of mind and body (E2p7s) precludes Spinoza from subscribing to the Platonic belief that the body is a prison for the soul, as well as to the Cartesian method of overcoming slavery to the passions by restructuring the relation of mind and body. Similarly, Spinoza's immanentist conception of the substance-mode relation, according to which all creatures are "in" God (E1p17), phrased in traditional religious language becomes the claim that all things participate in divine nature (cf. E2p49s[IVA]). Cf. Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory," p. 270–71; Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," p. 192; and Lin, "Teleology and Human Action," p. 318.

⁵ This becomes especially true by the time of Kant's practical philosophy: the only unconditionally good thing is a good *will*; cf., *Groundwork* I. Consider also the following problems: if our will is exempt from causal determinations that govern the rest of nature, how can we reconcile the laws of human action with these more general laws? But if our will *is* subject to the determinism that governs natural phenomena, how do we allocate responsibility for evil and maintain a belief in divine goodness and omnipotence? Another controversy concerns God's will: is this will moved by recognition of what is *intrinsically* good? Or is it only God's will that determines what counts as "good," as Descartes had proposed? The notion of will figures prominently in Descartes's moral picture more generally: it is the exercise of our will, by nature compelled toward the good, that is correct or incorrect in moral judgments; resoluteness in willing constitutes our supreme good and virtue, and is the cause of our happiness.

⁶ Many of these terms turn out to be co-referential.

⁷ For Spinoza's Stoic debt, cf. especially E4app32, E5p10s, and Rutherford, "Salvation"; James, "Spinoza the Stoic"; Kristeller, "Stoic and Neoplatonic Sources"; Pereboom, "Stoic Psychotherapy"; and Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 88f.

unorthodox conclusions, especially in what concerns the nature of will, appetite, desire, and goodness.⁸ To be sure, recognizing Spinoza's heterodoxy requires care on the part of the reader. This is because Spinoza masks his disagreements with tradition by an ample use of traditional language. (As he does not tire of repeating, philosophy concerns itself not with words but with things [cf. e.g. E3dazoexpl].) So Spinoza preserves the outer shell of established moral and theological doctrines while filling it with new meanings, ones that would be valid within his own, new, metaphysical framework. In this way he carries out a systematic reinterpretation of inherited ethical concepts in accordance with what he takes to be the true description of nature as it is in itself, thereby allowing such concepts to become part of this account.⁹

One of the principal forces pushing Spinoza to part ways with received ethical tradition is precisely the metaphysical foundation on which he builds his own ethics. For an inquiry like ours—into Spinoza's conception of will, appetite, and desire—there are two metaphysical commitments of particular relevance. These are Spinoza's metaphysical and explanatory *naturalism* and his rejection of *teleology*.¹⁰ Let me quickly define these. First, by Spinoza's "naturalism" I mean his conviction that "the laws and rules of nature, according to which all things happen . . . are always and everywhere the same" and so is "the way of understanding" them (E3pref/G 2:138).¹¹ Human beings are not a "dominion within a dominion" (E3pref/G 2:137). That is, we are neither exempt from the rules by which other beings must play nor privy to a special set of phenomena. Second, a "teleological" conception of nature is (very roughly) one on which things have the properties they do, and *ceteris paribus* develop and act in the ways they do, because of the consequences this has—consequences typically described as an attainment of an "end" or of a "good."¹²

⁸ To be sure, Spinoza often finds like-minded company in the equally heretical Hobbes. For example, both stress the importance in ethics of self-preservation and determinism, and both argue for the priority of desire to goodness and for the need to view human beings as parts of nature (even if they disagree on the existence of the highest good, and the desirability and possibility of tranquility). Cf. Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory," pp. 267–68. On the continuities of Spinoza's ethics with the ethics of Descartes and/or Hobbes, cf. Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 146ff; and Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 88ff; Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, pp. 185–92. Spinoza's debt to Hobbes's ethics deserves more room than I can give it here.

⁹ Cf. Bennett, *A Study*, p. 222; Carriero, "Conatus and Perfection," p. 83. Cf. also Descartes AT 3:506 and Leibniz's claim to "restore" and "rehabilitate" Aristotelian notions "in a way that would render them intelligible, and separate the use one should make of them from the abuse that has been made of them" (*New System of Nature*, p. 139).

¹⁰ This is a controversial claim. See the next section and note 12.

¹¹ For discussions of Spinoza's naturalism, cf. Della Rocca, *Spinoza*; Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology" (which argues that Spinoza *fails* to derive a naturalistic moral theory from his metaphysics [p. 218ff]); Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality," p. 135; Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, pp. 190–93; LeBuffe, "Spinoza's Psychological Theory," p. 1; Garrett, "Representation and Consciousness"; and Lin, "Teleology and Human Action," p. 349ff.

¹² Cf. Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," p. 310. For other definitions, cf. Bennett, *A Study*, §51.4; Curley "On Bennett's Spinoza," p. 44ff; and Lin, "Teleology and Human Action," p. 327. For Spinoza's relation to Aristotelian teleology, cf. Curley, "On Bennett's Spinoza," p. 45; Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality."

In what follows, we will chart the effect both of these metaphysical commitments have on Spinoza's conception of volition, desire, and appetite. But it is especially the second of these commitments that, within a moral context, creates a singular puzzle. For us to be able to see this, I first will need to say a few more words about Spinoza's condemnation of teleology. This will be the subject of the next section.

2. SOME BACKGROUND: SPINOZA'S CASE AGAINST TELEOLOGY

The view that Spinoza undertakes (to quote Jonathan Bennett) a "drastic" and "radical attack" "against *any* kind of teleology" was the consensus among Spinoza's readers for a very long time, even though more recently several commentators have concluded that Spinoza's anti-teleological polemics target divine ends alone.¹³ Already Leibniz complained that the "Spinozist view" "dismisses the search for final causes and explains everything through brute necessity" (*New Essays* I.1, p. 73). This is how Spinoza himself describes his position:

[others have] maintained that the Gods direct all things for the use of men. . . . This was why each of them strove with great diligence to understand and explain the final causes [*causas finales*] of all things. . . . [T]hey sought to show that nature does nothing in vain. . . . Not many words will be required now to show that Nature has no end set before it, and that all final causes are nothing but human fictions [*naturam finem nullum sibi praefixum habere et omnes causas finales nihil nisi humana esse figmenta*]. . . . I have already sufficiently established it, both by the foundations and causes from which I have shown this prejudice to have had its origin, and also by . . .

(To be clear, I will not count here cases where a mental state representing an end produces an effect as "teleological" in the relevant sense.)

It's admittedly artificial for me to address the topic of final causes in isolation from any consideration of Spinoza's view of forms and species, but limited space requires this compromise. For a broader consideration of Spinoza in relation to Aristotelian philosophy, see Carriero's work.

¹³ *A Study*, §51.1; my ital. For similar assessments of the breadth of Spinoza's criticism of ends, see also Schopenhauer, *World as Will*, 2.337; Donagan, *Spinoza*; Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality"; Carriero, "Conatus and Perfection"; and Della Rocca, *Spinoza*. For readings of Spinoza's criticisms as targeting divine ends only, see Curley, "On Bennett's Spinoza"; Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza"; Lin, "Teleology and Human Action"; and Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 198f. There is no room here for a comprehensive refutation of this more modest interpretation of Spinoza's criticism but, briefly, it rests primarily on three arguments: (1) Spinoza's restriction of criticism in E1app to divine ends, (2) his ostensible endorsement there of human ends; (3) his conatus doctrine. We shall shortly see why (3) fails. Regarding (1), the first Appendix is explicitly dedicated to divine nature alone. So the absence of criticism of *finite* ends there fails to show that Spinoza's criticism isn't in fact broader. Regarding (2), Spinoza's attribution of ends to human beings is more plausibly read as describing (not endorsing) our *ordinary and false* self-understanding, one rooted in the belief that we are causally undetermined, and responsible for our misunderstanding of other things, including God (cf. Carriero, "Conatus and Perfection," pp. 86–87).

all those [propositions] by which I have shown that all things proceed by a certain eternal necessity of nature (E1app/G 2:79–80; cf. E4pref/G 2:206.)¹⁴

Spinoza's basic claim is that teleological concepts simply fail to mirror the nature of things as they are in themselves. In metaphysical rigor, there is nothing in nature like a final cause. The correct way to conceive of natural causality is on the model of a deduction of properties *from* an essence.¹⁵ In other words, all that "is" simply "follows [*sequor*]" necessarily from God's essence, in the way that properties of a geometrical figure are inferable from its essence, as stated in its definition (cf. E1p16d, E1p17s/G 2:62).

Spinoza suggests that the idea of a final cause entered the repertoire of human thought only as a consequence of our ignorance of how our desires were in fact produced in us. Instead of attributing them to an infinite series of prior causes, we have come to regard it as the "first [*prima*]" cause—that is, as the spontaneous or uncaused cause that explains without itself being subject to explanation (E1p28, E4pref/G 2:206–207).¹⁶ And we went on to generalize this type of explanation to all things (E1app/G 2:78). For as long as we rely only on sensory experience, and thus on whatever impressions our finite bodies are capable of accumulating, we inevitably fall into confused empirical generalizations (E2p40s1/G 2:121). This, as Spinoza tells it, is the origin of teleology as the thesis of the universal causal and explanatory priority and self-sufficiency of ends.

In banishing teleology from his metaphysics in this way, Spinoza is, to be sure, a thinker of his time. As is well known, the early modern period marked a massive shift in beliefs about the nature of causality. In particular, many philosophers abandoned the Aristotelian view that all natural phenomena are, in their God-given natures, fundamentally directed toward ends, actualizing certain predetermined potentialities. The place of teleology in natural philosophy was by and large taken over by a mechanistic explanatory paradigm. On this view of nature, every state of affairs arises lawfully from a prior one, without any purposes governing the actions and reactions of blind efficient causes.

Yet even among the moderns who championed this sort of mechanism in natural philosophy, some nonetheless held onto a teleological view of *moral* phenomena, thereby preserving a sense of purposiveness in the sphere of human action.¹⁷ This bifurcated

¹⁴ Cf. E4pref/G 2:206 and Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3, 25, 11. The scope of ends Spinoza dismisses here as "fictions" is controversial in line with narrower and broader readings of Spinoza's criticism of ends (see note 13); see discussion in Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," p. 315; and Curley, "On Bennett's Spinoza," p. 40. For discussion of the apparent non-sequitur of deriving an absence of ends from necessity, see Lin, "Teleology and Human Action," p. 322; Bennett, *A Study*, p. 216; and Carriero, "Conatus and Perfection," p. 85.

¹⁵ This is to understand natural causality—including all cases of what Spinoza labels "efficient" causality—as fundamentally "formal" causality. See Carraud, *Causa Sive Ratio*, p. 295ff; and Viljanen, "Spinoza's Essentialist Model."

¹⁶ Cf. Curley, "On Bennett's Spinoza," p. 41; see also Carriero, "Conatus and Perfection," p. 88.

¹⁷ This, for example, was Descartes's position. In his view, although the causality that governs bodies is indeed mechanistic, the union of mind and body that constitutes a human being is divinely and providentially directed towards well-being as its proper end (*Med.* 6).

view of causality is, however, not available to Spinoza: it is closed to him by his commitment to naturalism. For one of the consequences of this naturalism is that Spinoza's prohibition on teleology has to be seen as perfectly general and uncompromising. It has to include human beings in its sweep. In other words, Spinoza's non-teleological, naturalistic metaphysics entails also a non-teleological account of human agency.

Here we come up against an example of the consequences that Spinoza's metaphysical commitments carry for his moral doctrines. For Spinoza's universal ban on teleology means that volition, desire, and appetite cannot, in metaphysical rigor, be end-directed phenomena. So even if Spinoza concedes to the tradition, as we saw above, that willing and desiring are concerned with some "good," this "good" cannot for him play the metaphysical function of an end at which the willing or desiring being might aim. Since Spinoza adopts the ancient dictum that to genuinely know some thing we must know its causes (E1a4), this means that in his eyes irreducibly final-causal explanations are inadmissible. That is, the goodness of the desired object or of the willed state of being cannot genuinely explain why a particular desire or volition occurs or has certain properties.

Spinoza's non-teleological take on phenomena of moral agency certainly goes against the grain of how of such phenomena were typically conceived, whether it be by the Stoics, medieval Aristotelians, or moderns like Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, and Kant. Even putting Spinoza's unorthodoxy on this point aside, the problem is that it is simply not self-evident how such an account could be made coherent or even plausible—that is, how we are to conceive of a volition or a desire if not as end-directed. To deny their end-directedness is, it seems, to deny the phenomenology arguably universally present in willing or wanting to do something: we act *because* the object of such volitions or desires appears in some sense "good."

But Spinoza does not deny that, in the course of ordinary experience, we often *take* ourselves to be acting in view of ends and typically under the aspect of the good. His point is rather that this sort of self-understanding does not furnish an accurate metaphysical picture of the causal relations at work.¹⁸ Indeed, as we shall see again and again, for Spinoza such *prima facie* phenomenological evidence counts philosophically for very little in general. In his eyes, it tends to distort rather than reveal what, in metaphysical rigor, is really going on. As we shall also see, in combination with a commitment to a rigorous derivation of moral truths from metaphysical ones, this conviction drives Spinoza to sacrifice all sorts of moral intuitions and to conclusions that seem to run afoul of both experience and common sense.

To return to the case at hand, what is missing from our teleological self-understanding is the recognition that our representations of ends and goods are themselves necessary

¹⁸ Cf. Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality," pp. 141–42; and Carriero, "Conatus and Perfection," p. 87, 89. For the view that our self-understanding as end-directed agents is also Spinoza's considered view of the nature of human action, see Curley, "On Bennett's Spinoza," p. 40–41; Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," p. 313; Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 198f; and Lin, "Teleology and Human Action," p. 318ff.

effects of prior causes.¹⁹ That is, from the perspective of the merely empirical “first kind” of knowledge, which can give rise to all sorts of errors (E2p40s2, E2p41), we may indeed characterize what appears to us as a matter of ends. But this is not how the intellect would grasp the same situation, adequately:

What is called [*dicitur*] a final cause [*causa . . . finalis*] is nothing but a human appetite insofar as it is considered as a principle, or primary cause [*principium seu causa primaria*], of some thing. For example, when we say that habitation was the final cause of this or that house, surely *we understand* [*intelligimus*] nothing but that a man, because he imagined the conveniences of domestic life, had an appetite to build a house. So habitation, insofar as it is considered as a final cause, is nothing more than this singular appetite. *It is really an efficient cause* [*revera causa est efficiens*], which is considered as a first cause, because men are commonly ignorant of the causes of their appetites. [E4pref/G 2:206–207; my ital.; cf. E4d4]

As this passage suggests, in Spinoza's view a metaphysically rigorous account of human desire for shelter would appeal not to any ends but instead solely to the workings of “efficient” causes—efficient causes no longer subordinated to nor dependent on final causes, as they were on the Aristotelian picture.²⁰ But beyond this emancipation of efficient causes, as well as Spinoza's general commitment to the modeling of causality on a deduction of properties from essences, it is not obvious how we are to understand the nature of the “efficient” causes that, according to Spinoza, are at work in will, desire, and appetite. Although the *Ethics* broaches the topic of causality already in its first line, it never offers an official definition of “cause” in general or of “efficient” cause in particular.

In the face of such an interpretative puzzle, it might be tempting to conclude that Spinoza relies so heavily on terms traditionally used to describe the “good” (terms such as “virtue,” “salvation,” and “blessedness”) because he in fact wants to reaffirm purposiveness in the sphere of human action at least and to endorse the existence of moral ends. But if this were the case, Spinoza would treat phenomena of moral agency as if they were subject to fundamentally different rules than other phenomena in nature, thus abandoning his stated commitment to naturalism. He would also fail to deliver on his promise of grounding his morals in his metaphysics. We could try to avoid imputing this sort of inconsistency to Spinoza by proposing that, for him, moral philosophy is simply not in the business of truth, that it is offered solely for the sake of therapeutic or prudential value.²¹ For example, for the sake of social harmony, it might be useful, even if false in metaphysical rigor, to assert that freedom and a perfected understanding are

¹⁹ For this reason, nature seen through the prism of teleological concepts simply appears “upside down”: “what is really a cause, [this view] considers as an effect, and conversely. What is by nature prior, it makes posterior” (E1app/G 2: 80).

²⁰ Cf. Carriero, “Conatus and Perfection,” p. 74, 89. See also note 15.

²¹ For this kind of interpretation of the status of Spinoza moral doctrines, see e.g. Carriero's description of Spinoza's model of human nature as merely “a practical guide or model that we set up for ourselves” (“On the Relationship,” p. 272).

human ends. The weakness of this proposal is that nothing indicates that Spinoza did not intend his ethics to be first and foremost a collection of universal truths on equal footing with his metaphysics. Indeed, if we take his attempt at a derivation of ethics from metaphysics at face value, this much is dictated by his own epistemology: only adequate ideas can follow from adequate ideas (E2p40). So adequate metaphysical doctrines can imply only equally adequate ethical doctrines. The latter cannot be *merely* prudential expedients or therapeutic fictions. (This is not to deny that Spinoza is happy to give us an extra push us toward enlightenment by involving our imaginations. For instance, his catalogue of the actions of the “free man” (E4p66ff) lets us emulate such actions without genuine understanding and so imaginatively experience ourselves as taking them for an end (cf. E5p10s).)

Therefore we must look for a different solution, one that does not suffer from the above flaws. To state our task more precisely, in order to explain how Spinoza understands the nature of will, desire, and appetite and their relation to the good, we must solve the following two puzzles and do so in a manner that respects Spinoza’s commitments to naturalism, to a rigorous grounding of moral doctrines in metaphysical truths, as well as his rejection of metaphysical teleology. First, we have to explain how Spinoza reconceives the *causal nature* of will, appetite, and desire if the teleological model on which his predecessors and contemporaries rely is no longer available to him. This investigation will take up the bulk of the remainder of the paper (sections 3–6). Second, we have to explain how he reinterprets the relation between volitions (appetites, desires) on the one hand and the “goodness” of the desired object or willed state of being on the other, if this goodness can no longer be viewed as an end that produces and explains our volitions (appetites, desires). We will address this question in section 7.

To begin tackling these two questions and so begin fleshing out Spinoza’s positive account of will, desire, and appetite, we first must look at his account of “striving [*conatus*].” This is because it is fundamentally in terms of striving that Spinoza defines all three phenomena of moral agency. For this reason, the conatus doctrine can be justly described—as Don Garrett once put it—as the “single most essential underpinning of Spinoza’s ethics.”²²

3. THE NATURE OF “STRIVING”

Spinoza’s basic claim is that will, desire, and appetite all share a metaphysical foundation: they are all at bottom a kind of “striving” (E3p9s). To be more precise, striving is what will, desire, and appetite all amount to at the level of more general metaphysical

²² “Spinoza’s Ethical Theory,” p. 271. For similar verdicts, cf. Bennett, *A Study*, p. 215, 231; and Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 87. The conatus doctrine is crucial also for Spinoza’s account of the passions, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. See also TTP 16.

description, where this means bracketing any reference to a specific “attribute” (or fundamental kind of being, such as thought or extension). Conversely, what distinguishes these three phenomena of moral agency is, primarily, the attribute under which striving is being considered.²³ This is analogous to how Spinoza treats discussions of God, for example: by definition, God is a thing that exists under *all* attributes (E1d6). Nonetheless, it is also possible to consider him solely *qua* thinking or solely *qua* extended (E2p1–2).²⁴ Likewise, what the moral-philosophical tradition has come to refer to as “will,” “desire,” and “appetite” are in Spinoza’s eyes merely attribute-specific ways of conceiving of striving.

To grasp the causal nature of these three phenomena, we must first illuminate the causality proper to striving. This will be the task of the next three sections. In section 6, we will look at what is distinctive about the phenomena of moral agency that striving grounds—that is, at what sets them apart, both from one another and from striving itself.

What then does Spinoza understand by “striving?” In the *Ethics*, Spinoza officially introduces this concept in Part III by means of the general metaphysical principle that “Each thing, as far as it is in itself, strives to persevere in its being [*Unaquaeque res quantum in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur*]” (E3p6; transl. alt.). The underlying idea that in nature there is a universal drive to self-preservation has a long history.²⁵ But almost universally throughout this history, this principle was understood teleologically. That is, preservation was thought to constitute an end for striving things, often as part of a providential account of nature. Now, given what we know about Spinoza’s metaphysical commitments, we can expect that this not how *he* understands this principle.²⁶ Indeed, this expectation is borne out in the very next proposition, where Spinoza identifies striving with “essence”:

The striving by which each thing [*unaquaeque res*] strives to persevere in its being [*suo esse*] is nothing but the actual essence of the thing [*nihil est praeter ipsius rei actualem essentiam*].

²³ As we shall see, desire represents a slightly more complicated case because it also involves consciousness. Unsurprisingly, Spinoza sometimes writes as if will, desire, and appetite were simply identical (E3p35d, E3daexpl, E3p2s[ii]). Note that for him the distinction between attributes is what is left of a “real” distinction (E1p10s). See Descartes’s theory of distinctions, PP 1.60.

²⁴ In fact, this would be true of any thing in Spinoza’s metaphysics (see E2p7s).

²⁵ See e.g. Cicero *De Finibus* 3.5–6; Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 19; also cf. Hobbes’s “endeavor” (*De Cive* 1.7, *Leviathan* 6).

²⁶ Again, this is a controversial point. For teleological readings of Spinozistic striving, see e.g. Curley, “On Bennett’s Spinoza,” p. 40ff; Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, pp. 108–109, 164; Della Rocca, “Spinoza’s Metaphysical Psychology,” p. 218; Garrett, “Teleology in Spinoza,” pp. 313–14; Garrett, “Spinoza’s Conatus Argument,” p. 148; and Lin, “Teleology and Human Action.” For non-teleological interpretations, see Bennett, *A Study*, p. 215, pp. 221–25; Carriero, “Spinoza on Final Causality”; Carriero, “Conatus and Perfection”; Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 137ff; and Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 151ff. (Strictly, Bennett has one foot in each camp: he believes Spinoza *fails* to carry out his intention to offer a non-teleological theory of human motivation [p. 231, 44].)

Dem. *From the given essence of each thing some things necessarily follow [sequuntur]. . . . So the power of each thing, or the striving [potentia sive conatus] by which it (either alone or with others) does [agit] anything or strives to do anything . . . is nothing but the given or actual essence of the thing [E3p7&d; my ital.]*

If we are allowed to elaborate somewhat speculatively on Spinoza's behalf, an "essence" is just the set of properties of a thing that are jointly sufficient and severally necessary for this thing to be what it is, such that no thing can exist without having its essence, and, conversely, no *other* thing can have that essence (E2d2).²⁷ In E3p7, Spinoza's fundamental claim is that "each thing" will necessarily produce certain effects—it will necessarily "do" something—simply by virtue of having a particular essence. And this "necessary following" of effects from an essence just is the striving of the thing. In other words, what defines the "efficient" causality proper to striving is the relation between a thing's essence and the effects both produced by this essence and deducible from it, as stated in the definition of the thing. But, as we know, a causal relation in which an effect is explained by showing how it arises from something conceptually and causally prior to it, without invoking any "ends" or "goods" that brought it about and furnished its explanation, is by definition non-teleological.²⁸ In short, E3p7 confirms what Spinoza's general rejection of metaphysical teleology would lead us to expect, namely that Spinozistic striving is not an end-directed phenomenon.

According to Spinoza, then, among the various effects that a thing will necessarily produce in the course of its existence, only the effects that are produced by its own essence will count as constituents of its "striving." More precisely, Spinoza's claim is that any effect will count as composing a thing's striving *to the degree* that it has been brought about by its own essence, rather than because the thing has been affected by

²⁷ In the framework of the *Ethics*, different "things" are distinct from another only "modally."

There is some controversy about whether Spinoza is committed to the uniqueness or universality of essences (see e.g. Della Rocca, *Representation*, p. 87). I cannot address this issue fully here, but I proceed on the assumption that Spinoza posits the existence in nature of the unique essences of really existing particulars, but also allows for rationally constructed universal essences such as the essence of "human being."

²⁸ Cf. E4p25: "No one strives to preserve his being for the sake of anything else. Dem.: The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is defined by the thing's essence alone (by 3p7). If this [essence] alone is given, then it follows necessarily that each one strives to preserve his being"; cf. also E3p9s, E4p52s. This non-teleological interpretation of Spinozistic striving is further confirmed when we return the idiom of a "conatus" to its historical context. For many modern thinkers understood the verb *conari*, its derivatives, and its cognates along the lines of the law of inertia in physics. Indeed Descartes uses the same key turns of phrase as Spinoza when describing "striving" in the course of mechanistic and conditional analyses in his physics, thus within a domain from which he famously banishes appeals to final causes. (Cf. e.g. "each thing, insofar as it is in itself [*quantum in se est*], always continues in the same state" [PP 2.37, cf. 1.28]. Cf. also Spinoza, DPP2p17; Hobbes, *Elements of Philosophy* 3.15; and Newton, *Principia*, 3rd def.) For similar interpretations of the conceptual ancestry of Spinoza's conatus, see Curley, "Spinoza's Moral Philosophy," p. 368; *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 107ff; Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality," p. 132f; Carriero, "Conatus and Perfection," pp. 69–70; Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," p. 194; Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 145ff; and Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 152.

some other thing (E3p9). That is, for Spinoza, a thing “strives” even insofar as it is not the *total*, or “adequate,” cause of a given effect, which therefore cannot be wholly explained by appealing to its essential nature alone (E3d1–2). It is to capture this particular wrinkle in his picture of striving that Spinoza specifies that each thing strives “insofar as it is in itself” (E3p6).²⁹

Spinoza also describes such cases of only partial responsibility for a particular effect as cases of striving on the basis of “inadequate” ideas (E3p9d). And his acknowledgment that things can strive without a clear and distinct understanding of what they are doing or why is particularly relevant for our purposes. This is because it begins to explain how it is possible that, as noted in the previous section, we can sometimes *misunderstand* the nature of our own desires, appetites, or volitions and so take ourselves for example to be acting on ends.

4. THE GROUNDS AND SCOPE OF “STRIVING”

As we saw in the previous section, for Spinoza, striving boils down to the non-end-directed production of necessary effects by the essences of things—or, in medieval Aristotelian parlance, the production of “*propria*.” In other words, striving is nothing other than a thing’s “active,” or effect-generating, essence.³⁰ This explains why Spinoza can nonetheless agree with tradition at least that the conatus represents a *universal* principle (as also befits his own naturalism). This is because, on his account, there is striving wherever there are efficiently causal productive essences; but all things possess essences (E2d2), and all essences are intrinsically causally productive. This last claim follows from a principle asserted already in Part I of the *Ethics*: “Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow” (E1p36).³¹ Any existing, or actual, essence will thus necessarily give rise to some effects, and thus be active.³² Hence each and every existing

²⁹ For alternative interpretations of Spinozistic “striving” (inertial; probabilistic; in terms of inherence, PSR, motive tendencies or present “states” rather than durationally unfolding eternal essences) see Bennett, *A Study*, p. 222; Carriero, “Spinoza on Final Causality,” p. 133ff; Carriero, “Conatus and Perfection”; Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 107ff; Della Rocca, “Spinoza’s Metaphysical Psychology,” p. 194ff; Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 145ff; Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 153; Garrett, “Spinoza’s Conatus Argument,” “Teleology in Spinoza,” pp. 313–14; Lin, “Teleology and Human Action”; and Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics*, p. 194ff. For a more general account of the history of this principle, see Cohen, “*Quantum in se est*.” See also note 23.

³⁰ By E5p29s, there are two other ways one can gloss “actual” in E3p7: as being in duration and as being implied by God’s nature. Given E3p7d, “active” strikes me as the most appropriate gloss. Cf. Spinoza’s comment that “God’s power is nothing except God’s active [*actuosam*] essence” (E2p3s). Spinoza also does not mention “actuality” every time he identifies striving with essence (see e.g. E4p26d), suggesting that this qualification is not meant to represent a significant restriction, as it would be at least on the durational reading of “actual” (since not all things are in duration).

³¹ As has been often noted, Spinoza uses “essence” and “nature” interchangeably.

³² Cf. Spinoza’s claim that from the essential properties of any thing, as stated by its definition, an intellect can infer some further set of properties (E1p16d).

“thing” can also be said to strive to a greater or lesser degree, reflecting the degree of its causal autonomy from its environment.

What this shows is that the conatus doctrine—the great hinge of Spinoza’s moral philosophy—is a direct consequence of Spinoza’s conception of the nature of essence, and more precisely, of his view of essence as something that is causally intrinsically productive. In other words, in conformity with Spinoza’s ambition to deduce an ethics from his metaphysics, the doctrine that founds much of Spinoza’s moral philosophy turns out to be an elaboration of a perfectly general metaphysical principle asserted already in Part I.

The question for us is this: What pushes Spinoza toward this view of essence? Arguably it follows from a conjunction of three very basic postulates of his metaphysics and theology, namely that

- (1) all things other than God are immanent modifications of God’s own being (rather than, as for Descartes or Leibniz for example, substances external to their creator) (E1p18; E3p6d);
- (2) the essence of God (who has no non-essential properties) consists in causal “power [*potentia*]” (E1p34d); this is, more precisely, the power to bestow existence and activity on all things; and, finally,
- (3) all the effects God is capable of producing are necessarily produced (E1p17s/ G 2:62).

In other words, Spinoza’s conception of essence, and hence of striving (and thus ultimately also of the three phenomena of moral agency that striving grounds), stands and falls with his ability to justify these three basic commitments of his theology and metaphysics: substance-monism, identification of divine essence with power, and necessitarianism. Together these entail that all non-divine entities are the immanent affections of a being whose essential nature is to be an absolutely infinite causal power—the necessarily realized power of producing all possible effects. So ultimately each creature strives because at bottom each is nothing other than a determination of this power, an effect by means of which the one substance produces still further effects.³³

We can also put this by saying that all creatures strive because they are all determinate manifestations of *divine striving*—that is, of the activity of the divine essence. At first blush, it certainly might seem strange to think of an infinite and perfect being like God “striving.” For such language may appear to imply a struggle against something. But we must take care not to be misled by the connotations of end-directedness present in the standard English translation of “conatus” as “striving” nor by the fact that, starting with E3p8, Spinoza devotes himself primarily to an analysis of *finite* striving as it unfolds in duration. The conatus doctrine has a perfectly universal scope. As Spinoza says in E3p6,

³³ For other passages that ground striving of modes in divine power, cf. E3p7d, E4p4d, E2p45s, and E1p24c.

it is “each thing” that strives. Moreover, all of the various components of the doctrine fit the divine case just as well: the causal “schema” we have identified as proper to striving—namely, the relation of “necessary following” of *propria* from an essence—equally applies to the causality of the divine essence. For this essence too is a causal “power” from which things—indeed, an infinity of them—“follow necessarily” (E1p34, E1p16). And, as substance, God is by definition “in” himself (E1d3). So when in E1p16 Spinoza declares that “[f]rom the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways,” he is describing nothing other than the divine conatus. God’s striving will of course differ greatly, even if only in degree, from the striving of any finite thing. Unlike our striving, divine striving will not be conceivable in relation to duration; none of it will depend on inadequate ideas; none of it will be resisted, thwarted, or modified by any external causes. For, in relation to God, there are no external causes.³⁴

In seeing the striving of creatures as a manifestation of divine striving, Spinoza carries on the long-standing theological tradition according to which finite creatures, in their deficient ways, imitate God’s own being and power. The key difference is that, in Spinoza’s substance-monistic framework, finite creatures are not just *like* their transcendent creator. They *are* manifestations of God’s own essence and causal power, the finite means through which God exerts this power.³⁵

5. ON THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF SUICIDE

There remains one more element of the metaphysical foundations of will, appetite, and desire that we have left unaddressed thus far. This is the intrinsic connection striving has to self-preservation. For, to recall, Spinoza asserts not merely that each thing “strives,” but more specifically that it “strives to persevere in its being” (E3p6). In the mouth of a Stoic or a medieval Aristotelian, this would mean that things strive because

³⁴ The isomorphism of the general causal “schema” of striving on the one hand, and of the causal schema of God’s production of the world on the other, further confirm that striving should be construed non-teleologically.

It’s controversial to include God in the scope of the conatus doctrine; the most common reading of the doctrine takes it to be applicable only to finite modes. But for this same conclusion cf. also Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 153. Consider also that in his writings Spinoza repeatedly talks about divine “will” (willing is one way of conceiving of striving) and that in *Metaphysical Thoughts* he writes explicitly that God “perseveres” by the “power” which “is nothing but his essence” (CM 2.6/G 1:260). However, either (1) a teleological construal of striving (given Spinoza’s universally acknowledged rejection of divine ends), or (2) restricting the sense of “actuality” in E3p7 to the durational sense (see note 30), would preclude God from being included in the scope of the conatus doctrine. As regards (1), as noted above (see note 13), I side with interpreters who hold that Spinoza rejects all metaphysical teleology, and so also doesn’t permit a teleological reading of the conatus doctrine. Regarding (2), E2p45s offers evidence against a durational reading of striving.

³⁵ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 19.3; cf. Lin, “Teleology and Human Action.”

perseverance in being stands for them as an end. The question for us is this: given his rejection of metaphysical teleology, how does Spinoza reinterpret this relation between striving and perseverance?

The answer can be found in the way Spinoza argues for this relation.³⁶ The argument in question is made possible by Spinoza's underlying, more general commitment to the intelligibility of being. From this commitment, it follows that truths about existence and about causal relations can be discovered through mere reflection on the eternal natures of things, as stated in their definitions.³⁷ The specific premise of Spinoza's argument about the relation of striving to perseverance is that a thing's definition, in stating its essence, states an eternal truth about the conditions of this thing's *existence* (as well as intelligibility) (E2d2). That is, it states what is necessary and sufficient for the thing being defined to be (for finite modes this means, to "be actualized in duration") and to be conceived. On this basis, Spinoza concludes that *logically* no essence can give rise to effects that would entail its own negation and thus the negation of the thing's existence (E3p4), for an essence that (*per impossibile*) contained sufficient grounds for its own negation would in Spinoza's eyes be simply contradictory. That is, it would belong not to a genuine, unified "thing" at all but to a chimera, like a "square circle." In short, logically a thing's essence by itself can never suffice for that thing's destruction (in contrast to the thing's total state at any given time, a state that includes properties due at least in part to external causes).

As a result, for Spinoza to say that all things "strive to persevere in being" is not to name some end that things have when striving, some future or possible state of being that they all want to reach. Rather, it is to name a logically necessary property common to all essential effects. Considered just in its essential nature, abstracting from external causal influences, each thing must continue to be what it essentially is, no matter what else is true of the effects that follow from its essence—no matter, that is, what other qualities its striving involves or by what specific actions it proceeds. The self-destruction of an essence is for Spinoza simply a self-evident and rudimentary conceptual impossibility, tantamount to there being, miraculously, an effect with no cause. As he writes, "Anyone who gives this a little thought will see" that if a thing "should, from the necessity of his

³⁶ What follows is only one of many ways Spinoza's argument about perseverance has been construed. For an alternative reading, see e.g. Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, ch.4, and Carriero, "Conatus and Perfection." For a teleological interpretation, see Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory," pp. 290, 296; Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 198; and Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," p. 213.

³⁷ Cf. Bennett, *A Study*, pp. 234–35; Lin, "Teleology and Human Action," p. 345. For an in-depth study of intelligibility as Spinoza's most fundamental commitment, see Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, "A Rational Manifesto." On the conatus doctrine as a "specification of a principle of sufficient reason," see Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality," p. 132ff; and Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, pp. 138–43. It is not obvious what kind of logic could model causal relations in Spinozistic nature; see Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism," pp. 193f. See also Bennett's criticism of Spinoza's decision to leave temporal considerations out of definitions: since in fact "causal laws cover stretches of time," a thing could cause itself to not exist after a period of time (*A Study*, p. 235; cf. Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 138ff).

own nature, strive not to exist . . . is as impossible as that something should come from nothing" (E4p20s).³⁸

Occasionally in the *Ethics*, Spinoza also implies that a thing's striving involves not merely such non-contradictory effects, but more specifically non-contradictory effects that *increase* this thing's causal power (E3p12, cf. E4p31d). This makes striving look less like mere maintenance of an existential status quo or like simple inertia (to which it is sometimes compared by scholars) and more like phenomena that intrinsically tend toward a maximum (for example, the sequence of natural numbers or the acceleration of falling objects).³⁹ The fact that, without any appeal to ends, striving can take on this sort of "maximizing" profile in Spinoza's framework follows from the fact that it is something a thing does insofar as it is in itself—that is, insofar as it is an "adequate" cause. It is easiest to see the mechanism responsible for this maximization from the perspective of thought. Namely, insofar as any mind is able to act from itself, or adequately, it necessarily continues to increase in its power of producing adequate ideas. This is because the more we (genuinely) understand, the more we can understand.⁴⁰

This is what matters look like when we consider a thing in its essential nature, in abstraction from external causes. But once other entities enter the picture, destruction once again becomes a logical and also a metaphysical possibility. There is no longer any immediate logical guarantee that the conditions necessary for the actualization of this particular eternal essence will continue to be affirmed. And the more what follows from a thing's essence follows inadequately—that is, the less this essence causes and explains any given effect—the greater the likelihood that the contribution of other beings to this effect will bring about undesirable consequences, including diminution of the thing's causal power, and eventually its wholesale destruction (cf. E4p30–31). For this reason, striving has to be understood in conditional or hypothetical terms, as a claim about what a thing *would* do, were it left to its own devices, and per impossible free from the influence of things more powerful and essentially different from it (E4a1).⁴¹

Seen in a more concrete and practical light, Spinoza's principle of universal self-preservation amounts to the claim that suicide is in metaphysical rigor impossible

³⁸ For similarly "logical" readings of Spinozistic perseverance, cf. Bennett, *A Study*, pp. 234–36; and Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 196. Cf. also Hobbes's description of the drive to persevere as "a certain impulsion of nature, no less than that whereby a stone moves downward" (*De Cive* 1.7).

³⁹ For criticism of this increase claim, see Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," p. 213. For an inertial reading, see e.g. Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality," p. 134; and Garrett, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument," p. 145.

⁴⁰ This reading was suggested to me by Don Rutherford. For an alternative proposal, see Carriero, "Conatus and Perfection," p. 79.

⁴¹ For other conditional construals of striving, see Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality," p. 132ff; Della Rocca "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," p. 194ff; and Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 146ff. Cf. also Descartes, PP 3.56. For criticism of such construals of power, see Leibniz, Letter to de Volder (March 24/April 3, 1699), *Philosophical Essays*, p. 172.

(E4p20s). (Indeed, according to Spinoza, it is impossible even to desire or will suicide once will and desire are properly understood as manifestations of striving.) At first glance, this may appear to be simply false—indeed, an offense to everyday experience of candles burning out, metastasising cells, and clinical depression. Unsurprisingly, the thesis has caused much consternation among commentators.⁴² But Spinoza's claim is simply that all cases of *ostensible* self-destruction could in principle be shown to have been brought about by causes external to and heterogeneous to the thing's own essence. In other words, in metaphysical rigor, neither a suicidal person nor a burning candle constitute a unified, single thing. So once again, ordinary phenomenological evidence fails to be a reliable clue to metaphysical truths, not just about causality but equally individuation.

6. WILL, APPETITE, AND DESIRE

We finally have in place enough of the metaphysical picture underpinning Spinoza's view of will, desire, and appetite to be able to say something more specific about these particular phenomena. This will be the goal of the next two sections.

Let me start by quoting Spinoza's own account of striving's relation to will, appetite and desire:

When . . . striving is related only [*solam refertur*] to the Mind, it is called Will; but when it is related to the Mind and Body together [*simul*], it is called Appetite. This Appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation [*conservationi inserviunt*]. And so man is determined to do those things. Between appetite and desire there is no difference, except that desire is generally related to men insofar as they are conscious [*conscii*] of their appetite. So desire can be defined as appetite together with consciousness of the appetite. [E3p9s]

The scholium describes the phenomena in question specifically in relation to human beings. This is in line with Spinoza's stated aim of focusing, from Part II of the treatise onward, on what is most relevant to *our* blessedness rather than dividing his attention among the infinite number of other things that also follow from God. Nonetheless, from what Spinoza says in the passage, we can extrapolate a more general picture of the phenomena in question. For, as Spinoza notes in the course of his discussion of minds, "the things [he has] shown . . . are completely general and do not pertain more to man than

⁴² For discussion of the doctrine, see Bennett, *A Study*, pp. 234–35; Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," p. 200ff; Spinoza, p. 138ff; Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 148ff; Garrett, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument," p. 147–49; and Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 196ff. Cf. also Hobbes, *Dialogue of the Common Laws (The English Works)*, 6.88).

to other Individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate.” (E2p13s/G 2:96)⁴³

The basic thesis underlying E3p9s is one we already encountered earlier: will, desire, and appetite all constitute at bottom attribute-specific ways of conceiving of striving. What we learned since about the nature of striving allows us to flesh out this thesis further. In particular, we can infer that will, desire, and appetite will all refer to ways a thing's essential nature intrinsically determines it to “do” certain things—rather than, for example, describing ways an entity might *respond* to something else that either is or appears to be good. Furthermore, Spinoza's non-teleological construal of the nature of striving implies that the causality governing will, desire, and appetite likewise will not involve ends. For there seems to be no good reason to conclude that the mere act of considering a non-teleological relation in reference to a particular attribute should fundamentally alter the causal nature of this relation, especially if we recall that for Spinoza the “order and connection” of causes is the same under all the attributes (E2p7s/G 2:90).⁴⁴ In this sense, for Spinoza we are indeed merely “spiritual automata” (TdIE §85): our appetites, desires, and volitions are governed entirely by the logical necessity of what is implied by our essential natures.

The three phenomena of moral agency that we are investigating have this much conspicuously in common. But E3p9s also puts us in a position to work out what sets them apart. Take will first. According to the scholium, will is striving considered in relation to the mind alone. That is, it is striving regarded solely under the attribute of thought, or as a relation of ideas. More precisely, to will something is for the essence of a particular mind—i.e. the collection of ideas representing a particular body (E2p13) to imply another idea, representing another thing, or the striver's own modification, or, confusedly, both. Conversely, any representation can be said to have been “willed” to the degree that it has been produced (and thus can also be explained) by the thing's own essence

⁴³ Thus although E3p9s defines the phenomena by reference to a “mind [*mens*],” whereas God for example has an “intellect [*intellectus*],” I take Spinoza to have a more general definition of will, desire, and appetite, according to which “will” for example is simply striving under the attribute of thought, whether it is the striving of a finite mind or of an infinite intellect.

However, as a result of Spinoza's narrowing of his focus in Part II, the formulations in E3p9s are ambiguous in at least two ways. First, Spinoza's reasons for restricting “appetite” there to striving in relation to a mind and body together are unclear. For in principle “appetite” could denote striving (1) under the attribute thought and extension specifically; or (2) under *all humanly knowable* attributes, whatever these are; or finally (3) under *all existing* attributes (although we can conceive, and thus speak, of only those two). But this ambiguity is ultimately inconsequential, since it concerns merely the rules for applying a particular term, rather than the underlying metaphysical picture. The second ambiguity concerns the kinds of things that could have an “appetite.” Namely, does Spinoza wish to reserve this term for human beings alone, or does he cite the human case merely as an example, but *any* striving mind and body can be said to constitute together an “appetite”? Passages like E3p57s suggest that we resolve this second ambiguity in favour of the latter reading. But it seems to me that *any* thing that strives in thought and extension could thereby count as having an appetite.

⁴⁴ The case of desire is slightly more complicated because it includes, in addition to a reference to the attributes, the criterion of consciousness, but Spinoza is clear that this makes no difference to the causal nature of the underlying striving: see E3da1expl, Ep.58, E4pref (G 2:206–207), E3p37d, and E3p57d.

under the attribute of thought, i.e. by the essence of this thing qua mind. Therefore it is no surprise to find Spinoza insisting that, contrary to what some of his predecessors have contended, the will is not any kind of “faculty” (E2p48), separable from a purely representational understanding. In his view, the causal power proper to the mental realm consists solely in the production of ideas, that is, in actions of the mind (cf. E2d3, E5pref/G 2:280). Thus, for example, the divine will—or divine striving under the attribute of thought—is simply the totality of consequences that necessarily follow from God’s essence qua thinking. And this is nothing other than the eternally existent totality of all ideas, or what Spinoza also labels God’s “infinite intellect” (cf. E2p49, E2p4).⁴⁵

This way of conceiving of the nature of the will has at least two noteworthy consequences. First, Spinoza’s reduction of will to ideas produced by the essence of a mind implies that not only human beings but each and every thing, from God to pincushions, can be said to “will.” This is because, for Spinoza, mindedness is a universal, albeit scalar phenomenon: all things have minds, even if of different degrees of complexity. This of course is a result in line with Spinoza’s commitment to naturalism. Secondly, Spinoza’s conception of the will also makes clear that, for him, there can be no such thing as “free will” if by “freedom” we were to mean the absence of determination or the genuine possibility of acting otherwise. And so “[t]hose . . . who believe that they . . . do anything from a free decision of the mind dream with open eyes” (E3p2s/G 2:144). This does not mean that Spinoza has no room in his ethics for any kind of “freedom.” But for him “freedom” means causal self-determination (E1d7). All told, we are quite far here from the notion of “will” entertained for example by Descartes—an absolutely free, *sui generis* faculty separable from a purely representational intellect, and reserved for only certain kinds of beings.

So much for Spinoza’s notion of will. What can we say about Spinozistic appetite? In E3p9s, Spinoza defines “appetite” as striving related to mind and body “together,” and “therefore” “nothing but the very essence” of a thing, “determining” it to certain acts or states of being. In other words, the notion of appetite allows us to pick out what a thing does because of its essential nature under both of the humanly knowable attributes. That is to say, it lets us refer to the striving of the “thing” that is numerically one but is conceived on the one hand as thinking and on the other as extended (cf. E2p7s, E3p2s/G 2:141). Since Spinoza is committed to the numerical identity of a given mind and of the body that this mind represents, on his account no willing can occur unless there is also, simultaneously, a corresponding appetite. That is, whenever the essence of a mind gives rise to certain ideas, the essence of the body that this mind represents will also give rise to certain effects in extension—to certain movements of bodies or stoppages of such movements. Yet, despite the numerical identity of these two causal series, we must also be able to distinguish them; hence the need for the concept of “will” in addition to that of “appetite,” even if referentially the two are redundant. For each attribute, *qua* essence of substance, must be conceivable “through itself,” that is without invoking

⁴⁵ Cf. Hobbes’s view that the will is simply our last desire or aversion (*De Cive* 13.16).

any other concept (E1p10, E1d3–4). And, no matter how extravagant this may sound to a Spinozistically-untrained ear, given that for Spinoza *all* things are both extended and to some degree thinking, in his universe every *res* has an appetite, just as every *res* wills. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza explicitly mentions the “appetites” of “insects, fish, and birds” (E3p57s), but on his account even rudimentary beings such as pebbles and light bulbs will be appetitive creatures.⁴⁶

Finally, E3p9s allows us to say a bit more about Spinozistic “desire.” The scholium defines desire as a kind of appetite, and more precisely an appetite of which one is “conscious.” What Spinoza means by this last qualification is not immediately clear. The notion of consciousness will of course soon afterwards acquire great importance for philosophers; but it is not one Spinoza himself pays much attention to or develops in any systematic fashion. The few remarks he does make suggest that he takes consciousness to be characterized at least by the following:

- (1) it is a scalar property (E5p31s, E5p39s, E5p42s);
- (2) it is accompanied by “knowing” (E2p23, E3p9d, E2p19, E3p30d, E2p35s);
- (3) a higher degree of consciousness signals “distinctness”—that is (by E2p36; E2p13s/G 2:96) “adequacy”—of the relevant ideas, which no longer represent what are in fact different entities as one entity, or solely under some common aspect (E2p40s1/G 2:120–21);
- (4) a higher degree of consciousness also denotes a higher degree of capacity for *autonomous* causation of a variety of effects (E5p39s, E2p13s).

This rough list of some of the properties of Spinozistic consciousness helps shed some more light on what Spinoza might have in mind when he defines “desire” as appetite of which one is “conscious.” Namely, to refer to a thing’s “desires” is to refer to what this thing does because of its essential nature when (a) this nature is conceived of as participating both in extension and thought, and (b) the thing in question is able to some degree to genuinely understand what it is doing—rather than merely experiencing the bodily movements or ideas its essence necessitates through a fog of entirely confused perceptions, as is possible according to Spinoza both in willing and mere appetite.⁴⁷ By Spinoza’s doctrine of common notions (E2p37–38), every mind is necessarily furnished with at least some adequate, or distinct, ideas—for example, those representing

⁴⁶ In what sense can we think of striving as related to mind and body “together,” if (following Descartes) Spinoza views minds and bodies as having nothing in common conceptually? Spinoza cannot mean that there is a single, unified representation of such striving, on the basis of some common concept; for what happens under each attribute must be explained in terms of that attribute alone (E1p10). Presumably thus he has in mind the conjunction of two equivalent descriptions of what is numerically a single causal process, an account of striving from the perspective of thought and an account of this striving from the perspective of extension. (Recall also that God is defined as a thing under all the attributes [E1d6]. This presumably represents another instance of thinking about something under several attributes “together.”)

⁴⁷ For Spinoza’s commitment to the omniscience of each mind, see E2p12.

the pervasive properties of thought and extension. (Hence to some degree every thing is genuinely “active,” a self-sufficient, or “adequate,” cause [E3d1–2]). As a consequence, every mind will have some distinct knowledge of its own essential effects under the two attributes, at least insofar as these constitute particular modifications of extension and thought. Thus on Spinoza’s account every being will experience desire to some degree, just as every being wills and every being experiences appetite. Of course most beings, being capable of few distinct representations, will experience only faint glimmers of desire.⁴⁸ And, to return to an earlier concern, to the extent that what we manage to represent distinctly in cases of desire are the causal relations governing our appetites, we will recognize both their inevitability and their non-teleological nature. But to the extent that our self-understanding as desiring agents is deficient, it is possible for us to falsely take ourselves to be acting on freely chosen ends. But “whether a man is conscious of his appetite or not, the appetite still remains one and the same” (E3da1expl).

Given that Spinoza characterizes consciousness as a matter of what an agent represents distinctly about herself, his lack of attention to this concept—however vexing to a reader—should now appear less surprising. For, as we’ve seen, Spinoza systematically downplays the philosophical significance of the first-personal point of view. It should also be unsurprising that of all the morally relevant phenomena of agency discussed by Spinoza, the one characterized by consciousness is least fundamental in the order of explanation: a category of a category of striving, which itself is determination of divine power. This sequence attests to Spinoza’s belief that in order to have a true moral philosophy, one must observe the proper order of philosophizing (cf. E2p10cs/G 2:93). So one does not set out from a conception of the self, or from the point of view of self-understanding. Rather, one must begin with a universal framework, the most general point of view, and only then figure out how anything like consciousness might fit into this cosmic schema.

Let me conclude this section with three more general remarks about Spinoza’s conception of will, desire, and appetite.

(1) In the first place, it will be useful to bring together and systematize the various facets of Spinoza’s moral-philosophical naturalism brought out by the foregoing analysis. We can represent this naturalism as a combination of two main theses. First of all, on Spinoza’s account, phenomena of moral agency such as will, desire, and appetite do not amount to a heterogeneous domain separate from—or even opposed to—the kingdom of nature, as some other thinkers have proposed. To give an account of the workings of these phenomena, Spinoza does not need to introduce any *sui generis* entities. He can draw solely on perfectly general metaphysical theses about the nature of attributes, essences, causes, God, and thought. And once we grant Spinoza the claim that

⁴⁸ Whether modes can ever have adequate ideas is controversial; see e.g. Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 114. For Spinoza’s notion of consciousness, see e.g. Garrett, “Representation and Consciousness”; and Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, ch. 3.

Insofar as all God’s ideas are distinct, he will be perfectly conscious of his entire appetite, and hence will also “desire” to the same degree as he experiences appetite.

everything that is, is both thinking and extended, all that is needed for appetite, will, and desire to manifest themselves is an essence that is to some degree causally self-sufficient. As noted above, by virtue of Spinoza's doctrine of common notions, this is a condition met by every essence. This is not to imply that justifying the metaphysical theses on which Spinoza relies is a trivial matter, but it shows how deeply this feature of Spinoza's ethics is rooted in his most rudimentary metaphysical commitments.⁴⁹

The second aspect of Spinoza's moral-philosophical naturalism is that human beings are not the sole occupants of the moral and practical sphere, at least as far as volitions, appetites, and desires are concerned. For to some degree every thing necessarily experiences such states. (We can think of this principle as the moral-philosophical twin of Spinoza's infamous panpsychism.) The doctrines Spinoza advances are perfectly general: whatever features are relevant in human beings for the applicability of a concept like "will," they are present to some degree in every being. It is true that, in the *Ethics*, Spinoza's utmost concern is with *our* blessedness. But in principle, an analogous if simpler treatise could have been written about other kinds of beings, with their specific essences, desires, and volitions—an *Ethics* of bees, for example, or an *Ethics* of spoons.

(2) The second general observation I would like to make about Spinoza's account of will, appetite, and desire is this. Given that, for Spinoza, these three phenomena constitute one and the same causal series, his account of their nature amounts to a tacit repudiation of that tradition of moral philosophy according to which moral agents are loci of a fundamental *conflict* between desires or appetites on the one hand and will on the other. This kind of conflict presents both a descriptive problem for moral philosophers (as they try to outline the structure of the soul that would allow for such a conflict) and a prescriptive one (as they advise us on how best to subdue our appetites).⁵⁰ For Spinoza, in contrast, the will is not some "higher" or more noble rational faculty through which we can (and indeed ought to) dominate our unruly, "lower" inclinations. Instead, will, appetite, and desire all identify, from the perspectives of two fundamental concepts ("thought" and "extension"), one and the same causal dimension of a thing's essential nature.

(3) Finally, it is worth noting here that E3p9s does not propose a separate label for striving considered under the attribute of extension alone. We can of course dismiss this omission as insignificant. But if we take it at face value, it suggests that striving that is not referred to the attribute of thought at all does not count as a phenomenon of moral agency, at least in the sense that it does not belong in a discussion that culminates, as E3p9s does, in an account of the good. Striving considered as a relation of bodies alone belongs instead in the so-called Physical Digression (G 2:97–102). On this reading, although striving is indeed an "essential underpinning of Spinoza's ethics," not all ways of conceiving of striving are relevant to an ethics.

⁴⁹ For skepticism about Spinoza's ability to justify the necessity of either modes or attributes, see e.g. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, pp. 254–61, 285–89.

⁵⁰ See e.g. Descartes, *Passions* §47.

Conversely, this lets us give one final refinement to our definitions of Spinozistic will, desire, and appetite. Namely, these are best understood as ways a thing's essential nature *as a mind* necessarily determines it to be and act—whether it is a matter of relations of ideas exclusively, as in the case of willing, or of relations of ideas together with relations of movement and rest among bodies, as in the case of both appetite and desire.

7. THE NATURE OF THE “GOOD”

The final question confronting us—the second of the two guiding questions we identified in section 2—is how, according to Spinoza, we are to understand anything like a volition, desire, or appetite *for the good*.⁵¹ Spinoza certainly agrees that there is some relation between desires, appetites, and volitions on the one hand and the property of “goodness” that certain things appear to have on the other. But, given his rejection of metaphysical teleology, he must conceive of this relation in such a way that, in metaphysical rigor, the “good” does not become an end for the moral agents who will or desire it. The question is, how, precisely does Spinoza do this?

The answer lies in the very same scholium in which Spinoza defines volition, desire, and appetite. His proposal is quite similar to Hobbes's: striving and its manifestations under the various attributes are to be regarded as causally and explanatorily *prior* to any judgments or attributions of “goodness.”⁵² Thus “we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it” (E3p9s). That is, it is not just that our desires or appetites for a good are not responses to the *intrinsic* properties of the thing being judged good (as if goodness were—as some others have supposed—a category of being itself, something “positive in things, considered in themselves” [E4pref/G 2:208]). It is that they are not responses at all. That is, we do not desire or will some object or state of being because of a prior perception or judgment that it is good—in other words, because we have first perceived or decreed its goodness or desirability. In Spinoza's view, the situation is exactly the reverse: if we judge something to be good, this is because some prior desire (will, appetite)—that is, some intrinsic effect of our essential nature—relates us to that thing, whether it be an external object or a represented state of our own being.

This is how Spinoza can preserve the relation of phenomena like volition or desire to the “good” while not giving up on his ban on teleology nor on his attempt to derive an ethics from his metaphysics nor on the truth-aptness of his own ethics. For, on his account, the “good”—any “good”—is not an end that fundamentally explains a thing's actions but rather a necessary effect of its essence. Once again, the phenomenology of

⁵¹ There are many aspects to Spinoza's notion of “goodness”; here I explore only its relation to striving.

⁵² Cf. *Leviathan* 6.7, *De Homine* 11.4.

ordinary experience thus proves misleading. From Spinoza's perspective, the common impression that we will or want something *because* it is good, or because it appears good, is once again only a symptom of our ignorance of our own causal nature as agents.

We can characterize this dependency of moral value judgments on striving more precisely if we recall our conclusion in the previous section, namely that for Spinoza all desires, volitions, and appetites in one way or another must involve the attribute of thought. In this light, the judgement that something is "good" can be understood to be simply one of the consequences of a striver's essential nature under the attribute of thought, i.e. part of what it is for its essence as mind to be causally active. That is, judgments attributing the property of "goodness" to an external object or to a thing's own possible state should be seen as belonging among the ideas that are necessarily produced by the essence of a thing's mind—alongside any other ideas it may entertain about the object of its judgment (e.g. that it is round, green, and edible).⁵³

E3p9s also makes clear that judgments of a thing's "goodness" are not reserved to cases of desire—that is, to instances where our representations are to some degree distinct or conscious. They equally follow from mere appetite and willing. So in Spinoza's universe all things, regardless of their degree of reality, constantly perceive things as "good" without necessarily apprehending such judgments distinctly, simply by virtue of possessing necessarily active essences. And for Spinoza (unlike Hobbes), it is in principle at least fundamentally intelligible, not a brute fact, why things have the desires (volitions, appetites) they do, and hence also why they deem certain things but not others "good." Namely, this is dictated by their essential natures, and these in turn are simply the necessary modifications of God himself.

As far as human beings specifically are concerned, Spinoza writes that, "We know nothing to be certainly good . . . except what really leads to understanding" and that, "What we strive for from reason . . . is nothing but understanding" (E4p26–27). That is to say, insofar as our desires, volitions and appetites follow from the *adequate* ideas that make up our essence as minds, what we desire and will is solely understanding. This is because greater understanding is the one thing we certainly know to increase our power to "act" as human beings (E4pref/G 2:208). And if, unlike the philosopher, we are mistaken about the true nature of our good, and instead pursue "wealth, honor, and sensual pleasure" (TdIE §3), this is because the appetites and desires responsible for such misjudgment follow at least in part from the inadequate ideas composing our essence as minds.⁵⁴

⁵³ Bennett's alternative proposal is that, for Spinoza, moral judgments *supervene on* representational features on the intrinsic states of essence (*A Study*, §52.3); Carriero's is that, for Spinoza, our inertial tendencies are, when conscious, *additionally* accompanied by a "pro-attitude" or affirmation ("Spinoza on Final Causality," pp. 138–41).

I take Spinoza to be making the weaker claim that *if* we judge something to be good, this is explicable as a manifestation of our striving, not the stronger one that everything we relate to as a consequence of our essential nature is also "good" (even if we only perceive this indistinctly).

⁵⁴ For Spinoza's view of species essences, see note 27.

8. CONCLUSION: SPINOZA'S "ETHICS"

The theses I have attributed to Spinoza here are likely, it seems, to inspire one of two diametrically opposed reactions in the reader.

In one sense, it seems difficult to dispute that moral philosophy constitutes the core of Spinoza's overall philosophical project. Even the titles of his works announce that this is his pre-eminent concern.⁵⁵ And, as was noted earlier, Spinoza announces explicitly in the *Ethics* that his aim is to lead us, "as if by the hand," to our mind's highest blessedness (E2pref). It seems that, for Spinoza, philosophy as such is not a purely theoretical or disinterested search for timeless and objective truths, one that would be indifferent to the philosophizing individual. Instead, whatever leads to "understanding" is also genuinely "good" for us (E4p27, cf. E4app4, TdIE §18). So engaging in philosophy is inseparable from undergoing a spiritual and practical conversion—from attaining salvation, happiness freedom and from finding the "best" way of living, just as was the case for Socrates or the Stoics.

From this point of view, Spinoza cannot be thought of simply as a metaphysician, intent on recording the true descriptions of "essences" and "properties" of things. He is also—and in the eyes of some of his readers, first and foremost—a moral and religious philosopher.⁵⁶ From this perspective, his rejection of common sense, of moral intuitions, of the data of ordinary experience, appear simply as the inevitable costs of philosophical rigor in deducing the true conditions of our salvation.

Yet things can also look very different. One can worry that Spinoza's eccentric conclusions—such as his denial of the possibility of suicide, or of our responsiveness to the good—are evidence of a blind adherence to abstract metaphysical logic that renders his ethics incapable of explaining truly significant ordinary phenomena and of honoring beliefs we value.⁵⁷ Indeed, it is not even clear that Spinoza's ethics amounts to a genuine "ethics." It is certainly a rather austere, scientifically detached view of the aims, scope, and methods of ethics, not ethics in the sense of a body of knowledge focused on distinctively human concerns, or on practical reasoning, or on the realm of what

Since for Spinoza value concepts always implicitly refer to an ideal standard (E4pref/G 2:207–208, E4p65d), more precisely striving determines first what we take to be the relevant "model [*exemplar*]" for a thing under consideration, and only by reference to this determines what we regard as "good." Hence in E4pref, Spinoza mentions that we "desire" to form a model of human nature. The model Spinoza offers us there should be understood as a hypothetical or conditional representation of our causal capacities *qua* human. But we can also relate to this model inadequately, and represent as an end for our actions, or something to be emulated or memorized without genuine understanding.

⁵⁵ Cf. Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory," p. 268.

⁵⁶ See e.g. Alquié, *Leçons sur Spinoza*; Curley, "Spinoza's Moral Philosophy," p. 371; and Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory," pp. 268–69.

⁵⁷ See e.g. Bennett's claim that Spinoza fails to capture our ordinary notions of will and desire (*A Study*, §52.4).

ought to be.⁵⁸ Recent readers have chastised Spinoza for his neglect not just of “contingent facts” about “human societies” but even of the mere passage of time;⁵⁹ but already Leibniz condemned Spinoza for “allow[ing] God infinite power only, not granting him either perfection or wisdom” (*New Essays* I.1, p. 73). Indeed we could accuse Spinoza of robbing not only God but also all human beings of the chance to be genuine moral agents: he makes us inhabit a world ruled by brute necessity and stripped of ends, free will, and all responsiveness to value. I mentioned in passing Spinoza’s systematic effort to redefine ethical terms; but for him this involves characterizing their definienda in purely *metaphysical* terms. Thus “virtue” comes to mean nothing more than the degree of causal power an entity has; “good” and “evil,” the degree to which something facilitates or hinders the acquisition of this power; “joy” and “sadness,” changes in the degree of one’s “reality.” In this sense, it is correct to say that, for Spinoza, ethics is just a category of his metaphysics.⁶⁰ It is not a grounding or a derivation of ethics from metaphysics but a reduction of the former to the latter. So it is perhaps unsurprising that over the centuries some of his readers have regarded Spinoza as the “most godless atheist the world has ever seen,” spreading opinions “infinitely prejudicial to all the societies and concerns of mankind.”⁶¹

But whatever verdict we pass on Spinoza’s interpretation of moral philosophy, we have to acknowledge the basic contention behind his proposals: that his way of doing ethics is the only way we can rehabilitate and retain ethics as a project of *veridical* thought, and so get hold of universally valid moral truths, ones that accord with what we know about nature and God as they are in themselves.

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⁵⁸ Similarly, Spinoza’s epistemology may leave us wondering whether he can account for genuine reasoning and self-consciousness. See Wilson, “Objects, Ideas, and ‘Minds.’”

⁵⁹ Bennett, *A Study*, p. 235, 306.

⁶⁰ Cf. Garrett, “Spinoza’s Ethical Theory,” p. 286.

⁶¹ Words of eighteenth-century theologian Burmannus (in Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 419).

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CHAPTER 17

ETERNITY

CHANTAL JAQUET

ETERNITY is a property that substance and modes have in common. God is eternal and so are modes: fully if they are infinite, partly if they are finite, as human beings are. Spinoza posits in E5p23 that “the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal.” Thus, men have both an indefinite existence or duration, and an eternal one. Their body dies and their imagination with it, but their understanding or their intellect (*intellectus*), which is the part of the mind constituted by adequate ideas, is eternal. This thesis sounds very odd because it seems to stand in contradiction to the “parallelism” or rather the equality¹ between body and mind. If the mind is nothing but the idea of the body actually existing, according to E2p13, it ought to be destroyed when the body dies. How can it partly remain? One may wonder whether Spinoza really thinks that the mind enjoys eternal existence or if he is merely paying lip service to a traditional belief. What does he mean when he states in E5p23s that “we feel and experience (*experimur*) that we are eternal”?²

To understand this mysterious statement, let us start by examining the way Spinoza defines eternity in E1d8:

By eternity I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing.

¹ To qualify the mind/body relationship, we prefer using the word “equality,” which Spinoza himself uses in E3p28d, instead of the word “parallelism,” which would imply some kind of dualism and entail false representations. On that point, see Jaquet, *L'unité du corps et de l'esprit*, ch. 1, “Pour en finir avec le parallélisme,” pp. 9–22.

² The word “Experience” is not quite adequate because Spinoza distinguishes “*mera experientia*” from “*experimentum*”; the word “Experiment” would be better because we are conducting something that looks like a scientific experiment. The experience indeed is an intellectual one; it is due to demonstrations and has nothing to do with an empirical fact. To say “experiment that,” however, is awkward.

Explanation: For such existence, like the essence of the thing, is conceived as an eternal truth, and on that account cannot be explained by duration or *tempus*, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end.

Let us first note that eternity is not related to a particular kind of being. It does not expressly refer to substance, and nothing stops us from ascribing this property to whatever kind of being fulfils this definition. Spinoza uses the expression “eternal thing,” which seems imprecise and somewhat circular to define eternity, but he probably does so on purpose. This expression may refer to substance, attributes, or modes. It is something new, for in traditional accounts, strictly speaking, the creator is the only one who is eternal, his creatures can only be immortal at best—provided they deserve it, of course. Eternity is existence *tota simul*; it has no beginning or end. It belongs to God because he is immutable. Aquinas, for example, posits that eternity is nothing but God himself and that we can find it only in God because it is a property that is a consequence of his immutability. Thus eternity is not a communicable attribute, for God is the only one who is absolutely immutable.³ Creatures are changing and moving so they can only partake of God’s eternity and enjoy some sort of eternity themselves. Thomists conceive of special forms of temporality as proportionate to each kind of being. God’s existence is measured by eternity and has no before or after. An angel’s existence is measured by *aevum* (“eviternity”), which reconciles immutability and local change, because angels can move into the space without being submitted to corruption; *aevum* is compatible with before and after, though it has a beginning but no end.⁴ As for men’s existence, it is measured by time, which has a beginning and an end; it is successive, finite: yet it can be immortal if the human soul is virtuous and faithful. In his early writings, CM, or Ep. 12⁵, Spinoza, partly reflects the traditional account of duration and eternity though he never mentions *aevum*. In CM 2.1, he posits that God’s infinite existence is called “eternity” and belongs exclusively to him, and not to created things which are subjected to duration. The human mind is said to be *immortal*,⁶ not *eternal*.

This is no longer the case in *Ethics*. Spinoza does not consider that there is a special kind of temporality proportionate to different kinds of beings. Eternity is no longer God’s prerogative; it belongs to modes, too. How can we account for this shift?

Spinoza acknowledges that human beings, as well as finite modes, enjoy a temporal existence because he views time as a measure of duration, but he refuses to regard man’s eternity as posthumous life. Eternity is not a reward for virtuous souls when the body ceases to exist. Virtue is not a burden we lay down when we die: it has intrinsic value, it is a joy, and it is its own reward. Eternity is timeless and must be distinguished both from perpetuity and immortality.⁷ Eternity has nothing to do with immortality or with any

³ Cf. *Summa theologica*, I, quest. 10, art. 3, resp.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, quest. 10, art. 5.

⁵ See G 4:53.

⁶ See CM 2.12/G 1:276. The Latin word is *immortalis*.

⁷ Spinoza uses the term “eternal” only once in E5p41s, not in order to describe his own position but in order to criticize a prejudice or common belief.

kind of post-mortem existence—whatever that may be—both of which, indeed, would be endless yet imply a beginning. Moreover, it has nothing to do with duration even though it has no beginning or end and is unlimited in every direction. Eternity, therefore, cannot be assimilated with perpetuity or sempiternity inasmuch as these entail an indefinite temporal dimension. Given all this, it is difficult to understand why Spinoza states that the human mind is eternal rather than immortal. Obviously, substance is eternal, because God is a self-caused being and his existence is included in his essence, but this is not the case for modes, especially finite ones, which have a beginning and can be destroyed by external causes. How can they enjoy real eternity?

To answer this question, we need to take a closer look at the peculiar phrasing of Spinoza's definition of eternity. Something is eternal if and only if its existence follows necessarily from the *definition* of an eternal thing.⁸ Let us keep in mind that Spinoza does not say that eternal existence follows from the *essence* of the eternal thing, as one might expect, but from the *definition* of the eternal thing. It is a crucial difference for if he had used the word "essence" instead of the word "definition," he would have ruled out any possibility of ascribing eternity to modes. There is of course a correlation between definition and essence, because definition states the essence of a thing, but in certain cases definition includes something more than the essence of a thing, namely its cause. In the case of God, whose existence follows from his essence (E1p11), using the word "definition" instead of "essence" entails no change. In the case of modes, however, this introduces a major change. For the existence of a mode in no way follows necessarily from its essence (E1p24), but it follows necessarily from its definition. To understand this, one must remember that, according to Spinoza's *Treatise of the Emendation of Intellect*, everything should be conceived, either solely through its essence or through its proximate cause.⁹ If the thing be cause of itself, it must be understood through its essence only; if it be not self-existent, but requires a cause for its existence, it must be understood through its proximate cause. Therefore, if the thing in question is created, the perfect definition must comprehend the proximate cause.¹⁰ If the thing is uncreated, the perfect definition shows its inmost essence, excludes all idea of a cause, and must not need explanation by anything outside itself and or something external.¹¹ In other words, definition is not always synonymous with essence. In the case of God, the two are indeed the same thing. But in the case of created things, the perfect definition includes both the essence of the thing *and* its proximate cause. This is not an idle distinction. If we start from the essence of modes, we can never prove their eternity because their essence does not include God as a cause. That is the reason why Spinoza holds that to the essence of

⁸ E1d8.

⁹ TdIE §92.

¹⁰ TdIE §96; in E1p8s2, Spinoza says that "The true definition of a thing neither involves nor expresses anything beyond the nature of the thing defined." Now the nature of a mode necessarily involves its cause because the mode exists in and is conceived through something other than itself, though its cause, namely God, who "is the efficient cause not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence" (E1p25), does not belong to its essence.

¹¹ TdIE §96.

a thing belongs that which being given, the thing is necessarily also given, and which, being removed, the thing is necessarily also removed; or that without which the thing, and which itself without the thing, can neither be nor be conceived.¹² Thus he avoids the mistake of those who seem to believe that the nature of God belongs the essence of created things when they assert that that without which a thing cannot be nor be conceived belongs to the essence of that thing.¹³ By contrast, if we start from the *definition* and not only from the *essence* of the thing, the proximate cause must be included, and if the thing in question is the human mind, we can prove its eternity. As a matter of fact, the proximate cause of man's intellect is God. For man's intellect is one part of the infinite divine intellect immediately produced by substance insofar as substance is constituted by the attribute of thought.¹⁴ In others words, the idea of the body I am is eternal inasmuch as it is one part of the eternal idea or intellect that God forms of his own essence, and of all things which necessarily follow therefrom¹⁵ In the divine intellect, there is an eternal idea of my mind. That idea is my intellect, and it is eternal like the divine intellect.

But one could object that in God's intellect there is an eternal idea of every thing. The human mind, therefore, would seem to enjoy no prerogatives: eternity is a common property. Every thing is eternal insofar as every thing has a mind because there is an idea of it in God's intellect. In E2p13s, Spinoza holds that "the things [he has] shown so far are completely general and do not pertain more to man than to other individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate. For of each thing there is necessarily an idea in God, of which God is the cause in the same way as he is of the idea of the human body. And so, whatever [he] ha[s] said of the idea of the human body must also be said of the idea of anything." But God's ideas are eternal. Therefore, the human mind and the idea of every extended mode are eternal too. Does this imply there is no difference between a man, a dog, and a stone?

Indeed, there is at least a quantitative difference, a difference of degree. The eternal part of the mind that remains is greater or smaller depending on the capacity for adequate understanding. "The more the mind understands things by the second and third kinds of knowledge, the greater the part of it that remains unharmed" (E5p38d). This criterion permits us to distinguish both between men themselves and between men and other beings. But we must remember that the ability of minds to understand adequately depends on the activity of their bodies. According to E5p39, he who possesses a body capable of the greatest number of activities possesses a mind whereof the greatest part is eternal. Thus, contrary to appearances, the body plays a key part in Spinoza's doctrine of eternity. This is in keeping with the statement in E2p13s for it is just a particular instance of the general method set out here: in order to determine wherein the human mind differs from other things and wherein it surpasses them, it is necessary to know the nature of its object, that is, of the human body. We can grasp the differences among minds and

¹² E2d2.

¹³ See E2p10s2.

¹⁴ E2p11c.

¹⁵ E2p3.

recognize the superiority of one mind over others by reviewing the differences among the corresponding bodies. "In proportion as the action of a body depend more on itself alone, and as other bodies concur with it less in acting, so its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly."¹⁶ What becomes of the mind, inasmuch as it is the idea of the body, always depends on its object.¹⁷

But how can we explain the puzzling fact that the mind, after death, ceases to be the idea of the body actually existing and nevertheless remains? To solve this conundrum, one needs to remember that "actual" has two meanings in Spinoza's philosophy and that it may refer either to a temporal existence or to an eternal one. For, according to E5p29s, there are two ways of conceiving the actuality of things, *sub duratione*, in relation to a given time and place, and *sub specie aeternitatis*:

We conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature. But the things we conceive in this second way as true or real, we conceive under an aspect of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*).

The second way of conceiving implies grasping the inherence and necessity of things in God; it does not rule out the first one, nor does it succeed it after death. The two ways of conceiving can be practiced simultaneously, but the second is the only one that is adequate. The first is an imaginative one, because, according to E2p31, we can only have an inadequate idea of the duration of things. Therefore, the statement according to which the mind is the idea of the actual existing body has two meanings. On the one hand, it means that the mind is the idea of the body existing in relation to a certain time and place. In this case, the idea of the body is an imaginative one, belonging to the first kind of knowledge, and it perishes when the body dies. This is the reason why the part of the mind named "imagination or memory" does not remain. On the other hand, this means that the mind is the idea of the body under an aspect of eternity and that it conceives the existence and essence of the body to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of divine nature. In this case, the idea of the body is an adequate one, belonging either to second or third kind of knowledge, and it is eternal. It corresponds to the part of the mind that remains, named "intellect," whereas imagination and body die.

Contrary to appearances, the equality between body and mind is upheld. When the actual body no longer exists, the mind, namely the imaginative idea of the body conceived in relation to a certain time or place, no longer exists. According to E3p11s, "the present existence of the mind and its power of imagining are removed, as soon as the mind ceases to affirm the present existence of the body." When he posits that intellect is eternal, Spinoza does not grant a privilege to the mind, because the intellect that

¹⁶ E2p13.

¹⁷ See also E5p39s: "he, who, like an infant or child, has a body capable of very few things, and very heavily dependent on external causes."

eternally remains is nothing but the idea of the body conceived under an aspect of eternity, for “in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses this or that human body under an aspect of eternity.”¹⁸ The mind is still and always the idea of the body. According to E5p23d, our mind is eternal insofar as it includes the essence of the body under an aspect of eternity. Therefore, in a certain sense, the body never dies and is always actual—in the second sense of the word—because its existence and its essence are necessarily and eternally included in God. It is not only the essence but the existence of the body that can be grasped *sub specie aeternitatis*. As Spinoza states in E5p30d, to conceive things under the aspect of eternity is to conceive things insofar as they are conceived through the essence of God as real entities, or insofar as they involve *existence* through the essence of God.

We must insist on this point: eternity, like duration, is a property of existence and is not related primarily to the essence of a thing.¹⁹ For God, this makes no difference, because his existence and his essence are one. For modes, however, this means that eternity is not only the property of an essence that remains forever because it is included in God’s attributes, but a property of existence we can feel and experience.

This is a somewhat abstract demonstration because what is mainly at stake here is not so much being eternal as knowing it and enjoying it. This dog is eternal, but does it know it? We should be tempted to say the same about the ignorant man who is unconscious of himself, of God, and of things.²⁰ But in E5p42s, ignorant men are not said to be totally unconscious but *nearly unconscious* (*quasi inscius*). So even the ignorant can be partly conscious of their eternity. Spinoza does not deny this; on the contrary, he posits that “if we look to men’s general opinion, we shall see that they are indeed conscious of the eternity of their mind, but that they confuse eternity with duration, and ascribe it to the imagination or the memory which they believe to remain after death.”²¹ The problem is to understand how we can feel and experience that we are eternal without confusion. In E5p23s, Spinoza gives the solution: “we feel and experience (*experimur*) that we are eternal. For the mind feels those things that it conceives by understanding, no less than those things that it remembers. For the eyes of the mind, whereby it sees and observes things, are none other than demonstrations (*demonstrationes*).”²² We feel eternal through demonstrations, which are the eyes of the mind. Why? Demonstrations produce within us a certain feeling, the feeling of certitude.²³ Certitude is the affect produced by a true idea. A true idea is eternal, and when we know that we have a true idea, that is, when we have the idea of the idea, we feel certain. This affect makes us experience our eternity because we feel that one part of our mind, the true idea we have formed, is

¹⁸ E5p22.

¹⁹ See E1d8 and E2d5.

²⁰ See E5p42s.

²¹ E5p34s.

²² My translation.

²³ See, E4p62d: “Whatsoever the mind conceives under the guidance of reason, it conceives it under the aspect of eternity or necessity (. . .), and is therefore *affected with the same certitude (eademque certitudine afficitur)*.”

eternal. So certitude born of true ideas makes us ascertain our eternity. That is the reason why the more adequately we know, the more we feel that we are eternal.

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CHAPTER 18

SPINOZA'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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IN this chapter I propose a new interpretation of Spinoza's approach to religion. My main thesis is that Spinoza is primarily concerned with a philosophical reinterpretation of Christianity. His celebrated critique of religion, by contrast, is a secondary project. It is not necessary to attain the goals of TTP, accounts for some of the main flaws in TTP's argument, and quite possibly was not part of TTP's original plan.

Nobody denies, of course, that Spinoza has much to say about God. Already in his lifetime, however, he was reviled as an atheist, a view that has recently regained currency. Only this time Spinoza's alleged atheism is not a curse word, but reason for praise among scholars who portray Spinoza as a founding figure of modernity—from secular humanism to liberal democracy. What gave rise to this perception? Since Spinoza's philosophy leaves no room for a *transcendent* God, it seems incompatible with what we mean by *Biblical* religion. How can Spinoza identify God and nature and hold onto a God who creates the world, performs miracles, responds to prayers, talks to prophets, issues commandments, and punishes and rewards? Spinoza's God, we are tempted to conclude, is the God of the philosophers, not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (to use Pascal's famous distinction). This seems to be corroborated by Spinoza's critique of religion in TTP. If we look at what the Bible literally says, Spinoza argues, we find fantastic stories about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who creates the world, performs miracles, and so forth. They bear witness to the vivid imagination of the prophets, but tell us nothing about God's true nature as demonstrated in philosophy. Hence churchmen cannot appeal to the Bible to suppress free philosophical inquiry. Add to this Spinoza's experience of violence perpetrated in the name of the God of the Bible—from Europe's wars of religion to his excommunication from Amsterdam's Jewish community. Could he

* References to the Latin are to Akkerman for TTP and to Gebhardt for all other works. I have sometimes modified the English translations: Curley for TdIE, KV, DPP, CM, and *Ethics*, Shirley (1998) for TTP, and Shirley (2002) for TP and *Letters*.

not expect to usher in a new age of toleration by showing that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is just a figment of the prophetic imagination? Spinoza, then, seems to have had excellent theoretical and practical reasons for rejecting the God of the Bible. Consider, finally, how well all this seems to fit with the evidence we have about Spinoza's views at the time of his excommunication. According to the Augustinian Monk Thomas Solano y Robles, for example, Spinoza claimed that at first he had been "circumcised and kept the Jewish Law," but later "changed his mind" because now it seemed to him "that the said Law was not true [. . .] nor was there a God except philosophically."¹

As attractive as some may find this narrative, it is by and large without foundation. The first thing to note is a puzzle: Spinoza both rejects and affirms the view that the God of the philosophers is the God of the Bible. According to the first two chapters of TTP, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is clearly not the God of the philosophers because neither the patriarchs nor the prophets had clear and distinct knowledge of God, but conceived God through the imagination. Elsewhere, however, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob clearly is the God of the philosophers. Consider Spinoza's interpretation of Adam's fall in the scholium to E4p68 as a parable for man's fall from freedom into bondage. The freedom Adam lost, Spinoza argues

was recovered by the patriarchs [i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] under the guidance of the spirit of Christ, i.e., by the idea of God [*idea Dei*], on which alone it depends that man should be free.

The *idea Dei* is God's "infinite intellect," which apprehends "God's attributes and his affections" (E2p4d). If the patriarchs were guided by God's infinite intellect to freedom, they must have had clear and distinct knowledge of God.

Spinoza, then, seems to engage in both the critique of Biblical religion and its philosophical reinterpretation. Even more puzzling is that the former entails an explicit rejection of the latter. All ties between philosophy and religion must be cut, Spinoza argues in the theological part of TTP. Properly understood philosophy and religion each have their own goal and method and do not interfere in each other's sphere. While the goal of philosophy is to determine what is true by means of demonstrations, the goal of religion is to ensure obedience to the law by means of Biblical narratives appealing to the imagination. Spinoza rejects two alternative ways of conceiving the relationship between philosophy and religion: "dogmatism," which subjects Scripture to reason, and "skepticism," which subjects reason to Scripture. By "dogmatism" Spinoza means the philosophical reinterpretation of a religious tradition, which he illustrates through Maimonides' interpretation of Judaism.

My claim is that Spinoza's approach to religion is best understood as a version of dogmatism. Had Maimonides not been his example of dogmatism, it would have been easier to see this. For Maimonides' dogmatism deviates from the standard version advocated

¹ Revah, *Spinoza et Juan de Prado*, p. 64.

by medieval Muslim and Jewish philosophers in ways that make it incompatible with TTP's defense of the "freedom to philosophize." Here Spinoza sides with the standard version against Maimonides, in particular with the Averroism of Elijah Delmedigo (d. 1493), whose treatise *Examination of Religion* he owned.²

Since Spinoza is writing in a Christian context and for a Christian audience, his version of dogmatism is a philosophical interpretation of Christianity. As scholars have noted, the vocabulary and concepts Spinoza uses for this purpose were in part shaped by the dialogue with his Christian audience—above all Collegiants and other progressive Protestant groups in the Netherlands.³ The distinctive features of this interpretation, however, have no counterpart in contemporary Christian circles. It is best understood in light of the philosophical interpretation of Judaism and Islam, in particular as set forth by Maimonides and Averroes, which Spinoza substantially revised on the basis of his own philosophical and Christian commitments.

I first show that, in the writings prior to TTP, Spinoza consistently advocates dogmatism. Then I outline the dogmatic interpretation of Christianity set forth in his later writings. Finally, I discuss Spinoza's critique of religion and propose an explanation for why he chose to undermine his dogmatic interpretation of Christianity.

SPINOZA'S EARLY DOGMATISM

The thesis that Spinoza endorsed dogmatism gives rise to an immediate problem: We have a great deal of evidence suggesting that Spinoza rejected Scripture as a source of truth at the time of his excommunication in 1656—for example, the testimony of the Augustinian Monk Thomas Solano y Robles quoted earlier.⁴ My argument by no means depends on disputing the credibility of these sources. They are, however, no more than the testimony of an act of youthful rebellion from which Spinoza obviously quickly distanced himself. For in his writings up to 1665—the year in which he started working on TTP—Spinoza consistently adheres to dogmatism whenever he discusses the character of Scripture.

What dogmatism means for Spinoza becomes clear from his critique of Maimonides' dogmatic interpretation of Judaism in TTP 7. Proponents of dogmatism make three key claims: that the founders of the religion—e.g. Moses or Christ—were accomplished philosophers, that religion's literal content—e.g. laws, narratives—offers pedagogical-political guidance to non-philosophers, and that disagreements between religion's literal content and philosophical doctrines can be resolved through allegorical interpretation. Two examples of Spinoza's early dogmatism will illustrate these points. The first

² See Fraenkel, "Spinoza on Philosophy and Religion."

³ See Meinsma, *Spinoza et son cercle*; Gebhardt, "Die Religion Spinozas"; Matheron, *Le Christ*; Hunter, *Radical Protestantism*.

⁴ For a more detailed account of this section, see Fraenkel, "Could Spinoza Have Presented."

comes from the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, published in 1663, which includes a discussion of how we ought to understand Scripture's claim that "God hates some things and loves other things." There appears to be a contradiction: God's will is immutable according to philosophy, but mutable according to Scripture:

But when we say that God hates some things and loves others, this is said in the same sense Scripture uses in maintaining that the earth disgorges men, and other things of that kind. That God is angry with no one, that he does not love things as the multitude [*vulgus*] believes, can be sufficiently derived from Scripture itself. [. . .] Here we are only inquiring after those things that we can grasp most certainly by natural reason [*ratio naturalis*]. It suffices that we demonstrate those things clearly for us to know that Sacred Scripture must also teach the same things. For the truth does not contradict the truth [*veritas veritati non repugnat*], nor can Scripture teach such nonsense [*nugas*] as the multitude imagines. [. . .] Let us not think for a moment that anything could be found in Sacred Scripture that would contradict the natural light [*quod lumini naturae repugnet*]. (CM 2.8/G 1:264–65)

The conflict between the philosophical doctrine and Scripture is resolved in the way every proponent of dogmatism would resolve it: God's love and hate in Scripture cannot be taken literally. The philosopher determines the true sense of Scripture in light of what has been demonstrated by "natural reason."

The second passage comes from Spinoza's correspondence with Willem van Blyenbergh, which took place between 1664 and 1665. One question they discuss is why the God of the Bible prohibits Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge, although the God of the philosophers determined him to disobey that same command:

I say that Scripture, because it is particularly adapted and useful to the multitude [*plebs*], always speaks in human fashion [*more humano*], for the multitude is unable to understand the higher things. For this reason I believe that all that God has revealed to the prophets as necessary for salvation is set down in the form of laws [*legum modo*]. On this account the prophets invented entire parables [*integras Parabolas Prophetarum finxerunt*] representing God as a king and lawgiver, because he revealed the means [leading to] salvation and perdition and is their cause. The means, which are nothing but causes, they called laws and wrote them down in the form of laws. Salvation and perdition, which are nothing but effects necessarily resulting from these means, they described as reward and punishment, putting their words more in accordance with that parable than with the truth, constantly representing God as human, now angry, now merciful, [. . .] now jealous and suspicious. [. . .] Therefore the command given to Adam consisted solely in this, that God revealed to Adam that eating of that tree brought about death, in the same way that he also reveals to us through the natural intellect [*per naturalem intellectum*] that poison is deadly. (Ep. 19/G 4:92–94)

By "revelation" Spinoza means the prophet's knowledge of the means leading to salvation and perdition of which God is the cause—as a scientist knows "through the natural

intellect that poison is deadly." What the prophet grasps thus corresponds to the content of the *Ethics* where Spinoza shows how perdition follows from enslavement to the passions (Part IV), how salvation follows from the power of reason (Part V), and how God is their cause (Parts I–V). Were the prophet to address philosophers, he would explain all this *more geometrico*, in the same way as a scientist would offer a causal explanation for the effect of poison at a scientific meeting. But since he is addressing non-philosophers, he must speak *more humano*, that is, in the language of the "multitude." Whereas from the *Cogitata* passage we learned that the philosopher should not take Scripture's anthropomorphic representation of God literally, here we learn why taking it literally is useful for non-philosophers. By composing a parable of God as a lawgiver and translating causal connections into laws associated with rewards and punishments, Scripture replaces the philosopher's knowledge of the good and his motivation to act according to this knowledge. Adopting dogmatism thus allows preserving the authority of Scripture, which can then be philosophically reinterpreted as a pedagogical-political program for the guidance of non-philosophers.

DOGMATISM IN SPINOZA'S LATER WRITINGS

In 1665, Spinoza starts working on TTP. In its final version, TTP sets forth Spinoza's critique of religion, which entails the rejection of dogmatism. This does not mean that Spinoza gave up dogmatism. In February of 1676, just a year before his death, he is still debating with Oldenburg which parts of Scripture must be reconciled with reason through allegorical interpretation. Consider this passage:

Scripture, when it says that God is angry with sinners [. . .] is speaking in merely human fashion [*more humano*] according to the accepted beliefs of the multitude [*vulgus*]. (Ep. 78/G 4:327–28)

Like many other passages that we will see below, this passage cannot be justified through the method of interpretation that Spinoza promises to adopt in TTP: "to neither affirm anything of [Scripture] nor to admit anything as its doctrine which I did not most clearly derive from it" (TTP Preface 10/S 5).

It is, in fact, likely that the critique of religion was not part of TTP's original plan. In a letter to Oldenburg from 1665, Spinoza lists three reasons for writing TTP:

1. The prejudices of theologians. For I know that these are what mostly prevent men from devoting their minds to philosophy. So I apply myself to disclosing [*patefacere*] such prejudices and removing [*amoliri*] them from the minds of sensible men [*prudantiores*].
2. The opinion of me held by the multitude [*vulgus*], who do not cease to accuse me of atheism. I am driven [*cogor*] to avert [this accusation] as far as I can.
3. The freedom to philosophize [*libertas philosophandi*] and to say what we think.

This I desire to secure [*asserere*] in every way, for here it is suppressed as it were by the excessive authority and the impertinence of preachers. (Ep. 30/G 4:166)

The first and third reasons describe two aspects of the same project: defending the “freedom to philosophize.” The notion is awkward, but likely deliberately chosen to convey Spinoza’s aim. In the *intellectual* sense, “freedom to philosophize” refers to philosophy strictly speaking. As we learn from TTP’s preface, the “one obstacle” preventing potential philosophers from doing philosophy is the belief “that reason must be the handmaid of theology” (TTP Preface 15/S 8), i.e. the view that Spinoza describes as “skepticism” in TTP 15. Ensuring that “sensible men” can pursue philosophy requires “removing” this “prejudice” from their “minds.” In the *political* sense, “freedom to philosophize” refers to the right of all citizens to think and say what they please. As we will see below, the freedom to philosophize in neither sense requires Spinoza’s critique of dogmatism. More important for my present purpose is Spinoza’s second reason. The only way Spinoza could avert the charge of atheism was by showing that the God he affirms as a philosopher is the same as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Demonstrating that his case for philosophy does not undermine Biblical religion was thus one of the three original motives for writing TTP! Hence the goals of TTP, as set out in 1665, are not only compatible with dogmatism, but require it.

Also in TTP’s final version, however, Spinoza is still very much concerned with interpreting Biblical religion along dogmatic lines. At the center of this interpretation is the ideal of intellectual perfection that Spinoza claims to be “our supreme good” (TTP 4.4/S 51). Why is intellectual perfection “our supreme good” and why does God command us to pursue it? Like all things, human beings are determined by the striving for self-preservation (*conatus*), the “the supreme law of nature” (TTP 16.2/S 179). The more power to do things we have, the better we are able to preserve ourselves. Hence we pursue what we think increases our power to act and avoid what we think decreases it. A thing’s perfection, then, is determined by its power, which is measured by the range of effects of which it is the cause. Spinoza’s view that perfecting the intellect is the most empowering activity for us follows from his epistemology. Since “knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of the cause” (E1a4) and since “God is absolutely the first cause” (E1p16c3), “nothing can be [. . .] conceived without God” (E1p15). If we are to know anything at all, knowledge of God must be innate. Hence Spinoza’s striking claim “that God’s infinite essence and his eternity are known to all” (E2p47s).

This doctrine is also taught by Scripture: “the prophets and the apostles clearly proclaim that God’s eternal word” is

divinely inscribed [. . .] in men’s minds, and that this is the true handwriting of God which he has sealed with his own seal, this seal being the idea of himself, the image of his own divinity, as it were. (TTP 12.1/S 149)

To be created in God’s image (cf. Genesis 1:26) thus refers to the *idea Dei* in our mind. Our “supreme good,” however, not only “depends solely on knowing God,” but also

“consists entirely” in this knowledge (TTP 4.4/S 51). Since God is not the external, but the “immanent [. . .] cause of all things” (E1p18), “whatever is, is in God” (E1p15). Hence “the greater our knowledge of natural phenomena, the more perfect is our knowledge of God’s essence” (TTP 4.4/S 51). To fill the innate *idea Dei* with content, we must deduce the effects of God’s causal activity from it (cf. E2p47s). Some do this more successfully than others, which accounts for the differences in intellectual perfection. This explains why perfecting the intellect is the most empowering activity. Recall that a thing’s power is measured by the range of effects of which it is the cause. Since everything we know is deduced from the *idea Dei* in us, it is an effect of which we are the cause. Hence the more we know, the more powerful we are. According to Spinoza, we experience an increase in power as joy. Love in turn arises when we experience joy together with the idea of the cause of joy (E3da2&6). Since we represent God as the cause of the increase in power and the concomitant joy derived from intellectual perfection, we will also love him (cf. E5p32c). Hence Spinoza can say that our “supreme good and blessedness” consists in “knowledge and love of God” (TTP 4.4/S 51). If we rationally pursue what is to our advantage, perfecting the intellect through knowledge and love of God is the “end of all human action” (ibid.). The things that reason prescribes for this purpose Spinoza calls “God’s commands” (ibid.). For knowledge of what contributes to our perfection, like all knowledge, is deduced from the *idea Dei* in us. Hence the prescriptions of reason “are ordained to us by God himself, as it were, in so far as he exists in our minds” (ibid.). Moreover, since knowing and loving God is the goal for the sake of which reason makes these prescriptions, God is also their final cause. Given that it originates in God and aims at God, this “rule of life” may “fitly be called the divine Law” (ibid.). What does the divine Law prescribe? Above all, of course, knowing and loving God. However, one consequence of our finite power is that we cannot live from contemplating God alone. We need many things—food, clothes, shelter, and so forth—to be able to live a life centered on contemplation. These things are not intrinsically good, but commanded by God or reason “insofar as they assist a man to enjoy the life of the mind” (E4app5). Since we cannot supply everything we need on our own, collaborating with others in a political community on creating the material, cultural, and intellectual conditions that promote perfection is “absolutely essential” for us (TTP 5.7/S 64). As Spinoza puts it in TdIE, the goal of forming “society” is “that as many as possible may attain [perfection] as easily and surely as possible” (TdIE §14). This is why the divine Law includes not only an individual “rule of life,” but also “the fundamental principles of the best state” (TTP 4.4/S 51). Caring about the perfection of others is not an altruistic obligation: “nothing is more useful to man in preserving his being and enjoying a rational life than a man who is guided by reason” (E4app9). For the more rational the citizens are, the more they agree on the nature of the good and the more efficiently they collaborate to achieve it. Making our fellow citizens as perfect as possible is thus one of “God’s commands.” Indeed, it is the second pillar of the divine Law: to love our neighbor as ourselves.⁵ Hence Spinoza

⁵ For the two core commandments that make up the divine Law, see TTP 12; on the second commandment, see also E4p37, E4p46, and E4p73s.

can say that if we pursue our perfection and the perfection of our fellow citizens “insofar as we have the *idea Dei*” and live “by the guidance of reason,” we have “religion” and “piety” (E4p37s1).

