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Essence, Existence, and Necessity: Spinoza's Modal Metaphysics

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Essence, Existence, and Necessity: Spinoza's Modal Metaphysics

“For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.”¹

Austen Haynes

¹ *Psalms* 36:9.

Abstract

“In thought, as in nature, there is no creation from absolute nothing.” I have taken on the daunting project of giving an account of Spinoza’s metaphysics, and laying out the reasoning behind his doctrines. In a letter written in December 1675, barely over a year before his death, Spinoza told Henry Oldenburg that the fatalistic necessity (which was disturbing readers of his philosophy) was in fact the “principal basis” of his *Ethics*. Since all of his metaphysical doctrines are entwined with this necessity, it is my task to piece this puzzle together. In this thesis, I will begin by discussing his definitions and axioms, and proceed to unfold his substance monism. I will then discuss his proofs of the existence of God, followed by his doctrine of God’s simplicity, causality, and eternity. I will then examine the relation of modes to substance, and the classifications of modes. From all of this I will conclude with an account of Spinoza’s necessitarianism. There are a number of objections that have been raised against Spinoza: that he arbitrarily defines his basic metaphysical terms, “stacking the deck” in favor of his system, that he assimilates the causal relation to the relation of logical implication, that there is a problem of divine attributes, that he does not adequately show that substance must produce modes, and that he does not show how the infinite mediate modes are deduced from the infinite immediate modes, or how motion follows from extension. In my discussion of Spinoza’s metaphysics, I will touch on all of these issues.²

² I would like to especially thank John Peterson for advising me in this project, and for enriching discussions on countless topics in metaphysics.

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I. Introduction

Giving an account of Spinoza's metaphysics is by nature similar to solving a puzzle. The definitions and axioms serve as the primary pieces, the building blocks which present us with a glimpse into the whole that is to be constructed, and is incomplete if any pieces are missing. It is a complex puzzle that requires the greatest care and attention to complete, as if this puzzle were intertwined with numerous other puzzle pieces that deceptively appear to belong to the same puzzle, but do not. The influence of Spinoza's philosophy has been monumental. Hegel famously said that one is either a Spinozist or not a philosopher at all. Nietzsche declared Spinoza to be his philosophical predecessor.³ Einstein referred to himself as a follower of Spinoza, responding in a telegram on his religious views that he believes in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the lawful harmony of the world. Despite this positive reception of Spinoza, there is also a vast amount of negative reception. Spinoza found himself facing the knife when an attempt to assassinate him failed.⁴ He was issued a *cherem*, a particularly severe form of excommunication from the Jewish community that involves shunning. In his own time, a leading French theologian called Spinoza "the most impious and dangerous man of the century." A powerful bishop similarly declared that this "insane and evil man...deserves to be covered with chains and whipped with a rod." Henry Oldenburg remarked on behalf of other readers of Spinoza that if his doctrine of necessitarianism is affirmed, then "the sinews of all law, all virtue and religion are severed."⁵ This distaste for Spinoza's doctrine of necessity is still alive today. In his book on Spinoza, Jonathan Bennett refers to his necessitarianism as "that being the dangerously false thesis towards which his explanatory rationalism is pushing him."⁶ As Samuel Newlands claims, "from Spinoza's contemporaries to our own, readers of the *Ethics* have denounced Spinoza's views on modality as metaphysically confused at best, ethically nihilistic at worst."⁷ It is perhaps this same feeling that led a philosophy professor at my university to say of the relevance of Spinoza's thought today that "Spinoza is dead."

I have taken on the project of giving an account of Spinoza's metaphysics, and laying out the reasoning behind his doctrines. I will begin by discussing his definitions and axioms, and proceed to unfold his one substance doctrine. I will then discuss his proofs of the existence of God, followed by his doctrine of God's simplicity, causality, and eternity. I will then examine the relation of modes to substance, and the classifications of modes. From all of this I will conclude with an account of Spinoza's necessitarianism. Spinoza describes his modal

³ "Ich habe einen Vorgänger, und was für einen!" From a letter to Overbeck, 30 July 1881.

⁴ For an account of this incident, see Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 110-111.

⁵ *Epistle LXXIV. CW*, 944.

⁶ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 121.

⁷ Newlands, *Spinoza's Modal Metaphysics*.

metaphysics as the “principle basis”⁸ of the *Ethics*, and since all of his metaphysical doctrines are entwined with this necessity, it is my task in this paper to piece this puzzle together. There are a number of objections that have been raised against Spinoza: that he arbitrarily defines his basic metaphysical terms, “stacking the deck” in favor of his system, that he assimilates the causal relation to the relation of logical implication, that there is a problem of divine attributes, that he does not adequately show that substance must produce modes, and that he does not show how the infinite mediate modes are deduced from the infinite immediate modes, or how motion follows from extension. In my discussion of Spinoza’s metaphysics, I will touch on all of these issues.⁹

II. The Definition and Relation of Substance and Mode

The fundamental principles of Spinoza’s *ontology*¹⁰ are not a radical departure from his predecessors.¹¹ Valtteri Viljanen has argued that the relation of substance and mode, despite Spinoza’s peculiar vocabulary, should be seen as both familiar and intelligible, and he demonstrates that Spinoza’s understanding of these matters harks back to the traditional distinction of substance and accident, or thing and property.¹² I follow Viljanen’s explanation of substance and mode, and this view will be presented in what follows. Spinoza’s definitions of substance and mode are given at the beginning of the *Ethics*:

Definition III: 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.

Definition V: By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived.¹³

The fact that substances are in and conceived through themselves, whereas modes are in and conceived through another, implies that substance holds an ontological and epistemological priority over modes.¹⁴ A substance is *in itself*,

⁸ *Epistle LXXV. CW*, 945.

⁹ Since writing this thesis, my views on have changed on various issues. This may not always reflect my current interpretations.

¹⁰ The study of the general nature of being, or the most basic features of what exists, as such. See, for example, Aristotle’s discussion of ‘being as being’ in *Metaphysics* IV.

¹¹ A recent commentator, Valtteri Viljanen, has given a persuasive argument in favor of this, which has influenced my view on the topic.

¹² Viljanen, *Spinoza’s Ontology*, 56. In: Koistinen (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza’s Ethics*.

¹³ *Ethics*, I, Definitions III and V. C I.408-409.