If we are perfectly rational, however, it is only in a metaphorical sense that we can be said “to obey” God’s commands (TP 2.22). In reality we enjoy complete autonomy, since everything we do follows necessarily from our rational nature (cf. TTP, note 34). We have thus attained the rank of the “free man” described in Parts IV and V of the *Ethics*. A free man will not give in to the “fleshly appetites” of “carnal man” (TTP 4.5/S 52), because the increase of power and joy derived from satisfying these appetites is much smaller than the increase of power and joy derived from perfecting the intellect. According to Spinoza’s moral psychology, “no affect can be restrained except by an affect stronger than and contrary to the affect to be restrained” (E4p37s2). This explains the free man’s motivation to do what he knows to be best: “because the mind enjoys this divine love or blessedness, it has the power of restraining the lusts” (E5p42). In this state, acting freely is the same thing as doing what God commands.

A community ordered according to the prescriptions of the divine Law is a community in which the life of the citizens is ordered towards what is best. For the prescriptions of reason are not only God’s commands but also “the laws of the best state” (TP 2.21). Politics thus ought to aim at a community of “free men.” As Spinoza puts it in TTP: “the purpose of the state is in reality freedom” (TTP 20.6/S 232).⁶ Spinoza’s best state, then, can be characterized as a *theocracy*, or, to use Spinoza’s own term, as “God’s kingdom:” it is ordered by the “precepts of true reason, that is, [. . .] the very precepts of God” (TTP 19.4/S 220). This, of course, does not imply an anthropomorphic concept of God as a lawgiver:

[T]he divine teachings revealed by the natural light or by prophecy do not acquire the force of command from God directly; they must acquire it [. . .] through the medium of those who have the right to command [. . .], and consequently it is only by their mediation that we can conceive of God as reigning over men. (TTP 19.8/S 222)

What scholars sometimes call Spinoza’s “Erastianism”—the thesis that the state is in charge of religion as Spinoza argues in TTP 19—thus needs qualification. For Spinoza, establishing laws is the sole right of the sovereign, which includes the *ius circa sacra*—the right to regulate religious practice. Since *all* laws are divine in a well-ordered state, however, the laws governing religious practice are just one subset of divine laws. The separation of state and religion is not only incomplete in a well-ordered state. They are, in fact, one and the same!

Note, however, that the core commandments of the divine Law—loving God above all and one’s neighbor as oneself—cannot be the object of *political* legislation. They are the fundamental values at which good legislation aims. For knowing and loving God and

⁶ This passage has often been interpreted as Spinoza’s endorsement of “negative” freedom—wrongly as Steinberg, “Spinoza on Civil Liberation,” showed.

loving one's neighbor just are not things we can do on command.⁷ A state can, however, promote them—for example, by establishing an excellent education system and making school attendance obligatory, or by ensuring a fair distribution of goods through taxation. The taxpayer does what a person who loves his neighbor would do on account of charity.

Describing the best state as a theocracy does not specify a form of government. A state is a theocracy on account of its rational order, not on account of the ruling group. Spinoza, in fact, explicitly leaves it open whether the right to enforce the prescriptions of God and reason is delegated “to the whole community, or to a number of men, or to one man” (TTP 19.4/S 220). The ideal state, of course, not only aims at, but *is* a community of free men. In such a state, God would rule directly, i.e. without the intermediary of any political institutions, whether democratic, aristocratic, or monarchic: “if men were so constituted by nature as to desire nothing but what is prescribed by true reason, society would stand in no need of laws at all” (TTP 5.8/S 64). In the Biblical story about Adam before the fall, Spinoza finds an allegorical representation of this ideal: Adam was a “free man” who lived in perfect rational harmony with Eve before eating from “the tree of good and evil” (E4p68s; cf. TTP 4.11).

Spinoza, of course, was never under the illusion that an ideal state can come into existence given the reality of human nature—even under optimal political and educational conditions: “[Those] who believe that ordinary people [. . .] can be persuaded to live solely at reason's behest are dreaming [. . .] of a fairy tale” (TP 1.5). Hence also the *best* state falls short of the *ideal* state. This is a point on which Spinoza insists throughout his works and that clearly sets him apart from Enlightenment optimists. Living under the guidance of reason is not just a matter of overcoming “laziness and cowardice” as Kant claimed.⁸ Most of us are unable to be free men *by nature* (cf. TTP 15.10). For one thing, nobody is born a free man: “all men are born in a state of complete ignorance” (TTP 16.3/S 180). Also in a well-ordered state, then, all citizens start out life under the guidance of non-rational desires. While some grow up to become free men, most remain in this state throughout life. As a consequence, spelling out what the ideal state would look like is a futile exercise for Spinoza (cf. TP 1.1). A good political theory must be compatible with “human nature as it really is” (TP 1.4). This does not mean that Spinoza dismisses the ideal of a community of free men. It only means that he will not lose time describing such a community, but will clarify how a political order compatible with human nature can be made to come as close as possible to it. The best state is a state that promotes the true perfection of all citizens and hence embodies the theocratic ideal to the greatest possible extent. Such a state, Spinoza argues in TTP, is a democracy. A democracy, however, requires citizens who can make autonomous decisions and engage in self-motivated collaboration for the common good. Hence it cannot be realized under all circumstances. The Hebrews, for

⁷ See TP 3.8 and 3.10; cf. TTP 13.

⁸ *What is Enlightenment*, Ger. p. 35/Eng. p. 54.

example, “were at liberty” to adopt any political order “they wished” after the exodus from Egypt.

However, the task of establishing a wise system of laws and of keeping the government in the hands of the whole community was quite beyond them; for they were [...] exhausted by the wretched conditions of slavery. (TTP 5.10/S 65)

Under these conditions Moses had no choice but to establish a monarchy. The excellence of a state, then, is not only constrained by human nature, but also by cultural factors—“the character of the people” (TP 10.7). Spinoza is thus committed to a contextualism that allows for multiple as well as more or less perfect realizations of the divine Law.

Who establishes a political order that counts as “God’s kingdom?” Given that the “precepts of God” for Spinoza are the “precepts of true reason,” we would expect him to wholeheartedly endorse Plato’s claim that this cannot be achieved unless the laws are established by a philosopher. However, a tenacious—and in my view mistaken—scholarly tradition sets Spinoza against Plato. Because of philosophers who conceive utopian states inhabited by men “as they would like them to be,” Spinoza argues, “no men are regarded as less fit for governing a state than theoreticians or philosophers” (TP 1.1). Spinoza is *not* saying that philosophers are unfit to rule. He is saying that because of a certain type of philosophers who write useless utopian treatises this is how philosophers in general are “regarded.” Whether a true philosopher will do everything in his power to promote the perfection of his fellow citizens is, in fact, not a normative question. It follows necessarily from the philosopher’s rational nature. Indeed, every “good citizen” should attempt to persuade the government to enact rational laws (TTP 20.7/S 232). And Spinoza would certainly welcome rulers who studied the *Ethics* and governed in accordance with its principles. According to TdIE, “moral philosophy” is the first science to which “attention must be paid” if the goal is “to form a society” that promotes the citizens’ perfection (TdIE §14). This does not mean that philosophers should have absolute power. On the contrary: a well-ordered state “must be so organized that its ministers cannot be induced to betray their trust [...] whether they are guided by reason or by passion” (TP 1.6). As much as possible, then, rationality—i.e. “God’s commands”—should be institutionalized. However, if “the laws of the best state” consist of prescriptions of reason, I cannot see how they can be put in place without a process of *rational* legislation that gradually implements “God’s commands.”

The problem Spinoza’s concept of Biblical religion is meant to solve is how imperfectly rational citizens can be made to follow the prescriptions of reason. Failing to secure this would have disastrous political consequences. Consider Spinoza’s notion of the “slave”—the human condition opposed to the “free man” on the scale of human perfection. A person “who lives under pleasure’s sway, unable to see and to do what is to his advantage, is a slave to the highest degree” (TTP 16.10/S 184). Whereas the free man acts under the guidance of reason and is motivated by the intellectual love of God, the slave acts under the guidance of the imagination and is motivated by passive affects. The affects are passive because they are caused by things he randomly encounters in his environment.

His imagination turns these affects into value judgments by association: he considers good whatever increases his power and hence causes him pleasure, and bad whatever decreases his power and hence causes him pain (cf. TTP 17.4). However, not everything we subjectively judge good is also objectively advantageous because we frequently miscalculate the effect things have on our overall constitution or on our long-term interests. Thus a “desire that arises from [. . .] a passive affect is called blind” (E4p59s). Guided by the imagination, slaves cannot agree on the good since the things that cause pleasure and pain vary as much as the constitutions of human beings. Hence by “the laws of appetite all men are drawn in different directions” (TTP 16.5/S 181). The disagreements give rise to violent conflicts and make collaboration for the common good impossible. In the “state of nature”—a state prior to any political order—life would indeed “be most wretched” (ibid.) since most citizens would neither follow reason nor the institutionalized rationality of laws.

Spinoza's solution to this problem is this: while non-philosophers cannot act *from* the prescriptions of reason, they can be made to act *according to* them through the rational management of their imagination.⁹ Although the imagination frequently misleads us, it does not do so necessarily. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza illustrates how the imagination works through the example of “merchants” who solve a mathematical problem by applying a rule that they discovered through experimenting with “very simple numbers” or “heard from their teachers without any demonstration” (E2p40s2). They reliably reach the correct conclusion without knowing the mathematical theory from which it is deduced. The aim, then, is to lead the imagination of non-philosophers to endorse the same prescriptions that philosophers deduce from the *idea Dei* in their mind. We already saw the key psychological law that must be observed for this purpose: “no affect can be restrained except by an affect stronger than and contrary to the affect to be restrained.” The resources of the imagination are, in fact, sufficient to motivate the transition from the state of nature to a political order. For “there is nobody who does not desire to live in safety free from fear.” Since this is impossible in the state of nature, everyone “will strive to avoid” it “insofar as he can” (TTP 16.5/S 181). Delegating the natural right to do whatever is in our power to a sovereign in exchange for security is thus an attractive trade-off even from the point of view of the imagination.

If we are rational, however, we want more than just a “secure” life. We want a “good life,” which includes “the cultivation of reason” (ibid.). The prescriptions that must be followed for this purpose can no longer be motivated by the imagination alone. One way to get non-philosophers to comply is by establishing an association between breaking the law and punishment in their imagination. Fear of punishment thus “restrains” the desire to commit crime. No state, Spinoza argues, “can subsist without [. . .] coercion [. . .] to control men's lusts and their unbridled urges” (TTP 5.8/S 64). Although fear is a non-rational motive, Spinoza argues, we are freer when we do what is rational than when we do what is not rational on account of a non-rational motive (cf. TTP 16.10).

⁹ Steinberg, “Spinoza on Civil Liberation,” p. 46.

Coercion, however, is only a last resort. A person who does what is right from fear “cannot be called just” (TTP 4.2/S 50), and a state based on coercion through fear of “capital or other punishment” is unstable on the long run (TTP 5.8/S 64). Far superior to coercion are the narratives of Scripture. Although they cannot give “clear knowledge” of “what God is and in what way he sustains and directs all things and cares for men,” they “can still teach and enlighten men as far as suffices to impress on their minds obedience and devotion” (TTP 5.16; S 68). Hence “knowledge of these writings and belief in them is in the highest degree necessary for the common people who lack the ability to perceive things clearly and distinctly” (*ibid.*). A legislator whose goal is to teach “an entire nation” or even “the whole of humankind” cannot “set before them a logical chain of reasoning.” He “must rely entirely on an appeal to experience and [. . .] above all adapt his argument [. . .] to the understanding of the common people” (TTP 5.14/S 67–68). Logical deduction must be replaced by an appeal to experience because the imagination construes its concept by associating impressions caused by the things we randomly encounter around us. The concept of God is a good example. Given Spinoza’s claim that knowledge of God is innate, he must account for why non-philosophers represent God in a confused manner: since “they cannot imagine God, as they can bodies, [. . .] they have joined the name ‘God’ to the images of things which they are used to seeing” (E2p47s). Spinoza can thus explain why the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at first view greatly differs from the God of the philosophers: because Scripture’s “language and reasoning is adapted to the understanding of the common people” (TTP 5.15/S 68). We can now see how Scripture’s legal and narrative contents complement each other: while the former ground laws that promote the love of God and of one’s neighbor, the latter ensure that non-philosophers follow these laws by instilling in them obedience and devotion.

The core doctrines taught by Scripture make up what Spinoza calls the “catholic or universal faith” (TTP 14.9/S 166). Everyone agrees, he argues, “that Scripture was written and disseminated [. . .] for all men of every time and race” (TTP 14.3/S 164). Hence Scripture’s core doctrines cannot include any “that good men may regard as controversial” (TTP 14.9/S 166). These doctrines are not derived exegetically from Scripture but analytically from the concept of obedience. They are conditions “without which [. . .] obedience is absolutely impossible” (TTP 14.9/S 167) The “basic teachings which Scripture as a whole intends to convey” are seven:

1. God, that is a Supreme Being, exists, supremely just and merciful, the exemplar of true life. He who knows not, or does not believe, that God exists, cannot obey him or know him as a judge.
2. God is one alone. No one can doubt that this belief is essential for complete devotion, reverence, that is love towards God; for devotion, reverence and love spring only from the pre-eminence of one above all others.
3. God is omnipresent, and all things are open to him. If it were believed that things could be concealed from God, or if it were not realized that he sees everything, one might doubt [. . .] the uniformity of the justice wherewith he directs everything.
4. God has supreme right and dominion over all things. [. . .] All are required to obey him absolutely, while he obeys none.
5. Worship of God and obedience to him consists solely in justice and charity, or love towards one’s neighbor.
6. All who obey God are saved; others, who live at pleasure’s behest are lost. If men did not firmly believe this, there

is no reason why they should obey God rather than their desires. 7. God forgives repentant sinners. There is no one who does not sin, so that without this belief all would despair of salvation. (TTP 14.10/S 167)

If these doctrines shape the imagination of non-philosophers from childhood on, they will believe in an omniscient and omnipotent God and associate obeying God with reward and disobeying him with punishment. The hope for reward and the fear of punishment would in most cases be powerful enough to “restrain” illicit desires. We can thus see the key moral-political role that Spinoza assigns to religion: it translates the free man’s religion of reason into a pedagogical-political program accessible to the imagination. Laws and narratives order the life of non-philosophers towards what is best, mediating the prescriptions of reason and providing the motivation to follow them. This program not only replaces the guidance of reason for non-philosophers. It also prepares not-yet-philosophers for the philosophical life. This is one reason why prophets “commended so greatly” non-rational affects like hope and fear. For

those who are subject to these affects can be guided far more easily than others, so that in the end they may live from the guidance of reason, i.e., may be free to enjoy the life of the blessed. (E4p54s)

In Spinoza’s fourfold typology of agents, the pious man occupies the second rank: below the free man, but above the man who acts from fear of punishment and the man enslaved to his passions.¹⁰ However, while the fear of divine retribution may be more efficient for ensuring long-term obedience than the fear of punishment through the state, it does not seem to imply greater perfection, since a person who obeys on account of fear “cannot be called just” as we saw. And is the pious man not barred by nature from sharing in knowledge and love of God, that is, the supreme good towards which a theocratic state is ordered? For the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is adapted to the confused notion of God that he construed in his imagination. Spinoza, however, considered it possible to replace fear as the pious man’s primary motive for doing what reason prescribes through a form of love of God which, although remaining in the realm of the imagination, goes hand in hand with a higher level of autonomy:

A commonwealth whose subjects are deterred from taking up arms [against each other] only through fear should be said to be not at war rather than to be enjoying peace. For peace is not just the absence of war, but a virtue which comes from strength of mind [*fortitudo animi*]; for obedience is the steadfast will to carry out orders enjoined by the general decree of the commonwealth. (TP 5.4)

Can non-philosophers be elevated from obedience derived from fear to obedience derived from “strength of mind?” For Spinoza “strength of mind” is the key virtue of free men on account of which they do what reason prescribes (E3p59s). It is subdivided into “tenacity”

¹⁰ For the argument of the following section, see also Steinberg, “Spinoza on Civil Liberation.”

and “nobility” referring to actions that promote one’s own perfection and the perfection of one’s fellow citizens (*ibid.*). Elsewhere, as we saw, Spinoza describes the pursuit of these intertwined goals as the free man’s religion and piety. The free man’s strength of mind is a rational virtue: it accounts for “all actions that follow from affects related to the mind insofar as it understands” (*ibid.*). However, the same virtue can also be grounded on the religious imagination. Hence strength of mind is the point where the religion and piety of the philosopher overlap with the religion and piety of the non-philosopher. Spinoza speaks with considerable admiration of how the state religion established by Moses served “to strengthen the mind [*animos firmare*] of the Hebrews” leading them to carry out their duty “with singular constancy [*constantia*] and virtue [*virtus*]” (TTP 17.24/S 205). Habituated to obedience from childhood on, desire and duty coincided to a degree that obedience “appeared to be freedom rather than slavery” (TTP 17.25/S 206). Moses thus achieved what all rulers should aim at: governing the citizens “in such a way that they do not think of themselves as being governed but as living as they please” (TP 10.8). Note that the ancient Hebrews did not obey the laws because they expected to be rewarded or punished in the hereafter. In “return for their obedience” God promised “them nothing other than the continuing prosperity of their state and material advantages” (TTP 3.6/S 38)—things like “fame, victory, riches, life’s pleasures and health” (TTP 5.3/S 61). Not only “good fortune,” according to Spinoza, but also the well-ordered “society” of the Hebrews did, in fact, ensure political independence, security, and prosperity over a long period (TTP 3.6/S 38). Hence there was a true causal link between obeying the law and enjoying the fruits of an empowering political order. Although the Hebrews did not *know* how *Deus sive Natura* brought these things about, they *imagined* that it was the doing of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Hence they loved God as the cause of the joy concomitant with their increased power. In a well-ordered state, then, which reliably satisfies the expectations of its citizens in return for obedience, non-philosophers, too, will act from the love of God. And since God is, in fact, the cause of their increasing power and joy—he is, after all, the cause of everything—the same true conclusion is attained through reason and the imagination. In such a state free men and pious men will share a great deal of goods and be united by strength of mind and the love of God (cf. TTP 5.20).

In a democracy, in which citizens govern themselves, the perfection of non-philosophers would rise even higher. For they would be compelled to think through the relationship between laws, their own interests, and the interests of their fellow citizens and would thus better understand the causal link between doing what the law prescribes and the increase in power they experience. Although their understanding would still fall short of knowledge in the strict sense because it is not deduced from the *idea Dei*, they would grasp part of the chain of causes and effects and to that extent share in the knowledge of the free man. The more they understand the less they need to conceive God as a lawgiver who rewards and punishes them for their behavior. And they would surely experience some measure of intellectual joy by thinking through the relationship between the political order and the citizens’ wellbeing. A political order based on “human nature as it really is” thus is compatible with the aim of divine laws “that as many as possible may attain [perfection] as easily and surely as possible.”

Unlike some Enlightenment philosophers, then, Spinoza did not think that the best state can do without the guidance that Scripture's legal and narrative contents provide to non-philosophers. Belief in an omnipotent and omniscient God who rewards obedience and punishes disobedience, combined with an empowering political order, is Spinoza's recipe for ensuring that non-philosophers do what reason prescribes.

The "catholic or universal faith" was meant to be adopted as both the "national religion" of the state and as the religion of the sovereign (TP 8.46). Is this compatible with the freedom to philosophize? Spinoza's main argument for the freedom to philosophize is presented in the political part of TTP. Since Spinoza equates right and power, the right of the citizens to hold and express the beliefs they consider true must be grounded in their power. If a citizen believes that God is a lawgiver who rewards obedience and punishes disobedience, for example, it is impossible to coerce him through threat of punishment to believe that God is the causal order of nature. Beliefs simply do not yield to political power. This is Spinoza's core argument for freedom of thought. The sovereign does, on the other hand, have the power to coerce citizens to profess beliefs they do not hold. However, doing so is against the sovereign's interest to preserve his power in the long run. For it creates duplicity, resentment against the sovereign, and eventually rebellion. Hence, by suppressing freedom of expression, the sovereign acts against his striving to preserve himself. From this perspective the argument against politically enforcing religious orthodoxy is just one instantiation of the argument for freedom of thought and expression in general. It does not in any way depend on settling the question of dogmatism, that is, the question whether Scripture has a true core. Enforcing religious doctrines, whether true or false, is impossible for the same reason that enforcing any doctrines is impossible. And coercing the citizens to profess religious doctrines, whether true or false, undermines the sovereign's power for the same reason that coercing the citizens to profess any doctrines undermines it. Indeed, in a community of free men, there would be no need for the toleration of dissent. Given the reality of human nature, however, creating such a community is not in the state's power: nobody is born free and most of us remain non-philosophers throughout life—even under optimal educational and political conditions. Hence "it is impossible that all should think alike and speak with one voice" (TTP 20.7/S 232). In the best state, then, freedom to philosophize in the political sense is the freedom of non-philosophers to make mistakes!

We can now see why Spinoza rejects Maimonides' program of legislating philosophical doctrines. A doctrine conclusively demonstrated in philosophy, Maimonides argues, "ought to be inculcated in virtue of traditional authority upon children, women, stupid ones and those of a defective natural disposition."¹¹ Spinoza disagrees:

Men, women, children, all are equally capable of obedience by command, but not of wisdom by command. Now if anyone says that, while there is no need to understand God's attributes, there is a duty to believe them straightforwardly without proof, he

¹¹ *Guide* 1.35 (Ar. p. 54/Eng. p. 81).

is plainly talking nonsense. [...] This is no more [...] indicative of their mind than the words of a parrot or a puppet speaking without meaning or sense. (TTP 13.5–6/S 159–60)

Moreover, enforcing true doctrines is not only futile, but undermines the power of the sovereign as we saw. For Spinoza, then, philosophy is the exclusive domain of philosophers. If knowledge of God “is a divine gift” (TTP 13.9/S 162), however, reserved to citizens who were allotted sufficient intelligence by God or nature, this leads us back to the question how non-philosophers can be made to act according to the prescriptions of reason. Given religion’s crucial role for ensuring obedience, the doctrines of the universal faith “which Scripture as a whole intends to convey” set limits to the freedom of thought and expression. If “obedience is absolutely impossible” without these doctrines, rejecting them as false in the name of freedom of thought and expression would “necessarily” lead to rebellion and obstinacy (TTP 14.8/S 166). Hence those who “teach such beliefs as promote obstinacy, hatred, strife, and anger” are rightly condemned by “faith [...] as heretics and schismatics” (TTP 14.13/S 169). Since “the best state grants to every man the same freedom to philosophize as we have seen is granted by religious faith” (TTP 20.9/S 234)—that is, neither more nor less—such troublemakers would also be criminally prosecuted. But does the state have the power to enforce the core doctrines of Scripture? Although the sovereign cannot enforce doctrines “by *direct* command,” Spinoza argues,

minds are *to some degree* under the control of the sovereign power who has many means of inducing the great majority to believe, love, hate etc. whatever he wills (TTP 17.2/S 192)

The means at the state’s disposal surely include the education system and organized religion.

How much does the universal faith constrain the freedom to philosophize? At first view it seems that a great deal in the formulation of the seven doctrines conflicts with reason. This would mean that we are not free to do philosophy without fear of contradicting Scripture. Spinoza stresses, however, that no doctrine is included “that good men may regard as controversial.” Surely philosophers are part of the class of “good men.” And at closer inspection Spinoza’s phrasing of the seven doctrines turns out to be deliberately ambiguous in a way that allows both non-philosophers and philosophers to endorse them. The following passage clearly implies that the doctrines can be construed in a philosophical sense:

[A]s to the question [...] why God is the exemplar of true life, whether this is because he has a just and merciful disposition, or because all things exist and act through him [...], on these questions it matters not what beliefs a man holds. Nor, again, does it matter for faith [...] whether he directs everything from free will or from the necessity of his nature, whether he lays down laws as a ruler or teaches them as being eternal truths, whether man obeys God from free will or from the necessity of the divine

decree, whether the rewarding of the good and the punishing of the wicked is natural or supernatural. (TTP 14.11/S 168)

The universal faith—and hence also Scripture—can thus be interpreted in accordance with both the imagination and reason. It is important to note that this offers a simple solution to the problem of the freedom to philosophize in the intellectual sense, which is one of the main aims of TTP as we saw: Spinoza could argue that philosophers need not fear conflicts with Scripture and theology because—to use the formula from CM 2.8—“the truth does not contradict the truth.” Hence defending the freedom to philosophize in the intellectual sense does not require rejecting the truth of Scripture.

Although the universal faith and Scripture can be interpreted philosophically, Spinoza is strictly opposed to imposing this interpretation on non-philosophers. Here again Spinoza opposes Maimonides who argues that non-philosophers, after having been “habituated” to philosophical doctrines, “should be elevated to the knowledge of the [allegorical] interpretation” of Scripture.¹² If this were right, Spinoza contends,

it would follow that the multitude, which for the most part does not know demonstrations, [. . .] could admit of Scripture only that which is derived from the authority and testimony of philosophers [. . .]. This would indeed be a novel form of ecclesiastical authority, with very strange priests or pontiffs, more likely to excite the multitude's ridicule than veneration. (TTP 7.20/S 104)

Recall that the purpose of Scripture's narratives is not to teach philosophy, but to ensure the obedience of non-philosophers to the prescriptions of reason, that is, to “God's commands.” Hence the criterion of a good interpretation is not its truth but what Spinoza calls its “piety,” that is, its efficiency in moving “the heart to obedience” (TTP 14.8/S 166). Citizens are free to interpret the doctrines of the universal faith as they please. The literal sense of Scripture's narratives carries no authority in this regard. For one thing, these narratives are themselves adaptations of the universal faith to different audiences shaped by different beliefs and practices. Hence Scripture does not present one, but many interpretations of its core doctrines that are, moreover, often inconsistent—when the teachings that move one audience to obedience conflict with those that do the same for another. In this sense, religious pluralism is already inscribed in Scripture itself. Moreover, since these narratives reflect beliefs and practices belonging to cultural contexts of a long time ago, they can, in fact, not be adopted without reinterpretation for contemporary audiences. This is why “pastors or ministers of the church” (TTP 5.18/S 69) are needed. None of this is in any way incompatible with dogmatism since the differences, inconsistencies, and outdated features of Scripture all concern its surface teachings, that is, what it says in the language of the imagination of its original audiences, and not its true core, that is, what it says in the universal language of reason. The same holds for the difficulty to establish the literal meaning of Scripture and the vicissitudes of its textual transmission, which

¹² *Guide* 1.35 (Ar. p. 55/Eng. p. 81).

led to the “corrupt” state of the Biblical text we now have.¹³ As Spinoza stresses throughout TTP 12–14: these problems in no way affect the clarity of Scripture’s core legal and narrative teachings, that is, the commandments to love God and one’s neighbor and the doctrines of the universal faith, which can be interpreted according to both the imagination and reason (cf. TTP 12.10–12).

Removing the authority of Scripture’s literal sense does, on the other hand, create space for multiple and conflicting interpretations. Any interpretation ensuring that its adherents obey the law is valid. Enforcing the universal faith as state religion, then, is compatible with a fairly broad religious pluralism. However, lest we exaggerate Spinoza’s religious liberalism, note that the state is not neutral in religious affairs. Apart from the “national religion,” Spinoza argues, “large congregations should be forbidden.” Hence

while those who are attached to another religion are to be allowed to build as many churches as they wish, these are to be small, of some fixed dimensions, and some distance apart. But it is important that churches dedicated to the national religion should be large and costly. (TP 8.46)

The doctrines of the universal faith are the only constraint on freedom of thought, but they are not the only constraint on freedom of expression. Recall that an interpretation of the universal faith must not be true, but pious. However, also if it conveys false beliefs, it is of paramount importance

that he who adheres to them knows not that they are false. If he knew that they were false, he would necessarily be a rebel, for how could it be that one who seeks to love justice and obey God should worship as divine what he knows to be alien to the divine nature? (TTP 14.8/S 166)

What does this imply for the public critique of religious beliefs? If the critique is based on a competing interpretation of the universal faith derived from the imagination, a Spinozistic state would have no reason to oppose it. For even if a believer rejects his old faith and converts to a new one, he would still be obedient. The case is different, however, if the critique comes from a philosopher. Consider a philosopher who publishes a polemical pamphlet in which he argues that God is the causal order of nature, not a law-giver who rewards obedience and punishes disobedience, and that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must be reinterpreted accordingly. In a Spinozistic state, publishing such a pamphlet would threaten the stability of the state, since a non-philosopher cannot convert to the philosopher’s religion of reason. If he rejects the religion of the imagination, he remains with no religion at all. A Spinozistic state thus would have to monitor how philosophers use their freedom of expression. While not imposing legal constraints, an author whose writings can be proven to have stirred up a rebellion would be liable to

¹³ See TTP 7–10.

criminal charges. Ideally, Spinoza seems to suggest, philosophers should “write only for scholars and appeal to reason alone” (TTP 20.15/S 237). Spinoza, then, would have had very good reasons to insist on the separation of philosophy from Scripture and theology without having to reject dogmatism. Most of what he says in TTP 15 about their independence and their respective ends and means is perfectly plausible within a dogmatic framework.

If I am right about the constraints on the freedom of expression, the education system in a Spinozist state would do well to include a mechanism to ensure that not-yet-philosophers do not reject Scripture and theology once they become actual philosophers. In their childhood, not-yet-philosophers, too, are motivated to obey through the belief in God as a lawgiver who rewards obedience and punishes disobedience. Once they learn that God is the causal order of nature, they will likely reject their childhood faith, unless they learn how to reinterpret it. This is exactly what happened to Spinoza: as we saw, at first he had been “circumcised and kept the Jewish Law,” but later “changed his mind” because now it seemed to him “that the said Law was not true [. . .] nor was there a God except philosophically.” In a Spinozistic state, making such claims in public would likely lead to criminal prosecution! The same mechanism would, of course, also help not-yet-philosophers of the opposite kind who believe that they must reject philosophy because of the “skeptical” prejudice that reason is Scripture’s “handmaid.” As we will see, parts of TTP can be read precisely as designed to facilitate the transition to a philosophical interpretation of Scripture.

If the philosophical critique of false religious beliefs in public is unwelcome in a Spinozistic state, this raises, of course, troubling questions about the critique of superstition and the critique of religion set forth in TTP and in the Appendix to the first part of the *Ethics*. It is very important not to confuse the two: whereas “superstition [. . .] is founded on ignorance,” Spinoza argues, “religion” is founded “on wisdom” (Ep. 73/G 4:307–308). In the preface to TTP and in the Appendix to *Ethics* I, Spinoza explains the psychological causes of superstition, the false beliefs about God and nature to which superstition gives rise, and how superstition is manipulated by religious impostors to further their selfish goals. His aim is clearly not to eradicate superstition, for “the masses can no more be freed from their superstition than from their fears” (TTP Preface 15/S 8). Rather, his aim is to explain how the manipulation of superstition leads to oppressing the freedom to philosophize. It can be understood as addressed to the *sovereign*, since it is “of the first importance” for the rulers, who must adopt the universal faith of TTP, “to guard [. . .] against becoming victims of superstition, seeking to deprive their subjects of the freedom to say what they think” (TP 8.46).

Below we will see that Spinoza’s critique of religion cannot be reconciled with his theological-political principles in this manner. My present aim, however, is only to show that defending the freedom to philosophize in both the intellectual and the political sense does *not* depend on rejecting dogmatism. Indeed, since Spinoza’s goal in TTP is not only to defend the freedom to philosophize but also to counter the charge of atheism, it is not clear how he could have succeeded without insisting that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the God of the philosophers are the same.

Is Spinoza's philosophical religion, as I have sketched it so far, compatible with the metaphysics of the *Ethics*? As I pointed out above, a thing's perfection for Spinoza is not determined by its rationality but by its power. And a thing's power is measured by the range of effects of which it is the cause. God's power is absolutely infinite: "From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways" (E1p16). Spinoza is committed to a version of the principle of plenitude: God causes all conceivable things ranging from the most powerful, that is, God himself who is *causa sui*, all the way down to the least powerful modification of his essence (see E1d1 and E1p7). Since Spinoza equates being with perfection—"it is a perfection to exist, and to have been produced by God," while the "greatest imperfection of all is not being" (KV 1.4/G 1:37)—God maximizes perfection. Hence a thing's Godlikeness is determined by its power: the greater a thing's power, the more it is like God. Considered under the attribute of thought, we become more powerful the more we perfect our intellect through knowing and loving God. The power of the state in turn is just the sum of the power of its citizens. Hence considered under the attribute of thought the state's power increases the more it promotes the intellectual perfection of its citizens. If we limit ourselves to the perspective of the attribute of thought, therefore, Spinoza can indeed call a rationally ordered state "God's kingdom." Through its rational order God, as it were, maximizes the citizens' perfection.

How is Spinoza's dogmatism distinctively *Christian*? The first thing to note is that the prescriptions of reason are also Christian prescriptions because the *idea Dei*, which is both the source and the goal of the prescriptions of reason, is Christ according to Spinoza. This is the key claim of Spinoza's philosophical Christology from the *Short Treatise* to his late correspondence with Henry Oldenburg. To the extent we are rational, therefore, we are Christians and the more we know, the more we participate in Christ who as God's infinite intellect is the sum total of knowledge. Likewise a state is a Christian state to the extent it is rationally ordered.

At first view, this philosophical Christianity seems to have little in common with its historical counterpart. It is a universal religion of reason grounded in human nature whose prescriptions are followed by everyone who rationally strives to preserve himself. Spinoza, however, insists that this "universal religion" is "revealed by the natural and the prophetic light" (Ep. 43/G 4:225). And throughout TTP he stresses that "[Scripture's] message, unclouded by any doubt or any ambiguity, is in essence this: to love God above all, and one's neighbor as oneself" (TTP 12.10/S 155). Although at the beginning of TTP 4 the concept of divine Law is derived from philosophical premises, at the end Spinoza quotes a series of Scriptural passages from Moses to St. Paul to support his claim that "Scripture unreservedly commends the natural light and the natural divine Law" (TTP 4.12/S 59). Spinoza can describe the philosophical deduction of the prescriptions of reason from the *idea Dei* as "prophecy or revelation," since these are defined as "the sure knowledge of some matter revealed by God to man." This includes "natural knowledge [. . .], for the knowledge that we acquire by the natural light of reason depends solely on knowledge of God and his eternal decrees" (TTP 1.1–2/S 9). With respect to the historical Christ, this is precisely what Spinoza says. To be sure, Spinoza is unorthodox by the

Christian standards of his time because he declines to fully identify “Christ according to the flesh” with the *idea Dei*, that is, “the eternal son of God” or “God’s eternal wisdom” (Ep. 73/G 4:308). Like all human beings, “Christ according to the flesh” has a finite intellect, whereas “the eternal son of God” is the infinite intellect. And claiming that the infinite becomes finite is for Spinoza as absurd as claiming “that a circle has taken on the nature of a square” (ibid.). Spinoza’s Christology, then, includes nothing that contradicts reason. He stresses, on the other hand, that “God’s eternal wisdom,” that is, God’s infinite intellect, “manifested itself [. . .] most of all in Christ Jesus,” that is, in the finite intellect of “Christ according to the flesh” (ibid.). Hence, while falling short of the infinite intellect, the historical Christ comes as close to it as a human being can. Spinoza’s historical Christ, then, is the most accomplished philosopher of all times who perceived things “truly and adequately” (TTP 4.10/S 55). Since Spinoza was confident to have found the “true philosophy,” his portrait of Christ implies that Christ deduced the teachings of the divine Law through the same chain of logical inferences by which they are deduced in the *Ethics*.¹⁴

The description of Christ offered in TTP 1, however, at first view seems at odds with my claim that the historical Christ for Spinoza is merely an outstanding philosopher. Taken at face value, this description encourages an orthodox interpretation of the historical Christ as the incarnation of God’s superhuman wisdom:

Nevertheless, a man who can perceive by the mind alone that which is not contained in the basic principles of our cognition, [. . .] must necessarily possess a mind whose excellence far surpasses the human mind. Therefore I do not believe that anyone has attained such a degree of perfection surpassing all others, except Christ. To him God’s ordinances leading men to salvation were revealed [. . .] directly, so that God manifested himself to the Apostles through the mind of Christ [. . .]. In that sense it can also be said that the wisdom of God—that is, wisdom that is more than human—took on human nature in Christ, and that Christ was the way of salvation. (TTP 1.18/S 14)

Since Spinoza’s philosophical commitments preclude any disruption of the natural order—for example a human mind attaining knowledge that cannot be attained by the human mind or wisdom that is more than human—he cannot endorse an orthodox interpretation of this passage. However, while the passage *allows* for an orthodox interpretation, it *must* not be interpreted in this way. Consider Spinoza’s explanation of what he meant to Henry Oldenburg:

I say that for salvation it is not altogether necessary to know Christ according to the flesh; but with regard to [. . .] God’s eternal wisdom, which has manifested itself in all things and chiefly in the human mind, and most of all in Christ Jesus, a very different view must be taken. For without this no one can attain to a state of blessedness

¹⁴ Cf. Pines, “Spinoza’s Tractatus,” p. 19.

[. . .]. And since [. . .] this wisdom has been manifested most of all through Jesus Christ, his disciples have preached it as far as he revealed it to them [. . .]. As to the additional teaching of certain churches, that God took upon himself human nature, I have expressly indicated that I do not understand what they say. Indeed, to tell the truth, they seem to me to speak no less absurdly than one who might tell me that a circle has taken on the nature of a square. (Ep. 73/G 4:308–309)

We can now see how the passage in TTP 1 can be read without conflicting with Spinoza's philosophical commitments. Recall that as *idea Dei* Christ is the infinite intellect that apprehends "God's attributes and his affections." God, according to Spinoza, is a "substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence" (E1d6). Although Spinoza claims "that God's infinite essence and his eternity are known to all," the human mind can only know *two* of God's infinite attributes, namely thought and extension. Christ, on the other hand, insofar as he is the infinite intellect, knows *all* of God's infinite attributes. Hence he knows things that can indeed "not be deduced" from "the basic principles of our cognition." If a person could know what the infinite intellect knows, he would obviously "possess a mind whose excellence far surpasses the human mind." This, however, is impossible. Only Christ as *idea Dei* "attained such a degree of perfection." Since the infinite intellect knows all things directly, he also knows "God's ordinances leading men to salvation [. . .] directly." With respect to this knowledge, Christ as *idea Dei* and the mind of the historical Christ overlap. And through the mediation of the latter God conveys his ordinances to the apostles. God's wisdom is "more than human," because it is the infinite, not the finite human intellect, and it did indeed take on "human nature in Christ," however not all of it, but only that part of which the historical Christ attained knowledge.

The deliberate ambiguity of this passage is motivated by the same considerations that led to the deliberately ambiguous phrasing of the doctrines of the universal faith. Taken literally, these doctrines, too, contain much that is at odds with Spinoza's philosophy. His restatement of the doctrine of the incarnation can likewise be interpreted according to both reason and the imagination. And the imagination of Spinoza's audience was, of course, shaped by the orthodox understanding of the incarnation. Spinoza did not include the doctrine of the incarnation among the doctrines of the universal faith because it is neither a necessary condition for obedience, nor a doctrine agreed upon by all "good men." Jews, for example, can be obedient while denying that God's eternal wisdom incarnated in Christ. Spinoza, however, is writing in a Christian context for a Christian audience. Hence he must offer an account of the foundational doctrine of Christianity as a *historical* religion that can be interpreted by both non-philosophers and philosophers in a Christian society.

As a historical religion, Christianity is not only a universal religion of reason taught by Christ *more geometrico*. It also is a pedagogical-political program that includes laws and parables through which Christ and the apostles adapted the prescriptions of reason to the imagination of non-philosophers in their time. When Christ "proclaimed" the things he

perceived truly and adequately [. . .] as law, he did so because of the people's ignorance and obstinacy, [. . .] adapting himself to the character of the people. So although his sayings were somewhat clearer than those of other prophets, his teaching of things revealed [. . .] quite often took the form of parables, especially when he was addressing those to whom it had not yet been granted to understand the kingdom of heaven. (TTP 4.10/S 55–56)¹⁵

Historical Christianity, then, instantiates the universal religion of reason in a context constrained by human nature and cultural limitations. In this respect, the Hebrew Bible differs only in clarity from the New Testament. Although in contrast to the New Testament, the prophets of the Hebrew Bible did not teach “God’s eternal word” as a universal religion, but “as the law of their own country” (TTP 12.8/S 153) this does not mean that they did not grasp its universal character. They only had to adapt it to the “wretched” condition of the Hebrews after the exodus from Egypt. To “the early Jews religion was transmitted in the form of written law, because at that time they were just like children” (TTP 12.2/S 149). Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Psalmist, and Solomon are among the witnesses Spinoza quotes to confirm that the true religion of the Hebrew Bible is universal. Consider Isaiah:

[O]f all of Isaiah’s teachings nothing is clearer than this, that the divine Law, taken in a strict sense, signifies [. . .] the universal law that consists in the true way of life. (TTP 5.2/S 60)

The difference between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, then, can be accounted for through tougher cultural constraints: due to their enslavement in Egypt, the intellectual and moral limitations of the Hebrews were particularly severe. We would thus expect Spinoza to explain the fact that the Hebrew Bible contains the divine Law in the same way in which he explained that it was taught by Christ: the patriarchs, Moses, and the rest of the Hebrew prophets were accomplished philosophers who deduced the prescriptions of reason from the *idea Dei*. They are the content of “prophecy or revelation” in the sense in which these notions apply to “the knowledge that we acquire by the natural light of reason.” There are a number of reasons why this is what we would have expected Spinoza to say. For one thing, it is the assumption underlying the dogmatism of his early writings. Moreover, it is a standard argument used by Christians to secure the unity of the two Testaments: the wisdom of the prophets is how they participate in Christ who is “God’s eternal wisdom.” Spinoza could simply have said that the prophets deduced the prescriptions of reason from the *idea Dei* in their minds and hence from Christ. And this is what he, in fact, says about the patriarchs: as we saw, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob regained the freedom Adam lost “under the guidance of the spirit of Christ,

¹⁵ On the adaptation of Christ’s teachings through the apostles, see TTP 11.

that is, by the *idea Dei*.” Moreover, Spinoza frequently attributes philosophical doctrines to the Hebrew Bible.¹⁶

However, the most striking evidence is Spinoza’s discussion of three crucial religious concepts in TTP 3–6: election, divine Law, and miracles. In all three cases, he first gives a philosophical account of the concept and then goes on to prove that Scripture teaches the same thing. We already saw Spinoza’s claim in TTP 4 that “Scripture unreservedly commends the natural light and the natural divine Law.” And although he unequivocally rejects the traditional understanding of election in TTP 3 and of miracles in TTP 6 and offers a naturalistic reinterpretation of these concepts based on his metaphysics, he claims to be doing so in complete agreement with Scripture. Consider miracles. In the traditional sense, a miracle means the disruption of the natural order through God’s will (making the sun stand still, for example). For Spinoza, by contrast, God is nature and the effects caused by the eternal and immutable laws of nature are God’s will. Hence a miracle in the traditional sense would be a contradiction: God would will and not will that the sun follows its natural course. What is perceived as a miracle, Spinoza explains, is simply a natural event for which the observer has no causal explanation. Hence he appeals to the will of God—the “asylum of ignorance” as Spinoza puts it in the *Ethics*. The “prophets,” Spinoza stresses, “take *the same view as I*” (TTP 6.23/S 86). Thus, after having made his case against miracles in the traditional sense “from basic principles known by the natural light of reason,” he goes on to

demonstrate from Scripture that God’s decrees and commandments, and consequently God’s providence, are in truth nothing but nature’s order; that is to say, when Scripture tells us that this or that was accomplished by God or by God’s will, nothing more is intended than that it came about in accordance with nature’s law and order, and not, as the common people believe, that nature for that time suspended her action. (TTP 6.12/S 79)

Spinoza then goes through a long list of Scriptural passages that he takes to prove his point, concluding that

all these passages clearly convey the teaching that nature observes a fixed and immutable order [. . .] and that miracles seem something strange only because of man’s ignorance. (TTP 6.22/S 86)

Why, then, does Scripture so frequently portray natural events as miracles? Because its purpose is not to instruct philosophers but to offer pedagogical-political guidance to non-philosophers. Hence it describes “events that strike the imagination [. . .] to instill piety in the minds of the multitude” (TTP 6.13/S 80).

To explain why the traditional understanding of election, the divine Law, and miracles is so markedly different from what he takes to be the consensus of reason and Scripture,

¹⁶ For examples, see Fraenkel, “Maimonides’ God,” and Fraenkel, “Hasdai Crescas.”

Spinoza relies on a *topos* in Christian anti-Jewish polemics: he blames the “Pharisees.” They misinterpreted the concepts of election and divine Law, and in the case of miracles they may even have sacrilegiously altered the Biblical text.¹⁷

Why is Spinoza keen to show that reason and Scripture agree? As I suggested above, parts of TTP seem to be designed to ensure that not-yet-philosophers who turn into philosophers reject neither Scripture nor philosophy. The rebellious not-yet-philosopher learns how Scripture can be reinterpreted according to reason while the timid not-yet-philosopher learns that reason must not submit to Scripture understood according to the imagination. The examples of election, the divine Law, and miracles illustrate the general claim Spinoza makes in the preface to TTP: that he “found nothing expressly taught in Scripture that was not in agreement with the intellect or that contradicted it” (TTP Preface 10/S 6).

The claim that the prophets were philosophers does not commit Spinoza to endorsing the entire body of laws in the Hebrew Bible as prescriptions of reason. He can declare the Jewish law invalid without dismissing the authority of prophecy. The prophets, as we saw, only taught “God’s eternal word” as “the law of their country” because of the childish condition of the Hebrews after the exodus from Egypt. Alluding to Colossians 2:16–17, Spinoza describes the Jewish law as “mere shadows,” which for Christians meant that as a “shadow” of Christ it was true allegorically, but no longer literally valid (TTP 4.6/S 53). If anything it would have been surprising if Spinoza’s philosophical reinterpretation of Christianity had not included the rejection of the Jewish law. Since Spinoza has removed the authority of Scripture’s narratives as well, his philosophical interpretation of Christianity does not commit him to accepting the authority of any historical content of Scripture. At the same time, every state whose laws promote the love of God and of one’s neighbor can lay claim to be a Christian state and use the *cultural* authority that Scripture’s narratives have to further the citizens’ perfection.

SPINOZA’S CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

We are, then, led to expect that Spinoza will portray the prophets as accomplished philosophers whose teachings agree with reason as long as we beware of the distortions of the Pharisees. And yet, Spinoza unequivocally rejects the view that the prophets were philosophers. They were not “endowed with a more perfect mind, but with a more vivid power of imagination” (TTP 2.1/S 22) and “perceived God’s revelations with the aid of the imaginative faculty alone” (TTP 1.27/S 20). Hence they did not translate what they deduced from the *idea Dei* in their mind into the language of the imagination because they were addressing the “common people.” They were non-philosophers themselves!

¹⁷ On election, see TTP 3.10/S 44; on the divine Law, see TTP 5.3/S 61; on miracles, see TTP 6.15/S 82.

When the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob conflicts with the God of the philosophers, this is due to the ignorance of the prophets.

The representation of things through the imagination is determined through psychological, physiological, and cultural factors: the mood of the prophet, his temperament and, most importantly, the superstitious beliefs and prejudices that shaped his cultural upbringing. The beliefs of the prophets about God and nature vary accordingly. They have in common, however, that for the most part they “are false” when judged by “reason and philosophy” (TTP 15.4/S 173). Hence

we are in no way bound to believe [the prophets] in matters of purely philosophic speculation. (TTP 2.12/S 27)

The overwhelming evidence in the Bible, of course, supports not what we would have expected Spinoza to say but what he actually says. His argument in TTP 7 is straightforward: interpreters of Scripture should not “extort [. . .] their own arbitrarily invented ideas” from it and “claim divine authority” for them (TTP 7.1/S 88). We cannot simply assume that Scripture contains the views we happen to hold true and then reinterpret it in their light. This also holds for views that are, in fact, true, i.e. demonstrated by reason. To establish Scripture’s “true meaning” we must read it on its own terms and deviate from what it literally says only if compelled on internal grounds. The method Spinoza proposes for establishing Scripture’s “true meaning” involves two steps. The first consists in meticulous philological and historical work: we must learn the language of Scripture, systematically order its statements and draw a profile of its authors to gain access to their imagination. Only after “having extracted the true meaning [of Scripture], we must necessarily resort to judgment and reason,” that is, determine whether a Scriptural claim is true or false (TTP 15.3/S 171). Since it reliably turns out to be false, Spinoza can conclude that Scripture has no authority in theoretical matters. The consequences for the dogmatic approach to Scripture are devastating. Its core assumption—that the prophets were “outstanding philosophers” (TTP 7.21/S 105) whose philosophical views are the allegorical content of a pedagogical-political program for the guidance of non-philosophers—must be dismissed for lack of textual evidence. Since the advocate of dogmatism agrees with Spinoza on the standards of evidence, he is left without reply.

The case against “skepticism” is more complicated. For the skeptic is in principle willing to play by Spinoza’s interpretative rules to establish the true meaning of Scripture. His “universal rule” is “that whatever Scripture teaches [. . .] quite expressly is to be admitted as absolutely true on its own authority” (TTP 15.2/S 171). The skeptic does, however, not recognize reason as Scripture’s arbiter. If reason and Scripture are at variance, reason must be dismissed. For the skeptic, the truth of Scripture follows from a miraculous act of revelation. Since human reason has been corrupted through Adam’s fall, it cannot guide us to blessedness and salvation. God in his grace offered us an alternative guide: the supernatural light disclosed through revelation, which in turn can only be correctly understood by those who partake in it on account of their faith. Both

the revelation and the interpretation of God's will in Scripture thus depend on God's miraculous intervention in the natural order. Spinoza cannot refute skepticism on textual grounds alone. He must rely on his philosophy to argue that reason can guide us to "blessedness" and "salvation" (cf. E5p42 with scholium), and that miracles, including a supernatural light, are metaphysically impossible, leaving reason as the only arbiter of Scripture. Only then can he claim that reason is "the greatest of all gifts and a light divine" (TTP 15.3/S 172) and that submitting reason to Scripture means "to accept as divinely inspired utterances the prejudices of a common people of long ago which will gain hold on [a person's] understanding and darken it" (TTP 15.1/S 170).

In TTP 1, 2, 7, and 15, then, Spinoza launches a momentous attack on the foundations of Biblical religion. Whereas the first line of argument leads us to expect that Spinoza will portray the prophets as accomplished philosophers, the second line leads us to expect that Spinoza will dismiss Biblical religion altogether and call for its replacement though a religion of reason. Spinoza, however, surprises us again. He goes out of his way to preserve the *practical* authority of the Bible as a pedagogical-political program ensuring that non-philosophers obey the law. Here we can clearly see the tension to which the two lines of argument give rise. Since Spinoza can no longer ground the practical authority of the prophets on the claim that they deduced the prescriptions of reason from the *idea Dei* in their mind, he must provide an alternative foundation. This foundation is highly implausible. Spinoza argues that the prophets stood out through their moral virtue on account of which they grasped the teachings of the divine Law. Since they did not philosophically deduce them, however, they lacked subjective certainty concerning the truth of what they grasped. Such certainty they attained through a miracle from God. This is obviously a bad alternative to the dogmatic foundation of prophetic authority. For one thing, it is not clear how the prophets could have stood out through their moral virtue. Virtue consists in following the prescriptions of reason—either our own if we are philosophers or on account of religious authority or fear of punishment if we are non-philosophers. Thus both philosophers and non-philosophers can develop "strength of mind," that is, "the steadfast will" to obey the law. In neither sense the prophet can have virtue: he is not a philosopher, nor can he derive virtue from obeying the laws of which his virtue is supposed to be the cause. Things get worse when we turn to miracles as the alleged reason for the prophet's subjective certainty. Here Spinoza explicitly contradicts himself: as we saw, in TTP 6 he claims that the prophets "take the same view as I" about the metaphysical impossibility of miracles.

This is not the only drawback of Spinoza's critique of religion. It obviously undermines his case against the charge of atheism since he can no longer claim that the God he affirms as a philosopher is the same as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Indeed, none of the dogmatic features that we saw in Spinoza's writings can be justified by the rules of interpretation laid out in TTP 7—from the description of Christ's spirit as the *idea Dei* and of the historical Christ as an accomplished philosopher to the claim that Scripture, properly interpreted, teaches the philosophical concepts of election, divine Law, and miracles.

And there is more: Spinoza also undermines the theological-political principles of a Spinozistic state.¹⁸ For as we saw, freedom of expression is constrained by the need to protect the non-philosopher's subjective conviction that his pious beliefs are true. Since these beliefs are derived from Scripture, they cannot be held true without believing in the truth of Scripture. The author of TTP's critique of religion would thus rightfully be condemned as one of the "heretics and schismatics [. . .] who teach such beliefs as promote obstinacy, hatred, strife and anger." Unlike the critique of superstition, the critique of religion cannot be reconciled with Spinoza's theological-political principles by taking it to be addressed to the sovereign. For Spinoza explicitly says that the rulers should adopt the universal faith of TTP and serve "as ministers of the churches and as guardians and interpreters of the national religion" (TP 8.46). The critique of religion, then, undermines not only the faith of the ruled, but also the faith of the sovereign.

While Spinoza has strong textual support for his critique of religion, it undermines his carefully crafted case for the authority of Scripture as a pedagogical-political program. To shed light on this puzzle, we must ask how Spinoza's critique of religion is motivated. He clearly thought of it as a key component in his defense of the freedom to philosophize in the twofold sense I proposed. It is crucial to see that the position Spinoza is targeting is skepticism, not dogmatism, which poses no threat to the freedom to philosophize. For one thing, Spinoza is addressing "prudent" readers who are prevented "from giving their minds to philosophy" because they were led to embrace skepticism—the view "that reason must be the handmaid of Scripture." The critique of religion obviously removes this "obstacle" by showing that Scripture has no authority "in matters of purely philosophical speculation." Spinoza wants, moreover, to defend the freedom of thought and expression against the political enforcement of religious orthodoxy—what he calls the "excessive authority and egotism of preachers" in the letter to Oldenburg. His immediate target is the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, which had built an alliance with the monarchist supporters of the House of Orange and aimed to become the church of the state. This would have given it the power to impose Calvinist orthodoxy. Spinoza understood the justification for the Reformed Church's political ambitions along the lines of skepticism: only the faithful, that is, the members of the Reformed Church, have access to the supernatural light contained in Scripture whose guidance is necessary for attaining blessedness and salvation. All dissent is a symptom of corruption and must be suppressed before it attracts others to the path of perdition. Against this threat Spinoza wants to defend the relatively tolerant Dutch Republic under Johan de Witt. In the preface to TTP, he stresses his "rare good fortune to live in a state where freedom of judgment is fully granted to the individual citizen and he may worship God as he pleases" (TTP Preface 8/S 3). More generally, any group trying to enforce religious orthodoxy in a Christian context will use a variation of the skeptic argument, appealing to the truth of Scripture and claiming to have

¹⁸ Cf. Garber, "Should Spinoza Have Published."

exclusive access to this truth. By showing that Scripture contains no truth and that its true meaning can be established by reason, which all human beings share, Spinoza could expect to remove the cornerstone of the justification for the political enforcement of religious orthodoxy.

While Spinoza's critique of religion is thus *motivated* by the aim to defend the freedom to philosophize, it is not *necessary* for it, since his political argument for freedom of thought and expression does not require settling the question of the truth of Scripture. It is in principle possible to attack skepticism from a dogmatic standpoint. This is what Lodewijk Meyer—Spinoza's doctor and close friend—tried to do in a treatise on Bible interpretation published in 1666.¹⁹ The advocate of dogmatism denies that revelation is a miraculous act and that Scripture's content derives from a supernatural light to which the natural light must submit. Spinoza's correspondence with Blyenbergh, however, from which I quoted above, likely taught him how inefficient the dogmatic critique of skepticism is. For Blyenbergh, a skeptic through and through, perspicuously points out that Spinoza has "very little proof" for dogmatism (Ep. 20/G 4:119). In the end, Spinoza reluctantly admits that he indeed lacks "mathematical proof" (Ep. 21/G 4:133) for the view that the teachings of Scripture and reason agree. TTP only radicalizes Blyenbergh's point: dogmatism not only lacks a mathematical proof, Spinoza now concedes, but has no textual support at all. More promising than a dogmatic defense of the freedom to philosophize is a comprehensive attack on the truth of Scripture, based on a method that raises its study to the same level of empirical objectivity that Francis Bacon claimed to have achieved for the study of nature.²⁰ While not necessary, then, Spinoza concluded that attacking the foundations of Biblical religion is a *more efficient* way to defend the freedom to philosophize. Albeit in very different ways, skepticism and dogmatism both depend on the premise that Scripture is true. Hence Spinoza's critique of religion could not strike down the one without also striking down the other. To defeat skepticism, Spinoza was willing to pay the price of undermining his philosophical reinterpretation of Christianity.

When Spinoza started working on TTP, defending himself against the charge of atheism was still one of his main aims. The evidence for an elaborate philosophical reinterpretation of Christianity in TTP and elsewhere suggests that at first this is the way he intended to go. His attempt to save Scripture's practical authority shows that, the critique of religion notwithstanding, he continued to consider religion indispensable as a pedagogical-political guide for non-philosophers. However, the integration of the philosophical reinterpretation of Christianity with the critique of religion in TTP is clearly flawed. In the long run, having it both ways proved impossible. The rules Spinoza proposed for reading Scripture eventually gave rise to the historical-critical method, which became the scholarly paradigm for studying the Bible. In

¹⁹ See *Philosophia*, chapter 11.

²⁰ In TTP 7, Spinoza deliberately construes his exegetical method in analogy to Bacon's "*historia naturae*" (TTP 7.2/S 89).

this way, TTP made an important contribution to the secularization of the West. While this method remains our best guide to the true meaning of a religious text, it undermines—for better or for worse—any attempt to reinterpret a religious or cultural tradition in light of intellectual commitments not derived from the text.

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CHAPTER 19

SPINOZA'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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SPINOZA developed over the course of his relatively brief life an elaborate and important political theory.¹ Anyone with even a modest acquaintance with the events in his life would not be surprised to discover how important politics was to him. The Jewish *converso* community in which he was born was the product of tumultuous events. Its members had lived covertly under the shadow of the Inquisition and then had to leave the Iberian Peninsula in order to live openly as Jews again. The Dutch authorities allowed Jews to enter the country only in 1596 and then subjected them to a rigorous set of restrictions. They made it clear, for instance, that Jews could live only in a certain area, that they could not engage in sexual relations with their Christian servants, and that they were not to proselytize in any fashion. Spinoza himself became part of the inner spiritual turmoil of the community, and he was eventually expelled due to his “wicked ways. . . abominable heresies . . . and . . . monstrous deeds” when he was 24 years old in 1656.² He then became close to, though he did not join, the Collegiants, one of the many Protestant sects in the free-thinking religious milieu of the Netherlands.³ Not everyone subscribed to principles of limited religious tolerance advocated by the republican States Party, and their opposition, the Orange Party, waged a long struggle to establish a monarchy and a state church. In the course of his subsequent philosophical endeavors, he became acutely aware that the intense political struggles of the young Dutch Republic could affect his own intellectual life. In a letter to Henry Oldenburg, a frequent correspondent and secretary of the British Royal Society, Spinoza wrote “I am now writing a treatise on my views regarding Scripture,” whose purposes were threefold: (1) to combat “the prejudices of the theologians,” (2) to “avert the accusation” held by the common people [*vulgus*] that he was an atheist, and (3) to vindicate “the freedom to philosophize

¹ I would like to thank Michael Della Rocca for his helpful comments.

² Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, p. 120.

³ Kolakowski, *Chrétien Sans Église*.

and say what we think" (Ep. 30). This treatise was eventually published anonymously as the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, but instead of contributing to the solution of tensions between church and state, the work only inflamed public opinion. The book was banned and destroyed by the authorities, and Spinoza had to beg his friends (e.g. in Ep. 44) not to publish a translation of the Latin work into the vernacular.⁴ From the case of Adrian Koerbagh, whose Spinozistic writings in Dutch had led him to be imprisoned, Spinoza was keenly aware of the limits and scope of public debate. But, at least according to his posthumous biographer, after the DeWitt brothers, who were the leaders of the States party, were imprisoned and killed by an angry mob, Spinoza was ready to confront the murderers in public. When he produced a sign (in Latin!) accusing them of being the "ultimate barbarians," so the story goes, he was restrained by his prudent landlord from such a foolish confrontation. This is fortunate for us as well, since it allowed Spinoza to complete his magnum opus, the *Ethics*, and write most of the *Tractatus Politicus*, in which he developed systematically many of his political views in a commentary on the best forms of each constitutional regime. Although Spinoza may have been awakened to political consciousness through his own personal difficulties in the Jewish community, he eventually developed a profound concern for the great public questions of his nation and epoch.

Spinoza's political philosophy is hard to categorize both in general terms and also in the history of seventeenth-century philosophy. Part of this is due to the difficulty of tracing his sources and also to the fact that his views developed and perhaps changed over time. Many scholars have noted the profound influence of Hobbes on Spinoza's political thought.⁵ In the *Theological-Political Treatise* and in the *Ethics*, he uses language that is unquestionably derived from social contract theory. Others have argued that, even if Spinoza had been a social contract theorist, he ultimately abandoned that view for something else.⁶ In the *Political Treatise*, there is little or no mention of the social contract. Instead, Spinoza claims that "men are so constituted that they cannot live without being subject to some common law" (TP 1.3), and notes that, "If it is for this reason that the Scholastics want to say that man is a social animal . . . I have nothing to say against them" (TP 2.15).⁷ The impression that Spinoza has adopted elements of scholastic natural law theory is strengthened, as we shall see, by his systematic use of the language of virtue in both the *Ethics* and his political writings, which he defines in part as the power to bring about things in accord with the laws of man's nature. But if Spinoza has become a kind of natural law theorist, he is certainly an unusual example of it. For one thing, given his forceful critique of natural teleology, it would appear difficult to integrate

⁴ Steenbakkens, "The Textual History."

⁵ See, for instance, Curley, "Man and Nature in Spinoza"; Verbeek, *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise*.

⁶ For example, Tosel, "Y-a-t-il Une Philosophie."

⁷ References to the *Theological-Political Treatise* and to the *Political Treatise* are to the forthcoming Curley edition. The numbers immediately following the chapter numbers of TTP are references to the section numbers introduced by Bruder and used by Curley.

Aristotelian natural law theory into his system. For another, Spinoza's use of this language has quite other connotations. The fact that he also defines "virtue," for instance, as "power" (E4d8), might lead us to the conclusion that he is really an early advocate and theorist of interest politics,⁸ an impression that is strengthened when we turn to famous passages in the *Ethics* in which Spinoza asserts that nature in itself is neither good nor evil. If natural law theory is based on the intrinsic normative value of the natural order that, with the aid of reason, we can realize in the determination of our proper ends, then Spinoza's metaphysics would appear to be entirely incompatible with it.

Each of these interpretations of Spinoza's political theory is related to an important philosophical problem. If Spinoza offers a version of social contract theory, then how does he solve the problem of state formation and maintenance? In particular, how does he solve the problem of the free-rider, that is, the person who finds it rational not to cooperate at all but still enjoy the fruits of the cooperation of others? Spinoza criticizes Hobbes's solutions to these problems and in some ways makes it even more difficult to resolve these issues. If Spinoza offers a version of natural law theory based on an account of virtue, then does he not just beg the most pressing questions concerning the formation and maintenance of a state in the age of religious pluralism and strife: how can conflict among individuals and sectarian groups be overcome to form a stable and secure state? And finally, if Spinoza offers an early version of a scientific theory of interest politics, then we can ask how he can account for the normative dimension of political philosophy. In other words, if politics is simply a matter of finding the means to satisfy the greatest number of interests and still maintain stability and security, then on what grounds could someone criticize the state as unjust? When Spinoza identifies "right" and "virtue" with power, is he not, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau claimed,⁹ simply equating might with right?

In what follows, I shall show that we can solve both philosophical and classification problems through a different interpretation of his political thought. I shall argue that Spinoza is a modern *republican* political philosopher. This claim has four basic elements. First, the state depends on a continuous and dynamic transfer of power from its citizens, which I define as *participation* in public life. Second, the stability of a state depends on how effectively the regime can foster participation in the state. Hence the republican ideal of government is expressed not so much in any particular constitutional form of the state but in how well each form can foster participation. The state's relation to its citizens is defined through the *minimal* and *maximal* forms of participation. The minimal definition is simply non-interference in the activities of others; the maximal definition is the promotion of a common good. Third, the participation of the individual in the state is not an end in itself but the means to the individual's own freedom. So, although participation in the state is a necessary condition of individual well-being, it is certainly not sufficient. Fourth, the participation

⁸ On this general topic, see Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*.

⁹ See Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Book I, Chapter III.

of individuals in the state, the quality and structure of state stability, and the freedom of the state and individual depend on the degree of rationality manifest in both the individual and in the institutional structures of the state. In other words, Spinoza's theory of knowledge and the passions have an important role to play in his political theory. To the extent that individuals act on the basis of reason and can check their irrational passions, and to the extent that the institutions of the state are developed in accordance with a scientific understanding of human nature, the state will be more stable and the individual more free.

This notion of a republican political theory helps resolve, I shall claim, each of the difficulties mentioned earlier. First, it explains the problem of classification and why Spinoza's view does not fit neatly into any of the other types of political theories. I shall argue that through his critique of these other positions he develops his own unique theory. Second, it resolves some of the key philosophical difficulties of the other competing interpretations. The idea of participation as a dynamic transfer of power helps explain how the state is formed and how the free-rider problem might be avoided. Spinoza, as we shall see, offers solutions both for the case in which the actors are primarily rational and for the case in which they are primarily irrational, or led by their passions. The idea that stability can be gained through a variety of state-forms, which depend on both specific mechanisms in the state constitution and also on the contingent conditions in which it is formed, explains how the state can be both natural and prone to conflict. The emphasis on individual freedom constrains the power of the state and also serves as the ground of a normative critique of state power. Third, it shows how Spinoza responded to his specific historical context. He offered a theory that was at once philosophically rigorous and also influenced by the traditions and circumstances of his time. He was trying to support the nascent Dutch Republic and at the same time develop a theory that could explain the strengths and weaknesses of other regimes.

POLITICS AND THE CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

Spinoza uses the social contract in two of his most important texts. In chapter 16 of TTP, Spinoza shows that the state can be founded on the basis of an agreement among men, who in the state of nature, have unlimited natural rights. In Part IV of the *Ethics*, Spinoza also makes use of the same concepts and arguments, albeit, as we shall see, in a slightly different form. So it was a constant feature of his political thought.¹⁰ There are several reasons why he adopted this theory. Obviously, though he only mentions him twice in his entire body of work, Hobbes influenced Spinoza. Spinoza had the

¹⁰ Since some scholars question whether Spinoza's later political theory is consistent with his earlier theory in TTP, it is significant that the same language appears here. For a recent treatment of this issue, see Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*.

Latin edition of *De Cive* in his library and most likely had read the Latin translation of the *Leviathan* as well.¹¹ But this only accounts for Spinoza's sources. The more important question is why did Spinoza turn to Hobbes and his theories. The deepest reasons may be, as we shall touch on in more depth later, *metaphysical* and *methodological*. Neither philosopher could accept the reigning tradition of scholastic natural law theory. They questioned the notion of a divinely ordained political order based on natural laws that could be discovered and elaborated by reason. In contrast, they argued that there were no natural goals in nature, that natural law did not necessarily fit or promote human ends, and that the passions, assisted by a calculating reason, ruled our social lives. For both Hobbes and Spinoza, the state is an artifice that is built on the basis of an agreement between individuals who naturally strive to preserve themselves. The state is not a given of nature but something that is put together by human beings in nature. However, if we leave metaphysics aside, there are important *political* reasons behind the rise of social contract theories in the seventeenth century. As many historians have told us, the religious conflicts between Protestants and between Protestants and Catholics—as seen most prominently in the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) or the internal struggles in many countries, including England and the Netherlands—called into question traditional forms of political life and their legitimation. Hobbes wrote the *Leviathan* in response to a particular crisis that was part of the English Civil War, and Spinoza, as we already noted, wrote TTP as an intervention in Dutch religious politics.¹² The notion of a social contract challenged and transformed natural law theory in response to a profound political crisis and sought to legitmate the new regimes that were developing.

Although it was published anonymously, TTP was the only public statement of Spinoza's political views during his lifetime. Like Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Spinoza's work was greeted with a great deal of hostility, much of which focused on his critique of religion and on the implications of the metaphysical claims. Henry Oldenburg, for instance, was worried that Spinoza's view that everything was necessary was tantamount to a fatalism that would undermine the possibility of any moral judgments concerning praise and blame or virtue and vice.¹³ Yet the political theory Spinoza put forth was just as controversial, since it attempted to ground the authority of the state without recourse to either divine or traditional authority. Indeed, as we shall discuss, the theological part of the treatise is in fact essential to the political argument. The purpose of TTP, as stated in the subtitle, is to show "that the Freedom of Philosophizing not only can be granted without harm to Piety and the Peace of the State, but also cannot be abolished unless Piety and the Peace of the State are also destroyed" (G 3:4).

¹¹ For more on the relation to Hobbes, see Curley, "I Durst Not Write So Boldly."

¹² For the background to Hobbes's work and the relation to his arguments, see Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*. There are other factors as well, such as the rise of capitalism, what C.B. Macpherson in his classic book called the theory of "possessive individualism," and the very birth of the idea of a modern nation state. See Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*.

¹³ See Ep. 74 and Spinoza's response in Ep. 75.

In order to establish this point, Spinoza must take three steps. First, he must limit the political claims of religion, which he does through the systematic critique of its foundation in revelation and the record of that revelation in Scripture. He concludes that the Bible is often unreliable and that prophecy is based on the imagination rather than reason and is addressed to a particular group and situation rather than to mankind in general. Hence, he claims that prophecy, unlike philosophy, has no right to make truth claims and should be employed only to promote social goods such as political obedience, justice, and charity. The second step, which we shall examine in more detail, is to explain the foundations of the state. He does this, as we are just about to explain, through the mechanism of a social contract theory. Religion in its legitimate sense is often, though perhaps not always, necessary to the foundation justification of the state. The third step is to determine the proper relation of the state to the church. Spinoza leaves little doubt that the state should be preeminent. Religion in its legitimate sense is often, though perhaps not always, necessary to the foundation of the state. But it must always subordinate itself to the ends of the state and has no right to challenge the state's fundamental authority over earthly affairs. Still, in order to maintain its power, the state must take into account the passions and imaginative identities of its citizens, which of course include more than anything else (at least in the seventeenth century) religion. If religion acts within its proper domain, then it can aid the state. And unless it trespasses across its boundaries, the state should tolerate religious expression. We need to keep in mind the relation of the explicit political theory of TTP to its larger goals.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

In chapter 16 of TTP, Spinoza offers the clearest statement of his social contract theory, whose goal it is to explain how individuals in the state of nature contract to establish a sovereign and civil society. "By the right and established practice of nature I mean nothing but the rules of the nature of each individual, according to which we conceive each thing to be naturally determined to existing and acting in a certain way." Lest we miss the implication of this definition, he continues: "For example, fish are determined by nature to swimming, and the large ones to eating the smaller; so it is by the supreme right of nature that fish are the masters of the water, and that the large ones eat the smaller" (TTP 16.2/G 3:189). The origin of this particular right is not some divine gift or decree, but rather the whole of nature itself. Because nature does what it does with supreme right, and because each particular thing in nature is part of nature as a whole, each particular thing has supreme right to do what it does. One might object here that nature is itself constrained by its creator, God. But this argument for natural right makes sense only against the background of Spinoza's radical metaphysics. He denies the existence of a transcendent God who stands outside of nature and who has created it for a purpose and then directs it towards that end. Instead, God just is the eternal natural

order, in the sense that he is identical with the laws that order it (TTP 3.7–10/G 3:45). So the right of nature is its infinite power, which is expressed in the innumerable activities of its constituent finite parts. Because a finite individual's right derives from nature as a whole, Spinoza does not give any distinct privilege to human rights over and against other things (TTP 16.5/G 3:189). All natural things have rights and what distinguishes them from one another is their relative power, which is circumscribed by their particular nature. Nor does Spinoza consider reason to have a special special role in defining a natural right. Because the right derives from nature itself and each thing has the "supreme right . . . to exist and act as it is naturally determined to do," both the "wise man has the supreme right to do everything which reason dictates" and the "ignorant and the weak-minded have the supreme right to do everything appetite urges" (TTP 16.6/G 3:190). A person has a natural right to act and preserve himself however he sees fit.

If we generalize natural right we quickly discover that the natural condition of man is no Garden of Eden but a barren landscape full of peril. Like Hobbes, who famously claimed that life in a state of nature was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (*Leviathan*, xiii.9), Spinoza also believes that natural right leads to conflict.¹⁴ In the absence of any coercive sovereign right, an individual not only acts as it is determined to do, but has the *right* to do so. As Spinoza puts it:

So whatever anyone who is considered to be only under the authority of nature judges to be useful for himself, whether under the guidance of sound reason or by the prompting of the affects, he is permitted, by supreme natural right, to want and to take, in whatever way, whether by force, by deception, by entreaties, or by whatever other way is, in the end, easier. [TTP 16.8/G 3:190]

It is a short step to conclude that a person "is permitted to regard as an enemy anyone who wants to prevent him from doing what he intends to do" (TTP 16.8/G 3:190). Unlike Hobbes, Spinoza does not describe in any detail how conflicting individual desires, the right to do whatever one sees fit, and the right to declare anyone in one's way as an enemy or object of manipulation lead to a state of war.¹⁵ But it is easy enough to see how these conditions would lead to a "wretched and almost brutal life" (TTP 4.20/G 3:79) characterized by fear, anxiety, and insecurity (TTP 16.12–13/G 3:191). Without any coercive sovereign authority, the natural right to preserve oneself would lead to a conflict that endangers the very existence of the individuals who have that right.

Natural right produces conflict among men, but it also contains the grounds for overcoming that conflict through the establishment of a sovereign power. Natural right does not have any special moral status that would constrain actions in the state of nature.

¹⁴ I refer to Curley's edition of the *Leviathan* by chapter and section number.

¹⁵ There is a brief discussion in TTP 4.20/G 3:73. Hobbes argues that the "chief causes of quarrel" are "competition . . . diffidence . . . and glory" (*Leviathan*, xiii.6).

As we have seen, it justifies whatever men naturally desire and leads most often to conflict. But natural right does involve the intrinsic desire for self-preservation. The natural disadvantages of the state of nature conflict with this desire and produce two motivations for leaving the state of nature behind. It produces psychological states, such as fear and anger, that are generally negative and tend to detract from our power to persevere because they produce conflict. And it produces pragmatic judgments based on simple instrumental reasoning that individuals would be better off even if their natural rights were curtailed. So both reason and passion motivate us to leave a pure state of nature behind:

[N]o one can doubt how much more advantageous it is to man to live according to the laws and certain dictates of our reason, which, as we have said, aim only at the true advantage of man. Moreover, there is no one who does not desire to live securely, and as far as possible, without fear. [TTP 16.12/G 3:191]

Still, even if men have the motivation to leave the state of nature, the problem remains of how exactly to achieve this goal. “[S]o long as everyone is permitted to do whatever he likes” (TTP 16.12/G 3:191), how could men give up their natural right without endangering themselves and thus violating the very reason for limiting the natural right in the first place? It is the social contract that makes it possible.

Spinoza thinks that the only way to overcome the uncertainty in the state of nature is to come together in a collective agreement that at once limits the right of each individual but benefits all through the establishment of a coercive authority that can ensure security for individuals. As he writes,

To live securely and very well men were necessarily obliged to act together, in concert, and that therefore they brought it about that the right which each one had to all things, according to nature, they would have collectively, and that it would not be determined any more according to the force and appetite of each one, but according to the power and will of everyone together. [TTP 16.13/G 3:191]

The idea of the social contract is that it simultaneously limits the excesses of natural right and also satisfies the basic desire for self-preservation. Of course, we may still ask what is the mechanism that makes this kind of collective agreement possible.

Spinoza derives an important corollary from his interpretation of natural right that explains the mechanism of the transition from a state of nature to a civil society. It is, he writes, a “Universal law of human nature,” that

no one fails to pursue anything which he judges to be good, unless he hopes for a greater good or fears a greater harm; nor does he submit to any evil, except to avoid a greater one, or because he hopes for a greater good. I.e., between two goods, each person chooses the one he judges to be greater, and between two evils, the one which seems to him lesser. [TTP 16.15/G 3:191–92]

Lest we think that he is begging the question, and assuming that men naturally pursue what reason might determine as an objective good, Spinoza reminds the reader that, “I say explicitly: the one which seems to the person choosing to be greater or lesser, not that things necessarily are as he judges them to be” (TTP 16.15/G 3:192). In other words, it is not what is objectively the best but what is subjectively perceived as the best that is always pursued. It is, Spinoza thinks, in the individual’s *interest* or *utility* to give up some measure of his natural right through a contract with other individuals in the same situation to form a civil authority that will establish laws and enforce them to prevent the excesses of a state of nature.

It is easy to see how this works when men are led primarily by reason. In contrast to Hobbes, who had a rather weak definition of reason as a faculty of the mind for the “reckoning (that is, adding and subtracting) of the consequences of general names” (*Leviathan*, v.2), Spinoza thinks that reason is based on true ideas of natural properties, which he calls “common notions” (TdIE §37; E2p40s2). In Part IV of the *Ethics*, Spinoza argues that “only insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, must they always agree in nature” (E4p35). This underlying agreement makes sense of the paradoxical corollary to this proposition, “that when each man most seeks his own advantage for himself, then men are most useful to one another” (E4p35c2). It is not simply seeking one’s advantage but seeking it according to reason. And since reason is an idea of what is common in our nature, the pursuit of rational self-interest will lead to agreement. If rational individuals agree in nature, then not only will they be useful to one another, they will be useful in a way that is mutually beneficial. In other words, rational individuals cooperate because they have a true idea of their essence as human beings and understand that it is through cooperation that their own essential nature is best realized.¹⁶ This claim is echoed in TTP (see 16.12/G 3:191) and is central to the idea that democracy is the “most natural” state (16.36/G 3:195). For when men act on the basis of reason, they can transfer their power to the state without ceding their autonomy. The state will simply be

¹⁶ Jonathan Bennett raised several objections to this key argument: (1) that how a thing helps or harms an individual relates not to its nature as such (i.e. its essence as a human being) but to its particular nature (i.e. its location and needs as a discrete individual), a problem that stems from a conflation between what is good for my nature and what is good for me; (2) that the role of reason is confused: because we all have knowledge of God (i.e. what is common), it does not follow that more of it would be better for us; and (3) that Spinoza has confused two moral visions: is he talking about the good of the collective or the good of each individual? See Bennett, *A Study*, pp. 299–307. Despite Bennett’s various and often astute criticisms of the particular arguments, I think that the main line of thought is consistent and plausible, both in terms of Spinoza’s metaphysics and in terms of common sense. The view is that there is a basis for cooperation in our common natures. (There may be other grounds for cooperation, i.e. in terms of the ways in which we differ, and indeed, Spinoza is well aware, as we shall see, of how our passions emphasizing our differences can lead to forms of cooperation, albeit inadequate ones.) Reason is the way in which we come to understand these common features. The more we understand these common features of our nature through reason, the more we will be able both to act together for the common good, and, because the common good is a necessary if not sufficient condition for many of our individual goods, to use these common features to provide for our own well-being.

the coordinating mechanism of rational individuals to achieve their own self-interest in concert.

At this point, a difficult problem seems to arise. If everyone lived under the guidance of reason, then there would be no need for a coercive state at all. But Spinoza repeatedly notes that most men are governed not by reason but by their affects (or passions) and hence are led to conflict.¹⁷ In the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza famously criticized the utopian nature of most political theory. He intends his own work to be consistent with the experience of politicians rather than the armchair view of philosophers (TP 1.1–2). Thus, in order for theory to be consistent with practice, it is necessary to examine the more ubiquitous case of those who are led primarily by their passions. What Spinoza has to show is how it is possible that the actions of those who are led primarily by their passions and who are not consciously acting on the basis of rational ideas that teach us what we have in common with each other, nonetheless can end up resembling the actions of those who are led by reason.

It is fortunate, then, that the same principle of utility works just as well in the case of individuals who are led primarily by their appetites or emotions, which Spinoza thinks are not rational. Reason obviously also plays a role in this process, but it is not the stronger form of reason involving true ideas of common natures, but more something like Hobbes's simple calculation of consequences. Even most irrational people (in Spinoza's sense)—i.e. those who do not know their true nature—calculate consequences in service of self-preservation. In TTP, it is the fear of being compelled to ends not in any sense our own that leads to cooperation in the form of setting-up coercive authorities. Whether it is the individual's rational calculation that he will not survive without some constraint on the actions of others or the pure fear that without such constraint he will be attacked, he is likely to come to the conclusion that such constraint would be desirable. Indeed, since everyone in the state of nature is practically speaking in more or less the same situation (and juridically speaking, in respect to the lack of civil authority in the state of nature, in *exactly* the same situation), there will be enough individuals in practice (and all individuals in theory) who will be motivated to cooperate and form a civil authority. And once a group of men act "as if with one mind" (TP 2.21), then there will exist the power to wield coercive authority over individuals who may not be so motivated, because, for instance, they have calculated that their interests will be best served in the continued state of nature. The state's right is constituted, then, through its force to compel its members through the control of their affects—and hence their bodies. As Spinoza writes, "that person [the sovereign] has the supreme right over everyone who has the supreme power with which he can compel everyone by force, and hold them back by fear of the supreme punishment [i.e. death], which everyone, without exception, fears" (TTP 16.24/G 3:193). The exact same mechanism is at play in the *Ethics*. After noting that reason leads to agreement and the passions to disagreement, Spinoza wonders how it is possible that men who are led by their affects "should be able to make one

¹⁷ For instance, see E4p37s2/G 2:237.27–32 or TTP 16.21–23/G 3:192–93.

another confident and have trust in one another” (E4p37s2). The answer is to invoke self-interest and the idea that one passion can be restrained by another, stronger one. Fear of punishment is what leads to the “maintenance” [*firmari*] of the state.¹⁸ Through such mechanisms, passionate individuals are led to the same outcome as those who rationally cooperate.¹⁹

SPINOZA AND HOBBS ON NATURAL RIGHT

On the face of it, Spinoza’s concept of a social contract is not very different from that of Hobbes. But the emphasis on utility indicates, at least from Spinoza’s perspective, a very important theoretical break with his contemporary. In Ep. 50 to Jarig Jelles, Spinoza writes:

With regard to political theory, the difference between Hobbes and myself . . . consists in this, that I always preserve the natural right in its entirety, and I hold that the sovereign power in a State has right over a subject only in proportion to the excess of its power over that of a subject. That is always the case in a state of nature.

In Hobbes’s account, the state is formed when individuals in the state of nature give up their natural right to the sovereign authority. The individual transfer of natural right is irrevocable. It is what Jean Hampton calls an “alienation” theory of social contract.²⁰ Hobbes insists on this feature as a necessary precondition of the absolute and indivisible form of sovereign authority. In contrast, Spinoza is explicit that individuals never alienate their natural right in forming a contract. Instead, the individual transfers his power to the sovereign through active or passive activity. It is what Hampton would call an “agency” theory of contract, in which the continued transfer of power is conditional on the representative fulfilling the conditions of the transfer. Since the only ground for transfer of right is, as we have seen, the agent’s subjective utility, if the agent does not think that the expected utility of a transfer is worthwhile (i.e. cooperating is less useful

¹⁸ Curley notes that he would prefer a different text, “*formari*,” which would be translated as “formed” or “established” (C 567). The textual reason is that there is a parallel passage with *formari* in TTP 16 (G 3:193,20). But I will come back to this point in what follows because it bears on an important philosophical problem in Spinoza’s account.

¹⁹ This raises an interesting question. Is the same principle—that what we have in common tends to benefit us—operative in both cases, consciously among rational individuals and unconsciously among passionate individuals? Or does the cooperation of passionate individuals depend on some completely different principle that nevertheless results in the same kind of benefits as those that cooperate on the basis of reason enjoy? This is parallel to a well-known problem in TTP: is the salvation of an ignorant person who is led to acts of justice and loving-kindness through faith the same state as that achieved by someone on the basis of reason? The best discussion of the latter problem is found in Matheron, *Le Christ*. Thanks to Michael Della Rocca for pointing out to me the presence of the former difficulty here.

²⁰ Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition*.

than not cooperating), then the agent maintains the right to withdraw the transfer. The result is that there is not a hard and fast distinction between the natural and civil state. The sovereign is constituted only through the continuous and dynamic transfer of right.

As we have seen, Spinoza has a radically naturalized idea of a natural right. On the face of it, Hobbes appears to have the same view. He defines "natural right" as "liberty to do or to forbear" (*Leviathan*, xiv.3). But, for Hobbes, natural right is something other than an individual's mere power. When an individual transfers the right to a sovereign, the natural liberty of a right is bound not only by the coercive power of the sovereign but also by the imposition of a natural law. Once he has "laid aside" or "transferred" his natural right in accordance with the demands of natural law, the right is no longer in effect (xiv.7). Even if the person were to have the power to disobey, the juridical precept *binds* him to obey, even if his interest were to dictate otherwise. A right is the kind of natural power that can be qualified or even abrogated by an artificial obligation. Spinoza, on the other hand, identifies right and power: "each individual has a supreme right to do everything in its power, or ... the right of each thing extends as far as it determinate power does" (TTP 16.4/G 3:189). Since one's power is defined in terms of acting according to one's nature, it would be impossible for an individual to give up his own right because that would mean to give up one's nature or all his power to persevere.²¹ For Hobbes, the contract is defined in part through the voluntary imposition of a natural law on the individual's unconstrained right. The natural law normatively supplements the natural right and produces a juridically defined civil state that irrevocably binds the individual.²² For Spinoza, natural rights are already the expression of natural law, and it is just a matter of finding the appropriate higher-level laws that determine an outcome that is collectively beneficial. There is nothing normatively special or binding about these laws; they have the same status as the laws of the striving of individual agents. So when an individual finds it useful to cooperate, there is no doubt some law that determines those conditions favorable to cooperation. But when circumstances change, it would be fully consistent with nature to follow some other course of action—say, not cooperating—because those prior laws would no longer obtain in the present circumstances. There is no supplement that normatively binds the agent to some course of action.

Spinoza illustrates his difference with Hobbes on this point in his treatment of the example of the highway robber. Hobbes argues that "Covenants entered into by fear," both "in the condition of mere nature" and "even in commonwealths," are "obligatory" (*Leviathan*, xiv.27; see also *De Cive* II.16). So if I were to promise a robber to deliver him

²¹ It would be a violation of Spinoza's fundamental doctrine of *conatus*, the striving of all things to persevere in their being (E3p6).

²² Let me emphasize that this is Spinoza's own interpretation of his difference with Hobbes. There has been and is a vigorous debate about the mechanism of Hobbes's theory, particularly the function of the so-called "laws of nature." It could be, as some scholars have argued, that the laws are not merely "counsels of prudence," as Hobbes himself described them, but binding laws whose force derives from God's commands. Spinoza resolves this debate for his purposes by claiming that, for Hobbes, there is a remnant of non-utilitarian obligation in the laws of nature and in the promise that binds individuals to obey the contracts they make with each other in the state of nature. This then sets the stage for his theory.

a ransom at a later time, I would be obligated to pay him, even if the robber no longer were to have any coercive power over me. The specific reason seems to be rather technical: “Men are freed of their covenants two ways; by performing or by being forgiven,” says Hobbes (*Leviathan*, xiv.26), and once a promise to repay the highwayman has been made, it can be discharged in only one of these ways. But the deeper reason seems to be that Hobbes thinks covenants in general are obligatory and that one exception would prove deadly to the whole system. In terms that we just introduced, the promise is obligatory because it is the voluntary imposition of an instance of a natural law upon us. Spinoza, on the other hand, thinks that “no one will stand by his promises unless he fears a greater evil or hopes for a greater good” (TTP 16.15/G 3:191–92). He continues,

To understand this better, suppose a Robber forces me to promise him that I will give him my goods when he wishes. Since, as I have already shown, my natural right is determined only by my power, it is certain that if I can free myself from this Robber by deceptively promising him whatever he wishes, I am permitted to do this by natural right, to contract deceptively for whatever he wishes. [TTP 16.17/G 3:192]

If circumstances change, one is justified on the principle of self-interest in not keeping one’s promise. Neither Hobbes nor Spinoza think that fear constitutes a kind of duress that would impinge our liberty. Both thinkers are committed to the view that fear may motivate a free action. But for Hobbes a promise has a normative significance that Spinoza denies. Spinoza thinks that “no contract can have any force except by reason of its utility” (TTP 16.20/G 3:192). He says that sovereigns should abide by their promises just as citizens should, but only because the performance of promises would be beneficial to the state. If the fulfillment of a promise would be detrimental to the state, then the sovereign would be justified in abrogating the promise (TTP 16.46/G 3:197). The overriding concern is the reason for the contract itself—namely, the security and well-being of the subjects.

A COLLECTIVE ACTION PROBLEM AND TWO RESPONSES

It has often been argued that Hobbes’s theory suffers from a profound collective action problem. Why would anyone in the state of nature, whose sole good is to preserve himself, give up his natural rights to a sovereign authority with the power to harm and kill him? If that is true of Hobbes, it is a fortiori the case with Spinoza. Hobbes seems to rely on a view of promising based on a rather traditional view of natural law to establish an obligation that would solve this problem.²³ Spinoza, though, explicitly took issue with

²³ Of course, it does not really “solve” the problem in its own terms at all.

this idea of natural right and the attendant conception of obligation. What could possibly explain how an individual would transfer his power to the sovereign on a regular enough basis to maintain, let alone to form, a state when he could change his mind and withdraw his power whenever it suited him? Earlier, we saw that Spinoza uses the Latin word “*firmari*” in the *Ethics* to explain how fear of punishment can “maintain” the state. But since we are supposed to explain how the state comes into being in the first place, how it is formed, then this account seems to beg the question. Once a police apparatus has been established to enforce the contract, it makes sense to assert that fear generally will lead to support of the state. But what explains the trust individuals would have to have in one another in order to form such a collective coercive apparatus in first place, especially when any one of them would be justified in deceptively making an agreement and then breaking it in order to satisfy his own sense of self-interest? It seems as if Spinoza would respond that only “irrational people” are likely to do this and “rational” individuals would not. But as we have seen, Spinoza has a rather strong conception of rationality. Even if his argument about the rational basis of community were correct, it still would not help explain how all the others who do not see the inherent benefit of community would be led to cooperate. Since he is quite aware that most people are not rational in this sense, he should be able to show how less-than-rational individuals would be led to cooperate.²⁴ Spinoza is quite adamant that rebellion against the sovereign is never justified.²⁵ Yet the question is why not? The idea that individuals fear punishment by the ruler only begs the question because the ruler could produce the requisite fear only by systematic enforcement,²⁶ which itself requires cooperation. If this kind of individual is narrowly self-interested—that is, led by his passions and uses reason merely to calculate what can best fulfil these passions—then why would he not prefer to have someone else bear the risks of enforcement, so that he can gain the benefits of cooperation without the attendant risks, such as pain and death? If most individuals think in this manner, then it is hard to see how any cooperation could occur.

The apparent rationality of free-riding plagues any account of the social contract that relies on self-interest to explain state-formation. Hobbes famously addressed the problem in terms of the “foole” who “hath said in his heart that there is no such thing as justice” and breaks promises whenever it seems to be in his own interest (*Leviathan*, xv.4), just as Spinoza’s agent does in the case of the robber. The answer seems to be that, though it might work once, repeated instances of deception would lead to a negative reputation and that, in the long-term, the agent would earn his just deserts and deserve his eponym.²⁷ Whether this answer actually works is debatable. Spinoza at least does not give this particular answer to the problem. This does not mean that he did not see

²⁴ For more on this problem, see Rosenthal, “Two Collective Action Problems.”

²⁵ For more on this subject, see Della Rocca, “Getting His Hands Dirty.”

²⁶ The threat of punishment without effective enforcement might work once but not repeatedly, which is precisely what is required for the maintainance of the state.

²⁷ There is a large literature on this subject. See, for instance, Gauthier, “Three against Justice.” See also Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition*, whose analysis I have followed here.

the problem or was not concerned with it. To the contrary, we can see at least two sustained lines of thought that address the problem of collective action, one that tries to stay within the bounds of social contract theory and another that ultimately challenges it.

The first response uses one of the major sources of political conflict—religion—and turns it into a necessary and positive feature of civic life. As we saw earlier, Spinoza turns to political theory proper more than two thirds through TTP after an extensive discussion of religion and Scripture in particular. In the opening sentences of TTP, Spinoza writes, “If men could manage all their affairs by a definite plan, or if fortune were always favorable to them, they would never be possessed by superstition” (TTP Preface 1/G 3:5). In order to address this lamentable condition, humans have offered oracles, prophecies, and explanations, all of which seek to overcome the fear and anxiety endemic to our natural condition. We seek to control our circumstances through the creation of institutions that manage our beliefs in a systematic way. Yet these beliefs are born out of our ignorance and are half-truths at best. They also feed the very passions that they attempt to quell. These superstitious beliefs are thus unstable and lead to either contradiction (through external events or internal inconsistency) or to conflict with other competing pseudo-explanatory systems. It is this instability and conflict that the institution of a sovereign authority is supposed to attenuate and control. But, as we have just seen, there is a problem in legitimating and explaining the institution of that authority from within social contract theory alone. The solution is not to discard religion altogether but rather to harness its imaginative and affective power in service of political unity rather than discord.²⁸

Spinoza develops this strategy through an elaborate discussion of the role of Moses in forming the ancient Israelite nation. He assumes that his audience knows this example and, given the Protestant political culture of the time, which was heavily influenced by the Old Testament, would take it as authoritative, that is, as an example to be followed.²⁹ Spinoza describes the situation of the Israelites in Sinai after their exile from Egypt in terms of a state of nature. Like other great founders, Moses is a cunning leader who must convince a disparate group of individuals that the common good serves their own self-interests. The role of Moses does not fit neatly into the confines of standard social contract theory. He is not instituted through a representative process, and he does not conquer the people through any force of arms. Rather, Moses finds a way to institute the state through reference to a set of pre-existing beliefs that he develops and manipulates in such a way that he can achieve his goal, which is to get the individuals to act together to establish a state.

The basic idea is that the leader must appeal to a set of interests that transcend the individual’s earthly situation and so change his self-interested calculations in such a way that they will lead him to cooperate with others in the institution of an earthly sovereign authority. Not surprisingly, Hobbes also grappled with this problem in the

²⁸ For recent useful discussions of the imagination and its political role in Spinoza, see Gatens and Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings*, and James, “Narrative as the Means to Freedom.”

²⁹ See Rosenthal, “Why Spinoza Chose the Hebrews.”

Leviathan where he notes that Moses did not inherit the authority of the covenant, which “depended yet merely upon the opinion of his sanctity” (xl.6), and so he must resort to the same mechanism of fear as a normal sovereign. But in this case it is not fear of the sovereign directly but fear of God. Hobbes cites Exodus in order to show that fear of God’s punishment led the Israelites at Sinai to fear Moses, who claimed to be God’s representative.³⁰ Spinoza also relies to some degree on the same mechanism. As we have seen, in the *Ethics* he thinks that only fear of a greater harm can restrain the passions (see E4p37s2) and the idea of God as a ruler with transcendent power would seem to trump any earthly reason to disobey. Nonetheless, Spinoza is loath to rely upon fear alone—even in the exalted form of fear of God—as the mechanism of social cohesion. In a passage in the last chapter of TTP, he appears to attack Hobbes’s idea when he writes that the “ultimate end” of the state is “not to act as a despot, to restrain men by fear, and to make them subject to someone else’s control” (TTP 20.10/G 3:240). The goal is to let men rule themselves rationally according to their highest natural right. But short of that there are other, less coercive mechanisms to ensure cooperation. In Spinoza’s account, Moses appeals to a sense of providence, in which the Israelites’ actions are part of a divine plan that will ensure them a special place in *this* world rather than the next. In chapter 3 of TTP, Spinoza argues that the Israelites were chosen not for any special wisdom they had about nature but due to the success of their temporal political organization. Indeed, the idea of election itself is what made their political organization unique, for it provided a transcendent ground that produced emotions other than fear to bind them together. The people are enjoined to act in such a way—i.e. nothing else than following the law set down by Moses—that would earn them the special role that God has given them in history. The idea of the “election” of the Israelites appears to them as a gift of fortune (for their base actions often do not prove worthy of the gift), but insofar as it is a political idea used by one of their leaders it exhibits the ingenuity of a leader, whose virtue is proved by his power to achieve certain effects. In other words, Moses manages to convince the obstinate individuals in the state of nature that they are fulfilling God’s purposes through accepting the laws that he has framed.

There is another, apparently very different response to the collective action problem. In chapter five of TTP, Spinoza gives an evolutionary account of the origins of society:

A social order is very useful, and even most necessary, not only for living securely from enemies, but also for making many things efficiently. For if men were not willing to give mutual assistance to one another, they would lack both skill and time to support and preserve themselves as far as possible. [TTP 5.18/G 3:73]

³⁰ “[T]he people, when they saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpets, and the mountain smoking, removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, speak thou with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (Exodus 20:18–19, quoted by Hobbes in *Leviathan* xl.6).

He goes on to say that division of labor is natural and contributes to the cohesion of this rudimentary social order. The social contract, which establishes a coercive government, is still necessary in order to quell conflict, but it is not, as we might have been led to believe based on a reading of chapter 16 alone, an imposition on a cruel individualistic world. Instead, the state of nature is already social and sets the stage for the institution of a political order. At the beginning of the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza takes this idea to its logical conclusion. After noting that “men can hardly sustain their lives and cultivate their minds without mutual aid,”³¹ he writes,

If it is for this reason [that the right of nature which is proper to the human race can hardly be conceived unless men have common laws] that the Scholastics want to say that man is a social animal—because men can hardly be their own master in the state of nature—I have nothing to say against them. [TP 2.15]

Although he accepts the scholastic conclusion, he does not derive it from the same set of premises. It is not because humans have a natural goal of sociability. It is because their finite nature—and the lack of power that follows from it—produces a set of natural incentives to cooperate.

Spinoza develops an elaborate theory of the affects in Parts III and IV of the *Ethics* in part to explain the precise mechanisms by which people are led to join one another in society.

The alternate demonstration and the first scholium to E4p37 show how some of the key processes work. A man desires something and calls it good. What we desire for ourselves we also desire for other men. Conversely, when the man sees someone else desire something, the mechanism of the “imitation of the affects,” by which men naturally feel a facsimile of what others do, leads him to desire it as well. In this way we are almost immediately connected in a complex set of reciprocal desires that link us to others. When the desires are understood rationally, and because the very object of reason is the common nature of things, then the desires will lead us to mutually satisfying cooperation. When the desires are irrational, they may still lead us to limited forms of cooperation—as when, for instance, two otherwise dissimilar people are led together through lust—but, since they are based on inadequate ideas of our common nature, they will eventually lead to disagreement and conflict.³²

The assumption of a complex social life is always in the background of the explicit political theory. Moreover, in TTP, the precise problem that the social contract is supposed to solve—the religious disputes and the related political schism—comes into being only once there is already a highly organized form of society. If men are already social, and if politics is merely the activation of a higher-level coercive

³¹ The theme has already been broached in the first chapter: “For men are so constituted that they cannot live without being subject to some common law” (TP 1.3).

³² The most thorough account of the doctrine of the “imitations of the affects” and of the metaphysics of Spinoza’s political philosophy is Matheron, *Individu Et Communauté*.

form of social life through explicit decision mechanisms, then Spinoza might be said to have resolved—or at least avoided—most of the most trenchant collective action problems.

SPINOZA THE REPUBLICAN

Some scholars have argued that the lack of any significant discussion of the social contract in the *Political Treatise* represented a change or evolution of his thought.³³ Because of deep problems in the Hobbesian framework of chapter 16 of TTP, such as the collective action problem, Spinoza had to move to a new way of conceptualizing politics in his later work. However, as we have just seen, even if there are problems with social contract thought, he does not abandon it completely. Instead of seeing the discourses of social contract and natural law theories as opposed, it is more useful to see Spinoza as trying to combine them in a novel way. The idea of the social contract is a political artifice that mitigates the tendencies to conflict among individuals and emphasizes their natural dispositions to cooperate. The framework in which this synthesis takes place is Spinoza's interpretation of traditional republicanism.

Spinoza, like some other Dutch intellectuals of his time, sought to transform the traditional, humanistic discourse of "civic republicanism" through a scientific conception of "natural law."³⁴ In TTP, Spinoza borrowed the *topos* of a commentary on the ancient Israelite republic that had become common among Protestant intellectuals and infused it with the scientific principles of his own philosophical system.³⁵ This effort was part of a much broader engagement with the republican tradition throughout Europe.³⁶ As a consequence, there are many features that characterize early modern republicanism. (As the vast literature on the subject makes clear, Republicanism is a name for a family of political concepts. Various thinkers whom we characterize as belonging to this tradition advocated many, if not all of them.) First and foremost, it rejected monarchy as the best form of government. However, not all rejected monarchy completely.³⁷ Some, like James Harrington, perhaps the best known English Republican of the seventeenth century, advocated a mixed form of government. Republicans encouraged intensive political engagement of the citizen both through offices and in the military. And, in contrast to its earlier forebears, many seventeenth-century republicans sought the redistribution of

³³ Etienne Balibar, for instance, writes that the philosophical concerns of the two works are wholly different. See the beginning of chapter 3 of Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*.

³⁴ For the Dutch context and Spinoza's place within it, see Haitsma Mulier, *The Myth of Venice*; Blom, "Virtue and Republicanism"; and Prokhovnik, *Spinoza and Republicanism*.

³⁵ For a recent survey of this, see Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic*.

³⁶ See van Gelderen and Skinner, eds., *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, vol. I.

³⁷ Eric Nelson has described this debate as between those who were "exclusivists" about republican, non-monarchical systems, and those who were not.

wealth through agrarian reform.³⁸ A complete account of how Spinoza's view fits within this tradition is beyond the scope of this work. What will be emphasized here are two key features of Spinoza's republican view: the nature of his rejection of monarchy and the central importance he places upon citizen participation in the state.

Spinoza has often been touted as one of the first modern political thinkers who argued that democracy was the best form of government. In TTP, he defines democracy "as a general assembly of men which has, as a body, the supreme right to do everything it can" (TTP 16.26/G 3:193). In a democracy no one preserves his right over another and so all are equal through the transfer of their right to the state. Because all men are involved in decisions, and since Spinoza assumes that cooperation involves a higher degree of rationality, "there is less reason to fear absurdities" (TTP 16.30/G 3:194). It should be noted, however, that in the unfinished section of TP on democracy, Spinoza explicitly excludes women and slaves from government because they are "under the authority of their husbands and masters" just as children would be subject to their parents and tutors (TP 10.3). Unlike male children, who will grow up to become rational agents, and slaves, who are inferior due to contingent circumstances, Spinoza claims that women are naturally inferior to men and incapable of self-rule. He bases this on (1) the empirical observation that nowhere do we find an example of women who rule, and (2) the assertion that since men tend to value women in accordance with their beauty they would be too jealous to follow their advice.³⁹ Although this obviously disqualifies Spinoza as a modern democrat committed to the equality of all human beings, it does not affect the distinction between democracy and other forms of government (all of which presumably also exclude women) in his theory.⁴⁰ If anything, the ground of this exclusion only emphasizes that it is not only the extent of participation but also the rational basis of that participation that is crucial in a democratic state. Democracy is the "most natural" form of the state [*imperium*] because it "approached most nearly the freedom nature concedes to everyone" (TTP 16.35/G 3:195). It can do this because it assumes that its male citizens are rational and so can cooperate successfully without the need of much, if any coercion. The state is stable at the same time as it respects the autonomous natural right of its citizens.

Whereas Hobbes argued that monarchy was the best form of the state because it best preserved the absolute nature of power at the core of sovereignty, Spinoza, as a good republican, claims the precise opposite—that democracy is the best means to preserve absolute power because everyone is always involved in its decisions. Hobbes did not claim that monarchy was the exclusive form of government, only that it was the best.⁴¹ Likewise, the fact that democracy is the most natural form of the state does not make it the only kind of state in Spinoza's theory. In fact, as we have already seen, because men

³⁸ See chapter 2 of Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic*.

³⁹ Due to this prejudice, when I write about Spinoza's political theory I have used the male pronoun exclusively.

⁴⁰ For a full range of discussion on this issue, see Gatens, *Feminist Interpretations*.

⁴¹ This point has been argued recently by Eric Nelson. See pp. 54–56 of Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic*.

are mostly irrational, Spinoza believes that a democracy is highly unlikely. In TP, he seems to prefer aristocracy as the best form of government possible under the ordinary circumstances of human life. A true democracy is rare because it is fragile. It depends on a minimum of coercion and a high degree of rationality. A properly designed aristocracy is everlasting in the sense that it cannot be destroyed except by some external act of fate (TP 10.9–10). In any case, it corresponds to the form of the actual Dutch government, which Spinoza is intent on preserving and improving. He discusses democracy at greater length in TTP than any other form of regime because it illustrates “the utility of freedom” in a state (TTP 16.37/G 3:195). In other words, democracy exemplifies to the highest degree the intrinsic rationality of cooperation. As a realist—someone who is committed to developing political prescriptions based on how men are rather than how they ought to be—Spinoza is more interested in defining and fostering the principles of a human life that lead to a stable state. Once he has isolated the key principle of democracy, he then looks to find it in other, more frequently found regimes.

Spinoza analyzes the three classical types of regime in terms of his fundamental principle of participation. He claims that the stability of each type of regime will be greater to the extent that its sovereign authority widens the scope of participation in the process of decision making. (He does not specify that rational participation is a prerequisite, but he thinks that the more widespread the participation the more likely that a rational outcome will result.) He reiterates this general principle several times in the *Political Treatise* and then offers concrete suggestions as to how each regime type can become more stable. In every case, following Machiavelli, Spinoza disparages mercenary armies and recommends general military conscription (TP 7.17 for monarchy and TP 8.9 for aristocracy). In the case of monarchy, he notes that the power of one man is quite unequal to preserving the whole state (TP 6.5, repeated in TP 8.3), offers a recommendation to expand the number of its counselors (TP, 7.5),⁴² and invokes the principle of participation: “We conclude therefore that the multitude can preserve a full enough freedom under a King, provided it arranges it so that the King’s power is determined only by the power of the multitude itself, and is preserved by the support of the multitude itself” (TP 7.31). Spinoza is always the pragmatist. Monarchy may be the least desirable regime, but it can still be reformed through the application of republican principles. The same is true for an aristocracy. The number of members of the ruling council needs to be proportional to the size of the state. “[W]e must seek a way of insuring that the rule does not gradually become concentrated in the hands of fewer men, but on the contrary, that the number of

⁴² “But for whatever reason a King may be chosen, by himself, as we have said, he cannot know what is to the advantage of the state. For this purpose, as we have shown in the preceding Article, it is necessary for him to have many citizens as Counselors. And because it is inconceivable that something will escape such a large number of men concerning the matter about which they are being consulted, it follows that, apart from the opinions which this Council reports to the King, none conducive to the well-being of the people is conceivable” (TP 7.5).

rulers increases in proportion to increases in the state” (TP 8.11). The greater number prevents absurd laws and corruption (see also TP 8.38). But numbers alone are not enough to ensure a stable regime. Every regime requires “excellence of mind” in its rulers (TP 8.2).

Spinoza is a republican not only because he thinks that monarchy is the least ideal form of the state (though it can be reformed via republican principles), but also because he maintains that the greater extent of participation a state has (and the more rational its citizens) the more power or virtue it has. Spinoza takes Hobbes’s concern with the stability of a state and fuses it with the republican idea of the virtue of political engagement. A state is stable to the extent that it can foster broad and deep participation among its citizens. As we have seen, in order to constitute a sovereign authority, they must dynamically transfer their right to the state, which is nothing other than transferring their power. That can be understood negatively as not interfering with the actions of the sovereign, but it also has a positive dimension, in that it means acting in coordination with others. Because he equates power with right, Spinoza describes the degree of stability in a state—i.e. its power to maintain its existence—in terms of the juridical “absoluteness” of its authority. The degree of absoluteness depends on the degree of participation in citizens in decision making (or the degree of the transfer of power). Thus Spinoza can say that the aristocracy is more absolute than a monarchy and so is better suited to preserve freedom (TP 8 subtitle of chapter heading, and TP 8.3).

Spinoza does not limit his discussion of participation to formal qualities of political structures. He also claims that, if a state is to be successful, then its institutions ought to address the imaginative and emotional factors that motivate participation. The state will be formed only if there is something in common among those who act together. It may be something as fleeting as common anger or something as longlasting as the commitment to a certain ideology or scientific view of nature. Likewise, when the state has been formed, it must design laws with an eye to these common interests and features. If the state produces laws that join some in anger against others, it will enhance its power for a while. While a monarchy can address immediately the emotional vacillation of men during a unstable situation, it must still take care, for obvious reasons, not to arouse the indignation of the “armed multitude” (TP 7.2). In this context, Spinoza again picks up a theme that was central to TTP and makes explicit the role religion can play in the state to foster unity and stability. In an aristocracy, the ruling council ought to have views consistent with the tenets of Spinoza’s “universal dogmas of faith,” i.e. those beliefs about God that foster justice and charity in the state. This is the best way to prevent the recurrent problem of religious conflict in the early modern state: “For it is especially necessary to take care that the Patricians themselves are not divided into sects, some favoring one group, while others favor others, and that they do not, in the grip of superstition, seek to take away from their subjects the freedom to say what they think” (TP 8.46). These comments suggest that, in the interest of fostering solidarity, Spinoza’s conception of religious toleration is more limited than it is often portrayed by subsequent liberal thinkers looking for a progenitor of modern ideas of the separation of church and

state.⁴³ While he recognizes that many forms of emotion can bind people together, he claims that his prescriptions are superior because, as he says in the analysis of the foundations of a well-organized monarchy, “I deduce these things from the common nature of man” (TP 7.2). If the laws and institutions of a state are designed on the basis of reason and reflect a scientific understanding of what we have in common as human beings and what we are capable (and incapable) of doing, then it will foster participation and therefore its continued existence and legitimacy.

VIRTUE AND FREEDOM

One of the charges leveled against early modern Republicanism was that, while its central virtue of political participation might strengthen the freedom of the state, it compromised the freedom of its individual citizens. Hobbes asserted that the citizen of a republic had no more freedom than that of an oriental despotism:⁴⁴

There is written on the turrets of the city of Lucca in great characters at this day the word LIBERTAS; yet no man can thence infer that a particular man has more liberty, or immunity from the service of the commonwealth, there than in *Constantinople*. [*Leviathan*, xxi.8]

Spinoza certainly seems to embrace the republican idea of freedom. He praises the “very shrewd Machiavelli” for his advice both on how to stabilize regimes and on how to protect freedom (TP 5.7). Yet he makes an important distinction in his political writings that is meant to address this criticism. He writes in the *Political Treatise* that:

It does not make any difference to the security of the state in what spirit men are led to administer matters properly, provided that they do administer them properly. For freedom of mind [*libertas animi*], or strength of character [*fortitudo*], is a private virtue. But the virtue of the state is security [*securitas*]. [TP 1.6]

One purpose of this distinction is surely to emphasize the role of institutional design in the success of a state. Even a state that does not have public-minded citizens can still persist if it has fair laws and its military is well-organized. But the distinction also undermines the identification of private virtue with political participation and sets a limit on the republican ideal of the state.

⁴³ For more discussion of this issue, see Rosenthal, “Tolerance as a Virtue”; Rosenthal, “Spinoza’s Republican Argument”; and Steinberg, “Spinoza’s Curious Defense.”

⁴⁴ For a thorough discussion of Hobbes’s view, see Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*.

This limit functions both from the point of view of the state and also from the point of view of the individual citizen. Fundamentally, as we have seen, the state depends on the continuous transfer of power for its stability. While oppression might in the short term produce stability, in the long term it will not because it will undermine the initial reasons for which the individual transferred his right to the state in the first place, i.e. he was convinced that he would be better off with the state than without it. It also works against a more insidious form of control by which the state attempts to mold individuals who will conceive their well-being only in terms that the state defines. Of course, the state certainly contributes much to the well-being of its citizens. Spinoza glosses the idea of “security” provided by the state in terms of its ability to achieve not only continued physical existence of its subject but also in terms of “peace” and “harmony” (TP 5.2). However, even when the various activities of the state contribute to more than the physical well-being of its citizens, it can contribute only to some and not all aspects of these goods. True, there may be some men who identify their goods wholly with the goods of the state—for instance, career soldiers who have renounced all private good for the honor of public glory achieved through dutiful service. Most public-minded men, though, will not identify their goods exclusively with those that the state can provide.⁴⁵ There may be some goods that are wholly private, such as the satisfactions of friendship, or others that are only partially public, such as the pursuit of scientific inquiry. The state might provide resources, such as universities, that are crucial in the production of scientific knowledge but cannot itself arrive at the truths, which depend on individual minds. The fact that the scope of individual goods exceeds the scope of the political constitutes an important check on the state’s power.

So even if we can (and should) analyze the conditions of a state’s virtue independently of an individual, it ultimately supervenes on the well-being of the individuals that constitute it. This is the point that the social contract element of Spinoza’s political thinking emphasizes against classical Republicanism. Individual participation in the state has both instrumental and qualified intrinsic value. It has intrinsic value to the extent that the state can embody shared qualities (common nature) with the individual. But the state is never identical to the individual, and its thriving is never identical with the thriving of its individual citizens. So it also provides instrumental value to the individual insofar as its well-being aids in the pursuit of the individual’s own projects. Thus, as Spinoza emphasizes in the final chapter of TTP, a state that is stable allows for the flourishing of goods that are not directly or at all political. The more a state allows its citizens to thrive the more likely in turn it will be stable, for they will have little or no reason to be discontented and they will have many reasons to promote the state’s interests. Because

⁴⁵ Much more could be said on this point. In E4d8, Spinoza writes, “By virtue and power I understand the same thing,” but then goes on to gloss this identification as “the very essence, *or* nature of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone.” So we could restate the distinction between the two kinds of virtue as saying that the nature of the state is not isomorphic and that the two intersect only in certain limited aspects. For an individual to identify his virtue with that of the state would be to restrict his virtue to only one aspect.

Spinoza does not identify the virtues of an individual and a state, there will sometimes be conflicts between the two. Spinoza's idea of Republicanism, however, offers a balance between individual freedom and the necessity of a highly organized political regime with its own elaborate demands.

The distinction between private and political virtue also helps to resolve a larger problem concerning the source of political normativity. If the virtue of a state is its stability, then what would prevent it from harming other states or its own citizens in order to maintain its power? As commentators have noted, once Spinoza has identified right with power in his social contract theory, then does not anything that we have the power to do make it right?⁴⁶ In the case of the state, if its goal is stability, then would not any means that leads to that end be justified? In Edwin Curley's words,⁴⁷ if there is no "transcendental standard of justice" then how could we condemn the excesses of Genghis Khan or any other tyrant? A classical form of Republicanism avoids the problem by identifying a particular form of the state as a kind of natural good. The actions of the state must be in conformity with that ideal, and all actions of its citizens must contribute to it if they are to realize their own nature. But when Spinoza refuses to identify a single kind of state as the good and distinguishes private from political virtue, he seems to have given up what would be an otherwise useful corrective to the artifices of social contract theory. However, if the stability of the state depends on the active transfer of individual power to the sovereign, and if the individual's goods always exceed the scope of the state's power, then it is the individual's well-being that serves as the normative standard against which we can measure the state's activities. In other words, private virtue, expressed as individual freedom, serves as the natural check on the excesses of state power.

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⁴⁷ "Kissinger," p. 322, also pp. 334–35.

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CHAPTER 20

LEIBNIZ'S ENCOUNTER WITH SPINOZA'S MONISM, OCTOBER 1675 TO FEBRUARY 1678

MOGENS LÆRKE

1. INTRODUCTION

THE first to compare Leibniz and Spinoza in a published work was the Cartesian Ruardus Andala who, in his *Dissertationum philosophicarum pentas* from 1712, argued that Spinoza's doctrine was the "closest parent" of Leibniz's doctrine of pre-established harmony¹. Philosophers and historians of philosophy have been discussing the exact relations between their respective philosophies ever since. Many prominent philosophers have contributed to the debate, including Wolff, Mendelssohn, Jacobi, Herder, Kant, Maimon, Schelling, Hegel, Cousin, Cassirer, and Russell.² Four monographs have been published since the historiography of philosophy was definitively established as an independent subdiscipline in the middle of the nineteenth century. First, in 1854, the Leibniz scholar and editor L.A. Foucher de Careil published a text by Leibniz that he (somewhat misleadingly) entitled *Réfutation inédite de Spinoza*, along with an

¹ This article is dedicated to Professor Mark Kulstad in gratitude for his invaluable help and advice over the last ten years, including and in particular for this article. I am also grateful to Michael Della Rocca and Alex Silverman for their many helpful comments. I use the following abbreviations for Leibniz's works: A = *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe* (NB: the abbreviation A II, i (2) refers to the new, improved edition of A II, i); AG = *Philosophical Essays*; GP = *Philosophische Schriften*; CP = *Confessio Philosophi*; DSR = *De Summa Rerum*; Arthur = *The Labyrinth of the Continuum*; L = *Philosophical Papers and Letters*.

² Cf. Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, pp. 48–67.

extended commentary.³ The work was followed up in 1862 by a re-edition containing an additional preface and some new texts by Leibniz, notably his 1676 annotations to Spinoza's letters to Oldenburg and his 1678 comments on *Ethics*. Foucher de Careil, fiercely anti-Spinozist, considered the philosophy of his hero, Leibniz, to be unambiguously opposed to Spinozism.⁴ Second, in 1890, Ludwig Stein published his *Leibniz und Spinoza*, where he suggested that, in the period from 1676 to 1680, Leibniz was "friendly" towards Spinoza. Stein suffered the misfortune of being rejected by the quasi-totality of German Leibniz scholars for defending a thesis he never held, namely that Leibniz was a Spinozist. In an article by Ursula Goldenbaum, Stein has only recently received the recognition he deserves.⁵ Third, in 1946, Georges Friedmann, a French scholar otherwise known for his work in sociology, wrote a book where he defended the thesis that Leibniz was opposed to Spinozism throughout his entire philosophical career.⁶ Friedmann's *Leibniz et Spinoza* was amended and re-edited several times and has, until recently, been the most commonly read commentary. Finally, in 2008, I published *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, which contains a reassessment of the question taking into account the considerable additions to both primary and secondary literature that have appeared since the publication of Friedmann's monograph.⁷

Recent debates in the Anglo-Saxon world have in many ways echoed the controversies that once opposed Stein to the German Leibniz scholars. These controversies mainly concerned the continuity of Leibniz's evaluation of Spinoza, indeed the continuity of Leibniz's philosophy as such.⁸ Scholars including Gerhardt, Dillmann, and Fischer all argued against Stein that the main tenets of Leibniz's philosophy were already in place before he had any real notion of Spinoza's philosophy. For this reason, Leibniz was from the outset destined to become an opponent incarnate of the Dutch Jew's philosophy.⁹ Similar assumptions about Leibniz's (lack of) philosophical evolution govern Friedmann's account.¹⁰ For readers familiar with the recent debates concerning certain Spinozistic-sounding passages in the set of philosophical fragments by Leibniz from 1675 to 1676 known as *De summa rerum*, the argumentation will sound familiar. It curiously resembles the arguments of G.H.R. Parkinson, Christia Mercer, and others in relation to *De summa rerum*. Thus, in a much-cited article from 1978, Parkinson maintains that any concession to Spinozism in the mid-seventies would be contrary to the "general tendency" of Leibniz's thought.¹¹ Mercer

³ In fact, the text is Leibniz's annotations to Johann Georg Wachter's *Elucidarius Cabalisticus* (1706). For a critical edition, see Leibniz, "J.-G. Wachteri de recondita Hebraeorum philosophia (1706)."

⁴ Cf. Moreau, "Les enjeux de la publication."

⁵ Cf. Goldenbaum, "Why Shouldn't Leibniz have studied Spinoza?"

⁶ See Friedmann, *Leibniz et Spinoza*. (I have used the third emended edition from 1975.)

⁷ Cf. Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*.

⁸ Cf. Goldenbaum, "Why Shouldn't Leibniz have studied Spinoza?"

⁹ Cf. Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, pp. 57–61, pp. 67–75.

¹⁰ Friedmann, *Leibniz et Spinoza*, p. 22.

¹¹ Parkinson, "Leibniz's Paris Writings," p. 78.

provides a more elaborate argument in her 2001 *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, arguing that any attribution of Spinozism to Leibniz in this period would contradict central tenets of a “core metaphysics” that Leibniz was committed to from very early on.¹² Such arguments aiming at bringing all speculation about Leibniz’s possible “Spinozist penchant” to a definitive halt are, in my view, problematic from a methodological point of view. First, they appear somewhat circular: it always comes back to saying that Leibniz was no Spinozist because he could not have been, that he did not incline towards Spinozism in this or that period or text because he never did. Second, and more importantly, they rely on the assumption that the truth of a philosophical doctrine can be reduced to its “core” and that everything falling outside this “core” can legitimately be ignored as mere metaphysical debris. There are, in my view, good reasons for continuing to discuss Leibniz’s relation to Spinoza once such methodological preconceptions are put aside.

In this article, I focus on a single metaphysical key issue, namely Spinoza’s *substance monism* and the stand that Leibniz takes in relation to it. There are two important remarks to make in this connection. First, any historically responsible study of the relations between Leibniz and Spinoza must consider the relation between the two philosophers a *unilateral* one. Spinoza had nothing to say about Leibniz’s philosophy about which he knew very little. Therefore, I will not address the hypothetical question of what Spinoza may have thought of Leibniz’s interpretation of *Ethics* or about Leibniz’s own metaphysics of substance. Second, I address only metaphysical questions. It should however not be forgotten that Leibniz read TTP twice, once shortly after the book appeared, around 1670/71 and around 1675/76.¹³ Thus there is a dimension of Leibniz’s reading of Spinoza that does not concern metaphysics, or at least concerns it only secondarily. I will nonetheless return to the excerpts from TTP that Leibniz wrote when reading it in 1675/76 because they contain a short annotation that is relevant for the question of substance monism. Moreover, I will focus on a particular period from October 1675 to February 1678. This does not imply that I will not refer to texts written before or after this relatively short time span but only that I believe it is during this time that Leibniz truly engaged with Spinoza’s metaphysics. Before October 1675, he did not know it sufficiently to have anything interesting to say about it. After February 1678, when Leibniz read the *Opera posthuma*, there is no evidence that he ever reopened any of Spinoza’s works (although he of course often *mentions* Spinoza after that date). Hence, I focus on Leibniz’s interpretation of Spinoza during the period he was actually *reading* Spinoza’s philosophical texts.

¹² Cf. Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, pp. 386–87, p. 430, pp. 453–55, p. 459.

¹³ Cf. Lærke, “G. W. Leibniz’s two readings.”

2. WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN OCTOBER 1675 AND FEBRUARY 1678?

In September 1675, the German nobleman Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus arrived in Paris. Leibniz had been living there since March 1672. Tschirnhaus, a promising young philosopher, was at the time a follower of Spinoza, whom he had met personally in The Hague in the winter of 1674–1675. Leibniz struck up a close friendship with his fellow countryman that would last until Tschirnhaus' death in 1708.

Conversing with Tschirnhaus allowed Leibniz to become better acquainted with Spinoza's philosophy. Even though Spinoza had only recently met Tschirnhaus in person, the latter had made a sufficiently favorable impression to be equipped with a manuscript copy of *Ethics* when he went to Paris.¹⁴ Tschirnhaus may also have had in his possession a manuscript copy of Spinoza's early *Short Treatise*.¹⁵ It is unclear whether Tschirnhaus showed Leibniz this or these manuscripts. We know that he asked permission to do so through Hermann Schuller and that Spinoza declined.¹⁶ The fact that Tschirnhaus showed much discretion in an analogous case concerning a similar request from Christian Huygens suggests that he probably respected Spinoza's wish and did *not* show the manuscript to Leibniz. However, he certainly did discuss the contents of the *Ethics*. This is clear from some notes that Leibniz scribbled down during or after such a conversation (or conversations).¹⁷ Tschirnhaus quite probably also showed Leibniz the letters Spinoza had written to him, including some letters to Hermann Schuller, who acted as an intermediary between Spinoza and Tschirnhaus for some time. Indeed, it is not unlikely that Leibniz contributed to the ensuing correspondence between Spinoza and Tschirnhaus in 1676 by offering questions, observations, and objections. Through Schuller and Tschirnhaus, Leibniz also gained access to a copy of Ep. 12—the so-called “Letter on the infinite” written by Spinoza to Lodewijk Meyer in 1663. He annotated it quite densely sometime around April 1676. In the period from the end of 1675 to around October 1676, sometime before the publication of the *Opera post-huma*, Leibniz was thus in close contact with the inner circle of Spinozists. The question is whether this had any impact on Leibniz's thinking at the time. To answer this question, one must consider a set of philosophical fragments dating from December 1675 to December 1676 and published in the Academy Edition, vol. VI, iii, under the title *De summa rerum*. This will be the topic of sections 3.1 and 3.2 of this article.

¹⁴ This is the manuscript recently discovered and published by Leen Spruit and Pina Totaro. Cf. Spruit and Totaro, eds., *The Vatican Manuscript*. The manuscript does not differ substantially from the published *Ethics*, at least not in ways that need concern us in this context.

¹⁵ Cf. Lærke, “A Conjecture about a True Mystery.”

¹⁶ Cf. Ep. 70/G 4:303; Ep. 72/G 4:305.

¹⁷ Cf. A VI, iii, 384–85/Arthur, 41–43.

But how about February 1678? What happened then? Spinoza died on February 21, 1677. Shortly after, on February 26, Hermann Schuller offered to sell the manuscript of *Ethics* to Leibniz for 150 Florentines.¹⁸ It was a rather strange offer that Schuller subsequently had to retract because an editing team consisting of members of Spinoza's followers and friends had begun preparing Spinoza's posthumous works. In the months leading up to the publication of the volume, Schuller constantly kept Leibniz informed about their progress.¹⁹ Finally, on January 15, 1678, Schuller announced that he had sent a copy of the book to Leibniz, who would receive it from the "son of the Jew" (probably the son of a certain Abraham Arendt).²⁰ Leibniz had awaited the work with impatience and apprehension. In the first days after he received the volume, he read it carefully, making excerpts and writing annotations and comments. Shortly after, he sent off letters expressing his first reactions to the "strange metaphysics" of *Ethics*.²¹ Among these various documents, the most important is without any doubt a text containing extended comments on almost all propositions in the first part of *Ethics*, the *Ad Ethicam Benedicti de Spinoza*.²² I discuss the text in some detail in sections 4.1 and 4.2.

Between these two important events in Leibniz's life—the day he met Tschirnhaus in Paris and the day Arendt's son brought him the package containing the freshly printed volume of the *Opera posthuma*—there was an important shift in attitude. Thus, as we shall see, at the time of *De summa rerum*, Leibniz seemed largely sympathetic to Spinoza's theoretical outlook or at least quite willing to combine Spinoza's opinions with his own, in accordance with Leibniz's habitual eclectic reading strategy, his "rhetoric of attraction" as Christia Mercer aptly dubbed it.²³ This conciliatory attitude had turned into the opposite after reading the *Ethics*. After 1678, Leibniz remained very hostile to Spinozism and no longer provided room for it within the otherwise extraordinarily open system of knowledge that he spent the rest of his life developing and promoting.²⁴ Arguably, the only other theory apart from Spinozism that benefited from the dubious privilege of being entirely excluded from Leibniz's *scientia generalis* was juridical astronomy.²⁵ So what happened? If we put aside the reading of the *Ethics* itself, it is hard to make conjectures about what prompted this change. In any case, it is unlikely that it happened overnight. A whole series of events between late 1676 and early 1678 may have contributed to this change of attitude.

First, when Leibniz left Paris in October 1676, he traveled to England, where he met Henry Oldenburg, secretary of the Royal Society and long-term friend of Spinoza. Oldenburg provided Leibniz with copies of the last three letters he received from Spinoza. These letters discussed a number of issues, including Spinoza's denial of free

¹⁸ A II, i (2), 475–76.

¹⁹ Cf. A II, i (2), 474–77, 574–75, 610–11.

²⁰ Cf. A III, ii, 314.

²¹ Cf. A II, i (2), 592–93.

²² Cf. A VI, iv, 1764–76.

²³ Cf. Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, p. 57.

²⁴ Cf. GP IV, 523–24.

²⁵ Cf. GP III, 562; A I, vii, 36.

will and necessitarianism, points of doctrine that Oldenburg considered contrary to religion and dangerous for morality. Leibniz wrote extensive comments on the letters and it did not escape his attention that there was something deeply contrary to his own philosophical and theological project about Spinoza's position.

When Leibniz left England for Hanover in the fall of 1676, he traveled via Holland. Oldenburg asked him to bring a letter to Spinoza. Leibniz however never handed over the letter even though he did meet with Spinoza mid-November 1676. In a letter from November 28, 1676, he wrote to Oldenburg that he had had "serious reasons" for this, reasons he would only be able to explain to him in person.²⁶ Oldenburg was rightfully upset with Leibniz, but he never got a clear answer concerning the "serious reasons" behind this peculiar behavior, although Leibniz hinted at some Spinozistic opinions that he found unacceptable.²⁷ Actually meeting Spinoza may have played a role. Leibniz may also have acquired a clearer image of Spinoza's reputation in Holland by speaking with other Dutch intellectuals. As Noel Malcolm has argued, it is quite possible that the letter from Oldenburg contained recommendations of Leibniz to Spinoza that, in case they were published, could prove harmful to Leibniz's fragile reputation as a "moderate" modern philosopher.²⁸ What the "serious reasons" really were is a matter of speculation, but it is clear that the trip to Holland made Leibniz considerably more cautious when it came to the Dutch Jew.

Undoubtedly, Leibniz's arrival at the court in Hanover in December 1676 was also important. In comparison to Paris, where Leibniz had the opportunity to discuss with the greatest minds of his time, the prospects for serious philosophical discussions at the rather provincial Hanoverian court were rather gloomy. Leibniz's best bet was the Dane Nicolas Steno, formerly a brilliant physician and geologist who, during a voyage to Italy in 1666, had converted to the Roman Catholic Church and abandoned his scientific career. He arrived in Hanover around November 1677, where he took up a position as the apostolic envoy of the Pope. Incidentally, Steno was also a fierce opponent of Spinoza, whom he had known in Holland prior to his Italian journey. After his conversion, Steno wrote an open letter to Spinoza exhorting him to abandon his evil ways and submit to the authority of the Church. It was published in 1675 in Florence under the title *De vera philosophia, ad novae philosophiae reformatorem*. Leibniz read Steno's open letter in March 1677 and was not impressed: "I have the impression that Mr. Steno presupposes too many things to persuade a man who believed in so few [. . .]. Spinoza would probably say that these are all beautiful promises, but that he has sworn not to believe anything without proof."²⁹ Nonetheless, spending his days at the Hanoverian court conversing with the somewhat fideistic Dane represented a considerable change of atmosphere in relation to his discussions with Tschirnhaus in Paris the previous year.

²⁶ Cf. A III, v, 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.* See also Oldenburg, *The Correspondence*, XIII, pp. 219–20.

²⁸ Cf. Malcolm, "Leibniz, Oldenburg, and Spinoza."

²⁹ A VI, iv, 2198.

It is not unlikely that this radical change of setting contributed to change Leibniz's general attitude towards Spinozism.

This biographical story forms the background for the way in which I chose to organize my study of Leibniz's reception of Spinoza's substance monism. Thus I will study Leibniz's position both *before* and *after* his change of attitude, first in *De summa rerum* and next in *Ad Ethicam*.

3. LEIBNIZ ON SPINOZA'S MONISM IN 1675–1676

There is a long tradition of speaking about Spinoza's philosophy as a "monism," although Spinoza does not use this term. Indeed, the philosophical term "monism" did not yet exist in Spinoza's lifetime: it was invented by Christian Wolff in 1721. Because Spinoza consequently does not define the term himself and the term can be used in a variety of meanings, before discussing Leibniz's stance towards Spinoza's "monism," one must clarify what is meant by monism in this context. The conceptual history of the term indicates two fundamental forms of "monism." First, there is *monism* simpliciter according to which all things are of one kind. Second, there is *substance monism* according to which there is one substance and everything else is a mode of this substance.³⁰ Whether Spinoza himself would subscribe to any of those positions is debatable but irrelevant in this context.³¹ For our purposes, it suffices to note that Leibniz took Spinoza to be a monist of the second variety (i.e., a substance monist). For example, while commenting on E1p18, Leibniz writes: "This follows from what he thinks to have demonstrated above, namely, that only God is a substance, and all the rest is his modes [*Deum solum esse substantiam, caetera eius modos*]."³²

Spinoza's substance monism—if indeed such a monism exists in Spinoza—can be considered from two distinct perspectives. On the one hand, there is what can be conveniently termed the *unity theory* of substance monism, hereafter designated SM[u]. It is the theory according to which all finite things are modes of a single infinite substance. It concerns the substance-mode relation in Spinoza's philosophy and is stated in E1p14 and in E1p25c: "Except God, no substance can be or be conceived" and "particular things are nothing but affections of God's attributes, or modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way." On the other hand, there is what we can call the *identity theory* of substance monism, hereafter abbreviated SM[i]. Spinoza's philosophy here is considered in opposition to a dualistic—i.e., Cartesian—conception of the

³⁰ On the history of the term "monism," see note 2 in Lærke, "Spinoza's Monism?"

³¹ For a study of this question, see my "Spinoza's Monism?"

³² A VI, iv, 1772/L, 201; trans. modified. See also *De ipsa natura*, GP IV, 508–9, 524, trans. AG, 160, 165.

mind-body relation. It corresponds to the idea that the mind and the body are different expressions of one and the same thing insofar as they are the same modification of substance expressed in two different attributes. This theory revolves around the substance-attribute and the attribute-attribute relations in Spinoza's metaphysics. It is tightly linked to what is often called—with a Leibnizian term—Spinoza's "parallelism," emblematically formulated in E2p7s: "whether we conceive Nature under the attribute of extension, or under the attribute of thought, or under any other attribute, we shall find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes, that is, that the same things follow one another." If we question Leibniz's attitude towards Spinoza's substance monism, we must address both these aspects of Spinoza's theory and what stand Leibniz took with regard to them, first in *De summa rerum* and next in *Ad Ethicam*.

3.1. SM[u] in *De summa rerum*

Let us first consider whether *De summa rerum* contains traces of a theory comparable to Spinoza's SM[u]. This is by no means a new question. It has been discussed intensively mainly among Anglo-Saxon scholars for over almost two decades. The controversy was originally prompted by Mark Kulstad, who, at the 1994 *Leibniz Kongress*, suggested that a passage in a text from late 1676, entitled *Quod ens perfectissimum sit possibile*, contained Spinozistic resonances in that it affirms that "all things are one."³³ Since, then, he has worked out the possible implications of this statement in numerous articles. Robert M. Adams has also taken up the idea, declaring the text outright Spinozistic.³⁴ But the suggestion has also been rejected, most strongly by Christia Mercer, who argues that a few statements that "smack of Spinozism" are insufficient to call Leibniz's position Spinozistic. On the contrary, she argues, once resituated in the larger context of Leibniz's "Platonism," these statements are entirely in line with the Platonistic emanative creation scheme that forms the "core" of Leibniz's metaphysics from very early on.³⁵

In this debate, I place myself firmly on the side of Kulstad and retain the idea that *Quod ens perfectissimum sit possibile* is in some way informed by Spinozistic monism (i.e., essentially related to what Leibniz at the time knew about Spinozism). I take a more cautious stand towards Adams' position on the matter and will avoid declaring the text Spinozistic in any authentic way or similar to Spinoza's own conceptions (whatever they might be is not our concern here). Moreover, I do not contest the idea that Leibniz's "monistic" statement may be understood otherwise in a broader context (Platonist or other). I will simply point to the fact that if we read the text in a narrower, more immediate context—and I fail to see why such a more narrow contextual approach should be any less motivated or, indeed, any less true, than a broader one—it becomes very

³³ Kulstad, "Did Leibniz Incline towards Monistic Pantheism in 1676?"

³⁴ Adams, *Leibniz*, pp. 127–28.

³⁵ Cf. Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, pp. 453–54, and "Leibniz and Spinoza on Substance and Mode."

difficult to explain away the Spinozistic resonances in the text. Let us take a closer look at the relevant passage:

It can easily be demonstrated that all things are distinguished, not as substances (i.e., radically) but as modes. This can be demonstrated from the fact that, of those things which are radically different, one can be perfectly understood without another; that is, all the requisites of the one can be understood without the requisites of the other being understood. But in the case of things, this is not so; for since the ultimate reason of things is unique, and contains by itself the aggregate of all requisites of all things, it is evident that the requisites of all things are the same. So also is their essence, given that an essence is the aggregate of all primary requisites. Therefore the essence of all things is the same, and things differ only modally, just as a town seen from a high point differs from the town seen from a plain. If only those things are really different which can be separated, or, of which one can be perfectly understood without the other, it follows that no thing really differs from another, but that all things are one, just as Plato argues in the *Parmenides*.³⁶

Now, it is clear that even if Leibniz is toying with some sort of monism, as he clearly is in this passage, we cannot conclude that it was Spinoza's monism he is toying with. It is, however, a problem that can be resolved by correlating the ways in which Leibniz formulated his own position with his descriptions of Spinoza's doctrine. In Ep. 73 to Oldenburg, Spinoza writes the following:

For I maintain that God is the immanent cause, as the phrase is, of all things, and not the transitive cause. All things, I say, are in God and move in God, and this I affirm together with Paul and perhaps together with all ancient philosophers. . . .³⁷

In his annotations, written about a month prior to the *Quod ens perfectissimum sit possibile*, Leibniz comments on this passage as follows:

Parmenides and Melissus, to whom Plato and Aristotle refer, have maintained something not so different. I recall having once abridged Plato's *Parmenides* in the form of demonstration. . . . It can certainly be said that all is one and that everything is in God; in the same way as the effect is contained in its full cause, and that the property of some subject is [contained] in the essence of this very same subject.³⁸

Two things should be noted about this annotation. First, Leibniz does not reject Spinoza's position but rather elaborates on it in order to reformulate it in a fashion that he apparently finds either clearer or better than what Spinoza explicitly states. Leibniz thus reconstructs Spinoza's position by saying that all things are one and in God as

³⁶ A VI, iii, 573/DSR, 93–95.

³⁷ Ep. 73/G 4:307.

³⁸ A VI, iii, 370; my translation.

effects are in a cause or properties are in a subject. This is a position that we also find explicitly stated in the *De summa rerum* in a text from April 1676: "It seems to me that the origin of things from God is of the same kind as the origin of the properties from an essence."³⁹ It then appears that, at least in this last text, Leibniz himself defends some sort of SM[u] where God and things are related like a subject is related to its properties. Second, in the annotation, Leibniz suggests that Spinoza's position is similar to that of Parmenides. However, in the *Quod ens perfectissimum sit possibile*, Leibniz affirms that his own argument according to which "all things are one" is "just as Plato argues in the *Parmenides*."⁴⁰ Given these texts, and the proximity of the dates at which they were written, it seems difficult to maintain that the position Leibniz defends in the *Quod ens perfectissimum sit possibile* can be understood adequately without taking into account that it in fact smacks (quite a lot) of Spinozism! On the contrary, everything points to the fact that Leibniz formulated his monistic position in this text being fully aware of, and even accepting, its Spinozistic resonances. Hence, it is clear that, *whatever* type of monism Leibniz was toying with in *De summa rerum*, Platonist or not, it surely was a monism that he believed was comparable to Spinoza's.

I will not discuss in detail what the SM[u] in *De summa rerum* consists in. Its possible implications have, in my view, been sufficiently analyzed in numerous articles by Kulstad. I will, however, address a possible objection, which may help to clarify at least in part what this SM[u] does *not* consist in. It concerns a short annotation that we find in the margins of Leibniz's excerpts from TTP 14. Leibniz writes that: "Here [*hic*] he [i.e., Spinoza] sufficiently reveals his opinion: that God is not a soul, but the nature of things etc., that of which I do not approve."⁴¹ Yitzhak Melamed recently argued that Spinoza's substance monism is covertly expressed exactly in TTP 14 in passages where Spinoza writes that "all things exist and act through him [i.e., God]" and suggests (without however clearly endorsing that view) that "God is everywhere in essence or in potential."⁴² This may have been the specific passages Leibniz had in mind when writing his comment. According to Parkinson, however, the comment must be read as a statement about Spinoza's philosophy as a whole. As such, Parkinson argues, it is sufficient to discard the possibility of any Spinozism in Leibniz's late Paris writings because it amounts to an explicit rejection of Spinoza's substance monism.⁴³

Is this reading convincing? I do not necessarily object to the idea that the note can be taken as a statement about Spinoza's general metaphysical position in TTP. On several occasions throughout TTP, Spinoza argues that "the power of nature is the very power of God."⁴⁴ Leibniz may very well have picked up on these passages. I do not admit,

³⁹ A VI, iii, 519/DSR, 77.

⁴⁰ The comparison between Spinoza and Parmenides is not infrequent in Leibniz's later texts. See, for example, *Textes inédits*, p. 38, and *Discours sur la théologie naturelle*, p. 96.

⁴¹ A VI, iii, 269–70.

⁴² TTP 14/G 3:178; cf. Melamed, "The metaphysics of the *Theological-Political Treatise*," pp. 135–36. For this paper, I used Edwin Curley's translation of TTP. I thank Curley for allowing me to use his work prior to its publication.

⁴³ Parkinson, "Leibniz's Paris Writings," p. 88.

⁴⁴ TTP 1/G 3:28, TTP 3/G 3:46, TTP 6/G 3:83, TTP 16/G 3:189, etc.

however, that it can be considered proof that Leibniz could not have made concessions to Spinozism in 1676. There are two reasons for this—one textual and philological, the other conceptual and philosophical.

The textual reason concerns the *dating* of Leibniz's excerpts from TTP. Mid-November 1675, Hermann Schuller sent a letter to Spinoza according to which Leibniz "thinks highly of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*."⁴⁵ The remark most plausibly reports something Leibniz had said to Tschirnhaus while rereading TTP.⁴⁶ If this is correct, the second reading of TTP took place *before* Leibniz got really acquainted with Spinoza's metaphysics. The notes from his conversations with Tschirnhaus should be dated sometime around February 1676. He only read Ep. 12 sometime late April 1676. Half of the letters exchanged between Tschirnhaus, Schuller, and Spinoza were written during spring and summer 1676. Leibniz only read the Oldenburg letters when traveling to England in October 1676. Nothing then prevents us from thinking that throughout 1676, during the period when the bulk of *De summa rerum* was written, Leibniz obtained considerably more information about Spinoza's position and gained a more nuanced understanding of his metaphysics.

The conceptual reason concerns the exact phrasing of Leibniz's objection. What does it imply to maintain that God is "the nature of things" (*natura rerum*)? The expression is sufficiently ambiguous to allow for a whole series of possible interpretations.⁴⁷ One of these may involve decisive opposition to any kind of substance monism, but there are, I think, more plausible options. One would be that Leibniz rejects an openly pantheistic position according to which God is the nature of things insofar as he is present in the totality of its parts. There is some plausibility to this interpretation because Leibniz rejects exactly this kind of monism in other texts from the period. In a text from spring 1676, he explicitly states concerning the thing that is the human mind that "God is not a part of our mind."⁴⁸ And in yet another text from the period, he notes:

There is in matter, as there is in space, something eternal and indivisible; which seems to have been understood by those who believed that God himself is the matter of things. But this is not said correctly, for God does not form a part of things; instead, he is their principle.⁴⁹

This last passage evokes a position that Leibniz at times attributes to Hobbes, namely that "God himself is material."⁵⁰ But it would not at all be surprising if Leibniz tended to assimilate Hobbes and Spinoza's metaphysical views in the context of TTP. Already in

⁴⁵ Ep. 70/G 4:303.

⁴⁶ Parkinson, "Leibniz's Paris Writings," pp. 77–78.

⁴⁷ In particular, the expression *natura rerum* may be taken either to signify "the essence of things" or as an idiom signifying simply "nature." I owe this point to Kulstad. In *Ad Ethicam*, Leibniz also points to this ambiguity in Spinoza's use of the expression *natura rerum* (cf. A VI, iv, 1768/L, 198).

⁴⁸ A VI, iii, 520/DSR, 81.

⁴⁹ A VI, iii, 392/DSR, 45.

⁵⁰ GP III, 298.

1671, Leibniz noted that TTP's metaphysical foundations were Hobbesian.⁵¹ Moreover, he tended to conflate their positions as two expressions of the same kind of modern "naturalism."⁵² There is thus good reason to think that the position Leibniz had in mind when denouncing the idea that "God is the nature of things" is something like a pantheistic version of Hobbes' materialism. I think there can be no doubt that Leibniz always was opposed to this kind of pantheistic and materialist monism.⁵³ Also, I believe he attributed it to Spinoza after reading TTP in late 1675.

But how about spring 1676, when Leibniz had become better acquainted with the philosophy contained in the *Ethics* through a well-informed admirer of Spinoza, namely Tschirnhaus? Did he still think that Spinoza was a Hobbesian materialist? I think not. There is good evidence that, later, Leibniz was unwilling to simply identify Spinoza and Hobbes' positions. Hence, in *De religione magnorum virorum* from 1686 to 1687, Leibniz describes them as holding related but distinct views: "In fact, this seems to have been the opinion of Hobbes and Spinoza, of whom the former made all things corporeal, and the latter thought that God was the very nature or substance of the world."⁵⁴ The question is *when* Leibniz realized that Spinoza and Hobbes did not endorse the same view and that he would have to revise his understanding of what Spinoza meant when holding that God is "the nature or substance of the world." I think it happened sometime in 1676.

Leibniz's 1676 annotations to Ep. 12 are helpful in that respect. In this letter, Spinoza discusses Chasdai Crescas' conception of the cosmological proof of God and of God as the "first cause."⁵⁵ According to Crescas, Spinoza explains, God is the "first cause" not in the sense of being the first cause in the series of finite causes that constitutes the world but only in the sense that God's existence underlies all things as an equal, necessary condition of this series. God is thus equally the cause of all things no matter where they are situated in the series of finite causes.⁵⁶ Now, Leibniz fully *agrees* with this conception of God's role as "first cause":

This is rightly observed, and agrees with what I am accustomed to saying, that nothing exists but that for whose existence a sufficient reason can be provided. . . . From these considerations a truly memorable thing also follows, that what is earlier in the series of causes is not nearer to the Reason for the universe, i.e., to the First being, than what is later, nor is the First Being the reason for the later ones as a result of the mediation of the earlier ones; rather it is the reason for all of them equally immediately.⁵⁷

⁵¹ A II, i (2), 106.

⁵² Cf. A II, i (2), 277.

⁵³ I think Catherine Wilson goes too far when asserting that, in *De summa rerum*, "Leibniz married Hobbesian materialism to his version of pantheism" (Wilson, "Atoms, Minds, and Vortices," p. 224).

⁵⁴ A VI, iv, 2460; my translation.

⁵⁵ Cf. Ep. 12/G 4:62.

⁵⁶ For Spinoza's position vis-à-vis Crescas, see Lærke, "Spinoza and the Cosmological Argument."

⁵⁷ Cf. A VI, iii, 283/Arthur, 117.

Clearly, Leibniz saw his own principle of sufficient reason reflected in the account of God's status as the "first cause" he found in Ep. 12.⁵⁸ He clearly approved of this account of the relation between God and the world. Now, in several texts written in the early 1670s, Leibniz defines the sufficient reason of a thing as the sum of its requisites.⁵⁹ Consequently, to say that God is the sufficient reason of all things amounts to saying that God either is or contains the requisites of all things. It is in this light that we must understand a reference to the Parmenidian notion of *unus-omnia* that appears in Leibniz's notes from his conversations with Tschirnhaus on the *Ethics*: "[God] is one-all; for in him are contained the requisites for existing of all the others."⁶⁰ This position, however, corresponds quite exactly to what Leibniz maintains in *Quod ens perfectissimum sit possibile*, namely that "the ultimate reason of things is unique, and contains by itself the aggregate of all requisites of all things." Finally, as already argued, what Leibniz holds in this latter text corresponds to the position he attributes to Spinoza. If one considers all these texts in conjunction, it thus seems clear enough that by spring 1676 Leibniz had developed a considerably more sophisticated view of Spinoza's SM[u] than he had in fall 1675 and that he even pondered the option of joining the Parmenidian-Spinozistic club.

3.2. SM[i] in *De summa rerum*

Let us now consider the aspect of Spinoza's substance monism that I call SM[i] in the context of Leibniz's papers from 1675 to 1676. In Spinoza, SM[i] explains the mind-body relation, but it also serves to ground an epistemic principle that will serve Spinoza well. I defined SM[i] as the thesis according to which the mind and the body are different expressions of one and the same thing insofar as they are the same modification of substance expressed in two different attributes. In Spinoza, this same doctrine is also stated in terms of some sort of structural identity. Thus, no matter whether we consider the order (or structure) of things under one attribute or the other, it is "one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes, that is, . . . the same things follow one another" (E2p7s). However, once Spinoza has established the identity of the order and connection of ideas in the attribute of thought and of bodies in the attribute of extension—i.e., what we can call the structural aspect of *ontological parallelism*—he can also validly appeal to the structural features of one attribute when explaining the features of the other. Spinoza makes

⁵⁸ Let me here preempt a possible objection. In his annotations to Ep. 12, Leibniz also notes that the argument implies that "this sufficient reason cannot be in the series of causes" and that "the reason for its existence lies outside the series" (A VI, iii, 283/Arthur, 117). In much later texts, Leibniz sometimes uses similar arguments to demonstrate divine transcendence (cf. *De rerum originatione radicali*, GP VII, 302). However, denying that God is part of things does not preclude the possibility that things can be modes of God (cf. Adams, *Leibniz*, p. 124).

⁵⁹ Cf. A VI, ii, 483; A VI, iii, 118/CP, 33.

⁶⁰ A VI, iii, 385/Arthur, 43 (trans. modified).

use of this form of explanatory strategy even before he has established ontological parallelism. Thus, in E2p2, where Spinoza undertakes to demonstrate the status of extension as an attribute of substance, he demonstrates his point by arguing that “the demonstration proceeds in the same way” as in E2p1, which demonstrates the same point concerning thought. Regardless of whether this constitutes a convincing proof of E2p2, it is clear that, in this demonstration, Spinoza implicitly appeals to ontological parallelism in order to explain analogically the nature of extension through the nature of thought. Similarly, the purpose of the physical digression following E2p13 is arguably to develop a convincing account of the modal structure and dynamics of the attribute of extension in order to use this account to explain the modal structure and dynamics of the attribute of thought. Hence, the two propositions surrounding the physics—i.e., E2p13 and E2p14—both concern not the nature of bodies but the nature of minds (on the one hand, that the mind is the idea of the body and, on the other, that the mind is capable of perceiving a great many things). This constitutes two examples of how Spinoza established a kind of *explanatory parallelism*, understanding by this an epistemic principle appealing to the structural analogy between the attributes grounded in *ontological parallelism*.⁶¹

Let us now turn to Leibniz. Leibniz had at least rudimentary knowledge of this part of Spinoza's philosophy.⁶² He was familiar with Spinoza's replies to a number of letters where Tschirnhaus, *via* Hermann Schuller, had questioned Spinoza about the parallelist doctrine in E2p7 and E2p7s. But does anything in *De summa rerum* suggest that Leibniz was attracted to this aspect of Spinoza's metaphysics? I think yes. Especially in texts written around March and April 1676, Leibniz repeatedly appeals to structural analogies between the realm of extension and the realm of thought when explaining one or the other.⁶³ He even states the fundamental principle of explanatory parallelism explicitly: “One attribute serves wonderfully to explain another.”⁶⁴ This does not, of course, prove that Leibniz grounded this explanatory parallelism in an ontological parallelism comparable to Spinoza's (i.e., that he adhered to anything like SM[i]). We can however here consider a rudimentary table that Leibniz drew up in *De origine rerum ex formis* from April 1676:

Common terms: God. Form, absolute, affirmative, perfection. Change. Modification.
 Belonging to thought: Mind. Primary intelligence. Soul. Universal Republic. Idea.
 Thought.
 Belonging to extension: The extended. The immeasurable. Place. Universal space.
 Shape. Motion.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Note that by this I do not mean a metaphysical principle whereby some feature in an attribute can be somehow conceptually *reduced* to some feature of another. This option is precluded by the conceptual barrier established in E1a5 and E1p2.

⁶² Cf. Lærke, “De Origine Rerum ex Formis.”

⁶³ A VI, iii, 520–21/DSR, 79–81; A VI, iii, 391–392/DSR, 43.

⁶⁴ AVI, iii, 392/DSR, 43.

⁶⁵ A VI, iii, 521/DSR, 81.

Even though the three categories of the table are not organized in an entirely symmetrical fashion, the intent remains quite clear: Leibniz is trying to formalize the structural analogies between thought and extension governing his explanatory parallelism. The most interesting part of this schematic account is the first category, which concerns “common terms.” To gloss Leibniz’s position, thought and extension have in common that they are absolute, affirmative forms all pertaining to God. According to this table, it seems that Leibniz considers God to be the term to which all simple forms such as thought and extension are attributed, and that it is here that we must search for the ontological ground of explanatory parallelism.⁶⁶ This interpretation finds further confirmation in *De formis attributis Dei*, where Leibniz establishes that “the essence of God consists in the fact that he is the subject of all compatible attributes,” that “an attribute of God is any simple form,” and that “extension and thought are more special forms.”⁶⁷ Now, unless one wishes to argue that the “special” nature of thought and extension consists in the fact that they are not simple, this affirms the conclusion that extension and thought are attributes of God.⁶⁸ This finds even further confirmation in *Quod ens perfectissimum sit possibile*, where Leibniz explicitly mentions “thought and extension” (*cogitatio et extensio*) as examples of “affirmative attributes.”⁶⁹ Thus Leibniz was developing a parallelist theory very similar to Spinoza’s, with both an explanatory and an ontological aspect to it.⁷⁰ Moreover, it is a similarity that cannot be coincidental. Leibniz could hardly have ignored the Spinozistic resonances of such ideas, given that he himself noted at the time about Spinoza’s philosophy that “he defines God as . . . a being that

⁶⁶ Such forms are what Leibniz elsewhere also terms “kinds of the world” that “relate” the essence of God in different fashions: “There is the same variety in any kind of the world [*genere mundi*], and this is nothing other than the same essence related in various ways, as if you were to look at the same town from various places” (A VI, iii, 522/DSR, 83; trans. modified).

⁶⁷ A VI, iii, 513/DSR, 69.

⁶⁸ Leibniz himself suggests that the “special” nature of attributes consists in their being more or less “relative”: “it is extraordinary that one form should be more special than another. So forms differ in this: that some are more or less relative. For example, thought has both a subject and an object, but extension has a subject alone” (A VI, iii, 513–14/DSR, 69). For a possible interpretation of these enigmatic statements, see Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, pp. 494–98.

⁶⁹ Cf. A VI, iii, 573/DSR 93. As for thought, Leibniz speaks about an “absolute thought” in *De origine rerum ex formis* (A VI, iii, 518/DSR 75). Interestingly, he also describes it as the “active intellect of God” (A VI, iii, 391/DSR 43). As for extension, *De origine rerum ex formis* develops in some detail a notion of “absolute extension” that is both indivisible and unchangeable, penetrates all things, and has only modes and no parts. Finally, it is “God himself in so far as he is considered to be everywhere, or, is immeasurable” (A VI, iii, 519/DSR 77). All this only adds to the Spinozistic atmosphere pervading the *De summa rerum* papers.

⁷⁰ The following passage in *De summa rerum* could seem to render the interpretation problematic: “So I do not accept the view of Spinoza, that the individual mind is extinguished with the body; that the mind in no way remembers what has gone before; that there remains only that which is eternal in the mind, i.e. the idea or essence of the body—namely, of this body—and that it is this which survives the mind” (A VI, iii, 510/DSR, 61). It is possible, even likely, that concerns about the immortality of the soul contributed to the fact that Leibniz subsequently abandoned his quasi-Spinozist parallelism. Nonetheless, in *De summa rerum*, Leibniz goes through considerable trouble to address the problem without dropping quasi-Spinozist parallelism. See Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, pp. 492–500.

contains all perfections, i.e., affirmations, or realities, or things that can be conceived"⁷¹ and that "[Spinoza] defines God as follows: that which is an absolutely infinite being, i.e., a substance consisting of infinite attributes."⁷²

3.3. Conclusions Concerning *De summa rerum*

Does the preceding amount to sufficient evidence that Leibniz in 1676, based on the information he had from Tschirnhaus, seriously considered the possibility of a divine substance monism similar to the one he believed Spinoza endorsed? I believe that the answer to this question must be affirmative: *De summa rerum* contains not one but many passages suggesting that Leibniz was seriously considering this option, both with regard to SM[u] and SM[i]. This affirmation must, however, be accompanied by three important clarifications concerning the *type* of Spinozism whose merits Leibniz was pondering. First, the Spinozistic substance monism in question does not correspond to Spinoza's doctrine but only to what Leibniz took Spinoza's doctrine to be given the information he had available. Next, the substance monism in question is to a large extent derived from Tschirnhaus' descriptions of Spinoza's doctrine rather than directly from Spinoza's texts. Finally and most importantly, the rudimentary theory that Leibniz sketched out in *De summa rerum* is a hybrid doctrine inspired by Spinozism but which also contains elements that are characteristic for Leibniz and for Leibniz only.

4. LEIBNIZ'S CRITIQUE OF SPINOZA'S MONISM IN FEBRUARY 1678

We now move forward to February 1678 and *Ad Ethicam*. What stand did Leibniz now take towards Spinoza's substance monism? As we shall see, things had changed considerably since the days in Paris. This is already clear from a superficial reading of Leibniz's comments on the *Ethics*, where, for example, he states that "Spinoza is certainly not a great master of the art of demonstrating"⁷³ and complains that "the author's mind seems to have been most tortuous; he rarely proceeds by a clear and natural route but always advances in disconnected and circuitous steps [...]"⁷⁴ Leibniz was clearly no longer sympathetic to Spinoza's philosophy. The motivations behind this shift in attitude can be at least partly explained by the biographical details worked out in section 2. But the exact

⁷¹ A VI, iii, 384/Arthur, 43.

⁷² A VI, iii, 276/Arthur, 103.

⁷³ A VI, iv, 1774/L 203.

⁷⁴ A VI, iv, 1775/L 204.

philosophical grounds upon which he now rejected Spinoza's substance monism must now be explored.

4.1. Leibniz's Critique of SM[u] in *Ad Ethicam*

In his mature metaphysics, Leibniz opposes his own theory of individual substances—called entelechies, substantial forms, or monads depending on the context or period in question—to Spinoza's SM[u].⁷⁵ It would be imprudent, however, to presume that anything like a pluralistic conception of monad-like substances lurks behind Leibniz's critique of Spinoza's one-substance theory in *Ad Ethicam*, for there is not sufficient evidence that Leibniz had any such theory of substance at his disposal in February 1678. There is good reason to think he was already opposing a theory of *created* substance distinct from God to Spinoza's theory of a single *uncreated* substance identical with God himself. Thus, in his comment on E1d3, Leibniz objects that, contrary to what Spinoza holds, it “seems rather to be true, that there are some things which are in themselves though they are not conceived through themselves. And this is how men commonly conceive of substance.”⁷⁶ The affirmation that we should allow for substances that are in themselves but not conceived through themselves suggests—this is at least how this comment is normally interpreted, and I see no compelling reason to interpret it otherwise⁷⁷—that Leibniz wanted to create some room for a traditional notion of created substance. But this does not amount to an affirmation of the existence of a *plurality* of such created substances. It would thus be too hasty to derive anything like an opposition between “Spinozistic substance monism” and “monadological pluralism” from this passage.

There is, however, another side to Leibniz's mature theory of individual substances that is just as important for his refutation of Spinoza as monadological pluralism. It is related to the theory of causation and the Leibnizian conception of harmony. As has often been pointed out, Spinoza's philosophy is a kind of “causal rationalism” to the extent that Spinoza considers conceptual and causal relations to be co-extensive.⁷⁸ There is a long tradition for attributing similar views to Leibniz, but it has been convincingly shown by Stefano Di Bella and Vincent Carraud that Leibniz does *not* conflate causal and conceptual relations.⁷⁹ Quite to the contrary, Leibniz's theory of harmonious “communication” between substances relies strongly on *dissociating* created things *causally* from each other and replacing causal relations with purely *conceptual* relations

⁷⁵ Cf. GP, III 575/L 663.

⁷⁶ A VI, iv, 1765/L 196.

⁷⁷ Cf. Friedmann, *Leibniz et Spinoza*, pp. 141–42; Bartuschat, “Spinoza in der Philosophie von Leibniz.”

⁷⁸ This is most clear from E1a4: “The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of the cause.”

⁷⁹ On this point, see Di Bella, “*Nihil esse sine ratione*”; Carraud, *Causa sive ratio*, pp. 391–496.

on the metaphysical ground level. Such conceptual relations are conceived in terms of logico-metaphysical correlations between individual concepts that Leibniz designates by means of key notions such as “compossibility,” “concomitance,” “conspiration” and, indeed, “harmony.” Thus, in his mature metaphysics, such as we find it in the *Monadology* and the *Principles of nature and grace*, Leibniz maintains that individual substances, now called “monads,” are related only as *if* they were causally dependent on each other, whereas they are, in fact, causally independent, insofar as they contain an active principle and act spontaneously.⁸⁰ While dissociating in this way monads from each other, this theory establishes instead a very strong and immediate causal relation between God and monads: monads are causally related only to God, who creates and continuously recreates them through a form of emanative causality.⁸¹ Thus, in his mature philosophy, Leibniz maintains that all individual substances, or monads, are causally dependent only on God (insofar as he creates and continually recreates them) but conceptually inter-dependent in the sense that they are conceptually correlated to each other in relations of harmony. For example, if the individual substance Paris spontaneously acquires the property of *loving* (Helen), then this property is only a well-grounded property (what Leibniz calls *phenomena bene fundata*) on the condition that there is a corresponding individual substance Helen that spontaneously acquires the property of *being loved* (by Paris). Through such correlations, individual substances provide conceptual grounding for each other's properties. But this in no way implies that Helen's being loved is the *cause* of Paris' loving, or vice versa, since they both acquired their respective properties through a spontaneous “primitive power” bestowed upon them by God when creating (and continuously recreating) them.

Now, returning to *Ad Ethicam*, I believe there are traces of such causal dissociation of things and strong emphasis on their conceptual interdependence. Let us direct our attention towards Leibniz's objection to E1p25. According to this proposition, “God is the efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence.” Spinoza demonstrates the proposition by means of an argument *ad absurdum* taking departure in E1a4 according to which “the knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause.” Hence, if one denies that God is the cause of essences, this implies that they can be conceived without God, which contradicts E1p15 according to which “whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.” Leibniz proposes the following extended commentary:

But this proof carries no weight. For even admitting that the essence of things cannot be conceived without God, by Proposition 15, it would not follow that God is the cause of their essence. For the fourth axiom does not say that “the cause of a thing is that without which it cannot be conceived.” (This would be false, for a circle cannot be conceived without a center, or a line without a point, yet the center is not the

⁸⁰ Cf. GP IV, 499. For Leibniz's use of the “as if” clause in relation to mind-body interaction, see *Monadology*, § 81.

⁸¹ See, for example, GP II, 264.

cause of the circle, nor the point of the line.) The fourth axiom says merely that “the knowledge of the effect involves the knowledge of the cause,” which is something far different. Nor is this axiom convertible—not to mention the fact that to involve something is one thing and to be inconceivable without it is another. The knowledge of a parabola involves the knowledge of its focus, yet the parabola can be conceived without it.⁸²

As Di Bella noted, this development is not so much a critique of E1p25 as a critique of the way in which Spinoza employs E1a4.⁸³ If one accepts E1a4 in the way Spinoza employs it, the conclusion Spinoza draws in E1p25d seems valid: if one maintains that God is not the cause of essences, these can be conceived without God, for *conceiving is conceiving through the cause*. But it is exactly this aspect of Spinoza’s causal rationalism that Leibniz seems to contest in the passage quoted above. In his view, E1a4 cannot serve to demonstrate that God is the *cause* of essences because that by which essences are *conceived* is not the same thing as their *cause*. In short, Leibniz objects to Spinoza that he confuses the cause of a thing with its conditions of conceivability and is thus reproaching him for conflating conceptual and causal implication.

This is very important for understanding the genesis of Leibniz’s mature modal philosophy insofar as it opens up the possibility for the conception of uncaused things. For in Leibniz’s mature modal philosophy, being *conceived* (in God’s mind) but not *caused* (to actually exist) will be the exact status of what he calls *possible* beings. The conceivability of such possible beings is crucial for his argument against Spinoza’s necessitarianism, which is exactly characterized by the denial that such possible beings can be adequately conceived.⁸⁴ But it also has a bearing on Leibniz’s critique of Spinoza’s substance monism. In an important respect, it announces the opposition to Spinoza’s causal rationalism that Leibniz establishes when, in his later texts, he argues that there is not one encompassing substance producing an infinity of modes that, within each attribute of that substance, are all *causally and conceptually dependent* on each other but, on the contrary, an infinity of individual substances that are all *conceptually related but causally independent from each other and causally dependent only on God*. In fact, in *Ad Ethicam*, Leibniz explicitly states something like this in his comment on E1p28, where he argues that “one particular thing is not determined by another in an infinite progression, for in that case things would always remain indeterminate, no matter how far you carry the progression. All particular things are rather determined by God.”⁸⁵

To be sure, the non-causal conceptual implication described in the comment on E1p25, which concerns the strong relation of “conceiving through,” may be a different kind of non-causal conceptual dependence than the one the mature Leibniz refers to when maintaining that all things “conspire” through harmony.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, an

⁸² A VI, iv, 1774/L 203.

⁸³ Cf. Di Bella, “*Nihil esse sine ratione*,” p. 297; *The Science of the Individual*, pp. 81–82.

⁸⁴ Cf. M. Lærke, “*Quod non omnia possibilia ad existentiam perveniant*.”

⁸⁵ A VI, iv, 1774–75.

⁸⁶ See, for example, *Monadology*, § 61.

important step towards the causal dissociation of things from each other (except from God) is taken with the distinction between conceptual and causal dependence in general that this comment testifies to. Moreover, in the commentary on E1p28, Leibniz will reintroduce final causes in order to re-associate things on another level. E1p28 is the proposition where Spinoza explains how all finite things are related to each other in relations of finite, efficient causation. Leibniz objects:

Prior things are not the full cause of the posterior,⁸⁷ but God rather creates posterior things so that they are connected with the prior according to certain rules of wisdom. If we say that prior things are the efficient cause of posterior, the posterior will in turn be the final causes of the prior, in the opinion of those who hold that God operates according to purposes.⁸⁸

In this passage, Leibniz envisages two distinct orders of nature: one going from the “anterior” to the “posterior” taking departure in efficient causes, and another going from the posterior to the anterior taking departure in final causes. Following the order of final causes, all things are related according to a “rule of wisdom.” What Leibniz had causally dissociated in his commentary to E1p25 then becomes re-associated in his commentary to E1p28, but now by means of another type of relation than efficient causation, namely relations of *reasons* and *ends*. Instead of being ordered according to a *causal* order, things are organized according to a *conceptual* order established in accordance with God’s wisdom (i.e., an order of final causation).⁸⁹ These relations are strongly reminiscent of the kind of conceptual, non-causal relations that Leibniz later will call relations of concomitance or harmony.⁹⁰

However, before we rush to the hasty conclusion that Leibniz was already proposing a “monadological” argument against Spinoza’s SM[u] in *Ad Ethicam*, we should halt and reconsider. For there is something essential missing from the account of Leibniz’s position outlined above, namely the idea that nature is composed of entities that possess some intrinsic force or primitive force making them act spontaneously. The notion of substantial forms or anything like it appears nowhere in the text. In other words, in *Ad Ethicam*, we have everything needed for a “monadological” objection to Spinoza’s SM[u], except monads! There is of course the option that they are somehow *implied*. To determine whether this might be the case, we should consider *Ad Ethicam* in the

⁸⁷ In fact, Leibniz wrote the opposite (“*nec posteriora priorum esse causam plenam*”). I follow Louis Loemker and Vincent Carraud—the French translator of the text—in assuming that it is slip of the pen. On this, see L, 206, note 12; and Leibniz, “Sur l’Éthique de Spinoza,” p. 15, note 15.

⁸⁸ A VI, iv, 1775.

⁸⁹ Spinoza writes in E1app that “all final causes are human fictions” (G 2:80). When first reading the *Opera posthuma*, Leibniz underlines the passage and notes above it: “*male*” (A IV, iv, 1709).

⁹⁰ See, for example, Leibniz, *Opuscules et fragments inédits*, p. 521 and A VI, iv, 1621. In a text from 1679, the *Quid sit natura prius*, Leibniz argues that all things “are connected by a sort of equation” (A VI, iv, 180).

context of Leibniz's other writings from the late 1670s. In *De corporum concursu* written in January 1678, Leibniz notes that:

the entire effect is equipollent to the full cause, or they have the same power . . . Note that, in metaphysical rigor, the preceding state of the world or some other machine is not the cause of the following [state], but God [is this cause], although the preceding state is a sure indication that the following will occur.⁹¹

This sounds very similar to the view Leibniz develops in the comment on E1p28. Also, it is reasonable to presume that Leibniz's position in *Ad Ethicam* is similar to the one he endorses in this text, written less than a month before. However, as Michel Fichant points out, *De Corporum concursu* defends nothing like a monadological argument but rather a kind of occasionalism similar to what can also be found in *Pacidius philalethi* from October 1676.⁹² Moreover, additional texts written in the period between *Pacidius philalethi* and *De corporum concursu* remain wide open to occasionalist interpretations, notably *Conversatio cum Domino Episcopo Stenonio de Libertate* from late November 1677.⁹³

The immediate context of *Ad Ethicam* then provides no support for the idea that Leibniz already endorsed the existence of substantial forms in the sense of spontaneously active individual substances. In fact, there is good reason to believe that it is not until 1679 that Leibniz reactivates the notion of substantial form in the context of his physics. According to Michel Fichant, we must identify a shift in Leibniz's position in a text written somewhere around 1678/79 entitled *Praefatio ad libellum elementorum physicae*.⁹⁴ Here, Leibniz writes that "if someone wishes in addition to ascribe to bodies a substantial form, I have no objection to this"⁹⁵ and "to ascribe a substantial form and perception, or a soul, to man alone is as ridiculous as to believe that everything has been made for man alone. . . ."⁹⁶ Unsurprisingly, this is also one of the first texts where Leibniz

⁹¹ Leibniz, *La Réforme de la dynamique*, pp. 145–46.

⁹² In *Pacidius philalethi*, Leibniz explains in the following manner the transition between two different states of a same body: "what moves and transfers the body is not the body itself, but a superior cause which by acting does not change, which we call God. Whence it is clear that a body cannot even continue its motion of its own accord, but stands in continual need of the impulse of God, who, however, acts constantly and by certain laws in keeping with his supreme wisdom" (A VI, iii, 567/Arthur, 212–13). Fichant notes concerning the passage quoted from *De corporum concursu*, that "we thus remain more or less with the doctrine from the *Pacidius philalethi* . . ." (*La Réforme de la dynamique*, p. 293, note; see also Fichant, "Introduction," pp. 42–43).

⁹³ In the *Conversatio cum Stenonio*, Leibniz provides the following very ambiguous explanation: "Properly and accurately speaking, the correct thing to say is not so much that God concurs in an action but rather that God produces the action. . . therefore it follows that in the end all acts are produced fully by God, in the same way as are all creatures in the universe. . . or it will suffice to say right from the start that God actually produces the action, even if it is a man who acts" (A VI, iv, 1381–82/CP, 127; trans. modified).

⁹⁴ A VI, iv, 1993–2010/L, 280–90.

⁹⁵ A VI, iv, 2007/L, 288.

⁹⁶ A VI, iv, 2009/L, 289.

proposes the critique of occasionalism he will later repeat incessantly, namely that occasionalism installs a perpetual miracle at the heart of metaphysics: "There are excellent and most learned men who cannot abide having all bodily phenomena explained mechanically. For they think that this injures religion. . . . Hence some of them make use of an immediate intervention of God everywhere."⁹⁷ This critique of occasionalism, however, contains an element of auto-critique and indicates a shift in relation to a position Leibniz himself endorsed at the time he wrote *Ad Ethicam, in Pacidius philalethi, Conversatio cum Stenonio* and *De corporum concursu*. Consequently, it would be chronologically problematic to suggest that Leibniz was opposing anything like "substantial forms" to Spinoza's SM[u] in *Ad Ethicam*.

So what can we conclude about this? First, we must read Leibniz's comments on E1p25 and E1p28 within the occasionalist framework that runs through his texts as a red thread from the end of 1676 to late 1678 or early 1679. Nonetheless, it is plausible that Leibniz's struggling with Spinoza's SM[u] led him one step further toward his own mature theory of individual substances and pre-established harmony. Reading the *Ethics* led Leibniz towards a better understanding of the fact that conceiving an alternative to Spinoza's position would require that he distance himself from causal rationalism and establish a clearer distinction between causal and conceptual implication. This involved, on the one hand, granting individual creatures greater mutual independence by breaking up the horizontal chain of efficient causes and insisting more strongly on the vertical relation of emanative causation between God and individual creatures. Hence the doctrine, stated in the comment on E1p28, according to which "one particular thing is not determined by another in an infinite progression" but that "all particular things are rather determined by God." On the other hand, it involved placing individual creatures in relations of non-causal conceptual inter-dependence. Hence the further comment on E1p28, according to which things "are connected with the prior according to certain rules of wisdom."

4.2. Leibniz's Critique of SM[i] in *Ad Ethicam*

Let us finally take a look at Leibniz's critique of SM[i] in *Ad Ethicam*. In *De summa rerum* we find a Leibniz largely sympathetic to the Spinozistic conception of God, speaking of God as "the subject of all compatible attributes" and exemplifying such attributes by "thought" and "extension." In *Ad Ethicam*, on the contrary, Leibniz rejects both Spinoza's conception of God and his theory of attributes. He even doubts that Spinoza's definition of God is intelligible at all. Similarly to Leibniz's well-known critique of Descartes' formulation of the ontological argument, he objects that Spinoza has not demonstrated that E1d6 involves no contradiction. Consequently, Spinoza has not proven the possibility of God thus defined: "he has not yet proved that God's nature does not imply contradiction, even though the author says without proof that it is absurd to say that it

⁹⁷ A VI, iv, 2008/L, 288.

does' . . ."⁹⁸ This objection does not, of course, disprove Spinoza's definition. But, at a closer look, Leibniz goes further and argues that Spinoza's definition of God *does* in fact entangle the latter in contradictions when seen in the light of other propositions in the first part of the *Ethics*. For this reason, Spinoza's SM[i] is not only insufficiently demonstrated but demonstrably wrong.

In this section, I take a closer look at the argument Leibniz offers. As we shall see, he argues that E1p5—i.e., the proposition according to which there can be no shared attributes and upon which the demonstration of SM[i] in E1p14 hinges—is not valid insofar as nothing prevents two distinct substances from having some attributes in common if they have others that are distinct. Jonathan Bennett develops a similar objection in his commentary on Spinoza, and it has subsequently come to be known as the "Leibniz-Bennett objection."⁹⁹ Certainly, the commentators who have discussed the objection should be praised for acknowledging Leibniz as its original author. Unfortunately, however, this has also contributed to some misconceptions concerning Leibniz's overall argumentative strategy. For, in fact, the Leibniz-Bennett objection covers only *half* of Leibniz's argument, which, in fact, is considerably more complex.

Let us first consider Leibniz's comment on E1d4 according to which an attribute is "what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence." Leibniz begins by noting that the definition is obscure and then proceeds to discuss its possible meaning in his own logical vocabulary:

For the question arises whether he understands by attribute every reciprocal predicate, or every essential predicate whether reciprocal or not, or, finally, every primary essential or indemonstrable predicate of substance.¹⁰⁰

Without going into the details of this complex (and also in some respects quite ambiguous) classification of predicates, the four options laid out by Leibniz can be summarized as follows:

1. A reciprocal predicate. Such a predicate is any definition, nominal or real (i.e., *a term by which the entire subject is conceived*.)¹⁰¹
2. An essential reciprocal predicate. For Leibniz, to have an essence means nothing but to be non-contradictory, possible, or conceivable: "to be understood is the sign of the true essence, i.e., of possibility."¹⁰² Conversely, the essence is that by which a thing is conceived (i.e., the *idea* of the thing). Hence, essential predicates are those predicates without which the subject cannot be conceived, as opposed to merely

⁹⁸ A VI, iv, 1771/L, 200.

⁹⁹ Cf. Bennett, *A Study*, pp. 69–70; Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, pp. 15–16; Garrett, "Ethics IP5," pp. 83–101.

¹⁰⁰ A VI, iv, 1765/L, 196–97.

¹⁰¹ Cf. A VI, iv, 152; A VI, iv, 1569; GP VII, 83, etc.

¹⁰² A VI, iv, 392; cf. A VI, iv, 762.

accidental predicates.¹⁰³ Being also reciprocal, or a definition, this type of a predicate is thus such that *without it the subject cannot be conceived, and through it the entire subject is conceived*.

3. An essential non-reciprocal predicate. A non-reciprocal predicate is *part* of a definition. Leibniz also calls it a *requisite*.¹⁰⁴ An essential non-reciprocal predicate is thus *a term that forms a part of that without which the subject cannot be conceived*.
4. An essential primary predicate is a *predicate without which the subject cannot be conceived*, insofar as it is essential, *and which is itself conceived in itself*, insofar as it is primary. Such a predicate can be either reciprocal (in which case it amounts to a perfect definition¹⁰⁵) or non reciprocal (in which case it is a simple requisite¹⁰⁶).

Which of these options would most plausibly apply to Spinoza's conception of an attribute? Leibniz, for his part, suggests a partial answer to the question by comparing the definition of substance, which is in itself (*in se*) and conceived by itself (*per se concipitur*), and the definition of the mode, which is in something else (*in alio*) and conceived through something else (*per alio concipitur*). On the basis of these two definitions, he makes the (very dubious) conjecture that the attribute must be defined as something in between. Hence, he writes the following in his comment on E1d5: “[the mode] seems therefore to differ from an attribute in this—that an attribute is indeed in a substance but is conceived through itself.”¹⁰⁷ On Leibniz's reading, then, the attribute is a being that is conceived through itself (*per se concipitur*) but that nonetheless is in something else (*in alio esse*). The analysis already appears in the marginal notes of Leibniz's copy of the *Ethics*. He writes here that the attribute is “that which is conceived through itself, but which is not in itself.”¹⁰⁸ I will not discuss whether this is an adequate interpretation of Spinoza's concept of an attribute but will simply note that this is indeed how Leibniz interprets it. Thus, on Leibniz's reading, the attribute constitutes the essence of substance (and is thus essential), is conceived through itself (and is thus primary), but it is not in itself (but a property that exists in some substance). From this, we can conclude that, with regard to the options laid out by Leibniz in his comment in E1d4, he considers the attribute to be an essential primary predicate.¹⁰⁹ From here, the problem is to figure out whether the attribute is a *reciprocal* or *non-reciprocal* essential primary predicate. This is the crucial point around which Leibniz's comments on E1p2 and E1p5 will revolve. It is in this context the Leibniz-Bennett objection will appear. It is also the discussion of this point that will eventually lead Leibniz to reject Spinoza's SM[i].

¹⁰³ Cf. A VI, iv, 55, 572–73, 1289.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. A VI, iv, 153, 277.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. A VI, iv, 1569.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. A VI, iv, 277.

¹⁰⁷ A VI, iv, 1765/L, 197.

¹⁰⁸ A VI, iv, 1706.

¹⁰⁹ See also the annotations to the *Ethics* according to which “an attribute is an essential or necessary predicate” (A VI, iv, 1706).

According to E1p2, “two substances having different attributes have nothing in common with one another.” Leibniz’s comment on this proposition can be analytically divided into three parts: [1] a first objection, [2] a possible reply to the objection and, finally, [3] a second objection that takes into account [2]. Objection [1] is the one known as the Leibniz-Bennett objection:

[1] If by attributes he means predicates which are conceived through themselves, I grant the proposition, assuming that there are two substances A and B and that c is the attribute of substance A and d the attribute of substance B, or that c and e are all the attributes of substance A, and d and f all the attributes of substance B. But the case is different if these two substances have some attributes different and some in common, as when c and d are the attributes of A, and d and f the attributes of B. If he denies that this is possible, he must demonstrate its impossibility.¹¹⁰

Nothing prevents two substances from having common attributes because they may have only some shared attributes but differ with respect to others and thus still be distinct substances. We will find a very similar argument in Leibniz’s comment to E1p5: “two substances can be distinguished by their attributes and still have some common attribute, provided they also have others peculiar to themselves in addition. For example, A may have the attributes c and d, and B the attributes d and e.”¹¹¹ The crucial point is that Leibniz here argues as if the attribute was a *non-reciprocal predicate*, that is to say, a partial definition or simple requisite. Insofar as it only constitutes part of the definition of the substance it belongs to, such an attribute does not constitute the whole essence of that substance. Contrary to what Spinoza affirms, two substances thus can have attributes in common and others that differ, insofar as the fact that they have shared attributes only involves that they have *part* of their essence in common.

Spinoza could respond to this in a variety of manners.¹¹² Don Garrett has analyzed at least five different options (more or less fortunate) and also himself provided a very convincing sixth one.¹¹³ Leibniz, however, proposes yet another seventh possible reply on Spinoza’s behalf:

¹¹⁰ A VI, iv, 1767/L, 198.

¹¹¹ A VI, iv, 1768/L, 198–99.

¹¹² One could even argue that Spinoza himself did respond, although not in a satisfactory manner. Leibniz was not the first to make this objection. In 1661, Oldenburg wrote: “I am so far conceiving clearly your third axiom—Things which have different attributes have nothing in common with one another—that the whole universe of Things seems rather to prove the contrary. For all things known to us both differ from one another in some respects and agree in some others” (Ep. 3/G 4:11). Spinoza replied as follows: “I have explained that an attribute is that whose concept does not involve the concept of another thing” (Ep. 4/G 4:14). This sounds very much like what Leibniz suggests in the beginning of his comment: “If by attributes he means predicates which are conceived through themselves, I grant the proposition . . .” Nonetheless, Spinoza’s response begs the question. As Leibniz notes, it is valid only on the assumption that all the attributes of the two things differ.

¹¹³ Cf. Garrett, “Ethics IP5.”

[2] Perhaps he would demonstrate the proposition, against this objection, as follows. Since d and c alike express the same essence (being attributes of the same substance A, by hypothesis), and d and f also express the same essence, for the same reason (being by hypothesis attributes of the same substance B), c and f must also. Hence it follows that A and B are the same substance, which is contrary to hypothesis, and it is therefore absurd that two substances can have anything in common.¹¹⁴

The reply can be reconstructed as follows: Spinoza, Leibniz imagines, retorts that an attribute is not a *non-reciprocal* essential primary predicate but a *reciprocal* essential primary predicate. In other words, an attribute constitutes the *entirety* of the essence of the substance it expresses: the attribute is not a *requisite* but a *definition*. For this reason, if A and B had an attribute d in common, this would make of them one and the same substance because, in that case, A and B would have the same definition even though they respectively have the attributes c and f that differ. For insofar as d is a reciprocal predicate and c also is a reciprocal essential primary predicate, c must, in A, express the same essence as d. Similarly in B, f must express the same essence as d, insofar as they are both reciprocal essential primary predicates of the same essence. And, finally, insofar as d expresses the same as c in A, and that d expresses the same as f in B, the essence of A and B must be the same. A and B are in fact only different names for one and the same substance, insofar as their concepts are defined by the same reciprocal essential primary predicate or definition d. In other words: two substances that have an attribute in common have one and the same essence and, therefore, they are one and the same substance. Consequently, two distinct substances cannot have attributes in common. Leibniz argues on Spinoza's behalf as though the latter was adhering to a principle similar to the principles of indiscernibles (i.e., the principle according to which two really distinct things cannot differ *solo numero*).

In order to counter this (fictive) response, Leibniz proposes a second objection. This is where his discussion of Spinoza's position goes beyond the Leibniz-Bennett objection:

[3] I reply that I do not concede that there can be two attributes which are conceived through themselves and yet can express the same substance. For, whenever this happens, these two attributes expressing the same thing in different ways can be further analyzed, or at least one of them. This I can easily prove.¹¹⁵

We can break down the argument by returning to the example. If d and c are reciprocal predicates that both constitute the entire essence of a same substance A, and both d and c are conceived by themselves, these two predicates must necessarily be the same. The distinction between several attributes belonging to a single substance does not resist analysis and becomes purely verbal if one maintains that these attributes are *reciprocal* predicates. In other words, if an attribute is a reciprocal predicate (i.e., if it constitutes or

¹¹⁴ A VI, iv, 1767/L, 198.

¹¹⁵ A VI, iv, 1767/L, 198.

expresses the entire nature of the subject it pertains to), and if it is also a *primary* predicate, that is to say, if it is conceived by itself, then *there can be only one per substance*. Leibniz suggests a very similar argument in his comment on E1p5:

I also wonder why he here takes the word “nature” and the word “attribute” as equivalent, unless he means by attribute that which contains the whole nature [i.e., that attribute is a reciprocal predicate]. If this is assumed, I do not see how there can be many attributes of the same substance which are conceived through themselves.¹¹⁶

If several essential, reciprocal predicates are attributed to one and the same subject, these predicates cannot be primary (i.e., un-analyzable and conceived through themselves). They can always be analytically broken down in such a way that one can be resolved into the other, or both of them into some third, simpler attribute. Leibniz returns to this same objection yet a third time in his comment on E1p10, according to which “each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself [i.e., in Leibniz’s vocabulary, each attribute is a *primary* predicate].” Leibniz writes: “But then it follows, as I have several times objected, that one substance can have only one attribute if this attribute expresses its whole essence [i.e., if the attribute is a *reciprocal* predicate].”¹¹⁷

Hence Leibniz’s overall argumentative strategy is complex. He discusses what he considers to be the only two possible interpretations of Spinoza’s SM[i], pointing out that neither of them is viable, albeit for different reasons. He is not simply *objecting* to Spinoza. He is, in fact, setting up a conceptual *trap*. If Spinoza maintains that the attribute is a non-reciprocal essential primary predicate, nothing prevents two substances from having shared attributes. In that case, E1p2 must be rejected. If, on the contrary, Spinoza maintains that the attribute is a reciprocal essential primary predicate, it is impossible for a single substance to have several attributes. But in that case, Spinoza’s definition of God in E1d6 as a substance constituted by infinite attributes becomes contradictory. In Leibniz’s view, of course, this impossible alternative leaves Spinoza’s SM[i] in ruins.

5. CONCLUSION

In the preceding paragraphs, I have reconstructed a decisive shift in Leibniz’s attitude towards Spinoza’s substance monism that took place around 1677. I have argued that this shift had a bearing on Leibniz’s evaluation of both fundamental aspects of Spinoza’s substance monism, SM[u] and SM[i]. Before 1677, Leibniz had—to paraphrase Stein—a more “friendly” attitude towards Spinoza. He made a serious effort to understand the form of reasoning governing this new philosophical doctrine that he had become

¹¹⁶ A VI, iv, 1768/L, 198.

¹¹⁷ A VI, iv, 1770/L, 200.

familiar with through Tschirnhaus. He also experimented with metaphysical structures and arguments reminiscent of this doctrine. At this time, long before Leibniz's own philosophy had solidified in any determinate form and his metaphysical thinking was in a phase of transition, he thus found room to try out the Spinozistic option and to consider how it might serve as a vehicle for his own metaphysical aspirations.

The experiment did not last long, though. When Leibniz changed intellectual milieu—moving from Paris to Hanover—his intellectual attitude towards Spinoza also changed. There are a number of plausible biographical and historical explanations for this that I discussed in section 2. But there are also a number of philosophical reasons. During this period, Leibniz gained access to texts written by Spinoza making it clear to him that the metaphysics of the Dutch Jew was just as outrageous as his theological politics. But he did not only find Spinoza's *opus magnum* theologically scandalous, but also philosophically “obscure,” “strange,” and full of “paralogisms.” In his critical comments on the first part of the *Ethics*, Leibniz developed a comprehensive critique where he put to use and tested some of his own most recent philosophical discoveries. It is possible that it was at this point that he had the first hunch of the anti-Spinozistic potentials of his own conceptions that he later summed up in a famous letter to Louis Bourguet from December 1714: “[Spinoza] would be right if there were no monads. . . .”¹¹⁸

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¹¹⁸ GP III, 575/L, 663.

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CHAPTER 21

PLAYING WITH FIRE

Hume, Rationalism, and a Little Bit of Spinoza

MICHAEL DELLA ROCCA

APART from a memorably and, perhaps ironically, disdainful passage near the end of Book I of *A Treatise of Human Nature*—a passage that I will turn to in due course near the end of this paper—Hume does not engage with Spinoza’s thought in any explicit and sustained way. That Hume rarely deigns to discuss Spinoza is perhaps not too surprising given the apparently unbridgeable differences between their views: Hume, the arch-empiricist, seems to have very little in common with Spinoza, the arch-rationalist. Indeed, each philosopher does have apparently impeccable credentials as either a rationalist or anti-rationalist. Spinoza’s rationalism is evident in the thoroughgoing way the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR)—the hallmark of rationalism—structures his entire system. Hume’s anti-rationalism is at work in his denial of innate ideas and in his multifaceted primacy of the senses over the intellect. But his anti-rationalism is perhaps nowhere more evident than in his powerful argument against the PSR. This argument is a distinctive anti-rationalist credential, for most philosophers who deny the PSR—and this is just about all philosophers—do so without any explicit argument. But Hume does have an explicit argument, which we’ll get to later, and it may be enough by itself to make him a member in good standing of the anti-rationalist club.

One theme that I will advance in this paper, however, is that there is more similarity between Spinoza and Hume than meets the eye. The similarities on which I will focus are of two kinds. First, there are several principles that guide Hume’s system that are, if not rationalist in motivation, at least friendly to rationalism, and these principles also actuate Spinoza’s rationalist system. Second, Spinoza and Hume agree on how to characterize rationalism itself and on how to elicit rationalism’s surprising implications. This characterization of rationalism that Hume and Spinoza employ is, perhaps, superior to the understanding of rationalism found in other philosophers, even in rationalist philosophers. That Hume joins Spinoza in accepting this characterization of rationalism may help to explain, as we’ll see, Hume’s attack on Spinoza in the famously disdainful passage near the end of Book I of the *Treatise*.