¹⁴ Viljanen, *Spinoza’s Ontology*, 57.

while a mode is *in another*. To understand what this means it is useful to go back to Aristotle's classic distinction of substance and accident. Accidents are entities that cannot exist on their own, and require a substance to serve as a subject in which it exists. Accidents *inhere* in subjects, while substances are entities that *subsist*. While accidents depend upon the substances in which they inhere, substances are not similarly dependent on their accidents. Substances are individuated by the basic features of their essence, and not by their accidents. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle had defined substance as:

That of which other things are predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else.¹⁵

Consider the following passage in the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas, which Spinoza's definitions strongly echo: "Those things subsist which exist in themselves, and not in another."¹⁶ Aristotle's distinction between subsistence and inherence is reflected in Spinoza's *being in itself* and *being in another*.¹⁷ This same framework is explicitly evident in Descartes, particularly in his *Principles of Philosophy*, where he assigns a causal independence to substances:

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.¹⁸

Descartes identified God as the only being that can be understood to depend on no other thing whatsoever. However, Descartes also said that both mind and body are substances which "can exist only with the help of God's concurrence."¹⁹ Descartes concludes this definition by stating:

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.²⁰

Spinoza accepts the basic principle of the Cartesian definition of substance, but he doesn't follow Descartes by including mind and body as substances. When Spinoza says that substance does not require the conception of any other thing than itself, he rules out mind and body as substances, since their essence is

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VII, 3, 1029a1-2.

¹⁶ *Summa Theologiae*, I, 29.2, resp.

¹⁷ Viljanen, *Spinoza's Ontology*, 58.

¹⁸ *Principles*, I, 51. CSM I.210.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

predicated on something else, namely God.²¹ Substance has to be something which isn't constrained or defined by anything else. Substance can't be a quality or a relation, as these terms imply dependence on things distinct from themselves. All relations and qualities are secondary and predicated on substance.²²

It is evident, as Viljanen has argued, that Spinoza's definition that substances are in themselves, and modes are in another, is in accordance with the traditional way of conceiving things and their properties: "there are those things, namely substances, that do not exist in anything else but are ontologically self-supporting; and there are those things, namely modes or modifications – Spinoza's gloss for accidents – that exist in, or inhere in, something, namely substances."²³ This is the meaning of the definitions of substance and mode, which are not arbitrary. There are no causal notions contained in these definitions.²⁴ "Thus, Spinoza takes himself to be entitled to hold, without offering any further proof, that modes are affections of substance,²⁵ and it is evident from this that substance is *logically prior* in nature to its affections, which constitutes the first proposition of the *Ethics*. Further, since it is an axiom that "whatever is, is either in itself or in another,"²⁶ it can also be inferred that "outside the intellect there is nothing except substances and their affections."²⁷ The only entities in Spinoza's ontology classifiable as *things* are substances and modes.²⁸

What does it mean to be *in* something? And how is the axiom that whatever is, is either in itself or in another, self-evident? The simplicity and clarity of this axiom is apparent, for Spinoza is merely telling us that if a thing exists, it must fall within one of two categories: existence that is fully independent or existence that is dependent on something else. The former is a substance, whereas the latter is a mode or modification. There is no third category, for we can't say that something is *in* nothing. The second axiom, that "what cannot be conceived through another, must be conceived through itself"²⁹ is complementary with the first axiom, and its self-evidence is the same. The first axiom dealt with the existential, or metaphysical, whereas the second axiom deals with the conceptual, or epistemological. When I conceive something, either I think of the thing through itself, or I employ a notion of a thing external to it to form my thought of the thing. Again, there are only two possible categories, and this is self-evidently known. Note that Spinoza has not said anything about the

²¹ This idea of predication will come up again later on, esp. see *Ethics*, I, Proposition XVII, Schol. C I.424.

²² Compare with *inherence* in *Ethics*, I, Propositions XV and XVIII. C I.420, 428.

²³ Viljanen, *Spinoza's Ontology*, 59.

²⁴ Carriero, *On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 261. Viljanen, *Spinoza's Ontology*, 59.

²⁵ Viljanen, *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ethics*, I, Axiom I. C I.410.

²⁷ *Ethics*, I, Proposition IV. C I.411.

²⁸ Viljanen, *Spinoza's Ontology*, 59.

²⁹ *Ethics*, I, Axiom II. C I.410.

adequacy of the conceiving, and he will later say that any idea we form of any finite mode involves the concept of something else.³⁰ What it involves the concept of is the attribute that constitutes the essence of substance in which the mode inheres.³¹

What Spinoza has said thus far is quite traditional, as Viljanen has pointed out:

The way in which conceivability is treated in Definition III and Definition V reflects the definitional priority Aristotelians considered substances to have over accidents: a definition reveals the essence of the thing defined, and the definition of an accident must refer to something other than the accident, namely the subject in which the accident in question inheres, whereas a substance is definable without reference to anything external to the substance. So when Spinoza elucidates his claim that a substance is conceived through itself by saying that a substance's 'concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed' (Definition III), he can be regarded as proceeding broadly along traditional lines.³²

Further, as numerous scholars have noted,³³ the influence of Descartes is evident in what Spinoza has said thus far. Consider the following passage:

A substance may indeed be known through any attribute at all; but each substance has one principle property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred. Thus extension in length, breadth and depth constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance. Everything else which can be attributed to body presupposes extension, and is merely a mode of an extended thing; and similarly, whatever we find in the mind is simply one of the various modes of thinking. For example, shape is unintelligible except in an extended thing; and motion is unintelligible except as motion in an extended space; while imagination, sensation and will are intelligible only in a thinking thing. By contrast, it is possible to understand extension without shape or movement, and thought without imagination or sensation, and so on; and this is quite clear to anyone who gives the matter his attention.³⁴

³⁰ *Ethics*, II, Proposition XLV. C I.481.

³¹ Viljanen, *Spinoza's Ontology*, 60.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Carriero, *On the Relation between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 250. Viljanen, *Spinoza's Ontology*, 60. Gueroult, *Spinoza*, 60-63.

³⁴ *Principles*, I, 53. CSM I.210-211.

This simply means that to conceive any body, we must conceive extension, and to conceive any idea, we must conceive thought. Viljanen argues that Spinoza is treading on “well-established grounds” when he says that substances are conceived through themselves and modes are conceived through another. It is merely his own formulation of the “conceptual priority traditionally given to substances over properties.”³⁵ It is thus well-founded to claim, as numerous other scholars have, that Spinoza’s definitions of substance and mode contain nothing controversial.³⁶ We can sum up what Spinoza has said as follows: “Whenever we think of something, we are thinking of some *thing*, (i.e., a substance), but that thing must always be a thing of some *kind*, it cannot be without some qualities, properties, or modes.”³⁷

III. Spinoza’s Definition of Attribute

The next subject of Spinoza’s ontology is the attributes. Attributes are “what the intellect perceives of substance, as constituting its essence.”³⁸ While substance is the most basic and essential *being*, and mode is a particular aspect of that being, attributes are *ways* of being. Descartes had similarly defined a *principal attribute* as that which constitutes a substance’s nature or essence.³⁹ We might ask, what does it mean to constitute something’s essence? To constitute the essence of a substance is to possess essential properties such that if these properties were absent, it is impossible to conceive of the substance.⁴⁰ This has given rise to an objection: If substance is conceived through itself, how can it not be conceived apart from an attribute? In the scholium to Proposition X Spinoza will state that each substance is conceived through itself and that “each being must be conceived under some attribute.”⁴¹ Thus, substance must be conceived under some attribute. If this is the case, we are presented with yet another dilemma: does this not make attributes conceptually prior to substances?

A popular solution to this problem is to identify substance with attributes.⁴² In fact, there is strong textual evidence to support this. Consider the following:

³⁵ Viljanen, *Spinoza’s Ontology*, 61.

³⁶ Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 11-12. Carriero, *On the Relation between Mode and Substance in Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 250. Viljanen, *Spinoza’s Ontology*, 61. Note that Wolfson has argued, to the contrary, that Spinoza offers a new way of understanding mode. Cf. Wolfson, I, 61-78.

³⁷ Viljanen, *Spinoza’s Ontology*, 61.

³⁸ *Ethics*, I, Definition IV. C I.408.

³⁹ *Principles*, I, 53. CSM I.210.

⁴⁰ *Ethics*, II, Definition II. C I.447.

⁴¹ *Ethics*, I, Proposition X, Schol. C I.416.

⁴² Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 16-18. Gueroult and Jarrett also argue in favor of this.

Whatever is, is either in itself or in another (by Axiom I), i.e., (by Definitions III and V), outside the intellect there is nothing except substances and their affections. Therefore, there is nothing outside the intellect through which a number of things can be distinguished from one another except substance, *or* what is the same (by Definition IV), their attributes, and their affections, q.e.d.⁴³

Further, in an epistle from 1661 the young Spinoza had originally defined attribute in the same way that he defines substance in the *Ethics*:

By attribute I understand whatever is conceived through itself and is in itself, so that its concept does not involve the concept of another thing.⁴⁴

An epistle from 1663 also supports this interpretation, where Spinoza defines substance:

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, which attributes such and such a definite nature to substance.⁴⁵

This interpretation still isn't without its own problems. In the scholium to Proposition X, Spinoza says:

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 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 Definition VI) as a being that consists of infinite attributes, each of which expresses a certain eternal and infinite essence.⁴⁶

The problem is that if substance and its attributes are identical, then how can one substance with many attributes still be one substance and not many substances?

⁴³ *Ethics*, I, Proposition IV, Dem. C I.411. Curley also points to Spinoza's definition of God as a substance consisting of infinite attributes. Consider also, Proposition XIX: "God is eternal, *or* all God's attributes are eternal." Proposition XX, Corol. II. "God, *or* all of God's attributes, are immutable." C I.427-428.

⁴⁴ *Epistle* II. C I.165.

⁴⁵ *Epistle* IX. C I.195.

⁴⁶ *Ethics*, I, Proposition X, Schol. C I.416.

It would seem that this objection leaves us in a sad state of affairs. Fortunately, Olli Koistinen has given a promising answer to this question. Viljanen summarizes Koistinen's view as follows:

Koistinen accepts that the concept of substance and its attribute must be identical, but observes that somewhat surprisingly this does not entail, for Spinoza, that a substance would be identical with its attribute. This is so, Koistinen suggests, because ideas are active affirmations, that is, propositions that always predicate properties of something, and we can regard the idea of a certain substance whose essence is constituted by a certain attribute, let us say *E*, as a proposition that predicates *E* of the substance in question. Thus a proposition 'Substance is *E*' – or, more exactly, 'Something is *E*' – expresses the absolutely primitive ontological feature of Spinoza's system. That is, substances and attributes are as it were inextricably fused together: the above proposition is not only the concept of the substance in question but also the concept of the attribute in question, that is, of *E*. There can be no idea of a substance without an idea of an attribute, and the idea of an attribute always contains the idea of a substance. That the above-mentioned complex proposition reveals the foundation of Spinoza's ontology explains how the *concepts* of substance and attribute can be identical while substance and attribute still remain distinct *entities*. And because the concepts of substance and attribute are identical, that it can be said that a substance is conceived both through itself and through its attribute poses no threat to the tenet that the concept of substance – and thus also of an attribute – does not refer to or involve any other concept, making it conceptually independent.⁴⁷

If this solves the problem of how a substance can be conceived both through itself and through its attribute, there is still the further difficulty of how one substance can have many attributes, each constituting its essence. This is known as the problem of attributes, and it is a problem I will look at more closely later on in this paper.⁴⁸ I will only say here that there are two sides to this issue: subjectivism and objectivism. Subjectivists claim that Spinoza's definition of attribute supports the view that the attributes are only what our intellect perceives *as if* constituting the essence of substance, but do not really constitute its essence. The problem with this interpretation is threefold: it makes Spinoza too

⁴⁷ Viljanen, *Spinoza's Ontology*, 63-64. From Koistinen, *On the Metaphysics of Spinoza's Ethics*, 18-24.

⁴⁸ I discuss this issue more thoroughly in a separate Appendix devoted to the problem of attributes. All further references to "Appendix" without referencing Spinoza's work are to this. I give a brief summary of this in the last three sections.

much of an idealist, the definition of attribute does not actually support the claim that Spinoza is a subjectivist, and there are multiple propositions that directly conflict with the subjectivist reading. While subjectivism would seem to solve the problem of attributes, and thus has an appeal, it can't legitimately be accepted as a plausible interpretation. Spinoza speaks of attributes as something real and objective, not depending on an individual perceiver to exist.