To elicit their similar understandings of rationalism, I need first to explore the other similarity between Hume and Spinoza, viz. the rationalist-friendly principles that Hume and Spinoza both accept. Hume's acceptance of these principles generates (in me, at least) two questions. First, is there an internal tension in Hume's system between these basic principles and Hume's overall anti-rationalism, a tension that renders Hume's system incoherent? Second, given the centrality of these rationalist-friendly principles, what is the fundamental source of Hume's anti-rationalism? The source certainly cannot be these rationalist-friendly principles by themselves. So what then is the source? This second question will be the focus of this paper, though I will at the end briefly return to the first question, which concerns internal tension. My search for the source of Hume's anti-rationalism will have the feel of a detective story, a whodunit, and like any good detective story my story will have its share of surprising twists before the culprit—the source of Hume's anti-rationalism—is finally unmasked.

Let me begin to investigate the fount of Hume's anti-rationalism by proceeding negatively: I will introduce two familiar basic Humean principles that are congenial to rationalism (two other such principles will emerge later). Once these principles have been eliminated as sources for Hume's anti-rationalism, we will have a clearer and surprising view of the one remaining possible source.

The first principle congenial to rationalism that I would like to consider is Hume's claim that conceivability is sufficient for possibility. (I will call this principle CSP). Thus, Hume says in a passage that, if not for its being in English rather than French or Latin, might have been written by Descartes: "nothing of which we can form a clear and distinct idea is absurd and impossible" (T 1.1.7.6).¹ Other such passages abound in Hume, such as, "whatever we conceive is possible, at least in a metaphysical sense" (Hume, *Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature*, para. 11), and, "*nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible*" (T 1.2.2.8).²

CSP is often understood as providing a criterion of possibility: the conceivability of a state of affairs enables us to know that that state of affairs is possible. But as the previous passages indicate, Hume focuses on what entails possibility (viz. conceivability), not on what is a way of telling that something is possible. Doubtless, of course, one may be able to employ a feature that is sufficient for possibility as a criterion of possibility—and Hume does this, for example, in the following passage: "To form a clear idea of any thing, is an undeniable argument for its possibility, and is alone a refutation of any pretended demonstration against it" (T 1.3.6.5). But Hume also and frequently makes the claim of sufficiency, and I will read him in this way.³

¹ I will use the abbreviations "T" for *A Treatise of Human Nature* and "E" for *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. I refer to passages in these works by the relevant section and paragraph numbers in the Oxford student editions.

² Unlike the first passage, this last one could not have been written by Descartes, who does not have the high opinion of imagination that Hume does.

³ Garrett, while recognizing that Hume often states a sufficient condition for possibility (*Cognition and Commitment*, p. 257, fn. 14), nonetheless labels the principle as the "Conceivability is a Criterion for Possibility Principle." Yablo recognizes that Hume treats conceivability as sufficient for possibility, but since he views such a claim as "implausibly strong" he proposes "to (misinterpret) Hume as claiming

As Don Garrett spells out nicely, CSP is crucial throughout Hume's system, such as in Hume's argument against the infinite divisibility of extension (T 1.2.2) and, as we will see, in Hume's argument concerning the nature of causation and necessary connection. But why should CSP be true? Because Hume regards it as "an establish'd maxim in metaphysics," he doesn't explore ways to motivate CSP. But here is a possible motivation—not necessarily Hume's—that is far from conclusive but that brings out CSP's rationalist appeal. One advantage of seeing modal facts as tied to conceivability facts is that we would then have an account of modal facts—a way of grounding them in something, viz. conceptual connection or containment, that is perhaps more familiar. Such an account of modality promises to remove at least some of the mystery from modality. Without such an account, modality threatens to be primitive. And if modality is primitive, we would not be able to give an account of why certain states of affairs are possible and others states of affairs are not. These states of affairs are possible and the others are not, and that's all there is to it. There would thus be no way to render this difference intelligible. A rationalist would embrace CSP to avoid this dark situation and to render intelligible a class of facts—modal facts—that would otherwise threaten to be mysterious. While Hume does not give this rationalist motivation for CSP and while the principle may be able to be motivated in rationalist-independent ways, the fact that CSP is congenial to rationalism shows that CSP by itself cannot be the source of Hume's anti-rationalism: how could a principle usable by a proponent of rationalism lead to anti-rationalism, unless of course there is some rationalist antinomy centered on CSP? But there is no sign that Hume invokes such an antinomy, and I will not pursue this matter further here.

The second rationalist-friendly principle at work in Hume that I want to explore is the view that causation requires conceptual connection. (I will call this principle CRCC.) According to CRCC, if one object (or event or whatever) causes another, then not only are they necessarily connected, but also the necessary connection is so strong that one cannot conceive of the first existing or occurring without thereby being committed to seeing the second as existing or occurring. For the proponent of this principle, there is some kind of conceptual connection between the relata in a cause-and-effect pair such that upon observing the cause one would, in effect, be able to deduce that the effect will occur. Upon observing this cause, one can, as I like to put it, see the effect coming.

Hume certainly accepts that causation involves some kind of necessary connection, and at times he seems also to accept the stronger claim that causation requires conceptual connection; that is, he seems to accept CRCC or at least to acknowledge that we are seriously drawn to it. At these times, he seems to hold that for there to be the necessary connection required for a causal relation (T 1.3.2.11), one must be able to see that the effect will occur. Upon observing the cause, we can deduce that the effect will occur "by the mere dint of thought and reasoning" (E 7.1.7). In this vein, Hume specifies that the necessary connection required for a causal relation "would amount to a demonstration,

only that the conceivable is *ordinarily* possible and that conceivability is *evidence* of possibility"
 ("Is Conceivability a Guide," p. 1, fn. 2).

and would imply the absolute impossibility for the one object not to follow, or to be conceived not to follow upon the other” (T 1.3.14.13).⁴

He goes on to claim, of course, that we never do observe such a connection in the world among distinct objects, so we never are able to see the effect coming. His reasons here stem from his Separability Principle according to which distinct objects (and ideas) are separable and thus not necessarily and not conceptually connected. There will be more on this principle shortly.

Given the Separability Principle and the consequent looseness and separateness of distinct objects, Hume concludes that no distinct objects possess the kind of conceptual connection that we were hankering after with our idea of causation. Indeed, he goes on to argue that the idea of causation so understood must be meaningless (e.g., at T 1.4.7.5) precisely because nothing can answer to it in our experience and because, for Hume, any meaningful idea must have its source in experience.

Because he finds that the notion of causation at work in CRCC is meaningless, Hume looks elsewhere for an account of causation, an account that may not capture all that we were hoping for but that may more accurately answer to our experience. Thus, Hume provides his two famous definitions of *cause* that involve the notion of constant conjunction and the transition of the mind from certain perceptions to others. But he seems to lament that these definitions are merely the best that he can offer and are not what we were wishing for. He complains that these definitions are “drawn from circumstances foreign to the cause” and that “we cannot remedy this inconvenience” (E 7.2.29). Hume also says that because one of his definitions ties the notion of necessary connection to mere transitions in the mind, we are inevitably “disappointed” (T 1.4.7.5) and that

such a discovery cuts off all hope of ever attaining satisfaction, but even prevents our very wishes; since it appears, that when we say we desire to know the ultimate and operating principle, as something, which resides in the external object, we either contradict ourselves, or talk without a meaning. (T 1.4.7.5)

Here Hume seems to pay allegiance to CRCC.

However, despite the apparent disappointment with his two definitions of “cause”, Hume may also be read as, in the end, endorsing these definitions and as acknowledging that there are causal relations—so understood—in the world, though not causal relations in the sense of “cause” at work in CRCC. Therefore, there may be a tension within Hume between a more restrictive understanding of causation (based on CRCC) and a less restrictive understanding (based on his two definitions). As I will suggest at the end of the paper, this may be symptomatic of a broader tension between rationalist-friendly and nonrationalist elements in Hume’s thinking.

As I’ve just indicated, CRCC is, like CSP, a rationalist-friendly principle. We can see this in the following way. Causation, as Hume knows only too well, threatens to

⁴ Hume similarly speaks of foreseeing effects in T 1.3.14.12, E 7.1.12 (“secondly”), and E 7.1.18 (“secondly”).

be a mysterious notion. We naturally want to ask—and Hume does ask—what does a causal relation consist in? In virtue of what does a causal relation obtain in those cases where there is a causal relation? Until we have a satisfactory answer, causation must remain a mystery. However, if we explain causation in terms of conceptual connection or conceivability, then the air of mystery seems to be removed, or at least we've reduced the notion of causation to something less mysterious and at work in any process of thought or reasoning, viz. conceptual connection. But if, contrary to CRCC, causation is severed from conceptual connection, then can we give an account of what causal relations consist in? If we say that causality consists in some nonconceptual relation, *R*, between *a* and *b*, then we naturally ask: in virtue of what do *a* and *b* stand in *R*? We can meaningfully ask this question precisely because *R* between *a* and *b* is nonconceptual, so we can conceive that *a* exists without standing in this relation to *b*. But if the relation is conceptual connection, then there is no room left to ask why *a* and *b* stand in this relation. This is because in merely raising the question we are already thinking of, conceiving, *a* and in conceiving *a* we thereby—if indeed there is a conceptual connection between *a* and *b*—are in a position to see *b* coming. That is, we see that *a* is connected to *b* and thus we are not able to conceive of *a* without *b*. So without CRCC, *a*'s causation of *b* would always remain a mystery, a brute fact. Because a rationalist eschews such brute facts, a rationalist would welcome CRCC, which ties causation to conceptual connection and so promises to remove some of the mystery surrounding the notion of causation. One can, as I have argued elsewhere, see Spinoza and Malebranche and perhaps Leibniz—three great rationalists—as holding that causation requires some sort of conceptual connection precisely for the rationalist reasons that I have just outlined.⁵

This rationalist motivation for CRCC is of a piece with the rationalist motivation I offered earlier for CSP: each principle offers a way to understand a potentially mysterious notion—possibility or causation—in terms of the potentially less mysterious notion of conceptual connection. Further, if Hume is right (as seems plausible) that the notion of causality is in part at least a modal notion, then we can see that CSP and CRCC are even more closely related: both principles provide an understanding of the modal in terms of the conceptual.

Hume does not offer this rationalist motivation for CRCC. Further, his acceptance of CSP and his, perhaps, conflicted pull toward CRCC—both of which are congenial to rationalism—do not mean, of course, that Hume is thereby a rationalist. Nonetheless, the presence of these rationalist-friendly principles in Hume can lead us to ask: what is the source of his anti-rationalism? Given that the two principles—CSP and CRCC—are congenial to rationalism, they cannot by themselves be the source of Hume's anti-rationalism (again, barring a rationalist antinomy of a kind that Hume does not seem to invoke). What principle or principles, then, are the source of Hume's anti-rationalism? This is the detective-story question that propels us through most of the rest of this paper.

⁵ See Della Rocca, "A Rationalist Manifesto" and "Causation Without Intelligibility."

To answer this question, I want to examine how, even when he is drawn to CRCC and is, to that extent, in agreement with (at least some) rationalists, Hume nonetheless avoids a full-blown rationalist account of causation. One difference between Hume, on the one hand, and rationalists such as Spinoza and Malebranche and Leibniz, on the other, is that, as I have indicated, these rationalists hold that there are causal and thus conceptual relations among things in the world, and Hume, even when he expresses sympathy for CRCC, denies that there are causal relations of this kind. So, in order to track down the sources of Hume's anti-rationalism, let's look more closely at his reasons for denying that there are conceptually and hence, in this sense, causally related objects.

This is how Hume argues that there are no necessary connections among objects and thus there are no causal relations in the sense specified by CRCC:

- (1) Purported causes, such as *a*, and purported effects, such as *b*, are distinct objects.
- (2) Distinct objects are separable.

Thus,

- (3) *a* and *b* are not conceptually connected and therefore are not causally connected in the sense of causation at work in CRCC.

The same would hold for any other pairs of object, so for Hume no object is genuinely conceptually connected to another.

Point (3) is a claim that rationalists tend to deny. And Hume needs only two premises to reach this anti-rationalist conclusion. The first premise rather uncontroversially claims that candidates for being cause and effect, such as flame and heat or the motion of one billiard ball and the motion of another, are distinct. As Hume says, "The effect is totally different from the cause . . . Motion in the second Billiard-ball is a quite distinct event from motion in the first" (E 4.1.9).

The second claim is more controversial; it is, in effect, Hume's Separability Principle, which he introduces at T 1.1.7.3: "whatever objects are different are distinguishable, and . . . whatever objects are distinguishable are separable by the thought and imagination." At T 1.3.6.1, Hume says, "There is no object, which implies the existence of any other if we consider these objects in themselves." Also: "what is distinguishable is separable" (T 1.2.2.3). Also: "every thing, that is different, is distinguishable; and every thing, that is distinguishable, may be separated" (T 1.2.3.10). Hume applies this principle equally to perceptions—impressions and ideas—and to objects. Thus, we find Hume saying in T 1.1.7.17, invoking the Separability Principle, "*all ideas which are different are separable.*" Similarly, he says in T 1.3.3.3, "All distinct ideas are separable from each other." (See also T 1.2.4.3, T 1.4.5.5, T 1.4.6.3, T App 21.) Hume's claim that conceivability suffices for possibility (CSP) helps explain his free movement between these two versions of Separability Principle: if objects can be *conceived* to be separate (i.e., if they are, in Hume's terms, separable in the imagination), then, given CSP, the objects themselves can really be separated.⁶

⁶ For a very useful analysis of Hume's uses of the Separability Principle, see Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, ch. 3.

Given the distinctness of the purported cause and effect and given the Separability Principle, which implies that distinct things such as *a* and *b* are separable and thus not necessarily connected and not causally connected, it follows that *a* and *b* are not causally connected. Therefore, the claim of distinctness together with the Separability Principle generates the difference between Hume and at least some rationalists with regard to whether genuine causal relations (of the kind that Hume and the rationalists and we were hankering after) obtain in the world. Perhaps, then, it is to these two premises, (1) and (2), that we should turn to find the source of Hume's anti-rationalism. Let's see.

The first premise—the claim that, say, the motion of one billiard ball is distinct from the motion of another billiard ball—is, as I noted, uncontroversial and apparently not a distinctively anti-rationalist claim. Rationalists and anti-rationalists alike can agree, it seems, that the flame is distinct from the heat or that the motion of one ball is distinct from that of the other. So it seems that we can eliminate (1)—the claim of distinctness—as the source of Hume's anti-rationalism, and we must conclude that if the source of Hume's anti-rationalism is to be located somewhere in the argument from (1) and (2) to (3), then the anti-rationalist weight must be borne by (2), the Separability Principle. This principle now seems the likely suspect in the search for the source of Hume's anti-rationalism.

This suspicion is confirmed once we see not only that Hume can use (1) and (2) as premises in an argument for the lack of conceptual and necessary connection between purported causes and purported effects but also that Hume even more explicitly uses these very premises in his most direct argument against that hallmark of rationalism, the PSR. Here is the argument in full:

All distinct ideas are separable from each other, and as the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct, 'twill be easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle. The separation, therefore, of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning of existence, is plainly possible for the imagination; and consequently the actual separation of these objects is so far possible, that it implies no contradiction nor absurdity; and is therefore incapable of being refuted by any reasoning from mere ideas; without which 'tis impossible to demonstrate the necessity of a cause. (T 1.3.3.3)

Hume is saying: because of the Separability Principle, any purported effect could exist without any (and every) other distinct event that might be thought to serve as its cause. Thus, the purported effect could exist without a cause. I regard this as an argument against the PSR or, at least, against the necessity of the PSR. To say that an event need not have a cause, as Hume says here, is to allow that an object can just pop into existence. Such an object, without a cause, would exist for no reason and therefore would be a counterexample to the PSR.⁷ In allowing that there may be counterexamples to the

⁷ For similar considerations against the PSR, see E 12.3.29 note.

PSR, Hume seeks to undermine the confidence that rationalists place in their guiding principle.⁸

All Hume needs to challenge the PSR and the foundation of rationalism is (1), the claim of distinctness, and (2), the Separability Principle. And, again, since (1) seems to be neutral with regard to rationalism and anti-rationalism, it seems that (2), the Separability Principle, must be doing the anti-rationalist heavy lifting.

Let's turn now to Hume's motivation for his controversial Separability Principle to get some deeper insight into the way it may ground Hume's anti-rationalism. The motivation that we uncover will prove, I believe, to be rather surprising.

Actually, few have investigated the sources of Hume's Separability Principle, and Garrett seems to have gone the furthest here. So let's begin with his account of the motivations for the Separability Principle, which in large part I accept. I merely want to go one step further than he does in uncovering the reasons for the principle.

Garrett argues convincingly that Hume's most important motivation for the Separability Principle turns on his assumption that distinguishability and separability are coextensive. This assumption is reflected, as he notes (*Cognition and Commitment*, pp. 68–69), in Hume's definitions of simple and complex perceptions: "Simple perceptions or impressions and ideas are such as admit of no distinction nor separation. The complex are the contrary to these, and may be distinguished into parts" (T 1.1.1.2). So the question of the basis of Hume's Separability Principle now becomes: how would Hume justify the coextensiveness of distinguishability and separability? Garrett notes that "Hume does not seek to justify this assumption" (*Cognition and Commitment*, p. 69). However, he claims, on Hume's behalf, that Hume

could argue: (i) that the only apparent counterexamples to the coextensiveness of distinguishability and separability are those provided by distinctions of reason; and (ii) that he has successfully explained these apparent counterexamples away. (*Cognition and Commitment*, p. 69)

I would like to explore Garrett's suggestion. In particular, in my endeavor to track down the justification of the Separability Principle and the source of Hume's

⁸ Although Hume regards the Separability Principle as entailing that *b* could exist without a cause, this is not clearly right. All that the Separability Principle claims is that distinct things are separable. Take *a* (the purported cause) and *b* (the distinct thing that is the purported effect). Given the Separability Principle, *a* and *b* are separable. It is sufficient for the truth of the Separability Principle in this case that *a* exists without *b*. The Separability Principle by itself doesn't entail that the effect could exist without the cause. In other words, for the separability of cause and effect it is enough that the cause can exist without the effect; it need not also be the case that the effect can exist without the cause. If it is not the case that *b* and other purported effects could exist with their causes, then the separability principle together with the claim of distinctness would not entail possible violations of the PSR. To strengthen Hume's argument here, he would need to say not only that distinct things are separable but also and more specifically that for any pair of distinct things each one could exist without the other. In other words, Hume needs to specify that the separability in question is a symmetric or two-way separability. I am indebted to Zoltan Szabo here.

anti-rationalism, I will consider (briefly) why distinctions of reason might initially be thought to be counterexamples to the Separability Principle and why Hume might think that he has averted this threat. Then I will want to raise a further and crucial question: are there any other potential counterexamples to the Separability Principle besides distinctions of reason?

Hume's examples of distinctions of reason include "the distinction betwixt figure and the body figur'd; motion and the body mov'd" (T 1.1.7.17) and between the figure and the shape of a body (T 1.1.7.18). Each of these examples of a rational distinction in Hume is what Descartes would call a modal distinction. For Descartes, this obtains between a mode and the substance of which it is a mode or between two modes of the same substance. For Descartes, the shape of a body is a mode of that body, a particular way that body exists. Descartes reserves the term distinction of reason (*distinctio rationis*) for the distinction between a substance and its essence or principal attribute or between a substance and any one of its unchanging features such as duration and existence (see PP 1.62). Shape, at least for Descartes at least sometimes, is a changing feature of a substance (this is one upshot of Descartes's piece of wax passage in the Second Meditation), so the shape of a substance is modally and not merely rationally distinct from the substance. The Cartesian modal distinction and distinction of reason are both to be distinguished from what Descartes calls a *real* distinction, which is a distinction between *res* or things or substances. Two or more really distinct things are capable of existence apart from one another; that is, they are separable (PP 1.60).⁹

Although Hume does not use the term *real distinction* as Descartes does, it's clear that for Hume things that are distinct—and not merely distinct by reason—are really distinct in Descartes's sense and thus are capable of separate existence. Thus, in saying that all distinct things are separable, as Hume does with his Separability Principle, Hume says that distinct things are, in this respect, like Cartesian substances.¹⁰ And he is saying that things that are merely rationally distinct are not separable. Thus, "a distinction of reason . . . implies neither a difference nor separation" (T 1.1.7.17).

In this light, things Hume regards as merely rationally distinct might appear to be counterexamples to his Separability Principle. Rationally distinct things are, for him, inseparable. Nonetheless, they seem to be distinct—they are, after all, rationally distinct—and Hume stresses that we distinguish them: "we begin to distinguish the figure from the color by a *distinction of reason*" (T 1.1.7.18). Thus, as inseparable yet seemingly distinct things, such items appear to violate the Separability Principle according to which distinct things are separable.

⁹ There is a large, inconclusive debate in the literature as to whether, for Descartes, separability is constitutive of real distinction or merely an implication of real distinction (see Wilson, *Descartes*, ch. 6; Rozemond, *Descartes's Dualism*, ch. 1; Hoffman, "Descartes's Theory of Distinction"). This dispute need not concern us here because (i) this is a paper about Hume (and also a little bit about Spinoza) and (ii) the point that real distinction entails separability is all that I need for the elucidation of Hume's views.

¹⁰ Hume makes precisely this point in T 1.4.5.5.

But Hume does not see distinctions of reason as a threat to the Separability Principle. As he explains, the body and its shape are inseparable and are also not distinct, similarly for the color and shape of the body, etc. In effect, for Hume, things that are rationally distinct are not distinct. To put the point perhaps less misleadingly and more Cartesianly: things that are rationally distinct are not really distinct. Why is this so?

For Hume, the mere rational distinction between the color and the shape of a particular white globe is made possible by the different resemblances that the white globe bears to other objects, such as the resemblance it bears to other white objects and the different resemblance it bears to other round objects. Hume puts the point this way:

We consider the figure and colour together, since they are in effect the same and undistinguishable; but still view them in different aspects, according to the resemblances, of which they are susceptible. When we wou'd consider only the figure of the globe of white marble, we form in reality an idea both of the figure and the colour, but tacitly carry our eye to its resemblance with the globe of black marble: And in the same manner, when we wou'd consider its colour only, we turn our view to its resemblance with the cube of white marble. (T 1.1.7.18)

Hoffman helpfully explains it this way: “when we think we are considering color alone and thus distinguishing it from figure, what we are really doing is thinking of both color and figure, but having the further thought of the resemblance the globe has with the white cube” (“Hume on the Distinction of Reason,” p. 5). Garrett makes a similar point: with a distinction of reason, “there is certainly a sense in which a distinction has been made, but it is not a distinction between two different *perceptions* or *objects*. Instead, we have distinguished two aspects of the *one* perception-token, or as Hume puts it, two ‘separate resemblances’ —that is, two different ways in which it may resemble others” (*Cognition and Commitment*, p. 63).¹¹ Strictly, on this reading of Hume, we do not distinguish the color and the shape. Indeed, they are not distinct—as Hume says, they are “in effect, the same and inseparable” (T 1.1.7.18)—at least they are not distinct in the sense of “distinction” at work in the Separability Principle, viz. Cartesian real distinction.

I am not concerned here with explicating further or defending Hume’s conception of distinctions of reason. In particular, I will not consider whether if *a* and *b* are merely rationally distinct they are identical or merely closely related in some way that falls short of identity. Certainly, Descartes’s notion of rational distinction may be read in such a way that rationally distinct items that are in some sense the same are nonetheless not identical.¹² Hume seems more willing than Descartes to say that rationally distinct things are identical. The point I want to stress here, however, is that for Hume merely

¹¹ See also Baxter, “Hume, Distinctions of Reason, and Differential Resemblance.”

¹² See Hoffman, “Descartes’s Theory of Distinction,” pp. 60–62. For a contrary reading of Descartes see Nolan, “Reductionism.”

rationally distinct things are not counterexamples to his Separability Principle, are not cases of distinct but inseparable things.

Let's grant Hume that rationally distinct things pose no threat to the Separability Principle. Garrett argues that seeing Hume this way enables us to see how he does or could argue for that principle. Garrett claims that since distinctions of reason are the only potential counterexamples to the coextensiveness of distinguishability and separability that is at the heart of the Separability Principle, Hume could argue that, with his account of rationally distinct things as not distinct after all, he has removed the key obstacle to accepting the Separability Principle. As Garrett says in a passage, most of which I have quoted already, Hume

could argue: (i) that the only apparent counterexamples to the coextensivity of distinguishability and separability are those provided by distinctions of reason; and (ii) that he has successfully explained these apparent counterexamples away, by showing that they involve only the distinction—and possible separation—of classes of resembling objects. (*Cognition and Commitment*, p. 69)

However, contra Garrett, there *is* another important group of potential counterexamples to the Separability Principle, things that may be seen as distinct yet inseparable. These potential counterexamples are things that are causally and thus, for Hume, necessarily connected. If two objects are distinct but causally connected, they would together be a case of distinct yet necessarily connected things, in seeming violation of the Separability Principle.

So to be confident of that principle, we (and Hume) need to be sure not only that rationally distinct items are not in fact distinct but also that there are no cases of distinct yet causally—and thus necessarily—connected things. How could Hume establish this claim—needed for the defense of the Separability Principle—that distinct yet causally and necessarily connected things don't exist?

One might think that to rule out such cases Hume could appeal to the point he makes later (in T 1.3.3) that there are distinct things but they are not causally and necessarily connected. That is, one might appeal to what I characterized earlier as Hume's neat argument against the PSR. But to invoke this later argument to defend the Separability Principle would be to beg the question, for Hume, as we saw, establishes in T 1.3.3 that distinct things are not causally and necessarily connected by explicitly relying on the Separability Principle. So Hume cannot appeal to the conclusion in T 1.3.3 to defend the Separability Principle: to do so, as Hume might say, "must evidently be going in a circle, and taking that for granted, which is the very point in question" (E 4.2.19).

Thus, to deal with the potential counterexamples to the Separability Principle stemming from distinct yet necessarily and causally connected objects, Hume cannot appeal—question-beggingly—to the claim that there are distinct things but they are not necessarily connected. The only available option Hume seems to have is to say that *if* there are causally and necessarily connected things, then those things are not distinct (in the sense of "distinct" that Hume is interested in) but rather only rationally distinct.

So the claim Hume needs to defend the Separability Principle is *not* that there are distinct things and they are not necessarily and causally connected (that claim would be question-begging in this context). Rather, the principle that Hume needs is this:

(N) If there are causally and thus necessarily connected things, then those things are merely rationally distinct.

(N), unlike the claim that there are distinct things and those things are not necessarily connected, doesn't presuppose that there are distinct things. By ruling out an important class of potential counterexamples to the Separability Principle, (N) can legitimately be used to support the Separability Principle which, in conjunction with the further, apparently innocent claim that purported causes and effects are distinct can be used (via the argument in T 1.3.3) to establish that there are distinct things but they are not necessarily connected and thus not causally connected.

To appeal to (N) to remove potential counterexamples to the Separability Principle would be to proceed in the same way that Hume proceeds in order to show that other cases of rational distinction do not threaten the Separability Principle. Just as figure and color, or figure and the body figur'd (!) are inseparable and not distinct (though they are rationally distinct), so too, according to (N), necessarily and causally connected objects—if such there be—are inseparable and not distinct (though they are rationally distinct).

So Hume needs (N)—the claim that causes and effects, if such there be, are merely rationally distinct—to get to the Separability Principle. And he relies on it plus the claim that purported causes and effects such as the motion of one billiard ball and the motion of another are distinct to reach the conclusion that those events or objects are not necessarily connected. Because the lack of such a necessary connection implies that these objects or events may exist without a reason, we reach the anti-rationalist conclusion that the PSR is false. So (N) plus the claim that purported causes and effects are distinct seems to be the source of Hume's anti-rationalism.¹³

Again, though, the claim that events such as the motions of the two billiard balls are distinct seems to be not particularly anti-rationalist: it seems to be neutral between rationalism and anti-rationalism. Thus, the anti-rationalist weight in Hume's system seems to be borne by (N), the claim that necessarily connected things would be merely rationally distinct.

But wait! This can't be right. (N) cannot be the source of Hume's anti-rationalism. And this is because (N) is yet another rationalist-friendly principle on which Hume crucially relies. To begin to see why, note that Spinoza and Leibniz, like Hume great philosophers but unlike Hume great rationalists, accept something like (N). They both

¹³ Although he does not present (N) as part of a motivation for the Separability Principle, and although I would challenge important aspects of his reading of Hume on causation I am happy to note that Wright also attributes to Hume something like (N) (see *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*, pp. 155–61).

assimilate the relation of dependence generally to the relation of statehood. Both affirm that if *a* depends on *b*, then *a* must be a state of *b* or something like a property of *b*. This connection between statehood and dependence is evident in the series of biconditionals that Spinoza accepts linking what it is to be in (or inhere in) a thing with what it is to be caused by or conceived through a thing.¹⁴ Similarly, the Leibnizian Predicate in Subject Principle whereby in each true proposition, the concept of the predicate is contained in the concept of the subject can be seen as deriving from the Leibnizian rejection of relations between distinct things and thus specifically from the Leibnizian rejection of relations of *dependence* between distinct things. Thus, for Leibniz, if something depends on a substance, it must not be distinct from that substance; rather, it must be a state of (or somehow predicated of) that substance.¹⁵ So for Leibniz as well as Spinoza, statehood and dependence are assimilated. States of things, in the Cartesian tradition, are not regarded as really distinct from those things but are instead seen as merely modally distinct from those things. As we have seen, Hume seems to use the term *distinction of reason* to capture any distinction other than a Cartesian real distinction. Thus, in assimilating statehood and dependence in the way that they do, Spinoza and Leibniz may seem to accept that necessarily connected things are merely rationally distinct in Hume's sense of rational distinction, and thus Spinoza and Leibniz accept something like (N).

However, the fact that Spinoza and Leibniz accept something like (N) does not show that (N) is a rationalist-friendly principle. As I've indicated, one way to show that a principle is congenial to rationalism is to show that one can derive this principle from the PSR. But we haven't yet shown that (N) can be derived from the PSR. It may be that, although Leibniz and Spinoza—both rationalists—accept (N), this acceptance does not stem from their rationalism.

However, I will now sketch reasons for thinking that (N) does derive from the PSR and that (N) is thus rationalist-friendly. I've developed these reasons elsewhere in connection with the views of Leibniz and Spinoza, but here I will just state these reasons in general terms without tying these reasons explicitly either to Leibniz or to Spinoza. Therefore, consider what would be the case if (N) were false. If so, then there could be a case in which *b* depends on *a* yet is not modally distinct from *a* (in Descartes's sense) and is not rationally distinct from *a* (in either Hume's sense or in Descartes's sense). In such a case, while *a* may have certain states, *c*, *d*, *e*, which are in *a* and so dependent on *a*, *b*—despite depending on *a*—would not be a state of *a* and would not inhere in *a*. In this situation, then, we would have two radically different kinds of dependence relations: the kind of dependence whereby a state inheres in that of which it is a state (this is the relation between *c*, *d*, and *e* to *a*) and the relation whereby something that is *not* a state of a thing depends on that thing. This would be the dependence relation whereby *b* depends on *a*.

¹⁴ See my "Rationalism Run Amok."

¹⁵ I have argued for this reading of Leibniz in "Violations." There I also explore the difficulties that this assimilation of statehood and dependence creates for Leibniz.

Of these two different dependence relations—inherence and what might be called noninherent dependence—we can ask: in virtue of what is it the case that only one of these relations of dependence is also a relation of inherence? What prevents the relation between *a* and *b* from being a relation of inherence; that is, what prevents *b* from being a state of *a*? After all, *b*, like *c*, *d*, and *e*, also depends on *a*. Yet what is it that makes *c*'s relation to *a* one of inherence or statehood and *b*'s relation not one of inherence or statehood? It doesn't seem as if there is anything illuminating we can say in answer to this question other than this: the difference between inherent dependence and noninherent dependence is just that the former is a relation of inherence and the latter is not. But to say this is to treat the difference between the two dependence relations as primitive, as not explicable. And to do this would be to take the difference between the dependence relations as a brute fact, that is, as a violation of the PSR.¹⁶

Thus, there is pressure, stemming from the PSR, to assimilate apparently different kinds of dependence relations to one other: dependence generally must be assimilated to the relation between a thing and its states. Given this conclusion, when there is a relation of dependence between *a* and *b*, they are not really distinct and perhaps are only rationally distinct (at least in Hume's sense). Thus, one can see how the PSR, which would preclude any primitive relations of dependence, would lead to an understanding of dependence according to which things dependent on one another are not really but only rationally distinct (at least in Hume's sense). That is, the PSR generates something like (N), a principle that is crucial to Hume's defense of the Separability Principle.¹⁷ Therefore, (N) is yet another rationalist-friendly principle playing an important role in Hume. As we saw, Hume at least sometimes relies on the rationalist-friendly principles that conceivability is sufficient for possibility (CSP) and that causation requires conceptual connection (CRCC). Similarly, he is committed to the rationalist-friendly principle (N) that necessarily connected things are only rationally distinct. And given as we have seen that the Separability Principle derives from (N), it turns out that that the Separability Principle is after all a rationalist-friendly principle too.

This result leaves us in a surprising place. Far from it being the case—as we have long suspected—that the Separability Principle is the source of Hume's anti-rationalism, it now turns out in this shocking dénouement that this is not the case at all. The Separability Principle is as rationalist-friendly as the two principles, CSP and CRCC, with which we began. But then (can it be?) the source of Hume's anti-rationalism must be the seemingly innocent claim—a claim seemingly neutral between rationalism and anti-rationalism—that purported causes and effects, such as the motion of one billiard ball and the motion of another, are distinct. Recall that the Separability Principle plus the “innocent” claim that purported causes and effects are distinct were enough to generate Hume's rejection of the PSR. While like bumbling detectives we have been focusing

¹⁶ Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 68. See also my “Rationalism Run Amok.”

¹⁷ Another rationalist way to motivate the assimilation of statehood and dependence stems from Leibniz's (and also Bradley's) reasons—based on the PSR—for rejecting relations among distinct things. I explore these reasons in “Violations.”

all our attention on interrogating the innocent Separability Principle, it turns out that the unobtrusive claim that purported causes and effects are distinct was all along quietly undergirding Hume's anti-rationalism. The claim that purported causes and effects are distinct, that fire is distinct from heat, that the motion of one billiard ball is distinct from the motion of another, is now unmasked as the real culprit (or hero, if you like) behind Hume's anti-rationalism.

This result makes Hume's simple argument against the PSR even more lethal. With this argument, Hume puts tremendous and unwelcome pressure on the rationalist. Hume takes two principles that rationalists do or should adopt—(N) and the Separability Principle—and uses these principles against the PSR and against rationalism itself. The only tool that Hume needs to twist rationalism against itself is the innocent claim that objects or events such as fire and heat, the motion of one billiard ball and that of another, and potential cause and effect generally are distinct. So Hume is thus perniciously putting the rationalist in an exceedingly difficult position: for the rationalist to accept the PSR and rationalist-friendly claims such as the Separability Principle and (N), the rationalist must deny that there can be distinct objects. That is, Hume's argument against the PSR and rationalism is in effect to point out that the only consistent form of rationalism is one that accepts a form of monism and denies any multiplicity of distinct objects.

This is bad news for rationalists who are, in general, unwilling to accept a monism of objects. Perhaps better than most rationalists, Hume understands that rationalism is vulnerable here. He points out, in effect, that in embracing rationalist principles such as (N) and the Separability Principle the rationalist is playing with fire because in accepting these rationalist principles, the rationalist makes it easy—almost too easy—to argue against rationalism simply by pointing out that the rationalist is committed to monism.

Leibniz is one rationalist, one purveyor of the PSR, whose system would be threatened by this Humean argument. Leibniz upholds the PSR—or at least he wants to—and at the same time he denies monism. Hume says, in effect, to Leibniz: “You can't have it both ways, Leibniz. Embrace monism or give up your precious PSR.”

However, unsurprisingly perhaps, Spinoza's rationalism is left untouched by this Humean onslaught, and that's because Spinoza “gets it.” He sees what a rationalist as such has to accept, and he doesn't flinch: he embraces monism. And perhaps it is because Spinoza doesn't or wouldn't flinch in the face of Hume's best shot against rationalism that Spinoza comes in for especially harsh invective near the end of Book I of the *Treatise*. Hume sees, perhaps, that Spinoza is unlike most rationalists in that Spinoza's rationalism cannot be used against itself. So instead of showing that Spinoza's rationalism is internally in conflict because it rejects the monism that is required by rationalism, Hume has to slam Spinoza for rejecting—unlike most rationalists—Hume's first premise: the claim that objects (e.g., purported causes and purported effects) are distinct and that monism is false. Thus, in his one explicit discussion of Spinoza in the *Treatise*, Hume first characterizes monism and, in particular, Spinoza's monism as the thesis according to which

whatever we discover externally by sensation; whatever we feel internally by reflection; all these are nothing but modifications of that one, simple, and necessarily existent being, and are not possess of any separate or distinct existence. (T 1.4.5.18)

Hume then goes on to label this thesis as nothing but “this hideous hypothesis” (T 1.4.5.19).¹⁸ Spinoza’s finite things, as modifications of the one simple substance, are merely, Hume would say, rationally distinct from that substance. Hume asserts that it is absurd to regard finite things as not distinct from one another or from some alleged simple and unique substance. For Hume, there is obviously multiplicity, and Spinoza’s monism is to be rejected on that basis. So unlike other rationalists who may accept Hume’s anti-monist premise and Hume’s rationalist-friendly Separability Principle yet incoherently and vainly seek to avoid Hume’s anti-rationalism, Spinoza clear-headedly rejects the Humean anti-monist premise, which is the source of Hume’s anti-rationalism. Because Spinoza cannot be charged with this incoherence, Hume has no choice but to attack Spinoza’s monism head on and deny its guiding insight.

There is, however, one final twist.

In the face of Hume’s attack, a Spinozist may find a glimmer of hope in the fact that Hume does not seem to offer an argument for his anti-monistic premise. The premise that there are distinct objects is, of course, enormously intuitively plausible, but Hume seems merely to assume it. He seems to treat his anti-monism as one of the foundations of his system, a system against which the internally coherent system of a rationalist monist stands opposed.

Perhaps an even brighter glimmer of hope for the Spinozist emerges from a further observation. In wielding, and treating as fundamental, rationalist-friendly claims such as CSP, CRCC (to the extent that he wields it), (N), and thus the Separability Principle, Hume too may be playing with fire. The rationalist’s question here is this: can Hume coherently employ all these principles that are congenial to rationalism—principles perhaps most easily motivated by the PSR—without embracing full-blown rationalism? How often can Hume go to the rationalist well and not contaminate his anti-rationalism? Or, to mix the metaphors, how many rationalist-friendly principles can Hume accept or at least be drawn to without falling off the precipice into a strong form of rationalism?

This is a nice question, and my hunch (more than a hunch, actually) is that a little rationalism and a little Spinoza go a long way, that it is difficult to accept some rationalist-friendly claims without accepting others and without accepting rationalism itself. Perhaps this can be done, but I don’t see how.¹⁹

Thus there is a worry that an internal tension threatens Hume’s anti-rationalist system just as—as Hume in effect shows—there is a tension within non-monistic forms of

¹⁸ In focusing on Spinoza’s monism and in calling it hideous, Hume seems to be drawing on Bayle’s famously harsh treatment of what Bayle calls “the most monstrous hypothesis that can be imagined” (*la plus monstrueuse hypothèse qui se puisse imaginer*). See Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, p. 296.

¹⁹ I explore some of the difficulties in accepting only a half-hearted form of rationalism, and I attempt to parlay these difficulties into a more or less direct argument for the PSR itself in “PSR.”

rationalism. We've already seen a manifestation of this tension with Hume's pull both toward and away from CRCC. But now we can see that this tension is more widespread appearing as a tension between several other key principles that Hume invokes and his overall anti-rationalism. I believe that this complicated philosophical terrain can be fertile. Hume's system is often and rightly seen as threatened by a conflict between his skepticism and his naturalism: the exploration of this friction has led to some of the most important work on Hume and yielded some of the most important insights to be gained from a study of his philosophy.²⁰ This new worry about a tension between Hume's tendency to embrace rationalist-friendly principles and his overall anti-rationalism is one that I hope may also lead to new insights into Hume's philosophy and the philosophical matters he addresses. And, perhaps even more important, this new worry suggests that Spinoza's rationalism may, after all, in some respects be better off than the anti-rationalism of Spinoza's opponents, including Hume.²¹

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²¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented before a faculty group at Yale, at Simon Fraser University, at a conference on Spinoza and his readers sponsored by the Jerusalem Spinoza Institute, at a New York City workshop on early modern philosophy, and at the University of Tampere. I am grateful for all the participants in these discussions and to the hosts for their kind invitations. I am also grateful to Don Garrett, Ken Winkler, Don Baxter, Jennifer Marusic, Jani Hakkarainen, and Hsueh Qu for helpful written comments.

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CHAPTER 22

KANT AND SPINOZA DEBATING THE THIRD ANTINOMY

OMRI BOEHM

SPINOZA is the dogmatic metaphysician par excellence. His thought marks the height of the attempt to determine philosophical truths by sheer conceptual speculation. His geometrical method reveals extravagant rationalist ambitions: using definitions and axioms, Spinoza ventures to demonstrate metaphysical theorems such as substance monism and necessitarianism. It is fair to say that Kant, who took it upon himself to undermine dogmatic metaphysical reasoning—who wanted to deny knowledge in order to make room for freedom and faith—should have taken Spinoza seriously.

Scholars commonly assume, however, that Kant never read Spinoza, and that he did not consider the *Ethics* worthy of a philosophical reply—certainly not before the Spinoza renaissance of the late 1780s, certainly not when constructing the *Critique of Pure Reason's* Antinomies of Pure Reason.¹ This assumption draws, as far as I know, on three pieces of historical evidence. First, it is usually thought that in Kant's day Spinoza was considered passé, a defeated philosopher. The prevalent metaphysics of the time was Wolff's systematic presentation of Leibnizian principles; Spinoza, as Lessing famously put it, was considered a “dead dog.”² Second, there is a letter from Hamann to Jacobi in which the former reports that Kant had told him, in a private conversation, that he had “never been able to understand Spinoza's philosophy.”³ This report is cited as an indication that Spinoza was irrelevant to Kant.⁴ Third, Kant never mentions Spinoza

¹ A recent example of this assumption is Garber and Longuenesse's *Kant and the Early Moderns*. In this collection of essays, encompassing excellent work on Kant and Descartes, Leibniz, Hume, Berkeley, and Locke, Spinoza goes completely unmentioned.

² Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*. For Jacobi and Lessing's conversation, see pp. 3–44.

³ Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, October 1785.

⁴ For example, Allison, “Kant's Critique of Spinoza,” p. 199f. (Allison focuses on Kant's treatment of teleology in the *Critique of Judgment*.)

or Spinozism within the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This fact is significant, because Kant does mention in his magnum opus almost every other name in the philosophical canon, including Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Newton, Leibniz, Wolff, and Mendelssohn.

Before proceeding to consider the third Antinomy, let us examine each of these pieces of evidence. As for the first, the once-accepted assumption that Spinoza was considered a “dead dog” in Kant’s day is no longer tenable. This is not the place to document in detail the abundant historical evidence supporting just the opposite conclusion (and this has been done by others).⁵ Suffice it here to recall the well-known fact that Spinoza is the subject of the single longest entry in Bayle’s *Dictionnaire* (1702). It is true that Bayle attempts to refute Spinoza (though some have doubted the sincerity of his intentions) but unlikely that so much space would be dedicated to refuting a neglected philosopher—unlikely, indeed, that Spinoza’s relevance would wane once this high-profile entry had been published about him. J. Zedler’s *Grosses Universal Lexikon* (1731–54) gives a similar impression, devoting to Spinoza a five-page discussion. Descartes, by comparison, is discussed in one page. Hume, Locke, Hobbes, and Plato are equally dealt with in one page (or less) each. D. Diderot and J. d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* (1751–72) similarly dedicates to Spinoza five times more space than to most relevant thinkers in the history of philosophy. While speaking of Spinoza’s metaphysics in extremely hostile terms, the *Encyclopédie* gives a reliable account of the *Ethics*’ definitions and axioms and discusses at length its most important demonstrations, especially E1p1–11. The *Dictionnaire*, the *Lexikon*, and the *Encyclopédie* were the main transmitters of Enlightenment thought.⁶ The attention they devoted to Spinoza ensured him a place at the heart of Enlightenment debate. It would be impossible for any educated reader to avoid contact with Spinoza’s ideas. It would be easy for every metaphysician to get a grasp on the system of the *Ethics*. And it would be tempting, for every philosophically inclined thinker, to read Spinoza for themselves.⁷

As for Hamann’s report to Jacobi, much caution is required with this report, not merely because it is second-hand. Consider the context of Hamann’s letter. Jacobi’s book, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, had been published shortly before Hamann’s conversation with Kant, igniting a nationwide scandal about Lessing’s Spinozism. Jacobi sent a copy of the book to Hamann, asking him to deliver it to Kant. In the book, Jacobi accuses

⁵ See especially Israel’s *Radical Enlightenment*.

⁶ Whereas Kant quite certainly read all three sources, Bayle’s *Dictionnaire* is probably the one most relevant for the present discussion. It can be ascertained that Kant read Bayle, and it is extremely likely that he was influenced by Bayle’s method of criticizing reason by antinomial dialectic in his entry on Zeno. (Indeed Kant discusses Zeno in the context of the Antinomies. More below.) See Ferrari’s entry on Bayle in his *Les Sources Françaises*, pp. 91–99 (as well as pp. 267–70 for a list of Kant’s references to Bayle). See also Ferrari’s “*Le Dictionnaire historique et critique*,” pp. 24–33.

⁷ Israel comments on philosophers’ tendency to overlook Spinoza’s impact on the Enlightenment, “philosophers are . . . saddled with what are really hopelessly outdated historical accounts of the Enlightenment and ones which look ever more incomplete, unbalanced, and inaccurate, the more research into the subject proceeds.” (See Israel, “Enlightenment! Which Enlightenment?,” p. 528.)

not only Lessing but also Kant of Spinozism, writing, for example, that Kant's discussion of space in the *Critique of Pure Reason* was written "ganz im Geiste des Spinoza"—fully in Spinoza's spirit.⁸ In the same passage, he proceeds to exploit Kant's Spinozist "spirit," suggesting that the discussion of space in the Aesthetic "can serve to explain" Spinoza's conception of substance as a whole ontologically prior to its parts.⁹ When Kant was later pressed by Hamann to disclose his opinion of the book, Kant replied (as Hamann reports) that he was "very pleased with the presentation" and that he had "never been able to understand Spinoza's philosophy."¹⁰ If this answer teaches anything at all it is that Kant, contrary to common opinion, had a sense of humor. Certainly it provides no genuine evidence that he had not read Spinoza. To be sure, if one insists on taking Kant's reported words at face value one would probably have to grant also that Kant was "very pleased" with Jacobi's presentation.

As for the observation that Kant never mentions Spinoza in the first *Critique*, it should be noted that on at least one occasion the *Critique* does discuss an unmistakably Spinozist theme—the geometrical method—and does not mention Spinoza. Over ten *Akademie* pages, Kant criticizes the use of "definitions," "axioms," and "demonstrations," arguing that, "in philosophy, the mathematician can by his method build only so many houses of cards" (A727–38/B755–66).¹¹ Kant explains that while in mathematics definitions, axioms and demonstrations are appropriate, in philosophy they are not; whereas in mathematics one can successfully begin with definitions, in philosophy definitions "[ought] to come at the end rather than at the beginning" (A730/B758). That this is directed at Spinoza's *Ethics* seems clear.¹² Other philosophers apply mathematical methods, of course, but none uses definitions, axioms, and demonstrations as Spinoza does.¹³ To be sure, Kant repeats the same argument also when explicitly arguing against Spinoza in his *Lectures on Metaphysics*:

Spinoza believed that God and the world were one substance . . . This error followed from a faulty definition of substance. As a mathematician, he was accustomed to finding arbitrary definitions and deriving propositions from them. Now this

⁸ Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, p. 91.

⁹ Ibid. Translation mine.

¹⁰ In Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, October 1785.

¹¹ Kemp Smith translates, "in philosophy, the *geometrician* can by his methods build only so many houses of cards" (my emphasis). This is not a literal rendering of Kant's use of *Mathematiker* but this is not necessarily a translation mistake. Kant means by the "mathematical" method what we mean by "geometrical." Kemp Smith must have been aware that Kant elsewhere refers to Spinoza as a mathematician because of his method, not a geometer (see below). All quotations from Kant's works are from the *Akademie Ausgabe*. The first *Critique* is cited by the standard A/B edition pagination, and other works are cited by the work's name followed by its siglum AA vol:page. English citations to the *Critique* are to the Kemp Smith translation. Translations from Kant's correspondence and reflections are mine.

¹² For a short interpretation of this passage, see Heman, "Kant und Spinoza."

¹³ As Aaron Garrett points out in this volume ("The Virtues of Geometry"), while other philosophers of Spinoza's day were stylistically and methodologically eclectic, Spinoza was unique in his consistent geometrical method and presentation.

procedure works quite well in mathematics, but if we try to apply these methods in philosophy we will be led to an error. For in philosophy we must first seek out the characteristics themselves and acquaint ourselves with them before we can construct definitions. But Spinoza did not do this.¹⁴

There is then at least one moment in the *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant does engage with Spinoza—one moment where it is untenable to conclude that Kant did not think of Spinoza from the fact that he did not mention his name. Are there other such moments in the *Critique*?

This question is intriguing, because when Kant mentions Spinoza by name—admittedly late in his career—his words are remarkable. In *Reflection* 6050 Kant writes, “Spinozism is the true consequence of dogmatic metaphysics.”¹⁵ In the *Critique of Practical Reason* he claims that if transcendental idealism is denied, “nothing remains but Spinozism, in which space and time are essential determinations of the original being itself.”¹⁶ In *Lectures on Metaphysics* Kant pronounces: “if space is taken to be a thing in itself, Spinozism is irrefutable—that is, the parts of the world are parts of the Deity, space is God.”¹⁷ And then again: “Those who take space as a thing in itself or as a property of things are forced to be Spinozists, i.e., they take the world as the embodiment [*Inbegriff*] of determinations from one necessary substance.”¹⁸ In short, when Kant mentions Spinoza by name he refers to his system as the most consistent form of transcendental realism.

The relevance of Kant’s words to his position in the *Critique of Pure Reason* must be examined with care. The quotes appear only in Kant’s later writings and only after the *Pantheismusstreit* had provoked a Spinoza renaissance in Germany. Moreover, it is not immediately clear what Kant understands by “Spinozism”: such a term can have a number of different meanings, or denote particular aspects of Spinoza’s system (similar problems arise when interpreting Kant’s relation to Leibniz).¹⁹ Nevertheless, it must also be taken into account that the Spinoza renaissance caused by the *Streit* was not a Spinoza *rediscovery* because Spinoza’s ideas—as pointed out above—had not been forgotten. The *Streit* does not so much mark the moment in which Spinoza’s thought first

¹⁴ *Lectures on Metaphysics* [*Lectures*] AA 28:1041. As far as I know, Kant never makes similar accusations against Descartes, Leibniz, or Wolff. Translations from the *Lectures on Metaphysics* are mine.

¹⁵ *Reflections* AA18:436.

¹⁶ *Critique of Practical Reason* [KpV] AA 5:102.

¹⁷ *Lectures* AA 28:567.

¹⁸ *Lectures* AA 29: 132.

¹⁹ Jauernig has recently dealt with this complexity in her “Kant’s Critique of the Leibnizian Philosophy”; Garber reflects on this problem in “What Leibniz Really Said?” Note that, in some respects, tracking what could be known to Kant of Spinoza’s philosophy and how accurate this picture was is less problematic than with Leibniz. Whereas much of Leibniz’s thought must be distilled from material unpublished in Kant’s day and unknown to Kant, Spinoza’s official position receives definitive articulation in two published works, the *Ethics* and the *Theological-Political Treatise*. In the case of Spinoza, however, the problem is to distinguish his thought from what was taken to be ‘Spinozism.’ We will see some examples of this below.

became familiar as the moment when one could write about Spinoza more openly (and even favorably). To my mind, the above quotes must one way or another be relevant to the *Critique of Pure Reason*. For if Kant discovered Spinoza only in the late 1780s, he (and we) would still have to worry that some parts of the *Critique* do not argue against transcendental realism's superior form. This strikes a nerve especially when considering the Antinomies of Pure Reason: if the Antinomies fail to address and rebut the most consistent form of transcendental realism, they fall short of sustaining Kant's aspirations. Spinoza's metaphysical position may escape refutation and, thereby, disarm the antinomy.

The present chapter has three parts. In the first, I analyze Kant's third Antinomy, arguing that it does not fail to address Spinoza's position. Specifically, I suggest that the Antithesis, commonly interpreted as a Leibnizian position, rather reflects Spinozist metaphysics.²⁰ In the second part, I raise what I take to be the chief Spinozist challenge to the Antinomy, stemming from Spinoza's cosmological *totum analyticum*—in the case of the third Antinomy, an infinite and complete explanatory whole. If that notion is granted, the Antinomy's Thesis—which relies on the incompleteness of infinity in suggesting an argument for the necessity of freedom from the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR)—fails.²¹ I conclude by suggesting how Kant's position can be defended.

One further interpretive claim that I will be making en route is that Kant's position is not as different from Spinoza's as we usually believe. In some respects the differences between the Königsberg professor and the Amsterdam Jew are subtle though crucial. To be sure, I do not believe that the *Critique of Pure Reason* was written “fully in Spinoza's spirit.” Yet there are moments in which Kant is pushed close to *some form of Spinozism*—in fact, there are moments when he seems to be well aware of this—and I will indicate several of these as we move along.

I. THE THIRD ANTINOMY AND SPINOZA

1. The third Antinomy deals with the problem of causality and freedom. The Thesis maintains that there are two types of causality—that of “nature,” whereby worldly events follow necessarily from antecedent states; and that of “freedom,” whereby events occur through a power “of generating a state spontaneously.” The Antithesis argues in opposition to this that there is only one type of causality, and that this is causality “in accordance with the laws of nature” (A444/B472). On the Antithesis's view, every worldly event

²⁰ Within the limits of this chapter it is impossible to make a case regarding all four Antinomies. Elsewhere I argue in detail for a similar case regarding the first Antinomy (“The First Antinomy and Spinoza”). Grier has noticed that the fourth Antinomy reflects Spinozist argumentation (see her *Kant's Doctrine*, p. 224f.).

²¹ Franks raises a similar challenge to the third Antinomy in “From Kant to Post-Kantian Idealism.” I discuss Franks's account below.

necessarily follows from the cosmos's preceding state. The idea of freedom is therefore an illusion, an "empty thought entity" (A445/B473). The third Antinomy is systematically related to the first, which deals with the problem of the world's beginning. Kant explains that "if you do not, as regards time, admit anything as being mathematically first in the world, then there is no necessity as regards causality, to seek for something that is dynamically [causally] first" (A449/B477). Thus whoever sides with the first Thesis (arguing that the world is finite in space and time) will also side with the Thesis of the third (arguing that there is freedom); while those who side with the first Antithesis (arguing for the world's infinity) will also side with the Antithesis of the third (arguing against freedom). The third Antinomy is also systematically connected to the fourth, which deals with the (non-) existence of a necessary being. This is due to the fact that they draw on similar cosmological (first cause) arguments.²² In interpreting the third Antinomy I will at times be assuming these connections.

The prevalent historical account of the Antinomies maps their arguments onto the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence. This reading has been most exhaustively and influentially elaborated by S. Al-Azm.²³ On that view, the theses correspond to Clarke's Newtonian position, while the antitheses correspond to Leibniz's. In the case of the first Antinomy, for example, whereas the Thesis assumes space and time to be Newtonian "empty containers," the Antithesis represents Leibniz's rejection of empty containers by an argument from the PSR. In the case of the third Antinomy, it is assumed, the Thesis reflects Newton's position—in which the "world machine" requires God's intervention in order "to keep running properly"—whereas the Antithesis reflects Leibniz's determinist position, in which freedom is excluded by an argument from the PSR.²⁴

This reading has become deeply entrenched but it suffers from some immediate problems. Regarding the interpretation of the first Antinomy, for example, it must be noted that despite rejecting Newtonian empty containers by an argument from the PSR, Leibniz does not affirm the world's infinity: he affirms rather that the world is indefinitely large, and reserves infinity exclusively for God.²⁵ (This is significant, because Kant was well aware of the infinite/indefinite distinction [A511-15/B539-43] and does use the term "infinite" in articulating the first Antithesis.) Moreover, contrary to the Antithesis, Leibniz does not deny, but affirms, that the world is created. As for the third Antinomy,

²² Kemp Smith writes, "Kant's proof of freedom in the thesis of the third antinomy is merely a corollary from his proof of the existence of a cosmological or theological unconditioned." See his *A Commentary*, p. 497. (emphasis mine).

²³ Al-Azm, *The Origins*. Interpreters in the English-speaking tradition sometimes overlook that Al-Azm is not the first to draw on the Leibniz-Clarke connection. E. Cassirer and G. Martin did so earlier, among others. For an extremely thorough discussion, see Kreimendahl, *Kant—Der Durchbruch von 1769*, pp. 156–85.

²⁴ Al-Azm, *The Origins*, pp. 87–90.

²⁵ The infinite/indefinite distinction is more often associated with Descartes than with Leibniz. Moreover, Leibniz is sometimes remembered as affirming an infinite (rather than an indefinite) number of monads. However, while he uses the infinite/indefinite terminological distinction less carefully than Descartes, Leibniz insists that the world cannot be regarded a *whole*, which implies that he considers it indefinite rather than infinite. Consider the following passage from the *New Essays*: "Descartes and his

Leibniz does not offer an argument from the PSR against freedom: in contrast to the third Antithesis he argues that freedom and the PSR are compatible, even complementary. Al-Azm deals with this fact by commenting briefly that Leibniz is “couched in the language of freedom” when articulating a determinist position.²⁶ This is unsatisfactory. Leibniz is not merely “couched” in the language of freedom: contrary to the Antithesis, Leibniz is a compatibilist. Let us examine the case of the third Antinomy in more detail.

2. The Thesis states that causality in accordance with the laws of nature is not the only causality from which “appearances of the world” can be sufficiently explained. To explain the world’s appearances, “it is necessary to assume that there is also another causality, that of freedom” (A445/B473).

Thesis: Prove: to sufficiently explain all worldly phenomena it is necessary to assume both natural causality and causality of freedom.

1. Assume (for the sake of a *reductio*) the Antithesis: there is no freedom; all worldly phenomena take place solely in accordance with laws of nature.
2. It follows that every worldly event (say, E₃) “presupposes a preceding state” (E₂), from which it necessarily (*unausbleiblich*) follows.
3. Further, it follows that the preceding state (E₂) also came into being “in time.” [If E₂ always existed, E₃ would also have always existed. But this contradicts the assumption that E₃ came into existence subsequently to E₂].
4. Thus every worldly cause (such as E₂) presupposes a preceding worldly cause, which itself follows “according to the law of nature,” and so forth, *ad infinitum*.
5. Therefore, on the assumption that “everything happens according to the laws of nature,” there will always be a “deeper” (*subalternen*) cause but never an ultimate one. Because the regress continues *ad infinitum*, the series of causes remains incomplete.
6. However, the “law of nature” consists in the claim that nothing happens without a cause “sufficiently determined a priori.”
7. Therefore, when taken in an “unlimited universality,” the claim that all causality takes place only in accordance with the laws of nature is contradictory.
8. Therefore, causality in accordance with the law of nature is not the only kind of causality. There is also causality of freedom.

At first glance, the argument only licenses the negative claim that “causality of nature” is not the only kind of causality. No positive argument is provided for the affirmation (in

followers, in making the world out to be indefinite so that we cannot conceive of any end to it, have said that matter has no limits. They have some reason for replacing the term ‘infinite’ by ‘indefinite’, for there is never an infinite whole in the world, though there are always wholes greater than others *ad infinitum*. As I have shown elsewhere, the universe itself cannot be considered to be a whole” (p. 151).

²⁶ Al-Azm, *The Origins*, p. 87.

proposition 8 above) of a causality of freedom. However, as often noted in the literature, Kant considers natural causality and causality of freedom (spontaneity) contradictories (A533/B561). If freedom just is liberty from natural causality then, on the assumption that the Thesis's argument goes through, the conclusion is warranted.

The core of the argument is the move from the fifth proposition to the seventh by the mediation of the sixth—the claim that “the law of nature consists just in this, that nothing happens without a cause sufficiently (*hinreichend*) determined a priori.” As has been noted by several interpreters, “determined a priori” does not carry the ordinary Kantian sense (of independence of experience) but rather the traditional sense, of ‘in advance of’ or ‘prior to.’²⁷ On that reading, the Thesis's argument is the following:

- (a) A thing is understood by natural causality (henceforth: naturalistically), if and only if it is understood mechanically (i.e., by an antecedent event).
- (b) Had there only been natural causality, no explanation would be ultimate or complete (i.e., some facts would remain unexplained) [by proposition 6]. However,
- (c) This violates the demand that “nothing happens without being sufficiently antecedently determined.”

Despite the textual plausibility of that reading, J. Bennett rejects it.²⁸ He points out that this interpretation commits the Thesis's target—that is, the Antithesis—to a position more sweeping than that in which “there is only causality of nature.” Indeed, given (b) and (c) the Antithesis is refuted by the Thesis only if the former assumes, first, that there is only natural causality; and second, that every event admits of an ultimate explanation. Bennett argues that the latter position cannot be the Thesis's target because it renders the Antithesis's proponent “such an obvious straw man that Kant cannot have taken it seriously or supposed that the thesis-arguer would do so.”²⁹

Bennett's position is puzzling. It seems clear that the Thesis argues against a position committed to (a)–(c) but it is less clear why that position is that of an obvious straw man. In fact, thus understood, the Antithesis articulates nothing but a thoroughgoing commitment to the PSR. In this light, the metaphysical dispute that constitutes the third Antinomy is no longer understood as a dispute over freedom and causality in general but, rather, as a dispute over freedom and the PSR. This interpretation is endorsed by H. Allison (among others), who is similarly puzzled by Bennett's position. The Antithesis's fully universalized version of the PSR is not that of a straw man, says Allison, but the Leibnizian version. “Leibniz,” Allison adds, “is one of Bennett's favorite philosophers.”³⁰

Contra Bennett, then, it seems reasonable to read the Thesis as debating the PSR. The argument assumes, for the sake of a reductio, (a) that there is only naturalistic causality

²⁷ For example, Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, pp. 378–79.

²⁸ Bennett, *Kant's Dialectic*, pp. 184–86.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

³⁰ Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, p. 380.

and (b) the PSR: every event has an ultimate explanation. This position is then challenged by showing that (a) and (b) pull in opposite directions: the PSR's demand for explanatory completeness is inconsistent with the claim that all causality is naturalistic. For if the latter were the case, the explanatory (causal) regress would have continued ad infinitum and, therefore, there would be no explanatory completeness.

Note that in understanding the Antithesis as Leibnizian, Allison is following Al-Azm. Yet Leibniz does not argue from the PSR against freedom. On the contrary, he holds that freedom and the PSR are compatible and complementary. For Leibniz, despite the fact that every worldly event is determined (or explained) by its causes, no such event is genuinely necessary precisely because an *ultimate* naturalistic explanation is impossible.³¹ A thing's or an event's existence does not follow directly ("blindly", as Leibniz would put it) from its possibility (or nature). Every worldly event is contingent and requires an act of choice in order to occur, because the causal series determining it regresses ad infinitum.

Consider Leibniz's doctrine of infinite analysis. According to Leibniz, fact *x* is necessary if and only if its existence can be proven by an analysis of its reasons. (For only in that case can *x*'s existence be shown to obtain by identity proposition; thus only in that case does *x*'s contrary imply a contradiction.) It follows that fact *x* is contingent if the analysis of its reasons consists of an infinite series. (For in that case it cannot be proven that *x* exists; *x*'s contrary is not a contradiction.)³² Given that the existence of the world as a whole, as well as the existence of worldly entities, depends on an infinitely regressing series of causes, their existence cannot be proven. It is contingent.

Leibniz invokes the doctrine of infinite analysis in defending divine and human freedom alike. God must have chosen freely to create the present world because it cannot be proven that this world is the best. The same doctrine is also applied to human freedom: the series of causes that determines a given human action is contained in the notion of its agent but, because that series regresses ad infinitum, each action is contingent. No action or decision is fully accountable (provable) by an analysis of the said series. Consider the following claim from the *Discourse on Metaphysics*:

As the individual concept of each person includes once for all everything which can ever happen to him, in it can be seen a priori the evidence or the reasons for the reality of each event . . . But these events, however certain, are nevertheless contingent, being based on the free choice of God and of his creatures. It is true that their choices

³¹ Indeed this might be the reason why Bennett does not ascribe the Antithesis to Leibniz as other commentators do. Moreover his view that the Antithesis cannot convey a necessitarian position because necessitarianism is (so he thinks) a straw man's position is at least continuous with his belief that Spinoza also did not hold a necessitarian position.

³² Cf. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §13. For more detailed accounts of Leibniz's doctrine of infinite analysis see Russell, *A Critical Presentation*, pp. 25–35; Couturat: "On Leibniz's Metaphysics," pp. 30–35; Adams, *Leibniz*, pp. 25–30. The success of this doctrine is controversial, of course. See Blumenfeld, "Leibniz on Contingency"; Lin, "Rationalism and Necessitarianism."

always have their reasons, but they incline to the choices under no compulsion of necessity. (§13)

This claim is supported by the following example, which invokes Caesar's successful crossing of the Rubicon:

If anyone were capable of carrying out a complete demonstration by virtue of which he could prove [the] connection of the subject, which is Caesar, with the predicate, which is his successful enterprise, he would bring us to see in fact that the future dictatorship of Caesar had its basis in his concept or nature . . . but one would not [thereby] prove that it was necessary in itself, nor that the contrary implied a contradiction . . . [For] this demonstration of this predicate as belonging to Caesar *is not as absolute as are those of numbers or of geometry*, but this predicate presupposes a sequence of things which God has shown by his free will. This sequence is based on the first free decree of God. (*Discourse on Metaphysics* §13; emphasis added)

By claiming that the demonstration of the connection between 'Caesar' and 'crossed the Rubicon' is "not as absolute as are those of numbers or of geometry," Leibniz implies that his doctrine of infinite analysis relies on the infinite/indefinite distinction. Leibniz accepts complete infinity (which he terms the 'Absolute') in geometry and mathematics but rejects it in metaphysics. Accordingly, every causal series (like the "sequence" he alludes to above) is indefinite: its conclusions cannot be demonstrated. Therefore, the contrary of its conclusion is not contradictory. Without the further assumption of divine will, choice, and freedom, no explanation *can* be complete. This invites Leibniz's claim that the sequence is "based on the first free decree of God."

3. If anything, Leibniz's understanding of freedom and the PSR bears interesting similarities to the argument presented in the Thesis (especially to proposition 5). Certainly it is not related to the argument of the Antithesis. The crucial point, I think, is Leibniz's *strategy* of argumentation: despite arguing that every event is determined, Leibniz doesn't argue from the PSR against freedom. On the contrary, invoking the PSR in combination with the doctrine of infinite analysis, Leibniz argues *for* freedom. This is also the strategy of the Thesis.

An objection often raised against Leibniz's doctrine of infinite analysis is worth repeating here. That doctrine, it is argued, renders freedom an illusory human fancy: if everything is determined by a series of causes, the fact that that series regresses ad infinitum is immaterial. Due to the limitations of our finite intellects, we cannot complete an infinite analysis. God, whose intellect is infinite, can complete an infinite analysis—there is no place for assuming genuine contingency and no need for a causality of freedom.³³

³³ Cf. Russell, "Recent Work on the Philosophy of Leibniz," p. 378.

As A. Lovejoy puts it, despite the fact that we are “unable to apprehend the necessity,” we can still “be sure that the necessity is there, and is recognized by the mind of God.”³⁴

The Leibnizian reply to this objection must be understood in terms of the infinite/indefinite distinction. Leibniz denies cosmological-metaphysical infinity; he maintains that every cosmological series of causes can be only indefinite (i.e., proceed ad infinitum). Even God cannot completely analyze an indefinite series because it is essentially incomplete. If this is so, no event is necessary; there is room left for contingency and freedom.³⁵ We will see below that the Spinozist challenge to the antinomy elaborates on the same point. Unlike Leibniz, Spinoza denies that the infinite/indefinite distinction applies in this case. This threatens to render freedom illusory after all.

4. The Antithesis states that “there is no freedom. Everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with laws of nature” (A445/B473).

Antithesis: Prove: there is no freedom, all events happen according to the laws of nature.

1. Assume (for the sake of a reductio) the Thesis: there is freedom in the “transcendental sense” (i.e., a power of “absolutely beginning a state”).
2. It follows that there is “a series of consequences” of the state that was freely initiated.
3. It follows (a) that a series of events have their absolute beginning in a spontaneous cause and (b) that that spontaneous cause has an absolute beginning (i.e., it does not take place as a state in any preceding series).
4. However, every beginning of an action presupposes a state of the “not yet acting cause.”
5. Moreover, if the beginning of action is not only the beginning of a causal sequence but also a first beginning, it presupposes a state that has no causal connection at all with the preceding state of the cause (i.e., there is no sense in which the event follows *from* the cause).
6. Therefore, transcendental freedom is contrary to the causal law, and is a connection of the successive states of effective causes in accordance with which no unity of experience is possible, which thus cannot be encountered in any experience.
7. The idea of such freedom is, therefore, “an empty thought entity,” that is, there can be no transcendental freedom.

³⁴ Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, p. 175.

³⁵ This Leibnizian reply is well-known. See for example Rescher, *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, p.44; Adams, *Leibniz*, p. 28. However, while much work has been done on Leibniz’s doctrine of infinite analysis, and some work has been done on Leibniz’s infinite/indefinite distinction, I do not know of any work that has combined the two.

The heart of the argument is the fourth proposition, stating that every change must be connected to the antecedent state of the changing agent. The fifth proposition extends that proposition to the notion of “absolute beginning” and the sixth concludes (by the second and the third propositions) that causality of freedom violates the fourth and the fifth propositions, because it posits that a state can begin without connection to the agent’s antecedent state. The sixth proposition claims, further, that causality of freedom violates the “unity of experience” and, therefore, cannot be met with in experience. It is an “empty thought entity.”

The third Antithesis is less controversial than other antinomial arguments. This may be due to the commonsensical conclusion that freedom and naturalistic causality are mutually exclusive. Schopenhauer, for example, who is otherwise hostile to the Antinomies, accepts the third Antithesis as an adequate proof, consistent with Kant’s transcendental idealism.³⁶ Strawson similarly approves of the Antithesis as a “simple denial of freedom,” which can be deduced from Kant’s Second Analogy of Experience.³⁷ Indeed the fourth proposition (“every beginning presupposes a state of the ‘not yet acting cause’”) could be interpreted as a disguised statement of Kant’s Second Analogy, which argues that every causal change must be connected to the antecedent state of the agent of change (A189/B232). On that reading, which is widely adopted in the literature, the sixth proposition is derived from the fourth and fifth, which are understood as the Second Analogy: *because* freedom violates the “unity of experience” (contradicting the second Analogy) it cannot be met with in experience. Therefore, it is “an empty thought entity.”³⁸

There is something inaccurate about that reading, which, indeed, raises a suspicion of circularity.³⁹ It would be inappropriate for Kant to assume transcendental idealism in the fourth and the fifth propositions (by bringing in the Second Analogy) because the position to be assumed and refuted in the Antinomy is that of transcendental realism. From the latter perspective, what can or cannot be met with in experience does not license conclusions about what there is. Accordingly, the claim that freedom destroys “the unity of experience,” which is raised in the sixth proposition, does not license the desired conclusion: the fact that freedom cannot be met with in experience does not show that there is no freedom.

There is no doubt that Kant’s terminology of ‘experience’ evokes transcendental idealism and, to that extent, is unfortunate. However, the argument itself is carried out from the position of transcendental realism and is not circular. To see this, let us recall the argument of the Thesis. We saw that the Thesis is effective only if its target—the Antithesis—relies on the PSR. The Thesis argues against the position that (a) there is

³⁶ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, p. 498.

³⁷ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, pp. 208–10.

³⁸ For example, Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, p. 282f; Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, p. 411f; Hudson, *Kant’s Compatibilism*; Malzkorn, *Kants Kosmologie-Kritik*, p. 214.

³⁹ See Röttges, “Kants Auflösung der Freiheitsantinomie,” pp. 45–48; Ortwein, *Kants Problematische Freiheitslehre*, pp. 24–26.

only naturalistic causality and (b) every event has an ultimate explanation (if you'd like, 'there are no brute facts'). Now because the Thesis and the Antithesis are constructed as mutual refutations it is appropriate—in fact, necessary—to use the one in the interpretation of the other. Therefore, the Antithesis's fourth proposition is not Kant's Second Analogy of Experience (which would be the PSR's transcendently ideal version) but the PSR. The claim that every beginning of action presupposes a state of the "not yet acting cause" follows from the claim that there are no brute facts: the abrupt emergence of an event, a sudden beginning which is not connected to the previous state of the "not yet acting cause," is just such a brute fact. On the reading proposed here, the fifth proposition universalizes the PSR, which is announced in the fourth proposition, to causality of 'absolute beginning.' Such a beginning cannot occur because it violates the PSR by the emergence of a state that bears no causal (explanatory) connection "with the preceding state of the cause"—*ex nihilo nihil fit*. (Put simply, the Antithesis's denial of freedom does not depend on the claim that freedom violates the "unity of experience." It depends rather on freedom violating the PSR.)⁴⁰

5. Evidently, the Antithesis cannot be understood as a Leibnizian application of the PSR. It is Spinoza who, in contrast to Leibniz, excludes freedom by an argument from the PSR.⁴¹ Now it is clear that Kant recognizes the relevance of Spinoza's position to the Antithesis's fatalistic position. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* he writes that the Leibnizians pretend to preserve room for freedom by taking space and time as properties of finite beings but not of God. Their position, however, collapses into fatalism:

I do not see how those who insist on regarding time and space as determinations belonging to the existence of things in themselves would avoid fatalism of actions; or if (like the otherwise acute Mendelssohn) they flatly allow both of them [time and space] to be conditions necessarily belonging only to the existence of finite and derived beings but not to that of the *infinite original being*—I do not see how they would justify themselves in making such a distinction, whence they get a warrant to do so, or even how they would avoid the contradiction they encounter when they regard existence in time as a determination attaching necessarily to finite things in themselves, while God is said to be the cause of this existence but cannot be the cause of time (or space) itself.⁴²

⁴⁰ Watkins advocates a similar reading, relying on the Antithesis's text rather than on comparing it to the Thesis. See his *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*, p. 309f.

⁴¹ The PSR is traditionally better associated with Leibniz than with Spinoza, who did not, for example, include that principle among the axioms of the *Ethics*. However, as Martin Lin ("The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza") shows in this volume, nearly all of the *Ethics*' axioms express, or at least clarify, Spinoza's espousal of the PSR.

⁴² KpV AA 5:101f.

The shortcomings of this position bring Kant to conclude that if transcendental idealism is not adopted,

Nothing remains but Spinozism, in which space and time are essential determinations of the original being itself, while the things dependent upon it (ourselves, therefore, included) are not substances but merely accidents inhering in it; for if these things exist merely as its effects *in time*, which would be the condition of their existence itself, then the actions of these beings would have to be merely its actions that it [God] performs in any place and at any time . . . [Thus Spinozism] argues more consistently than the creation theory can when beings assumed to be substances and *in themselves existing in time* are regarded as effects of a supreme cause and yet as not belonging to him and his action.⁴³

Without transcendental idealism, “freedom could not be saved,” Kant writes:

A human being would be a marionette or an automaton . . . built and wound up by the supreme artist; self-consciousness would indeed make him a thinking automaton, but the consciousness of his own spontaneity, if taken for freedom, would be mere delusion.⁴⁴

It is true that this passage was written after the *Pantheismusstreit* had begun. Yet for precisely that reason the most surprising element about it is the fact that it contains little that should be surprising or new. Kant’s words are consistent with his characterization of transcendental realism in the first *Critique’s* Antinomies and in some pre-critical texts, the only novelty being the mention of Spinoza’s name. Kant’s claim that transcendental realism leads to viewing space and time as “divine determinations” is continuous with the infinitistic position articulated in the first Antithesis (with its denial of the world’s creation); it is consistent with Kant’s claim that the Antithesis deprives us of a “primordial being distinct from the world” (A468/B496). The claim that transcendental realism cannot but regard freedom a “delusion” is continuous with the argument presented in the third Antithesis that freedom is a “mere thought entity” (A447/B475). It should be at least noted that already in the pre-critical period Kant had little taste for Leibnizian compatibilism. In the *New Elucidation* he comments on Leibniz’s position on freedom and the PSR:

I readily admit that here some of the adherents of the Wolffian philosophy deviate somewhat from the truth of the matter. They are convinced that that which is posited by the chain of grounds which hypothetically determine each other still falls a little short of complete necessity, because it lacks absolute necessity. But in this matter I agree with their illustrious opponent: the distinction, which everyone recites parrot-fashion, does little to diminish the force of the necessity of the certainty of the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

determination. For just as nothing can be conceived which is more true than true, and nothing more certain than certain, so nothing can be conceived which is more determined than determined. The events which occur in the world have been determined with such certainty that divine foreknowledge, which is incapable of being mistaken, apprehends, both their futurity and the *impossibility of their opposites*.⁴⁵

It is very common to interpret the *New Elucidation* as expression of Kant's adherence to Leibnizian compatibilism.⁴⁶ In light of the above passage, however, this view is untenable.⁴⁷ Kant is mocking Leibnizian compatibilism and complains that everybody recites it "parrot-fashion" despite the fact that it is futile. It is worth noticing what may be the source of the confusion surrounding Kant's position. In the *New Elucidation*, Kant rejects Crusius's conception of freedom as action without a reason and grants compatibilism instead. He insists moreover that freedom worthy of that name is nothing but one's determination to action according to inner reasons. This has suggested to interpreters that Kant was a Leibnizian. Longuenesse, for example, reasons: "To the question: 'is this principle of reason [PSR] applied to human action compatible with freedom of the will and freedom of action?' Kant answers—again against Crusius—that being free is not acting *without a reason*, but on the contrary acting from an *internal* reason . . . Kant, here, is faithfully Leibnizian."⁴⁸ However, Kant's rejection of Crusius's position—his acceptance of compatibilism—does not entail that he has granted *Leibnizian* compatibilism. For in the same passage Kant had also sided with Crusius against Leibnizian compatibilism in embracing Crusius' accusation that the PSR—which the Leibnizians and he, Kant, posit—entails necessitarianism. Thus Kant's compatibilism consists in the view that every action (God's action included) is completely necessitated (for there is nothing "more determined than determined") and that we are free nevertheless. "The question hinges," he writes, "not upon to what extent" things are necessary but "whence" the necessity derives: even though necessitarianism obtains one is free if the reasons of one's action (again, God's actions included) are internal.⁴⁹ Kant's compatibilism in the *New Elucidation* best resembles the Stoic compatibilism of Spinoza.

Returning to the second *Critique* passage, the crucial question is what *argument* brings Kant to conclude that those who regard space and time as properties of things-in-themselves are committed to regarding them as properties of God. This assertion draws on the proposition that it is *arbitrary* to regard space and time as "necessary properties belonging to the existence of finite beings" but not to the existence of the "infinite original being itself"; as well as that it is *less consistent* to maintain that finite beings "in themselves existing in time" are "effects of a supreme cause and yet not belonging to him and

⁴⁵ *New Elucidation* [PND] AA 01:400.

⁴⁶ See for example Longuenesse's important paper on the PSR: "Kant's Deconstruction," p. 74; Heimsoeth, "Zum kosmologischen Ursprung," p. 215.

⁴⁷ This is argued also by Byrd, "Kant's Compatibilism."

⁴⁸ "Kant's Deconstruction," p. 74. Heimsoeth reasons along similar lines ("Zum kosmologischen Ursprung," p. 215).

⁴⁹ PND AA 01:400.

his action.” There is not much of an argument here but Kant is assuming a position he already defended in the first *Critique*.⁵⁰ The fourth Antinomy’s connection to Spinoza deserves a separate study but here consider the Observation on the Thesis. Kant writes that after invoking the cosmological argument in establishing the existence of a necessary being one must decide “whether that being is *the world itself* or a thing distinct from it” (A456/B484; my emphasis). This formulation is intriguing but slightly inaccurate, or careless, because Kant in fact holds that even if the unconditioned is not distinct from the world, two possibilities still remain. The unconditioned can belong to the world as “the highest member of the cosmological series” or as the whole series taken in its totality (and hence as “the world itself”). There are three possibilities, then. God is either (1) distinct from the world (not spatiotemporal); or (2) the highest member of the cosmological series (spatiotemporal); or (3) the “world itself,” (i.e., the whole cosmological series taken in its totality [spatiotemporal]). Kant’s position in the fourth Antinomy is that if appearances are taken to be things-in-themselves—what is equivalent to saying: if transcendental realism is true—one cannot uphold (1). God must be spatiotemporal:

If we begin our proof cosmologically, resting it upon the series of appearances and the regress therein according to empirical laws of causality, we must not afterwards suddenly deviate from this mode of argument, passing over to something that is not a member of the series. Anything taken as condition must be viewed precisely in the same manner in which we viewed the relation of the conditioned to its condition in the series which is supposed to carry us by continuous advance to the supreme condition. If, then, this relation is sensible and falls within the province of the possible empirical employment of the understanding, the highest condition or cause can bring the regress to a close only in accordance with the laws of sensibility, and therefore only in so far as it itself belongs to the temporal series. (A458/B486)

The explanatory dependence relation obtaining between conditioned and condition asserted of appearances (or of things viewed by transcendental realists) is causal-temporal: the condition exists in a time prior to the conditioned (the latter comes into existence by necessity following the former). Moreover, every condition (or at least any condition of a conditioned *in* the world) is itself conditioned (i.e., it came into existence in a moment of time following another condition). (Kant does not defend this claim here; he is silently relying on proposition 3 of the third Thesis [above].) This forms a series which is “supposed to carry us by continuous advance to the supreme condition.” Now because it is the explanatory power of causal (temporal) dependence relations that establishes the existence of a necessary being, it would be illegitimate to appeal to a different dependence relation between the unconditioned and the world. (Otherwise the argument will not go through.) This means that if one uses this argument to establish the existence of God, it is legitimate to assume only that the explanatory dependence

⁵⁰ The following discussion is a brief adaptation from my “Kant’s Idea of the Unconditioned and Spinoza’s.”

relation between phenomenal conditioned things (i.e., conditioned things viewed by transcendental realists) and the supreme condition of their existence is also causal-temporal. This means that the unconditioned condition exists in time prior to the existence of the (first) conditioned being. (For Kant it follows from the definition of a temporal cause that it itself comes into existence in time; see for example proposition 3 of the third Thesis.) Therefore, the unconditioned being exists in time. Therefore, if time is viewed as a property of things, time is a property of the unconditioned being.

This argument rules out the first view of the unconditioned (i.e., 1): the unconditioned is not distinct from the world; it is temporal. This excludes the Wolffian-Leibnizian position.⁵¹ In other words, it establishes Kant's claim in the second *Critique* that it is illegitimate to view space and time as essential properties of things but not of the unconditioned being that created them. Now, note that we are still left with two alternatives. God can be conceived as a part of the cosmological series (i.e., 2) or as the "world itself" (i.e., 3). At first glance the former perhaps seems less damaging or less 'Spinozist' than the latter. However, (2) cannot sustain the theistic practical aspirations of those who, like the Leibnizians, cling to (1). For if the unconditioned exists in time (on that view, it does) then it always so existed; but then, so did the cosmological series following from it—which therefore always exists as a whole. (If a temporal unconditioned cause always existed, Kant writes, "its consequence would have also always existed" [A444/B472].) Hence, once (1) is ruled out, the spatiotemporal view of the unconditioned sooner or later collapses into (some sort of) Spinozism.⁵² This precisely licenses Kant's conclusion in the second *Critique* that transcendental realism is committed to Spinozism. Thus the same considerations that bring Kant to say that he cannot "see" how transcendental realists would "justify themselves" in allowing that space and time are "conditions

⁵¹ Regarding the fourth Antinomy, some have already noted the relevance of Spinoza to the argument of the Thesis. See Heimsoeth's "Le Continu métaphysique," pp. 89–91. Heimsoeth comments that Spinoza's doctrine, "telle que Kant la connaissait ou l'imaginait, a été, pour lui toujours, plus qu'on ne le remarque ordinairement, l'objet de méditations critiques, et cela précisément au cours de l'itinéraire qui le menait vers sa position définitive." While I agree with every word of this extremely controversial remark, Heimsoeth does not offer much historical or philosophical support for it. More recently, Grier offers some discussion of Spinoza as a possible historical source of the argument (see her *Kant's Doctrine*, p. 224f.). In fact, Al-Azm also concedes that the Newtonian position (which he assumes is represented in the Thesis) is pushed to Spinozism, and that Clarke came close to conceding as much (see his *The Origins*, p. 117f.).

⁵² Heimsoeth remarks that the conception conveyed by (2) expresses the Stoics' fatalist and Spinozist conception of the world soul (see his "Le Continu métaphysique," p. 90f., as well as his "Zum kosmologischen Ursprung," p. 209.) Heimsoeth does not offer much argumentation for this claim. But it is strongly supported by the fact that Kant discusses Zeno's paradoxes in connection with the Antinomies. While I cannot discuss this point in detail here, it is highly relevant for the present discussion. As we have seen above, Kant's pre-critical conception of freedom arguably resembles Stoic/Spinozist compatibilism. Moreover, Kant's position in the Antinomies was certainly influenced by Bayle's use of antinomial dialectic in connection with Zeno in the *Dictionnaire* (indeed Kant discusses Zeno in the Antinomies [A502f./B530f.]). Surprisingly little attention has been paid to Bayle and the Antinomies, an exception being Ferrari's entry on Bayle in his *Les sources françaises*, pp. 91–99. See also his "Le Dictionnaire historique et critique," pp. 24–33.

necessarily belonging only to the existence of finite and derived beings but not to that of the infinite original being”—the same considerations that lead him to think that Leibnizians fall back to Spinozism—are already at work in the first *Critique*.⁵³ In other words, the *Pantheismusstreit* did not change Kant’s mind about the Leibnizian position. He had seen their collapse into Spinozism all along. In this connection, note a comment Kant makes in the second *Critique* immediately after arguing that transcendental realism is committed to Spinozism:

One might rather say that the dogmatic teachers of metaphysics have shown more shrewdness than sincerity in keeping this difficult point out of sight as much as possible, in the hope that if they said nothing about it no one would be likely to think about it.⁵⁴

6. Kant describes the Antithesis position as that of pure empiricism: “In the assertions of the antithesis we observe a perfect uniformity in manner of thinking,” he writes, “and complete unity of maxims, namely a principle of pure empiricism, applied not only in explanation of the appearances within the world, but also in the solution of the transcendental ideas of the world itself, in its totality” (A 465f./B 493f.). At first glance this seems to complicate the association of the Antithesis with Spinoza. Who would have thought that Spinoza was an empiricist—that he strived to explain everything, worldly phenomena and the world itself, by an *empiricist* principle?

Note first that the same question also applies to the competing, commonly accepted interpretation of the Antithesis as Leibnizian. Leibniz is hardly a greater empiricist than Spinoza. To see how Kant could indeed think of Spinozism as pure empiricism one has to become more clear on what Kant means by “empiricism” in this context. Specifically, what is the empiricist explanatory principle, applied consistently by the Antithesis, through which everything—worldly phenomena and *the world itself*—is explained? This principle is that of granting only philosophical knowledge acquired by the naturalistic standards of “possible experience” (A468/B496). This principle consists then in an overriding acceptance of a mechanism of nature. Mechanistic explanation is necessary and sufficient for explaining everything—worldly phenomena and the existence of the world

⁵³ One advantage of reading the second *Critique* passage in light of the fourth Antinomy’s Thesis is that it provides a possible explanation for a mistake Kant makes about Spinoza. Kant writes that if transcendental idealism is denied, “nothing remains but Spinozism, in which space and time are essential determinations of the original being itself.” But of course Spinoza does not regard time, but thought, as an “essential determination” (attribute) of substance alongside space. This mistake could be the result of the fourth Antinomy argument because that argument proceeds by showing that the unconditioned being must be temporal (i.e., that time must be an “essential determination of the original being itself”). Kant’s mistake shows that what Kant understands by Spinozism may not correspond exactly to Spinoza’s own system.

⁵⁴ KpV AA 5:102.

itself. Now, whereas Spinoza is not what *we* call an empiricist, he fits rather well with Kant's notion of pure empiricism. Spinoza pledges to explain worldly phenomena and the idea of the world itself, substance, solely by mechanistic and, in this sense, empiricist principles. To be sure, Spinoza's use of these principles eventually transcends the limits of experience and of naturalistic explanation by relying on the dogmatic-metaphysical notion of substance. However, and this is just the point, so does the Antithesis: it derives the cosmological notion of the world from empiricist principles.⁵⁵

7. In a general note on the Antinomies, Kant describes two (exclusive) ways in which the idea of an unconditioned being can be represented:

The unconditioned may be conceived in either of two ways. It may be viewed as consisting of the entire series in which all the members [*Glieder*] without exception are conditioned and only the totality of them is absolutely unconditioned. This regress is to be entitled infinite. Or alternatively, the absolutely unconditioned is only a part [*Teil*] of the series—a part to which the other members are subordinated, and which does not itself stand under any other condition (A417/B445).⁵⁶

Let us call the first conception of the unconditioned A1 and the second A2. A1 strongly suggests Spinozistic substance monism. The infinite series itself, considered as a totality, may be conceived as Spinoza's unconditioned substance, whereas the series' conditioned members may be conceived as its modes. Kant's passage makes it clear that the relation obtaining between the unconditioned entity and the conditioned items of the series is that of a whole and its parts. (Of course, here is at least an apparent problem, for strictly speaking Spinoza does *not* understand substance as being constituted by its parts. Substance is simple: modes are conceived only through limitation of the whole [see more below].) The conflict between A1 and A2 generates the antinomies: A1 maps onto the antitheses' infinitistic conception that eliminates the possibility of a creation, freedom, and a transcendent God. A2 maps onto the Thesis: it relies on an unconditioned entity to which the series is subordinate, and it allows room for creation (*Weltanfang*) and freedom (*absolute Selbsttätigkeit*) (A418/B445-46).

It should be at least noted that Kant's ideal of pure reason—that *regulative* idea of a necessary, unconditioned being, regulatively directing our reason's striving to explain everything—has the structure of A1. This is consistent with his claim in the second *Critique* that the Spinozist conception of the relation between the unconditioned and the world is superior to the Leibnizian conception. The ideal is thus conceived as the "All of Reality," encompassing all other conditioned beings as "nothing but limitations (*nichts als Schranken*)" (A575/B603). While it is outside my scope to discuss the Ideal

⁵⁵ Note that Kant associates the empiricism of the Antithesis's with Epicurus (A471/B499). The Thesis he associates with Plato. This is significant because Kant elsewhere associates Epicurus's mechanistic conception with Spinoza's. In fact, Kant maintains that Spinoza's mechanistic conception is superior to Epicurus's (*Critique of Judgment* [KU] AA 5:391).

⁵⁶ I thank James Kreines for first pointing out this passage to me.

of Pure Reason in detail, it should be observed that in the same period in which Kant explicitly names Spinozism “the most consistent form of dogmatic metaphysics,” he also claims that the regulative ideal of reason yields a Spinozist conception:

This One . . . contains the material for production of all other possible things, as the supply of marble does for an infinite multitude of statues, which are altogether possible only through limitation . . . In a world fashioned this way one comes strongly to suspect that this metaphysical God (the *realissimum*) is one with the world (despite all protestations against Spinozism), as the totality of all existing things.⁵⁷

Consider also the following assertion from the *Lectures on Metaphysics*:

The *conceptus originarius* of Being in general, which is supposed to be the ground of all concepts of things, is a concept of the *ens realissimum*. All concepts of negations are derivative, and so we must first have real concepts if we want to have negative ones. The embodiment [*Inbegriff*] of all realities is considered also as the stock [*Magazin*] from which we take all the matter for the concepts of all beings . . . All difference between things is thus a difference of form [. . .] All *conceptus* of *entia limitata* are *conceptus derivativi* and the *conceptus originarius* for our reason is that of an *ens realissimum*. If I deduce the existence of an *ens realissimum* from its concept, this is the way to Spinozism.⁵⁸

To be sure, Kant thinks that Spinozism is deeply mistaken. Yet its mistake consists in deducing the existence of a necessary being from its concept, not in the way it represents that being as the “ground of all concepts of things.”

II. THE SPINOZIST CHALLENGE TO THE ANTINOMY

After the break of the *Pantheismusstreit*, Kant repeatedly claims that only transcendental idealism can prevent Spinozism—that only his philosophical revolution can prevent the threats posed by radical metaphysical rationalism. In the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (published at the height of the *Pantheismusstreit*) he writes that only transcendental philosophy can answer the injury of such doctrines as materialism, fatalism, and atheism (Bxxxiv); that he had “found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith” (Bxxx). This promise to have saved the practical

⁵⁷ *Lectures* AA 20:302. (See below several similar passages.) Elsewhere I discuss the connection between the Ideal of Pure Reason, Kant’s *Beweisgrund*, and Spinozism in detail. Note that the association of the Ideal and a Spinozist conception is suggested also by the Ideal’s connection to the fourth Antinomy. I discuss the Ideal’s connection to Spinoza in “Kant’s Regulative Spinozism.”

⁵⁸ *Lectures* AA 28:706. My translation.

interests of reason depends to a large extent on the success of the Antinomies. Kant's promise is fulfilled only if he has shown that transcendental realism—which he thinks necessitates Spinozism—leads to contradictions. Yet does Kant challenge Spinozist transcendental realism as successfully as he pledges? Let me here address one particular problem for his position.

1. The third Antinomy (as well as the first) draws heavily on the infinite/indefinite distinction. It relies on the assumption that a series regressing ad infinitum—that is, an indefinite, not an infinite regress—cannot be completed. The first Thesis relies on this assumption in claiming that the “infinity of a series consists in the fact that it can never be completed through successive synthesis” (A426/B454). The third Thesis relies on this assumption in claiming that in order for a regressing series to be complete, causality of freedom (i.e., a first beginning) must be postulated (A444/B472). This type of argument, which trades on the incompleteness of indefinite regresses, was a commonplace challenge to Spinoza and his fatalism in Kant's day. Mendelssohn, for example, summarizes Wolff's (alleged) refutation of Spinozism in the following way: “[Wolff] proved that Spinoza believed that it is possible to produce, by combining together an infinite stock of finite qualities, an infinite [thing]; and then he proved the falsity of this belief so clearly, that I am quite convinced that Spinoza himself would have applauded him.”⁵⁹ These words apply more readily to the first Antinomy's Thesis but a similar idea is also found in the Thesis of the third. Moreover we have seen that Leibniz's doctrine of infinite analysis (conceptualized not without an eye on Spinozist fatalism) gives another relevant historical example: Leibniz's position requires (among other things) that an analysis of reasons be indefinite rather than infinite—that the regress of the analysis be incomplete.

Spinoza has an obvious reply to this challenge. His monism collapses the distinction between God and world, what enables him to view substance as a positively infinite whole. Consider Spinoza's words in his letter to L. Meyer:

. . . they talk utter nonsense, not to say madness, who hold that Extended Substance is put together of parts, *or* bodies, really distinct from one another [. . .] So that whole array of arguments by which Philosophers ordinarily labor to show that Extended Substance is finite falls of its own weight. For they all suppose that corporeal Substance is composed of parts.⁶⁰

In Kantian terms, Spinoza views the world as an infinite *totum analyticum*—a simple infinite whole whose parts are conceived as the whole's limitations, not its proper parts. This enables Spinoza to view the world as an infinite existing entity (targeted in the first

⁵⁹ Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, p. 16. My translation.