Attributes are really distinct, but Spinoza holds that it does not follow from this that each attribute must constitute a thing of its own. This view is expressed clearly by Michael Della Rocca's interpretation of a *conceptual barrier* between attributes:

No attribute, say *E*, can offer grounds for a substance not to have some other attribute, say *T*, because then a fact about *T* – that it is not possessed by a certain substance – would be explained by *E*; but then something concerning *T* would be conceived through *E*, and this would go against *T*'s status as an attribute, that is, as something that is conceived solely through itself.⁴⁹

But what does it all mean? Spinoza does not see a problem in holding that just as human beings are mental and physical beings, a substance can also be mental and physical. As Viljanen says: “a substance can be conceived under many different aspects, can have several objective essential features, many basic ways of being.”⁵⁰ Since each being must be conceived under some attributes, modes must also be conceived under some attribute. They are modes of an objective feature of substance.

IV. Relations and Causality Between Substances

Merely from the definitions and axioms already stated, Spinoza will derive Propositions II and IV. Spinoza states in Proposition II that “two substances having different attributes have nothing in common with one another.”⁵¹ Note that Spinoza's argument for one substance depends on three facts, the last of which depends on this proposition:

- 1) That God exists. (This is independent of there being more than two attributes) (Proposition VII, Proposition XI)

⁴⁹ Viljanen, *Spinoza's Ontology*, 66. From Della Rocca, *Spinoza's Substance Monism*, 18, 28-29. Cf. Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*, 9-17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ethics*, I, Proposition II. C I.410.

- 2) That God has *all* attributes. (This is satisfied as long as God's having infinite attributes entails his having all attributes.) (Proposition VIII, Proposition IX)
- 3) No two distinct substances can have an attribute in common. (Does not depend on any considerations of the number of attributes) (Proposition II-V)

This proposition is clearly targeted at a particular medieval view of the distinction between the essence of God and of the world. Maimonides says that the difference in their essences is so great, that no attribute can be predicated of them in any related sense:

When they ascribe to God essential attributes, these so-called essential attributes should not have any similarity to the attributes of other things, and should not have any similarity to the attributes of other things, and should according to their own opinion not be included in one and the same definition, just as there is no similarity between the essence of God and that of other beings.⁵²

Wolfson interprets Spinoza as saying that: "When the same attributes, predicated of two substances, are homonymous terms, used in absolutely different and unrelated senses, the predication of these attributes does not imply any real relationship in the essence of the two substances."⁵³ This fits in well with what Spinoza held as an axiom in the *Short Treatise*: "Things that have different attributes, as well as those that belong to different attributes have nothing in themselves the one from the other."⁵⁴ Wolfson rightly advises us to think of Spinoza's usage of the term attribute here in the sense of predicates. This interpretation fits in well with what both Curley and Bennett say about the opening propositions.⁵⁵ As Curley repeatedly emphasizes,⁵⁶ an objection that was brought up by Leibniz may help us to understand the manner in which Spinoza is thinking about substances and shared-attributes. The objection Curley is referring to is that "two substances might have some attributes in common and others which were distinctive of each one (e.g., substance A has attributes C and D, substance B has attributes C and E)."⁵⁷ Curley points out that this objection rests on the assumption that a substance may have more than one attribute. This gives us reason to think that Spinoza is beginning by following the Cartesian conception of substance in which "*To each substance there belongs one*

⁵² *Moreh Nebukim*, I, 56. Maimonides goes on to say: "this is a decisive proof that there is, in no way or sense, anything common to the attributes predicated of God, and those used in reference to ourselves' they have only the same names, and nothing else is common to them."

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ C 151. Axiom IV of the Appendix to the *Short Treatise*.

⁵⁵ See *Ethics*, I, Proposition V.

⁵⁶ C I.410 n. 8, also *BGM*, 15. Curley has repeatedly referred to this objection by Leibniz.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

principal attribute; in the case of mind, this is thought, and in the case of body it is extension”:

A substance may indeed be known through any attribute at all; but each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred. Thus extension in length, breadth and depth constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance. Everything else which can be attributed to body presupposes extension, and is merely a mode of an extended thing; and similarly, whatever we find in the mind is simply one of the various modes of thinking.⁵⁸

Indeed, this line of interpretation seems to fit very well. Bennett also agrees that this fixes the apparent gap that Leibniz noticed, since Spinoza does not even speak of the possibility of a substance having more than one attribute until Proposition IX. Thus, Bennett says that, “until then he is speaking in terms of the concept of a one-attribute substance.”⁵⁹ The language used by Spinoza in the demonstration of Proposition VIII as contrasted with Proposition IX justifies this interpretation.

Spinoza next says in Proposition III that “if things have nothing in common with one another, one of them cannot be the cause of the other.”⁶⁰ Spinoza draws this proposition out of Axioms IV and V.

Axiom IV: The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause.

Axiom V: 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.⁶¹

In light of these axioms, we might want to phrase this proposition as: “when things have nothing in common (i.e. things whose concepts cannot be understood through each other), one cannot be the cause of the other.” Surely this has to be what Spinoza means in this axiom from the *Short Treatise*: “What has nothing in itself from another thing can also not be the cause of the existence of such another thing.”⁶² H. A. Wolfson puts it best when he says of Axioms IV and V that:

⁵⁸ *Principles*, I, 53. CSM I.210.

⁵⁹ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 69.

⁶⁰ *Ethics*, I, Proposition III. C I.410.

⁶¹ C I.410.

⁶² Axiom V of the Appendix to the *Short Treatise*. Note that I referred consecutively to Axiom IV for Proposition II and to Axiom V for Proposition III. C I.151.

Starting, therefore, with his own premise that God acts by necessity, he argues against the mediaevals⁶³ that if God's nature be essentially different from the nature of the world, He could not be the cause of the world.⁶⁴

Thus, Spinoza thinks that it is a contradiction to say that a divine nature that is homonymous with the nature of the world, and still bears any conceptual (and thus, causal) relation with it. This contradiction is evident from the fact that an overwhelmingly popular medieval view stated that divine nature and the nature of the world were absolutely different, yet the world was produced by a process of emanation from the divine nature. Spinoza was well aware of the extreme weakness of divine creation, noting the eagerness of mediaevals to impose immaterial intermediary causes between God and the world.

V. The Identity of Indiscernibles

Spinoza states in Proposition IV: "Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another, either by a difference in the attributes of the substances or by a difference in their affections."⁶⁵ In this proposition he is giving his own version of the *identity of indiscernibles*. Two things are distinguished from one another either by what basic kind of thing they are, or in a relational sense that isn't basic. The concept of an extended thing on any basic level is only extension, and of a thinking thing, only thought. Thus, it is impossible to distinguish two things whose qualities are identical. His argument would look something like this:

1. Everything in Nature is differentiated by a basic difference of attributes or by a non-basic and qualitative difference in modes.
2. Therefore, the conceptual content of any two things, conceived under the same attribute, involves nothing but that attribute. (i.e. the conceptual content of an extended thing involves only extension)
3. It follows that nothing could distinguish two things with exactly the same qualities (conceptually, via the attribute).⁶⁶
4. The two things are then really the same thing.
5. Therefore, there exists only one thing.

⁶³ Note that when Wolfson refers to the mediaevals, he is not necessarily referring to all of medieval philosophy together. When he states that the mediaevals held a particular view, he is usually referring to widespread beliefs in Jewish and Islamic philosophy, likely championed by Maimonides, or Avicenna, or another popular figure from these two cultures whose philosophical views gained widespread acceptance. However, the scholastics are not always exempt from being included in this grouping, though they are not usually the primary target.

⁶⁴ Wolfson, I, 90.

⁶⁵ *Ethics*, I, Proposition IV. C I.411.

⁶⁶ For more on this, see *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 67.

Spinoza thinks it obvious that nothing exists external to the intellect except substances and modes, and therefore there is nothing else by which they are distinguished from one another. It follows that nothing can be distinguished from God and still have something in common with Him. The two would have to be either absolutely different or absolutely identical.

VI. The No-Shared Attribute Thesis

Spinoza asserts in Proposition V that “in nature there cannot be two substances of the same nature or attribute.”⁶⁷ Spinoza had formulated an earlier version of this proposition, in which he says that “there are no two equal substances”⁶⁸ His proof runs as follows: “Every substance is perfect in its kind.”⁶⁹ For if there were two equal substances, then they would necessarily have to limit one another, and consequently, would not be infinite.”⁷⁰ The demonstration of Proposition V is as follows:

If there were two or more distinct substances, they would have to be distinguished from one another either by a difference in their attributes, or by a difference in their affections (by Proposition IV). If only by a difference in their attributes, then it will be conceded that there is only one of the same attribute. But if by a difference in their affections, then since a substance is prior in nature to its affections (by Proposition I), if the affections are put to one side and [the substance] is considered in itself, i.e. (by Definition III and Axiom VI), considered truly, one cannot be conceived to be distinguished from another, i.e. (by Proposition IV), there cannot be many, but only one [of the same nature *or* attribute], q.e.d.⁷¹

The no-shared attribute thesis is based off of Spinoza’s identity of indiscernibles, which we saw in the previous proposition. Two things are identical if there is no feature by which they differ. If two things are distinct, some feature must differentiate them. With regard to substances, attributes and modes are the only entities that could differentiate them. But what justification does Spinoza have for putting the affections *to one side* when considering substances? An appealing answer has been given by Viljanen:

⁶⁷ *Ethics*, I, Proposition V. C I.411

⁶⁸ *KV*, I, ii, 2. C I.66. Note: All references to *KV* are to the *Short Treatise*.

⁶⁹ See my explanation of *Ethics*, I Proposition VIII.

⁷⁰ *KV*, I, ii, 6. C I.67.

⁷¹ *Ethics*, I, Proposition V, Dem. C I.411.

By remarking that ‘a substance is prior in nature to its affections,’ Spinoza is reminding us that distinguishing a substance by its modes would amount to a situation in which a substance is individuated by and conceived through something external to it (i.e., external to its essence); this would be at odds with the very definition of substance, which, as we have seen, characterizes a substance as a self-supporting entity, and one that does not require anything external to be conceived. Moreover, on this point Spinoza is in accordance with more or less the entire Western tradition.⁷²

Since modes can’t distinguish two substances, the attributes are the only other possibility left. But the attributes fare no better at distinguishing substances either. If we take any attribute, and if two substances shared that attribute, then it cannot be that attribute that differentiates the two substances. Given the identity of indiscernibles, the two substances are in fact identical. The identity of attributes amounts to the identity of substances.

VII. Leibniz’s Objection

In Leibniz’s remarks on Spinoza’s *Ethics*, he notes the following concerning the demonstration of Proposition V:

I reply that a paralogism seems to lurk here. For two substances can be distinguished by attributes, and yet have some common attribute, provided they also have in addition some which are peculiar. For example, A and B; the attribute of the one being *c d*, and of the other, *d e*.⁷³

Leibniz is asking, why can’t it be the case that two substances, A and B, have opposing attributes, *c* and *e*, but share the attribute *d*? If they can, then they are distinct entities. It is up to Spinoza to show that substances with multiple attributes can’t share one of their attributes. This is a very powerful objection, and many have taken it as conclusive in refuting Proposition V, one of the most central doctrines in Spinoza’s metaphysics. Indeed, if this objection holds, it would leave us in a sorry state of affairs.

Viljanen has provided a useful interpretation of this issue. First of all, as countless scholars have noted, it might be the case that Spinoza overlooked the

⁷² Viljanen, *Spinoza’s Ontology*, 67. Viljanen points to Carrero, who says: “as would have been obvious to a contemporaneous reader of the *Ethics*, to make a substance depend on its accidents for its individuation would be to make a substance depend on its accidents for its existence, a dependence that is incompatible with its status as a substance.” *On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 251.

⁷³ *The Philosophical Works of Leibniz*, 15.

possibility of this objection. This seems odd, since this objection is nearly a universal concern of his readers. This implies that we should consider what Spinoza was thinking when he wrote this proposition. Viljanen points to the fact that Spinoza holds that “essences are highly individual, unique to their possessors.”⁷⁴ Consider Definition II of Part II of the *Ethics*:

I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing.⁷⁵

What is relevant for Proposition V is that Spinoza says that an essence cannot be nor be conceived without its possessor. This may explain the line of thought Spinoza had in Proposition V. Thus, Viljanen notes:

Given it, there cannot be two distinct things of the same essence; and as attributes constitute essences, Spinoza is led to think that it is impossible for two substances to share an attribute, because whenever there is an attribute constituting an essence, we have a particular substance without which the attribute could not exist.⁷⁶

But, as Viljanen points out, Spinoza would have a hard time convincing Cartesians that an attribute could not be or be conceived without a certain substance. He suggests that Spinoza could rely on a widely accepted way of conceiving essences and the definitions that express essences during the seventeenth century. This conception is the view that “both attributes and definitions express essences, and definitions do not involve any number of individuals.”⁷⁷

Michael Della Rocca has also provided a useful response to Leibniz’s objection.⁷⁸ Spinoza accepts that “each attribute of a substance, independently of any other attribute of that substance, is sufficient for conceiving of that substance.”⁷⁹ This follows when Spinoza’s definition of attribute and his definition of essence are combined. Since this is the case, Leibniz’s objection faces a

⁷⁴ Viljanen, *Spinoza’s Ontology*, 68.