⁶⁰ Ep. 12/G 4:55–56.

Antinomy) as well as a complete explanatory whole (targeted in the third Antinomy). If this is granted, Spinoza's position escapes refutation by the Thesis. It threatens thereby to disarm the antinomy.

2. P. Franks has brought up a similar challenge to the Antinomy, developed from Jacobi's account of Spinoza as it was presented during the *Pantheismusstreit*.⁶¹ Franks observes that Jacobi deduces from the PSR a consistent position in which an infinite whole is affirmed and every event is sufficiently explained—without requiring an assumption of freedom. “The finite is in the infinite,” Jacobi writes, “so that the sum of all finite things, equally containing within itself the whole of eternity . . . is one and the same as the infinite being itself.”⁶² Jacobi points out, moreover, that such an infinite sum of all things is a coherent conception because it is conceived as a *totum analyticum*: “this sum is not an absurd combination of finite things, together constituting an infinite, but a whole in the strictest sense, whose parts can only be thought within it and according to it.”⁶³ Jacobi thus anticipates and checks the anti-Spinozist challenge raised by Wolff, Mendelssohn, and Kant's Antitheses.

This brings Franks to conclude that Kant's transcendental idealism is not the only resolution of the Antinomy. Transcendental idealism *and* Spinoza's substance monism, he writes, offer the “hope” of a solution: Spinozism may “outflank” the *Critique of Pure Reason* “because it provides a solution to the Third Antinomy that competes with Kant's transcendental idealism, a solution unsuspected by Kant . . .”⁶⁴

In fact, Kant's problem is more severe. Transcendental idealism and Spinozism cannot be concurrent resolutions to the antinomy because the Spinozist position is transcendentially real. If Spinozism constitutes a possible solution, there is no antinomy at all, for transcendental realism does not conflict with itself. Moreover, we have seen that this (alleged) Spinozist challenge to the third Antinomy concerns the first Antinomy just the same. Unlike the third Antinomy, the first is supposed to provide a proof of transcendental idealism (A506f./B534f.). Therefore, if Spinoza's cosmological *totum analyticum* is granted, transcendental idealism loses force.

What would be Kant's stance toward the Spinozist reliance on the cosmological idea of complete infinity?

3. Whereas Kant thinks that that conception is natural and even necessary for our rational operations, he deems it incoherent, illusory. Given any measurable totality (or magnitude), he thinks, it is possible for a greater magnitude to exist (e.g., A527/B555). His view is supported by standard set theory: given any set (i.e., a

⁶¹ “From Kant to Post-Kantian Idealism.”

⁶² Jacobi, *Werke*, 1 1:95. See Franks, “From Kant to Post-Kantian Idealism,” p. 239f.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Franks, “From Kant to Post-Kantian Idealism,” pp. 241–44.

measurable totality) a greater set exists. In this sense every set is only *relatively* large and no set—no measurable totality—can be considered positively unlimited, which is the way Spinoza claims to conceive of substance.⁶⁵ The positively infinite—the Absolute Infinite⁶⁶—can perhaps be thought of as the class of all sets rather than as the set of all sets.⁶⁷ But then, such an Absolute cannot be regarded an actually measurable totality, like Spinoza’s ‘One.’ In this sense one can think of the infinite whole as, say, an explanatory progress—much more like a Kantian regulative conception than a Spinozist one.⁶⁸

This should shift much of the burden of proof to the Spinozist. The Third Antinomy cannot be successfully resolved if the notion of the actually existing whole cannot be justified. Given the paradoxes it entails, on what grounds should we accept it as coherent? Certainly we do not meet in ordinary experience an object that is a positive infinite whole. It seems at least likely that we arrive at that notion by *mistakenly* thinking that one can complete a regressing series produced by our indefinite ability to add a unit for every measurable totality. What grounds then justify Spinoza’s reliance on the absolute, positively infinite? I don’t think that Spinoza himself directly justifies this notion, which is so intimate to his thought. He must have regarded it unproblematic. (I don’t know that more recent Spinozists have attempted to defend Spinoza’s position on that score, either.) Yet without such a justification Spinoza’s cosmological *totum analyticum* does not pose a genuine threat to Kant’s position.

To complicate things, note that Kant himself is not completely unsympathetic to complete infinity.⁶⁹ Throughout his career he maintains that this notion should not be dismissed too quickly. Still, from Kant’s ultimate position regarding the infinite we may learn how, if at all, this notion can be justified, and why such justification is not available to a Spinozist.

Consider the following passage from the *Dissertation*:

Those who reject the actual mathematical infinite do so in a very casual manner. For they so construct their definition of the infinite that they are able to extract a contradiction from it. The infinite is described by them as a quantity than which none greater is possible, and the mathematical infinite as a multiplicity—of an assignable unit—than which none greater is possible. Since they thus substitute maximum for infinitum, and a greatest multiplicity is impossible, they easily conclude against this infinite which they have themselves invented. Or, it may be, they entitle an infinite multiplicity an infinite number, and point out that such a phrase is meaningless, as

⁶⁵ For a detailed discussion of Kant’s conception of infinity, see Moore, “Aspects of the Infinite.” (See also “Erratum,” in *Mind* 98 (1988), p. 501.)

⁶⁶ Cantor, “Letter to Dedekind,” p. 114.

⁶⁷ See Moore’s defense of such suggestion in “Aspects of the Infinite,” p. 217.

⁶⁸ Moore shows nicely how the problem of the universal set can be treated as an antinomy. (See Moore, “Aspects of the Infinite,” p. 217.) See also Majer’s treatment in “Das Unendliche.”

⁶⁹ See also Kemp Smith’s discussion in *A Commentary*, p. 486f.

is, indeed, perfectly evident. But again they have fought and overthrown only the figments of their own minds. If, however, they had conceived the mathematical infinite as a quantity which, when related to measure, as its unit, is a multiplicity greater than all number; and if furthermore, they had observed that measurability here denotes only the relation [of the infinite] to the standards of the human intellect, which is not permitted to attain to a definite conception of multiplicity save by the successive addition of unit to unit, nor to the sum-total (which is called number) save by completing this progress in a finite time; they would have perceived clearly that what does not conform to the established law of some subject need not on that account exceed all intellection. An intellect may exist, though not indeed a human intellect, which perceives a multiplicity distinctly in one intuition [*uno obtutu*] without the successive application of a measure.⁷⁰

Kant's approach to the infinite is subtle. He thinks that rejecting its possibility on the grounds that "the greatest multiplicity is impossible" is no good because actual infinity need not be conceived as a multiplicity. On that point Kant agrees with Spinoza who, as we have seen, thinks it is "madness" to reject infinity because it is a whole "put together of parts." However, Kant thinks that even if actual infinity is not known to be contradictory, it cannot be grasped by the human intellect. On that score he disagrees with Spinoza, who holds that if anything can be adequately grasped, it is the infinite whole.⁷¹ In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant gives voice to the same position expressed in the *Dissertation*, when he writes that even if the infinite "whole of nature" is "spread before us," no experience can sustain knowledge "*in concreto*" of this whole because it would be impossible to have a "consciousness of its absolute totality" (A482f/B510f.). On that point, however, Kant would eventually rethink. His analysis of the sublime in the *Critique of Judgment* suggests a way in which one can experience (though not in the ordinary Kantian sense) the "absolutely large." Kant's account of the sublime brings out some important points to take into account in connection with the antinomy and Spinozism—especially when considering the connection between infinity and freedom.

4. Kant opens his analysis of the sublime with a discussion of "mathematical" infinity. Although he does not say so, mathematical infinity corresponds to the early modern indefinite, consisting in our ability to add, for any measurable magnitude, an additional unit—there can be no hindrance to enlarging any given magnitude

⁷⁰ *Dissertation* AA 2: 388n (Kemp Smith's translation).

⁷¹ Consider his words: "But as for knowledge of the origin of Nature, we need not have any fear of confusing it with abstractions. For when things are conceived abstractly (as all universals are), they always have a wider extension in our intellect than their particulars can really have in nature. And then, since there are many things in nature whose difference is so slight that it almost escapes the intellect, it can easily happen, if they are conceived abstractly, that they are confused. But since, as we shall see later, the origin of Nature can neither be conceived abstractly, *or* universally, nor be extended more widely in the intellect than it really is, and since it has no likeness to changeable things, we need fear no confusion concerning its idea, provided that we have the standard of truth (which we have already shown). For it is a unique and infinite being, beyond which there is no being." (TdIE §76)

ad infinitum (“ins Unedliche”).⁷² Kant explains that this mathematical notion (the indefinite) does not produce and cannot account for the notion of the complete infinite. First, because the mathematical notion is merely that of negating the finite (by the ability to enlarge every given series); and second, because the mathematical procedure is *abstract*, consisting in the addition of units regardless of their size. (For all that matters, one could continuously add geometrical points.) An actual *Größenschätzung*, Kant says, an estimation of magnitude, is not purely mathematical: estimating magnitude or size also requires an aesthetic measure, a criterion that provides (through the imagination or the senses) the constant basic unit’s actual size.

Nevertheless, to the successively generated mathematical infinity, Kant says, reason adds the demand that the infinite succession be completed:

The mind listens to the voice of reason [*Stimme der Vernunft*] within itself, which demands totality for all given magnitudes, even those that we can never apprehend in their entirety [. . .] and it exempts from this demand not even the infinite (space and time). Rather, reason makes us unavoidably think of the infinite (in common reason’s judgment) as given in its entirety (in its totality).⁷³

The infinite given in its entirety, moreover, is the cosmological idea of the complete world:

If the human mind is nonetheless to be able to think the given infinite without contradiction, it must have within itself a power that is supersensible, whose idea of a noumenon cannot be intuited but can yet be regarded as the substrate underlying what is mere appearance, namely, our intuition of the world.⁷⁴

This infinitistic cosmological notion is similar to the cosmological notion attacked in the antinomies (more specifically, to A₁) but is not identical to it, for it is not transcendently real. This cosmological notion is a noumenal substrate of nature, the “supersensible”:

The proper unchangeable basic measure of nature is the absolute whole of nature, which, in the case of nature as appearance, is infinity comprehended. This basic measure, however, is a self-contradictory concept (because an absolute totality of an endless progression is impossible). Hence that magnitude of a natural object to which the imagination fruitlessly applies its entire ability to comprehend must lead the concept of nature to a supersensible substrate (which underlies both

⁷² KU AA 5:251–52.

⁷³ KU AA 5:254.

⁷⁴ KU AA 5:254f.

nature and our ability to think), a substrate that is large beyond any standard of sense.⁷⁵

Kant recognizes that our reason compels us to think the actual infinite and grants, moreover, that that infinite “leads to” the concept of the supersensible substrate of “all nature.” But how exactly does actual infinity lead to the concept of the substrate of “all nature”?

According to Kant, the notion of the mathematical infinite (the indefinite) cannot be the source of our representation of the positively infinite because the latter is merely abstract whereas the former is not. The infinite is conceived as having an actual size (the absolutely large) and, as pointed out above, this requires an aesthetic measure, providing the basic unit’s actual size. Now in order to produce the absolutely large the basic measure itself must be the largest possible—it must be the notion of “everything,” (i.e., of the “world”). This, however, is where the discussion quietly refers to the Antinomies, for it relies on the argument that taking this measure to be transcendently real involves a contradiction. This implies that this measure has another source from the world taken as transcendently real, what “must lead” from the “concept of complete nature” to the concept of a “supersensible substrate”—some substrate that is large beyond any standard of sense and underlies the complete phenomenal reality.

Still, why does Kant grant that that infinite “supersensible substrate” of nature is a meaningful notion? Certainly he has reasons to think that it is an illusion of reason, consisting in the temptation to think that indefinite procedures can be completed. Certainly no possible experience, neither in the Kantian sense of the term nor in any other, exemplifies the supersensible substrate of nature in empirical experience. Kant thinks that it is an experience of freedom that illustrates the notion of the infinite (i.e., the absolutely large); for through an experience of freedom we become conscious of a measure in relation to which everything in nature is absolutely small:

[We find] in our power of reason a different and nonsensible standard that has *this infinity itself under it as a unit*; and since in contrast to this standard everything in nature is small, we found in our mind a superiority over nature itself in its immensity [. . .] [It reveals in us] an ability to judge ourselves independent of nature, and reveals in us superiority over nature.⁷⁶

The same point is formulated in the well-known conclusion of the second *Critique*, which is in fact a description of the experience of the sublime:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and respect [*Ehrfurcht*], the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me . . . The first begins from the place

⁷⁵ KU AA 5:255.

⁷⁶ KU AA 5: 261 (emphasis mine).

I occupy in the external world of sense and extends the connection in which I stand into an unbounded magnitude with worlds upon worlds and systems upon systems . . . The second begins from my invisible self . . . and presents me in a world which has *true infinity* but which can be discovered only by the understanding . . . The first view of countless multitudes of worlds annihilates, as it were, my importance as an *animal* creature . . . The second, on the contrary, infinitely raises my worth as an intelligence by my personality, in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and even of the whole sensible world.⁷⁷

5. Kant's conception of the infinite whole has some similarities to Spinoza's. Like Spinoza's conception, Kant's "supersensible" is an infinite cosmological substrate underlying "what is mere appearance, namely, our intuition of the world." It is a supersensible substrate that underlies "both nature and our ability to think." As suggested above, this unconditioned all-encompassing notion corresponds to the regulative ideal of pure reason. The Ideal, says Kant, "is not merely a concept which, as regards its transcendental content, comprehends all predicates *under itself*; it also contains them *within itself*; and the complete determination of any and every thing rests on this All of Reality [*dieses All der Realität*]" (A577/B605). As we have seen above, there are reasons to think that Kant himself understood the structure of the regulative ideal of reason in rather Spinozist terms. This is continuous with the fact that the regulative ideal is structured along the lines of the Antithesis's rather than the Thesis's conception of the unconditioned (A1).

What is significant is that Kant accepts the infinite only on the basis of the consciousness of freedom. If not for that consciousness, talk of the infinite remains an empty use of words—hardly a safe foundation for rationalist pursuits. If the notion of the infinite can be exemplified in some sort of experience, this must arguably be an experience of freedom: every other experience is necessarily limited and relative to the limiting conditions of space, time, and causality. This need not be understood as a position particular to Kant. In fact Spinoza, too, would agree about this.⁷⁸ By the same rationale, it is also reasonable to say that if an individual conceives of the infinite unconditioned, that person is genuinely free; for she must grasp that notion independently of the limiting

⁷⁷ KpV AA 5:161f. (emphases mine).

⁷⁸ Spinoza would agree that the foundations of the *Ethics* are known to be true if and only if one has an adequate idea of substance (providing knowledge that the definition of substance is true and that substance exists). However, for Spinoza, having an adequate idea just *is* being free. In order to challenge the Kantian position, therefore, Spinozists will have to show (without beforehand assuming the coherence of the actual infinite) that it is possible for us to have an adequate idea of substance or, what is the same, to become free. As Della Rocca points out, it is not obvious that finite beings like us can have adequate ideas (see his *Representation*, p. 183 (fn. 29), as well as "The Power of an Idea," p. 205). In a recent paper, Marshall attempts to show that even if the problem pointed out by Della Rocca applies to adequate knowledge of finite beings, we can have adequate knowledge of substance (see his "Adequacy and Innateness"). I cannot discuss Marshall's interpretation here but only suggest that one can accept this solution only if the notion of the complete infinite is beforehand accepted as legitimate.

conditions of space, time, and causality. In this sense, one can grasp the infinite if and only if one is free. But Spinozists cannot rely on an experience of freedom—certainly not of the sort accounted for by Kant in the sublime—to ground their reliance on the complete infinite. By rendering the experience of freedom a mere delusion, they threaten to undercut their own position.⁷⁹

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⁷⁹ I thank Michael Della Rocca, Karsten Harries and James Kreines for their comments on earlier versions of this essay.

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CHAPTER 23

“NOTHING COMES FROM NOTHING”

Judaism, the Orient, and Kabbalah in Hegel’s Reception of Spinoza

PAUL FRANKS

“NOTHING comes from nothing.”¹ In a letter to Simon de Vries, Spinoza cited this thesis as an example of truths “which do not explain any thing or affection of a thing . . . absolutely eternal truths.”² The thesis is readily recognizable as a negative formulation of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). A positive version would read, “Everything comes from something.”

Now, Spinoza assumed the PSR throughout. But “nothing comes from nothing” was hardly his favorite formulation. What is perhaps his canonical formulation occurs in E1p11d2: “For each thing there must be assigned a cause, *or* reason, as much for its existence as for its nonexistence.” Yet “nothing comes from nothing” played an important and untold role in the reception of Spinoza that culminated in Hegel’s famous interpretation. Indeed, as we shall see, Hegel associated it explicitly with Spinoza.

To be sure, a different formula played a far more prominent role in Hegel’s interpretation of Spinoza: the formula that “determination is negation.” Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi had drawn attention to this statement in the letters to Mendelssohn, whereby he provoked, in 1785, the Spinozism Controversy, which, along with the publication of Kant’s *Critiques*, is rightly regarded as the stimulus for the development of German idealism. Nevertheless, “nothing comes from nothing” was central to Jacobi’s seminal presentation of Spinoza’s philosophy. And it is this thesis that establishes the essential

¹ The thesis is often ascribed to Parmenides, and it certainly has pre-Socratic sources, but its earliest extant statement in this formulation occurs in Aristotle’s account of his predecessors. See Aristotle, *Physics* 1.8.191a28: “from what is not nothing could have come to be.” See also Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* bk. 1, 150, 156–157, 543–544; bk. 2, 287.

² Ep. 10.

background for the emphasis on determination as negation in the Spinoza interpretations of Jacobi and Hegel. But we can best understand the background in question by seeing how the thesis in question had featured in an earlier debate, explicitly cited by Jacobi, concerning Spinoza’s relation to Kabbalah.

What could there possibly be to say about such a relation? We have only one statement by Spinoza that is clearly about Kabbalah, and it is hardly an endorsement: “I have . . . read, and am acquainted with, a number of Kabbalistic triflers whose madness passes the bounds of my understanding.”³

But there were two reasons, at the turn of the eighteenth century, to connect Spinoza with the Kabbalah. First, it was widely assumed that since Spinoza was of Jewish descent, this fact must necessarily have played a significant role in the constitution of his thought. At the same time, Spinoza could hardly be reduced to his Jewishness, since he and the Jewish community had parted ways in mutual enmity. Indeed, Spinoza’s critical construal of his ancestral religion was a major source of the Kantian and post-Kantian critique of Judaism as a merely political system.⁴ Second, an enormous work, *Kabbala Denudata*, produced by a team that was led by Christian von Rosenroth and included Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont, made available for the first time in Latin translation a major corpus of Kabbalistic texts, including works from the *kitvei ha-Ari* (the writings of Isaac Luria) which would not be printed in Hebrew until the late eighteenth century.⁵ The first volume appeared in 1677, which was also the publication year of Spinoza’s *Opera Posthuma*. Christian interest in Kabbalah was not new, but it had previously been confined to the small number of those who could read the original texts. The discovery that Jews had their own speculative tradition, with ancient roots but still active, was as monumental in the Christian perception of Judaism as the discovery in the thirteenth century that Judaism was more Talmudic than biblical. A wide-ranging debate about the meaning and significance of Kabbalah engaged some of Christian Europe’s greatest minds. Some viewed it as proto-Christian, hence as a way to convert the Jews. Others viewed it as dangerously heterodox—a symptom, like the Talmud, of the corruption of the modern Jews and their distance from their ancient roots.

This debate suggested one way to solve the conundrum of Spinoza’s Jewishness: he could be interpreted as a sort of Kabbalist.⁶ Surely, this was what Spinoza meant when he said that he agreed with Paul, perhaps all ancient philosophers, and the ancient Hebrews, insofar as one could infer the views of the latter from “certain traditions” that had undergone much corruption.⁷ The idea that a kernel of ancient Hebrew tradition was still to

³ TTP 9/G 3:135–136 (Shirley translation). Spinoza’s library included Joseph Solomon Delmedigo, *Ta’alumot Hokhmah*, ed. by Samuel Ashkenazi (Basel, 1629), which contains an account of Lurianic Kabbalah according to Israel Sarug. See Walther and Czelinski, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinozas*, 342–358, doc. 151. On Sarug, see note 23 below.

⁴ See Hegel, *Vorlesungen*.

⁵ *Kabbala Denudata seu doctrina Hebraeorum transcendentalis et metaphysica atque theologica*. On the redaction of Luria’s writings, see Avivi, *Kabbalat ha-Ari*.

⁶ For a useful discussion, see Popkin, “Spinoza: Neoplatonic Kabbalist?”

⁷ See Ep. 73/G 4:307: “All things, I say are in God and move in God, and this I affirm together with Paul and perhaps together with all ancient philosophers, though expressed in a different way, and I would

be found in Kabbalah was central to Christian Kabbalah. It was argued in particular that both Spinoza and the Kabbalah were committed to the principle that “nothing comes from nothing,” rejecting the orthodox Judeo-Christian view of *creatio ex nihilo*.⁸ This interpretive tradition established the background against which Lessing, Jacobi, and Hegel developed their readings of Spinoza. Indeed, it is hard to understand much of what they say about Spinoza unless the connection with Kabbalah is borne in mind.

It is controversial whether Jacobi and Hegel were correct to ascribe the comprehensive doctrine that “*all* determination is negation” to Spinoza. But it is relatively easy to show that even if the ascription had some justification, its importance within Spinoza’s system was vastly overemphasized by Hegel. As Pierre Macherey asks, “What logic leads Hegel to attribute this phrase to Spinoza, to make it the principal marker and motif of their divergence?”⁹ I will argue that one factor is Hegel’s attempt to negotiate Spinoza’s Jewishness.

I. MORE’S NIGHTMARE: THE REJECTION OF CREATION

Kabbala Denudata is more a library than a single book. Besides translations of selections from the *Zohar*—by the eighteenth century the closest thing to a canonical Kabbalistic text—it contained numerous recent treatises by Kabbalists involved in or influenced by the upsurge in the sixteenth century of speculation connected with the town of Safed, which came to be known as Lurianic Kabbalah. It also contained essays for and against Kabbalah by contemporary Christian philosophers. In one volume, Christian von Rosenroth published a nightmare reported by Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist who was a friend of van Helmont. In the dream, an eagle flew from the Orient and through a window into More’s room. The room turned into a garden and the eagle, which seemed to be made of only bones and no muscles, began to speak, turning into a boy. More asked the boy, who said he came from Zion, whether he believed in one god, and the boy answered, “No.” Thereupon, More began to kick the boy, who turned into a bee, threatening to sting More’s shins. Awakening abruptly and attempting to discern the cause of his nightmare, More could conclude only that it was the result of reading the Kabbalistic texts that had been made available for the first time in an earlier volume of *Kabbala Denudata*. To be sure, a few ancient and sublime doctrines were to be found

even venture to say, together with all the ancient Hebrews, as far as may be conjectured from certain traditions, though these have suffered much corruption.”

⁸ The view is certainly old, attested first in 2 Maccabees 7:28. But it is by no means the only one to be found among Jewish and Christian thinkers, and it is far from clear that Genesis must be read in such a way.

⁹ Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, p. 113.

therein, symbolized by the eagle’s bones. In general, however, Kabbalistic views were not only false but dangerous, and they even undermined the monotheism on which Judaism and Christianity supposedly agreed.¹⁰

To explain what was so horrifying about the Kabbalah rendered accessible by Rosenroth and his collaborators, More summarized Kabbalistic doctrine in sixteen theses, under the title *Philosophical Fundamentals, or Kabbalah of the Eagle-Boy-Bee*.¹¹ The first was “nothing can be created from nothing.”¹² At the heart of the corrupt character of Kabbalah, thought More, lay this denial of the ancient teaching of creation from nothing. Since it was impossible to create anything from nothing, and since creation from preexisting material would compromise divine omnipotence, everything had to be created from God’s spirit. “Nothing can exist independently (*a se*) apart from God.”¹³ But, since there are, evidently, distinct things, these must exist through a division of God into distinct spirits. Through a contraction of the spirit, these distinct essences fell into a state of slumber, from which they could awaken only through expansion. In their unconscious state, these divine spirits constituted the material world. This was worse than pantheism. It was polytheism.

Both Rosenroth and van Helmont had tried to preempt any such condemnation in the texts framing *Kabbala Denudata*, where they presented their Kabbalistic work as a step toward the conversion of the Jews.¹⁴ Many contemporaries believed that so long as the Jews remained unconvinced by Christianity, no ultimate salvation could occur. This had been the view of the Renaissance Christians who first discovered Kabbalah in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Pico della Mirandola argued that Kabbalah—with its internally differentiated godhead, its “trinity” of highest *sefirot*, and its figuration of the godhead as *adam kadmon* (the primordial human)—was virtually Christian, and that through it, Jews could be brought to see that Christianity was the fulfillment of these Kabbalistic doctrines.¹⁵

¹⁰ What exactly “creation from nothing” could mean and whether it is essential to Jewish or Christian orthodoxy are of course far from clear. In his *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides had argued that it was essential and, indeed, philosophically legitimate. But many of his philosophical commentators, strongly influenced by Averroes, thought that Maimonides’s esoteric doctrine affirmed a continual creation of the cosmos through ongoing emanation, not a voluntary act creating the world *de novo*. If Jewish philosophers spoke of “creation from nothing,” they often meant it in a very special sense. As we shall see, kabbalists added to this the idea that no emanation could occur unless God first created nothing (the sefirah known as *keter*, or “crown”) out of Godself, whence being (the sefirah known as *hokhmah*, or “wisdom”) could now come. They, too, could speak of creation from nothing, but in an esoteric sense.

¹¹ *Fundamentae Philosophiae sive Cabbala Aeto-Paedo-Melissaeae*, in *Kabbala Denudata*, vol. I, part 2, pp. 293–307; also published in More, *Opera Omnia*, II/1:523–528.

¹² More, *Fundamentae Philosophiae, Kabbala Denudata*, vol. I, part 2, p. 293. My translation.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Van Helmont also responded to More’s objections in *Ad Fundamentae Cabbalae Aeto-Paedo-Melissaeae Dialogus*, in *Kabbala Denudata*, vol. I, Part 2, 308–312, translated as *Cabbalistical Dialogue in Answer to the Learned Opinion of a Doctor of Philosophy and Theology that the World was Made of Nothing* (London: Benjamin Clark, 1682).

¹⁵ See della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, sec. 43.

It is unknown whether any Jews were converted as a result of the publication of *Kabbala Denudata*.¹⁶ However, in a notorious incident that hardly helped Rosenroth's cause, one of his collaborators, Johann Peter Spaeth, converted to Judaism. He became a rabbi in Amsterdam, where he was known as Moses Germanus. He would play a crucial role in the establishment of the idea that Spinoza was a Kabbalist.

As is often the case, however, the framing of this feature of Spinoza's reception also owed a great deal to Pierre Bayle's influential article on Spinoza, published in 1697. In it Bayle wrote that "Spinoza did not believe that anything could be made out of nothing."¹⁷ This was, of course, just the principle that had been ascribed to Kabbalah by Henry More a few years earlier. At the same time, Bayle also created the possibility of a connection between Spinoza and Oriental philosophy. To be sure, he ascribed the principle that nothing comes from nothing to European as well as Oriental philosophers. However, on his account, the Orientals had gone beyond the Europeans by interpreting the principle, not merely as a rejection of creation *ex nihilo*, but as a substantive doctrine. In Note B, Bayle remarked that a follower of Confucius had proven "the Aristotelian maxim that nothing comes from nothing," and that the Confucian teaching was "that nothing is the principle of all beings."¹⁸ Bayle did not say that Spinoza had also taken this step. But the only distinction he explicitly drew between Spinozism and Confucianism was that "Spinoza does not contend for the inaction of the first principle."¹⁹ The question of the active or inactive character of Spinoza's substance would return, along with the connection to Kabbalah and the Orient, in later interpretations of Spinoza, including Hegel's.

Not long after the publication of Bayle's *Dictionary*, the connection with Kabbalah was explicitly drawn in polemics against Spaeth, a.k.a. Moses Germanus. In 1699, Johann Georg Wachter published *Spinozism in Judaism; or, the Divinized World in Contemporary Judaism and its Secret Kabbalah, to Moses Germanus, alias Johann Peter Spaeth, born in Augsburg*.²⁰ The book contained a report of Wachter's account of his conversations with Spaeth in Amsterdam, along with Wachter's argument for the conclusion that Spaeth's conversion to Judaism was bad, not only because Judaism was inferior to Christianity, but also because Judaism was secretly Kabbalistic, and—here lay the

¹⁶ The origin of Christian kabbalah has been associated with the conversion to Christianity of Abner of Burgos (1260–1347), who argued that the kabbalah was implicitly Trinitarian and incarnationist. See Scholem, "The Beginnings of the Christian Kabbalah." The importance of kabbalah for Abner's conversion has, however, been criticized recently by Sadik, "Is 'R. Abner' R. Abner of Burgos?" See Maciejcko, *Mixed Multitude*, for discussion of a mass conversion of Jews in eighteenth-century Poland, led by Jacob Frank, who drew on Christian Kabbalah as well as on Sabbatianism to argue that kabbalah was indeed implicitly Trinitarian and Christian, and that the Talmud was a corruption of authentic, i.e., proto-Christian, Judaism.

¹⁷ *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, "Spinoza," Remarque N, 4:259; mistranslated by Popkin in *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, pp. 303–304n.

¹⁸ *Dictionnaire*, "Spinoza," Remarque B, 4:255; *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, p. 292.

¹⁹ *Dictionnaire*, "Spinoza," Remarque B, 4:255; *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, p. 293.

²⁰ *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb oder die vom heutigen Judenthumb und dessen geheimen Kabbala vergotterte Welt, an Moses Germano sonsten Johann Peter Speeth, von Augspurg gebürtig*.

innovation—Kabbalah was equivalent, or at least strikingly similar, to the philosophy of Spinoza.²¹

Along the way, Wachter gave an exposition of some of the doctrines to be found in *Kabbala Denudata*, including a German translation of More’s summary in sixteen theses, beginning with “Aus nichts könne nichts werden.”²² Wachter also drew heavily on *Porta Coelorum*, a summary translation, published in *Kabbala Denudata*, of Abraham Cohen de Herrera’s *Gate of Heaven*,²³ written in Amsterdam in Spanish and then edited and translated into Hebrew by Isaac Aboab, one of Spinoza’s teachers at the *Etz Hayyim* school and, later, one of those who signed his *herem*.²⁴ By juxtaposing the account of the Kabbalah based on these two sources with his own summary of Spinoza’s metaphysics, Wachter thought that the connection would be unmistakable.

Kabbalistic doctrine was summarized by Wachter in five points:

- (1) That the Eyn Sof [the infinite, not-yet-revealed, divine ground] comprehends everything in itself. . . . (2) That there is one created and uncreated state of God and God can, in a certain respect, be His own creature and product. (3) That the created state of God constitutes the world. (4) That the creation of the world can occur through the unfolding and extending of God which diffuses itself in itself (in its divine expanse) and through itself (through its own rays) from above until below in multiple ways, and brings forth in such a way multiple sorts of being. . . . (5) That the world is nothing distinct or separate from God, and the *many*, which we call *all*, is exactly the same as the *one*.²⁵

The first point of Wachter’s summary is not very clearly formulated. But he thought that it was obviously to be found in Herrera’s treatise, in which the infinite is said to exist “infinitely in itself as utterly simple, individual, and indivisible, and in all of its effects, which are all other things.” And he also thought that it was clearly related to Spinoza’s argument in his “falsely named *Ethics* Part I” that just one substance exists, is conceivable, and is infinite (E1p14c1), and that whatever is, is in God and nothing can be or be conceived without God (E1p15). The second and third points allude to the distinction between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata* in the *Ethics* (E1p29s) and perhaps to the Kabbalistic distinction between, on the one hand, the essence and embodiment of self-manifesting divinity—the *adam kadmon* and the *olam ha-azilut* (world

²¹ Not long after, Wachter changed his evaluation of kabbalah, of which he was now in favor. See his *Elucidarius Cabbalisticus*, which also contains an account of the agreement between Spinoza and kabbalah. I hope to compare the two accounts elsewhere.

²² Wachter, *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb*, 101.

²³ See Herrera, *Gate of Heaven*; and Altmann, “Lurianic Kabbalah in a Platonic Key.” Herrera had studied with Israel Sarug (or Saruq), a purported disciple of Luria, who presented Lurianic kabbalah as a philosophy. See Scholem, “Israel Sarug: Student of the Ari?”; and Meroz, “R. Israel Sarug.”

²⁴ The Latin epitome *Porta Coelorum* is based on Aboab’s Hebrew version, *Sha’ar ha-Shamayim* (Amsterdam: Immanuel Benveniste, 1655), not directly on Herrera’s Spanish original.

²⁵ Wachter, *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb*, 94–95. Translations from this work are my own.

of emanation)—and, on the other, the *malbushim* (garments) of divinity, namely, the worlds of *beriah* (creation), *yezirah* (formation), and *‘asiah* (making).

The crux of Wachter’s argument is to be found in his fourth point. For, if the affinity between Spinoza and the Kabbalah consisted primarily in their shared rejection of creation *ex nihilo*, then they must both have developed an alternative conception of creation, or of the grounding of everything in God. Both Spinoza and Herrera, Wachter argued, rejected not only the creation *of* the world, but also any creation from nothing *within* the world. Thus, both denied that any substance can produce another substance.²⁶ In effect, both denied the possibility of any *innovation* whatsoever. And both asserted that multiplicity arises from the simplicity of the one infinite substance, not as a novelty, but as the expression of its infinity.

From the four preceding points, the fifth follows: “that the world is nothing distinct or separate from God, and the *many*, which we call *all*, is exactly the same as the *one*.” In other words, both the Kabbalah and Spinoza were committed to pantheism: God is the cause of the world, and the one is the cause of the many, in such a way that God or the one is *identical* with the many. Here, Wachter cited E1p18: “God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things.” Rather than citing any specific passage from Herrera, however, he simply referred to “the entire *Gate of Heaven*,”²⁷ since creation, not from nothing, but rather from Godself via God’s expressions—*adam kadmon* and the sefirotic structure iterated through the various worlds—was the book’s principal message, from which followed the immanence of God throughout even the natural world.²⁸

The upshot was obvious, or so it seemed to Wachter. Addressing Spaeth, he wrote, “Your Spinozistic godlessness is now as clear as day.”²⁹ Spinoza’s *Ethics* was the philosophical fulfillment of More’s nightmare, purified of the imagery of many Kabbalistic texts. Like Herrera and the other Kabbalists whose works were published in *Kabbala Denudata*, Spinoza’s commitment to divine uniqueness had led him to the monstrous view that divided the godhead and divinized the world.

Wachter’s intention was to condemn Kabbalah—and thereby contemporary Judaism, and thereby Spaeth—by association with the notorious Spinoza. However, an unintended effect was to transform the reception of Spinoza, who could now be seen as a Kabbalist. Another association drawn by Wachter would also prove to be influential: between Kabbalah, hence Spinozism, and the speculative theology of Jacob Boehme (1575–1624). Here Wachter could cite Abraham Hinckelmann, who had already argued that Boehme’s ideas were rooted in the Orient, specifically in Persian Zoroastrianism,

²⁶ E1p6 and *Kabbala Denudata*, vol. I, Part 2, 72–73 = *Gate of Heaven*, Discourse 5, sec. 9, p. 174.

²⁷ *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb*, 101.

²⁸ Does this count as creation at all? The answer depends, so it seems to me, on whether the entities brought into being from Godself have independence once they exist. They might be regarded, for example, as images of divinity and as possessing a quasi-divine independence insofar as they, like God, have will. An emphasis on will is, perhaps, the distinctive feature of Jewish versions of Neoplatonic emanation, beginning with Solomon ibn Gabirol. See ibn Gabirol, *Kingly Crown*. Kabbalists came to understand will in terms of negativity.

²⁹ Wachter, *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb*, 95.

and that he had received those ideas thanks to the mediation of Kabbalah.³⁰ This was relevant to Wachter’s argument because it was through his interest in Boehme that Spaeth had become involved in Rosenroth’s circle.

A strikingly similar connection between Spinoza and Kabbalah was made in 1707 by Jacques Basnage. In the third volume of his *History of the Jews*, he gave an extensive account of Jewish belief, including the beliefs of the Kabbalists. Spinoza, he claimed, had failed to credit the Kabbalists, who were clearly the source of his main ideas, only because of his own quest for fame.³¹ Like Wachter, Basnage drew heavily on Henry More’s summation of the Kabbalah. Spinoza and the Kabbalists shared three basic principles, Basnage argued.³² The first was the ancient thesis that nothing could come from nothing. The second stated that there was exactly one substance, and the third stated that minds and bodies were distinct modifications of the same underlying substance. Spinoza differed from the Kabbalists, however, insofar as he privileged matter over mind as an expression of substance, while the Kabbalists favored mind. In a later passage, Basnage also discussed Herrera, whom he considered a more reliable guide than the Christian Kabbalists obsessed with the Trinity, but he did not connect Herrera with Spinoza. His view of Spinoza as a Kabbalist seems to have been rooted, not directly in Wachter’s account, but in one of Wachter’s main sources—the *Philosophical Fundamentals* of Henry More—along with the article of Bayle, to whom Basnage left the task of refuting Spinozism.

One more account deserves discussion, since it was a source for Hegel’s lectures on the history of philosophy: Jacob Brucker’s *Historia Critica Philosophiae*, published in 1742–44.³³ The second volume contained an extensive account of ancient Jewish thought, including Kabbalah. Brucker includes a comparison of the principles of Egyptian-Alexandrian (i.e., Middle Platonic) philosophy, Oriental philosophy, and Kabbalah, each of which assumed as its first principle that “nothing comes from nothing.”³⁴ Brucker argued that both Middle Platonism and Kabbalah must have originated in Oriental philosophy. Among the other advantages of this hypothesis was the fact that it confirmed the long-standing view that Jews were not Occidentals or Europeans. Kant, for example, called the Jews “the Palestinians living among us,”³⁵ and, similarly to Brucker, he wrote of the “*pantheism* (of the Tibetans and other oriental peoples),” from whose “philosophical sublimation Spinozism is begotten, which is closely akin to the very ancient *system of emanation* of human souls from the Godhead (and their final

³⁰ See *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb*, 99; and Hinckelmann, *Detectio Fundamenti Bohmiana* (Hamburg: Schultz, 1693). On the relationship between Boehme, his disciple Balthasar Walther and kabbalah, see Schulich, “Einheit in Differenz” and Penman, “Second Christian Rosenkreuz?”

³¹ Basnage, *L’Histoire des Juifs*, 3:86–107.

³² Basnage, *L’Histoire des Juifs*, 3:98.

³³ Hegel owned the 1756 edition.

³⁴ Brucker, *Historia Critica*, 2:960–963.

³⁵ Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Ak. 7, 205n. References to Kant’s works are cited by volume and page number of the *Akademie* edition (abbreviated “Ak”).

reabsorption into it).³⁶ Like the eagle of Henry More's nightmare, Spinozism had flown in from the Orient.³⁷

II. JACOBI'S VISION: THE ANNIHILATION OF INDIVIDUAL AGENCY

In More's summary of Kabbalah, "nothing comes from nothing" did not express any substantive doctrine. There was no mention of any "principle of nothingness," as in Bayle's account of Confucianism. Instead, the thesis marked the rejection of divine creation from nothing, and hence of orthodox Christianity as well as of Judaism in what was taken to be its pristine sense. For Jacobi, however, the same ancient slogan expressed a substantive doctrine, albeit in an ironic fashion. First, it was a version of what Leibniz had called the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Second, it expressed the thought that, thoroughly and rigorously developed, this principle led to the annihilation of all individual agency. As Jacobi believed Spinoza had shown, rationalism, starting from an infinite and divine nothing, led inexorably to a world of finite nothings.

Jacobi began, like More, with a horrific vision. But it was one he had experienced while awake, at the age of eight or nine. In his 1785 *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*, he merely mentioned the vision.³⁸ Only in the third supplement to the second edition of 1789, after considerable speculation on the part of his readers, did he specify the vision's content. It was a vision of annihilation, specifically of the dissipation of individuality within the infinite vastness of eternity.³⁹ By the time of Jacobi's epoch-making conversation with Lessing, Spinoza had become the fulfillment of his nightmare.

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of Jacobi's exposition of Spinozism, and certainly the one that most confused his contemporaries, was the way in which he combined an effusive appreciation of Spinoza's philosophical rigor with a strong condemnation of the monstrous consequences of his views. This combination was, of course, essential to Jacobi's project. For he wished to show that philosophical rationalism, if pursued rigorously to its ultimate consequences, led to the shipwreck of reason itself. The only way to save reason was to free it from the rationalist construal of reason as inference, and to restore the natural faith of ordinary human beings in their perceptual faculties.⁴⁰

³⁶ Kant, "End of All Things," Ak. 8, 335.

³⁷ On the pervasive association in European thought of Jews with the Orient, see Penslar and Kalmar, *Orientalism and the Jews*.

³⁸ Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*, 8; *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 183.

³⁹ See Supplement III to the second (1789) edition of Jacobi's *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, p. 328; *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 362.

⁴⁰ See Franks, "All or Nothing," pp. 95–102.

Spinoza came up early in Jacobi’s conversations with Lessing. On the second day of Jacobi’s visit, Spinozism emerged as the principal contrast with “the orthodox concepts of the Divinity.” On the third day, they discussed “the spirit that inspired Spinoza himself.” According to Jacobi, Lessing agreed with the exposition that Jacobi proceeded to give:

The spirit of Spinozism . . . is certainly nothing other than the ancient *a nihilo nihil fit* that Spinoza made an issue of, but with more abstract concepts than the philosophers of the Kabbalah or others before him. In keeping with these abstract concepts he established that with each and every coming-to-be in the infinite, no matter how one dresses it up in images, with each and every change in the infinite, *something* is posited *out of nothing*. He therefore rejected any *transition* from the infinite to the finite. In general, he rejected all *causae transitoriae, secundariae* or *remotae*, and in place of an emanating *En-Soph*, he only posited an *immanent* one, an indwelling cause of the universe eternally unalterable *within itself*, One and the same with all its consequences.⁴¹

Following directly in Wachter’s path, Jacobi explained Spinoza’s philosophy as a more abstract variant of Kabbalah, one that proceeded from the familiar principle that “nothing comes from nothing.” When Jacobi summarized his own position in six propositions, the third stated that “the *philosophy* of the Kabbalah, or so much of it as is available to research, and in accordance with its best commentators, van Helmont the younger and Wachter, is, *as philosophy* nothing but undeveloped or newly confused Spinozism.”⁴² In other words, not all Kabbalah was genuinely philosophical, but its philosophical element was either a less developed version of Spinozism, or else a Spinozistic philosophy expressed in less rigorous and more concrete terms.⁴³

The linchpin of Jacobi’s understanding of Spinoza was the “nothing comes from nothing” principle. In effect, this formula expressed, for Jacobi, the Principle of Sufficient Reason in the broad sense characteristic of rationalism. It is true that Jacobi himself used the term, “Principle of Sufficient Reason” in a narrower way, to refer to the restricted principle of efficient causation operative in the natural world. But he used the “nothing comes from nothing” formulation for the principle that *underlies* and *grounds* natural causality—the principle that there must be an intelligible ground for every determination or event—so that it is equivalent to what many contemporary Spinoza scholars would call the Principle of Sufficient Reason implicit throughout Spinoza’s

⁴¹ Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, 13–14; *Main Philosophical Writings*, pp. 187–188.

⁴² Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, 170; *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 233.

⁴³ Playing on Jacobi’s comment, Maimon says in his *Lebensgeschichte*, 1, 141, that “kabbalah is nothing but expanded Spinozism, in which not only is the origin of the world explained by the contraction of the divine being, but also the origin of every kind of being, and its relation to the rest, is derived from a separate attribute of God.” See also Maimon’s 1791 commentary, *Gibeat ha-Moreh*, 161, on Maimonides’s *Guide of the Perplexed*, chap. 74, where Maimon says that Spinoza’s position “agrees with the Kabbalists with respect to *zimzum*.” The translations of Maimon are my own.

philosophy.⁴⁴ In this formulation, it is the Principle of Sufficient Reason, broadly construed, that plays the central role in Jacobi's reconstruction of Spinoza's argument for substance monism.⁴⁵

To be sure, Jacobi also drew attention to the formula that would ultimately be central to Hegel's interpretation: determination is negation. Although by no means as central to Jacobi's reading, the formula anticipates, not only Hegel, but also Jacobi's later charge that philosophy, developed to its limit, leads inexorably to *nihilism*.

Jacobi cited this second formula in paragraph XII of the summation of Spinoza's philosophy sent to Mendelssohn. What is crucial here is the way in which Jacobi used his own words to stitch together two quotations, as if his reading were far more than an interpretation:

*Determinatio est negatio, seu determinatio ad rem juxta suum esse non pertinet. 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 esse.*⁴⁶

The first sentence, from Ep. 50, will be discussed in more detail later. Part of the second sentence is a fragment of a passage from Spinoza's *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* "But since, as we shall see later, the origin of Nature can neither be conceived abstractly, or universally, nor be extended more widely in the intellect than it really is, and since it has no likeness to changeable things, we need fear no confusion concerning its idea, provided that we have the standard of truth (which we have already shown). For it is a unique and infinite being, beyond which there is no being."⁴⁷ But the words linking the two quotations are crucial. For Jacobi adds that, according to Spinoza, individual things are nonentities, and substance is indeterminate. On the one hand, the denial of genuine being to individuals is attributed to Spinoza himself. On the other hand, Jacobi insinuates that substance, being *indeterminate*, is also a negation and therefore also lacks genuine being, which is always determinate. As Jacobi put it in a footnote, "An absolute individual is just as impossible as an individual Absolute. *Determinatio est negatio*."⁴⁸ For him, only individuals could be actual.

Whether the reduction, not only of the finite, but also of infinite substance to nothingness was supposed by Jacobi to be part of Spinoza's philosophy or an unintended consequence thereof, remains unclear.⁴⁹ Either way, we now have a doctrinal version

⁴⁴ See Jacobi, *David Hume über den Glauben oder Idealismus und Realismus*, 236; *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 337, with respect to Kant's philosophy, "Neither the Principle of Sufficient Reason, nor even the proposition that nothing can come from nothing, apply to things in themselves."

⁴⁵ See Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, 118–157; *Main Philosophical Writings*, pp. 217–228.

⁴⁶ Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, 131; *Main Philosophical Writings*, pp. 219–220.

⁴⁷ TdIE sec. 76.

⁴⁸ Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, 211; *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 190n.

⁴⁹ A possibility unexplored by Jacobi and Hegel is that Spinoza is committed, knowingly or otherwise, to *degrees* of existence. See Della Rocca, "Rationalism, Idealism, Monism, and Beyond."

of “nothing comes from nothing”: starting from a principle that is nothing determinate and therefore, in effect, nothing, Spinoza had succeeded only in establishing a system that treated individual things as nothing more than nothings.

This seems related to the charge of nihilism that Jacobi made later against Fichte’s idealism, which he characterized as an “inverted Spinozism.”⁵⁰ In his 1799 open letter, *Jacobi to Fichte*, however, and in the pertinent supplements to the second (1789) edition of *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*, Jacobi was less concerned with the details of either Spinoza’s or Fichte’s arguments than he was with his general account of the besetting sin of rationalism: the displacement of perception by inference; the annihilation of concrete, individual things and agents; and the privileging, instead, of conceptual models or “mechanisms,” which are in fact mere reflections of human activity. The formula, “nothing comes from nothing,” may not have been explicitly quoted. Nevertheless, the process of annihilation, in its many variations, may be regarded as an extended commentary on the formula in its substantive interpretation: starting with the absolute I, which is meant to be everything but is therefore nothing, Fichte had succeeded only in establishing a system that treated individual things as nothings.

Kabbalah played no explicit role in the 1799 text in which Jacobi introduced the term “nihilism.” But in his original 1785 salvo against rationalism, Kabbalah played a remarkably important role in the establishment of the three options that Jacobi presented to his contemporaries. If the first option was Spinozism, then the second was a naturalized version of Lurianic Kabbalah, drawn from *Kabbala Denudata*, along with other texts by van Helmont, as well as hints made by Leibniz. Lessing seems to have oscillated between these two alternatives, both of which presupposed the principle, which apparently he did not doubt, that “nothing comes from nothing”:

Whenever Lessing wanted to represent a personal Divinity, he thought of it as the soul of the All; and he thought the Whole after the analogy of an organic body . . . Its organic compass, however, cannot be thought after the analogy of the organic *parts* of this compass, inasmuch as there is nothing existing outside it to which it can refer, nothing from which it can take or give back. In order therefore to preserve itself in life, this organic compass must somehow withdraw within itself from time to time; unite death and resurrection within itself with life.⁵¹

This was nothing other than a naturalistic version of the Lurianic doctrine of *zimzum*: the divine self-contraction that constitutes an empty space in which creation can take place. It is hard not to see anti-Judaism latent in the fact that the two equally pernicious alternatives between which Lessing vacillated were in some sense Jewish, along with the fact that Jacobi chose Mendelssohn as the addressee of his letters, as if to

⁵⁰ Jacobi, *Jacobi an Fichte*, 4; *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 502. On nihilism, see my *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism*, pp. 162–174.

⁵¹ Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, pp. 34–35; *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 196.

suggest that the famous Jewish-Christian friendship between Mendelssohn and Lessing had led to the disaster that was the Enlightenment.

Meanwhile, the third option was the one preferred by Jacobi himself: the famous *salto mortale*, or leap of faith—which, Jacobi explained, was not a specifically Christian faith but, rather, a faith into which we are all born—namely, faith in the cognitive potential of our perceptual capacities, whereby we know immediately and in a way that excludes proof, “that we have a body, and that there are other bodies and other thinking beings outside us. A wondrous and veritable revelation!”⁵² In conversation with Lessing, Jacobi described this position as “the Kibbel, or the Kabbalah in the *strict sense*—that is, *taking as starting point the view* that it is impossible, in and for itself, to derive the infinite from a given finite, or to define the transition from the one to the other, or their proportion, through any formula whatever. Hence, if anyone wants to say anything on the subject, one must speak on the basis of revelation.”⁵³ Presumably, although Jacobi never explained how, this emphasis on revelation was also intended to be compatible with commitment to creation *ex nihilo*, which was exhibited not only in divine creation and revelation but also in human voluntary action.

Jacobi’s talk of his own view as “the Kabbalah in the *strict sense*” was to some extent a mere play on words. But he used the term *kibbel*—the Hebrew verb meaning “to receive”—in order to make a serious point. He wanted to emphasize the essential importance of *perceptual immediacy* or *receptivity* for cognitive and moral agency, and thereby to provide an alternative to the inferentialist paradigm that he considered dominant within philosophy. The fact that he chose to characterize this position in terms of the *nonphilosophical* aspects of Kabbalah—in terms of the passive reception of revelation and tradition as authoritative—shows just how fundamental a role Kabbalah continued to play in intellectual debate over a hundred years after the publication of *Kabbala Denudata*. More specifically, ideas about Kabbalah continued to shape both the perception of Spinoza’s Jewishness and the options available for responding to the philosophical challenges posed by Spinoza’s system.

III. HEGEL’S READING: THE GENERATION OF SOMETHING FROM NOTHING?

Many of the elements of Hegel’s Spinoza interpretation come from the predecessors discussed above. But Hegel arranged them into a distinctive configuration that was

⁵² Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, p. 164; *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 231.

⁵³ Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, pp. 33–34; *Main Philosophical Writings*, pp. 195–196. The root of the Hebrew term *kabbalah* is the verb *le-kabbel* (“to receive”). Pico sometimes referred to *kabbalah* as *scientia receptionis*. Compare Wachter, *Elucidarius Cabbalisticus*, p. 19: “kebel.”

responsive both to Spinoza’s texts, with which Hegel was very familiar,⁵⁴ and to the exigencies of Hegel’s own system.

The proposition that nothing comes from nothing, along with its association with Spinoza, emerged early in Hegel’s *The Science of Logic*:

Ex nihilo, nihil fit—is one of the propositions to which great significance was attributed in metaphysics . . . The proposition, *nothing comes from nothing, nothing is just nothing*, owes its particular importance to its opposition to *becoming* in general and hence also to the creation of the world out of nothing. Those who zealously hold firm to the proposition, nothing is just nothing, are unaware that in so doing they are subscribing to the abstract *pantheism* of the Eleatics and essentially also to that of Spinoza. The philosophical view that accepts as principle that being is only being, nothing only nothing, deserves the name of “system of identity”; this abstract identity is the essence of pantheism.⁵⁵

The context is Hegel’s argument that logic must begin neither with being tout court nor with nothing tout court, but rather with being that is distinct from nothing but that cannot, in its “indeterminate immediacy,” be distinguished from nothing by any distinguishing feature. For it has none. When something new comes to be, this involves both the passage of the old from being to nothing, and the passage of the new from nothing to being. Thus becoming involves both being and nothing as moments. In the passage cited, Hegel wanted to emphasize the difference between this view, which he could present as a conceptual articulation of the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, and pantheism, whose basic principle is the denial of novelty.

It was this denial that Spinoza had in common with all pantheists, whether Eleatic or Oriental. Indeed, Hegel never missed an opportunity to emphasize that Spinoza’s philosophy involves “no development, no life, no spirituality or activity . . . [T]he One . . . is something utterly fixed [*Starres*] and immobile.”⁵⁶ Yet there was something distinctive, and distinctively valuable, about Spinoza’s philosophy. It was not new, but it was the beginning of novelty, the precursor of the system itself. Spinoza’s substance “is what is true. But it is not yet the whole truth.”⁵⁷ “Thought must begin by placing itself at the standpoint of Spinozism; to be a follower of Spinoza is the essential commencement of philosophy.”⁵⁸ Spinoza returned to the ancient principle that nothing comes from nothing, but in a way that constituted the beginning of modernity.

⁵⁴ Hegel mentions in his lectures that he played a small part in the preparation of Benedictus de Spinoza, *Opera quae Supersunt Omnia*, ed. by Heinrich Gottlob Paulus (Jena: In Bibliopolio Academico, 1802–1803).

⁵⁵ Hegel *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 21:71; *Science of Logic*, p. 61.

⁵⁶ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*.

⁵⁷ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*.

⁵⁸ Hegel, *Werke*, ed. by Michelet, Part 3, 337; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 3:257.

This logic—of the one who returns to the old and thereby creates the *possibility*, but not yet the *actuality*, of the new—was to be found both at the level of the *content* and at the level of the *form* of Spinoza's philosophy. Here Hegel gave a new centrality to the thesis that determination is negation, which became the main premise of an argument for substantial monism: "*The unity of Spinoza's substance*, or that there is only one substance, is the necessary consequence of this proposition, that determinateness is negation."⁵⁹ The unity in question showed itself in Spinoza's treatment of the distinction between universal and particular. "We have before us two determinations, the universal or what has being in and for itself, and the particular, or that whose concept contains its existence within itself."⁶⁰ Spinoza reduced both sides of the distinction to nothingness. First, the particular was nothing, because "*omnis determinatio est negatio*": "it is by negation that a singular thing is. Therefore it does not have genuine actuality. This on the whole is Spinoza's idea."⁶¹ Second, the universal was nothing, because it could be understood only abstractly or formally, as the negation of determinacy. Thus "substance is the total void of internal determinateness."⁶² Once again, we encounter a substantive interpretation: if the determinate particular is nothing, this is because it is ultimately one with the indeterminate universal, which is already nothing.

At the level of the form of Spinoza's philosophy, there was also a lack of mobility. Spinoza was committed to infinitely many attributes, but had to take as given just two—thought and extension—because he had no method for deriving the attributes from their principle: "He does not indicate how these two proceed from the one substance, however, nor say why he speaks only of two."⁶³ From this perspective, it made sense that Spinoza presented his philosophy *more geometrico*. Just as he returned to the ancient principle of immobility, so he returned to the ancient method of mathematics: "the movement of knowledge in mathematics takes place only on the surface; it does not touch on the thing that really matters, does not touch on the essence, that is, the concept, and hence it does not constitute any kind of comprehension of what is at stake."⁶⁴ The geometric method—and, it should be noted, the ancient, *axiomatic* method, as opposed to the modern, *analytic* method—remained external to its subject matter. The purpose generating the motion through the steps of the proof was always contributed by the mathematician, not by the mathematical object. And this was entirely appropriate to "the kinds of non-actualities which are the things of mathematics," because these things themselves lacked mobility. Consequently, the mathematical method was appropriate to the non-actual subject matter of Spinoza's philosophy too.

⁵⁹ Hegel, *Mainder Logik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 21:101; *Science of Logic*, p. 87.

⁶⁰ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 21:101; *Science of Logic*, p. 87.

⁶³ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*.

⁶⁴ *Phaenomenologie des Geistes*, p. 33; *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 45.

Now, the core of Hegel’s reading certainly owed a great deal to Jacobi and was to that extent not entirely new, not generated from nothing. To be sure, Jacobi mentioned the thesis that determinacy is negation only twice, and it was Hegel who gave the thesis its argumentative centrality.⁶⁵ For Jacobi, it was still the generic principle of pantheism, the principle that nothing comes from nothing, that played the main role in the demonstration of substantial monism. In contrast, Hegel made the determinacy thesis into the argument’s main premise. However, Hegel’s move could be seen as a development of what was implicit in Jacobi’s conception of rationalism as nihilistic, as annihilating both the determinate by rendering it negative, and substance by rendering it indeterminate. Hegel’s interpretation had the advantage of bringing out what was *distinctive* in Spinoza’s so-called pantheism: the nihilism whereby it annihilated the world and disclosed the nothingness of God. Jacobi was always more interested in showing that every version of rationalism led to nihilism than in distinguishing the versions. Characteristically, he thought that the distinction between atheism and acosmism—insisted upon by Maimon prior to Hegel—was empty wordplay.⁶⁶

Early in Hegel’s career, he had come to think of Jacobi’s conception of nihilism as a negative image of the speculative—that is, of the genuinely philosophical thinking that grasps contradiction as an opportunity for thought, as opposed to the reflective thinking that regards contradiction as the termination of thought. If Jacobi reacted with abhorrence, then what he abhorred deserved close attention.⁶⁷ This was a view that Hegel maintained throughout, although he changed his tone from ridicule to respect. But the nihilism that repulsed Jacobi was only the *beginning* of modern wisdom, and Hegel could say this only because he was already beyond the beginning—in fact, at the end, when philosophy could finally show itself to have become science. To know oneself to be at the end meant to be aware of what was lacking in the beginning, of what was deficient in the precursor:

Everything depends here on the correct understanding of the status and significance of negativity. If it is taken only to be the determinateness of finite things (*omnis determinatio est negatio*), then we are already thinking of it outside of absolute substance and have allowed finite things to fall outside of it; our imagination maintains them *outside* of absolute substance. Conceived of in this way, however, negation fails to be seen as *internal to the infinite* or *internal to substance*, which is supposed rather to be the sublated being of finite things.—Yet the manner in which negation is internal to substance has in fact thus already been said . . . Substance is supposed to be the sublation of the finite, and that is just to say that it is the *negation of negation*, since it is precisely negation which we took to be definitive of the finite.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Hegel first deployed his proprietary formulation of the thesis, “*all determination is negation*,” adding a universal quantifier missing from the original, in his 1817 review of Jacobi’s writings. See Hegel, *Schriften und Entwürfe I*, 10; *Hegel’s Heidelberg Writings*, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Jacobi, *Werke*, 4, xxxvi, 217n.

⁶⁷ See my paper, “Ancient Skepticism.”

⁶⁸ Hegel, *Schriften und Entwürfe I*, pp. 10–11; *Hegel’s Heidelberg Writings*, pp. 8–9.

What Spinoza lacked was an understanding of negation as internal to the absolute, and of the absolute as the negation of the negation, or as the self-negation of negativity, which thereby becomes determinate and productive of positive results.

Where could one find resources with which to develop this notion of self-negating negativity? On more than one occasion, Hegel cited Jacob Boehme:

“*Qualierung*” or “*Inqualierung*,” an expression of Jacob Boehme’s profound but also profoundly turbid philosophy, signifies the movement within a quality (sourness, bitterness, fieriness, etc.) inasmuch as in its negative nature (in its *Qual* or torment) the quality posits itself, securing itself from another; it signifies in general the internal unrest of quality by which it produces and preserves itself only in conflict.⁶⁹

Here we are at the extreme limit of Spinoza’s system, and it is here that his weak point appears. Individuation, the one, is a mere synthesis; it is quite a different thing from the *Ichts* or self-hood of Boehme, since Spinoza has only universality, thought, and not self-consciousness.⁷⁰

As Hegel explained in his lectures on Boehme’s thought, the *Ichts* was the image of the *Nichts*, the Son of the Father, thus the negation of the Father’s negativity, and at the same time the principle of reflexivity or self-consciousness.⁷¹ Only a speculative metaphysics of *self-negating negativity* could ground a dynamic ontology of qualities, regarded not as static properties or even as Spinozistic attributes but, rather, as self-moving in mutual tension. And only such a metaphysics could ground a dynamic ontology of voluntary agents, of novel beings capable of innovation.

Much of Hegel’s reading, it should be clear by now, was drawn from the tradition of More, Bayle, Wachter, Basnage, and Jacobi. Hegel understood the principle that nothing can come from nothing, not only as a rejection of creation *ex nihilo*, but also as a substantive doctrine. The principle was common to all pantheisms, but what distinguished Spinoza’s philosophy was its deployment of the doctrine that all determination is negation, which was the distinctive doctrine of Spinozism. Understood as negations, finite individuals were, in a sense, nothings, as Jacobi had seen. This much, both Jacobi and Hegel thought, Spinoza had explicitly asserted. But, perhaps unwittingly, Spinoza’s substance was, by contrast with finite individuals, indeterminate and therefore itself nothing. Thus Spinozism turned out to be akin to Confucianism as characterized by Bayle: a philosophy based on the principle of nothingness. The nothing of finitude came, indeed, from absolute nothingness, and Spinozism was truly a version of nihilism.

What, then, was original in Hegel’s reading? To be sure, Hegel gave more prominence than Jacobi to the proposition that determination is negation. With his characteristic

⁶⁹ Hegel, *Mainder Logik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 21: 102; *Science of Logic*, p. 88. The reference to Boehme, only implicit in the 1812 edition, was made explicit in the revised 1832 edition.

⁷⁰ Hegel, *Werke*, 15:395; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 3:273.

⁷¹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*.

attention to dialectical architectonics, Hegel used this proposition to present Spinozism as a rigorous nihilism, with abstract, unactualized negativity serving as the principle of both its content and its form. But this was only a further development, carried out with Hegel’s accustomed aplomb, of Jacobi’s interpretation. More original was Hegel’s treatment of Spinoza as the *precursor* of the view articulated by Hegel himself. In Hegel’s early Jena philosophy, Spinoza’s nihilism was the solvent in which traditional metaphysics could be reduced to nothingness, so that the *positive* content given in speculative intuition could take its place. Later, in the mature philosophy that emerged around 1805, Spinoza’s nihilism was the necessary prelude to the *self-negating* negativity that could alone *actualize* itself in the system of philosophical science. What was required, on this view, was an even more thoroughgoing nihilism—the “self-consummating skepticism” of the *Phenomenology*—that would annihilate itself and thereby constitute the positive in a speculative sense.

IV. THREE QUESTIONS

I now want to raise three questions: (1) Is Hegel’s critical reading fair to Spinoza? (2) What role does Spinoza’s Jewishness play in Hegel’s reading of Spinoza as precursor? (3) Why, in light of the pertinence of the discussions that had taken place from the time of Wachter to Hegel’s own day, did Hegel omit all mention of Spinoza’s possible relation to Kabbalah?

First, is Hegel’s critical reading fair to Spinoza? To answer this question requires a threefold assessment: (A) Are finite individuals *non-entia* according to Spinoza? (B) Is Spinoza’s substance indeterminate and therefore nothing other than an abstraction? (C) Did Spinoza fail to derive the attributes from the principle of substance, and did he thereby remain just as abstract at the level of philosophical form as at the level of philosophical content? The answer to all three questions, I believe, is no.

Spinoza certainly said that “determination is negation.” But he did not say, as Hegel would have it, that *all* determination is negation. In Ep. 50, Spinoza was speaking, not about finite individuals in general, but rather about geometric figures. According to Ep. 12, however, these delimitations of space are not genuine entities, but rather “beings of reason [*Entibus rationis . . . or aids of the imagination*]” (G 4:57).⁷² Substance is infinite, and it is as infinite that it is conceived by the intellect. Only when we consider extended substance, not by means of the intellect, but rather “abstractly, *or superficially*” (G 4:56), by means of aids such as “Measure, Time and Number” (G 4:57), can we delimit it as we please and consider the delimitations or shapes themselves. Useful as this procedure may be, it would be folly to confuse these abstractions with the modes of substance, which can never be adequately understood in such a manner. Surely a principal target of Spinoza’s criticism was Descartes’s geometrical approach to extended substance.

⁷² Ep. 12 is adduced by Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, pp. 128–140.

It may be objected on Hegel's behalf that Spinoza speaks of finite individuals in general as "in part" negations.⁷³ Yet this is precisely the difference between finite individuals and geometrical figures: while the former are "in part" negations, the latter are "not anything positive."⁷⁴ Considered in regard to their being, extended individuals are modes of extended substance, expressions of infinity. Only considered in regard to their non-being are they finite, and it is only in this regard that geometric figures pertain to them. Thus geometric figures are negations, not in part, but *wholly*.

Now, it is true that, in Ep. 36, Spinoza speaks of substance as "absolutely indeterminate," which would seem to support Hegel's interpretation.⁷⁵ However, even if we accept the formulation is genuine—which is not compulsory, since only a Latin translation of the Dutch original is extant—Spinoza cannot have meant that substance lacks all determinacy and is therefore a mere abstraction. Since substance is infinite and expresses its infinity in infinitely many ways, it would surely be accurate to say that substance has every possible determinacy and is *omni*-determinate. Perhaps this is what Spinoza meant by "absolutely indeterminate": when an individual is considered as determinate in some particular way, this excludes other possible but incompatible determinacies; but substance expresses itself in *every* possible determinacy to the exclusion of none, and to that extent lacks any *particular* determinacy. Certainly, Spinoza did not mean that it would be wrong to ascribe determinacy to substance. To say such a thing would be to commit oneself to something very like Maimonides's strictures on predication with respect to God, and Spinoza certainly rejected any such view in favor of a more rigorous development of the Cartesian idea of God as the infinite: to be sure, an idea that surpasses our comprehension but, at the same time an idea than which no idea is more clearly and distinctly perceivable.⁷⁶

This also explains why Hegel was unfair in charging Spinoza with failing to derive the attributes from substance, and with the deployment of a mathematical method that remains external to the self-movement of its subject matter. It is not that there is no self-movement at all in Spinoza's metaphysics. To say this would be to confuse Spinoza's rational metaphysics with the imperfectly rational foundations of Descartes's physics. However, self-movement would have to be understood as *conatus*, as the *tendency* of that which expresses substance determinately to continue expressing substance determinately, unless some external reason emerges for it to cease doing so. *Conatus* is the metaphysical ground of inertia. It is not, like Hegelian negativity, the motive force of a teleology that proceeds to actuality by means of a sequence of self-negations. In Spinoza's metaphysics, there is actuality—indeed, there are infinitely many variations

⁷³ E1p8s1: "being finite is really, in part, a negation, and being infinite is an absolute affirmation of the existence of some nature." Melamed makes this point in his insightful essay "Omnis determinatio est negation."

⁷⁴ Ep. 50: "figure is a negation and not anything positive."

⁷⁵ G 4:185.

⁷⁶ Descartes, Third Meditation, AT 6:46. For further discussion of Ep. 36 and its use of the phrase "absolutely indeterminate," see Melamed, "The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance, Attributes, and Modes" in this volume.

of actuality—but there is no narrative. Accordingly, derivation, which is the plot of a narrative, is not Spinoza’s responsibility. To this sort of metaphysics, the mathematical method, whose only narrative is the mathematician’s passage from obscure and confused to clear and distinct perception, seems entirely apt.

I turn now to the second question, what role does Spinoza’s Jewishness play in Hegel’s account of Spinoza as precursor? A great deal, according to Fackenheim, who wrote, “Once the Jewish ‘fear of the Lord’ was the beginning of all religious wisdom. Now the beginning of all modern philosophical wisdom is the Spinozistic God.”⁷⁷ This seems to me correct. The precursor status of Judaism with respect to Christianity was for Hegel no mere historical fact. It was the paradigm of a dialectical pattern. Moreover, the lack of actuality, the absence of self-movement, the static condition, that Hegel ascribes to Spinozism closely resembles the lack of actuality and the static condition that he attributes to Judaism, with which he associates a conception of divinity as lacking self-development, and hence an external relationship of the human to the divine.⁷⁸

However, Fackenheim’s statement requires qualification in two respects. First, Spinoza was not the *only* modern stand-in for Judaism. Spinoza may be said to have universalized Jewish monotheism, but it was Kant and Fichte who universalized Jewish law. Hegel distributed the precursor function of Judaism among all these figures. Second, Spinoza for Hegel was in an important sense not a Jew at all. Rejecting the divine transcendence and narrative that were so important to Judaism, Spinoza was a throwback to the pantheism of the Oriental worldview.⁷⁹ In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel is reported to have said, “Spinoza was a Jew by descent, and what found expression in the form of thought in his philosophy is in general on the oriental intuition according to which everything finite appears merely as something transient, as something vanishing.”⁸⁰ As we have already seen, Kabbalah was perceived as coming from the Orient, and, indeed, Jews were generally perceived as Orientals. To some extent, this merely meant “non-Europeans.” But Oriental thought was also associated with pantheism, as we have seen in the note on Confucius attached to Bayle’s article on Spinoza. Surely, the pantheistic doctrine of divine immanence was at odds with the Jewish theme of divine transcendence. While few made subtle distinctions here, Hegel understood Spinoza as returning from Judaism to an Oriental standpoint. However, it must be said that Spinoza’s Oriental philosophy was *post-Jewish*. The Jewish contribution was, above all, to make the world prosaic,⁸¹ and Spinoza’s immanentism was nothing if not prosaic. Spinoza did not return to Oriental pantheism, with its poetic representations of divinity manifesting itself in

⁷⁷ Fackenheim, *Encounters*, p. 125.

⁷⁸ See Franks, “Inner Anti-Semitism or Kabbalistic Legacy?” See also O’Regan, “Hegel and Anti-Judaism.”

⁷⁹ I am grateful to Brady Bowman for pointing out that Hegel’s discussion of Spinoza relates to his discussion of Oriental religion and philosophy.

⁸⁰ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, sec. 151Z; *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part 1: Science of Logic*, sec. 151, Addition.

⁸¹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 4, 567; *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 2:678: “the world is now prosaic.”

innumerable forms. Rather, he orientalized Jewish monotheism, seeing the one God as immanent throughout the natural and prosaic world of mathematical physics.

Now for the third question, why does Hegel make no reference to Kabbalah in his discussion of Spinoza? Even if he was not directly familiar with the discussions of More, Bayle, Wachter, and Basnage, he was certainly familiar with Jacobi's endorsement of Wachter. He may well have also known Salomon Maimon's further endorsement of the view that Spinozism and the philosophical Kabbalah are intimately related. It was standard to mention Kabbalah in a discussion of Spinoza, whether one made a judgment or not.⁸² Moreover, Hegel mentioned Boehme, whose affinity with Kabbalah was well-known. The divine life that Boehme described in terms of the Trinity plus seven chemical forms is remarkably similar to the divine life articulated by the Kabbalists in terms of ten sefirot. In addition to Wachter's citation of Hinckelmann, Hegel would very likely have been familiar with the works of Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, a major figure in Hegel's native Württemberg during the eighteenth century who had sought a synthesis of Boehme and Lurianic Kabbalah, and who influenced Schelling. In Hegel's discussion, then, Kabbalah was omitted, but Boehme may be regarded as a Trinitarian stand-in for Kabbalah.

Seen in this light, Hegel's position was different and, indeed, original. He did not agree with Wachter, Basnage, Jacobi, and Maimon that Spinoza was in some sense a Kabbalist. Rather, he maintained—in effect, although *not* in so many words—that Spinoza was *not Kabbalistic enough*. In particular, it may be argued that the very features that Hegel regarded Spinoza as lacking may be found in Kabbalah, specifically in the Lurianic Kabbalah introduced to the non-Jewish philosophical world through *Kabbala Denudata*.

First, the highest sefirah, thus the beginning of the beginning of divine self-manifestation, is *keter* (crown), which, by the fourteenth century if not earlier, was characterized as *ayin* (nothingness), from which arises the second sefirah, *ḥokhmah* (wisdom) or *yesh* (being).⁸³ Thus medieval Kabbalists understood creation *ex nihilo* to mean, not merely the exclusion of the doctrine of creation from preexisting matter, but the substantive doctrine of creation from the principle of nothingness, and this became the standard view, enshrined in *Raya Mehemna*, a work included in the printed version of the *Zohar*.⁸⁴ The nothingness in question was internal to the self-manifestation and inner life of God, just as Hegel demanded. Moreover, one of the principal ideas associated with Lurianic Kabbalah, although it certainly predates Luria, was the idea of creation through *zimzum*—that is, through a withdrawal of the infinite that constitutes an

⁸² Thus, Schelling remarks in passing, in his *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 78, that “whether emanation has ever been understood in this [Spinozistic] way, e.g. in the Jewish kabbalah, is still a big question.”

⁸³ *Kabbala Denudata*, I, Part 1, 79–81, discusses the identification of *keter* as *ayin*, citing the interpretation, found in Joseph Gikatilla (1248–after 1305), *Sha'arei Orah* (Mantua: Jacob Cohen, 1561), of Job 28:12, “*Me-ayin timza ḥokhmah*” as “From nothing, wisdom comes into being.”

⁸⁴ See *Zohar* 3:256b, which presupposes the identification of *keter* as *ayin*.

empty space within which creation of that which is other than God becomes possible.⁸⁵ In other words, divine creation was the self-negation of negativity. Again, this was just the feature that Hegel thought was lacking in Spinoza but present in Boehme.

Now, my point is not that Hegel must have drawn his ideas directly from Kabbalah. There are certainly Christian thinkers—including, notably, Scotus Eriugena and Meister Eckhart—in whose writings similar ideas may be found, and, in any event, Hegel’s ideas are far from reducible to the ideas of others. Rather, my point is that there are significant affinities between Kabbalah and Hegel’s own thought and that Hegel may be expected to have been aware of these affinities. Consequently, Hegel’s failure even to mention Kabbalah in a context where it would usually be discussed—in an account of Spinoza’s philosophy—deserves explanation.

The solution, I suggest, lies in Hegel’s attitude to Judaism and its implications for his attitude to Kabbalah. As is well known, Hegel was highly critical of Judaism in his early writings and developed a deeper appreciation of it in his 1827 and 1831 lectures on the philosophy of religion.⁸⁶ In his early writings, he presented Judaism as liberation from earthly powers, the price for which was enslavement by the divine Lord. Later, he came to see that Judaism involved a genuine reconciliation between the divine and the human, albeit inferior to the reconciliation effected by Christianity. But Hegel never abandoned his critique, which he now reformulated. To be sure, Judaism was now seen as involving both human liberation and purposeful, divine particularization.⁸⁷ However, Judaism did not *unify* the human and divine dramas: God initiated and oversaw the human narrative, but remained unchanged and hence external to the development. Consequently, divine mediation in Judaism was external and abstract, never becoming self-mediated and concrete as did divine mediation in Christianity.⁸⁸ Parallel to this stasis at the level of content was a paralysis at the level of form: the Jews remained frozen at the developmental stage of their election as one people among others, and Judaism failed to become genuinely universal. Excluding itself from history, Judaism resisted the alteration of even its most contingent elements.⁸⁹

The similarity to Hegel’s characterization of Spinoza should be clear. In both cases, there is stasis and even paralysis at both the levels of content and form. But how could Hegel base his account of Judaism on the Hebrew Bible alone, ignoring the entire development of postbiblical and rabbinic thought? How, over a century after the publication of *Kabbala Denudata*, could Hegel say that Judaism acknowledged no internal

⁸⁵ See *Kabbala Denudata*, I, Part 2, 150. See Schulte, “*Zimzum* in der *Kabbala Denudata*.” On the pre-history of the concept, see Idel, “On the Concept of *Zimzum*.”

⁸⁶ See Hodgson, “Metamorphosis of Judaism.”

⁸⁷ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 4: 563; *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 2:671.

⁸⁸ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 4:574–575; *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 2:683.

⁸⁹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 4:575–577n; *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 2:683–685n.

development of God and never developed the story of the Fall, when these were exactly the topics of Kabbalistic treatises available in translation?

Kabbalah was discussed by Hegel, not in his lectures on the philosophy of religion, but in his lectures on the history of philosophy. Notably, he discussed Kabbalah in the section on Neoplatonism, and he asserted that the better part of Kabbalah was already contained in the philosophy of Philo of Alexandria. He included in this assessment not only the general principle that everything is contained causally and eminently in God, but also the Lurianic principle that first in the All is the *adam kadmon* or *keter elyon* (supernal crown).⁹⁰ As a moment in Neoplatonism, however, Kabbalah was treated not only as ancient and therefore post-Jewish, but also implicitly as proto-Christian. For Hegel, Neoplatonism was a transitional moment in which Greek philosophy could be seen to return to subjectivity, and in which the world of spirituality could be seen to emerge.

Here Hegel was undoubtedly helped by two factors. First, Kabbalistic texts such as the *Zohar* presented themselves and were treated by Kabbalists as ancient.⁹¹ Second, the Lurianic Kabbalah had been presented as a variation of Neoplatonism. It was in connection with Neoplatonism that Kabbalah had been interpreted during the Renaissance, and it was explicitly in such a context that it was now interpreted by Herrera in the only modern Kabbalistic text mentioned by Hegel. Some of the distinctive features associated with Lurianic Kabbalah, such as the doctrine of *zimzum*, were interpreted by Herrera in a nonliteral way that allowed him to reconcile them with the Neoplatonic account of creation as emanation from the overflowing, positive *Eyn Sof*.

Nevertheless, Hegel was able to avoid questioning a deep-seated prejudice insofar as he treated Kabbalah as proto-Christian rather than genuinely Jewish, and as ancient rather than as a vital tradition that had developed in the Middle Ages and that was still developing in modernity.⁹² He was thereby able to maintain the view, in which he was deeply invested, that Judaism was paralyzed at a stage of development prior to the advent of Christ. At the same time, Hegel could ignore the ongoing vitality of Kabbalah

⁹⁰ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*.

⁹¹ Hegel mentioned *Sefer Yeẓirah*, typically ascribed to Abraham, and the *Zohar*, typically ascribed to R. Simeon bar Yoḥai. However, *Sefer Yeẓirah* is first attested in the tenth century, while the *Zohar* appeared in the thirteenth. While both contain older traditions, the scholarly consensus is that they were first put into textual forms close to the times of their attestation. I say “textual forms” because there is no evidence of a single *Urtext* in either case. Both took on a degree of textual fixity only insofar as they became the subjects of commentaries, and later insofar as they were printed. Even then, however, they were never solidified into single texts. See Hayman, *Sefer Yesirah* and, on the *Zohar*, Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts*.

⁹² Hegel was hardly alone here. Christian kabbalists regarded kabbalah as ancient insofar as it contained traces of the pristine, proto-Christian doctrine prior to the development of Talmudic Judaism, and kabbalah was treated as ancient by Hegel’s main sources, notably by the aforementioned Jacobus Brucker, whose account of kabbalah depended on Rosenroth, More, Wachter and Basnage, among others.

in his own day, and he could regard Trinitarian thinkers akin to the Kabbalah, such as Boehme, as providing the necessary complement to Spinozism. The very idea of a modern Jewish philosophy, in which Spinozism would be synthesized with elements of Lurianic Kabbalah, was thus completely excluded.

V. CONCLUSION

One of the many riddles posed by Spinoza’s life and works was the impact of his Jewishness on his thought. I have argued that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Spinoza was read by Bayle, Wachter, and Basnage as an Oriental pantheist, committed to the principle that nothing comes from nothing. This principle had already been ascribed to Jewish Kabbalah by Henry More in his reaction to the texts published in *Kabbala Denudata*, and both Wachter and Basnage accordingly interpreted Spinoza as a Kabbalist. Building on this earlier discussion, Jacobi explicitly invoked the relationship between Spinozism and Kabbalah, citing the principle that nothing comes from nothing, but also drawing attention to Spinoza’s statement that determination is negation.

It was Hegel, however, who made this latter statement central to his account of what made Spinoza distinctive. If Hegel’s interpretation was indebted to his predecessors, he nonetheless gave an original twist to the argument that Spinoza’s Jewishness was reflected in his philosophy via Kabbalah. For Hegel, Spinoza was a post-Jewish Oriental philosopher, who had renewed the ancient Oriental focus on the One in a modern way. As Judaism had served in antiquity as Christianity’s precursor, so Spinozism—with its rigorous yet abstract articulation of the nullity of the finite—served in modernity as Hegelianism’s precursor. To convert the nihilism of Spinoza into the science of Hegel, however, it was necessary to synthesize Spinozism with the Trinitarianism of Boehme, and to express this synthesis in adequately conceptual, nonimagistic terms. On this view, Spinoza was no Kabbalist. But neither was Boehme. Others may have regarded Boehme as a Christian Kabbalist, but Hegel saw modern speculative thought as exclusively Christian, and relegated Kabbalah to antiquity.

The distortions of Hegel’s interpretation of Spinoza may be explained, then, as resulting from the exigencies of Hegel’s dialectical interpretation of history. Committed to the sublation of Judaism by Christianity in antiquity, Hegel could not acknowledge, whether in the form of Kabbalah or in the form of Spinozism, the ongoing vitality of Jewish thought in modernity.⁹³

⁹³ Thanks to Brady Bowman for his insight about the Orient, to Michael Della Rocca for his infinite patience and helpfulness, to Yitzhak Melamed for arranging the conference at which I first gave a version of this paper and for sharing his insights with me, to Gabriel Citron for helpful comments, to Alex Silverman for his editorial diligence, and to Hindy Najman for her support and conversation.

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CHAPTER 24

NIETZSCHE AND SPINOZA

Enemy-Brothers

YIRMIYAHU YOVEL

THIS essay presents Spinoza and Nietzsche as philosophical “enemy brothers” who share a radical philosophy of immanence and the negation of all transcendence. For both, the immanent world, which is devoid of an inner or outer purpose, constitutes the overall horizon of being and the sole possible source of value, and both, in their different ways (either as *amor fati* or as *amor dei*), call for a celebrating affirmation of it. Yet, as the paper spells out, within their deep affinity each philosopher maintains a totally different view of immanence and of the existential experience linked to it.

Amor fati—love of fate—is the defiant formula by which Nietzsche sums up his philosophical affirmation. The term, never before used in philosophy,¹ is clearly a polemical transformation of Spinoza’s *amor dei intellectualis*, rejecting the primacy of the intellect and putting *fatum* (fate) in place of Spinoza’s nature-God as the object of love.

The pair *amor dei* and *amor fati* provides an apt verbal representation of the complex relationship between Nietzsche and Spinoza, the two enemy brothers of modern philosophy. Perhaps no two philosophers are as akin as Spinoza and Nietzsche, yet no two are as opposed. If Spinoza initiated the modern philosophy of immanence and undergirds it throughout, then Nietzsche brings it to its most radical conclusion—and, as we shall see, turns this conclusion against Spinoza himself.²

¹ See Wurzer, “Nietzsche und Spinoza,” p. 84. This study seems to contain all the quotations in Nietzsche where Spinoza is mentioned or alluded to, as well as many helpful insights. Wurzer reports having failed to find a precedent to *amor fati* in all the philosophical handbooks and encyclopedias he perused.

² The theme around which this essay revolves is “the philosophy of immanence,” for which Spinoza had set a powerful paradigm while later philosophers—Nietzsche being a prominent case—worked it out in different, often rival ways. The basic ideas are that this world is all there is, the overall horizon of being and the sole possible source of norms and values, and that any advancement, elevation, or emancipation of which human existence may be capable can also occur only within the immanent world and in this life. From Schopenhauer and Hegel to Freud and Deleuze, to cite only a few names (a fuller

Nietzsche explicitly recognizes his debt and kinship to Spinoza. Speaking of his “ancestors,” Nietzsche at various times gives several lists, but he always mentions Spinoza and Goethe—and always as a pair.³ This is no accident, for Nietzsche sees Goethe as incorporating Spinoza and as anticipating his own “Dionysian” ideal.

Goethe, Nietzsche says, was a “magnificent attempt to overcome the eighteenth century by a return to nature,” an endeavor in which he “sought help from history, natural science, antiquity, and also Spinoza.” Goethe, Nietzsche adds, wanted “totality” (of sense, reason, feeling, will); he “disciplined himself in wholeness,” and he “created himself.”

Goethe conceived a human being who would be strong, highly educated, skillful in all bodily matters, self-controlled ... who might dare to afford the whole range and wealth of being natural, being strong enough for such freedom; the man of tolerance, not from weakness but from strength ... the man for whom there is no longer anything that is forbidden—unless it be weakness, whether called vice or virtue.

This strongly Spinozistic ideal of Goethe Nietzsche turns in his own direction:

Such a spirit who has become free amid the cosmos with a joyous and trusting fatalism, in the faith that only the particular is loathsome, and that all is redeemed and affirmed in the whole—he does not negate any more. Such a faith, however, is the highest of all: I have baptized it with the name of Dionysus.⁴

In this revealing passage, Nietzsche attributes his own idea of *Übermensch* to Goethe while painting it in milder and more harmonious colors. In a certain respect, indeed, Nietzsche is a kind of intemperate Goethe, a stormy cultural radical who lacks Goethe’s delicate artistic balance and is carried away by contradictory drives and by the more ferocious aspects of his naturalistic revolt. But, at bottom, as he looks at Goethe’s ideal, Nietzsche recognizes himself in it, assimilates this ideal to his own Dionysus, and traces it partly back to Spinoza. Spinoza thus has a privileged role in forming Goethe’s position, which Nietzsche sees as the kernel of his own.

The extent of their kinship came as a flash to Nietzsche in the summer of 1881 when, probably after reading Kuno Fischer’s book on Spinoza (where the concept of power is emphasized), he exclaimed in a postcard to his friend Franz Overbeck:

I am utterly amazed, utterly enchanted, I have a precursor, and what a precursor!
I hardly knew Spinoza: that I should have turned to him just now was inspired by

map is offered in my *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, Vol. II: *The Adventures of Immanence*, from which this essay is drawn), this Spinozistic pattern of thought recurs in several attires in the history of modern thought.

³ Nietzsche mentions “Heraclitus, Empedocles, Spinoza, Goethe” (*Gesammelte Werke* 14:109); “Plato, Pascal, Spinoza, and Goethe” (21:98); in *Human, All-Too-Human*, §408 he mentions three pairs as follows: “Epicurus and Montaigne, Goethe and Spinoza, Plato and Rousseau.”

⁴ *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 49. In all references to Nietzsche’s works, numbers refer to sections, not pages (unless otherwise noted).

“instinct.” Not only is his over-all tendency like mine—making knowledge the most powerful affect—but in five main points of his doctrine I recognize myself; this most unusual and loneliest thinker is closest to me precisely in these matters: he denies the freedom of the will, teleology, the moral world order, the unegoistic, and evil. Even though the divergencies are admittedly tremendous, they are due more to the differences in time, culture, and science. *In summa*: my solitude, which, as on very high mountains, often made it hard for me to breathe and made my blood rush out, is at least a dualitude.⁵

Nietzsche, in his enthusiasm, tends to minimize the divergences between himself and Spinoza, which he attributes to the distance in time, culture, and so on. On other occasions, however, he disputes with Spinoza quite bitingly. What had incited Nietzsche's enthusiasm was, above all, Spinoza's strict naturalism with its many derivatives (which Nietzsche lists on the postcard), including the abolition of good and evil, the denial of a built-in moral world order, and an emphasis on self-interest and power as the basis of life and the lever for ethical advancement.

Nietzsche also singles out their common tendency “to make of knowledge the most powerful affect,” meaning that knowledge is determined by the instinctual part of life and is no longer seen as an autonomous interest; and also that as affect, knowledge retains its role in liberating life. But here a major difference arises. Nietzsche, in a more Socratic manner, attributes a salutary affective power to knowledge in the critical, not the doctrinal sense; it is the kind of knowledge gained through disillusionment. This knowledge teaches no fixed positive truth, but purifies the individual of decadent images and false metaphysical consolations, preparing him or her for the final self-overcoming assent of *amor fati*.

In Spinoza, the immediate affective tone of knowledge is joy, the sensation of the enhanced power of life; Nietzsche, on the contrary, incessantly stresses the painful nature of knowledge and measures the power (and worth) of a person by “how much truth he can bear.” Knowledge, in the sense of disillusionment or critical enlightenment, is a source of suffering and primarily a temptation to despair—which the Nietzschean man will overcome and transform into Dionysian joy. *Gaya scienza*—joyful knowledge⁶—is a task and goal in Nietzsche, not the normal outcome. Yet even when this goal is achieved, the conquered temptation to despair remains an inevitable component of Dionysian joy. Joy is not the natural outcome but the product of self-overcoming.

This already hints at some of the crucial differences between Nietzsche and Spinoza. Indeed, if Spinoza, as Nietzsche puns, redeems him of his solitude into a state of “dualitude,” he also presents him with a powerful alternative. Nietzsche and Spinoza offer two rival options within the same radical conception, that of total

⁵ Postcard to Franz Overbeck from Sils Maria, July 30, 1881; I used Kaufmann's translation (*The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 92) but rendered *Einsamkeit* as “solitude” (not “loneliness”) and the pun *Zweisamkeit* as “dualitude” (not “two-someness”).

⁶ I render this term according to its philosophical meaning, not its literal translation, which is, of course, “gay science.”

immanence. Both declare the “death” of the transcendent God and see life within immanence as all there is. This-worldliness is co-extensive with being in general. Moreover, the universe, *pace* Hegel, is devoid of any subject-like features or inherent teleology and thus offers man no consoling semblance of his own image engraved in the nature of things. Man himself is a fully immanent (or, in Spinoza’s terms, “natural”) being, with no supernatural gifts, obligations, or deficiencies; he neither lacks something more elevated residing in a superior world, nor is he endowed with special powers emanating from such a transcendent domain. Man has no separate, eternal soul,⁷ no “transcendental self” to replace it, no a priori reason demanding to impose itself externally upon nature and life. As a finite mode, man is, however, but a drop in the immanent universe and as such is inescapably bound and constrained by it; this fact (or destiny) he must interiorize, understand, and assent to with the full intensity of his life if he is to endow his bare existence with a worthwhile meaning compatible with the boundaries of immanence (freedom in Spinoza, authentic existence in Nietzsche). This involves some form of “love of necessity”; yet the crucial question is how to interpret this necessity, whether as a self-justifying system of rational laws or as opaque and indeterminate *fatum* that nothing can justify or capture by rational categories, causes, or laws. This question is the watershed at which, upon the common ground of immanence, Nietzsche and Spinoza stand in conflict and each argues, indeed, pleads and seduces, toward a totally different experience of immanence.

In Spinoza the immanent world inherits divine status and many of the properties of the defunct transcendent God. Self-caused and self-justified, it is eternal and infinite both in quantity and in perfection. Its existence follows necessarily from its essence, governed by fixed and eternal laws, and is also rationally intelligible throughout. As for man, he exists “in God” and shares in the same universal rationality by which eventually he can rise above his finitude and realize eternity within his temporal existence. By contrast, Nietzsche’s experience of immanence leaves no room for order, permanence, fixed laws, inherent rationality, or truth; it presupposes a mode of existence from which not only God but (as Nietzsche says) God’s “shadows” have also been removed. Man exists here in an ever-transient flux of (cosmic) “will to power,” without redemption, without fixed truth, with nothing to explain his life or justify his death. As for the concept of necessity—the object of love—it signifies that existence flows from the essence of God and is rational and divine throughout, whereas in Nietzsche necessity is opaque and unintelligible *fatum*, devoid of essence or rational ground and pressing upon all creatures as an inescapable burden.

These are two radically opposed experiences of the world, one securing order, permanence, and even, in a pantheistic vein, the sense of cosmic meaningfulness and shelter provided by the old religions (though it denies their historical form) and the other

⁷ In Spinoza, the alleged eternity of the soul, discussed in the last part of his *Ethics*, is impersonal; it is the eternal idea of myself in the “infinite intellect,” which exists without the body. The mind-body parallelism is not broken, but the problem is shifted to another duality, that of eternity and duration.

leaving man in a metaphysical wasteland, a world of conflicts and transience that cannot be captured by rational categories and from which all metaphysical consolation is banned. Consequently, the assent and celebrating acceptance of immanent existence in Nietzsche's *amor fati* must take the defiant and self-overcoming form of a "nevertheless." *Amor fati* is based upon a fundamental dissonance between the individual and the world, as against their consonant agreement and semimystical identification in Spinoza's *amor dei intellectualis*.

PERSONAL AFFINITIES

The striking personal kinship of Nietzsche and Spinoza cannot pass without comment. When Nietzsche speaks about their "dualitude," he throws into relief the picture of two independent and solitary thinkers, each living in relative isolation, their lives almost consumed by their philosophical work, and both making unsettling discoveries that alienated them from most of their contemporaries (who saw them as cultural villains) and from the major bulk of tradition. (Nietzsche, however, had Spinoza to lean upon—and compete with—in building a new countertradition.) The objects of shock and horror, they were denigrated as "atheistic" or "nihilistic" (depending on the abusive idiom of the age) and shunned as socially subversive and grossly antimoral. However, both Nietzsche and Spinoza, though they rejected the concepts of good and evil, were profound moral philosophers, not in the sense of prescribing duties or grounding moral obligations, but in setting a perspective of human ascendance and perfectibility and trying to seduce their audience toward it.

The highly esoteric nature of their ideal reflects both men's existential isolation and aristocratic frame of mind. Spinoza, unlike Nietzsche, was partly equipped to deal with the problem of esotericism because he had worked out a distinct moral perspective for the multitude and distinguished it categorically from that of the happy few. Not so for Nietzsche, who sometimes seems to suggest that his aristocratic psychology should apply to everyone within the new culture. This is both incoherent and dangerous, a potential for inevitable abuse.

Linked to their isolation and revolutionary message—and also, in Nietzsche, to his sense of depth and aristocracy—is both men's taste for mask and equivocation. "Whatever is profound loves masks," says Nietzsche, who abundantly illustrates this belief in his work. His complex, aphoristic utterances—intentionally equivocal, loaded with allusions and ironic twists, exaggerating, pretending, over- and understating, leaving crucial points half-said while lingering upon others of lesser importance—provide the reader with a wealth of insights as well as pitfalls. This way of writing not only reflects the nature of Nietzsche's literary gifts or his conscious choice of unsystematic style or his need to divert, shock, and seduce his readers, but also, I think, betrays an existential need for masks per se. Depth cannot disclose itself directly but must use the roundabout route of hide and seek, overwhelm, and retreat, which includes irony as a

necessary ingredient. Nietzsche's depth is frequently dramatic but rarely pompous, and, like Heine, he knows that good style can be used not only to pass on a message but also to erect a protective screen. Self-exposure borders on bad taste, and sincerity is the virtue of the vulgar.⁸

Spinoza, with his geometrical method, obviously had no qualms in using a direct, unequivocal style, at least for strict philosophical purposes and when communicating with the initiated. Yet Spinoza was also a great connoisseur of masks and a master of equivocation. Few surpassed him in carrying on a discourse on several levels simultaneously, a practice he used primarily for prudence and persuasion, but which clearly also gave him intellectual and esthetic pleasure. It was not only a strategic necessity but also a *laetitia* (if not an outright *amor*) *intellectualis*.

The mask had yet another function for both philosophers. Experts in using it, they were equally sensitive to its use—and abuse—by others, especially when the mask was not put on deliberately. In this they share with thinkers like Marx and Freud, who set out to unmask accepted notions and established personal and social façades by digging into the unavowed motives and mechanisms behind them.

Spinoza lacks a sophisticated apparatus for explaining the varieties of self-deception and ideological mystification but he shares, and indeed triggers, the modern trend of educating the mind to be suspiciously attentive to itself and its projected images and to seek a deeper, perhaps a darker kind of enlightenment than the one provided by the overt process of reasoning.

That such a trend of “dark enlightenment” is tied up with a philosophy of immanence will be attested by the list of its major representatives. Machiavelli and Hobbes, Spinoza, Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, perhaps Heidegger, and Sartre were all bound by a philosophy that challenges the “divine part” in man and its alleged origin in a transcendent realm; each worked to shatter complacent self-images and comforting illusions and claimed to have discovered something dark and unsettling about the structure of man and his world. This kind of “knowledge”—always painful, as Nietzsche repeatedly says, with its critical “dark” side and disillusioning cure, and the unrelenting drive to gain it, to make it a powerful and salutary affect—is also the common ground that Nietzsche seems to have discovered between Spinoza and himself.

Nietzsche makes innumerable direct references to Spinoza. Some of his remarks are important, others are marginal, and all are biased in style and content by Nietzsche's current philosophical emphasis. Hence it will not serve our purpose to follow the line of “Nietzsche as reader of Spinoza.”⁹ Instead, I shall try to reconstruct their respective

⁸ I therefore cannot agree with the high premium that Della Rocca, in his otherwise illuminating comparison of the two philosophers in his *Spinoza*, seems to place on “transparency” in Nietzsche (and Spinoza). Each had a deep and complex reason to shun direct, unveiled openness to the public. What Nietzsche passionately sought was *lucidity*—overcoming *self*-deceptions and comforting illusions, which is an internal, personal effort that requires (and when successful, manifests) great existential power. But transparency in the current sense, of being easily accessible to others, was rather to be avoided.

⁹ They were collected and analyzed by Wurzer, “Nietzsche und Spinoza.”

positions around certain key philosophical issues, especially the nature of immanence, its existential experience, and the proper human response to it.¹⁰

CONATUS VERSUS WILL TO POWER

A necessary consequence of the philosophy of immanence that Nietzsche and Spinoza share is their adherence, in their theory of man, to a strict naturalistic monism. For both philosophers there is a single natural principle active in man that constitutes his individual existence (as it does everything else in nature). This principle is not a static being but a dynamic thrust, striving, or desire; as such, it is also the unique principle underlying all the affects, drives, and diverse forms of human behavior. Spinoza calls it *conatus*; Nietzsche, “will to power.”

Conatus in Spinoza is basically the striving for self-preservation. “Everything . . . endeavors to persist in its being” (E3p6) is the first principle from which the rest is derived, encompassing all human affects from the most common to the most philosophical. For

¹⁰ Among other assessments of the Spinoza–Nietzsche relation, I should mention three. In his *Spinoza*, Deleuze rightly sees Spinoza and Nietzsche as sharing a similar critique of the distortions of life and of the passions built on sorrow, and he presents Nietzsche as using Spinoza to demystify the image of the human being who has inherited the place of the dead God, notably by denying his role as subject and the primacy of consciousness. Della Rocca, in the concluding chapter to his *Spinoza* (“The Aftermath of Spinoza,” section 5), seems to follow that line in stating that Nietzsche shared Spinoza’s view that I am nothing more than my actions, and thereby undermined the bifurcation of doer and deed (p. 298). But that which, above all, brings Spinoza closest to Nietzsche according to Della Rocca is the view that value and perfection are radically intrinsic (p. 292). “Nietzsche like Spinoza rejects any bifurcation between a thing to be evaluated and the source of that evaluation.” For both, “the source of value must be within the nature of the thing to be evaluated,” which leads Della Rocca to characterize this position as “*the immanence of value*” (pp. 298–99).

I certainly agree with this characterization. But the issue of value—and of ethics, or practical philosophy—is not at the core of my present interest. Value is part of a broader range of issues that, in both philosophers, is marked by a strictly immanent approach. This includes the immanence of being and the philosopher’s experience of living in a world without transcendence. My interest in this essay lies more in the cognitive and existential dimension of the topic—the experience of total immanence as the philosopher’s prime recognition and affirmation (*amor fati*).

Schacht, in an essay on “The Spinoza–Nietzsche Problem,” sees the principal affinity of Nietzsche and Spinoza in the demand “to translate man back into nature” and then “to read ourselves out of it again . . . as a natural, and yet also more than merely natural, form of existence” (pp. 211–12). Following Paul Tillich, Schacht calls both philosophers “ecstatic naturalists,” a position that seems to take seriously Spinoza’s sense that nature “is not merely prosaic.” This non-reductive naturalism may have a point although, conceptually, it walks a narrow path. I agree that nature itself, in both cases, can produce its own elevation beyond its “raw” state and create advanced and most refined phenomena—physical, psychological, cultural—that remain totally natural while demonstrating nature’s elevated capacities; but one should beware of interpreting that elevation in the old dualistic terms of “nature” versus “spirit.” For this (and other) reasons, I prefer to avoid the term “naturalism” altogether and replace it with “a philosophy of immanence,” and to characterize Nietzsche’s will-to-power as “self-transcendence within immanence” (see later).

Spinoza, the mode of being of individual things is *duratio* (duration), defined not in temporal but in modal terms. It is the mode of being of a thing whose existence does not follow necessarily from its essence. As such, it needs external causes in order to come into existence, and it will endure in existence as long as external causality will permit, constantly resisting its assault and the dangers it represents. This resistance, the negative aspect of *conatus*, is not an attribute or an added quality of finite things but their very mode of being. It constitutes their individuality as distinct entities.

In defining humans by their self-centered desire, the *conatus* is (as Nietzsche recognizes with approval) the very opposite of disinterestedness. Yet its offspring includes not only common passions and desires but also the drive for rational knowledge (*conatus intelligendi*) as well as the supreme emotion and life-form of *amor dei intellectualis*. Both aggression and empathy, violence and mutual help issue from this single natural principle, depending on circumstances, the laws of psychology, and one's degree of knowledge (i.e. of emancipation).

This monism is, of course, a necessary corollary of Spinoza's strict naturalism or principle of immanence. Since there is no transcendent world, no moral world order, no a priori norms and obligations, no purposive organization of the universe, but only a world governed by a play of mechanical forces, the individual's total life must be explained and grounded in a strictly natural principle of desire that individuates him or her as a single natural entity. *Conatus*, as the striving of every natural being to persevere in existence and, for this purpose, to enhance its power to exist, is thus made by Spinoza into the single principle from which all human behavior and all civilized phenomena are derived.

This monism agrees with Nietzsche as well—and for similar reasons. Nietzsche's will to power, like the *conatus* it replaces, is conceived as “the primitive form of affect, [such] that all other affects are only developments of it.” But here again Nietzsche contradicts Spinoza. “It can be shown most clearly that every living thing does everything it can not to preserve itself but to become more,” Nietzsche writes in a note to himself (*Will to Power* 688), naming Spinoza as his specific opponent. Elsewhere he insists: “A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength—life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 13). What especially disproves Spinoza's thesis are the frequent cases (which Spinoza is unable to explain except as “folly”) in which one is ready to risk one's life for the sake of expanding and transcending oneself:

The wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, of a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at the expansion of power and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation. [*Gay Science* 349]

Spinoza, too, speaks of enhancing the power of existence (and of action) as his goal.¹¹ Frequently he conjoins this goal with self-preservation (either as its implication or

¹¹ For example, in E3p13, Spinoza shifts from the original *conatus* to the concept of “the power of activity” of the body and/or the mind.

as its equivalent) but then—at least on one occasion—seems to suggest that they are independent concepts.¹² Despite this ambivalence, the only coherent way to construe Spinoza's theory is to see the one goal as subservient to the other. Enhancing the power of existence and of action is desirable because it increases the prospects of self-preservation. In Nietzsche, however, power is not an instrument of life but defines and encompasses it. We do not first exist and then seek to prolong our existence by augmenting its power; rather, we exist from the start as will to power, that is, as the dynamic projection of our being and as the built-in thrust to enhance and expand it, for which life as merely given may sometimes be jeopardized.

Will to power is thus a drive toward self-transcendence, which is natural to all humans (and to all other beings, as well). Nietzsche (correctly, I think) sees no contradiction in the idea that immanent entities—the only kind there is—strive by nature to go beyond their boundaries and “become more.” This does not infringe upon the principle of immanence because, in transcending themselves, they are not necessarily guided by a transcendent realm or by a priori norms, but express and project their own existence and constitution. Hence we need not assume a separate world in order to think that all this-worldly entities exist by nature as this self-transcending drive.

Heidegger later adapted this Nietzschean idea of self-transcendence within immanence to his own account of human existence (*Dasein*) and of the meaning of being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*). But Heidegger restricted his analysis to human beings, to whom he accorded a privileged ontic position in being. Thereby he aligned himself to the Hegelian strand within the philosophy of immanence and, like Feuerbach, performed an inner critique within it. Nietzsche, on the other hand, sides with Spinoza's anti-Hegelian view that humans have nothing special that distinguishes them ontologically from the rest of being, to which they are assimilable.

This uniformism leads Nietzsche and Spinoza to apply their principles even to physical entities. In Spinoza, the physical side of *conatus* is the resistance a body shows to external causes that threaten to dispossess it and take its place.¹³ It thus displays a “defensive” posture, so to speak—the effort to resist external invasion and preserve what is physically the self. But in Nietzsche, characteristically, the physical idiom or expression of will to power states the exact opposite: “every specific body strives to become master over all space and to . . . thrust back all that resists its extension.”¹⁴

¹² In the preface to Part IV of the *Ethics*, Spinoza rejects the usual concepts of perfection and imperfection, then gives them a new use: greater perfection means that the power of activity has increased (meaning self-originating activity or freedom). This is independent of duration; one cannot say that a thing is more perfect because it has persisted longer in existence. Hence, the goal of increasing the power of activity of the individual is dissociated from self-preservation and linked directly to freedom.

¹³ This contrast remains significant even if we choose to read Nietzsche's words metaphorically rather than literally. Such a reading is invited because the crude physicalistic translation of will to power runs into grave difficulties, not the least of which results from Nietzsche's own critique of the concepts of “matter,” “body,” and “quantifiable space” as “fictions.”

¹⁴ *Will to Power* 636. This corresponds roughly to what non-Cartesian philosophers (such as Locke and his followers) called “impenetrability,” namely, the ontic quality that constitutes materiality. (In Spinoza and Descartes, extension alone is sufficient for this purpose, but Spinoza, in the physical side of the conatus, implies a form of impenetrability, as well.)

Two further points must be made. The monism of *conatus* and will to power requires a theory to explain how the diverse and opposing forms of mental and cultural life can spring from one and the same primordial principle. But only Spinoza provides such an explanation; Nietzsche leaves us wondering how the will to power takes the various forms it does, especially those forms Nietzsche considers devious, alienated, or otherwise nongenuine. Will to power can be healthy or degenerate, Dionysian or decadent. In its negative form, it works in the morality of *ressentiment*, in the Christian culture, and in the attempt of the rationalists to dominate the world by subjecting it to an imaginary web of fixed categories and laws. What is to distinguish between these “negative” forms of will to power and its “positive” or healthy expressions? What will explain how the one can be transformed into the other (as Spinoza explains the transformation of a “passive” into an “active” affect), and why do we persist in calling “weak” a form that has dominated human life throughout two millennia of its history? Nietzsche would have been greatly served by a theory of alienation of some sort, accounting for reversals in the mode of will to power (from genuine to devious and vice versa) and explaining how it becomes a hindrance to itself and how this can be resolved.

Finally, Spinoza’s insistence on self-preservation is in accordance with his metaphysics of self-identity and permanence, whereas Nietzsche’s will to power, in attributing self-transcendence to all immanent entities, agrees with his general theory of flux, which denies self-identity of any sort. In this way, their differences over *conatus* and will to power fall well within the broader Spinoza–Nietzsche confrontation over the nature of the immanent world, to which we shall return. Meanwhile, let us briefly consider the ethical implications of what has been said so far and its relation to the nature of the philosophical enterprise.

MORALITY AND SELF-OVERCOMING

Although Nietzsche and Spinoza reject good and evil as values embodied in nature or imposing themselves upon nature from without, they are, we said, moral philosophers in the sense of stressing human perfectibility. Each inspires his readers to seek a rare ethical achievement—*amor dei* in Spinoza, *amor fati* in Nietzsche—or at least to rise to some more attainable degree of existential liberation. Ethics, however, cannot be based upon supranatural powers, norms, categories, transcendental precepts, and the like to substitute for the transcendent God. Nor can ethics take its cue from some latent structure of the universe, as if there existed a moral world order imprinted upon things, which has to be copied or read off those things as a guideline for moral obligation. The very notion of moral obligation (or moral duty) has no sense in a strictly immanent system and must, in both Spinoza and Nietzsche, make way for *self-overcoming* as the key ethical concept.

Ethical achievements must have nature as their sole source, substrate, and principle. As strict naturalism goes hand in hand in both Nietzsche and Spinoza with a powerful ethical project, the latter must be construed as an ethics of self-overcoming, whereby

the immanent natural principle (*conatus* in Spinoza, will to power in Nietzsche) shapes itself into something higher, producing a value that neither conflicts with nature nor transcends it toward some supranatural norm, but resides in the new organization and quality of the same natural principle and the mode of life to which it gives birth.

Self-overcoming thus differs radically from what may bear a similar name in Kant, the Stoics, or Christian morality and asceticism. It does not impose external constraints upon life and the emotions but lets life reshape and sublimate itself, with one strain of emotions working on and giving shape to another. Not reason versus life, but life molding itself and enhancing its own power, generates self-overcoming in both these philosophers of immanence.

This is also a new or alternative interpretation given to the age-old concept of “spirit” or “spirituality,” though neither Spinoza nor Nietzsche uses these terms in order to avoid the adverse connotations of Christian asceticism and priestliness. Restraints that depress life by subduing it to some superior principle over and above life itself are liable to produce a morbid and self-denying asceticism that Spinoza shuns as much as Nietzsche despises. Spirit, or what should serve as its adequate substitute, is not a separate principle stemming from another world or from man’s pure and autonomous consciousness, nor does it serve to depress and subdue life. Rather, spirit (or, in Nietzsche, “free spirit”) is life itself, with its full-blooded dash and affective power, as it shapes and gives meaning to itself by that mode of self-overcoming that enhances rather than reduces its vital and creative powers. On this understanding, the Dionysian way of life is also the most “spiritual.”

The immanent ethics Nietzsche shares with Spinoza can neither recognize altruism nor accept a morality of self-denial, pity, or guilt. At the same time, it rejects unrestrained licentiousness and all forms of *laissez aller*. Grounded as it is in the respective principles of *conatus* and will to power, it places virtue in the shaped and sublimated self-assertiveness of the individual, that is, in the invigorating form of self-overcoming. But here a major difference appears.

In Spinoza the sublimation of the affects is informed by reason and objective scientific knowledge; hence it obeys definite rules and universal patterns. Not so in Nietzsche, who conceives of the life of his *Übermensch* as an open existential experiment, and who recognizes no objective knowledge, only perspectival interpretations. Self-overcoming thus has a hermeneutical aspect in Nietzsche; it is linked to a personal mode of self-interpretation whereby the individual projects and gives meaning to his or her life. To better appreciate this point, we must consider how Nietzsche and Spinoza see the nature of philosophy and its relation to life.

PHILOSOPHY AND LIFE

For Nietzsche there is no objective truth, only “perspectives” and “interpretations” that serve and are bound by existential drives and interests. Hence philosophy—or rather,

philosophizing—is not understood as a search for objective knowledge or as a new kind of science. It is, fundamentally, an evaluative attitude toward life, an attitude that both expresses and finds support in certain cognitive images. Accordingly, Nietzsche's so-called "genealogical" method sets out to uncover the origins of the various cognitive beliefs and claims to truth within the typical psychology and life preferences imbued in them. (The term genealogy connotes a search for covert origins that are to be exposed and also evaluated as "noble" or "ignoble.")

Life is always the life of some individual; hence philosophy, as a mode of life and an attitude toward it, must have an individual focus or goal. To philosophize means that a certain individual takes a stand toward life, imparts meaning to it, affirms or negates it, and thereby gives it shape. This process is not confined to the individual's intellect alone but is carried out by the fullness of his or her life, with its affective (or instinctual) basis and the will to power that this life embodies and projects. Hence life is a kind of existential *causa sui* in Nietzsche, using the term in a weak (psychological and not ontological) sense. Life is both subject and object of the process of self-interpretation; it is the generator and the value giver, as well as the subject matter that is being shaped and given meaning and value. In the (rather disapproving) words of Jaspers: man is here his own creator in the state of "self-being without God."¹⁵

The individual's self-creative attitude toward her or his life is not a mode of consciousness but of being, in which his or her instinctual life, by imparting meaning to itself and the world (through action, experimentation, inner experience, self-discipline, etc.) also transcends and shapes its raw, wild substantiality. Self-interpretation is thereby supposed to be linked to self-overcoming as well, and to the ethical perspective of life.

This view of philosophy stands of course in opposition to the time-honored ideal of philosophy as science, which Spinoza had shared and renovated, but which Nietzsche traces back to Socrates and Plato. Faithful to his genealogical method, Nietzsche objects to this ideal not only as a simple philosophical fallacy but as a decadent perspective that serves the self-image and life preferences of an unhealthy and world-weary culture, the opposite of his Dionysian ideal.

Spinoza's geometrical method not only highlights the ideal of philosophy as science; it also seems to Nietzsche to advocate a cold, repressive attitude to life and an absolute intellectual asceticism:

Non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere! [Not to laugh, not to lament, nor to detest, but to understand] says Spinoza as simply and sublimely as is his wont. Yet in the last analysis, what else is this *intelligere* than the form in which we come to feel the other three at once? One result of the different and mutually opposed desires to laugh, lament, and curse? Before knowledge is possible, each of these instincts must first have presented its onesided view of the thing or event. Since only the last scenes of reconciliation and the final accounting at the end of this long process rise to

¹⁵ Jaspers, "Man as His Own Creator," p. 153. Recall also Nietzsche's comment on Goethe: "he created himself."

our consciousness, we suppose that *intelligere* must be something. that stands essentially opposed to the instincts. [*Gay Science* 333]

Nietzsche adds that conscious knowledge is only the tip of the iceberg under which a struggle of instincts is raging. But he seems to forget that rational understanding in Spinoza suspends the emotions but does not kill them; eventually, it is supposed to enhance the power of emotion while rechannelling its direction and turning its quality from “passive” (or servile) into “active” (or free). Herein lies the ethical and affective goal that philosophy has in Spinoza. (Spinoza makes this goal abundantly clear, from the programmatic opening of his essay on the intellect to the *Ethics*.) Science with all its apparatus, including the geometrical method, is but a preparation for attaining freedom, joy, active power, and the transformation of one’s life into something resembling secular salvation.

Of course, to fulfill this goal, knowledge must be “pure,” not in the sense that it has no bearing on existential needs and drives but in the sense that, in order to properly serve these drives, knowledge must be free of bias and follow its own logic and the constraints of its subject matter. Otherwise, among other ills, it will fall prey to illusions and mystifications from which Nietzsche, too, wishes to liberate the philosopher.

Thus Spinoza is not the repressive or cold rationalist who alienates life from philosophy, as Nietzsche sometimes polemically pictures him. And yet their differences remain vast. Spinoza did not believe in an objective world and in true knowledge that can capture it (in the idiom of a contemporary philosopher, knowledge is a kind of “mirror of nature,” though the mirror in this case is part of nature itself).¹⁶ Spinoza deduced the concepts and postulates of modern science as if they were eternal truth. Moreover, he wished to experience the universe not only as a scientific object but as a theological one—as God. Hence, Nietzsche charges, Spinoza was not a radical philosopher of immanence. He disposed of the transcendent God, but kept his “shadows” alive.

IMMANENCE AND THE SHADOWS OF THE DEAD GOD

Centuries after Buddha was dead, Nietzsche tells his readers, people were still showing Buddha’s shadow lingering in a cave (*Gay Science* 108). So it is with the dead God: his shadow still hovers in and over the world of immanence, and if not exorcised, will

¹⁶ Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. The “mirror” in this case is the objective order and connection of ideas, which Spinoza also calls (metaphorically) “the infinite intellect of God,” namely, all the true ideas with their true connections. This set exists in itself in nature, as part of the attribute of thought that does not depend upon our actual subjective thinking. Hence nature, so to speak, has its own “mirror” within it; the “mirror” is its inner self-reflection.

survive for thousands of years. But “we” (meaning the new philosophers), Nietzsche insists, must overcome not only God but his shadows.

What are these “shadows of the dead God”? They include, on the one hand, the idea of a moral world order, of good and evil inscribed in the order of things, which Spinoza, as Nietzsche recognizes, had already set out to abolish. On the other hand, these shadows also include the postulates of science and of rational thinking generally, projected upon the universe as objective and eternal truths. Here Nietzsche confronts Spinoza as a direct and, in a sense, specific opponent. Many of the rationalist postulates that Nietzsche criticizes are associated with the category of substance, Spinoza’s main concept; and Spinoza’s deification of nature—which many other rationalists avoid and to which the scientific outlook is not committed—adds a distinct “shadow of God” to his picture of the immanent universe. When will the world be purified of God for us? Nietzsche exclaims. Spinoza believed that in insisting that the immanent world was “substance” and not “subject,” and by adhering to a strictly mechanistic explication of the world, he avoided any vestiges of anthropomorphism. Yet genealogically, Nietzsche argues, the concept of substance is tacitly presupposed in that of the subject; and mechanism is no less anthropomorphic than teleology, only more subtly so.

Mechanism presupposes the unfounded belief (characteristic of weak and life-weary people) in rational necessity and permanent laws, as well as a set of notions and postulates that make this belief possible although they have no corresponding reality¹⁷ but are all fictions. They are our images, serving a variety of human needs—biological, psychological, and existential.

Over immense periods of time the intellect produced nothing but errors. A few of these proved to be useful and helped to preserve the species: those who hit upon or inherited these had better luck in their struggle for themselves and their progeny. Such erroneous articles of faith ... include the following: that there are enduring things; that there are equal things; that there are things, substances, bodies; that a thing is what it appears to be; that our will is free; that what is good for me is also good in itself.¹⁸

Later (and elsewhere) Nietzsche extends this list of fictions, which he also calls “articles of faith,” to include the soul, the subject, cause and effect, form and content, geometrical entities (lines, surfaces, bodies), divisible space and time, and so on. Many of these articles of faith (especially the belief in self-identical and measurable “things” and in identical cases upon which logical and natural laws are based) are not merely intellectual abstractions; they penetrate the deepest and most immediate organic functions and build themselves into the patterns of “sense perception and every kind of sensation.”

¹⁷ Neither in the realist sense nor in the Kantian sense of a necessary universal structure of self-consciousness.

¹⁸ *Gay Science* 110. By “appearance,” Nietzsche seems to mean the scientific picture of a phenomenon, not its bare sensual face. Scientific “explanations” are phenomenal, but taken to express some “true being” of what they stand for.

They even set up for themselves a self-immunizing system: “even in the realm of knowledge these propositions became the norms according to which ‘true’ and ‘untrue’ were determined—down to the most remote regions of logic” (*Gay Science* 110).

To break this vicious circle of self-immunization—or rather, to bypass it—Nietzsche turns to his genealogical method, which does not accept rational claims to truth at face value but looks for their origins in the various needs and functions of life. “Pure logic” is neither pure nor primordial; it is the product of a life process that needs and presupposes its fictions.

THE ORIGINS OF LOGIC

Logic is bound to the condition: assume there are identical cases. In fact, to make possible logical thinking and inferences, this condition must first be treated fictitiously as fulfilled. That is: the will to logical truth can be carried through only after a fundamental falsification of all events is assumed ... Logic does not spring from will to truth.¹⁹

Fortunately for survival, our senses help in forming this fiction because “the coarser organ sees much apparent equality” (*Will to Power* 511). Moreover, as in the process of digestion, the organism assimilates as much of this fiction as it needs and discards its excesses. In *Gay Science* Nietzsche elaborates this idea in a semi-Darwinian vein:

How did logic come into existence in man’s head? Certainly out of illogic, whose realm originally must have been immense. Innumerable beings who made inferences in a way different from ours perished; for all that, their ways might have been truer. Those, for example, who did not know how to find often enough what is “equal” as regards both nourishment and hostile animals—those, in other words, who subsumed things too slowly and cautiously—were favored with a lesser probability of survival than those who guessed immediately upon encountering similar instances that they must be equal. The dominant tendency, however, to treat as equal what is merely similar—an illogical tendency, for nothing is really equal—is what first created any basis for logic. [§111]

And Nietzsche continues, in a passage that may directly apply to Spinoza (because it puts substance at the center of rationalist fictions):

In order that the concept of substance could originate—which is indispensable for logic although in the strictest sense nothing real corresponds to it—it was likewise necessary that for a long time one did not see nor perceive the changes in things. The

¹⁹ *Will to Power* 512. By “logic” we should understand beside formal logic also rationalist thinking in general, which uses it as a basis.

beings that did not see so precisely had an advantage over those that saw everything “in flux.” [Ibid.]

This advantage, as Nietzsche often points out, is not only biological but also mental. It is both painful and awesome to experience the world as the transient indeterminacy it is. Ordinary humans crave permanence, fixed and rigid entities in which to find order and consolation. Just as animals whose perception was more precise suffered a biological disadvantage, so the more discerning philosophers, the skeptics and critics of rational illusion, incur suffering and anxiety for themselves. Nietzsche, however, in his ideal of the *Übermensch*, seeks to overcome the effects of ordinary psychology in order to create a new type of response suitable for the powerful and the rare.

Nietzsche’s critique of “logic” and rationalist postulates centers on the concept of self-identical “things,” which is also the basis for the category of substance—Spinoza’s major concept. A “thing,” however, is also thought of as a self-identical unit that exercises (or submits to) causal agency. Yet to Nietzsche, causality is as much a manmade projection as is teleology. Citing Hume with approval, Nietzsche claims that there is nothing to justify our “faith” that event A has something in it that effects or generates event B. The causality we attribute to “things” is the reified projection of our own inner experience, namely, of what we feign to be the causality of our will.

“We believe ourselves to be causal in the act of willing: we thought that here we caught causality in the act.”²⁰ Hence we generalize from our will to the rest of the world and attribute will-like entities to external events as well, calling them “powers,” “agents,” or “causes.” On Nietzsche’s genealogical analysis, then, causes are magical embodiments of imaginary acts of will. And Schopenhauer, in his bizarre doctrine that being is willing, had therefore only “enthroned a primeval mythology.”

Man believed originally that wherever he saw something happen, a will had to be at work in the background as a cause, and a personal, willing being ... The faith in cause and effect became for him the basic faith that he applies wherever anything happens—and this is what he still does instinctively; it is an atavism of the most ancient origin. (*Gay Science* 127)

Causality is also based upon the fiction of the serial universe, composed of discrete, self-identical entities. Nietzsche objects not only to the causal dependence of event A upon event B, but to the very splicing of the world process into such unitary items as events A and B. “An intellect,” he speculates, “that could see cause and effect as a continuum and a flux ... would repudiate the concept of cause and effect and deny all conditionality” (ibid., 112).

The myth of the will, or the subject as agent, also underlies the concept of substance itself. On several occasions Nietzsche analyzes the concept of substance as a consequence of the concept of subject, not the reverse. This is because the subject

²⁰ *Twilight of the Idols*, “The Four Great Errors,” 3.

“is interpreted from within ourselves, so that the ego counts as substance, as the cause of all its deeds, as a doer.” Hence,

the logical-metaphysical postulates, the belief in substance, accident, attribute, etc., derive their convincing force from our habit of regarding all our deeds as consequences of our will—so that the ego, as substance, does not vanish in the multiplicity of change.—But there is no such thing as will. (*Will to Power* 488)

Seen in this light, the Spinoza–Hegel controversy would appear to be fictitious, since Hegel does not really transcend Spinoza, and Spinoza does not really oppose Hegel but rather includes Hegel’s idea of the universe as subject in his own concept of substance.

THE NATURE OF IMMANENCE AND THE PROBLEM OF TRUTH

We need not go into all the “shadows of God” which Nietzsche seeks to exorcise in order to capture his kind of world-picture and experience of immanence.²¹ But before looking at the positive world image that Nietzsche offers, a crucial question must be addressed: what is the status of Dionysian “truth?” We have seen that Nietzsche recognizes no facts, only interpretations, and no objective knowledge, only perspectives that are relative to existential interests and drives. Yet he also gives detailed accounts of the nature of the universe his *Übermensch* recognizes and experiences. Are these accounts also mere perspectives, or is there a Dionysian truth that escapes perspectivism and applies to the world prior to all interpretations?

This is perhaps the most problematic issue in Nietzsche’s thought. Neither the text nor the logic of Nietzsche’s work furnishes a satisfactory resolution. On many occasions, Nietzsche seems to suggest that there is a sober and painful view of the world and of life that deserves the name of truth *simpliciter*. The more we can take and accept of this truth, the stronger we are and the freer we may become. Frequently, Nietzsche also speaks of those who shun tragedy, transitoriness, or the multifaceted character of existence as fearing truth or fleeing from it; and he calls the opposite beliefs, the postulates

²¹ That immanence is Nietzsche’s main theme, and the meaning of his claim that “God is dead” was recognized by Heidegger. God, says Heidegger, stands for the supersensible world in general, which since Plato (or more precisely, his late Greek and Christian interpreters) has been “considered the true and genuinely real world” in contrast to the sensible and changeable world down here, which therefore is unreal. “The world down here is the vale of tears in contrast to the mountain of everlasting bliss in the beyond.” Therefore, Heidegger concludes, Nietzsche’s word that God is dead means the denial of this transcendent world, the “supersensible world is without effective power.” Transcendence is negated; immanence is all there is. (Heidegger, “Nietzsches Wort: ‘Gott ist Tot,’” p. 200; English tr. p. 61). Heidegger, incidentally, comes close to Heine at this point (see my *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, Vol. II, chap. 3).

of rational science and metaphysics, by the outright name of “errors” and “fictions.” It seems to me that this tendency betrays Nietzsche’s more direct and spontaneous mind, as he lets his “gut-philosophy,” so to speak, express itself without the critical restraints he should however have obeyed in light of his philosophical method. For on Nietzsche’s official view of philosophy, nothing can evade the hermeneutical process, there can be no “bare” facts or truth prior to a value-laden interpretation, and perspectivism is the universal rule.

If so, what is the status of the latter pronouncement? Is not this theory itself yet another perspective—a metaperspective, perhaps, but one that also depends upon an existential commitment? Yes, a Nietzschean might answer, this is the cognitive counterpart of the Dionysian way of life, which it makes possible and to which it is relative. Existential options come together with their corresponding cognitive images, but the latter depend on the former, not the other way around.

Whether Nietzsche would have lived in peace with this relativization of what he sensed as his painful and dramatic discoveries about the universe is an open question. In the final analysis, Nietzsche can neither accept nor reject the idea that the Dionysian worldview is a truth unbound by perspective. But this important question has little bearing on our present discussion for we are contrasting two rival experiences of immanence, and there is no doubt that, on whichever interpretation, the Dionysian world image enjoys in Nietzsche a privileged position as the view that he pleads for and values most. Whether his reasons are partly also cognitive or only existential is a secondary consideration for the present purposes. With this in mind, we may now summarize the Spinoza–Nietzsche confrontation on the image of the immanent world.

In Spinoza the immanent world is a rational *causa sui*, having its reason, meaning, and justification within itself. Eminently intelligible, it is illuminated, as it were, from within by the light of reason, which pervades and constitutes every entity. The universe inherits the role and status of God, and omnipresent reason takes the place of the divine presence or grace. Man, living within the immanent universe, exists within God and may rise to a detailed knowledge of this relation—with all the mental repercussions that such a consciousness entails.

God, in other words, is not dead in Spinoza. He does not disappear from the horizon of Spinoza’s philosophy but is, as Spinoza sees it, correctly identified for the first time. All the sublimity, the infinity, the supreme “wisdom” (intelligibility), the omnipresence, and the divinity of the old personal God are here attached to what is claimed to be their true and only legitimate subject, the universe or the nature-God. Spinoza not only naturalizes God but also deifies nature.

“God’s shadows” are indeed present everywhere in Spinoza. Substance and causality, self-identity and permanence are the dominant marks of his universe. And although there is also transience in Spinoza’s world (every particular thing is inevitably perishable), the individual thing also has an eternal aspect whereby it is grasped (and exists) from the standpoint of eternity. Individual things are fully determined by causal laws that, far from expressing something arbitrary or “opaque” about the universe, are thought to embody its supreme rationality and divinity. Mechanical causation is seen as equivalent to logical

derivation, and even particular things, which exist by external causes and not by virtue of their own essence, are considered from the standpoint of eternity as logically (not only factually) necessary.

In Nietzsche, on the other hand, the immanent world has no inherent reason, order, or justification. Even its natural necessity—the basis for *amor fati*—cannot be construed as a rational system of cause and effect. To Spinoza's banning of teleology Nietzsche adds the abolition of mechanical causality as another, subtler form of anthropomorphism. As there is nothing fixed and capturable in the world, there are no identical and even no *self*-identical causes and events, and thus no basis for permanent universal laws. The major categories and postulates by which we understand the universe are but useful fictions, and even logic is exposed as an illusion, an imaginary fixation of what in itself is indeterminable and evades all forms of "correct" or "true" picturing.

Against Spinoza's eminently rational, law-governed nature-God, Nietzsche thus opposes a world in everlasting flux—never self-identical, never at logical rest, never attaining equilibrium (by which it would be captured and defined) or a fixed final state—a world that is neither pure being nor pure becoming but always wavering between both. "Eternally self-creating, eternally self-destroying" (*Will to Power* 1067), the world must be experienced as a contingent and irrational variety of the *causa sui*. Though it has no transcendent cause or inherent rational grounds, it maintains itself by itself and lives of itself: "its excrements are its food." Nietzsche offers a variation of this idea in calling the world "a work of art that gives birth to itself" (*ibid.*, 1066, 796). The artistic metaphor indicates that the world has some organization in Nietzsche, though it is esthetic rather than scientific.²² But the metaphor should not be pressed too hard. Even as "work of art," the world remains indeterminable and elusive, a cluster of perspectives without fixed substance. Moreover, its art forms are themselves transitory and liable to constant change and transformation.²³

Thus we are back in the domain of flux. If Spinoza's rational substance continues the tradition of Parmenides, Nietzsche sides with his opponent, Heraclitus, but goes much further than this pre-Socratic master, since he also denies the *logos*, or fixed rational order, which in Heraclitus undergirded the world-flux.²⁴ Thus man has nothing constant to hold on to in Nietzsche's world. His experience of immanence is that of a metaphysical desert, a yoke, the everlasting undoing of all transitory forms and the constant slipping of being from under his feet.

²² This suggests, as Schacht holds (in *Nietzsche*), that Nietzsche does recognize causation but objects to the duality of cause and effect as separate items. The world process is a continuum and a totality, where both simultaneously and consecutively innumerable features take shape and flow into each other. It is flux in the ancient sense of Heraclitus, or rather Cratylus, where one cannot enter the same river even once, yet the river flows on.

²³ For a detailed study of Nietzsche from this perspective, see Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*.

²⁴ Nietzsche would agree with Cratylus, who radicalized Heraclitus in saying that one cannot enter the same river even once, since flux undermines self-identity and there is no such thing as the same river. But even Cratylus did not deny—as Nietzsche does—the eternal logical order of the universe that the flux constitutes and reproduces.

The following quotation from the end of *Will to Power*, where, using a mixture of poetic and semiscientific idioms, Nietzsche projects his “positive” vision of the world, sounds like the last of the pre-Socratic philosophers:

And do you know what “the world” is to me? ... This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expand itself but only transforms itself; ... at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms, out of the simplest forms striving toward the most complex ... and then again returning home to the simple out of this abundance, out of the play of contradictions ... a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this, my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, ... my “beyond good and evil,” without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself ... do you want a *name* for this world? ... this world is the will to power—and *nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides! [*Will to Power* 1067]

This famous passage (over which we are told that Nietzsche toiled) seems to be written more as a metaphysical fable than as a full-fledged scientific theory. But it conveys the kind of immanent world experience that Nietzsche suggests as the stuff of the Dionysian affirmation.

Another pertinent fable is eternal recurrence, which does not as much impose a fixed order on the universe as it dramatizes the inescapability of immanence. For it bars any perspective of life either outside the world or within it (in some better future) by which life in the present can be redeemed, guided, or given meaning. And as life has no source of meaning beyond itself, it must be endowed with meaning on the basis of its instantaneous character.

ETERNAL RECURRENCE AND *AMOR FATI*

Eternal recurrence, says Nietzsche, is the chief doctrine taught by his Zarathustra. I shall not discuss the question whether eternal recurrence was also meant as a full-fledged cosmological theory but take it as an existential fable, expressing the kind of self-overcoming that *amor fati* involves. Seen in this way, eternal recurrence serves to better explicate the content of *amor fati* and also to test its existence.²⁵

²⁵ I share Schacht's view that eternal recurrence appears primarily as a test for the Dionysian life. Only later did Nietzsche also try to see “whether it might as well be true” (Schacht, *Nietzsche*, p. 260). This attempt powerfully tempted Nietzsche but is overridden with problems, both within the theory proper and in its status as metaphysical “truth.” On this last issue it ties in with the general problem of truth

Eternal recurrence derives its primary meaning in Nietzsche as the theme of a major act of affirmation. Whether in joy, routine, or suffering, and although he does not see an inherent purpose or readymade meaning in existence, the Dionysian man will say “yes” to his life as it is by wishing this life to repeat itself over and over again, exactly as it has been, without any novelty, betterment, progress, or the like. In *Gay Science* (351), Nietzsche expresses this idea in terms of an acute temptation and test:

What if one day or night a demon were to sneak after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you, “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything immeasurably small or great in your life must return to you—all in the same succession and sequence. . . .” Would you now throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him, “You are a God and never have I heard anything more Godly”? . . . How well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?²⁶

This is the utmost affirmation of immanence. By craving that every moment, every passing “joy and sigh” be repeated forever, I recognize the closed horizon of immanence as the totality of existence, and also, in *amor fati*, transform this recognition from a burden into a celebration. It is not resignation but the active joy of the self-created man, liberated from the external yoke of transcendent religion, morality, utopia, or metaphysics.

It should be noted that what I wish to be endlessly repeated is not only the content of every moment but its very momentariness. Immanence is identified here with the present, with what exists now as merely transitory, and in wishing it to recur time and again I equally wish it to pass away. Or rather, I recognize and accept the mode of being in which transience is the rule.

Herein also lies Nietzsche’s alternative to Goethe’s Faust. Faust craves being able to say to the moment, “Stay forever”; he wants eternity to be placed in this-worldly moments. Nietzsche does as well, but to him this-worldly moments contain their passing away within themselves; hence Nietzsche cannot tell the moment to stay forever but only *to repeat itself* forever. In this way he both adheres to the moment and affirms and accepts its inevitable transience.

I sketched earlier. But even as a perspectival hypothesis it has its problems of coherence, both within the rest of science and concerning its postulates. How can identical states recur if there is nothing identical in the world? This in itself should have undermined all efforts by Nietzsche to canonize his existential fable of recurrence into a semiscientific theory. Fortunately, however, the existential and ethical function (and meaning) of this fable does not depend on its being also a full-fledged cosmological theory. Hence I may ignore this question when trying to use eternal recurrence to explicate the experience of immanence in *amor fati*. Magnus calls it a “countermyth” (*Nietzsche’s Existential Imperative*, chap. 6).

²⁶ I am using Magnus’s slight corrections.

Significantly, Nietzsche attributes eternal recurrence to Heraclitus, his master in matters of flux and transitoriness. But Nietzsche also could have found this theme—colored in pessimistic and “decadent” tones—in the Preacher’s complaint that “there is no new thing under the sun” and “the thing that hath been, it is that which shall be.” The Book of Ecclesiastes concludes that all is vanity and life is a burden, whereas Zarathustra and his followers are supposed to make the ultimate confirmation of immanence a source of celebration.

Eternal recurrence dramatizes the inescapability of immanence. In being prepared to live every moment of my life innumerable times over and again, I renounce any claim or hope for a “next world.” Even my hope for the future does not refer to a better state of this world (as in Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Christian and Jewish eschatology) but to the same kind of existence taken over and over again. What is to replace my present life is this same life again—that is, *nothing* is to replace my present life. Immanent life is all there is. In calling for its identical repetition I thereby assume the weight of immanence as my only horizon.²⁷

But what kind of immanence? Certainly an immanence very different from that of Hegel or Spinoza. In Hegel, the historical progress toward freedom and self-knowledge offers a perspective in which the human race (and through it, being itself) is to be actualized. Although the immanent world is all there is, it has, so to speak, an inner transcendent dimension—the *telos* (goal) it has to realize and become. This also gives time a qualitative character in Hegel, as the medium of historical novelty and advancement. Spinoza admits of no such teleology, and like Nietzsche, he views time (or better, duration) as qualitatively neutral.²⁸ At best, the notion of progress in Spinoza has a subjective meaning relative to *conatus* and personal desire. An individual may indeed attain a rational way of life, but this occurs by mechanistic causes and does not manifest any inherent structure or goal of the world-substance as such. In other words, God (the universe) is utterly indifferent to the human lot and to human ethical and rational achievement.

This view, of course, makes Spinoza much more appealing to Nietzsche than Hegel and his followers. But Spinoza, too, must be perceived by Nietzsche as having his own eternalistic, rather than historical, form of “transcendence within immanence,” because he accepts the eternal substance and laws of nature as underlying the world of change and as reflecting the inherent rationality and timelessness of God. Even what Spinoza calls *natura naturata*, the world of finite and transitory things, is not really in flux, because it is eternally shaped by *natura naturans* and because, thereby, the transient particulars have their self-identity while they last.

²⁷ But Nietzsche is less naive than the young Heine. Nietzschean man is no stranger to suffering and the temptation of pessimism, and there is a Sisyphean element in the fable of eternal recurrence.

²⁸ “Duration” is Spinoza’s term for the temporal process as a real mode of being, before its continuity is broken by limits and measurements. The latter is called *tempus* and is considered unreal, a mere (though necessary) “auxiliary of the imagination.”

Moreover, in the third kind of knowledge and its accompanying experience of *amor dei intellectualis*, the transcendent element of timelessness is even said to enter the immanent particular (the knowing mind) and transform it in such a way as to abolish its finitude and make it allegedly infinite. Here, the penetration of eternity into the domain of transience has not only scientific, but semimystical connotations.

Nietzsche's eternal recurrence excludes both historicist and eternalistic transcendence.²⁹ The only eternity Nietzsche admits is the endless recurrence of transitory states, in which his Dionysiac philosopher will place all the worth that tradition had attributed to permanence. This will not be passive resignation but the active joy and vigor of a person delivered from the grip of transcendent religion. But this, it should be stressed, is an immensely difficult task that calls for a new type of psychology and person.

It is essential to see that *amor fati*, with its celebrating assumption of immanence, runs counter to normal human psychology. Ordinary people, Nietzsche expects, will experience pure immanence as a yoke and an oppression. Their natural response to it and to recurrence is pessimism and world-weariness, the depression of their vital powers—or the various forms of escape and self-deception current in religion and traditional philosophy (Spinoza not excepted). It takes a powerful act of defiant affirmation, a supreme “nevertheless,” to transform the oppression of immanence into its opposite, joy and celebrating power, and this requires a new and rare kind of psychology, the one that constitutes and expresses the *Übermensch*.

To make this transformation feasible, the individual needs support from a whole new culture based upon the revaluation of all values (of which, therefore, *amor fati* and recurrence are the cornerstone): “No longer joy in certainty but in uncertainty; no longer ‘cause and effect’ but the continually creative; no longer will to preservation but to power.” While these new values are diametrically opposed to Spinoza's teaching, there are others on which Spinoza himself had insisted, like “freedom from morality; the abolition of the ‘will’; the abolition of ‘knowledge-in-itself’” (*Will to Power* 1059, 1060).

Amor fati thus differs from Spinoza's *amor dei* not only in content and mood but also in its mental structure. Spinoza's *amor dei* expresses a harmonious agreement with the universe, whereas *amor fati* involves an inner rupture and distance, bridged by an act of defiant affirmation. This has several implications.

First, the structure of defiant affirmation endows the Nietzschean *Übermensch* with a greater share of agency than can be credited to its Spinozistic counterpart. In Spinoza, any progress of the mind is determined by continuous, semimechanistic lines of logical inference and psychological determinism. Even liberation, once attained, was not caused by us but “occurred” to us. In Nietzsche, however, a person attains *amor fati* through an act of defiant assent, by which he or she introduces a break into the ordinary

²⁹ Hegel, incidentally, unites them both in the same *telos*. The goal of historical progress in Hegel is the suprahistorical (or eternalistic) standpoint that is to emerge from it. After this occurs, there will be a kind of eternal recurrence of the same in Hegel's world too—namely, the same rational and timeless principle maintaining itself as actualized throughout the empirical varieties in time. Time will again lose its qualitative nature; there will be only chronological time but not a strictly historical one.

course of events, negating its normal (and continuous) outcome and producing its opposite instead. Thus, even without admitting free will, the person may be credited with more agency and, indeed, freedom in bringing about the ethical state he or she values.

Second, the moment of rupture and defiance precludes all mystical connotations from *amor fati*. There can be no form of *unio mystica* here, as in Spinoza, because the defiant posture entails a distance between the affirming person and the universe he or she affirms and loves. *Amor fati* bridges this gap but does not abolish it. On the contrary, it maintains the tension of “nevertheless” as a constant feature of itself. Thus Dionysus, though he bears a mystical name, actually stands for a non-mystical attitude.

Finally, *amor fati* is an overcoming of Christianity—even in its atheistic cover. Pessimistic atheism remains at bottom a Christian frame of mind because it denies all value to the immanent world as such. What is more Christian than feeling miserable and oppressed in a Godless universe? It is only when the temptation of pessimism is resisted and the world as divested of all “shadows of God” is accepted and experienced as a source of joy that man becomes his own creator and, for the first time, Christianity is overcome and Dionysus supplants Christ.³⁰

THE TEMPTATION OF PANTHEISM

In the rare moments of religious temptation, when his “god-forming instincts occasionally become alive,” Nietzsche comes close to Spinoza in picturing an impersonal God existing beyond good and evil:

Let us remove supreme goodness from the concept of God; it is unworthy of a god.
Let us also remove supreme wisdom; ... God the *supreme power*—that suffices!
Everything follows from it, “the world” follows from it!

And in a different mood:

Is it necessary to elaborate that a God prefers to stay beyond everything bourgeois and rational? And, between ourselves, also beyond good and evil? (*Will to Power* 1038)

Yet these moments of religious (and pantheistic) temptation are declared to be “impossible” and Nietzsche resists them. Spinoza’s *deus sive natura*, Nietzsche says, betrays the

³⁰ One can, however, argue whether this overcoming of Christianity is essential to the Dionysian posture or only a necessary historical condition, but Nietzsche writes for his contemporaries. Even if the future *Übermensch* will celebrate immanence immediately, Zarathustra can only do so as an overcoming of Christianity.

illicit “longing to believe that in some way the old God still lives” and “the world is after all like the old beloved, infinite. God” (ibid., 1062). But this is precisely what *amor fati* and recurrence preclude. Even Dionysus, the symbol of transient immanence, should not be deified. It is true that Zarathustra, in an imprudent moment, declared that he would believe only in a God who could dance (Dionysus). But this, Nietzsche later reassures us, was merely a manner of speaking, a counterfactual conditional: “Zarathustra says he would, but he will not”; for “Zarathustra himself is merely an atheist; he believes neither in old nor in new Gods” (ibid., 1038).

The pantheistic temptation and its resistance reveal something else to us. A God existing beyond good and evil could suit Nietzsche’s critique of morality, but is incongruous with his sense of being in the world, with *amor fati*, and thus is rejected. In resisting the pantheistic temptation, Nietzsche makes it clear that his philosophy is not exclusively concerned with a critique of morality but centers on a reevaluation of the whole experience of existence. The new values he seeks are not moral ones but existential modes and responses to life (like the love of transience, the joy in uncertainty, etc.); they constitute, indeed, a new psychology that could not co-exist with pantheism (just as, on other grounds, it is incompatible with mysticism).

POLITICAL NORMATIVENESS

Amor fati and *amor dei* are, of course, the highest achievements that Nietzsche and Spinoza offer as immanent philosophers bound by an ethics of self-overcoming. But the same principle of radical immanence also affects their views of the origins of political normativeness.

To account for the origin of binding rules of conduct in a world that has no inherent values and norms, Spinoza had recourse to the notions of contract and consent—a fact that makes him one of the first modern political philosophers and anchors his protodemocratic views directly within his doctrine of pure immanence. As there is nothing on earth or beyond it to generate binding norms and obligations, these can only be drawn from the consent of actual human beings who set up a government to use and distribute power in the service of their natural desires. Thus it is only with the state and its enforceable legislation that normativeness emerges in the world and makes sense at all.

This interplay of consent and power stands at the heart of Spinoza’s view of political authority. Consent is needed to set up political institutions and state power is needed to keep them in effective existence. Moreover, consent itself is seen by Spinoza as a form of power that checks the power of the state. When a government is felt to be unjust or illegitimate, this will undermine political stability and threaten the survival of government. On the other hand, state power cannot penetrate the individual’s mind and dominate his or her inner thoughts (so Spinoza, living before Stalin, believes). Hence liberal democracy (as we call it today) is the preferable system, not because it embodies a priori

values or the innate rights of man, but because it is best suited to reconcile state power to the power of thought and procure a relatively stable and peaceful government. In other words, Spinoza is an early democrat, not because he believes in transcendental norms but because democracy is best suited to a world from which they are absent—a world of pure immanence.

In linking political authority to human consent Spinoza is obviously a disciple of Hobbes. But he objects to Hobbes' pessimistic portrayal of man's natural disposition to others; and, especially, he takes Hobbes seriously to task as an inconsequential naturalist. Hobbes wished to derive all human affairs, including political authority, from nature alone, but did not strictly adhere to his own principle.

Hobbes based obligation on the binding power of the contract. But why keep the original contract? This meta-obligation Hobbes could not ground within the contract itself, so he relegated it to a grey area of precontract normativeness which he called "natural law," a curious name and problematic concept for the strict naturalist philosopher Hobbes claimed to be. The notion of precontract normativeness flirts dangerously with that of a "natural moral order" to which both Spinoza and Nietzsche must object. In addition, Hobbes' construal of the contract introduces a degree of discontinuity between nature and civilized life. In overcoming the natural state of man, the original contract establishes the foundations of civilized life as a new domain, a kind of "realm within a realm." It provides for a universe where man, through this new realm, is ultimately said to spring from nature; it includes the semi-*a priori* moment of "natural law" with its doubtful naturalistic credentials, and causes an inner rupture within nature that gives rise to civilization as a semi-autonomous domain. Nature and reason, the natural and the civilized states, are linked but not quite continuous with each other. Hobbes seems to deviate from a strict naturalistic monism in favor of the vestiges of Christian (or Platonic) dualism, to which, at the price of logical coherence, he makes what seems to Spinoza unacceptable concessions.

Spinoza, at least in his official doctrine, makes no such concessions. He construes the passage from the natural to the political domain as continuous, and recognizes no "inner leap" in nature or a "realm within a realm" founded by civilization. Strictly speaking, the state of nature is not overcome by the political contract but continued in a different mode. This is why, in the last analysis and after allowing for necessary nuances, the idea that "might is right" has strong literal application in Spinoza. For this reason, however, *actual* consent is needed no less than the original (and abstract) contract in order to sustain a stable political life. Since nothing, including the original contract, can guarantee the keeping of contracts, state power is needed to enforce them; but as state power cannot compel the mind, it becomes indispensable to acquire the consent of the governed to the authority of their government. Again we see how Spinoza's strict naturalism—viewing the state, including a liberal democracy, as a natural play of forces—also stands at the root of his democratic tendencies. Spinoza is a harbinger of modern liberal democracy (as against Hobbes' tyrannical state) because of his stricter adherence to naturalism and the principle of immanence.

Spinoza rejects Hobbes' grim and pessimistic portrayal of man's natural disposition to other humans. To Hobbes' *homo homini lupus est*, Spinoza retorts provocatively with *homo homini deus est*. There is in man a natural potential to mutual help and mutual benefit, based upon *conatus* and natural interests. Hobbes' pessimistic picture translates the Christian myth of original sin into secular terms, but is still a prisoner of this myth. By nature, man's disposition to others depends on circumstances and the psychological laws of association and resemblance. On certain occasions they will produce rivalry and envy, on others empathy and compassion. Man is thus morally indifferent by nature—a position that no longer conceals religious motifs and which Nietzsche will welcome contra Hobbes, as he will also hail Spinoza's rejection of pity as a keystone of morality.

Nietzsche's Dionysian metaphysics of power has frequently been misrepresented as a political doctrine, leading to Bismarckian politics and also to fascism and nazism. Dispelling these gross distortions and misconceptions (which cannot be done here) does not, however, provide us with a positive political doctrine that can be attributed to Nietzsche. But there are many negatives: Nietzsche opposed nationalism, the modern nation-state, patriotism, racism, anti-Semitism, liberalism, socialism—indeed, those ideas that were most of the new trends of his time based upon the phenomenon of the mass society. In denouncing these “modern ideas,” Nietzsche may seem to betray a taste for something like conservatism, yet he does so under a misleading mask; for there is very little in the past he wishes to preserve. He was a cultural radical looking forward to a future where politics would lose its importance in human affairs altogether. The only “great politics” he sometimes hints at concerns the unification of Europe and the mixing of its races; but this, too, has a cultural goal for Nietzsche, not a political one.

In mood, taste, and sensibilities, Nietzsche may indeed be placed on the “right-wing” spectrum of politics.³¹ Yet beyond these vague generalizations, a positive political doctrine can hardly be derived from Nietzsche's thought. His failure to provide such a theory is perhaps in the first place due to his being a profoundly antipolitical philosopher—a cultural aristocrat, aloof from the base concerns of the mass society which he snubs but cannot cope with. All political ideologies repel him because of their strong reliance on the masses. And there is little he denounces in stronger terms than the modern cult of politics and the state—that “new idol” of which Zarathustra strongly warns his followers³² and which Nietzsche repeatedly declares to be the enemy of culture.³³

This aristocratic disdain of politics reflects a dangerous confusion. Inevitably, modern politics is mass politics. To combine the dreams of a rare Dionysian hero with the realities of mass society (as Nietzsche in off moments is tempted to do) is as unrealistic as it is a call for abuse. Nietzsche's *Übermensch* cannot be universalized—that is, vulgarized—without incurring logical contradiction and social and political disaster. Fascism,

³¹ Perhaps there is some doubtful room for a kind of left-Nietzscheanism as tried in America since the 1960s, to which Nietzsche himself would almost certainly have objected. For another objection, see Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, pp. 225–26.

³² *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “On The New Idol,” p. 160.

³³ *Twilight of the Idols*, “What the Germans Lack,” pp. 1, 4.

though abhorrent to Nietzsche, is one of the tragic caricatures of such an impossible combination of the aristocratic and the vulgar. As the shopkeeper, the bus driver, and the petty intellectual worker are endowed with “Dionysian” qualities and placed beyond good and evil, the result must assume onerous dimensions. Nietzsche himself, of course, would have recognized in nazism everything he loathed—extreme nationalism and xenophobia, mass culture and the cult of the state, *ressentiment* and the identifying marks of a “slave morality” which can assert the self only by negating others. Yet Nietzsche’s general paralysis when it comes to dealing with political theory, and his failure to provide an alternative way of emancipation for the ordinary man (the basis of political theory in Spinoza), place the tension and the danger of abuse well within the confines of his philosophy.³⁴

SPINOZA AS A GENEALOGICAL SCANDAL

Perhaps because of their striking “dualitude,” the person of Spinoza always haunted Nietzsche. “Hermit, have I recognized [i.e., unmasked] you?” Nietzsche asks in a poem, *To Spinoza**. Has he indeed?

Some of Nietzsche’s comments on Spinoza would apply equally to himself. A “sick hermit” Nietzsche calls Spinoza, a “shy” and “vulnerable” man who has put on a “masquerade” (his geometrical method) in order to shield his most personal philosophy from a prying, vulgar world. Shifting metaphors, Nietzsche also calls Spinoza’s mask a “chastity belt” and his personal philosophy “a virgin.” The erotic allusion again applies to both these bachelor-philosophers (a kinship Nietzsche highlights elsewhere) and sheds more light on the term *hermit*.³⁵

Yet these similitudes cease when Nietzsche comes to the core issue—the love of permanence and eternity. Here the enemy-brothers pattern takes its full force. Spinoza is denounced as the symbol of weakness and decadence, a man oppressed by his own existence, fearful of the Dionysian truth, and unable to cope with the trying implications of his own discovery: that immanent existence is all there is.

* Lovingly facing the “one is everything”
amor dei, happy from comprehension—
 Take off your shoes! That three times holy land—
 —Yet secretly beneath this love, devouring,
 A fire of revenge was shimmering,
 The Jewish God devoured by Jewish hatred . . .
 Hermit! Have I recognized you?
 —(Nietzsche, *Werke*

[Leipzig: Kroner, 1919], 8: 369, my translation)

³⁴ On this and related issues, see also Rosen, “Friedrich Nietzsches politische Welt,” p. 221; Polin, “Nietzsche und der Staat.”

³⁵ *Genealogy of Morals* 3, p. 543.

Sketching a “psychology of metaphysics” that should apply to all rationalists since Plato, Nietzsche singles out Spinoza as the prime example of those who “have feared change, transitoriness,” a stand which he says betrays “a straightened soul full of mistrust and evil experiences.” Even the *conatus*, Spinoza’s most naturalistic principle, is exposed as “the symptom of a condition of distress,” because in stressing self-preservation it puts an unhealthy limitation on will to power, the actual principle of life (*Gay Science* 349). No wonder, Nietzsche surmises, that the survival principle has been advanced by sick philosophers “such as the tuberculosis-stricken Spinoza,” since these people “indeed suffered distress.”

This is not all. Nietzsche goes on to attribute rancor and subtle vengefulness to Spinoza, even as the psychological essence of his work:

These outcasts of society, these long-pursued, wickedly persecuted ones—also the compulsory recluses, the Spinozas and Giordano Brunos—always become in the end, even under the most spiritual masquerade, and perhaps without being themselves aware of it, sophisticated vengeance-seekers and poison brewers (let someone lay bare the foundations of Spinoza’s ethics and theology!). (*Beyond Good and Evil* 25)

The context is Nietzsche’s attack on the philosopher-martyrs who are supposed to have suffered “for truth’s sake”; but with minor differences, it is also a form of *ressentiment* which Nietzsche sees at the root of Spinoza’s ethics and metaphysics.³⁶ In exposing the “poison” of *ressentiment* in Spinoza’s philosophy, Nietzsche not only burdens Spinoza with the ills of rationalism but, paradoxically, also with the ills of his forefathers, the Jewish priests through whom Christianity had taken over the world.

Here we start to note the incongruence in the portrait Nietzsche is bound to draw of Spinoza. In Nietzsche’s genealogy, the philosophy of Spinoza must be seen as expressing and reinforcing the kind of person with the following characteristics. He is the lover of permanence, hence a decadent and weak person who, oppressed by the burden of immanence and by his own existence, escapes the painful perspective of Dionysian truth toward illusory metaphysical comfort. In addition, he is also petty, full of rancor, and mistrust, the man of *ressentiment* who can assert himself only by negating others and who transforms (or sublimates) his vengefulness into the creation of inverted values and theories. Such a person is also bound to glorify suffering and pity, to inspire (and submit to) guilt feelings and *morsus conscientiae*. In short, he is bound to be exactly the kind of petty “slave” moralist whom Nietzsche abhorred and was exhilarated to discover that Spinoza was not.

³⁶ *Ressentiment* is the dominant attitude of the weak and decadent persons who cannot be assured of themselves unless they negate others; it is the genealogical source of the morality of good and evil, whereby the psychological “slaves” take subtle vengeance on their betters by subjecting them to their own inverted values.

Thus Spinoza upsets Nietzsche's genealogical scheme. Although a lover of permanence and eternity, he is, like Nietzsche himself, a philosopher of power and joy, rejecting the moralism of good and evil, guilt and pity, and trying to expurge the mind of the negative and self-poisonous emotions of envy, hate, rancor, and *ressentiment*, which he sees as a form of suffering that depresses the vigor of life.

Something has gone wrong in Nietzsche's genealogy. Spinoza, his enemy-brother, presents him with a singular counterexample. He is both a Nietzschean and yet a lover of reason and permanence. Spinoza is thereby a genealogical scandal for Nietzsche—impossible, unthinkable, yet embarrassingly real.

Spinoza had already played this unsettling role in the past. The image of the virtuous atheist he projected was an intolerable scandal to his contemporaries and to later generations. Atheism was supposed to lead inevitably to moral anarchy and destructive violence; but Spinoza's philosophy of ethical restraint and mutual help, together with the legend of his saintly life, seemed to attest to the contrary. Nietzsche, of course, is the first to claim that atheism and barbarism are not the same; but he is embarrassed by the semi-Dionysian virtues Spinoza advocates and manifests despite his decadent rationalism. This again highlights the enemy-brother relationship between the two men, for it is by being partly Nietzschean that Spinoza upsets Nietzsche's oversimplified unmasking of rationalism.

Can there be, then, a more rationalist Nietzschean? Was Goethe coming close to being one? Or the young Heine (who admired Spinoza and whom Nietzsche admired)? Or, put less personally, can a more radical recognition of reason's finitude (but also, as such, of its worth)—a finitude that goes far beyond whatever Kant has signaled—help bring out the kinship of these enemy-brothers over and above their opposition?

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CHAPTER 25

SPINOZA'S AFTERLIFE IN JUDAISM AND THE TASK OF MODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

MICHAEL L. MORGAN

BARUCH Spinoza was the most important participant in the philosophical response to the rise of the new science and the scientific revolution to have been born within the Jewish community and educated within the Jewish tradition. Furthermore, he was the most important early modern philosopher to have been influenced by the heritage of medieval Jewish philosophy, of Jewish commentaries on the biblical text, and of other Jewish literature. By themselves, however, his Jewish birth and upbringing and the influence of Jewish tradition on his works have never been sufficient to explain the interest of subsequent Jewish writers, philosophers, and political leaders in Spinoza and his work. Rather, it is the combination of the striking character of his thought, together with the circumstances surrounding his excommunication and his place within and then without the Jewish world, that has resonated in the minds and hearts of so many Jews.

But the echoes of Spinoza and Spinozism in Jewish life have been anything but uniform. Looking for a model of the advocacy for tolerance and freedom of speech, for the preeminence of reason and rationality, for democracy and the freedom of the state and public life from religious domination, and for novel views of God, divine providence, and human salvation, indeed for a heretical alternative to traditional orthodoxies, Jew after Jew has found that model in Spinoza. At the same time, other Jews, looking for a model for the threats to Judaism and Jewish identity of modernity, of atheism and materialism, of a critical and historical reading of sacred texts, of a reductive and functional analysis of Jewish laws and practices, and of a denial of free will and an adherence to a scientific worldview, have found no better example than Spinoza. The excommunicated Jew, who lived most of his adult life estranged from Jews and in the company of

rationalist Christian sectarians, may seem to be an unlikely friend and even an unappealing adversary. But he has been both, often and in significant and provocative ways.

In the following pages, I want to do three things. First, I will take note of some of the many Jewish intellectuals and leaders who have found inspiration or provocation in Spinoza. Here, I will be brief. We have surveys of his influence and resonance, and I will not repeat what is available elsewhere.¹ Second, and more importantly, I will consider the philosophical significance of Spinoza's legacy within Judaism. That significance, I will argue, concerns the different ways in which Spinoza has become a symbol of philosophical tendencies in Jewish self-understanding. Finally, I will look at several Jewish philosophers who have taken an interest in Spinoza at one time or another, to see how their various responses to him exemplify the symbolic modalities of Jewish character I have identified. These figures are Leo Strauss, Emil Fackenheim, and Emmanuel Levinas. My discussion will of necessity be brief and highly focused, but I hope that we can see, by looking at these cases, how the symbolic presence of Spinoza signals a dialectic in modern Jewish philosophy concerning various interpretations of Jewish existence and their interaction.

SPINOZA AND SPINOZISM IN JUDAISM

Students of modern Jewish culture and thought have noted that Spinoza and Spinozism seem to occur everywhere from the early eighteenth through the late twentieth centuries, although it is more difficult to find Jewish intellectuals who were influenced by Spinoza or by followers of Spinoza. Those who cite him, refer to him, and eulogize him are not always familiar with his work, and even if they are, their familiarity does not always extend to a deep analytical understanding of it. Some, however, do address him and his thought and do exhibit such depth and sophistication. Moreover, some focus on the Spinoza of the *Ethics*, while others call upon the Spinoza of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. In short, the currents of Spinozism that flow through modern Jewish culture and thought are anything but uniform. Some, such as the Italian Samuel David Luzzatto, criticized Spinoza, while others, from Moses Hess to David Ben Gurion and Isaac Deutscher, praised him and considered themselves followers of a sort. Others, such as Martin Buber and Joseph Klausner, addressed him on occasion but for what are rather incidental reasons. Isaac Bashevis Singer employed Spinozism in order to portray the tension between reason and passion in Judaism.² Figures such as Hermann Cohen commented forcefully on Spinoza's excommunication and his role in Jewish life and Jewish thought; yet some never refer to the excommunication or do so only incidentally. Philosophers, such as Salomon Maimon, Leo Strauss, and Emil Fackenheim,

¹ For example, Levy, *Baruch Spinoza*. See also Schwartz, "Spinoza, the First 'Modern Jew'"; Schwartz, *First Modern Jew*.

² I refer here, of course, to Singer's famous short story "The Spinoza of Market Street."

were primarily interested in Spinoza's place in modern philosophy as well as his role in modern Jewish philosophy; others found most compelling his image as a heretic, a hero of liberation and emancipation from the bonds of institutional religion. Given the diversity of responses, it is not easy to say what kind of classification of those who read and discussed Spinoza would be most helpful.³

For our purposes, let me call attention to a few moments in Spinoza's Jewish reception during the past three centuries. Not long after Spinoza's death and the publication of his works, he was for the first time taken to be a Kabbalist and a Neoplatonist and to have provided a philosophical articulation of central concepts of the Lurianic Kabbalah, especially those of divine contraction (*tzimtzum*) and emanation. In 1785, Moses Mendelssohn, in the *Morgenstunden*, identified Spinoza with Kabbalah and castigated both for *Schwarmerei*, "sentimentality," although, in Mendelssohn's first book, written thirty years earlier, he had argued in Spinoza's behalf, and elsewhere in the *Morgenstunden* he is less dismissive. Somewhat earlier in the eighteenth century, Salomon Maimon, in his *Autobiography*, had claimed that Spinoza's account of the substance-mode relationship was a philosophical articulation of the Kabbalistic notion of *tzimtzum*, the initial act in the process of creation whereby, eventually, the material world is realized within the space vacated by an original divine abundance.⁴ Later, in the twentieth century, Spinoza's possible indebtedness to Kabbalistic concepts was noticed on several occasions, especially the similarity of his ideas to those of Abraham Cohen Herrera (c.1570–1635) and his metaphysical system in the early chapters of his *Puerta del Cielo* (*Gate of Heaven*).⁵

The tradition of associating Spinoza with the Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition, and, in particular, with the cosmological system of Isaac Luria (1534–1572) goes back to the late seventeenth century. The story has been told on several occasions. Let me mention the highlights.⁶ The central figure is a German deist, Johann Georg Wachter, who, on a visit to Amsterdam in 1698–99, met Moses Germanus, a convert to Judaism who had become the rabbi of the Spanish-Portuguese congregation in Amsterdam after the collapse of the Sabbatean messianic movement in Holland.⁷ Moses Germanus, whose original name was Johann Peter Spaeth, took Spinoza's ideas, especially those in Part I of the *Ethics*, to be very similar to the Neoplatonic account of the Kabbalah given in Herrera's *Puerta del Cielo*, a work that Spinoza may very well have known: a Hebrew

³ There are even those who never or virtually never cite Spinoza, yet in whose work others have identified a strain of Spinozism. See, e.g., Magid, "Spinozistic Spirit."

⁴ See Melamed, "Salomon Maimon," esp. p. 82 and fn. 57. For an important, classic description of *tzimtzum* as the initial act in the process of creation out of nothing in the Lurianic Kabbalah, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 260–264, and also 264–268 on the complementary notions of the "breaking of the vessels" and *tikkun* (repair or mending). See also Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 128–152.

⁵ See especially Popkin, "Spinoza, Neoplatonic Kabbalist?"; Brann, "Spinoza and the Kabbalah."

⁶ See Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, esp. pp. 645–652; Popkin, "Spinoza, Neoplatonic Kabbalist?" My account is indebted to both.

⁷ Popkin, "Spinoza, Neoplatonic Kabbalist?," p. 390.

translation of the Spanish work was published by one of Spinoza's rabbis, Isaac Aboab, in 1655.⁸ Moses Germanus, drawing on Herrera's work and his familiarity with Kabbalah—Herrera was one of the translators of the *Kabbala Denudata*, a compendium of Latin translations of Zoharic and Lurianic texts published by Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, a Christian Kabbalist, in 1677 and 1684—associated Spinoza with the Kabbalah.⁹ In 1699, Wachter published an account of his conversations with Moses Germanus, *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb* (1699), in an attempt to attack Judaism by identifying Spinoza's atheism with the Kabbalah and Judaism with the latter.¹⁰ The core of Wachter's identification of Spinoza with the Kabbalah was that Spinoza had simply restated Kabbalistic themes in Neoplatonic vocabulary, and the central mechanism for so doing was, as Wachter saw it, their common adherence to the Principle of Sufficient Reason and its corollary, that nothing comes into being from nothing (*ex nihilo nihil fit*).¹¹ This principle, which was central to Spinoza's account of substance and mode and to his system overall, was also the principle that the Kabbalah appropriated from Neoplatonism and that underpins the idea that everything, even the material world, must come from God, which, as *Ein Sof*, is itself no-thing and is therefore itself wholly independent. In a sense, that is, Wachter takes the narrative of emanation in the Lurianic Kabbalah to represent the logical relationships of substance, attributes, and modes that are found in Part I of the *Ethics*. Wachter's conclusion, then, was that for Spinoza, and hence for the Kabbalah and for Judaism, God determines all things, and all things occur within him, so that "God is the author of evil, wars are conflicts which God incites against Himself, and the baseness, anger, and aggression of men is all hatred of God of Himself." The outcome is a rejection of religion and morality in any traditional sense.¹²

In a later work, the *Elucidarius Cabalisticus* (1706), Wachter addresses the same issue, the relationship between Spinoza and the Kabbalah, but he does so in a different spirit. He does continue to identify them, but rather than attack the pair, he praises both. That is, in this work and subsequently, Wachter advocated a natural religion in which God, the divine intellect, and the world were taken to be the same. It is a view that he found in the Kabbalah, in Christianity, and in Spinoza, primarily by reading Proposition 7 of Part II of the *Ethics* as claiming a real identity of the attributes of thought and extension.¹³

This reading of Spinoza and the Kabbalah, together with various criticisms of Spinoza's reading of the Bible, became common fare in the eighteenth century. It was appropriated and discussed, for example, in Jacques Basnage's *The History of the Jews from Jesus*

⁸ We have an excellent translation with notes by Kenneth Krabbenhoft. Books I and II are especially interesting when compared with the *Ethics*, Part I. Herrera is explicitly indebted to Plotinus and Proclus, whose *Elements of Theology* is cited frequently.

⁹ Popkin, "Spinoza, Neoplatonic Kabbalist?" p. 390.

¹⁰ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 646. See also Popkin, "Spinoza, Neoplatonic Kabbalist?" pp. 400–401.

¹¹ Popkin, "Spinoza, Neoplatonic Kabbalist?" pp. 392, 394–395, 398.

¹² Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 648; and Wachter, *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb*, iii, pp. 60–61, quoted in Israel

¹³ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 649–652.

Christ to the Present Time: Containing their Antiquities, their Religion, their Rites, the Dispersion of the Ten Tribes in the East, and the Persecutions this Nation has suffer'd in the West. Being a Supplement and Continuation of the History of Josephus (London, 1708; originally published in French in 1706 and revised in 1716).¹⁴ Leibniz repeated Wachter's claim that Moses Germanus "believed Spinoza had revived the ancient cabbala of the Hebrews."¹⁵ Moreover, this identification was at the heart of Salomon Maimon's famous comment in *Autobiography*:

In fact, the Kabbalah is nothing but expanded Spinozism, in which not only is the origin of the world explained by the limitation of the divine being [namely, by *tzimtzum*, or contraction], but also the origin of every kind of being, and its relation to the rest, is derived from a separate attribute of God [in Kabbalah, the *sefirot*]. God as the ultimate subject and the ultimate cause of all beings, is called *Ensoph* (the infinite, of which, considered in itself, nothing can be predicated). But in relation to the infinite number of beings, positive attributes are ascribed to him; these are reduced by the Kabbalists to ten, which are called the ten *Sephirot*.¹⁶

Maimon, in this passage, takes Spinoza to have formulated philosophically what in the Kabbalah is the doctrine of the ten divine attributes, or *sefirot*. And just as in the Kabbalah, God has no attributes per se but does have attributes in terms of his relationship with the infinite number of beings; so, in Spinoza, the one and only substance, insofar as all things are dependent on it for their existence and follow from it necessarily, is mediated for them by infinite attributes, of which the two that are realized in our world are thought and extension. What the Kabbalah expresses graphically in terms of the images of the *Ein Sof*, the *sefirot*, *tzimtzum*, and more, Spinoza formulates as the necessity of vertical causation from substance to finite modes, via the action of attributes, through the infinite immediate modes, and so forth.

If there is a reception of Spinoza that links him with the Kabbalah and associates his conception of *amor Dei intellectualis* with the Lurianic notion of *tikkun olam*, there is another reception that links him more directly with the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and its advocacy of liberal democracy, tolerance, and freedom of speech. Spinoza's historical context was the wars of religion of his time, and, like his contemporary Thomas Hobbes, one of his motives was to restrict the power and influence of religious institutions in order to free citizens from the ill consequences of religious war and civil strife and provide them with tranquility and peace of mind.¹⁷ In this context, Spinoza's special

¹⁴ Popkin's important paper ("Spinoza, Neoplatonic Kabbalist?") is framed as a discussion of Basnage's thirty-page discussion in book 4 of his history; Popkin gives the text as Livre IV, Ch. V, 4.128–158; pp. 294–299 in the English folio edition of 1708.

¹⁵ See Leibniz, *Theodicy*, sec. 9.

¹⁶ Maimon, *Autobiography*, p. 105; *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, p. 84; quoted by Melamed, "Salomon Maimon," p. 83.

¹⁷ Moses Hess, in *The Holy History*, takes the Thirty Years War to be the primary context into which Spinoza was born (p. 33).

contribution was to argue for liberal democracy and the separation of the private and public domains and to interpret Scripture as supporting this separation and the freedom of inquiry and of speech it permits. To argue for these claims, within the Jewish tradition, is to wrestle with the plight of the Jews as an oppressed and persecuted people and to seek to redeem Jewish dignity through political action. For some Jews, that political action would take place in societies in which Jews are a minority and hence would aim at supporting efforts in behalf of liberal democracy. For others, that political action would be interpreted as nationalistic, as the impassioned struggle to realize the hopes for a Jewish state. Moses Hess (1812–1875) was one who found this political and activist Spinoza extremely appealing, and even emblematic of a special kind of courage.

Hess was an important, if minor, figure in the early development of socialism and communism in the 1830s and thereafter.¹⁸ As the author of one of the first modern Jewish nationalist works, he is also considered an early, central advocate in the emergence of Zionism in the nineteenth century. Born and educated in a traditional Jewish community in the Rhineland, he was largely self-taught in Western philosophy. Throughout his career, his writings on socialism had a distinctly Jewish quality, and he took the model of Jewish identity and Judaism to be Spinoza, whom he took to represent the most important Jewish contribution to modernity: the ideas of unity, universality, and historical concreteness that are the foundation of socialism. In this way, Spinoza showed the young Jew a way to philosophy that required, too, a separation from Jewish orthodoxy.¹⁹ From his early work, *The Holy History of Mankind* (1837)—which he published anonymously as the work of a “young disciple of Spinoza”—to his last major work, *Rome and Jerusalem* (1862), Hess took Spinoza to be the paradigmatic advocate of a socialism that would bring with it justice and equality for all humankind.

According to Hess, in *The Holy History of Mankind*, Spinoza ushered in the third and culminating stage of Western history. Spinoza’s contribution was multifaceted. First, he synthesized the ancient Jewish commitment to the concrete realization of genuine community, its combination of religion and politics, spirit and matter, with Jesus’s advocacy of universal salvation for all humankind, into a universal socialist message. In other words, he looked forward to a universal socialist community that would mediate between Judaism and Christianity. Second, in response to Hegel and the Left Hegelians, Hess saw in Spinoza the hope for the historical realization of this socialism in the future. In support of this project, finally, Spinoza represented, too, the shift from theoretical contemplation to practical action, from metaphysics to ethics. Spinoza, that is, reaffirmed the Jewish idea of the messianic future by showing how a social democracy could be realized historically for all humankind. Essential to such a socialist society would be the elimination of inheritance rights, which would lead to the erosion of the practice of private property and the decline of all the divisions that this practice engendered.²⁰

¹⁸ My account of Hess is indebted to the excellent study *Moses Hess*, by Shlomo Avineri.

¹⁹ Avineri, *Moses Hess*, pp. 21–22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–46, 69–72.

However, while we can make these general points about Spinoza's significance for Hess, it is much harder to clarify with any precision exactly where Hess finds them in Spinoza's writings. One reason is that in *The Holy History of Mankind*, Hess only infrequently cites Spinoza, and when he alludes to him, it is not altogether clear what reading drives the allusion. Avineri points us in a helpful direction when he asks, "What was Spinoza's specific contribution to world history and why did Hess consider him a harbinger of the New Age?" and then answers, "*Amor dei intellectualis*, the intellectual love of God was, according to Hess, Spinoza's great achievement."²¹

Avineri does not say that identifying and clarifying this *concept* of the highest form of human life was Spinoza's great achievement. Rather, he says that for Hess the achievement was Spinoza's accomplishing such knowledge, what Hess calls, throughout the work, the "knowledge of God." The content of that knowledge, which is also a knowledge of nature and history, is unity, the unity of the spiritual and the material in all manner of ways—of religion and politics, of ideals or values, such as justice and equality, with concrete social and economic conditions, and so on. This is the central teaching of E2p7, that the order and connection of ideas is one and the same as the order and connection of bodies, as Hess reads it.²²

Of course, this pivotal proposition, which plays a fundamental and continuous role throughout the *Ethics* after being introduced, is often taken to refer narrowly to the mind-body relationship. For recent commentators, there is controversy over whether the proposition means that there is one state of affairs that can be grasped and understood from two points of view, that is, a monistic or nondualist reading, or two separate orders of being that are isomorphic or coordinated—an order of ideas or mental states of affairs and an order of extended or physical states of affairs—a dualist or nonreductionist reading. Hess's interests, however, are less metaphysical than that. He regularly refers to the knowledge of God or the science of nature as "life," which suggests that he takes the totality of nature to be an organism and its discrete contents to be organic totalities, which, in the case of human beings, can be understood as physical systems with emotional and cognitive capacities. Although this reading may incorporate metaphysical assumptions, Hess's use of the proposition is not primarily metaphysical at all. For him, the proposition speaks to much larger and more embracing issues, which in Marxism have to do with ideology and the economic, material base, and which in Hegel concern thoughts, values, and culture generally and in their relation to the natural world, concrete conditions, and historical realization. That is, for Hess, E2p7 concerns the separation between spirit and matter writ large and all the divisions, dichotomies, and bifurcations that the pair involves or entails—those between culture and nature, rich and poor, aristocracy and peasantry, religion/morality and politics. To Hess, it is part of Spinoza's achievement to have shown and to have realized in his own system that

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²² See *ibid.*, p. 111; compare p. 156, fn. 15. Hess used this proposition as the motto for his second work, *European Triarchy* (1841). Avineri notes that Hess takes France and its activist, revolutionary tradition to realize this unity of consciousness and action in behalf of justice and equality (p. 98).

it is by means of a special “knowledge of God” (*amor Dei intellectualis*) that one grasps this unity, and that this special kind of knowing is by means of reason and not feelings or fantasy, imagination. This is what Hess means when he says,

As our Master [Spinoza] appeared, Christ has triumphed. And once again, a period has come to the end of its cycle. The history of revelation of God the Son—or the knowledge of God in the feelings of the soul [what Spinoza would call the knowledge of the first kind, in E2p4os2]—which has until now dominated the earth [i.e., in Christianity], has been fulfilled and closed. With our immortal Teacher [i.e., Spinoza], the foundations of the new age have been laid; with him began the history of revelation of God [as] the Holy Spirit, or the purest knowledge of God [i.e., what Spinoza would call the knowledge of the third kind in E2p4os2]. When Spinoza was fully formed, he united once again, like his ancestors Adam and Christ, the conflicts of his age in his divine soul into a living whole [i.e., in his knowledge of God, his system, which is founded on the ultimate unity of all nature in the one and only one substance, God or Nature]. And once again, he saw more than his predecessors and deeper than his contemporaries [e.g., Descartes or Hobbes]; for he recognized God who is Life. For God revealed himself to him not in the feelings of his soul, but in the bright light of reason.²³

These last sentences mean that unlike ancient Judaism, which united spirit and matter (culture or ideas and the natural world and the world of politics) in fact but not in thought, and Christianity, which based its knowledge of nature, God, mind, and the material world on sense perception, imagination, and feeling, Spinoza based his grasp of the real unity of all on a rational construction, on reason deducing a unified system from foundational definitions and principles. Moreover, as we shall see shortly, it was a systematic understanding that issued in an ethics, in a mandate to realize the unity it comprehended in reality by means of social revolution.

This grand unity is manifest in human history and in social life through action; Hess associated this political action with the French revolutionary tradition. It involved the formation of human associations based on cooperation and collaboration. This point is most surely taken directly from Spinoza. In a remarkable passage, Hess virtually reproduces a line of thinking from the *Ethics*, one that is present, too, in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*:

The inner essence of all salvation is, according to the Master’s teaching [i.e., Spinoza’s], the knowledge of God, the united consciousness of life. Accordingly, good is what promotes this knowledge; bad, by contrast, is what prevents or beclouds it. And because there is nothing for man in all of nature which promotes more his humane determination, [i.e.,] the knowledge of God, than his brethren who are inspired by the same striving—it is further good that men associate, live in society.

²³ Hess, *Holy History*, pp. 37–38.

This is the teaching of the Master. He did not teach what should be, but what is: what is here in all eternity, this he merely brought to consciousness.²⁴

This account, of course, captures Spinoza's reasoning in E4p35–37. Human beings live best when they live according to reason. As Spinoza says in E4p35c1, "There is no singular thing in Nature which is more useful to man than a man who lives according to the guidance of reason." What Hess calls "social association" is a human good, for it facilitates the striving for that knowledge of God which characterizes every rational person. Moreover, according to E4p37, the good that a reasonable person wants for himself, he also wants for everyone, and the more his life is governed by reason, the more he wants the good. These considerations account for the rise of the civil state, which Spinoza clarifies in E4p37s2. It is in such a state, which allows men "to live harmoniously and be of assistance to one another" (G 2:237), that men are governed by laws backed by sanctions and are told what is good and what is evil. Moreover, in the state of nature, prior to the establishment of a civil state, "all things belong to all" (G 2:238). There is neither justice nor injustice. These come into being only with the civil state, "where it is decided by common consent what belongs to this man, and what to that" (G 2:238–39). In Hess's words, human association and cooperation, the consent to give up power to a sovereign in order to coordinate individual conduct to the benefit of all, are goods that all acknowledge. But the institution of private property leads to inequity and the oppression of the poor by the rich; hence, while the state is necessary, what is desirable is a movement to eradicate the inequities in property that lead to injustice and suffering.²⁵ The movement in behalf of socialism, in Hess's time, then, ought to aim at creating a just and equal society.

In the passage just quoted, Hess makes a point of saying that Spinoza teaches what is, and not what should be. That is, in the *Ethics*, Spinoza gives an account of how rationality has led humankind to live in societies and to establish states to govern them. In other words, Spinoza takes it to be the case that human beings naturally live in societies and form structures to order and govern them. Still, Hess often speaks of Spinoza as recovering the Jewish idea of messianism, which he says is Judaism's most important contribution, and that idea surely has a normative and evaluative character. It is about what ought to be done, and not simply about what is. Spinoza's metaphysical and scientific understanding of nature, human beings, and society is not purely descriptive; it issues in a normative outcome, the emergence of ethics. For Hess, Spinoza advocates socialism, and he is aware, too, that socialism, at our given historical moment, will require the establishment of nations with a socialist commitment. For all his universalism, like Spinoza, Hess is nonetheless a realist, and it is in this respect that he finds his way to advocate for a national Jewish revival in the people's ancient homeland. But why, if the goals of socialism are universal, is it necessary to establish national homelands and, in

²⁴ Hess, *Holy History*, p. 64.

²⁵ See *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Chapter 16, for Spinoza's account of the genesis of the civil state, the empowerment of the sovereign, and so forth.

particular, for the Jews to establish a national homeland for themselves? Hess's answer to this question is not a simple one.

According to Hess, Judaism's special contribution to Western history is the idea of messianism, the idea that moral purposes ultimately will and ought to be realized politically.²⁶ The historical process, which will culminate in the messianic age, is just that, a process, and one in which national differences make a contribution. Different national peoples and cultures make different contributions to the messianic realization, the creation of a just and equal socialist state. In the end, this goal is the aim of all history for all peoples. The goal is universal, but given national differences, their contributions are distinctive. Hess makes this point by claiming that the universality of all humanity requires the mediation of individuality, and that individuality is both the particularity of discrete individual persons and the identity of nations.²⁷

Judaism is fundamentally a nation, a life of cultural and social practices aimed at realizing a just and equal society and characterized by communal and social solidarity. In antiquity, Judaism was originally a national culture and society, but in the course of Western history, it has been stripped of its national character; in Germany in particular, it is treated as a religious community founded on beliefs. Furthermore, the Jewish people are politically oppressed and socially restricted. This alienated condition not only is a distortion of Judaism's essential character as a nation; it also severs the Jewish spirit from its social and material ground. What is needed is to recover Judaism's national identity by striving to re-establish a Jewish national home in its ancient land. Since social emancipation is, in Hess's mind, associated with class issues and socioeconomic conditions, with national subjection, it requires as a solution national liberation, which involves control of political institutions and of productivity and land. Specifically, such a transformation requires that the Jewish people possess their own land and that the legal conditions for labor and associations be directed by Jewish, that is, social democratic, principles. The Jewish state should be a socialist one that aspires to eradicate social differences that lead to inequality and injustice. But the critical point is that the messianic movement of a modern Judaism as heralded by Spinoza must be a national one, the re-establishment of a Jewish state.²⁸ According to Hess, this was Spinoza's view, for he clearly took Judaism to be a nationality: "Spinoza still conceived of Judaism as a nationality and believed that the restoration of the Jewish State depended merely on the courage of the Jewish people."²⁹

²⁶ See Avineri, *Moses Hess*, pp. 216–218. Hess takes messianism to refer to ethical and political progress, which is intelligible from the point of view of agents within history.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 173, 177.

²⁸ See Hess, *Rome and Jerusalem*, p. 23: "The Kingdom of the Spirit is proclaimed in the Bible as coming in the future. For a long time this prophetic pronouncement was understood as referring to a hereafter, as having nothing in common with present life. Spinoza was the first to understand the Kingdom of the Spirit as a present reality. With Spinoza, came its beginning. But it is still in its embryonic stage." See also Avineri, *Moses Hess*, pp. 214–237; Hess, *Rome and Jerusalem*, pp. 77–89.

²⁹ Hess, *Rome and Jerusalem*, p. 28. This is clearly a reference to the national portrait of the Jewish state in antiquity, as Spinoza portrays it in *TTP*; Hess is alluding to Spinoza's comment at the end of Chapter 3 about the re-establishment of the Jewish state.

Unlike so many of Spinoza's other Jewish readers, Hess was inspired by Spinoza, had read him, and considered himself a follower or disciple. I have tried to show how his acknowledgement of Spinoza is rooted in his reading of particular texts and, especially, of the way in which, for Spinoza, human life is a unity of the spiritual and the material, as Hess would put it. For him, Spinoza is a kind of organic monist, and surprisingly perhaps, he found in Spinoza a commitment to the universality of the Jewish messianic idea and also a recognition of its nationalist dimension.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SPINOZA'S JEWISH RECEPTION

How might we formulate the philosophical significance of the Jewish reception of Spinoza?³⁰ That reception is complex and varied, as I have pointed out. In a few cases, Spinoza was the object of serious, detailed study by Jews, who called attention to him either because they found him congenial or because they found him repugnant. In many other cases, he was not studied with care and in a nuanced way. Rather, he presented an image—of a rebel or revolutionary spirit within Judaism, of a paradigm of integrity and rational dignity, or, possibly, of a benighted rejector of all that is revered and valuable in Judaism. To many, he represented a call to action; to others, he portrayed an arid intellectualism and rationalism that failed to appreciate what is rich and vital in Jewish life.

There is doubtless some truth in all these perspectives, for there is indeed a richness in Spinoza, in his life and his thinking, that challenges rather than easily conforms to any simple formulation. What I would like to suggest, however, is one such perspective, a philosophical one, that from one direction shines a light on the Jewish Spinoza reception that I believe is fruitful. Let me formulate my point this way: the reception of Spinoza indicates one venue in which modern Jewish philosophy struggles with Platonism, a set of tendencies Judaism finds fascinating and abhorrent, all at once.

Platonism—which I use here as a term of art—comes in two varieties. One is the Platonism of Plato's *Phaedo*. Its hallmarks are the commitment to a separation between two ontological domains, that of pure, unchangeable, and perfect being and that of changing, contingent, and imperfect becoming, and the separation between the human body and the soul that inhabits it. According to the ontological scheme, the domain of being is that of the Platonic Forms, and the domain of becoming is the contents of the physical and temporal world of our everyday lives. The former can be grasped only by reason functioning on its own, while the latter is the venue of emotions, desires, sense perception, and imagination. Moreover, this set of dualisms corresponds to a set of

³⁰ This section is indebted to conversations with Paul Franks, with whom I am writing a book on modern Jewish philosophy that will employ a version of this scheme to locate developments in Jewish philosophy from the seventeenth century to the late twentieth century.

evaluations: sense perception and the emotional life grounded in it are inferior to the life of reason. The Forms are objects of the highest value, while the changing, obscure items in the physical, material world are of lesser value. Universality is valued over particularity; that which is absolute and unconditioned, over that which is qualified and conditioned; and that which is permanent and eternal, over that which changes and is contingent and historical.

There are strains in Judaism that seem to aspire to such a Platonism and the Gnostic denigration of the physical world and what is associated with it. Many such strains respect the universality and eternity of Jewish beliefs; they treat ordinary life as a virtual chaos in need of purification and sanctification, and they take God, wholly transcendent, to have graciously made available—through a detailed legislation or set of norms—the means to carry out this process of purification. Or, they reject the world of the mundane altogether, take it to be unredeemable, and find in Judaism techniques for fleeing the world, escaping into an intimacy with a transcendent God.

There is, however, another form of Platonism, what I will call a “realistic Platonism.” This is the Platonism of the *Republic* and, perhaps, of the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*. Here, too, there is a separation between two domains, but they are treated not as radically severed but, rather, as intertwined, as two dimensions of one reality, or as one reality embedded within another. Unlike the view of the person as a combination of two utterly different components, a soul and a body, here the soul is a set of capacities that are associated with the body in complex ways. The soul is not the seat of reason, while all other psychological states are associated with the body. Rather, the body is itself complex in its motivational and affective character, and its capacities are related intimately to the soul in various ways. Similarly, sense perception and desire are vehicles for growth and development, and there is no such thing as a pure and wholly disengaged cognitive grasp of the Forms, no goal of wholly disengaged knowledge. All knowledge is of the way in which the world and human conduct are structured and ordered as they are. This is a Platonism of the streets; it is Platonism that is a halfway house between pure Platonism and Aristotelianism. And it is a far cry from Democritus, Epicurus, and the Stoics, materialists all.

My claim, then, is that the Jewish reception of Spinoza brings to the surface some of those features that characterize the lure of Platonism, in its pure form; yet it highlights the way in which to remain Jewish, one must move toward the more realistic Platonism that inclines toward Aristotelianism, where the dichotomies of reason and desire, body and soul, form and matter, and much else are less rigid and even more extensively intertwined.

This way of viewing the philosophical significance of Spinoza, however, most applies to those Jews who find some positive value in Spinoza. They want to accept his naturalism but adapt it, so to speak, so that it does not lead to a complete rejection of God and Judaism. But there are Jews who do not see that positive value, and this calls for another way of reading him. It is a way that is best expressed in the Pantheism Controversy of 1784–85, initiated by the correspondence between Friedrich Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn regarding Lessing’s Spinozism. A particularly helpful interpretation of the

philosophical significance of the controversy is given by Frederick Beiser in *The Fate of Reason*. According to Beiser, the main philosophical problem behind the controversy is the dilemma between rational skepticism and irrational faith. Spinoza is taken to represent the fullest, most developed expression of rationality and the work of reason, and reason or philosophy is hence taken to lead to skepticism regarding God and religion, morality, and common sense or ordinary beliefs. The outcome of philosophy, as exemplified by Spinoza's system, is nihilism and a kind of solipsism. The only way out of this impasse is through a leap of faith. Either one commits oneself to philosophy, science, and atheism, or one accepts God, the world, and morality on faith. This dilemma represents the way Jacobi saw Spinozism; the latter symbolized an emerging scientific naturalism, an uncompromising commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason and the determinism it implies. It leads, moreover, to relativism about value and hence to what Jacobi, in his new coinage, called nihilism. The attack on Spinoza is an attack on natural science, and the fear of Spinoza is a fear of all that science entails—atheism, determinism, moral skepticism, and nihilism.³¹

To Jews drawn to Spinoza, who view him in some positive light, the philosophical significance of their encounter, then, is the struggle against pure Platonism as I have described it. But for the Jews who are repelled by Spinoza or who fear him or take him to raise a powerful challenge to Judaism, the issue is not one against Platonism; it is about the truth of scientific naturalism and all that follows from it. It is, that is, against Epicureanism and the critique of religion, as Leo Strauss would have it. Moreover, this problem about naturalism does have its effect on the attractiveness of Spinoza; it is, perhaps, part of what leads the Jewish reader of Spinoza to mitigate his appeal and what leads such a reader to find, between pure Platonism and the skepticism of naturalism and the plight of nihilism something that I have called a “realistic Platonism.”

JEWISH PHILOSOPHICAL RECEPTIONS OF SPINOZA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

I would like now to test my proposal about how to understand the philosophical significance of Jewish Spinoza reception, by briefly examining three twentieth century readings of Spinoza by philosophers, indeed Jewish philosophers. They are Leo Strauss, Emil Fackenheim, and Emmanuel Levinas. While we cannot offer comprehensive readings, we will need to say enough to be able to judge whether these three provide sympathetic or critical readings and how they place themselves in terms of the Jewish encounter with Platonism and the naturalist skepticism that I have identified.

Leo Strauss's study of Spinoza began in 1924, with his response to Hermann Cohen's wartime attack on Spinoza, and culminated in the publication of his first book, *Spinoza's*

³¹ See Beiser, *Fate of Reason*, pp. 44–108, esp. 75–91.