⁷⁵ *Ethics*, II, Definition II. C I.447.

⁷⁶ Viljanen, *Spinoza’s Ontology*, 68. Olli Koistinen also writes: “Attributes for Spinoza are those properties that make individuation through itself possible and for that reason they must be non-relational individuating properties which means that they cannot be shared by several substances: they are individual essences – rejected by all things except their bearer.” *Individual Essences in Individuation*, 149.

⁷⁷ Viljanen, *Spinoza’s Ontology*, 69-70.

⁷⁸ See Della Rocca, *Spinoza’s Substance Monism* in Koistinen, *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, 17-22.

⁷⁹ Della Rocca, *Spinoza’s Substance Monism*, 18.

serious problem. Leibniz had said, two substances, A and B, can have opposing attributes, *c* and *e*, but share an attribute, *d*. But this can't be right, for substance A could not be conceived solely through attribute *d* as the substance that has attribute *d*. This alone would not be enough to distinguish substance A from B.⁸⁰ Instead, as Viljanen also argues, substance A would have to be conceived as the substance with *c* and *d*, which would mean that the concept of a certain substance with attribute *d* would require not only the concept of attribute *d*, but also the concept of attribute *c*, and would thus be partly conceived through *c*.⁸¹ The problem with this is that it violates the *conceptual barrier* between attributes.

Conceiving a substance with a certain attribute would depend on conceiving some other attribute. Thus, the conceptual independence of attributes guarantees that the kind of situations depicted in the objection cannot occur. An argument put in epistemological terms thus seems to fare better than one based on the doctrine of individual essences.⁸²

VIII. Unity of Substance

In Proposition VI, Spinoza states that “one substance cannot be produced by another substance.”⁸³ In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza sets out this proposition as one which he will prove in order to explain *what* God is.⁸⁴ Spinoza challenges his opponents by saying: “If someone wishes to maintain the contrary, we ask whether the cause which would have to produce this substance has the same attributes as the one produced or not? Not the latter, for something cannot come from Nothing. Therefore, the former. And then we ask again whether, in that attribute which would be the cause of what is produced, there is as much perfection as in what is produced, or more, or less? We say there cannot be less, for the reasons already given. We also say there cannot be more, because then these two would be limited, which is contrary to what we have just proven. So there would have to be as much. Then there would be two equal substances, which is clearly contrary to our preceding proof.”⁸⁵ Spinoza's challenge states that the proponent of the proposition that one substance *can* be produced by another substance must either accept that the two substances share attributes or do not share attributes. If the proponent of this view argues that the two substances do not share attributes, then his argument is inherently flawed, for he is proposing that nothing is the cause of the second substance.

⁸⁰ Cf. Viljanen, *Spinoza's Ontology*, 70.

⁸¹ This argument is taken from Viljanen, *Spinoza's Ontology*, 70.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 70-71.

⁸³ *Ethics*, I, Proposition VI. C I.411

⁸⁴ *KV*, I, ii, 2. C I.66

⁸⁵ *KV*, I, ii, 7-8. C I.67 The preceding proof is that there are not two equal substances.

Since it cannot be the case that the two substances do not share attributes, the proponent of this view is left with one option: that the two substances do share attributes. However, this argument dissolves when we consider Spinoza's *identity of indiscernibles*.⁸⁶ Spinoza has already shown that nothing could distinguish two things with exactly the same qualities. If two substances share an attribute, then there is no quality within that attribute that differentiates the two. This is why Spinoza objects that if one substance is said to produce another substance, and the two share attributes, then we must ask whether the attribute in question contains as much perfection as the one produced, or more, or less? Spinoza denies that it can contain less, for every substance is infinitely perfect in its kind.⁸⁷ This is evident when we consider the second definition: "That thing is said to be finite in its own kind that can be limited by another of the same nature." He also denies that it can contain more, as the two would be limited. Again, the proponent of this view is left with one option: that the two substances have as much perfection in their shared attribute(s). This would mean that the two substances are equal, which has already been shown to be absurd (by Proposition V). Spinoza also rejects the possibility of one substance producing another by showing that it leads to an *infinite regress*.⁸⁸

Spinoza's first proof from the *Ethics* that one substance cannot be produced by another substance simply argues that since two substances with different attributes have nothing in common (Proposition II) and if things have nothing in common, one cannot be the cause of the other (Proposition III), one substance cannot produce another substance that has *different* attributes. And since it has already been shown that there cannot be two or more substances that share an attribute (Proposition V), one substance cannot be produced by another substance. In the corollary, Spinoza states that it follows from this argument that a substance cannot be produced by anything else. Indeed, using the proof Spinoza just gave that one substance cannot be produced by another substance, along with the first axiom, that "whatever is, is either in itself or in another," we can conclude that substance is not in another. This conclusion will serve as the basis for Spinoza's proposition that it pertains to the nature of a substance to exist. I have given the argument in a deductive proof below:

1. In nature there is nothing except substances and their affections. (Axiom I, Definition III, Definition V)
2. Substance is prior in nature to its affections. (Proposition I)
3. Substance cannot be produced by another substance. (Proposition VI)
4. Therefore, substance cannot be produced by anything else.

⁸⁶ Found in *Ethics*, I, Proposition IV.

⁸⁷ See *Ethics*, I, Proposition VIII.

⁸⁸ *KV*, I, ii, 10. C I.68.