Critique of Religion, in 1930. I want to set aside any overall account of Strauss's intellectual career and the place of this episode within it and focus on the main issue of this early encounter, the question whether Spinoza had refuted revealed religion or orthodoxy. For these purposes, I can also ignore any detailed examination of Strauss's book and look primarily at his famous autobiographical statement, in the preface to the English translation of the book, published in 1965, concerning the context for his encounter with Spinoza.

There is a broad context for Strauss's examination of Spinoza and a narrow context. The broad context is the theologico-political predicament of a young Jew in Weimar Germany and, by implication, in the modern world; the narrow context is the question of whether or not to cope with that predicament by returning to Jewish orthodoxy. I will not spend much time on the former, since there are many excellent, detailed accounts of Strauss's conception of the theologico-political predicament of the Jew in the modern world.³² The predicament marks the situation of a Jew in a modern liberal democracy, for in such societies, those who choose to remain Jews are nonetheless still the targets of prejudice and hatred. Liberal democracies cannot protect Jews from such attitudes and hence from persecution and various kinds of restrictions on their freedom. Such attempts at reconciliation between orthodoxy or revealed religion and liberal democracy and its culture of reason are failures. Here Strauss follows Nietzsche. Such failures indicate a "failure of nerve" on the part of liberal democrats, a tendency toward "self-deception" on the part of the orthodox, and a "refusal to 'endure fearful truth'" on both their parts.³³ How does the modern Jew, then, deal with this aporia? Strauss canvasses various options and shows their flaws: secularism, neo-orthodoxy, and Zionism of various forms—political, cultural, and religious.³⁴ The upshot is that the Jew with "intellectual probity" faces a choice, either return to orthodoxy and revelation or abandon it for secular atheism.

Strauss puts it this way:

One wonders whether an unqualified return to Jewish orthodoxy was not both possible and necessary—was not at the same time the solution to the problem of the Jew lost in the non-Jewish modern world and the only course compatible with sheer consistency or intellectual probity. Vague difficulties remained like small faraway clouds on a beautiful summer sky. They soon took the shape of Spinoza—the greatest man of Jewish origin who had openly denied the truth of Judaism and had ceased to belong to the Jewish people without becoming a Christian. It was not the "God-intoxicated" philosopher but the hard-headed, not to say hard-hearted, pupil of Machiavelli and philologic-historical critic of the Bible. Orthodoxy could be returned to only if Spinoza was wrong in every respect.³⁵

³² Recent ones include Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss*; and Smith, "Leo Strauss and Modern Jewish Thought," esp. pp. 148–152. There is an excellent account in Tanguay, *Leo Strauss*, esp. pp. 10–48. I have given an account in Morgan, "The Curse of Historicity."

³³ Smith, "Leo Strauss and Modern Jewish Thought," p. 151.

³⁴ Janssens is especially focused on the Zionist attempts and their interrelationships; see *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, pp. 8–18.

³⁵ Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique*, p. 15.

If Spinoza's critique of revealed religion was effective, then no return to orthodoxy was possible, which is compatible with rationality. But was Spinoza's critique compelling?

Strauss turns to Hermann Cohen's attack on Spinoza. Cohen, when he wrote in 1915, had been offended by those among German Jews who sought to rescind the ban against Spinoza and proceeded to venerate him. Cohen opposes such veneration and criticizes Spinoza for having taken a Christian point of view in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, together with its traditional critique of Judaism as materialistic, carnal, and political; for having taken the side of politics over against religion; and for having attacked Judaism for its parochialism yet at the same time for acknowledging the universal ethical character of a biblical faith. These, among other criticisms, formed the core of Cohen's negative attitude toward Spinoza. In the end, Cohen charges Spinoza with lacking the fidelity and love one associates with a member of the Jewish people.³⁶

Strauss, in his preface and elsewhere, conducts a detailed refutation of Cohen's attack, arriving at the conclusion that Cohen has not read Spinoza carefully enough. He was not sufficiently attentive to Spinoza's style and to the context in which he wrote. Hence, he did not understand Spinoza. "Cohen read Spinoza on the one hand not literally enough and on the other hand much too literally; he understood him too literally because he did not read him literally enough."³⁷ Ultimately, Strauss's chief criticism of Cohen is that he never came to grips with the central question raised by Spinoza, whether his critique of religion—and this means of religious orthodoxy, of revealed religion—had in fact refuted orthodoxy. As Strauss puts it, he simply took it for granted that Spinoza's system had refuted revealed religion. But for someone living in Cohen's time and in Strauss's, this is the most central question.³⁸ Cohen had, however, advanced this project without carrying it out, for he had helped to dislodge the veneration of Spinoza that might have been an obstacle to a serious critical examination of him and because Cohen had aimed at the right target, the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, not the *Ethics*. This latter is an important consideration.

Strauss reasons this way. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza argues from definitions and other premises that already presuppose that orthodoxy or revealed religion is false. There is no argument in the *Ethics* to that effect; the work begs the question. The reason for this feature of Spinoza's system is that it is presented from no particular point of view but, rather, from the standpoint of an impersonal, detached reasoner; the system elevates rationality and the standpoint of the divine intellect and is itself presented from that point of view. In the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, on the other hand, Spinoza's authorship is dialectical, in the Platonic and Aristotelian sense of that expression. As Socrates points out in the *Meno*, definitional inquiry that involves question and answer,

³⁶ For an excellent account of the reasons for Cohen's critical attitude toward Spinoza after 1910, especially the role of Cohen's opposition to pantheism and his belief that Kant's negative treatment of Judaism in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* was indebted to Spinoza's political account of Judaism in the *Tractatus*, see Nauen, "Hermann Cohen's Perceptions of Spinoza."

³⁷ Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique*, p. 26.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

that takes the form of the interrogation of an interlocutor, must proceed according to assumptions that the interlocutor can be expected to accept.³⁹ In Spinoza's case, the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* argues on the basis of Scripture and so would seem to be aimed at an audience that includes Jews and Christians, who are receptive to philosophy and the new science, but whose beliefs are grounded in scriptural authority. Spinoza's audience, that is, includes adherents of revealed religion; and if Spinoza does deliver a critique of revealed religion in that work, it will be effective only if it can convince these readers to change their minds about orthodoxy and accept that kind of scriptural faith, a universal moral faith, that is one outcome of Spinoza's case. In the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Spinoza registers arguments against orthodoxy and against Maimonidean rationalism. In order to demonstrate that faith is compatible with scientific and philosophical rationality, on the one hand, and with liberal democracy, on the other, he presents and defends a biblical hermeneutic that supports a reading of Scripture according to which it teaches this universal moral faith that does not conflict with scientific and philosophical reason.

This way of putting Spinoza's project in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* is mine. Strauss puts it slightly differently:

In the *Theologico-political Treatise*, however, Spinoza starts from premises that are granted to him by the believers in revelation; he attempts to refute them on the bases of Scripture, of theologoumena formulated by traditional authorities, and of what one may call common sense [Spinoza calls this the "natural light"]. For in the *Treatise* Spinoza addresses men who are still believers and whom he intends to liberate from their "prejudices" so that they can begin to philosophize; the *Treatise* is Spinoza's introduction to philosophy.⁴⁰

I think that it is important to keep in mind that for Spinoza, philosophy is his version of Cartesian scientific philosophy; the believers he addresses are not "vulgar" believers but, rather, ones with a willingness to accept such philosophy, even if they are only willing to do so on the authority of Scripture, or at least if it does not conflict with Scripture, when properly read. Hence, the *Tractatus* is an introduction to philosophy, in a sense, or perhaps more precisely, it is a bridge to scientific philosophy from the standpoint of faith and revelation.

How, then, does Strauss understand what Spinoza has accomplished? He uses a strategy that is very similar to the strategy that Maimonides, in Part II of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, uses to show that the Mosaic view of creation, which he takes to be the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, and the Aristotelian view of the world's eternity are equally possible. Maimonides argued that none of the traditional arguments for Aristotle's view are compelling; hence the conclusion that the world is eternal, is not necessary. There is only scriptural support for the Mosaic view, but if the Aristotelian view is possible, then

³⁹ See Plato, *Meno* 75c8–e5.

⁴⁰ Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique*, p. 28.

so is the Mosaic view.⁴¹ Strauss argues, in a similar way, that Spinoza's naturalism and revealed religion may be in conflict and incompatible; but if Spinoza's system is not necessary, then both views are possible. In Strauss's words:

The genuine refutation of orthodoxy would require the proof that the world and human life are perfectly intelligible without the assumption of a mysterious God; it would require at least the success of the philosophic system . . . Spinoza's *Ethics* attempts to be the system but it does not succeed; the clear and distinct account of everything that it presents [the rational, scientific account] remains fundamentally hypothetical. As a consequence, its cognitive status is not different from that of the orthodox account. Certain it is that Spinoza cannot legitimately deny the possibility of revelation. But to grant revelation is possible means to grant that the philosophic account and the philosophic way of life are not necessarily, not evidently, the true account and the right way of life: philosophy, the quest for evident and necessary knowledge, rests itself on an unevident decision, on an act of will, just as faith does. Hence, the antagonism between Spinoza and Judaism, between unbelief and belief, is ultimately not theoretical but moral.⁴²

The core of Strauss's evaluation of Spinoza's critique of orthodoxy and revealed religion, then, is that it fails because it is ultimately hypothetical, and not unconditional and certain, and if so, then deciding between faith and scientific naturalism is a moral issue, not an epistemological or cognitive one. Furthermore, as Strauss goes on to claim, philosophy seeks to be rational, and rationality requires compelling reasons and cannot be based on decision; the outcome of Spinoza's failed critique is that rationality has shown itself to be fundamentally flawed. If philosophy is based on an act of will, it is fatal to philosophy, Strauss argues; hence, the real outcome of Spinoza's failed critique is the "self-destruction of philosophy," which, he says, is "not an unmitigated blessing."⁴³

Let me set aside Strauss's reasons for worry. They are not unworthy, for in part they have to do with the role of rationality in traditional Judaism and even more seriously with the rise of Nazism, of fascism, and the atrocities bred of blind allegiance and fanaticism. For our purposes, however, the central question is whether Strauss is right that Spinoza's critique fails. If his biblical hermeneutic is grounded in his naturalism, and his naturalism is grounded in various hypotheses, how much does this weaken the case for a scientific philosophy? And if the philosophical critique of revelation fails, is the outcome that philosophy is an act of will? And does this lead to the self-destruction of philosophy itself?

To begin with, in what sense is Spinoza's critique of orthodoxy hypothetical? Roughly speaking, Strauss argues that Spinoza's system in the *Ethics* is hypothetical insofar as it is a deductive system that relies upon definitions and axioms as premises. Furthermore, Spinoza's argument in the *Tractatus* is hypothetical insofar as his method for reading

⁴¹ See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Part 2, chapters 13–25.

⁴² Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique*, p. 29.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Scripture relies upon the premise that the Bible is a book like any other book, which denies *ab initio* the sacred, revealed character of the Bible, and thus begs the question.⁴⁴ Furthermore, traditionally miracles are signs that are evidence for revelation, and Spinoza's account of miracles as natural events that are yet to be explained, which is how ordinary reason would treat them, does not so much refute the fact of miracles as treat the issue as one of knowledge rather than fact. According to Strauss, Spinoza's reason for rejecting the traditional notion of a miracle is that his system proves that there are no acts of divine intervention into the natural, causal order.⁴⁵ In the *Tractatus*, however, this denial is assumed, not proven, for the limits of our knowledge do not prove that there are no acts of divine intervention; that the order of nature is closed causally is understood by reason but not by philosophical reason. "Reason, devoid of faith, engaged in the pursuit of scientific inquiry, shows itself as immune to miracles."⁴⁶ In the end, then, either Spinoza's critique of revealed religion is based on common sense at best, or it is based on a system that relies on definitions and axioms that are unproven but must themselves be accepted on faith. But is Strauss right that Spinoza's refutation is somehow compromised by being hypothetical in these ways? Moreover, is Strauss correct that this failure entails that Spinoza's naturalism is grounded in an act of will and therefore suspect?

First, would Spinoza have taken his own system to be hypothetical, and if so, would that have qualified its results? No. Spinoza claims self-evidence for the definitions and axioms which he employs and for the Principle of Sufficient Reason, which is everywhere operative in the working out of his system. Spinoza would not have considered the definition of substance, for example, and those of attribute and mode, to be hypotheses and for that reason epistemologically suspect or weak or uncertain. But, it is one thing to consider whether Spinoza himself would or would not have taken his system to be hypothetical and defective; it is another thing to consider whether we ought to treat his system in these ways. Should we treat the definition of substance and principles such as that of sufficient reason as mere suppositions? Should we consider commitment to Spinoza's thoroughgoing naturalism as an act of will? Should we take rational systems grounded on decisions of acceptance to be somehow incoherent? I think that Spinoza would have denied that the system of the *Ethics* is hypothetical and therefore a failure as a rational system. I think that if he had believed it was hypothetical in this way, he would indeed have taken this to be a flaw and might very well have believed that a system requiring foundational acts of faith is thereby impugned. We, on the other hand, would doubtless be more inclined to take Spinoza's definitions and founding principles, such as the Principle of Sufficient Reason, to be accepted for various reasons but not to be self-evident in any epistemologically compelling sense. But we might very well not find the various reasons that lead us to accept these definitions and principles to cripple

⁴⁴ See Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique*, p. 263; also Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, pp. 37–42.

⁴⁵ See Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique*, p. 130. This is the gist of Strauss's analysis of the argument regarding miracles in the *Tractatus*; the account in *Spinoza's Critique* is rather more complex; see pp. 123–136. For discussion, see Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, pp. 45–48.

⁴⁶ Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique*, p. 136.

the system. We would be more inclined, perhaps, to take Spinoza's initial assumptions to be justified partly by the role they play in producing an account of the natural order, the physical and psychological worlds, and much else that is compelling and illuminating and rich. That is, we might be very happy to take the foundations of Spinoza's system to be provisional but not believe that fact to render the system flawed or unsatisfactory. To do so would require a very narrow view of rationality and understanding, one that we, unlike Spinoza, for whom rational necessity is always expressible deductively, would not find attractive. In short, I think that Strauss has misread Spinoza, nor has he clearly understood how we—or any modern Jew interested in the encounter between scientific naturalism and the belief in revelation and divine intervention into nature and history—should read Spinoza. From reading Strauss, the modern Jew would not be clear about why Spinoza's encounter with orthodoxy and revealed religion should be important to anyone today. Spinoza's requirements for systematicity might very well not be ours, nor might his understanding of rationality, of justification, and of epistemic commitment. Indeed, if the modern Jew does or should share Spinoza's view of such matters, one should explain what these concepts meant to Spinoza and should mean to the Jew today.

Strauss takes Spinoza's scientific naturalism to be incompatible with the belief in revealed religion. But unlike Jacobi and many others, Jewish readers included, Strauss does not simply dismiss Spinoza as a materialist and atheist. Strauss does not use Spinoza as a device to show that Judaism must oppose naturalism and all it entails. Rather, he finds Spinoza to be a valuable "location" for considering the options for a modern Jew faced with this incompatibility between Judaism and naturalism. In 1965, Strauss may think that Spinoza's critique of revealed religion ends up by exposing the voluntarism behind the rational system it presupposes and thus by impugning itself. But he then wonders if setting reason aside is an "unmitigated blessing," and he doubts that it is. But this does not lead Strauss to revise his thinking about Judaism. Strauss is not the person to watch try to negotiate a Jewish mediation of the polarity between atheistic naturalism (Epicureanism is how traditional Judaism identifies this option) and extreme Platonism. For that we need to turn elsewhere.

Emil L. Fackenheim, throughout his career, considered himself indebted to Strauss in important ways. One of those ways involved the advice that the modern Jewish philosopher should take Spinoza seriously, which Fackenheim does in his most important work of Jewish philosophy, *To Mend the World*, first published in 1982. Unlike Strauss, Fackenheim accepts the neo-orthodox response of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig to the modern critique of revelation and revealed religion associated with such figures as Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Strauss is dissatisfied with Buber, for turning Judaism into competing interpretations of religious experience, and with Rosenzweig, for failing to take Jewish law (*Halachah*) seriously enough. Fackenheim does not take either problem to be debilitating. In *To Mend the World*, he has moved on to further problems that both Spinoza and Rosenzweig would have to face, the question of the historicity of Jewish belief and Jewish life and, especially, the problem of dealing with radical evil. These problems frame the primary goals of the book, a confrontation between Judaism (Christianity, philosophy, and much else) and the radical evil of Nazism and

the Holocaust. Before Fackenheim argues for the epoch-making character of Auschwitz and its significance for Judaism, Christianity, and philosophy, he turns to Spinoza and Rosenzweig and asks how they view human nature, history, and evil. What does he say, in this early chapter, about Spinoza's encounter with these matters and with the character of Jewish identity in the modern world?⁴⁷

Fackenheim proceeds in two stages. First, he looks at how Spinoza deals with Judaism in the *Tractatus* and what kind of ideal modern person is portrayed in the *Ethics*; he then uses this account to show what options Spinoza makes available for modern Jewish identity and the limitations of Spinoza's proposal.⁴⁸ Second, Fackenheim asks what a Spinoza today who has confronted honestly the horrors of Auschwitz would look like.

The options for the modern Jew which Fackenheim finds are two: "One is to reject the Jewish past as a dead relic and become a man-in-general among men-in-general. The other is for him to take his Jewish destiny into his own hands and restore the ancient Jewish state."⁴⁹ One option is to abandon Judaism and become a secular humanist, as it were; the second is to become a Zionist. Fackenheim's analysis of how Spinoza arrives at these two options focuses on the *Ethics* and how there Spinoza develops his cognitive and emotional account of the ideal person, who strives for *amor Dei intellectualis*, an understanding of the natural order that involves the removal of passive emotions and the cultivation of active ones. The core of Spinoza's ideal, then, is a combination of rationality and activity, and in this regard, Spinoza stands utterly opposed to the traditional Jewish ideal of fear of God and a life of passivity and waiting.⁵⁰ Hence, for the modern Jew, the only honest options are to abandon Judaism or to restore Jewish activism, which means political activism in behalf of the restoration of the Jewish state.

A third alternative, for which Spinoza shows no sympathy at all, is the continuation of a *Galut* (exile) Judaism, which is nostalgic for the Jewish past but without any active commitment to restore it—that is, a Jewish quietism and passivity. The reason for these attitudes, of course, is that Spinoza's ideal is a rational, active person whose life,

⁴⁷ In earlier works, especially at the conclusion of *The Religious Dimension*, Fackenheim asked the same question of Hegel: Would Hegel today, after the Holocaust, still be a Hegelian? What Fackenheim does here, in *To Mend the World*, is to engage Spinoza first, insofar as he is the paradigmatic early modern example of a comprehensive, systematic philosopher; and he asks how Spinoza deals with history, Judaism, and evil. His discussion is complex in style, but in essence, this is what he seeks to accomplish. He juxtaposes Spinoza with Rosenzweig, who is post-Hegelian and systematic, but he asks the same basic questions of him.

⁴⁸ See Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, pp. 38–58. His account is very much indebted to Strauss. A major difference is that he focuses his ultimate attention on the options for modern Jewish identity that Spinoza identifies or makes available.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 53–57. Fackenheim compares Spinoza's naturalist account of emotion and its application to the striving for greater rationality in the life of the person who is increasingly free of passive emotions with the rabbinic account of wonder and fear of God that leads to a life of passivity and waiting. This is Fackenheim's way of juxtaposing Spinoza's naturalism with rabbinic Jewish revealed religion. Ultimately, he argues that an authentic Jewish response to the horror of the Holocaust is a life that combines passivity and activism, a sense of divine purpose with human self-confidence.

emotional and cognitive, is shaped by scientific understanding, although he does admit that the historical situation of such a rational person may require political and even military conduct in behalf of a civil state, as long as that state is a liberal democracy or is working toward becoming one. Fackenheim also notices a fourth alternative, a Jewish life that is satisfied with its place in liberal democracies and with relegating its Judaism—substantially influenced by rationalism and science—to the private sphere, but he notes that while Spinoza would have defended the Jew's right to live such a life, there is little reason to think that Spinoza would have found anything of value in it.⁵¹

When Fackenheim returns to Spinoza, after his analysis of Rosenzweig, his question can be framed in these terms: if Spinoza lived today, in a post-Holocaust world, what would his options for Jewish identity be? In what ways would he have responded to the horror and the evil? Would his options have remained the same, or might he have changed his mind?⁵² First, Fackenheim seeks to show that what was a minor option, barely acknowledged in the *Tractatus*, the re-establishment of a Jewish state, would be for Spinoza today, after the Nazi atrocities, an “inescapable necessity.” For Spinoza, the essence of a thing and hence of a person is its *conatus*, or “striving,” for self-preservation (E3p6&7); this is the same as its power or virtue (E4d8). Fackenheim cites E4p18s and E4p22, where Spinoza recalls these identities: “the foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one's own being” (E4p18s/G 2:222). He then notes that since encountering things outside oneself is unavoidable, it is always better to join with others in order that each should seek its own preservation and also the advantage of all. Fackenheim, citing E4p35s, draws the conclusion that what Spinoza is advocating is the utility and hence the moral necessity of a state, which Fackenheim takes to involve military defense against external threats. In a world rife with anti-Semitism of the most extreme kind, Fackenheim argues, in a world after Auschwitz, surely the establishment and defense of a Jewish state would be a necessity.

Moreover, Fackenheim then claims that while self-preservation is the foundation of virtue, the highest virtue is self-respect, and though the option of becoming a man-in-general, which is what Spinoza advocates, is available to the modern Jew, it is not available equitably and fairly. While others are allowed to maintain national and cultural and religious differences with respect and integrity, the Jew is expected to become a man-in-general but only by abandoning his particularity; he alone cannot become a universal person with a sense of self-respect. Fackenheim does not cite Spinoza in support of this line of thinking, and one wonders if Spinoza would agree with it. He might, in fact, take it that the Jew alone seems to be given the opportunity—even if it is forced upon him—to become genuinely and thoroughly universal; to him it might be ironic that those who persecute the Jew, in the very act of persecution, might be doing the Jew a favor. For Spinoza, that is, there is the false self-respect or self-esteem that comes with the acknowledgment of others and the true one that comes with one's own sense of

⁵¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

⁵² The relevant passage is in *ibid.*, pp. 95–100.

self-worth in virtue of reason and understanding. Surely, however, Fackenheim would remind Spinoza that self-respect occurs along a spectrum, and that in view of the necessity of one nation living among others, the more harmonious one's conduct and purposes, the more active one can be, and the less compelled by external causes. For an embattled and threatened people or nation, that requires some maintenance of national difference as a set of policies and capabilities for defending itself, while acknowledging the value of the universality of morality, its commonality with all.⁵³

In short, Fackenheim has sought to update the nationalist and statist side of Spinoza vis-à-vis his dominant universalist tendency. Unlike others, who simply quote the famous passage from the end of chapter 3 of *Tractatus*, regarding the re-establishment of the Jewish state, Fackenheim subjects it to careful scrutiny. First, he takes it seriously as a historical claim; second, he realizes that its status, so to speak, depends upon historical circumstances, and that this is something Spinoza had recognized. Third, he concludes that in today's world, what was once a bare possibility would now be a historical necessity. He now turns, however, to the question of the state's Jewish character. To be sure, Spinoza might see an active political engagement, even by traditional Jews, as testimony against the Pauline view that the primacy of the law and of divine power continues to be debilitating, rendering Jews and Judaism weak and even impotent. But is that enough to warrant the thought that Spinoza would now countenance a more serious Jewish engagement with the Jewish state? Spinoza might allow for religious particularity but would he advocate it?

One thought is that the wonder and surprise that for some gives rise to an openness to the transcendent, for Spinoza is wholly naturalized as a motivation for continued scientific inquiry and the striving for greater understanding of the natural order. Fackenheim suggests that Spinoza's rationalism, so conceived, would lead, at most, to Jewish secularism, but hardly to any kind of neo-orthodoxy or commitment to revelation. But such a conclusion suggests that, for Spinoza, human beings act within certain reasonable limits, in terms of both their private conduct and their collective organization. Human beings want to serve their own interests, but when they fail and their social and political conduct is dysfunctional, surely such failures, the failures of bad government, occur within limits. But if we expose this conception of the limits of human motivation and capacity to the realities of Auschwitz, could Spinoza have remained confident about human nature and its rational capabilities? Could he have continued to say that bad governments, while possible, can only be bad within limits?

Fackenheim quotes the first paragraph of chapter 17 of Spinoza's *Tractatus*, in which Spinoza points out that there are limits to the amount of right or power individual citizens will (and can) transfer to the sovereign. "If men could in fact be so completely deprived of their natural right as thereafter to be powerless to do anything except by the will of those who hold the supreme right [i.e., the sovereign], then indeed the subjects of the most violent tyranny would be without resource, a condition which I imagine

⁵³ See *ibid.*, pp. 95–97.

no one can possibly envisage" (G 3:201).⁵⁴ But, as Fackenheim argues, what was unimaginable to Spinoza is to us, today, a commonplace. Spinoza is insufficiently radical when it comes to tyranny and oppression. At one level, he is insufficiently realistic or Machiavellian; were he alive today he would never say that domination by fear and corruption is limited; we have seen tyrannies that belie such optimism—in the Soviet Union, Cambodia, China, and elsewhere. At another level, however, and this is the point Fackenheim has been aiming at, Spinoza is simply too optimistic about human interests and desires. Drawing on survivors of the Nazi death camps, especially Primo Levi and Jean Améry, Fackenheim notes that in the camps "the subjects of the Führer's tyranny typically needed no manipulation, for they *chose* blindness, and obeyed in a spirit of willing sacrifice."⁵⁵ Here was torture and murder as an ideal, not performed for functional reasons; rather, the agents of the crimes made these ideals their own and acted on them. Fackenheim claims that this conduct does not exhibit an alternative conception of human nature; it places the very idea of human nature in question, for it is evidence that human capacities and desires are changeable, dependent on circumstances, and utterly historical.⁵⁶ Here, then, we have a phenomenon, the death camps, which exemplifies the nature of the Nazi totalitarian regime; it is a society whose citizens do not abandon all rights and power out of fear or corruption but willingly appropriate ideals aimed at eradicating humanity and life itself.

One reason, then, that Spinoza today could no longer say this is that he would have to revise his conception of what governments are possible. Another reason, however, is that he might have to revise his convictions about that of which wise men are capable. For Spinoza, the wise man, the sage, constantly strives for rationality, emotional life in harmony with nature, and tranquility based on increased activity and reduced passivity. The tendency toward rationality, for Spinoza, is always good and is invincible, even if it does face obstacles. But Fackenheim quotes Améry who, in a famous essay, describes the ways in which Nazi torture and oppression in the camps constituted an assault on rationality and the intellect themselves. And he quotes, too, Primo Levi's widely cited description of the Muselmann, the living dead, and asks us to imagine how many wise souls succumbed and became Muselmänner.⁵⁷ In other words, Fackenheim proposes that today Spinoza would not only be more realistic about the extremity of tyranny and political power; he would also be more realistic about the perishability of rationality. There are historical situations in which wisdom and rationality cannot survive; Spinoza's ideal is not a timeless, universal, and permanent one; it is historical through

⁵⁴ I use Shirley's translation of the *Tractatus*. Fackenheim used the Elwes translation, but the sense is the same.

⁵⁵ Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, p. 99.

⁵⁶ Implicitly, Fackenheim is drawing here on Hannah Arendt, who referred to the death camps as laboratories for testing conceptions of human nature, but more importantly, also to Elie Wiesel, who said that at Auschwitz, not only did man die, but also the idea of man.

⁵⁷ Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, pp. 99–100. He cites Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, p. 7; and Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, p. 82.

and through. As Fackenheim puts it, the “attainment of eternal blessedness” is a matter of luck as well as reason; “eternity itself is invaded by historicity.”⁵⁸

This conclusion, that today even Spinoza would admit the historicity of rationality, of human nature, and of social and political life, was Fackenheim’s goal. It is Fackenheim’s reason for having orchestrated an engagement between Spinoza’s naturalism and rationalism and modern Jewish life and, especially, with the reality of the Nazi death camps. Moreover, to reach this conclusion, Fackenheim has argued that Spinoza does not countenance the possibility of a radically evil regime. Or, to put it differently, he has argued that the power or right of the state is limited; “there can never be any government so mighty that those in command would have unlimited power to do anything they wish” (TTP17/G 3:203).

What exactly is Fackenheim claiming against Spinoza? Fackenheim thinks that when it comes to what the tyrant wants, how he acts, and why subjects obey, the central factors are motives. It makes a significant difference that Spinoza’s subjects might obey out of fear and hope or both, whereas Hitler’s subjects “*chose* blindness and obeyed in a spirit of willing sacrifice.”⁵⁹ But Spinoza claims that what makes the right and power of the state and what makes a subject are not the motives for obedience but the fact of obedience. Even obedience chosen by the subject out of fear of punishment or hope of reward is still obedience. Hence, ideals chosen for whatever reasons and sacrifices made as the result of choice are still acts of obedience to Hitler. They do not diminish his power or right. Nonetheless, if the ideals are ideals of torture and murder and if the sacrifice is a willing obedience to them, Fackenheim takes this to be something that Spinoza could not countenance. There are some motives and some reasons that are incoherent for Spinoza, perhaps because they are incompatible with the interests that human beings, by his lights, always have, to persevere in their being and hence to become as free and as rational as possible. In short, Spinoza cannot conceive of either tyrants or subjects who cease to act as human beings, but for Fackenheim this was exactly the case in the Nazi Reich. It is for this reason that the Nazi death camps and the Nazi regime showed human nature to be radically historical.

Although Fackenheim’s encounter with Spinoza is limited, what he does discover is that any responsible Jewish engagement with Spinoza will try to avoid the eternity of Platonism and the extreme materialism of naturalism; Spinoza today would still not permit transcendence, but he might pay historicity greater attention. In order to clarify how Jewish philosophical self-understanding might survive such an encounter, however, Spinoza is not sufficient. Fackenheim turns to Rosenzweig and others. We, on the other hand, will finally consider Emmanuel Levinas to see whether his reflections on Spinoza are more satisfying in this respect or differ in important ways from those of Strauss and Fackenheim.

⁵⁸ Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, p. 100.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Levinas has three short pieces on Spinoza.⁶⁰ It is one thing, of course, for us to speculate about the objections Levinas could have leveled against Spinoza—that Spinoza's system has no room for radical transcendence, that it is a paradigm of totalizing thinking, that Spinoza's conception of ethics is itself founded on his naturalism, that our most fundamental motivation is to preserve ourselves in our being, and such, but it is another to identify and examine the criticisms that Levinas himself does in fact level against Spinoza. We cannot here give a comprehensive reading of the three essays, but we should consider Levinas's most significant charges, what he finds disturbing in Spinoza and what he finds important and valuable.

Levinas's earliest essay on Spinoza was occasioned by the proposal of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's prime minister, on the 300th anniversary of Spinoza's excommunication, to rescind the ban against him, as a matter of justice and respect. To begin, Levinas argues that the issue is relevant, not pointless; the "condemnation or rehabilitation of Spinoza" is significant and telling for the Jewish people.⁶¹ Spinoza represents the locus of Judaism's encounter between the problem of modern Jewish identity and its solutions—emancipation and national revival. Debating what to do with Spinoza is debating about what accommodations Judaism has made in order to endure in Western culture. Levinas's point is that Spinoza represents submission to reason and rationality. Judaism respects such submission, but Western Enlightenment culture does have its anti-Jewish side, and Spinoza is implicated in that side too. Therefore, Levinas defends taking Spinoza and his excommunication seriously. It is a matter worth revisiting.

Where, then, does he stand? Like Hermann Cohen before him, Levinas has no sympathy for overturning the ban; to him, "Spinoza was guilty of betrayal" and deserved the indictment and to have been excommunicated. Why? Because he "subordinated the truth of Judaism to the revelation of the New Testament."⁶² That is, in the *Tractatus*, Spinoza privileges the evidence of the New Testament and even treats Jesus as the highest form of prophecy. Throughout the work, Spinoza denigrates Judaism and the Hebrew Bible in terms that recall traditional Christian criticisms. All this tends to undermine Judaism and especially the weakened Jewish sensibility of intellectuals whose education and dispositions have been suffused with Christian ideas and practices. "The intimate thought of Western Jewish intellectuals is bathed in a Christian atmosphere."⁶³ In short, Spinoza has contributed to this privileging of Christian teaching; he has aided and abetted the ease with which later European Jewish intellectuals, Levinas's contemporaries for example, abandon Judaism in what Levinas calls "conversion without the scandal of apostasy."⁶⁴

⁶⁰ "The Spinoza Case" (1955–56), "Have You Reread Baruch?" (1966), and "Spinoza's Background" (1979).

⁶¹ Levinas, "Spinoza Case," p. 106.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Nonetheless, Levinas claims, Judaism should not be opposed to rationality, any more than it can “turn its back on mathematics,” nor can it “remain disinterested in democracy and social problems.”⁶⁵ Judaism is not a matter of beliefs and ritual conduct alone; its central commitments are to enhance humane and rational relations between people in the face of the violence of ideologies or mythologies. Judaism is a vanguard against fanaticism and totalitarianism. In these ways, Judaism is akin to some of Spinoza’s deepest convictions, to free human beings from compulsion toward mythology and imagination and to all the fears and drives that come with that compulsion. Judaism “consists in promoting understanding between all men who are tied to morality.”⁶⁶ But, Levinas chides, a pure rationalism that is akin to morality and humane society comes from the Greeks, from Plato and Aristotle; one has a better chance of finding it in them than in Spinoza with his Christian inspiration. Judaism, he claims, may tolerate Christianity; it may feel “friendship and fraternity.”⁶⁷ But Christianity is not Judaism’s genuine offspring. They differ, and Spinoza’s adoption of a Christian standpoint toward Judaism has done little good and much harm. In short, Levinas supports the ban on Spinoza, who was indeed not rationalist enough and who adopted and conveyed a Christian view of Judaism that demonstrated for all with eyes to see his “betrayal” of Judaism.⁶⁸ Judaism is the fountainhead of morality, of responsibility to others and justice; Spinoza betrayed Judaism through the injustices he performed against his people.

Ten years later, in a review of Sylvain Zac’s book *Spinoza et l’interprétation de l’écriture*, Levinas turns to Spinoza’s method of interpretation and its role in the *Tractatus*. He begins by commending Zac’s straightforward and uncontrived reading with Strauss’s esoteric reading—as breaking “with this mixing of philosophical history [and] detective fiction.”⁶⁹ Levinas wonders what contribution Spinoza’s method makes to “religious consciousness” and, in particular, to Jewish experience.⁷⁰ To be sure, Spinoza’s goal in the *Tractatus* was not to formulate a new hermeneutic and to employ it to reconfigure religious sensibility; rather it was to defend the freedom to engage in scientific and philosophical inquiry vis-à-vis religious and political institutions and to do so by means of a reading of Scripture. The *Ethics* gives an account of nature and man’s place in it; it also recommends a way of life aimed at the highest form of knowledge and conduct shaped by it. The *Tractatus* argues that such inquiry and such conduct in no way threaten the moral faith and liberal politics taught by Scripture and that this can be understood by reading Scripture in a historically serious and responsible way. “The idea of applying a historical method to the Bible is therefore born from a concern to protect true philosophy in the City.”⁷¹

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 107.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 109.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 108.

⁶⁹ Levinas, “Have You Reread Baruch?” p. 111.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 112.

Spinoza's strategy, to free philosophy and scientific inquiry from religious confinement, is to show that Scripture teaches obedience and morality, not natural philosophy. This account of the central teaching of the Bible is one that Levinas should find appealing. Levinas reports Zac's reading of Spinoza: "The Bible is not aimed at the true knowledge of God but only at the teaching of a practical rule of living, inspired by the disinterested love of God. To know God, as Jeremiah says, is to practice justice and charity."⁷² The central biblical message is the mandate to "love God and one's neighbor." In the Bible, as Spinoza reads it, the ethical is primary; it teaches what Levinas calls "a religious liberalism but one devoid of philosophy."⁷³ What he means is that the morality the Bible teaches is not Spinoza's philosophically and systematically formulated naturalistic ethics; but the two are akin to one another. Furthermore, although the biblical morality is grounded in affective motives, "such as fear, hope, fidelity, respect, veneration, and love," the outcome is "obedience but not servitude."⁷⁴ In Kantian terms, it is heteronomous but nonetheless ethically legitimate, since it does not require abdicating one's own interests in favor of the master's, for the motive for obedience is fidelity and fervor. Moreover, Zac sees this coordination of obedience with fervor and joy as native to Judaism and the idea of *simchah shel mitzvah*, the joy of fulfilling the commandment.⁷⁵ In short, Spinoza has identified a moral faith—an ancestor of Kant's moral faith—that is located somewhere between the complete submissiveness of orthodoxy and the philosophical ethics that Spinoza calls the intellectual love of God. "This is a religion of moral certainty that is universal, not to be confused with any script-based religion yet irreducible to a religion of reason."⁷⁶ Levinas calls it a "historical faith" marked by a "curious autonomy," one that philosophers do not require but of which believers open to philosophy should be persuaded.⁷⁷

All this is well and good for the seventeenth-century reader, but it is insufficient to persuade the twentieth-century one. There is no easy return to the dogmas of the universal moral faith on which this scriptural morality is based. But fortunately, for the Jew at least, there are other resources, ones that Levinas takes very seriously; these resources fall under the name "the Talmud," and the way in which a renewed interest in it and novel ways of reading it contribute to a rich understanding of the Bible and its central teaching. As Levinas points out, Spinoza vigorously rejects such mediation in favor of a leap into the past, a historical return to the Bible itself, but in this regard he has erred, for he has read the Talmud poorly and lacks the perspectives we now have available.⁷⁸ The Talmud's multiple authors focus on a unified message and help to

⁷² Ibid., p. 114.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 115.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ In 1979, when Levinas examined Spinoza for the final time, he returned to one strand of his earlier assessment. How familiar was Spinoza with the Talmud? What was the attitude of the Amsterdam Jewish community to the Talmud and rabbinic studies, as compared to the interest in Kabbalah and medieval Jewish philosophy? In the *Tractatus*, Spinoza attacked and rejected the Pharisees and their reading of Scripture, and he opposed any reliance on commentaries and intermediary interpretations when trying

identify “the internal coherence of the religious experience attested to by the Bible.”⁷⁹ That experience Spinoza has identified accurately enough. It is the experience of justice and goodness, of mutual concern and responsible social existence. The upshot of this point is that, for Levinas, Jews today can accomplish what Spinoza proposes in a richer way. They can see that the Word of God, the teaching of the Bible, can agree with science and philosophy; there are those who “regard [the Scriptures] . . . as an essential form of the spirit . . . compatible with political and scientific freedom” and those who do not.⁸⁰ At a time when philosophy of the old, traditional kind is at an end, Levinas notes, it is this power of Scripture that allows it to survive and to instruct. That is, to put the point in Levinasian terms, Spinoza is remarkable in that his paradigmatic exemplification of the Greek tradition nonetheless finds room to respect the special teaching of the Hebrew Bible, the primacy of the ethical as grounded in the encounter with transcendence. Here Levinas finds something extraordinary in Spinoza’s rationalism, an openness to the religious, to the ethical, not insofar as it is naturalistically reducible, but insofar as it is unconditional and foundational. There is, he says, something “irreplaceable” about hearing the Word of God in the Bible and not through philosophy.⁸¹ In the end, then, Levinas’s earlier judgment that Spinoza betrayed Judaism and the Jewish people is mitigated here and even, one might think, revised. By reading the *Tractatus* and its respect for Scripture and taking that respect seriously, one sees in Spinoza, even if he himself might deny it, a respect for the religious and an appreciation of the limits of philosophy and reason which modern Jews and others can and should appreciate.

For Levinas, then, Spinoza and especially the *Tractatus* raise important questions for modern Jewish life and thought. First, Spinoza does indeed come to excellent and worthy conclusions about the primacy of justice and charity for Judaism. Second, he arrives at such results, however, by reading the Bible through Christian eyes, and this is a betrayal of Judaism and the Jewish people, who are regularly seduced or compelled by Christian culture to accommodate to it and to abandon Judaism. Third, Spinoza fails to appreciate the special and powerful role that the Talmud and rabbinic thinking play in laying bare and clarifying the central ethical teaching of the Bible. Finally, Spinoza does provide a unique opportunity to observe how reason and Western philosophy can and should respect the Bible and the religious and moral sensibility it teaches. Within the very heart of totality, infinity shines through—there is within naturalism and rationality an intuition that the interhuman, responsibility toward the other, the ethical is at the heart of human thought and existence.

to understand the meaning of Scripture. Levinas, in his essay, proposes some features of Talmudic exegeses that suggest why and how it is fruitful and rich as a vehicle for capturing the essential teachings of Scripture. See Levinas, “Spinoza’s Background.”

⁷⁹ Levinas, “Have You Reread Baruch?” p. 116.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 117–118.

In Levinas's encounter with Spinoza, we find an appreciation that Jewish philosophy and self-understanding, to succeed at articulating what is genuinely Jewish, must find a way between the extremes of radical Platonism and bald naturalism. Levinas finds such a path in Spinoza. At the same time that Spinoza's respect for reason, scientific and philosophical, is uncompromising, he nonetheless finds it possible to characterize Judaism as a "historical faith" that is steeped in the teachings of the Bible, which are ethical through and through, and yet to characterize that ethical sensibility as an obedience and not a servility to God—that is, as an openness to transcendence. Deep in the heart of Spinoza, that is, Levinas finds the conjunction of immanence and transcendence that he believes is the truth of Judaism.

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CHAPTER 26

SPINOZA'S RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY METAPHYSICS

SAMUEL NEWLANDS

PREAMBLE

How is a long-dead Dutch philosopher relevant to contemporary metaphysics? Lurking behind this question are far more sweeping questions about the relation of contemporary philosophy to its history. In what ways, if any, is the work of *any* long-dead philosopher relevant to contemporary projects? What is it to be “relevant” to contemporary concerns in the first place? Should contemporary interests inform interpretations of philosophical history, and, if so, how? This isn’t an essay on methodology in the history of philosophy, so I won’t dwell on these larger issues for long, lest we never get back to the initial question. But I will say a bit up front about what I will take the relevant sense of relevance to be in this chapter before turning to Spinoza’s relationship to contemporary interests.

One way a long-dead philosopher could be relevant to contemporary concerns is as an *outsider*. Historically distant philosophers operated in intellectual cultures very different from our own; they faced different challenges, accepted different assumptions, and sometimes pursued different questions. Perhaps the *more different* their orientation and interests are from our own, the more relevant they become. Studying their work could provide us with alternative perspectives and agendas, a hedge against intellectual groupthink. By standing outside contemporary paradigms, their work could remind us just how narrowly and contingently constrained our own intellectual horizons and interests tend to be. More positively, the works of philosophical outsiders may contain neglected alternatives, making their study relevant to contemporary pursuits by providing a cache of forgotten but promising ideas. Interpretations that emphasize the otherness of historical figures will be especially attractive to those dissatisfied with

contemporary discussions: the history of philosophy may become relevant by offering an escape from the blind alley in which we (allegedly) now find ourselves.

An alternative approach takes historical thinkers to be relevant to the extent to which they are *forebears* of contemporary views. Instead of highlighting the ways long-dead figures differ from us, perhaps we should focus on the ways their concerns and conclusions are ancestors of our own. The hope is that genetic illumination will shed new light on contemporary questions. Understanding the origins of a dominant paradigm like naturalism may help us better understand the problems naturalism can and cannot contribute to solving. By emphasizing the continuity between philosophy and its history, this approach will be especially attractive to those who believe there is a common core to philosophical problems that transcend their cultural and historical development. The vice in ignoring the history of philosophy would be akin to the vice of ignoring the views of a like-minded contemporary colleague just because they happen to work in a different building or speak in a different native tongue from ours. Bridging the gap in these cases may take additional effort, but surely at least some of us ought to make the effort to do so, given that we're all (allegedly) pursuing similar questions.

Of course, taken too far, either approach can make the history of philosophy quite *irrelevant* for contemporary practitioners. Make long-dead philosophers too alien to contemporary concerns and they become philosophically unhelpful and uninteresting, save as antiquarian artifacts to be studied only for the same reasons one might study alchemy—surely not to further one's scientific understanding of metallurgy! Or if we focus too much on historical views that are proto-versions of what many of us now believe, the history of philosophy becomes increasingly irrelevant by providing merely cruder and less developed versions of contemporary theories—why study the inchoate beginnings of a view when we have far more developed versions now?

Clearly we should approach the history of philosophy in a way that blends both orientations, finding in historical figures views that are at once somewhat familiar and somewhat foreign. An apt model is a good philosophical conversation partner. A good interlocutor will have interests in some of the topics we're interested in, but she will also hold a set of views distinct from our own against which our own convictions can be reevaluated. At any rate, this is how I propose to treat Spinoza in this chapter: his views are relevant to contemporary metaphysics to the extent to which they immerse us in ongoing philosophical discussions, challenging and being challenged in turn.

One final methodological point bears mentioning. Both the outsider and forebear models share the view that the history of philosophy remains *philosophically* relevant, even though they disagree on the ways it is relevant. Not everyone accepts this point of agreement, however, and dissenters include those working in both contemporary and historical fields. Here, at least, I am no dissenter. I share the view of those who do not see a deep divide between studying philosophy and studying its history. The work of those who have successfully bridged the cultural and intellectual distance between long-dead philosophers and the rest of us have shed too much light on both interpretive and constructive questions to be rejected as fundamentally misguided. Let us join them in their

philosophical labor and explore further the ways Spinoza's views are relevant for contemporary metaphysics.

INTRODUCTION

I begin with a word of caution. The topics I discuss are intended to *illustrate*, not wholly constitute, Spinoza's relevance to contemporary work. That's a good thing, since many of the views I will attribute to Spinoza involve highly controversial interpretations that other Spinoza scholars (including contributors to this volume) would reject, and I make no attempt to adequately defend my interpretations here. Defending particular interpretations would take us too far afield from this essay's goal of fostering dialogue with contemporary philosophers, whereas avoiding controversial claims altogether would degrade the discussion into a series of vague and uninteresting generalities.¹ The reader is therefore encouraged to substitute alternative interpretations of Spinoza into the mix and consider what distinctive illuminations they may yield as well as to reflect on Spinoza's relevance to other issues in metaphysics. I hope what follows can help provide a template for at least one fruitful way such dialogues can unfold.

I will consider Spinoza's views on three topics of contemporary interest: monism; metaphysical dependence; and modality. Two common threads in Spinoza's approach to these different topics will emerge, but it is worth highlighting them at the outset, as they too should be of contemporary interest.

SYSTEMATICITY

The first common thread in Spinoza's philosophical outlook is *systematicity*, both across and within traditional subfields of philosophy. Spinoza was a deeply systematic thinker. His major work, the *Ethics*, is a tightly crafted book whose geometrical structure highlights what he saw as the connections—sometimes surprising—between metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, psychology, philosophy of mind, action theory, political theory, the natural sciences, and even religious beliefs and practices. On Spinoza's approach to philosophy, untangling problems in moral philosophy requires attending to issues in human psychology, metaphysics, and philosophy of mind. Similarly, adequately understanding one's inner life of beliefs, desires, sensations, imaginings, and emotions requires a scientifically rigorous exploration of the external world, a religious examination of the nature of God, and metaphysical scrutiny about the nature of intentionality.

¹ Where appropriate, I provide citations to places where I defend these controversial interpretations at greater length. The topics I discuss are also canvassed in other essays in this volume, so readers are encouraged to turn there for an orientation to Spinoza secondary literature.

For Spinoza, philosophical investigations are all-or-nothing affairs. Given what he takes the interconnections among all these branches of philosophy (broadly construed) to be, he concludes that making progress on one philosophical question requires making simultaneous advances on many others.

Spinoza's systematic approach to philosophy would today earn him the label of an *interdisciplinary* thinker, though hopefully without any of the charlatanry that also gets lumped under that label. He should be greeted as a friend by current analytic philosophers who are trying to apply insights from the natural and social sciences to philosophical questions, though he would also be critical of approaches that attempt to subordinate the methods, results, and utility of philosophical pursuits to those of the purely scientific domain. Metaphysics is to be informed by, not made subservient to, physics and biology on Spinoza's model (and, I hasten to add, vice versa).

Spinoza's commitment to systematicity also applies within a given subfield of philosophy, such as metaphysics. This marks him as a bit of an outsider to trends in contemporary analytic metaphysics. In many contemporary quarters, metaphysics has the feel of a speculative lunch buffet: on display is a range of carefully developed views on a wide array of metaphysical issues, and the philosopher is invited to step up, tray in hand, and choose among the bounty as she will. A little eternalism, a bit of counterfactual analysis of causation, some linguistic ersatzism, a healthy dose of Platonism about numbers, and, for dessert, reduction-free physicalism. Spinoza's approach to metaphysics is less buffet and more value menu: many metaphysical theses stand or fall together, for they are based on shared, though often hard-to-discern underlying principles. For Spinoza, metaphysicians ought to endorse individual views only insofar as they are willing to endorse these other, sometimes surprising, companion views ("Who ordered the gunky space-time?!").

Systematicity can cut both ways, of course. Philosophers with systematic proclivities are also quick to cry foul when genuinely distinct views have been unnecessarily run together. Later, we will see a stronger alliance on this tendency between Spinoza and contemporary metaphysicians, both of whom excel at taking views that historically were thought to come as a package and showing how they are not mutually entailing after all. Spinoza will continue to insist, however, that such decoupling ought to be followed by an alternative recoupling of views.

EXPLANATORY NATURALISM

A second broad and related theme that we will encounter is Spinoza's *explanatory naturalism*. Naturalism has become one of those catch-all terms in contemporary philosophy, so widely and regularly applied that it appears, at best, to have several different meanings. Without trying to disambiguate contemporary usage, I will call Spinoza's *explanatory naturalism* the position he endorses in the Preface to Part III of the *Ethics*: "... for Nature is always the same, that is, the laws and rules of Nature, according

to which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are always and everywhere the same. So the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same, namely, through the universal laws and rules of Nature" (G 2:138). In this passage, Spinoza makes two important claims. First, everything can be understood or explained through "the laws and rules of Nature." This reminds us of Spinoza's general commitment to the explicability of all things, a view captured in his version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR): "For each thing there must be assigned a cause or reason, as much for its existence as for its nonexistence" (E1p11d2). But although Spinoza's explanatory naturalism is consistent with the explanatory rationalism embodied in the PSR, it goes further than the PSR itself.

Explanatory naturalism, as Spinoza's second point in this passage makes clear, constrains what counts as a proper explanation. Spinoza claims that the explanans—"the laws and rules of Nature"—are changeless and universal in the sense that they always apply across all domains. Proper explanations, for Spinoza, do not admit of exception clauses. Making exceptions to the scope of explanatory principles is indicative of the failure of those principles to adequately explain, Spinoza thinks. Earlier in the Preface to Part III, Spinoza criticized those who try to make human beings "a dominion within a dominion" (G 2:137). He had in mind philosophers like Descartes, who tried to explain the nature and activity of persons using a set of mental principles that Descartes himself admitted do not apply within the purely physical domain. No, Spinoza objects, proper explanatory principles are universally applicable. Everything plays by the same rules.

Putting these points together, Spinoza's explanatory naturalism is the thesis that each of the most basic explanatory principles applies to everything and the set of basic explanatory principles is sufficient to explain everything, even God.² If, for example, possessing intentional mental states partly explains God's activity, then so also will possessing mental states partly explain the activities of humans, trees, and rocks. There will, of course, be differences in complexity and degrees among the *explananda*, but there are no differences in explanatory scope among the most fundamental explanatory principles.³

² It might initially appear that Spinoza's explanatory naturalism is inconsistent with his explanatory barrier between the attributes (E1p10). Isn't the explanatory scope of each attribute limited? Short answer: no. Each attribute applies to the very same domain; the very things that fall under one attribute—substance and modes—also fall under every other attribute. The identity of substance and modes across attributes means that each attribute applies equally to every existing thing. And jointly, the set of attributes is sufficient to explain all the features of substance and modes. So, far from being an exception to his explanatory naturalism, Spinoza's attribute doctrine is the clearest example of it. (To get a feel for Spinoza's position, compare his insistence that each thing can be explained as both thinking and as extended with Descartes's insistence that substances that have the attribute of thought *cannot* be explained in terms of extension.)

³ Here is another point of relevance: I suspect Spinoza would be unhappy with the popular multileveled approach to the relations between the special sciences. If emergent phenomena were to operate and be explained by distinct, nonfundamental laws (e.g., biological laws or principles that are "over and above" the laws of physics), then facts about higher-level phenomena would violate Spinoza's explanatory naturalism. Since this multilevel ontology is often taken to be compatible with contemporary forms of naturalism, this should give us pause when trying to assimilate Spinoza's sense

Hence, in addition to affirming PSR-style demands for the explanation of everything, Spinoza's explanatory naturalism places a demand on the ways of explaining as well. Explanations must be constant, exceptionless, and applicable across all domains. This leads Spinoza to seek out explanatory principles that can do such work, and we'll see examples of what he finds in later sections.

Notice that Spinoza's explanatory naturalism underwrites his commitment to systematicity. Because he thinks there must be uniform and exceptionless ways of explaining every feature of the world, his proposals for explaining the world will be deeply systematic. The basic explanatory relations that account for human psychology must also account for religious practices, metaphysics, ethics, and the formation of political communities. Simultaneously exploring these different domains will, he hopes, reveal underlying explanations that can then be used to illuminate yet other domains of inquiry.

Spinoza does not, so far as I can tell, have an independent argument for his explanatory naturalism, anymore than he has an independent argument for his explanatory rationalism (PSR). It is among the basic background beliefs that animate and structure the rest of his philosophical thought. And in that, he is just like every other philosopher: we all have to start somewhere. Spinoza's ultimate faith is that our world is structured by such universal explanatory principles. It seems fair to give Spinoza at least this much at the outset: *if* he succeeds in finding and articulating such universal and constant explanations of everything, he will have gone a long way toward vindicating his faith and making his explanatory naturalism more appealing to the rest of us.

MONISM AND METAPHYSICAL DEPENDENCE

Spinoza was a monist. Few students escape modern philosophy survey classes without learning this fact. Passages like E1p14–15 are clear proof texts: “Except God, no substance can be or be conceived”; “Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.” These propositions espouse *substance monism*, the view that there exists exactly one substance, namely, God. For much of the twentieth century, that conclusion alone catapulted Spinoza's views into the realm of the exotic, the type of philosophical view to be taught for the sake of historical completeness but not worth grappling with too seriously.⁴

of naturalism with contemporary forms. For other concerns about this tiered picture that are friendly to Spinoza's concerns, see Heil, *From an Ontological Point of View*.

⁴ Seventeenth-century metaphysics abounded with seemingly quixotic views that are regularly presented as exhibits in the “Believe It or Not!” museum of the history of ideas: occasionalism; phenomenalism; superaddition; anything involving monads.

However, in one of those remarkable epicycles of intellectual history, monism is once again being taken seriously by metaphysicians, a turn of events that invites us to revisit Spinoza's position as well. The renewed interest in monism isn't as unlikely as it may first appear, as several major trends in the last forty years of metaphysics and philosophy of mind stand behind it. As philosophers of mind became interested in forms of supervenience (following similar discussions in metaethics), metaphysicians began to study the riches of metaphysical dependence more generally.

At the same time, in the wake of positivism's demise, substantive metaphysics was reinvigorated by a keen interest in modality (Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* is the *locus classicus*) and by related questions about the identity, persistence, and constitution of objects (Van Inwagen's *Material Beings* is the *Naming and Necessity* counterpart here). One interesting and viable option that emerged from these discussions was a broadly Aristotelian account of the world that had been thought long dead in Anglo-American philosophy since Hume: a world layered by essences, natures, natural kinds, and *in rebus* universals, which together form a rich structure of necessary, sometimes empirically discoverable connections among contingent beings. When metaphysicians evaluated such layered accounts of reality, a natural question arose: in what way(s) do the less fundamental features of the world depend on the more fundamental features? It is but a short step from questions about dependence and metaphysical priority to questions about the *order* and *direction* of dependence and priority, to which monism stands as a viable reply.

Most recently, several metaphysicians have developed new arguments for versions of monism, arguments with enough promise to rouse pluralists from their dogmatic slumbers for long enough to respond with fresh antimonistic defenses.⁵ Thus, the time is ripe to approach Spinoza's most famous metaphysical conclusion as more than just an historical oddity; I'll try to spur this process on by situating Spinoza's monism in relation to contemporary versions.

Let's begin by looking more closely at Spinoza's form of monism. Although Spinoza claims that exactly one substance exists, this does not prevent him from referring to a plurality of "things" (E1p16). In other words, Spinoza does not think only one *thing* exists. Many—indefinitely many!—things exist, though only one existing thing is a substance. That is, only one thing is ontologically fundamental or "prior in nature" (E1p1): substance or God. Everything else is a modification or mode of that one substance. A vast amount of interpretive ink has been spilled on how we ought to understand the substance–mode relation in Spinoza, and I'll have something to say about this vexed issue shortly. But notice straightaway that Spinoza does not advocate a more extreme form of monism, one that Jonathan Schaffer calls "existence monism," the view that there is exactly one (concrete) existing object.⁶

⁵ For example, see Schaffer, "Monism: The Priority of the Whole"; Cameron, "From Humean Truthmaker Theory"; Horgan and Potrč, *Austere Realism*; Rea, "How To Be an Eleatic Monist"; Sider, "Against Monism"; Trogdon, "Monism and Intrinsicity."

⁶ See Schaffer, "Monism." The leading, and perhaps only, proponents of this view are Horgan and Potrč, who call the one existing thing the *blobject*.

Existence monism is strikingly at odds with common-sense intuition and everyday discourse. It seems to entail that a seemingly straightforward assertion like “There are three chairs in my office” is false, though a sharp-minded metaphysician will find ways to paraphrase away the pluralistic commitments of such utterances or to restrict the assertability conditions of its denial to very special circumstances.⁷ However, Spinoza had a remarkably high tolerance for error theory, so it is unlikely he would be perturbed if it turned out that most of us uttered mostly falsehoods in ordinary discourse. His opposition to existence monism lies elsewhere.

Why, then, does Spinoza want to maintain both substance monism and the existence of a plurality of nonsubstantial things? The answer turns on what Spinoza takes to be the metaphysical requirements of perfection. Spinoza’s God isn’t merely qualitatively diverse. Inhering in God is a plentiful pastiche of individuals, natures, and dependencies—ininitely many individuals, attributes, and the parallel, isomorphic patterns of relations they stand in. According to Spinoza, God would be less perfect, less powerful, were God not to instantiate such a plentiful array of complex things. Such an emaciated being, he argues, would not be God at all. As Spinoza put it in an early reflection, “God’s true perfection is that he gives all things their essence, from the least to the greatest; or to put it better, he has everything perfect in himself.”⁸ Put more grandly, in virtue of its perfect and plentiful nature Spinoza’s One must also give rise to the Many.⁹ Admittedly, more work needs to be done on the origins and motivations of Spinoza’s conviction that perfection requires both plenitude and parsimony, though it is a view he shared with other seventeenth-century rationalists. At the very least, we should recognize that Spinoza’s *thing pluralism* stems from his convictions about the necessary richness of God’s perfect internal structure rather than from contemporary concerns about preserving common-sense intuitions or achieving reflective equilibrium between theory and pretheoretical views.

Even if we grant Spinoza his motivation from God’s perfection for wanting to avoid existence monism, we might nonetheless worry that his substance monism collapses into existence monism in the end. For despite Spinoza’s claim that there exist infinitely many things besides substance, it may turn out that his individuals aren’t sufficiently independent of God to count as genuine things in the final analysis.¹⁰ I’ll return to this

⁷ Alternatively, following Horgan and Potrč, one could defend a different semantics for truth that counts the statement as true, even though there are no such things as chairs and offices.

⁸ KV 1.6/G 1:43; see also E1app/G 2:83; E1p33s2; E1p16; E1p9; E2p6.

⁹ British interpreters of Spinoza at the turn of the twentieth century focused on this aspect of Spinoza’s metaphysics (see Newlands, “More Recent Idealist Interpretations”).

¹⁰ Kant pressed a version of this objection: “But every thing, just because it is a thing, is *eo ipso* not the predicate of another thing, but it exists for itself and is thus a substance. . . [the things in the world] would cease being things if they were mere determinations of another thing.” A bit surprisingly (coming as it does during his critical period), Kant suggests that introspection reveals why the “concept of a thing in general” is that which “exists for itself, without being a determination of any other thing”: “For my own self-consciousness testifies that I do not relate all my actions to God as the final subject which is not the predicate of any other thing, and thus the concept of a substance arises when I perceive in myself that I am not the predicate of any further thing,” adding a few lines later, “I myself am a thing and also

worry later. For now, let's grant Spinoza that in addition to the one substance, there exist a plurality of other, albeit dependent, things.¹¹

Admittedly, if by substance monism Spinoza meant only that there exists a plurality of dependent things in addition to the one completely independent substance, he will be guilty of rephrasing a common view in an exotic sounding manner. If all Spinoza's substance monism amounts to is the claim that God alone is fully independent and that everything else that exists depends in various ways on God, then Spinoza will simply be describing *monotheism*, a position that earns the title monism only by a terminological sleight of hand. Descartes, for instance, readily admits that, strictly speaking, only God is a substance, but he takes that admission to be perfectly consistent with the existence of many other, less independent things, things that he and many others call finite substances.¹² Is Spinoza just reserving the word *substance* for God alone, while agreeing that there are lots of other more and less dependent things in the world and ham-fistedly insisting that we call them all modes instead of calling some finite substances?

To see that this is *not* what Spinoza is doing, consider again E1p15: "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be nor be conceived without God." The latter half of this proposition is a thoroughly orthodox view in the seventeenth century: everything (besides God) depends on God in the sense that God is part of the ontological and explanatory grounds of all other things. However, the first half of this proposition contains the explosively heterodox claim that everything is in that on which it depends. If by "in" Spinoza means something close to what was traditionally meant by "inheres," Spinoza's claim that the plentiful range of existing things is in the one substance returns his form of monism to the distinctive and controversial.¹³

Spinoza's monism is beginning to sound more like Schaffer's second type of monism, *priority monism*. Priority monism is the doctrine that exactly one basic (concrete) object exists. Whatever other objects exist, they are derivative objects, things that are ultimately grounded in, and hence dependent on, the one basic thing. Schaffer points out that most historical monists were actually priority monists, and it is priority monism that Schaffer himself tries to defend. But once again, we might wonder whether priority monism is really just a general version of something most traditional theists already believe: God alone is the fundamental existent, and everything else is ontologically grounded in, and hence dependent on, God.¹⁴ Once again, as with Spinoza, exactly how outlandish and

a substance" (*Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 382). I am grateful to Karl Ameriks for calling these passages to my attention.

¹¹ I write as though substance and modes all *exist* to the same degree, differing only in their dependence relations. Michael Della Rocca has argued instead that Spinoza's finite modes don't *fully* exist. If existence comes in degrees, Della Rocca's Spinoza could be classified as a distinctive kind of existence monist: exactly one concrete thing (substance) *fully* exists, though many other things exist to a lesser, non-zero degree. (See his "Rationalism Run Amok.")

¹² PP 1.51.

¹³ For further discussion of Spinoza's views on inherence, see Melamed's essay "The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics" (this volume).

¹⁴ The two aren't equivalent, since even if the truth of theism entailed the truth of priority monism, the reverse entailment would still be false. One could be a priority monist without being a theist. (As Schaffer

heterodox priority monism turns out to be depends on the nature of the dependence relation that obtains between the one basic thing and the many derivative things. For Spinoza, the issue turns on the meaning of his claim that everything *is in* substance. For priority monists, it turns on the meaning of their claim that everything is asymmetrically *grounded in* the one basic thing. Until we get clearer on these forms of metaphysical dependence, it will be unclear exactly what these monisms amount to.

What we need in both cases is an account of dependence, the kind of metaphysical relation in monism that holds between the one fundamental thing and all the other, less fundamental things. Spinoza and priority monists like Schaffer provide accounts of such dependence, though their accounts are importantly different. Thus, while I think Spinoza would applaud the renewed interest in metaphysical monism that Schaffer's exposition of priority monism has generated, we should nonetheless distinguish Schaffer's version from Spinoza's by distinguishing their accounts of metaphysical dependence.

Let's begin with Spinoza. Metaphysical dependence relations form the backbone of Spinoza's philosophical system. And what an abundance of dependence relations he uses! By my count, Spinoza uses twenty-two different locutions for relations of metaphysical dependence within the first half of Part I of the *Ethics* alone—that's twenty-two varieties in just twelve pages of text.¹⁵ The very first definition of the *Ethics* defines one type of metaphysical dependence (self-causation) in terms of another type of dependence (conceptual containment). Two definitions later, when Spinoza begins to lay out his ontology, he again uses dependence as the explanans: what it is to be a substance is to be self-inhering and self-conceived. In this way, metaphysical dependence precedes and shapes Spinoza's ontology. To explain what exists, Spinoza first appeals to the ways things could hang together, an appeal that invites questions about the nature of the "hanging" or metaphysical prioritizing relations themselves.¹⁶

Spinoza had a long-standing interest in discerning, articulating, and ultimately explaining metaphysical dependence relations. In his earliest work, he claimed that our "ultimate end" involves explaining things through their dependence relations (TdIE §92). Indeed, what it is to provide an explanation of something is to articulate the dependence relations in which the thing stands, according to Spinoza. Given Spinoza's central insistence that everything must be explained, the project of explaining things through appeals to dependence means that dependence relations lie at the heart of his metaphysical project.

pointed out in correspondence, contemporary priority monists will likely also deny that the fundamental thing has other traditional divine attributes.)

¹⁵ The list: causing, explaining, inhering in, determining, producing, creating, generating, corrupting, following from, depending on, acting on, constituting, being conceptually involved in, being formed from the concept of, conceiving through, conceiving by, contained in, belonging to, flowing from, existing on account of, being understood through, and being prior in nature to.

¹⁶ For a recent discussion of this strategy in ontology, see Schaffer, "On What Grounds What."

In fact, Spinoza goes yet further in his appeals to metaphysical dependence. Recall that Spinoza's explanatory naturalism has a very broad range: in principle, nothing is immune from the demands of explicability. We have now seen that explicability, for Spinoza, is first and foremost a matter of metaphysical dependence. Things are explained through their dependencies. What about the dependence relations themselves? Are the forms of dependence that he appeals to in the *Ethics*—causation, inherence, existential dependence, conceptual dependence, part-whole, and the like—themselves primitive and inexplicable? I don't think so. For example, Spinoza clearly rejects primitive causation and instead explains causal dependence in terms of conceptual dependence (E1d1, E1p3). That is, just as Spinoza sought to explain *things* via priority and dependence, he also tries to explain the dependence relations themselves via priority and dependence. This constitutes one of the more important but easily overlooked projects in the early parts of the *Ethics*: Spinoza tries to prioritize the prioritizing relations, a project that is the natural outgrowth of his explanatory naturalism.

Since I do not have the space to defend here what conclusions I take him to reach, let me simply state what I take to be his ultimate position on dependence. Spinoza is a conceptual dependence monist (CDM). He thinks all forms of metaphysical dependence are at bottom forms of conceptual containment relations.¹⁷ What it is for one thing to cause another or to inhere in another or to depend on another just is for one thing to be conceived through another. A lot of details need to be fleshed out about this account, but one upshot is clear: Spinoza's substance monism, when combined with CDM, entails that all nonbasic things depend on substance by being conceptually dependent on substance, a tightness that Spinoza often illustrates by the relation between a triangle and the sum of its interior angles (e.g., E1p17s). Thus, the way everything else inheres in God is by being conceptually contained in God, a conclusion that reveals just how far from traditional monotheism Spinoza's monism truly is.

Let's now turn to priority monists. Schaffer sometimes models his grounding relation in mereological (parthood) terms, though obviously one in which the whole is prior to its parts. Spinoza too sometimes expresses his monism in terms of part-whole relations (KV 1 Dialogue 1/G 1:30; Ep. 32; E2p11c; E4p4d), though since the dominant view was (and still is) that parts are prior to the wholes that they compose Spinoza is often wary of talking about parts in this context, lest he be misunderstood. (He argues at length that extension has no parts *in the bottom-up sense* of parthood.) Although the logical contours of parthood relations have been carefully explored in contemporary metaphysics,¹⁸ the priority monist's claim that the one fundamental thing stands to less fundamental things as a whole stands *prior* to its parts still leaves unanalyzed the nature of this metaphysical part-whole dependence. What does it mean for the whole to be *prior* to its parts? The priority monist answers that it involves a top-down direction of asymmetrical ontological dependence, but what is *that*?

¹⁷ For discussion and defense, see Newlands, "Another Kind of Spinozistic Monism."

¹⁸ A very good starting place for contemporary mereology is Simons's *Parts: A Study in Ontology*.

There is a family resemblance among common expressions of such priority: grounding, in virtue of, dependent on, prior to, and so forth. Is there a further analysis of ontological priority available? Schaffer himself thinks not: ontological priority is a metaphysical primitive. Even if that is true, we might still wonder whether one member of the family best approximates the relation of metaphysical grounding.

Here are a few of the options that have been explored in recent years. The priority monist may intend a *modal* account of dependence, according to which x ontologically depends on y just in case the existence of x necessitates the existence of y . A virtue of this analysis is that it uses more familiar *modal* relations to define ontological dependence. However, as several others have pointed out, this account of dependence seems too coarse-grained to discriminate between cases of necessary covariance and genuine asymmetrical dependence.¹⁹ It lets in too many false positives.

An alternative is what E. J. Lowe calls *identity dependence*. According to one version, x ontologically depends on y just in case, necessarily, x depends for its identity on y in the sense that y metaphysically determines the identity, nature, or kind of thing that x is.²⁰ This account relies on a broadly Aristotelian theory of essences and sortals that many metaphysicians now accept.²¹ Like the modal account, the identity dependence account also relies on another kind of dependence—metaphysical determination—to define ontological dependence.²² However, given Spinoza's identification of determination and dependence (via CDM), he could not think that Lowe's account provides a noncircular *definition* of ontological dependence, even if he agreed that Lowe's proposal sheds some light on the structure of ontological dependence.

The closest contemporary analog to Spinoza's conceptual dependence is an *explanatory* account of grounding, according to which x ontologically depends on y just in case, necessarily, x exists because y exists.²³ (Equivalently: just in case, necessarily, the existence of y *explains* the existence of x .) On this account, ontological dependence, like all forms of dependence for Spinoza, is rooted in explanatory dependence. However,

¹⁹ Fine, "Essence and Modality." Spinoza anticipates this idea, arguing that essential dependence is more fine-grained than modal dependence, so the two forms of dependence are not equivalent (E2p10cs).

²⁰ Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics*. Identity dependence entails modal existential dependence, though not vice versa.

²¹ One noteworthy difference between Lowe's and Schaffer's approach to ontological dependence is that Lowe rejects Schaffer's suggestion that a single kind of ontological dependence relation obtains across ontological categories. Whereas for Schaffer many different kinds of *relata* can straddle the single *grounding* relation, Lowe posits distinct grounding relations for distinct classes of entities (a natural move for someone with Lowe's Aristotelian instincts).

²² Lowe also gives a definition of identity dependence that doesn't explicitly invoke metaphysical determination: the identity of x depends on the identity of y just in case there is a function F such that it is part of the essence of x that x is the F of y (Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics*, p. 149, with slight modification). Here "metaphysically determines" becomes as innocuous as the way a function determines a value.

²³ See Correia, *Existential Dependence*; Schnieder, "A Certain Kind of Trinity." Parallel formulations are available for *essential* dependence, *states of affairs* dependence, and so forth.

like Lowe's proposal, this account succeeds as an analysis only to the extent to which the notion of explanation itself is sufficiently transparent.²⁴

For his part, Spinoza tries to fill out the notion of explanation, and hence ontological grounding, in conceptual terms. He was probably inspired by the Cartesian confidence that conceptual relations are in principle transparent to the rational mind and so especially well suited to playing the fundamental explanatory role he assigns to them. That transparency assumption is no longer widely shared and needs more support than Spinoza saw fit to give it. But we can discern Spinoza's trajectory. He would be dissatisfied with a primitive, inexplicable grounding relation for the very reasons he would be dissatisfied with primitive causal relations. His explanatory naturalism admits of no exceptions to the demands of explanation. He reasons that ontological dependence, like inherence, is just a relation of conceptual dependence.

One might object that Spinoza himself reaches a ground floor of explanation with his own conceptual containment relations. And if everyone, including Spinoza, has to reach a ground floor somewhere, why favor making conceptual relations primitive and inexplicable instead of causation or inherence or just ontological priority itself?

In reply, Spinoza denies an assumption of the objection. He does not think he reaches a *inexplicable* ground floor with his CDM, an unexplained or ungrounded form of dependence that then explains or grounds the rest. If he had, perhaps it would be fair to ask him why we should stop with one set of brute facts instead of some other set. Instead, Spinoza tries to find a *self-explaining* relation to play the role of the fundamental grounding operation. Admittedly, the line between the inexplicably primitive and the self-explaining primitive is a thin one, but Spinoza clings to it at several points in his system. While Spinoza's belief that (basic) conceptual containment relations *are* in principle intellectually transparent and self-explanatory needs further defense than he gives it, his desire to use them to avoid positing inexplicable primitives at the foundation of his explanatory enterprise reminds us just how far and deep his explanatory commitment runs.

Spinoza's effort to find a self-explanatory foundation for ontological dependence also highlights another point of disagreement with priority monists. Whatever it turns out to be, ontological dependence is treated as irreflexive by priority monists like Schaffer.²⁵ Spinoza emphatically denies this. While he is sympathetic with those who are suspicious of an unbounded chain of dependence that descends *ad infinitum* ("turtles all the way down"), Spinoza does not think the solution is to posit an ontological foundation that is itself ungrounded, like, say, God or the world as a whole. Instead, Spinoza

²⁴ Lowe objects that the explanatory relation (i) is "hardly very perspicuous;" (ii) threatens to blur inappropriately the boundary between epistemology and ontology; and (iii) generates opaque contexts (Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics*, p. 146). As we will see, Spinoza has the resources to allay the first two concerns, and he wholeheartedly embraces the final one—opacity is the philosophical grease that keeps the Spinozistic system running smoothly.

²⁵ Schaffer, "Monism: The Priority of the Whole," p. 37; cf. similar commitments in Rosen, "Metaphysical Dependence"; Correia, "Ontological Dependence."

embraces the rare alternative of insisting that some grounds—God in the case of things and conceptual containment in the case of the grounding relations themselves—are *self-grounding*.²⁶ For Spinoza, the great chain of being does not terminate at a dead end. It bottoms out in a cul-de-sac.

Some readers will be puzzled by the notion of a self-grounded thing, much less a self-grounded grounding relation. This puzzlement is understandable if the form of grounding we have in mind is something like causation. Spinoza's opening definition aside, how can something *cause* itself to be? Acts of causation seem to presuppose the existence of the cause. That is, whereas accounts of infinite causal descent or an uncaused causer are at least *prima facie* intelligible options, the claim that there is a being that causes itself to exist seems outright incoherent. However, according to Spinoza's CDM, a self-grounded thing is just a thing whose conceptually laden structure is wholly self-contained and hence wholly self-explicable. Though this picture may remain puzzling to some, it strikes me as markedly *less* puzzling than the *causa sui* analog. At the very least, showing that it makes no sense to think of God as a self-explanatory being (in the sense of being conceptually self-contained) requires an *argument*, and I don't yet know of one that would leave Spinoza without at least a plausible reply.

What leads Spinoza to this conclusion about grounding and reflexivity is again an application of his explanatory naturalism. Everything plays by the same explanatory rules—including God. Hence, if everything requires ontological grounds in virtue of which everything is explicable, so too does God. However, since there are no independent grounds in God's case, the only remaining option is self-grounding. Otherwise, God would be an exception case, *pace* explanatory naturalism. The same argument runs for the grounding relations themselves: if some forms of grounding are nonprimitive and admit of explanation, then the most basic form (and the *only* form, according to CDM) must be explained as well.²⁷ Once again, the only remaining option will be self-explanation.

Suppose something like the aforementioned is the correct account of Spinoza's monism and theory of ontological dependence. We have seen that while Spinoza's monism is similar to priority monism, there remain important differences about the nature of ontological dependence that create differences in their respective monistic conclusions. Let us now return to the initial worry that prompted this comparison, whether Spinoza's monism ultimately collapses into existence monism. Does Spinoza secure the plurality of "things" in name only, analogously to the way we first worried that he secured "monism" in name only? That is, by insisting on the monistic closeness between God and

²⁶ For this reason, ontological dependence for Spinoza will be antisymmetrical rather than asymmetrical. The dispute over these formal properties is hardly trivial. As Schaffer pointed out in correspondence, it can help settle whether the PSR is violated and whether the grounding relation imposes substantive constraints on the nature and modal status of the fundamental thing.

²⁷ For an account of why, according to Spinoza's CDM, the fact that conceptual dependence is the most *basic* form of grounding entails that it is the only form (i.e., why he should favor elimination over some kind of reduction), see my "Another Kind of Spinozistic Monism."

everything else in terms of conceptual dependence, does Spinoza undermine the basis for everything else being genuine “things” after all?

This is a difficult though pressing question for Spinoza. It is also a version of a more general pressure that Spinoza faces repeatedly in other parts of his system: maintaining both sameness and distinctness, identity and diversity. In the present case, a great deal depends on what the identity and persistence conditions for being an individual thing are, another topic that has been discussed with great frequency in contemporary metaphysics. Spinoza thinks at least some finite modes are the bearers of powers, activities, tendencies, properties, parts, natures, and distinctive structures; call this the *center of activities* condition. He also thinks that each finite mode inheres in, that is, is conceptually contained in, something else; call this the *dependence* condition. Now consider: to be a thing, is it sufficient to satisfy the center of activities condition, or must genuine things also fail to satisfy the dependence condition?

Ever the systematic philosopher, Spinoza provides his own answer. He develops an account of the persistence of bodies and minds in Part II of the *Ethics* according to which satisfying the center of activities condition *is* sufficient for being an individual thing. He then shows in later parts of the *Ethics* that at least some finite modes *are* sufficiently self-organizing systems of activity, thereby making them individual (albeit dependent) things. But Spinoza agrees with tradition that these limited things aren't *substances*, for they inhere in, are contained in, another. Once again, Spinoza tries to walk the middle ground: there are nonsubstantial individuals, things that aren't substances but that are nonetheless genuine *things*. We may wonder whether he can have his cake and eat it too. Are the persistence conditions Spinoza lays out sufficient or even correct in the first place?

These questions would take us in yet another direction ripe for historical and contemporary dialogue, though I will not pursue them further here. This much is clear: properly evaluating whether Spinoza succeeds in saving both the plurality of things and the uniqueness of substance requires evaluating his theory of individuation, his conceptual dependence monism and ultimately his explanatory naturalism itself. Though daunting, these interconnections are not objectionable aspects of Spinoza's thought. Instead, they reinforce the systematic character of Spinoza's metaphysics—properly evaluating one piece forces us to reckon with and evaluate many others. His views on monism and ontological dependence are no exception, which presumably is a good thing for a philosopher who insists on exceptionless philosophical theories.

MODALITY

If monism is Spinoza's most famous conclusion, a close second is his view that “in nature there is nothing contingent” (E1p29). According to most interpreters, Spinoza endorses necessitarianism, the view that all truths are necessarily true. In ontological terms, the actual world is the only possible world. As with monism, it is tempting to present

Spinoza's necessitarianism as, at best, an instructive *reductio*. We all know that necessitarianism is false, so the philosophical relevance lies in exposing exactly where Spinoza blunders. I won't engage in that glum interpretive project here, partly because I don't think Spinoza was a straightforward necessitarian²⁸ and partly because it threatens to obscure an underappreciated and highly relevant feature of Spinoza's views on modality.

Ted Sider voices a familiar intuition about modality: "Whether something *is* a certain way seems unproblematic, but that things might be otherwise, or must be as they are, seems to call out for explanation."²⁹ Not all metaphysicians agree with Sider that modal facts cry out more loudly for explanation, though some have offered reductive theories of modality at least partly to discharge a perceived explanatory demand.³⁰ Among those who accept modal primitives, some do so grudgingly on the grounds that reductive theories of modality are more problematic than an unanswered explanatory demand would be. Spinoza, however, is unwilling to shy away from an in-virtue-of-what question, so if, as Sider suggests, modality cries out for explanation, it shouldn't be surprising that Spinoza endeavors a reply.

Although Spinoza's interpreters often take questions about the distribution of necessity as their starting points ("was Spinoza a necessitarian?"), we should instead begin with a prior question: just what is modality, according to Spinoza? Like Descartes, Leibniz, and in his own way Hume, Spinoza doesn't take modal truths to express ungrounded, primitive facts about ways the world might or must be. Spinoza is emphatic that there must be *reasons* that modal truths about objects are true. "A thing is called necessary either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause" (E1p33s1). According to this passage, that a thing is truly said to necessarily exist is explained either by its essence or by its causal history, which suggests that the modal status of a thing's existence is explicable in terms of other facts. More generally, Spinoza seems to think that the modal profile of an object isn't a brute fact about that object. Instead, if objects have basic modal properties, their instantiation is explained by other properties that those objects have. Likewise, if basic modal ascriptions about the world are true, they are true in virtue of other features of the world.

On what does Spinoza ground the modal features of objects, and in virtue of what does he think modal truths are true? Unlike Descartes, Spinoza cannot appeal to God's arbitrary volitions to provide the ontological grounds for modal truths. God's will, according to Spinoza, is just a mode of one of God's attributes (E1p17s), and as a mere mode God's will is posterior to a range of Divine modal facts, such as God's necessary existence. So at least some modal facts about God obtain independently of God's

²⁸ I defend this interpretation in my "The Harmony of Spinoza and Leibniz." For a discussion of some of the most prominent interpretations of the strength of Spinoza's modal commitments, see my "Spinoza's Modal Metaphysics."

²⁹ Sider, "Reductive Theories of Modality."

³⁰ For a critical survey of recent reductive theories of modality, see O'Connor, *Theism and Ultimate Explanation*, chapter 1. For a briefer discussion of some of the major versions, see Sider, "Reductive Theories of Modality."

volitions, according to Spinoza. However, Spinoza couldn't explain some modal facts about God in one way, without appeal to God's will, and all other modal facts another way, by appeal to God's will, without violating by his explanatory naturalism. Hence, for Spinoza if some grounds for modal truths are independent of God's will, *all* grounds for modal truths are independent of God's will.

Spinoza also cannot join Leibniz in grounding modal truths entirely in the Divine *intellect*, at least not in the way Leibniz suggests.³¹ For one, Spinoza denies that an intellect is, strictly speaking, among the most ontologically basic features of God (E1p17s; E2p1). Furthermore, the ontological grounds of all modal truths cannot lie in intellectual relations among Divine ideas because, according to Spinoza, some modal truths about extension must be explicable without any appeal to the attribute of Thought. Because of (i) the explanatory barrier between attributes (E1p10) and (ii) the necessary existence of Extension as an equally fundamental way of being a substance (E2p2), Spinoza cannot rely on facts about Thought to explain about modal facts about Extension. However, this means facts about Thought, including God's ideas, cannot be used to explain facts about modality *at all*, lest there be a case of nonuniform explanans, *pace* explanatory naturalism. Spinoza must look elsewhere to find a universal ground for and explanation of modality.

Instead of appealing to God's will or intellect, Spinoza attempts to ground modal truths in—what else?—conceptual relations. Before unpacking this idea, notice again the systematic character of Spinoza thought. Just as explanatory naturalism justifies his efforts to explain and thereby ground other forms of dependence in conceptual relations, so too Spinoza's explanatory naturalism motivates his efforts to explain and thereby ground modal truths in conceptual relations. Conceptual relations appear to be a fundamental way of explaining seemingly very different sorts of features of the world in Spinoza's system, the sort of basic kind of explanatory relation that he first set out to discover.

I won't present here the full textual case for attributing the view to Spinoza that conceptual relations ground and explain the basic modal features of objects. To take the clearest textual example: what explains the fact that God necessarily exists, according to Spinoza? He does not treat this as a brute fact about God. Instead, Spinoza claims that God's necessary existence is due to God's self-causation (E1p7; E1p11d; E1p24d). As I suggested already, Spinoza understands self-causation to be a conceptual containment relation between essence and existence and therefore true of that "whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing" (E1d1). Because (i) causal relations are just conceptual relations, and (ii) God's necessary existence is due to God's self-causation, it follows that the conceptual relation between God's essence and existence is the ground of the necessity of God's existence. In other words, it is because God cannot be conceived except as existing that God necessarily exists. Spinoza emphasizes the conceptual grounds of God's necessity of existence in E1p19d, as that "to whose nature it *pertains to* exist, or (what

³¹ For discussion of Leibniz on this point, see my "Leibniz on the Ground of Possibility."

is the same thing) from whose definition *it follows* that he exists” (emphases mine). The conceptual relation is the ground of the modal fact. As I also noted earlier, Spinoza believes in the explanatory transparency of conceptual relations. If so, the conceptual connection also *explains* the modality of God’s existence. More generally, Spinoza seems to believe that conceptual relations ground and explain modal truths.

One further, more complicated feature of Spinoza’s modal views is worth mentioning briefly before turning to contemporary theories. Spinoza also seems to think that most objects can be conceived in more than one modally salient way. That is, modal facts not only depend on conceptual facts but also vary as the relevant conceptual relations vary. Interestingly, Spinoza thinks that, conceived in one way, any given finite thing exists necessarily. Conceived in a different way, that same finite thing exists only contingently. The relevant difference in ways of conceiving involves which, if any, of a finite mode’s external causal relations are included in the concept. Conceived broadly, in a way that includes relations to its infinitely long causal history, a finite mode exists necessary. Conceived more narrowly, including only its essence or its essence plus some but not all of its causes, that same mode exists only contingently. In such cases, ascriptions of necessity and contingency to one and the same thing are both true, relative to these different ways of being conceived. Both ascriptions are consistent because, according to Spinoza, the truth value of modal predications to objects is sensitive to the ways those objects are conceived. In other words, modal contexts are intensional contexts, for Spinoza.³² Because modal facts track these differences in ways of conceiving one and the same object, there is an important sense in which one and the same mode can consistently be both contingent and necessary, though always relative to these different ways of being conceived. Hence, strikingly, both necessitarianism and its denial are consistently true for Spinoza, relative to different ways of conceiving the objects of the world.

In this way, Spinoza’s modal theory is closer to some contemporary versions of anti-essentialism than previous interpreters have appreciated.³³ By an asserting (i) an analysis

³² An intensional context is one in which the substitution of co-referring designations can fail to be truth-preserving. The most common examples are in belief contexts: Suppose (i) Superman is Clark Kent and (ii) I believe that Superman can fly. There are plausible reasons to think that (i) and (ii) alone do not entail (iii) I believe that Clark Kent can fly. One explanation of this failure is that some contexts of belief ascriptions are referentially opaque, in which case some belief ascriptions invoke intensional contexts. Spinoza’s position on modality, I believe, is that a similar opacity is created by modal ascriptions.

³³ At the same time, Spinoza’s version may have more constraints in place than some contemporary anti-essentialist accounts. As we may now put it, Spinoza thinks that the essences of finite objects constrain their persistence conditions across times and across worlds, determining some of the changes a thing can survive (which determines further modal facts about a thing). Since all genuine ways of conceiving any finite object for Spinoza involve conceiving the essence of the thing, Spinoza will have the resources to reject at least some very promiscuous versions of anti-essentialism. For instance, Spinoza need not grant that my body could have been a tube of toothpaste, even though there is some way of designating my body according to which a tube of toothpaste could satisfy it (such as “the thing sitting in the office chair”). The persistence conditions that apply to bodily essences are somewhat elastic, according to Spinoza. Bodies can survive the gradual replacement of parts, for instance (see Spinoza’s “Physical Digression” following E2p13s). Yet Spinoza also thinks that there are limits to this plasticity (E4pref), and being toothpaste tube-shaped may well be a configuration that would violate my body’s

of modality in terms of conceptual connections and (ii) that there are variations among the modally relevant ways of conceiving one and the same object, Spinoza endorses a view analogous to some contemporary forms of anti-essentialism that is surprisingly sophisticated and distinctive, even if underdeveloped.

It is very controversial whether Spinoza accepts (ii), the thesis that draws him close to contemporary anti-essentialists. It may be less controversial that Spinoza accepts (i), which places him within a tradition of philosophers who explain modal facts by appeal to conceptual relations. But should Spinoza be happy with these bedfellows? Conceptualist theories of modality are not very popular these days, and it is doubtful that Spinoza has a theory that is developed in enough detail to answer all the challenges that have been raised against them in the past forty years. However, as in the previous section, my goal in what follows will not be to defend Spinoza against all newcomers but rather to help situate his views among several contemporary versions to discover points of continuity and discontinuity. There, I hope, we will see better his relevance to the ongoing discussion.

Contemporary theories of modality that sound broadly similar to Spinoza's conceptualist account are often labeled *modal conventionalist* theories. Conventionalists about modality believe that our conventional practices ground and explain the modal component of modal truths. As Alan Sidelle puts it (approvingly), the "modal force [of necessary truths is to] be explained in terms of *us*, in terms of our carving up the world, and not in terms of an independently existing modal structure of reality."³⁴ More generally, Sidelle writes, "The basic claim of the conventionalist is that it is our decisions and conventions that explain and are the source of modality."³⁵ By contrast, a realist theory of modality claims that the modal force of propositions and the distribution of modal properties are determined independently of human conventions and practices. Modality is a mind-independent feature of the world.

This is undoubtedly a loose account of conventionalism. Who is the *us*? What are conventions? How are *they* determined and explained? For the first half of the twentieth century, modal conventionalism was widely embraced by logical positivists who claimed that all necessary truths are analytic truths, by which they meant that necessary truths are either logical truths or propositions that are true in virtue of the *meaning* of the terms of the proposition. That is, the relevant conventions and practices on which modal truths depend were *linguistic* conventions and practices. The association of modal conventionalism with linguistic convention continues to this day, even though contemporary conventionalists like Sidelle deny that all necessary truths are analytic and knowable a priori. As Sidelle asks, "What is it that we are basically learning about

persistence capacities. Spinoza does not, unfortunately, say a great deal about the nature of the intrinsic properties of essences that would give us a more detailed account of exactly where the boundaries lie. (For a recent discussion of a form of essentialism that also tries to straddle the divide between promiscuous and restrictive modal-determining essences, see Mackie, *How Things Might Have Been*.)

³⁴ Sidelle, *Necessity, Essence and Individuation*, p. 23.

³⁵ Sidelle, *Necessity, Essence and Individuation*, p. 30.

when we make progress in these issues [of modality]? Our concepts, our rules for speech and thought? Or metaphysically deep facts about the objects investigated?”³⁶ A bit more fully then, modal conventionalism is the view that modal truths are true in virtue of relations between objects, human linguistic practices, and empirically discoverable, nonmodal properties of those objects.

One advantage of modal conventionalism is that it offers a promising modal epistemology. After all, if knowing our linguistic practices and other empirically discoverable features of the world suffices for knowing all modal truths, we can hold out hope that the rich necessities of the metaphysicians are ultimately knowable via the empirically respectable investigation of the scientists. And even if complete modal knowledge remains forever an ideal, a conventionalist has a clean story to tell about how we know the truth of modal propositions we think we do know. She needs only to appeal to things we already have plausible epistemic theories for: language and the scientifically accessible world.

There are also metaphysical advantages of conventionalism. It discharges the explanatory demands of modality that Sider noted. The modal features of the world aren't simply “out there,” in need of an explanatory bridge connecting them to less puzzling, nonmodal features of the world. According to conventionalism, modality is grounded in the workaday realm of human language and science. The explanatory demand of modality is thereby answered. Modality is only as puzzling as are the meanings of our words and the scientifically assessable character of the physical world around us.

Of course, since modal conventionalism is now a minority view, it must also face some steep objections. One pressing worry is whether modal conventionalism can contain the mind relativity of modality or whether it entails mind-dependence theses about other features of the world. After all, the identity and persistence conditions of objects seem to involve *modal* conditions about what an object *could* or *could not* survive or under what sortal an object *could* or *could not* fall. But if *those* modal facts are also due to our linguistic conventions, it is hard to see how the very essences of objects themselves aren't also partly constituted by their relations to human conventions and practices.³⁷ As Sidelle himself puts the conclusion (again approvingly), “. . . It is not merely the modal facts that result from our conventions, but the individuals and kinds that are modally involved.”³⁸ Hence, modal conventionalism seems to imply that we don't just carve up *modality* with our linguistic practices. We also carve up the world into individuals and kinds with our linguistic practices. Sidelle is again instructive, embracing what others see as a *reductio* of the view: “If what it is to be an individual of a certain sort is to have certain features not only actually, but essentially, then the conventionalist has all the same reason to think that if there are any such individuals, they must also not be ‘fully independent,’ but should arise out of our individuating practice, which is our way

³⁶ Sidelle, *Necessity, Essence and Individuation*, p. 16.

³⁷ For versions of this worry, see Rea, *World Without Design*, pp. 85–9; Elder, *Real Natures*, pp. 3–20; Yablo, “Review of Alan Sidelle, *Necessity, Essence and Individuation*.”

³⁸ Sidelle, *Necessity, Essence and Individuation*, p. 77.

of articulating the world.”³⁹ Though Sidelle is willing to accept this expansion of conventionalism, others see it involving too high a cost.

I will call this the *explosion objection*: modal conventionalism explodes into a broader antirealism about objects. If true, the modal conventionalist who trumpets the epistemic and metaphysical advantages of modal conventionalism will sound like the idealist who claims he's solved the mind–body problem by getting rid of physical objects altogether. In one sense, that's true. He's answered an epistemic and explanatory question—but *what an answer!*

However, not all modal conventionalists follow Sidelle in accepting the consequences of the explosion objection. John Heil asks rhetorically, “Does this [form of modal conventionalism] mean that statues are mind-dependent entities? Why should it? We decide what counts as a statue, but an object's satisfying the statue concept is a matter of that object being a particular way quite independently of how we take it to be.”⁴⁰ Heil's point is that although modal conventionalism may broaden into conventionalism about sortals (like *statue*), it remains a mind-independent fact about the world whether there are any statues answering to our convention.

Amie Thomasson goes even further in trying to avoid the explosion objection. She restricts modal conventionalism to the view that “all modal truths are *ultimately* based on analytic truths” and denies that modal truths need worldly truth-makers at all.⁴¹ “The fundamental mistake of this and similar attacks on modal [conventionalism] seems to lie in assuming that modal truths require truthmakers, and concluding that these must be either intrinsic modal properties . . . or extrinsic properties whose existence depends on human minds and conventions.”⁴² If basic modal truths are analytic truths, and if analytic truths are without truth-makers, then the inference from Thomasson's restricted modal conventionalism to the claim that what (partly) makes modal propositions true are human linguistic practices is blocked. Furthermore, if the truth-makers for modal propositions *aren't* human conventions, then presumably the truth-makers for the modal aspects of identity and persistence conditions of objects also aren't human conventions. If so, her version of modal conventionalism does not entail any broader anti-realism about objects.⁴³ How could it? On her view, strictly speaking, the modal component of modal truths ultimately doesn't place *any* conditions on the world.

³⁹ Sidelle, *Necessity, Essence and Individuation*, p. 57.

⁴⁰ Heil, *From an Ontological Point of View*, p. 186.

⁴¹ Thomasson, *Ordinary Objects*, pp. 62–72. She labels her view modal conceptualism to distinguish it from Sidelle's, but that strikes me as an ill-suited replacement since she does not seem to disagree with Sidelle about running together conventions and concepts. I have instead labeled Spinoza's view *modal conceptualist* to highlight the crucial difference between his view and all other conventionalist views, as I explain later.

⁴² Thomasson, *Ordinary Objects*, p. 67.

⁴³ Thomasson's is not the only escape hatch for conventionalists. One could instead endorse some version of modal plenitude and claim that the role of our conventions is to disambiguate which of the many and similar objects or modal profiles we are picking out (see Thomasson, *Ordinary Objects*, p. 71 for references; Rea, *World Without Design*, for criticism). Sider has suggested another version of modal conventionalism that tries to avoid the explosion objection without relying on meaning conventions or

From Spinoza's perspective, I think Thomasson's attempt to make modality an exception to the explanatory demands that undergird much of the truth-maker project would be too a steep price to pay to avoid the explosion objection. He writes, as did most seventeenth-century metaphysicians, as if things in the world have modal structures about which modal truths make substantive claims. For example, we have seen that Spinoza writes about the necessity of God's existence as a fact that is made true by real features of the Divine nature. So although I think Spinoza would agree with Thomasson that a bad assumption is being made in the debate between modal conventionalists and realists, I do not think he would locate it over the existence of modal truth-makers.

Let's see where Spinoza's modal conceptualism might fit into this contemporary discussion. Spinoza and many modal conventionalists agree that modal truths are true in virtue of something besides only objects and their properties. Their truth conditions involve three place relations between objects, properties, and a convention or way of conceiving.⁴⁴ Hence, whether it is true that "*x* is necessarily *F*" depends partly on facts about our linguistic practices, meaning conventions, practical interests, or the way *x* is conceived or designated.

Where Spinoza and contemporary modal conventionalists most deeply disagree is over the nature of the conventions. Noticing this difference will also help us see how Spinoza would answer the explosion objection. Since its early days among the positivists, modal conventionalism has frequently appealed to *meaning*, *linguistic rules*, *mental or linguistic concepts*, or *language conventions* as the grounds of modal truths, the only grounds left after the Humean purge of all speculative metaphysics. But Spinoza is no Humean and certainly no positivist, so we should be careful not to read what *he* might take conceptual sensitivity to mean in the light of the impoverished ontologies of latter-day positivists. Spinoza's modal conceptualism is not primarily a view about linguistic practices or meaning conventions.

For Spinoza, the bad assumption in the contemporary dispute is that if modality is grounded in conceptual relations, then modality is grounded in mind-dependent, contingent features about human practices, be they psychological, pragmatic, or linguistic.

analyticity. Let only bits of nonmodal reality play the truth maker role for all truths, including truths like "All bachelors are unmarried men" and " $2 + 2 = 4$." Nothing about our conventions in any interesting way makes these propositions true; only features of the world are truth makers. This blocks the threat of exploding mind dependence. While our conventions make it is the case that these are *necessary* truths, they have nothing to do with what makes them *truths*. Rather, on the basis of practical reasons, we have conventionally decided to single out mathematic, logical, metaphysical, and some empirical truths as an interesting but gerrymandered collection, an unruly and unnatural collection whose interest to us we mark out with our modal discourse. But there isn't anything particularly special about this class of truths that marks them out except that they satisfy some interests we happen to have when we single them out with our modal predicates. (For more on this deflationary version of conventionalism, see Sider, "Reductive Theories of Modality"; Cameron, "What's Metaphysical".)

⁴⁴ This won't be correct for every version of modal conventionalism. On Thomasson's version, the truth conditions for basic modal truths will not involve objects and properties at all. On Sider's view, the truth conditions for basic modal truths involve *only* objects and properties (including whatever it is about them that our interests have honed in on).

To Spinoza, contemporary modal conventionalists are right in their belief that modal truths are true only relative to some further feature—but they've all misidentified the further feature. What Spinoza means by “x is necessarily F only relative to some way of conceiving x” is not that x is necessarily F relative to some way of *thinking about* x, or some mind-dependent *presentational guise* of x, or some *linguistic practice* that associates x with F, or some *practical human interest* in correlations between x and F, or an *analytic truth* that x is F in virtue of the meaning of “x” and “F.” For better or worse, Spinoza is a metaphysician at heart, and he takes modal propositions to be about metaphysical facts, propositions whose basic truth conditions do not appeal to our psychological states, practical interests, or features of our language. Whatever the merits were of early twentieth-century associations of meaning and necessity, Spinoza's thinking about modality lies squarely in the precritical, prelinguistic turn of seventeenth-century speculative metaphysical realism. Thus, the *ways of conceiving* in Spinoza's system are *not* psychological states or linguistic conventions, regardless of how interchangeable these expressions have now become.⁴⁵

So although Spinoza, on my reading, agrees with conventionalists that the truth values of modal truths depend partly on ways the world is conceived, those ways are not mind-dependent, interest-dependent, psychological, or linguistic in nature. Like Frege, Spinoza is a realist about ways of conceiving things. The modes of designation or presentational guises of objects are not purely psychological states, though they can enter into the content of our ideas. They are real, objective, “out there” —ways of being conceived are ways of being. Unlike Frege, however, Spinoza does not locate the domain of such entities in a purely abstract realm. For Spinoza, the most basic ways of conceiving the world, the attribute contexts, are concretely reified.⁴⁶ They aren't located in the head or in the Platonic heavens; they are out there in the same way *concreta* like tables and chairs are thought to be out there by realists. Yet unlike straightforward realists about modality, these ways of conceiving do figure into the truth conditions for modal propositions in ways that allow divergent, seemingly inconsistent modal predications to be true of one and the same object, relative to which way of conceiving it “falls under” or, better, is structured by.

Once we appreciate these contrasts, we can also better understand Spinoza's fuller views on the modal status of finite things. A finite mode is truly said to be necessary in virtue of being structured by one set of causal–conceptual relations. This same mode is also structured by a different set of causal–conceptual relations, in virtue of which it is also truly said to be merely contingent. Modal realists were right, in a sense—modality *is* about mind-independent natures or structures of things. But they failed to see how each single thing is structured in multiple ways, in virtue of which its modal profile can also vary. That's partly

⁴⁵ For a defense of this reading of Spinoza, see my “Thinking, Conceiving, and Idealism.”

⁴⁶ In personal correspondence, Della Rocca questioned whether Spinoza's ways of conceiving could be something like Armstrongian (or Aristotelian) immanent universals. Only in a very loose sense, I would think, given Spinoza's thoroughgoing nominalism (see my “Spinoza's Theory of Universals” for further discussion).

why Spinoza labeled these structures conceptual relations in the first place, since it seemed clear to him that one and the same individual can fall under very different conceptual relations (Ep. 9).

More generally, Spinoza's grand, contentious, yet interesting idea is that one and the same individual is structured in very heterogeneous ways, analogous to the way that one and the same individual can fall under different concepts. This is perhaps clearest in the case of Spinoza's attributes—one and the same thing is structured by both Thought and Extension—but the same point holds within each attribute. That this claim about the structure of the world *is true* is very controversial, but that the modal facts *would* correspond to such divergent structures *were they there* seems more plausible. Spinoza's attempt to make the same structuring features that are responsible for causation and ontological dependence *also* responsible for modality is yet another outgrowth of his explanatory naturalism.

Here's the upshot for the explosion objection. The sensitivity of modality to these mind- and language-independent ways of conceiving objects is, for Spinoza, due to the conceptual grounds of modal facts themselves. Modal connections just are conceptual connections, though Spinoza's conceptual connections aren't the same mind-dependent features to which contemporary modal conventionalists appeal. Thus, his modal conceptualism does not entail a broader explosion into mind-dependent conventionalism about objects.

This is probably still a bit opaque. It is easier to say what these ways of conceiving *aren't* for Spinoza than what they *are*. More work needs to be done on this most basic metaphysical category in Spinoza's thought, especially by those familiar with contemporary metaphysics. Spinoza promises a middle ground between contemporary realism and contemporary conventionalism about modality, a position with the epistemic and explanatory advantages of conventionalism but without some of the associated costs. Whether or not there *is* such a middle ground to be had—Frege without the Platonism, divergent structures of objects with built-in referential opacity—has yet to be seen. Yet again, making progress on Spinoza's views on modality requires making further progress on the rest of his thought. Here the interpretive task has been helped, not hindered, by comparing Spinoza's positions to some recent analogs. In this way, we see not only that is Spinoza relevant to contemporary metaphysics but also that contemporary metaphysics is relevant to interpreting Spinoza.⁴⁷

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⁴⁷ I am grateful to Michael Della Rocca, Greg Fowler, Jonathan Schaffer, Alex Skiles, and participants of a 2009 graduate seminar at the University of Notre Dame for helpful comments and criticisms.

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CHAPTER 27

LITERARY SPINOZA

REBECCA NEWBERGER GOLDSTEIN

I. “OUR COMMON SAINT”

THE attention that literary artists have lavished on Spinoza is remarkable. Writers have not only shaped their aesthetics by reflection on Spinoza, have not only inserted his views into the inner lives and dialogues of their characters, but have molded the man himself into a protagonist in their novels, poems, and plays.

This last aspect of the literary fascination with Spinoza is particularly noteworthy. The *person* of Benedictus Spinoza has drawn, over the centuries, unusual attention, and not only from literary writers. “Spinoza is the noblest and most lovable of the great philosophers,” Bertrand Russell wrote in *The History of Western Philosophy*, a startling assertion, since the ascription of these affectionate adjectives deviates from the overall impersonal tone Russell more characteristically adopts—even, we could say, from the overall impersonal tone that Western philosophy more characteristically adopts. “Intellectually, some have surpassed him,” Russell continues, “but ethically he is supreme. As a natural consequence, he was considered, during his lifetime and for a century after his death, a man of appalling wickedness.”¹ The drama compressed into Russell’s irony is itself a stimulus to the imagination. The makings of a good story already seem to be in place: the philosopher as martyr.²

The significant writers to whom Spinoza has significantly mattered range across genres and sensibilities, and their reasons for considering him artistically relevant vary as widely as their methods of making him so. Some writers declared themselves devotees of his thought and were strengthened in their art by their interpretations of his views. Others were deeply bothered by some aspect of his system—his determinism, for

¹ Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 521.

² The honor of being the first philosopher/martyr of Western philosophy goes to Socrates, convicted on the capital charges of corrupting youth and atheism.

example, or his insistence on the supremacy of reason over the passions—and made art out of their resistance.

George Eliot (1819–1890), arguably the most philosophically inspired of the great nineteenth-century British novelists, falls into the first category. She decided to write fiction seven months after completing her translation of the *Ethics*, the first in English, and her view of her writing as a “set of experiments” is imprinted with certain Spinozist positions.³ The robust determinism to which she subjects her characters, as well as the conception of freedom and virtue that moves her plots along to their ethically resounding dénouements, bears the impressions of her close relationship with Spinoza’s works.

But where Eliot was artistically sustained by Spinoza’s determinism, Herman Melville (1819–1891), arguably the most philosophically inspired of the great nineteenth-century American novelists, chafed against it. Melville mentions Spinoza by name only once in *Moby Dick*, but his preoccupation with the fate of human freedom in the face of Spinoza’s logic helped to fuel his masterpiece. It is not far-fetched to see, in the symbol-saturated battle between Ahab and Moby Dick, that monster of metaphysical consequentiality, reflections of Melville’s struggle with Spinoza.

In addition to Eliot and Melville, other writers with pronounced Spinozist fixations are (arranged chronologically): Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Frederich Hölderlin, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Novalis,⁴ Heinrich Heine, Berthold Auerbach, Matthew Arnold, Erwin Kolbenheyer, Jorge Luis Borges, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Bernard Malamud, Zbigniew Herbert, David Ives, Eugene Ostashevsky, and Goce Smilevski.

My intention is to give a sense of the grand sweep of literary artists—that is, novelists, poets, and playwrights—reacting through their art to Spinoza’s ideas. Given the irrecconcilability of the approaches and attitudes, it is all but impossible to make a sustained argument concerning Spinoza’s literary appeal. If there is an overarching explanation for why this particular philosopher has been so artistically generative, perhaps it lies in what one might call Spinoza’s rationalist purity. Nobody has ever made greater claims for the life of pure reason. For some temperaments this is inspiring, for others off-putting.

Other philosophers—one thinks particularly of Plato—have influenced important literary artists, but Spinoza seems unique among philosophers in the amount of literary fascination with the man himself. This is yet another, and in some sense quite separate, way in which Spinoza has made himself felt in literary contexts, his life transformed into plots, with his excommunication and his possible love for Claire-Marie, the daughter of his Latin tutor, Franciscus van den Eenden, usually providing the dramatic foci. This aspect of “literary Spinoza” seems easier to explain. Spinoza was routinely demonized,

³ She wrote, in a letter to Dr. Parry in 1876, “My writing is simply a set of experiments in life—an endeavour to see what our thought and emotion may be capable of—what stores of motive, actual or hinted as possible, give promise of a better after which we may strive—what gains from past revelations and discipline we must strive to keep hold of as something more sure than shifting theory” (*George Eliot Letters*, 6:216–217).

⁴ Novalis was the pen name of Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg.

well into the Age of Enlightenment, for daring not only to think outside all religious frameworks but to live—and, apparently to live contentedly and ethically—outside them. He was also canonized—of course, by others—for exactly the same reason. Goethe (1749–1832), who wrote in later life that, for a period of his youth, he never left the house without a copy of the *Ethics* in his pocket, referred to the philosopher as “our common saint.”

The fictionalization of Spinoza’s life begins, significantly enough, during the Enlightenment period and continues into our own day. The writers who have made Spinoza the central character of novels run the gamut from the nineteenth-century German-Jewish Berthold Auerbach (1812–1882), an advocate of the *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment, whose novel *Spinoza* is the first work of historical Jewish fiction, to the Hungarian fascist Erwin Kolbenheyer (1878–1962), who published his *Amor Dei: Ein Spinoza Roman* (translated into English as *God-Intoxicated Man*) two decades before becoming a Nazi propagandist.

And then there are the playwrights who have put Baruch Spinoza on the stage, right up until the present: “In his new play ‘New Jerusalem,’ which opened Sunday at the Classic Stage Company,” the *New York Times* wrote in its favorable review of January 2008, “Mr. Ives is channeling no less a thinker than Spinoza, the influential Jewish philosopher of the 17th century and a man not exactly known for his snappy humor.”

What can one say in the way of explanation for the multifaceted literary attraction to Spinoza, right up until today? One suspects it is not the *Ethics*’s deductive style, à la Euclid, that enchants the novelists, playwrights, and poets. And the fascination becomes only more remarkable when one considers how little it was reciprocated. For all the attention that literary artists have paid to Spinoza, he appears to have accorded little thought to the arts, and we might begin a discussion of literary Spinoza by considering why not.

II. “NONE OTHER THAN PROOFS”

Spinoza subjects all things human to a standard of evaluation that arises out of the following claim: “No life, then, is rational without understanding, and things are good only insofar as they aid man to enjoy the life of the Mind, which is defined by understanding. On the other hand, those that prevent man from being able to perfect his reason and enjoy the rational life, those only we say are evil” (E4app5).

In the rigor of his promotion of knowledge as the supreme utility in human life, Spinoza recalls no one so much as Plato. So, for example, both philosophers presume in their political philosophies that the best government is the one that best advances human understanding. For Plato, the presupposition leads to a utopia ruled by philosopher-kings; whereas Spinoza concludes (at least in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*) in favor of democracy.

Likewise, both philosophers felt compelled to consider the advisability of erotic love in the light of its possibilities for cognitive advancement. Plato was famously torn on the subject, producing a dramatic peripeteia in Socrates's second speech of the *Phaedrus*. Romantic love is indeed a madness, but there are truths that can only be grasped while in its derangement. (Beauty is ontologically determinative, and eros in cracking us open to beauty, yields a glimpse into the structure of reality.) Spinoza, in contrast, is undivided in his disapproval of the erotic experience:

[S]ickness of the mind and misfortunes take their origin especially from too much Love toward a thing which is liable to many variations and which we can never fully possess. For no one is disturbed or anxious concerning anything unless he loves it, nor do wrongs, suspicions, and enmities arise except from Love for a thing which no one can really fully possess. (E5p20s/G 2:293–94)

The sorry conclusion of affairs of the heart is deduced with Q.E.D. finality: “A purely sensual love, moreover, i.e., a lust to procreate that arises from external appearance, and absolutely, all love that has a cause other than freedom of mind, easily passes into hate—unless (which is worse) it is a species of madness. And then it is encouraged more by discord than by harmony” (E4app19).⁵

But when it comes to the subject of the arts, Spinoza is oddly reticent. His failure to consider the aesthetic response—surely a profound facet of human experience—is all the stranger when one compares him, again, to Plato, who directs as much conflicted pondering to the arts, particularly to poetry, as to erotic love. There are places in the dialogues when Plato's attentions to the poets recall the sad quip of Osip Mandelstam: “Only in Russia is poetry respected—it gets people killed.”⁶ Plato, too, respected poetry—enough to banish the poets from his utopia in the *Republic* (398a). The conclusion clearly pained him, and he confesses later in the *Republic* that, should someone offer a sound justification for the rational uses of poetry, “we at least would be glad to admit it, for we are well aware of the charm it exercises” (607c).⁷ Beauty always remains, for Plato, whether abetted by the arts or not, a crucial instrument in the progress of the understanding. If anything, the experience of beauty is too profound and powerful in its potential to transform the soul to be entrusted to the care of any but the philosophers—certainly not to irresponsible poets, who only care about the aesthetic effect that they produce. Plato's agony over literature is palpable (and in the *Phaedrus*, when he reverses himself in regard to eros, his prose gradually transforms itself into poetry.)

In contrast, there are few references in Spinoza to either beauty or the arts, and those passages in which the arts are mentioned only serve to underscore the impression

⁵ See also E4p44.

⁶ Mandelstam's was a self-prophesy. He was arrested in 1938 and sentenced to a prison camp. He died in transit.

⁷ Grube and Reeve translation. Shorey translates the same passage in a way that more vividly highlights Plato's own torn attitude: “we would gladly admit her, since we ourselves are very conscious of her spell.”

that Spinoza did not feel the power of aesthetic experience to be such as to warrant concern, unlike the erotic urge. Music and the theater are mentioned in a list of innocuous amusements that only “savage and sad superstition”—that is, religion—would forbid.

To use things, therefore, and take pleasure in them as far as possible—not, of course, to the point where we are disgusted with them, for there is no pleasure in that—this is the part of the wise man.

It is the part of a wise man, I say, to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another. (E4p45s2/G 2:244).

Music and the theater are as harmless as a good meal or a rousing game of soccer. So go ahead. Enjoy. But don't mistake the experience with the lasting transformations that attend reason's progress. The arts are irrelevant to the rationalist project that alone makes life worth living.

The exercise of reason, for Spinoza, is not an emotionally sterile experience, but is at one with the pleasurable expansive emotions that reside in the sense of our own power increasing, our minds reaching beyond themselves to approach closer to the vast spread of existence. The *Ethics* culminates in a vision of transcendent experience, a bliss attendant on the upper reaches of understanding, which is of a vast and impersonal sort. The experience lifts you right out of yourself, so much so that you think of death least of all things (E4p67) and merge your very identity with a sense of the infinite intricate web of necessary connections that is existence. So it is that the truth-seeking activity of the mind achieves its own salvation. It is an exhilaratingly secularized version of the possibilities for human transcendence.

Many have claimed similar transcendence for aesthetic experience, in particular as a response to art. Aesthetic experience, too, is the result of the mind's cultivation and disciplined activity. It, too, can deliver a bliss that seems to lift you right out of yourself, inducing an experience of merging with the vastness of existence.

But for Spinoza the progress of the understanding must proceed by way of the rigors of logic or not at all. “For the eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes things, are the demonstrations themselves” (E5p23s/G 2:296). It's a poetic line on Spinoza's part; but it also explains why he never considered poetry, or any other art for that matter, a means for transcending our finitude. The faculty of imagination, under which he includes all ideas linked together through (mere) association of ideas—whether the associations are suggested through sense perception or fantasy or hearsay—brings a knower only to the lowest rung of knowledge, providing him with the raw data on which reason can go to work in order to form any adequate idea, its adequacy measured by the number of necessary connections linking it to other ideas. Reality, being composed of the very stuff of logic, demands the rigors of deduction if it is to be known at all, and it is only in our coming to know reality that our transcendence can be achieved and sustained.

Shakespeare's *King Lear*, like Mozart's *Requiem*, is duly classified together with Chanel No. 5 and philodendra.

III. ROMANCING SPINOZA: LESSING, GOETHE, HÖLDERLIN, NOVALIS, COLERIDGE, WORDSWORTH, HEINE, AND ARNOLD

Spinoza made his grand literary debut more than a century after his birth, and it was sensational. It was in Germany, the year was 1785, and the impresario was Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819), whose most lasting contribution to philosophy was his coinage of the term “nihilism” (*Nihilismus*). Nihilism was, Jacobi argued in his *Briefe über die Lehre von Spinoza*, precisely where consistent philosophy inexorably led. And consistent philosophy, he further argued, means Spinoza, which is regrettable. Consistent philosophy is Spinozist, hence pantheist, fatalist, and atheist.⁸ Far from being philosophy's unfortunate erratum, Spinoza was its damnable demonstratum.

Jacobi's attack was on the *Aufklärung*, the Enlightenment, with its presumption that we are made better—and not only better off—by reason's progress. Such an assertion is implicit in the moral philosophy of Jacobi's contemporary, Immanuel Kant: there is a logic underlying moral reasoning, summed up in the categorical imperative, and we act morally insofar as our acts are motivated by our grasp of moral logic. The aim of the Enlightenment was to authorize reason to usurp what properly belongs to the domain of religion, claiming for itself even the moral life of man. Or so Jacobi's argument, not always coherent, seems to go.

Jacobi's line of attack is not unfamiliar to those who follow the contemporary debate between reason and faith, science and religion. The Enlightenment still has not been secured against attacks from both fideists and postmodernists. Jacobi foreshadowed both. A fideist, he argued that knowledge can only be acquired through religious faith. “Faith is the element of all human cognition and activity.”⁹ A proto postmodernist, he argued that the whole notion of objectivity was a myth.¹⁰ And in mounting his argument, he put Spinoza front and center, a politically savvy move, since Spinoza had long been regarded as beyond the pale. The notoriety of Spinoza had not diminished with his death; his form of atheism was branded as more execrable than any other, his influence

⁸ Jacobi, “Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn” (1785), in *Main Philosophical Writings*. See, in particular, p. 187 and pp. 233–34 for his identification of philosophy with fatalism, pantheism, and atheism—in short, “Spinozism.”

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

¹⁰ “And can living philosophy ever be anything but history? . . . And just as every age has its own truth, the content of which is like the content of experience, so too it has its own living philosophy that displays in *progress* the age's dominant pattern of thought” (*ibid.*, p. 239).

often merged with Satan's.¹¹ Well-rehearsed denunciations of Spinoza became a prerequisite for entrance into the academic and ecclesiastical ranks, so that by 1710 there was a *Catalogus scriptorium Anti-Spinozanorum* in Leipzig. Identifying the whole project of the Enlightenment with Satan's philosophical representative was a clever maneuver, even if Jacobi was entirely sincere. The intellectual fireball he ignited was dubbed the *Pantheismusstreit*, the Pantheism Controversy, or, alternatively, the *Spinoza-Krieg*, the Spinoza War. Goethe spoke of it as "an explosion," and Hegel wrote of "a thunderbolt out of the blue." The controversy reconfigured the intellectual and literary landscape of Germany, and, through an odd turn of events, succeeded in transforming the ultra-rationalist Spinoza into a figure that even a Romantic poet could love.

The fracas was precipitated by Jacobi's trying to draw Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) into an argument by revealing to him the scandalous secret that their mutual friend Lessing (1721–1781), who had just recently died, was a closet Spinozist. According to Jacobi, Lessing had confided shortly before his death that he had come to the conclusion that "there is no other philosophy than the philosophy of Spinoza."¹²

It was Mendelssohn who had first introduced Lessing to Spinoza in the first place,¹³ and Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise* had drawn heavily on Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, so perhaps Lessing's Spinozist sympathies did not come to Mendelssohn as the shattering news that Jacobi implied it must be.¹⁴ In any case, and whatever Jacobi's real agenda, the publication of his account of the Mendelssohn-Lessing-Spinoza-Jacobi matrix created a maelstrom that swept in all the leading intellectual and literary figures of Germany, including Kant, and became a referendum on the *Aufklärung*.

Jacobi espouses the kind of "the heart-has-its-reasons-of-which-reason-is-ignorant" line that was symptomatic of the Sturm und Drang crowd,¹⁵ and yet—a delicious twist in the plot—one after another of the leading lights of that movement leapt in to declare themselves Spinozists. Goethe claimed that the three greatest influences on him had been Linnaeus, Shakespeare, and Spinoza. In his autobiography, *Aus meinem Leben*,

¹¹ See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, most especially pp. 48–49. See also Franks, "Nothing comes from Nothing" (this volume).

¹² Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 187.

¹³ Mendelssohn's first book, *Philosophische Gespräche* (1755), was sympathetic to Spinoza.

¹⁴ Jacobi's account of his conversation with Lessing is priceless. The former was humorless, the latter an inveterate wit, and Mendelssohn's initial reaction to Jacobi's revelation was that Lessing was probably pulling Jacobi's leg a great deal of the time, which seems not an unreasonable assumption, (though it certainly offended Jacobi). So, for example, when Jacobi fervently urges him to make a leap of faith—a *salto mortale*, he calls it—Lessing demurs, explaining that he is unable by reason of his age and weight. Jacobi appears to have played the straight man in this crowd. Goethe took a teasing attitude toward him, too, remarking that "God had punished him with metaphysics." Heine has great fun at Jacobi's expense: "He was but a gossiping old woman, disguised in the mantle of philosophy, who, having insinuated himself among philosophers, began by whining to them about his affection and his sensibility and ended by inveighing against reason." Heine winds up a paragraph describing the swarm of adversaries arrayed against Spinoza with "in the midst whimpers the old woman Jacobi, the sutler of this army of the faith" (*Religion and Philosophy*, pp. 79–80).

¹⁵ Jacobi explicitly invokes Pascal as enunciating his "leading theme" in "Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn," *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 237.

Dichtung und Wahrheit, the first volume of which was published in 1811,¹⁶ he claims that Spinoza exerted an extraordinary power over him in his early adulthood, the period during which he wrote *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, or *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, a work of the Sturm und Drang whose extreme popularity had young men not only dressing like young Werther but also romantically committing suicide.

After looking around me in vain for a means of disciplining my peculiar nature, I at last chanced upon the *Ethica* of this man. To say exactly how much I gained from that work was due to Spinoza or to my own reading of him would be impossible; enough that I found in him a sedative for my passions and that he appeared to me to open up a large and free outlook on the material and moral world. But what specially attached me to him was the boundless disinterestedness which shone forth from every sentence. That marvelous saying, “Whoso truly loves God must not desire God to love him in return,” with all the premises on which it rests and the consequences that flow from it, permeated my whole thinking. To be disinterested in everything, and most of all in love and friendship, was my highest desire, my maxim, my constant practice; so that that bold saying of mine at a later date, “If I love Thee, what is that to Thee?” came directly from my heart.¹⁷

Whether this is an example of “Wahrheit” or “Dichtung”—there is little evidence in Goethe’s conduct during this period of his life that Spinoza’s disinterestedness was having the claimed calming effect¹⁸—still, here is Goethe throwing the monumental weight of his stature on the scales for Spinoza. And other Sturm und Drang also lined up to declare for Spinoza. Friedrich Hölderlin, for example, wrote, in a letter to his mother, “[O]ne *must* arrive at his ideas if one wants to explain everything,”¹⁹ and Novalis (1772–1801) memorably described Spinoza as “the God-intoxicated man.”²⁰

It’s a strange tale, but true. Jacobi’s attack on the *Aufklärung* brought one after another of the German Romantics to profess that they had been ardent Spinozists all along. (In fact, it was Jacobi’s giving Goethe’s poem “Prometheus” to Lessing that provoked Lessing into saying that the poem is Spinozist and so is he [Lessing].) Jacobi’s attack on Mendelssohn, by way of Lessing and Spinoza, did more to burnish Spinoza’s reputation than anything that had preceded it.²¹ Spinoza became injected into the literary bloodstream, so that writers beyond Germany’s borders, too, caught the fevered inspiration.

¹⁶ Volumes 2 and 3 followed in 1812 and 1814.

¹⁷ See Hume Brown, *Youth of Goethe*, p. 210.

¹⁸ In Goethe’s letters from this period of his life he frequently refers to the writers he’s reading. The only reference he makes to Spinoza is in a letter to a friend who had had lent him the *Ethics*. “May I keep it a little longer?” he writes. “I will only see how far I may follow the fellow in his subterranean borings” (ibid.).

¹⁹ Hölderlin, No. 41, *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters on Theory*, p. 120.

²⁰ In addition, to Goethe, Hölderlin, and Novalis, the Sturm und Drang thinkers Johann Herder and Friedrich Schelling declared themselves on the side of Spinoza.

²¹ Beiser discusses Spinoza’s reputation changing “apparently, overnight . . . from a devil into a saint” (*Fate of Reason*, p. 44). Jonathan Israel presents material demonstrating that Spinoza had a broad, if subterranean, influence throughout the century prior to the 1780s. See Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*.

The English Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) was deeply interested in German philosophy and closely followed the *Pantheismusstreit*. In this way, Spinozism, especially as it became transformed by the Romantic imagination, began to permeate the English literary scene, influencing not only Coleridge but also such poets as William Wordsworth (1770–1850).

How could a movement that elevated the claims of the ardent heart over those of cold reason find an ally in a writer who entitled the section of his book dealing with the passions “Of Human Bondage”?²² The terms of the *Streit*, which made “pantheism” interchangeable with “Spinozism,” partly explains how. Spinoza’s tricky concept of *Deus sive natura* was transformed into an apotheosis of the beautiful nature of sunsets and mountain views, and his description of the third level of knowledge, intuition, was understood as beatific communion with natural beauty.

Under such an interpretation of Spinoza, such sentiments as those expressed in these lines from Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” can be described as “Spinozist.”

And I have felt
a presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth. . .

Or, take this expression of “natural piety,” from the same poet’s “My Heart Leaps Up”:

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

²² Somerset Maugham used this phrase as the title of a novel, often cited as his masterpiece, depicting the excessive love of the club-footed Philip Carey for Mildred, a less-than-virtuous waitress subject to considerable instability, whom Philip can never possess. The emotional distress and unhappiness that Spinoza deduced would necessarily follow from excessive love necessarily follows.

So, too, the early Coleridge expresses his sense of Spinozism in such passages as this one from “The Eolian Harp”:

O! the one Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
Rhythm in thought, and joyance everywhere—
Methinks, it should have been impossible
Not to love all things in a world so filled . . .
And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all.

The idea that the deifying principle is “within us and abroad,” that we are elevated by, and subjugated to, its habitation within our own self, also appealed to the Romantic soul.²³ Frederick Hölderlin (1770–1843), who spent the last thirty-five years of his life as a prisoner of his own mad mind, had been a poet of rare, if underappreciated, talent in his youth. He studied theology in Tübinger Stift, where, or so some speculate, he interested fellow student G. W. F. Hegel in Heraclitus’s notion of the union of opposites, which Hegel transformed into the doctrine of dialectics. While Hölderlin was studying theology he lost his Christian faith and abandoned his plan to enter the ministry. Shortly after meeting Goethe and Schiller, he began work, while still in his twenties, on an epistolary novel, *Hyperion*, which is shot through with a Spinozism filtered through Romanticism: “There is a god in us who guides destiny as if it were a river of water and all things are his element.”²⁴ “Oh forgive me when I am compelled! I do not choose; I do not reflect. There is a power in me, and I know not if it is myself that drives me to this step.”²⁵ “I once saw a child put out its hand to catch the moonlight; but the light went calmly on its way. So do we stand trying to hold back ever-changing Fate. Oh, that it were possible to watch it as peacefully and meditatively as we do the circling stars.”²⁶ “We speak of our hearts, of our plans, as if they were ours; yet there is a power outside of us that tosses us here and there, as it pleases until it lays us in the grave, and of which we know

²³ In America, the Transcendentalists also vibrated powerfully to this idea. The divine principle we each hold within us was, of course, the great theme of Ralph Waldo Emerson (who was a lifelong friend of Coleridge’s): “That is always best which gives me to myself. The sublime is excited in me by the great stoical doctrine, Obey thyself. That which shows God in me, fortifies me. That which shows God out of me, makes me a wart and a wen. There is no longer a necessary reason for my being. Already the long shadows of untimely oblivion creep over me, and I shall decrease forever.” This is from his Divinity School Address, delivered before the Senior Class in Divinity College, Harvard University, July 15, 1838. The oration garnered Emerson denunciations as an atheist, and he was not invited back to speak at Harvard for the next thirty years.

²⁴ Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, p. 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

not where it comes nor where it is bound.”²⁷ This last quotation echoes a poetic moment in the *Ethics*. In E3p59s, Spinoza writes, “From what has been said it is clear that we are driven about in many ways by external causes, and that, like waves on the sea, driven by contrary winds, we toss about, not knowing our outcome and fate” (G 2:189). Spinoza is, of course, describing life as it is lived outside the “guidance of reason” (E4p50), but this language, only slightly modified, becomes an expression of a more romantic sensibility.

And yet some of the Romantics, particularly Coleridge, eventually came to find certain implications of Spinozism deeply troubling. Spinoza’s version of salvation demands a radical overhaul of one’s personal sense of self. The contingencies that seem to constitute one’s own inviolable individuality fall away as one’s intellect comes more and more to reflect the necessary connections that constitute reality, also known as the infinite intellect of God. The ontological dimming of the self can be rattling to the Romantic soul, with its tendency to glory in its own indomitable selfhood. Coleridge beautifully expresses this rattling:

The *idea* of the Supreme Being appeared to me to be as necessarily implied in all particular modes of being as the idea of infinite space in all the geometrical figures by which space is limited. . . .

For a very long time indeed I could not reconcile personality with infinity; and my head was with Spinoza, though my whole heart remained with Paul and John.²⁸

Spinoza is, of course, the great unifier; the dualisms that had previously been in place—put there by Plato, by Descartes—are denied. Mind and body are the same thing, though viewed under different conceptions or attributes, thinking and extension, conceptions that use incongruent notions—beliefs and emotions, desires and attitudes for thinking, rest and motion for extension—to carve up what is essentially the same thing. (Wordsworth’s mysterious poem “A Slumber” can be read in the light of Spinoza’s mind-body monism.) Another dualism taken for granted, at least since Plato, opposes reason and cognition, on the one hand, against the emotions. This dualism is also collapsed in Spinoza’s system. Every emotional state is also a knowledge claim; and, conversely, knowledge claims are simultaneously emotions. Although Spinoza’s denial of the distinction between cognition and emotions sounds as if it might be compatible with the most unrestrained Romantic irrationalism, it is not. Spinoza is not saying that there is a wisdom in the emotions, so *feel feel feel* in order that you might *know know know*. Rather, his theory of the emotions interprets the emotions as having propositional components. The emotions involve beliefs or judgments about how aspects of the world affect one’s own ability to persist and to thrive (*conatus*), together with the pleasure or pain attendant on those judgments. Since emotions have this propositional element they can be corrected under the “guidance of reason.” And because knowledge always increases

²⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁸ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, pp. 200–201.

our ability to persist and to thrive, adequate ideas are always pleasurable emotions. Cognition is itself an emotionally expansive experience.

Willi Goetschel has argued that Mendelssohn and Lessing, in their exchange with one another on the nature of dramatic tragedy, were interested in working Spinoza's theory of cognition and the emotions into an aesthetics.²⁹ To some extent, this makes sense. After all, the blending of a new and deeper apprehension of the world with profoundly expansive feelings of pleasure sounds like an apt description of aesthetic experience. It wasn't, of course, Spinoza's description of aesthetic experience, but a philosopher can be the source of ideas that are not necessarily his own—in fact, not necessarily even consistent with his own.

Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) was yet another Romantic writer who declared his affinity with Spinoza, whom he interprets in the light of Romantic pantheism. And he claims for this worldview, again identified with Spinoza, an overriding influence on the *Weltgeist* of his German contemporaries.

Germany is now the fertile soil of pantheism. This is the religion of our greatest thinkers, of our best artists, in Germany . . . No one says it, but everyone knows it: pantheism is an open secret in Germany. We have, in fact, outgrown deism. We are free, and want no thundering tyrant; we have reached majority and can dispense with fatherly care. Neither are we the work of a great mechanician. Deism is a religion for slaves, for children, for Genevese, for watchmakers. Pantheism is the occult religion of Germany, and this result was foreseen by those German writers who, fifty years ago, let loose their zealotry against Spinoza.³⁰

Heine may, of course, be overstating the case; he had a tendency to do so. He is certainly expressing his own personal outlook, which he identified with Spinoza, though it is Spinoza as a Romantic would have him, Spinoza as he had been reinterpreted during the *Pantheismusstreit*. Heine is disapproving of Spinoza's mathematical bent. “We also find in Spinoza, as in Descartes, a mode of demonstration borrowed from mathematics; this is a grievous fault.” But if we penetrate past the “harsh exterior” then,

we become conscious of a feeling such as pervades us at the sight of great Nature in her most life-like state of repose; we behold a forest of heaven-reaching thoughts whose blossoming topmost boughs are tossing like waves of the sea, whilst their immovable stems are rooted in the eternal earth. There is a peculiar, indescribable fragrance about the writings of Spinoza. We seem to breathe in them the air of the future.³¹

Heine, in turn, calls Goethe “the Spinoza of poetry,” proclaiming that the Spinozistic element is spread throughout his poetry. “The doctrine of Spinoza has escaped from its chrysalid mathematical form, and flutters about us as a lyric of Goethe.”³²

²⁹ See Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity*.

³⁰ Heine, *Religion and Philosophy*, p. 79.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

The poet Matthew Arnold (1822–1888), who also revered Spinoza, pondered the source of Spinoza’s power over such writers as Lessing, Goethe, and Heine, who was Arnold’s older contemporary. “Heine, the man (in spite of his faults) of truest genius that Germany has produced since Goethe—a man with faults, as I have said, immense faults, the greatest of them being that he could reverence so little—reverenced Spinoza.” It is not, Arnold writes, the “metaphysical formulas” that touch the literary imagination: “Propositions about substance” drift past non-philosophers “like so much idle wind.” Rather, for these great spirits of artistic Romanticism to have been moved “there are needed the wings of a genuine sacred transport, of an ‘immortal longing.’ These wings Spinoza had; and, because he had them, his own language about himself, and his aspirations and his course, are true; his foot is in the *vera vita*, his eye on the beatific vision.”³³

Artists tend to be susceptible to intimations of the sublime, since there is no great art without it. The fact that Spinoza had himself no reverence for the arts is a mere detail. The mood invoked is, for Spinoza’s Romantic admirers, everything. The exhilarating sense of being lifted straight out of oneself through the intense activity of the mind, that heightened state which is every bit as cognitive as it is emotional, and blissfully so at that: this is a “transport” that every great artist must know, their creations, in turn, able to induce such transports in others. Aesthetic experience, one might say, is the alogistic analogue to Spinoza’s *amor Dei intellectualis*. But in being alogistic, it is not, of course, Spinozist at all. Nevertheless, one can hardly blame artists for responding to Spinoza for having embodied, and with such originality, a “sacred transport.”

Students of Spinoza may have wondered how the system of the *Ethics* could be viewed as pantheistic in the sense in which that term is generally understood, and Spinoza viewed as a philosophical forebear of, say, John Muir. The answer lies, at least partly, in the controversy surrounding the Enlightenment, provoked by Jacobi, a provocation that prompted the Romantic poets to reshape Spinoza into a form that allowed them to claim him as one of their own.

IV. “FICTION’S MOST REDOUBTABLE ANTI-SPINOZIST”: HERMAN MELVILLE

Melville’s poem “The Parthenon” includes this stanza:

Spinoza gazes: and in mind
Dreams that one architect designed Lais—and you!

³³ Arnold, “Spinoza and the Bible,” p. 216.

At one point in the draft of this poem, Melville had substituted in “the Pantheist” for “Spinoza,”³⁴ an indication that he had inherited the romanticized version that Spinoza had undergone during the *Pantheismusstreit*, making Pantheism and Spinozism interchangeable. It is no wonder, since Melville studied Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*,³⁵ the poet’s intellectual biography, which shows him to have avidly followed intellectual currents in Germany. Coleridge appeared to have spent the 1790s struggling with “Spinozism.” In *Biographia Literaria*, he reports that, suspected of Jacobin sympathies in his youth, he was spied on by an agent of the government, who eventually cleared him.

He had repeatedly hid himself, he said, for hours together behind a bank at the seaside (our favourite seat), and overheard our conversation. At first he fancied that we were aware of our danger; for he often heard me talk of one Spy Nozy, which he was inclined to interpret of himself, and of a remarkable feature belonging to him; but he was speedily convinced that it was the name of a man who had made a book and lived long ago.³⁶

Spinoza was a major preoccupation for Coleridge, and Melville, studying Coleridge, inherits Coleridge’s preoccupation.³⁷ Echoing Coleridge’s comment about his difficulties reconciling “personality with infinity,” Melville writes to his friend Nathaniel Hawthorne c. April 16, 1851, praising both *The House of Seven Gables* and its author for being a man who “says No! in thunder; . . . For all men who say *yes* lie. And all men who say no,—why they cross the frontiers into Eternity with nothing but a carpet-bag—that is to say the Ego.”³⁸ Melville finds the carpet-bag essential and, to the extent that Spinoza’s thought would wrest it from him, he struggles with Spinoza. We can feel the tremors of those struggles in his masterpiece, *Moby Dick*.

Though the diverse literary strategies that Melville’s *Moby Dick* employs should warn us against making too reductive an interpretation, it is not unreasonable to see in Ahab’s struggles with the leviathan something of Melville’s battle with a worldview that swamps personality with infinity. Ahab, as Richard Gravil memorably puts it, is “fiction’s most

³⁴ See Cohen, “Comment on the Poems,” p. 245.

³⁵ Coleridge, in setting out his philosophy, appears to borrow heavily from Schelling, although, he claims, “all the main fundamental ideas, were born and matured in my mind before I had ever seen a single page of the German philosopher,” an interesting claim made all the more interesting by Coleridge’s also calling Schelling “a great and original genius” (*Biographia Literaria*, p. 161). Melville, in *Moby Dick* (chap. 42) makes a sly joke at Coleridge’s expense that is tied to this passage in the *Biographia Literaria*. Ishmael is recalling “the first albatross I ever saw . . . Through its inexpressible strange eyes methought I peeped to secrets which took hold of God.” He then goes on to say that “by no possibility could Coleridge’s wild Rhyme have had aught to do with those mystical impressions which were mine, when I saw that bird upon our deck. For neither had I then read the Rhyme, nor knew the bird to be an albatross. Yet in saying this I do but indirectly burnish a little brighter the noble merit of the poem and the poet.” See Gravil, *Romantic Dialogues*, p. 150.

³⁶ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, pp. 193–194.

³⁷ See Gravil, *Romantic Dialogues*, for an illuminating discussion of the influence of Coleridge on Melville.

³⁸ Julian Hawthorne, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, vol. 1, p. 388.

redoubtable anti-Spinozist,” and Ahab’s maniacal hatred of the whale, his irrational unappeasability that dooms himself and his crew, contains something of our own—of Coleridge’s, of Melville’s—rebellion against the maddening habit of reality to be what it is despite us. How dare it override our wills? Its very objectivity is an affront to our dignity. This is lunacy, of course, and it is the very lunacy that animates Melville’s masterpiece.

When Ahab first reveals to the crew of the *Pequod* that they are to devote themselves to hunting down and destroying the great white sperm whale who had maimed him, he bends them to his own impassioned purpose. Only Starbuck, the chief steward and a sober and conscientious Quaker, withstands Ahab’s charisma. “Vengeance on a dumb brute!” cried Starbuck, “that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous.” Ahab’s response to Starbuck promotes his monomania to metaphysics:

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! . . . Sometimes I think there’s naught beyond. But ’tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him.

It’s not clear whether, in Ahab’s mind, the “unknown but still reasoning thing” is truly malicious, or whether it must only appear so to him precisely because of its “outrageous strength,” placing it outside the sphere of his control, an unappeasable affront to him, to mankind in general. “Talk not to me of blasphemy, man,” he continues to berate Starbuck. “I’d strike the sun if it insulted me.”³⁹

This megalomaniacal madness is a metaphysical madness. Ahab is enraged by what he suspects might be the case: “Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? . . . if the great sun move not of himself, but is an errand boy in heaven . . . how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does that living, not I?”⁴⁰ Ahab is intent on proving his autonomy over nature, including over his very own nature, and the irony of course is that the defiance that dooms him is itself determined. It is the very essence of his character not to accept the essence of his character. He is driven by his maddened desire not to be driven, as he himself seems sometimes, self-maddeningly, to glimpse. On the second day of the chase, after Starbuck almost succeeds in getting Ahab to relent, Ahab pulls back short, declaring “Ahab is ever Ahab, man. This whole act’s immutably decreed. ‘Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates’ lieutenant; I act under orders. Look, thou, underling! That thou obeyest mine!”⁴¹

³⁹ *Moby Dick*, chap. 36.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. 132.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, chap. 134.

Ahab, of course, pulls down the Pequod and its entire crew. Perhaps they all deserved it (except for Starbuck!) for relinquishing to him their identities, together with all sense of responsibility for their own actions. (Spinozism requires the tricky double maneuver of both surrendering one's self and retaining responsibility over one's self. The wise man, under the guidance of reason, is obligated to view all things, even himself, *sub specie aeternitatis*).

Whatever pale fears and foreboding some of them might have felt before; these were not only now kept out of sight through the growing awe of Ahab, but they were broken up, and on all sides routed, as timid prairie hares that scatter before the bounding bison. The hand of Fate had snatched their souls. . . . They were one man, not thirty . . . this man's valor, that man's fear; guilt and guiltiness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal god to which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to.⁴²

Ishmael, though he has at times been threatened with ontological extinction by the "Pantheism" that would merge selfhood into the all,⁴³ is the lone survivor. By being the disinterested observer, he has retained his faculty of judgment and sense of agency. By the time he is pulled into the raging vortex into which everybody else has disappeared, it has quieted

to a creamy pool. Round and round, then, and ever contracting towards the button-like black bubble at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve. Till, gaining that vital centre, the black bubble upward burst; and now, liberated by reason of its cunning spring, and, owing to its great buoyancy, rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot lengthwise from the sea, fell over, and floated by my side. Buoyed up by that coffin, for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirgelike main.⁴⁴

This is the coffin that Queequeg—that tattooed "cannibal" from Polynesia— had prepared for himself when he was ailing. After his recovery, Queequeg, with "wild whimsicalness," carved the lid

with all manner of grotesque figures and drawings; and it seemed that hereby he was striving, in his rude way, to copy parts of the twisted tattooing on his body. And

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Here is Ishmael reflecting on the perils of being lulled into too disinterested a point of view while one is precariously perched in the ship's crow's nest: "There is no life in thee now, except that rocking life imparted by a gently rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God. But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or your hand an inch; . . . and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through the transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise forever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists!" (ibid., chap. 35).

⁴⁴ Ibid., Epilogue.

this tattooing had been the work of a departed prophet and seer of his island, who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth; so that Queequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them.⁴⁵

Queequeg had at first presented a terrifying sight to Ishmael, but the two grow close, respecting and loving one another; Ishmael takes to referring to him as “my Queequeg.”⁴⁶ The truth that Queequeg loves in all its inscrutability, inscribing it on his body to make it as much a part of himself as its unintelligibility will allow—in wild contrast to Ahab—is reproduced onto the coffin lifebuoy that floats Ishmael to safety. Truly, “[t]o man, then, there is nothing more useful than man.”⁴⁷

So is Ahab’s doom the outcome of his unreasoned defiance of the necessity that arises from out of the pages of the *Ethics*? Does Melville side with Spinoza in the end, acknowledging that the structure of reality demands a rethinking of the reality of the self? It is impossible to say, and it hardly matters. What does seem quite clear is that one of the great masterpieces of philosophical literature could not have been written had reflections on Spinoza not entered deep into the literary bloodstream.

V. SPINOZA’S ENGLISH TRANSLATOR: GEORGE ELIOT

The *Pantheismusstreit* had made Spinoza a hero to some of the most influential literary figures of Germany. The cross-fertilizations between writers soon made itself felt in England where Spinoza, cast as Goethe had cast him, as “our common saint,” made his appearance. By the 1850s, a group of progressive, secular-leaning British thinkers began to write of Spinoza in semi-hagiographic terms, producing the sort of narrative that was compressed into Bertrand Russell’s thumbnail presentation of the philosopher’s life in *The History of Western Philosophy*. George Henry Lewes (1817–1878) published an essay, “Spinoza’s Life and Works,” in the *Westminster Review* in 1843, presenting the philosopher in exalted terms, as “the young truth-seeker,” undeterred by threats, bribery, and assassination attempts by outraged coreligionists.

Lewes would eventually become George Eliot’s companion, though they did not meet until 1851. In 1849, Eliot had already begun working on a translation of Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, and from 1854 until 1856 she worked on a translation of the *Ethics*. Eliot’s was to have been the first English translation of Spinoza’s work,

⁴⁵ Ibid., chap. 110.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ E4p18s/G 2:223.

although, because of an altercation between Lewes and the publisher, the translation was not published until 1978. A few months after finishing her translation, Eliot turned her mind toward writing fiction, beginning the piece that eventually became *Scenes from a Clerical Life*.

Unlike other literary figures who declared themselves Spinozists without bothering too much with the details of the system, Eliot possessed the intimate knowledge of the translator. Given the sort of fiction that she went on to produce, it is not difficult to imagine that her decision to write fiction was at least partly a reaction to Spinoza. Although she refers to Spinoza by name only once in her fiction, and that is to chide him for not being, as she was, sufficiently philo-Semitic,⁴⁸ Spinozist elements are manifest in her fiction, not least of all in the purpose she gives to her art. Eliot staunchly defines her art in ethical terms. As Spinoza tries to transform us on the cognitive, emotional, and moral level through strict deductive proofs, so Eliot seeks to do the same through her fiction. For Eliot, as for Spinoza, the cognitive and emotional and moral are not separate, self-contained domains. Rather, the cognitive is emotional is moral. However, this identification hides ambiguities, and the decision Eliot made to write fiction certainly points to a divergence between her own views and those of the philosopher she had translated.

And yet aspects of Spinozism firmly impress themselves on her work. Like Spinoza, Eliot is concerned with disengaging ethics from theology, and she is merciless in depicting the ways in which religious zeal is often indicative of the very opposite of moral integrity, an expression of hatred and fear rather than the expansive, loving appreciation of reality which defines true piety.

The superstitious know how to reproach people for their vices better than they know how to teach them virtues, and they strive, not to guide men by reason, but to restrain them by Fear, so that they flee the evil rather than love virtues. Such people aim only to make others as wretched as they themselves are, so it is no wonder that they are generally burdensome and hateful to men. (E4p63s1)

So wrote Spinoza. And here is Eliot, who makes good use of such burdensome and hateful tendencies in her plot lines. “I don’t like the set he belongs to,” the amiable, skeptical clergyman, Mr. Farebrother, says of the fanatical Mr. Bulstrode in *Middlemarch*. “They are a narrow ignorant set, and do more to make their neighbors uncomfortable than to make them better. Their system is a sort of worldly-spiritual cliquism: they really look on the rest of mankind as a doomed carcass which is to nourish them for heaven.”⁴⁹

Eliot herself had gone through a fervent evangelical period in her youth, and when she abandoned it, she abandoned the idea that goodness requires God. Her fiction is intent on

⁴⁸ “Baruch Spinoza,” she writes in her last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, “had not a faithful Jewish heart, though he had sucked the life of his intellect at the breasts of Jewish tradition. He laid bare his father’s nakedness, and said ‘They who scorn him have the higher wisdom: Yet Baruch Spinoza confessed, he saw not why Israel should not again be a chosen nation’ (p. 452).

⁴⁹ Eliot, *Middlemarch*, pp. 112–113.

proving the point, not only by vividly presenting us with close-up depictions of the workings of religious hypocrisy and bigotry and craven, pitiful God-toadying, but also in presenting the portraiture of secular goodness. Here is Eliot's most laudable heroine, Dorothea Casaubon, née Brooks, of *Middlemarch*, confessing her moral passion:

"But I have a belief of my own, and it comforts me."

"What is that?" said Will, rather jealous of the belief.

"That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil—widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower."

"That is a beautiful mysticism—it is a—"

"Please not to call it by any name," said Dorothea, putting out her hands entreatingly.

"You will say it is Persian, or something else geographical. It is my life. I have found it out, and cannot part with it. I have always been finding out my religion since I was a little girl. I used to pray so much—now I hardly ever pray."⁵⁰

Eliot's fictional world operates under a strict determinism, but this determinism allows, as in Spinoza, for freedom and moral growth.⁵¹ Character, for Eliot, is described exclusively in moral terms, and her interest is in plotting out how characterological tendencies and social factors play out "under the varying experiments of Time," as she writes in the prologue to *Middlemarch*. The *Ethics* is ultimately addressed to the question, what can be *done* with human nature? So, too, is Eliot's fiction. All her characters are driven by their endeavor to persist in their own beings and to flourish, as Spinoza tells us we all must be; all are pursuing their notions of pleasure; and all—even her most admirable characters—have their fatally inadequate ideas and conatus-induced blindnesses. And yet some characters allow enough of the world to seep into their consciousness so as to be edified by it, while others are impervious to reality's corrections. This susceptibility to the chastisements rendered by reality is what makes the great moral difference, for Eliot as for Spinoza, explaining why some make moral progress while others—the incorrigibly vain or self-righteous or frightened⁵²—are stymied.

We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves. Dorothea had early begun to emerge from that stupidity, but yet it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr. Casaubon,

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁵¹ "I shall not be satisfied with your philosophy," Eliot wrote in a letter of 1875, "till you have conciliated necessitarianism—I hate the ugly word—with the practice of willing strongly, of willing to will strongly, and so on" (*George Eliot Letters*, 6: 166).

⁵² Eliot, in true Spinozist spirit, often presents the vain, the self-righteous, and the frightened wrapped up in religious garments. Both Mr. Casaubon and Mr. Bulstrode in *Middlemarch* are moral monsters, ready to sacrifice others to their ends; and both see themselves, and are seen by their neighbors, as profoundly religious. Both are ultimately governed by fear, and "religion can only change when the emotions which fill it are changed and the religion of personal fear remains nearly at the level of the savage" (p. 384).

and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling—an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects—that he had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference.⁵³

Knowledge, for both Eliot and Spinoza, redeems us, but knowledge, to be truly knowledge, must be of the soul-transformative kind, prompted by a love of the truth that will take in the truth even when it does not gratify our sense of ourselves. This is the knowledge that itself becomes expansive emotion.

It is an uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught, and yet not to enjoy: to be present at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self—never to be fully possessed by the glory we behold, never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardour of a passion, the energy of any actions, but always to be scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted.⁵⁴

Knowledge, as with Spinoza, must work the whole self; otherwise it is just another way for the ego to blot out the world: “Will not a tiny speck very close to our vision blot out the glory of the world, and leave only a margin by which we see the blot? I know no speck so troublesome as self.”⁵⁵

But Eliot’s art is not only focused on representing human nature and its capacity for moral transformation. She sees art as itself an instrument for moral transformation.

If Art does not enlarge men’s sympathies, it does nothing morally. I have had heart-cutting experiences that opinions are a poor cement between human souls; and the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures.⁵⁶

Spinoza, too, thought opinions a bad cement between human souls, and he, too, had written on the importance of a knowledge that is not emotionally inert: “No affect can be restrained by the true knowledge of good and evil insofar as it is true, but only insofar as it is considered as an affect” (E4p14). Both Spinoza and Eliot merge the cognitive, emotional, and moral. But there is a fundamental difference. For Eliot, the feelings of sympathy with others itself amounts to moral knowledge, more trustworthy than any other, she often suggests;⁵⁷ whereas Spinoza classifies such emotions as sympathy, pity

⁵³ Ibid., p. 135.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 177.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 260.

⁵⁶ Letter to Charles Bray, 5 July 1859, in *George Eliot Letters*, 3:110–111.

⁵⁷ “There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow men” (Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 383).

and compassion among the passive emotions that come about through the haphazard attachments of pain and pleasure with objects. The desirable, the moral emotions, arising out of human sympathy and pity, are what, for Eliot, gives rise to the necessary moral knowledge, whereas for Spinoza, the process goes in the opposite direction. It is the active emotions of understanding, the pleasurable expansiveness of knowledge itself, that realize true moral progress. The feelings of pity and sympathy are, in themselves, unreliable sources and guides. "Pity, in a man who lives according to the guidance of reason, is evil of itself, and useless," he writes in E4p50, going on in the following scholium to argue:

He who rightly knows that all things follow from the necessity of the divine nature, and happen according to the eternal laws and rules of nature, will surely find nothing worthy of Hate, Mockery or Disdain, nor anyone whom he will pity. Instead he will strive, as far as human virtue allows, to act well, as they say, and rejoice.

To this we may add that he who is easily touched by the affect of Pity, and moved by another's suffering or tears, often does something he later repents—both because, from an affect, we do nothing which we certainly know to be good, and because we are easily deceived by false tears.

Actions that originate in feelings, even our most compassionate feelings, are not, for Spinoza, the source of moral actions. Rather, it is feelings that originate in knowledge—that are, in fact, the feelings of joy that we take in the knowledge itself—that become the emotions necessary in making one's way morally through life. Clear-sighted apprehension of reality is both necessary and sufficient. It is reason that will bring a person to see that

[h]ate is to be conquered by returning Love, and that everyone who is led by reason desires for others also the good he wants for himself.

To this we may add what we have noted in E4p50s and in other places: a man strong in character considers this most of all, that all things follow from the necessity of the divine nature, and hence, that whatever he thinks is troublesome and evil, and moreover, whatever seems immoral, dreadful, unjust, and dishonorable, arises from the fact that he conceives the things themselves in a way that is disordered, mutilated, and confused. For this reason, he strives most of all to conceive things as they are in themselves, and to remove the obstacles to true knowledge. (E4p73s)

One can hear echoes of the *Ethics*, most especially of Part III, in Eliot's depictions of the moral complexions of her characters. Like Spinoza, she, too, believes that there are not only active thoughts but active emotions that can make us better. And yet she departs from Spinoza's views on the all-important question of what these thoughts and emotions are, and how they can be arrived at. Human sympathy, even if aroused by contingent, unreasoned means, is, for Eliot, central, and art—and, in particular, literature—which induces us, through its vivifying incitements of the imagination, to participate in others' experiences and strengthens our powers of empathy, is therefore

the most effective instrument of moral strengthening. “I think,” she wrote in a letter of 1866,

[A]esthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity. . . . [C]onsider the sort of agonizing labour to an English-fed imagination to make art a sufficiently real back-ground, for the desired picture, to get breathing, individual forms, and group them in the needful relations, so that the presentation will lay hold on the emotions as human experience—will, as you say, “flash” convictions on the world by means of aroused sympathy.⁵⁸

Art is able to do what mere argument cannot because it is able to arouse sympathy. And this aroused sympathy, according to Eliot, is fundamental to moral progress.

Eliot, of all the great literary figures, had an intimate acquaintance with Spinoza. But her understanding of Spinoza did not induce complete agreement. When she asks “Is there not a genius for feeling nobly which also reigns over human spirits and their conclusions?”⁵⁹ one can well imagine the imagined interlocutor to whom she is addressing herself.

VI. THE JEWISH SPINOZA: BERTHOLD AUERBACH, I. B. SINGER, AND BERNARD MALAMUD

Spinoza, it has been argued, by, among others, Jonathan Israel,⁶⁰ was all along a provocative agent in the move toward the European Enlightenment, his reasoning churning beneath the intellectual surface even while he was being routinely denounced. Jacobi’s attack on Lessing had the effect of thrusting Spinoza out into the open as the movement’s putatively formative thinker. If thinkers like Israel are right, then there was justification to Jacobi’s charges. The way to the Enlightenment really had been prepared by Baruch Spinoza.

One of the prime participants in the *Pantheismusstreit*, Moses Mendelssohn, was the leading figure in what is called the *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment. The term derives from the Hebrew word for the intellect; followers were known as *maskilim* (singular: *maskil*). Partly an intellectual movement and partly a political movement aimed at winning equal rights for German Jews, the *Haskalah* placed much of the responsibility for a change in their status on Jews themselves, urging them to step out of their ghetto mentalities, to forsake Yiddish and learn the language of their country, to broaden their

⁵⁸ Letter to Frederic Harrison, 15th August, 1866, in Eliot, *George Eliot’s Life*, 2:441.

⁵⁹ Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 366.

⁶⁰ See Israel’s masterful *Radical Enlightenment*. See also my *Betraying Spinoza*.

lives of study to include the riches of secular learning. Mendelssohn was both an observant Jew and a man fully conversant and comfortable with secular literature and philosophy, and his life of reconciliation between the two cultures was meant to be the model for the early thinkers of the *Haskalah*. But the figure of Spinoza—who firmly left his Jewishness behind after his banishment from the Portuguese-Jewish community of Amsterdam—was, from the very beginning, a source of fascination and inspiration to the *maskilim*. Mendelssohn's first published work was a study of the philosopher, and once Goethe and others declared themselves as ardent admirers, Spinoza became the heretic in whom enlightened Jews could take special pride.

But as the *Haskalah* gathered strength, a fundamental rift appeared among its adherents. There were those who, like Mendelssohn, argued that secularization was fully compatible with Jewish tradition and identity, and those who, like Heinrich Heine, found such compatibilism either intellectually or practically impossible. (Heine converted to Lutheranism in 1826, writing that conversion was “the ticket of admission into European culture.”⁶¹) Though it is easier to see why someone like Heine would cherish the example of the banished son of the Jews of Amsterdam, both sides of the controversy claimed Spinoza as an ally. Though the two groups approached the *Haskalah* differently, both laid claims to Spinoza as the first *maskil*.

One way in which the “compatibilists” among the *maskilim* responded was to try to create a new Jewish culture, one which would incorporate Western learning and values while still retaining distinctly Jewish elements: no matter what Jews would go on and study and accomplish in the outside world, they were urged to feel a unique bond of kinship with one another and their shared history. Utilizing Western literary devices, the compatibilists produced Jewish novels, most particularly in the genre of historical fiction. The first of these was entitled *Spinoza* and was authored by Berthold Auerbach. Auerbach had also changed his name from “Baruch,” and in his letters to his cousin he revealed a deep identification with the subject of his novel.⁶²

Auerbach advocated for both German nationalism and Jewish allegiance (a dual-patriotism that was characteristic of the German-Jewish community until its decimation), and he also argued for an interpretation of Judaism that was evolutionary in its very essence, a steady cumulative march away from tribal parochialism toward the ideals of universalism (though the traditionalist rabbis were often the last to understand the progressive essence of their religion).

These themes are hammered home in Auerbach's novel, (with historical facts often shattered in the hammering). So, for example, the novel presents Spinoza discovering at fifteen, right after he has been ordained a rabbi, that his mother had been a Moor who

⁶¹ Quoted in Sagarra, *Tradition and Revolution*, p. 11.

⁶² Some have dismissed Auerbach's *Spinoza* as little more than disguised autobiography, but Jonathan Skolnik convincingly argues it is more. “Auerbach's historical novel creates a reading public and presents Jewish and non-Jewish readers with the open-ended drama of modernization: a novel about the limits of communal acceptance in an incompletely secularized society, a novel that itself participates in the creation of a secular Jewish culture” (Skolnik, “Writing Jewish History,” p. 107).

converted to Judaism out of love for his father.⁶³ This wrenches him out of the narrow sectarianism of the Amsterdam Portuguese-Jewish community.

What confusion there is in the life of humanity thus divided into races and sects, each one of which hates and persecutes the other, and thinks itself alone wise and righteous: thus the Temples become encampments where the watchword given out is salvation to the initiated, damnation to all the rest.

A voice stronger and more piercing than that of the Synagogue now called upon Baruch to pronounce the blessing on the revealed unwritten Law, whose two pillars are freedom from all shackles of race or creed, and love to all mankind. Had not Maimonides already taught that, “the pious of all religions shall inherit eternal felicity”? Baruch was no longer a son of Israel only, he was the child of humanity. It was not his descent alone that gave him this impulse thus to classify himself, though possibly it was the first motive. The Spirit of Life, the Spirit of God seized upon him, carried him over all boundaries, and held him firm and free in blissful uncertainty.⁶⁴

The novel’s major plotline involves the love crisis between Spinoza and his Latin tutor, the daughter of Franciscus van den Enden, who is here for some reason named Olympia rather than Claire-Marie; another major innovation of the novel is to transform her father from the freethinking van den Enden of history into a bigoted old man who objects to his daughter’s infatuation with the Jew.

In Auerbach’s depiction, Olympia is a high-spirited, music-loving, rather mad-cap young woman. Henry Oldenburg (1619–1677), the first secretary of the newly formed Royal Society of London, whose correspondence with Spinoza is a wonderful resource for Spinoza scholars, is, in Auerbach’s novel, Olivia’s special friend, and it is through her that Spinoza and Oldenburg meet. The liberties taken with historical facts are often amusing. So, for example, after Olympia objects to Spinoza’s given name—“Baruch! Ugh! It makes me quite ill and frightened, it is so like a conjuration, the name would sound lugubrious in music, I should accompany it with F minor, listen!”—she re-christens him “Benedictus.”

“Sit down,” she said, “and you, Herr Oldenburg, come here, you shall be witness of the baptism.”

She then laid her hands on Baruch’s head and said, “In the name of Aristotle, Bacon, and Descartes, I give thee the name Benedictus, that the name may be great and last for ever and ever, and that, whenever thou writest that name, thou mayest think of her from whom the word arose. *Benedicite! In saecula saecularum, Amen!*”

The concluding words she sang to a church chant,

“Have I done it right?” she asked as she raised her hands, and as if involuntarily stroked Benedict’s cheek with the right.

⁶³ Spinoza, of course, was neither ordained a rabbi nor mothered by a convert.

⁶⁴ Auerbach, *Spinoza*, 1:127.

“So well,” said Oldenburg, “that if you should find my name Henry, or Hendrik, as it is called in this country, unmusical, I would let you give me another, without fear of being accused of blasphemy. I should so like to know how it feels to be under your blessing hands.” Olympia blushed, but passed her hand over her face to hide her confusion.⁶⁵

Poor Olympia has much to confuse her. Spinoza’s vacillates throughout the novel, his better nature knowing that love directed toward a finite mode—even so delightful a one as Olympia—will entail a compromise with the demands of reason.

A heart accustomed to suppress all stormy ebullitions, to gain the even pulsation and moderation of expression that is as far removed from dull stupidity as from extremes of joy and sorrow, in such a life we do not meet with dizzy heights or dark depths that fill the sympathetic spectator sometimes with painful horror at the threatened ruin, and sometimes with quiet satisfactions at the safety gained.

Our hero has not lost himself for love of a woman, but his better life is endangered by it. . . . No visible Kingdom will be revolutionized by the rise and fall of our hero, but a Kingdom of the mind, with wide-spreading influence, is brought into jeopardy. In the quiet, unadorned garret in the Kalverstraat, Amsterdam, the conflict will be decided.⁶⁶

Auerbach’s *Spinoza* sets various precedents, not only introducing Spinoza as a literary character, but marking him out as having a special significance for Jewish progressives. There are a staggering number of Yiddish books that discuss Spinoza, and his life was put onto the Yiddish stage by at least four playwrights. Spinoza’s works become, for the Yiddish writer, a symbol that his or her intended readers will immediately recognize. All that a Yiddish writer had to do was place a copy of the *Ethics* in a character’s possession and much would be tacitly understood: this character had begun his life within the confines of religious orthodoxy from which he was struggling free, an autodidact thirsting for the greater world. So, for example, a short story by I. B. Singer,⁶⁷ “A Tutor in the Village,” opens with this paragraph:

At the end of 1922, or perhaps it was at the beginning of 1923, I was offered a teaching job in the village of Kocica. I had left home and become “enlightened.” I had taken off my Jewish cap and my gaberline and put on a Polish cap and a short jacket. Nevertheless, my new employer, Naphtalie Tereshpoler, hired me to teach his children—first, because he had known my grandfather, the rabbi of Bilgoray, and, second, because he wanted his boys and girls to learn not only the Torah but a little Polish and arithmetic as well . . .

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1:249.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2:156.

⁶⁷ I go into Singer’s attitude toward Spinoza at greater length in the last section of this chapter.

. . . I had packed all my belongings into one valise—a few shirts, underwear, socks, a Polish grammar, an eighty-year-old algebra text, and Spinoza’s *Ethics* translated into German.⁶⁸

This method of shorthand characterization, using Spinoza, was carried by Jewish writers to the New World. *The Fixer*, the Pulitzer-prize-winning novel by Bernard Malamud (1914–1986), is based on the case of Menahem Mendel Beilis, who was charged with the “ritual murder” of a Christian boy in the last days of czarist Russia.

When Malamud introduces his protagonist, Yakov Bok, an impoverished handyman, he is leaving his village behind for the big city, Kiev, having sold all his meager goods except for his tools “and a few books: Smirnovsky’s *Russian Grammar*, an elementary biology book, *Selections from Spinoza*.”⁶⁹

The Investigating Magistrate found the cigarette in his pocket and lit it. He smoked silently, standing on the other side of the table, still studying Yakov’s tormented face in the candlelight.

“I saw among your possessions when you were arrested a few books, among others a volume of selected chapters from the work of the philosopher Spinoza.”

“That’s right, your honor. Could I get them back? I’m also worried about my tools.”

“In due course, if you are not indicted. Are you familiar with his writings?”

“Only in a way of speaking,” said the fixer, worried by the question. “Although I’ve read the book I don’t understand it all.”

“What is its appeal to you? First let me ask you what brought you to Spinoza? Is it that he was a Jew?”

“No, your honor. I didn’t know who or what he was when I first came across the book—they don’t exactly love him in the synagogue, if you’ve read the story of his life. I found it in a junkyard in a nearby town, paid a kopek and left cursing myself for wasting money hard to come by. Later I read through a few pages and kept on going as though there were a whirlwind at my back. As I say, I didn’t understand every word but when you’re dealing with such ideas you feel as though you were taking a witch’s ride. After that I wasn’t the same man. That’s in a manner of speaking of course, because I’ve changed little since my youth.”

Though he had answered freely, talking about a book with a Russian official frightened the fixer. He’s testing me, he thought. Still when all’s said and done, better questions about a book than a murdered child. I’ll tell the truth but speak slowly.

“Would you mind explaining what you think Spinoza’s work means? In other words if it’s a philosophy what does it state?”

“That’s not so easy to say,” Yakov answered apologetically. “The truth is I’m a half-ignorant man. The other half is half-educated. There’s a lot I miss even when I pay the strictest attention.”

⁶⁸ *Collected Stories: A Friend of Kafka to Passions*, p. 685.

⁶⁹ Malamud, *The Fixer*, p. 8.

“I will tell you why I ask. I ask because Spinoza is among my favorite philosophers and I am interested in his effect on others.”⁷⁰

The prisoner is somewhat reassured by the magistrate’s words, though, of course, he is still uncertain how much of this discussion of Spinoza is a trap being laid. The magistrate pushes him to produce his take on Spinoza, which produces an exposition of the philosopher’s ideas that manages to be quite faithful to Spinoza, while also revealing more of the character of Yakov, wary and wry, eager and cynical:

There’s also something called Necessity, which is always there though nobody wants it, that one has to push against. In the shtetl God goes running around with the Law in both hands, but this other God, though he fills up more space, has less to do altogether. Whoever you end up believing in, nothing has changed much in the world if you’re without work.⁷¹

The discussion of Necessity prompts the magistrate to introduce the question of freedom and then, dangerously, the question of political freedom.

“Is such a thing as you describe it, true freedom, would you say, or cannot one be free without being politically free?”

Here’s where I’d better watch my step, the fixer thought. Politics is politics. No use fanning up hot coals when you have to walk across them.⁷²

When later, the Investigating Magistrate seems to turn on Bok, the prisoner wonders, “Was this the man who said he admired Spinoza?”⁷³ But, as things transpire, an admiration for Spinoza not only provides a shorthand for creating character; it provides a reliable test for character. Bibikov proves to be so ethical a man that he, too, is doomed by the corruption of the state. And Bok’s own moral growth while imprisoned—his coming, for example, to understand and thus forgive his erring wife—follows Spinoza’s own teachings. Powerless Bok, up against no less a figure than the Czar himself, experiences the sort of freedom that comes through the progress of the understanding, the expansive ability of seeing one’s own life in an ever-widening context.

Berthold Auerbach and Bernard Malamud, along with others who wrote in Hebrew and Yiddish and various of the languages of the far-flung Diaspora, laid claim to a special kinship between Spinoza and the Jews, a kinship that many of their readers felt. But the split that divided the original *maskilim* of Moses Mendelssohn’s time continues to be felt even today. Spinoza’s own indifference to his Jewish identity seems, to some—even if they are not traditionalists per se—to cross an invisible line that goes beyond atheism,

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 75–76.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 77.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 85.

disentitling Jews from feeling any affinity, at least *qua* Jews, with Spinoza. Attempts to place Spinoza in a Jewish context can still draw ire from one's coreligionists.

VII. A SPLENDID ACT OF IMAGINATION: JORGE LUIS BORGES, ZBIGNIEW HERBERT, EUGENE OSTASHEVSKY

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) often claimed that he assessed philosophical ideas strictly according to their aesthetic appeal, giving high marks to the singular and marvelous. On these grounds, Spinoza appealed to him. Borges playfully inserts fleeting allusions to Spinoza in several of his stories, including “Death and the Compass,” in which a brilliant detective, Erik Lönnrot, “who thought of himself as a pure logician,”⁷⁴ receives three fatally misleading clues, one of which is a letter signed by one “Baruch Spinoza.” “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” too, mentions Spinoza in describing a nonexistent place, Tlön, first conjured in the seventeenth century, “the work of a secret society of astronomers, biologists, engineers, metaphysicians, poets, chemists, mathematicians, moralists, painters, and geometricians.”⁷⁵ The tale not only suggests, as much of Borges’s fiction does, that the borders between reality and fantasy are porous, but also ultimately adopts a rather Spinozistic ethical take, condemning mankind for its willingness to forsake reality (though such an accomplished ironist as Borges should perhaps never be taken at his word, especially when he appears to be moralizing):

Almost immediately, reality gave ground on more than one point. The truth is that it hankered to give ground. Ten years ago, any symmetrical system whatsoever which gave the appearance of order—dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism—was enough to fascinate men. Why not fall under the spell of Tlön and submit to the minute and vast evidence of an ordered planet? Useless to reply that reality, too, is ordered. It may be so, but in accordance with divine laws—I translate: inhuman laws—which we will never completely perceive. Tlön may be a labyrinth, but it is a labyrinth plotted by men, a labyrinth destined to be deciphered by men. Contact with Tlön and the ways of Tlön have disintegrated this world. Captivated by its discipline, humanity forgets and goes on forgetting that it is the discipline of chess masters, not of angels.⁷⁶

Borges’s father, Jorge Guillermo Borges Haslam, was a lawyer with literary aspirations—“he tried to become a writer and failed in the attempt,” according to his son—and was also a committed Spinozist, but Borges always claimed to be unable to understand the

⁷⁴ Borges, *Aleph and Other Stories*, p. 65.

⁷⁵ Borges, *Ficciones*, p. 22.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

philosopher. It was while Borges was reflecting on Spinoza that he offered the (ironical?) suggestion that all philosophy may well be a branch of fantastic literature. He also claimed to have regretted not including Spinoza in his *Anthology of Fantastic Literature* along with such writers as Edgar Allan Poe and H. G. Wells. After all, he said, Spinoza's God is a "splendid act of the imagination," rivaling any tales of a dead man under hypnosis or a time machine.⁷⁷

Borgesian fictions, often taking the form of convoluted intellectual exercises, revel in the scourge of all rationalist enterprises, the mind-paralyzing paradox that humbles our intellectual pretension of being able to see clear through to the end. He also confessed himself inconsolable by the sort of radical objectivity Spinoza espouses. Spinoza confers on reality, or rather on our apprehension of reality, all the saving powers that traditional religion offers, including the power to console us for our finitude, which makes us prey to misfortunes beyond our control, including our mortality. Borges confessed himself inconsolable by such metaphysics. He ended a lecture on Spinoza with these words:

Sometimes, far from any philosophical idea, I wonder why the destiny of an individual named Borges who lived in the twentieth century in a city named Buenos Aires, in the southern hemisphere, is of any interest to myself, why his fate, which is nothing in this universe, interests me so. But it is difficult to console oneself in this way. I have tried to take Spinoza seriously, but I have never been able to do so.⁷⁸

Nevertheless, in the 1970s Borges reportedly contemplated writing a full-scale study of Spinoza, though he eventually gave it up, insisting on his incapacity to grasp the philosopher's system. It is very much in the coy spirit of Borges that, abandoning his project, he nevertheless wrote an apocryphal biographical entry about himself, dated 2074, in which he recommends this unwritten book to any readers who are interested in Borges's philosophical commitments. Spinoza is the only philosopher mentioned in the pseudonote, for what that's worth. And when he was asked to name his favorite historical figure, Borges immediately responded, "Spinoza, who committed his life to abstract thought," a response that has the mark of sincerity, despite the writer's cavalier attitude toward those fantastical creations, philosophical systems.⁷⁹ At times he suggested that Spinoza had

⁷⁷ "Spinoza's system exists like an attribute of Spinoza, we think of his system as an attribute of that creator who is Spinoza himself. I have met no one who accepts Spinoza's system. It is possible to accept the reality of pantheism. It is easy to accept the idea that everything is God to a greater or lesser degree. . . . But the idea that all that is is a whole and that that whole is God and that that God has an infinite number of attributes, is only acceptable as a fantasy, as a splendid act of the imagination" (Borges, *Borges en la Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires*, p. 72). The translation is from Kristal, "Unrequited Sublimations," p. 228, fn. 11.

⁷⁸ This is from a lecture, "Spinoza, A Pathetic Figure," that Borges gave in 1980 at the Freudian School of Buenos Aires. For a Spanish edition, see *Borges en la Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires*. The English translation can be found in Aizenberg, ed., *Borges and His Successors*, pp. 276–284.

⁷⁹ This interview was originally in the *Cuestionario Proust* (1979). It is reprinted in Borges, *Textos recobrados 1956-1986*, pp. 344–348. The translation of Borges's answer is as found in Abadi, "Spinoza in Borges' Looking-Glass."

produced more of a religion than a philosophy, and if so he ought to be regarded not as a thinker but a saint.

The religious suggestion is not empty. Despite the cultivated irony of his style, Borges regarded the singular man behind the singular system with a touch of reverential awe. Here is a thinker utterly alone in all of the grandeur of pure reason, a grandeur not diminished by the futility of reason's project. In fact, if anything the grandeur is all the greater for being futile. Not even Spinoza can escape the tragic dimension.

Borges gave expression to his tragic sense of Spinoza in two sonnets. The first, which is entitled simply "Spinoza," was published in 1964 in his collection, *El otro, el mismo*. Borges, who liked to joke that he could not remember much about his writings, had a great fondness for this sonnet and enjoyed reciting it.

The Jew's hands, translucent in the dusk,
polish the lenses time and again.
The dying afternoon is fear, is
cold, and all afternoons are the same.
The hands and the hyacinth-blue air
that whitens at the Ghetto edges
do not quite exist for this silent
man who conjures up a clear labyrinth—
undisturbed by fame, that reflection
of dreams in the dream of another
mirror, nor by maidens' timid love.
Free of metaphor and myth, he grinds
a stubborn crystal: the infinite
map of the One who is all His stars.⁸⁰

When Borges was asked to contribute to an exhibition on Spinoza that the Buenos Aires Jewish museum was mounting, he contributed a second sonnet, this one entitled "Baruch Spinoza."

A haze of gold, the Occident lights up
The window. Now, the assiduous manuscript
Is waiting, weighed down with the infinite.
Someone is building God in a dark cup.
A man engenders God. He is a Jew.
With saddened eyes and lemon-colored skin;
Time carries him the way a leaf, dropped in
A river, is borne off by waters to
Its end. No matter. The magician moved
Carves out his God with fine geometry;
From his disease, from nothing, he's begun

⁸⁰ Borges, *Borges: A Reader*, p. 285.

To construct God, using the word. No one
 Is granted such prodigious love as he:
 The love that has no hope of being loved.⁸¹

Although Borges does not concede in these poems that Spinoza's project is anything but the splendid act of imagination that he had dubbed it, a sense of reverence still seeps through the skepticism, and the famous Borgesian irony is vigorously muted.

Spinoza has inspired other poets who, like Borges, were both impressed by the rigor of Spinoza's rationalist resolve and dubious of its success. The Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998) used his irrepressible alter ego, Mr. Cogito, a wry and melancholy commentator on a multitude of topics, to express his attitude to Spinoza.

Mr. Cogito Tells of the Temptation of Spinoza

Baruch Spinoza of Amsterdam
 was seized by a desire to reach God
 in his attic while polishing
 lenses
 he suddenly pierced a veil
 and stood face to face
 he spoke at length
 (and when he spoke
 his mind expanded
 and his soul also)
 he put questions on human nature
 —God stroked his beard absently
 he inquired into the first cause
 —God looked off into infinity
 he asked after the final cause
 —God cracked his knuckles
 cleared his throat
 when Spinoza fell silent
 God spoke
 —you're a good talker Baruch
 I like your geometrical Latin
 and the clarity of your syntax
 the symmetry of your proofs
 but let us speak of Things Truly Great
 —look at your hands
 scarred and shaking
 —you ruin your eyes
 by sitting in the dark
 —you eat poorly
 you dress badly

⁸¹ Borges, *Selected Poems*, p. 383.

—buy a new house
forgive Venetian mirrors
for reflecting surfaces
—forgive flowers in the hair
the song sung by drunkards
—manage your income well
like your friend Descartes
—be cunning
like Erasmus
—dedicate a treatise
to Louis Quatorze
he won't read it anyway
—temper
the rational fury
it will topple thrones
and blacken the stars
—think of
a woman
who will give you a child
—you see Baruch
we speak of Great Things
—I want to be loved
by the unlearned and fierce
for they are the only ones
who truly hunger after me
now the veil falls
Spinoza is alone
he sees no golden cloud
nor a light in the heights
he sees darkness
he hears a stair creak
footsteps going down.⁸²

God in this poem is in stark contrast to the impersonal *Deus sive natura* of Spinoza's system. Herbert presents a God who sounds more like a stereotypical Jewish mother, nagging her son to be more practical and to take better care of himself and also maybe give her some grandchildren. But, like Borges, Zbigniew Herbert, too, seems moved by the loneliness of purity surrounding the philosopher. Spinoza's inhabits a transcendence too high for God to imagine for himself. The splendid act of imagination has brought the philosopher to a singularity unoccupied by anyone but himself.

Perhaps the most irreverent literary use that has been made of Spinoza is to be found in the poetry of Eugene Ostashevsky, born 1968 in Leningrad and now a denizen of Brooklyn, New York. Ostashevsky has a character named DJ Spinoza— "DJ," he

⁸² Herbert, *Collected Poems*, pp. 314–316.

explains, because DJs spin. As the baptism itself indicates, Ostashevsky suffers under no exaggerated respect for the life of the mind, or that, at least, is the pose of the poems, which are also crammed with erudition. *The Life and Opinions of DJ Spinoza*, published in 2008, is a playful, punning poetical lollapalooza that features, in addition to DJ Spinoza, MC Squared and the Begriffon, who is Spinoza's most worthy antagonist, a creature who is half Heideggerian and half comic book. The poems delight in mixing highbrow and infra-lowbrow, mathematical equations squatting in the midst of bad rapper's rhymes, the cackling irreverence mocking pretensions of reason's lofty isolation. Here is an excerpt from the long poem "DJ Spinoza Fights the Begriffon":

DJ Spinoza is misleadingly cuddly
 His instructions say, HANDLE WITH CARE
 On a periodic table
 he lays out his definitions
 axioms
 propositions
 like dentist's tools before drilling a cavity.
 And then they begin to fight!

The poem ends with this stanza:

The Begriffon stands for me, Eugene Ostashevsky
 So naturally he is victorious.⁸³

In the poem that follows, called "The Second Part of This Poem" the Begriffon laces into DJ Spinoza for his solemn regard for the power of words:

Listen DJ Spinoza I had enough of your logocentrism
 Words are justifications only

Only physical power
 adjudicates the quizzical hour

Only the fist
 differentiates between resist and desist

Did you ever see giraffes
 hold a symposium?

The consciousness of animals is pure time
 untrammled by the vagaries of *Sic proba*⁸⁴

⁸³ Ostashevsky, *The Life and Opinions of DJ Spinoza*, pp. 23, 26.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.

Ostashevsky, one can be sure, is aware of the paradoxes his poetry subtends. The poet is as driven to take on the world by “using the word” (as Borges had put it in “Baruch Spinoza”) as is any philosopher. This is especially apparent when it is such a word-giddy poet as Ostashevsky. His fiercely cerebral constructions rage against reason’s hegemony, and Spinoza, with a certain appropriateness, takes the brunt.

VIII. DIVINE SPINOZA, FORGIVE ME: GOCE SMILEVSKI AND ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER (AGAIN)

Melville flailed against a Spinozistic high-mindedness that would dissolve our individuality, Ostashevsky rails against Spinoza’s empowerment of reason, which Borges and Herbert also questioned. For some literary writers it is another feature of Spinoza’s philosophy that draws their critical gaze: his rejection of romantic passion. Spinoza’s spurning of this particular transport has seemed to some writers to be so unnatural that a psychological explanation is sought.⁸⁵

Goce Smilevski (born 1975), is a Macedonian writer whose novel, *Conversation with Spinoza* is subtitled: *A Cobweb Novel*. Instead of chapters there are threads and the thrust of these threads leads us, in however gossamer a fashion, to the conclusion that Spinoza’s extreme rationalism is a psychological symptom rather than a philosophical position. The presumption throughout the novel is that something must have gone fundamentally wrong in the psyche of a man who renounced intimacy with another in favor of the cold comforts of pure reason.

⁸⁵ In considering the psychology of a philosopher as a way of interpreting his philosophy, it is worth remembering Hans Reichenbach’s important distinction between “the context of discovery” and “the context of justification.” A philosopher’s positions vis-à-vis a particular philosophical problem must be assessed according to the available philosophical grounds; but the question of why the philosopher devoted himself to this particular question, rather than to others, or why this sort of solution would occur to him, of all people, lies within the nexus of historical, sociological, and psychological factors that make up the context of discovery. Sometimes the context of discovery is even relevant to determining exactly what it was that the philosopher was trying to solve, and even to say. I have argued in *Betraying Spinoza* that Spinoza’s experiences among the refugees of the Iberian Inquisition, who made up the bulk of the Portuguese-Jewish community of Amsterdam, might well have presented the notion of personal identity to him as an urgent philosophical problem to be solved. The *Ethics* presents personal identity as a thing mutable: to assimilate adequate ideas is to reconstitute one’s own self. Just as there are passively received ideas and actively acquired ideas, so there are one’s passively received identity and one’s actively acquired identity. Knowing something of Spinoza’s context of discovery can help one to read the *Ethics* as fundamentally addressing the issue of personal identity, which was a question of such fundamental importance in his own community. In this way, the context of discovery is not altogether irrelevant to the context of justification, since the former can help us to clarify our vision of the philosopher’s particular project, the philosophical problems toward which it was oriented.

A pivotal scene presents the six-year-old Bento all alone with his mother in her terrifying death agony, her fingers becoming frozen around his wrist.

By the time Miriam, Rebecca, and Father came running into the house, my scream had already died out. My voice now seemed so feeble that I could say neither yes nor no. Miriam and Rebecca began crying seeing Mother's body, and Father tried to remove the dead fingers of Mother from my wrist, shouting that I was turning blue, that I was breathing heavily, and that there was no blood in my hand. He asked me to say something while he tried to release me from Mother's grip, but her fingers were clenched too tightly around my wrist. Just as I began to wish that I stay tied to her forever, that this remain an eternal bond—so that the loss would then only be partial—I saw Father spreading Mother's fingers enough for my hand to be pulled free. After that I ran to the corner of the room, curled up, and involuntarily fell asleep.⁸⁶

The novel, lyrical and dreamlike, has the reader (whose name is to be supplied in the provided blanks) confronting Spinoza, again and again, with fear of the emotions. Claire van den Enden is inserted into a central position in the drama. Spinoza's rejection of her love constitutes not only a diminishment of his life but an error in his epistemology. "How different your life could have been," we, as reader, try to instruct him, "if only you had accepted that it was possible to gain real knowledge through the senses, after she had come to your room."⁸⁷ The assumption of the novel is that Spinoza's philosophical positions were arrived at through the traumas he had suffered. The *Ethics* is, in the terminology of the Freudians, an elaborate reaction formation.

Isaac Bashevis Singer attested repeatedly in interviews to his own love for, and disagreements, with Baruch Spinoza, demonstrating the unusual personal connection that Jewish writers have felt with this philosopher, a connection they took for granted was shared by their largely Jewish readers. (Singer wrote his stories and novels in Yiddish.) Singer, for example, said in several interviews that it was Spinoza's attitude toward animals that first jarred him into both a distance from the philosopher and a personal decision to become a vegetarian.

I don't say that this passage made me a vegetarian, but I felt, when I read it, a great protest. I thought, if we can do to animals whatever we please, why can't another man come with a theory that we can do to human beings what we please? This did not make me a vegetarian. I was in my mind a vegetarian before—because when I read this I was revolted. And though I love Spinoza and always admired him (and I still do), I did not like this text.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Smilevski, *Conversation with Spinoza*, pp. 62–63.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁸⁸ Singer is no doubt referring to the comment in E4p37s1/G 2:236: "These are the things I promised, in E4p18s, to demonstrate. From them it is clear that the law against killing animals is based more on empty superstition and unmanly compassion than sound reason." Singer's interview can be found at <http://salsa.net/peace/conv/8weekconv8-2.html>.

But Singer's arguments with Spinoza go beyond Spinoza's anti-vegetarianism. "The Spinoza of Market Street" is perhaps the most successful example of a story whose anti-Spinozist plot is meant to dramatize the philosopher's foolishness in thinking that the Intellectual Love of God could take the place of the comfort of another human being with whom one's life is inextricably, if unreasonably, intertwined.

Dr. Nahum Fischelson, who had studied philosophy in Switzerland, is now living in a garret room in a poor Jewish section of Warsaw. His devotion to Spinoza is as zealous as the religious observance of his pious father, his study, like those of the boys bent over their texts of Talmud whom he can glimpse from his window looking down on Market Street:

On the table lay an open book written in Latin, and on its broad-margined pages were notes and comments printed in small letters by Dr. Fischelson. The book was Spinoza's *Ethics* and Dr. Fischelson had been studying it for the last thirty years. He knew every proposition, every proof, every corollary, every note by heart. When he wanted to find a particular passage, he generally opened to the place immediately without having to search for it. But, nevertheless, he continued to study the *Ethics* for hours every day with a magnifying glass in his bony hand, murmuring and nodding his head in agreement. The truth was that the more Dr. Fischelson studied, the more puzzling sentences, unclear passages, and cryptic remarks he found. Each sentence contained hints unfathomed by any of the students of Spinoza. Actually the philosopher had anticipated all of the criticisms of pure reason made by Kant and his followers. Dr. Fischelson was writing a commentary on the *Ethics*. He had drawers full of notes and drafts, but it didn't seem that he would ever be able to complete his work. The stomach ailment which had plagued him for years was growing worse from day to day. Now he would get pains in his stomach after only a few mouthfuls of oatmeal. "God in Heaven, it's difficult, very difficult," he would say to himself, using the same intonation as had his father, the late Rabbi of Tishevitz. "It's very, very hard."⁸⁹

Fischelson's commitment to Spinoza has reduced his life to the most meager subsistence. Considered a heretic, he has lost his position as librarian in the synagogue. He is so out of touch with the world that he isn't even aware that a war is about to break out—the First World War—and is caught without any provisions. He is sick, he is starving, he is absolutely alone. This isn't the life of freedom and high-mindedness as Spinoza had described it; in fact, it is barely even a life.

And then, as with all good stories, an unpredictable contingency enters and changes everything. There is a spinster, Dobbe, who lives in the garret room beside the Spinozist's. The neighbors call her Black Dobbe. "Dobbe was tall and lean, and as black as a baker's shovel. She had a broken nose and there was a mustache on her upper lip. She spoke with the hoarse voice of a man and she wore men's shoes."⁹⁰ It's this most finite of modes, illiterate, ignorant, and instinctively kind, who finds a corpse-like Dr. Fischelson and revives him. "Dr. Fischelson asked for the *Ethics*, and she gave it to him disapprovingly. She was

⁸⁹ Singer, *Collected Stories: Gimpel the Fool to The Letter Writer*, pp. 159–160.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

certain it was a gentile prayer book.”⁹¹ Dr. Fischelson’s salvation begins when he himself shows some curiosity about her. “Then one evening after Dobbe had given him his crackers and his glass of tea with milk, he began questioning her about where she came from, who her parents were, and why she had not married. Dobbe was surprised. No one had ever asked her such questions.”⁹²

These, of course, are the kinds of questions that are central to the storyteller’s art and perspective, and not so germane to the philosopher’s. The character’s posing these questions to Dobbe, his interest in her answers, leads in quick succession to his unlikely redemption: a state of blessedness entirely unlike the one that Spinoza presents at the end of the *Ethics*. The story ends with Nahum Fischelson, whose erstwhile study of Spinoza had reduced him to a death-within-life, now staring out his window onto Market Street, his snoring bride in the bed behind him, both of them having experienced a night of “miracles,” murmuring, “Divine Spinoza, forgive me, I have become a fool.”⁹³

IX. HOW COMPATIBLE IS LITERARY SPINOZA WITH PHILOSOPHICAL SPINOZA?

Singer’s tale, deceptively simple and told in a voice poised between the wry and the wrenching, expresses a tension between the literary imagination and Spinoza’s vision of salvation. The intuition behind “The Spinoza of Market Street” is that our unreasoned and yet fierce attachments to others, contingent and philosophically ungrounded though they may be, are essential to the flourishing of our human potential. Transcendence of the Spinozistic sort amounts to a life that might as well be death. This is an intuition that is shared by many novelists and poets, maybe even on some level by all. It is closely allied with the equally anti-Spinozistic intuition that there is something essential about human life that can be captured only in the particularities of storytelling.

Spinoza is a rationalist extremist, making every claim for reason that has ever been made. This is at least part of the explanation for why he has garnered such outsized reactions, accounting for the glorification and vilification that have attached themselves to his name. A priori reason has the power not only to tell us what reality is like but also what it necessarily has to be like. It also has the power of reconciling us to the nature of that reality, including our own inescapable finitude. But the reconciliation demands a stiff price.

The *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* offer abundant evidence that Spinoza was not, by nature, a cold and insensible man. To judge by the occasional asides

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 169.

⁹² Ibid., p. 171.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 176.

that enliven his deductions, he seems to have struggled with his own anger and disgust at the stupidity, pettiness, vanity, and hypocrisy of what he observed in human nature. There is even evidence that he intimately knew the agonies of sexual jealousy.⁹⁴ This makes the vision of transcendent possibilities that he offers us at the end all the more impressive; there is the sense that the divine acquiescence he attained by reason's means had that with which to contend in his own temperament.

Reason offers us, he tells us, the only consolations that are not also lies about the world (as opposed to the "superstitious religions"). It does this by reconfiguring our inner lives, our beliefs and emotions, our attitudes and aims. But such a radical internal makeover demands that something be abandoned: our entanglement with particularity, the particularity of others' existence and even of our own. And this something that is lost in the process of our being saved by reason provides the very substance of literature. Spinoza's solution to the problem of pursuing a human life sits uncomfortably with the guiding principles of the narrative arts, a situation which only increases the dramatic irony of his having loomed so large in the literary imaginations of so many.

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⁹⁴ See E3p35&s, as well as E3p36.

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