To give even more strength to the corollary above, Spinoza presents an alternative proof in his favorite style: *ex absurdo contradictorio*.⁸⁹

1. The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause. (Axiom IV)
2. A substance is conceived through itself, and its concept does not require the concept of any other thing, from which it must be formed. (Definition III)
3. If a substance could be produced by something else, the knowledge of it would depend on the knowledge of its cause. (by 1)
4. Therefore, it would not be a substance. (by 2 and 3)

IX. Essence and Existence⁹⁰

Spinoza now turns to the existence of substance, and states in Proposition VII that "it pertains to the nature of a substance to exist."⁹¹ In the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, Spinoza says:

If the thing is in itself, *or*, as is commonly said, is the cause of itself, then it must be understood through its essence alone; but if it is not

⁸⁹ Proof by the absurdity of its contradictory. The proof from the original Latin is: "Demonstratur hoc etiam facilius ex absurdo contradictorio. Nam si substantia ab alio posset produci, ejus cognitio a cognitione suæ causæ deberet pendere (per axioma 4) adeoque (per definitionem 3) non esset substantia."

⁹⁰ Note that Spinoza was influenced by Avicenna's conception of *modality* (necessity, possibility, impossibility). Avicenna's famous *essence-existence distinction* states: if you consider the essence of something, i.e., a computer, the essence of your computer does not tell you that the computer must exist. You can throw your computer out of the window, and it will then cease to exist. However, it can exist, because it is working right now. This tells you that its essence is neutral with respect to existence. In other words, it does not deserve to exist on its own merits, but it is possible. Conversely, if you consider something like a square-circle or a triangle with four sides, its essence guarantees that it doesn't exist, since simply by looking at its definition, you will see, i.e., that a square-circle must be both square and round, which can not be the case. This is what Avicenna calls impossibility. Necessity is explained in a similar manner. The essence of something necessary is an essence, or definition, which guarantees that a thing exists. The point of this essence-existence distinction is to show that there is such a Being that is a necessary being, and this is what he calls God. Now, to explain the move from possibility to necessity: If we look at the computer again, the computer is a possible existent, which means that its essence doesn't guarantee that it exists or doesn't exist. The computer does, however, exist. To explain its existence we need a cause, which must be something outside of the computer. Now, those who made the computer (computer technicians) are not any better for us. We end up with a chain of causes, and each member of the chain is merely possible or contingent. The question becomes: could there be a world where everything in the world was caused by something else and that other thing was merely contingent? Avicenna's answer is no! This example is one given by Peter Adamson.

⁹¹ *Ethics*, I, Proposition VII. C I.412

in itself, but requires a cause to exist, then it must be understood through its proximate cause. For really, knowledge of the effect is nothing but acquiring a more perfect knowledge of its cause.⁹²

Since Spinoza has already shown that substance is not produced by anything else, he states that the essence of substance must involve existence. In the *Ethics*, the proposition that the essence of substance involves existence is stunningly brief, as its proof is given in a single sentence, yet it is central in his argument that one substance (God) necessarily exists.

The proof he gives in the *Ethics* is so simple that it can be deceiving. The argument he gives there, with its logical dependencies given, runs as follows:

1. Whatever is, is either in itself or in another. (Axiom I)
2. Substance is not in another, for substance cannot be produced by anything else. (Proposition VI, Corol.)
3. Therefore, substance must be the cause of itself.
4. That which is the cause of itself is that whose essence involves existence. (Definition I)
5. Therefore, it pertains to the nature of substance to exist. (Proposition VII)

In the *Short Treatise* Spinoza shows that anyone who holds that one substance can produce another (contrary to the previous proposition) will end up in an infinite regress: "If we wish to seek the cause of that substance which is the principle of the things which proceed from its attribute, then we shall have to seek in turn the cause of that cause, and then again, the cause of that cause, and so on to infinity; so if we must stop somewhere (as we must), we must stop with this unique substance."⁹³ In both the *TdIE* and *PPC*, Spinoza clarifies the definition of *unique*. In the *TdIE* he says: "For this entity is unique and infinite, that is, it is total being, beyond which there is no being."⁹⁴ Then in the *PPC*, he gives a similar description: "It should be noted here that it follows necessarily from the mere fact that some thing involves necessary existence from itself (as God does) that it is unique."⁹⁵

Taken together, these two passages bring out an important link between Spinoza's refutation of the proposition that one substance can produce another and his justification of the proposition that it pertains to the nature of substance to exist, that is, the essence of substance involves existence. This further supports the interpretation given by Wolfson that Spinoza utilizes the principle of the identity of essence and existence in substance as an argument for the main contention of the second chapter of the *Short Treatise*, which is to refute the view

⁹² *TdIE* § 92. C I.38-39. All references to the *TdIE* are to Spinoza's *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*.

⁹³ *KV*, I, ii, 10. C I.68.

⁹⁴ *TdIE* § 76. This is Shirley's translation. Curley's translation reads: "For it is a unique and infinite being, beyond which there is no being." C I.34.

⁹⁵ *PPC*, I, Proposition XI, Dem. C I.255.

held by some medievals that there are two substances, God and the world, the latter of which has no existence involved in its essence, inasmuch as it must acquire existence through an act of creation or emanation.⁹⁶

There is a parallel proposition in the first 'Appendix'⁹⁷ of the *Short Treatise*, in which Spinoza says: "Existence belongs, by nature, to the essence of every substance, so much so that it is impossible to posit in an infinite intellect the idea of the essence of a substance which does not exist in Nature."⁹⁸

X. The Infinity of Substance

When Spinoza says that substance is infinite⁹⁹ he means that it is *unique*¹⁰⁰ and thus not limited. This uniqueness and infinitude means that it cannot be given positive description, as a description implies a limitation, *determinatio negatio est*.¹⁰¹ Wolfson has pointed out that "to call a substance infinite in this sense is like calling voice colorless."¹⁰² To call a voice colorless does not imply any negation of a property which it is expected to have, but rather an absolute exclusion of voice from the world of color. In the same way, Wolfson tells us "when substance is described as infinite in this sense, it means its absolute

⁹⁶ Wolfson, I, 130-131. Creation and emanation are not synonymous.

⁹⁷ The appendix is likely an early draft in the geometrical method of what would become the first part of the *Ethics*, not intended to serve as an addition to the *KV*.

⁹⁸ *KV*, Appendix, I, Proposition IV. C I.151.

⁹⁹ *Ethics*, I, Proposition VIII: "Every substance is necessarily infinite." C I.414. Infinite in, and by, its essence.

¹⁰⁰ Its essence involves existence, i.e. it is self-sufficient such that it depends upon nothing other than its own nature for its existence, and hence limited neither by itself nor by anything else. In *CM*, II, ii, Spinoza demonstrates that God is unique by showing him to be a supremely perfect being, that is, a "being that has all its perfections from itself and not from another." C I.319.

¹⁰¹ *Determination is negation*. Spinoza's argument for this is found in *Epistle L*: "A thing can be called one or single only in respect of its existence, not of its essence. For we do not conceive things under the category of numbers unless they are included in a common class. For example, he who holds in his hand a penny and a dollar will not think of the number two unless he can apply a common name to this penny and dollar, that is, pieces of money or coins. For then he can say that he has two pieces of money or two coins, because he calls both the penny and the dollar a piece of money or a coin. Hence it is clear that a thing can not be called one or single unless another thing has been conceived which, as I have said, agrees with it. Now since the existence of God is his very essence, and since we can form no universal idea of his essence, it is certain that he who calls God one or single has no true idea of God, or is speaking of him very improperly. With regard to the statement that figure is a negation and not anything positive, it is obvious that matter in its totality, considered without limitation, can have no figure, and that figure applies only to finite and determinable bodies. For he who says that he apprehends a figure, thereby means to indicate simply this, that he apprehends a determinate thing and the manner of its determination. This determination therefore does not pertain to the thing in regard to its being; on the contrary, it is its non-being. So since figure is nothing but determination, and *determination is negation*, figure can be nothing other than negation." *CW*, 892.

¹⁰² Wolfson, I, 134.

exclusion from any form of finitude, limitation, and description.”¹⁰³ To call a substance finite implies that it is comparable. A comparison can be made only between like things, and thus a finite thing is included within a class of like things. Consider what Maimonides says in the following passage:

Similarity is based on a certain relation between two things; if between two things no relation can be found, there can be no similarity between them, and there is no relation between two things that have no similarity to each other; *e.g.*, we do not say this heat is similar to that colour, or this voice is similar to that sweetness... You must know that two things of the same kind—*i.e.*, whose essential properties are the same, distinguished from each other by greatness or smallness, strength and weakness, etc.—are necessarily similar.¹⁰⁴

Spinoza clearly picks up on this when he is defining that which is “finite in its own kind” (Definition II). By this definition a thing is finite because it *suffers from description*. What this means is that a thing can only be described in terms that necessarily limit it. Finite things share a similarity, as described by Maimonides, to other things of the same kind by which they are compared. Hence, Spinoza says in his definition:

That thing is said to be finite in its own kind that can be limited by another of the same nature. For example, a body is called finite because we always conceive another that is greater. Thus a

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* Wolfson has linked this “negation of finitude” to what the medieval Jewish logicians referred to as “absolute negation,” contrasted with “particular negation.” The difference between these two senses of negation is expressed in the distinction between “A is not-B” and “A is not B.” An example of particular negation would be: “Balaam does not see,” and of absolute negation: “The wall does not see.” Wolfson has linked absolute negation to Spinoza’s usage of the term “negation” (*negatio*), and particular negation to Spinoza’s term “privation” (*privatio*). This is supported by what Spinoza says in *Epistle XXI*: “Privation is nothing but denying something of a thing which we judge to pertain to its nature, and Negation nothing but denying something of a thing because it does not pertain to its nature.” Spinoza further elaborates on privation: “I say, therefore, that Privation is, not the act of depriving, but only the pure and simple lack, which in itself is nothing. Indeed, it is only a Being of reason, or mode of thinking, which we form when we compare things with one another. We say, for example, that a blind man is deprived of sight because we easily imagine him as seeing, whether this imagination arises from the fact that we compare him with others who see, or his present state with his past, when he used to see. And when we consider this man in this way, by comparing his nature with that of others or with his own past nature, then we affirm that seeing pertains to his nature, and for that reason we say that he is deprived of it. But when we consider God’s decree, and his nature, we can no more affirm of that man than of a Stone, that he is deprived of vision. For at that time vision no more pertains to that man without contradiction than it does to the stone, *since nothing more pertains to that man, and is his, than what the Divine intellect and will attribute to him*. Hence, God is no more the cause of his not seeing than of the stone’s not seeing, which is a pure Negation.” C I.377.

¹⁰⁴ *Moreh Nebukim*, I, 56.

thought is limited by another thought. But a body is not limited by a thought nor a thought by a body.¹⁰⁵

As opposed to being finite in its kind, Spinoza also mentions that which is infinite in its kind. A thing that is infinite in its kind has the highest degree of the shared essential property of its kind, as opposed to being *unique* and having incomparable qualities. Being *infinite in its kind* is essentially inferior to being *absolutely infinite*. Thus, Spinoza says: “If something is only infinite in its own kind, we can deny infinite attributes of it.”¹⁰⁶

Absolute infinitude is *unique* and incomparable such that there is no *kind* to which an absolutely infinite thing belongs. In other words, it is its own kind. Spinoza, in describing in what respect God is unique or *sui generis*,¹⁰⁷ says: “Insofar as we conceive that there cannot be more than one of the same nature, he is unique.”¹⁰⁸ That which is absolutely infinite is its own genus, rather than being the highest degree of a genus. Hence, Spinoza says: “If something is absolutely infinite, whatever expresses essence and involves no negation pertains to its essence.”¹⁰⁹ Since there is no such negation, Spinoza concludes: “Between the finite and the infinite there is no relation, so that the difference between God and the greatest and most excellent created thing is no other than that between God and the least created thing.”¹¹⁰

In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza sets out to demonstrate: “That there is no limited substance, but that every substance must be infinitely perfect in its kind, viz. that in God’s infinite intellect no substance can be more perfect than that which already exists in Nature.”¹¹¹ Spinoza again gives a challenge, this time to the proponent of the view that there can be a limited substance, and asks whether this substance is limited through itself, or through its cause. Spinoza objects that it can’t be the case that a substance, which is necessarily that which is in itself, is able to limit itself: “It did not limit itself, for being unlimited it would have had to change its whole essence.”¹¹² In other words, that which is *causa sui* could not possibly change its nature and become less powerful or less infinite. In the first set of objections to the *Meditations* of Descartes, Johannes Caterus quotes a strikingly similar argument given by Suarez:

Every limitation proceeds from some cause; therefore if something is limited and finite this is because its cause was either unable or unwilling to endow it with more greatness or perfection; and hence

¹⁰⁵ *Ethics*, I, Definition II. C I.408.

¹⁰⁶ *Ethics*, I, Definition VI, Exp. C I.409.

¹⁰⁷ Its own genus or kind.

¹⁰⁸ *CM*, I, vi, 2. C I.325.

¹⁰⁹ Definition 6, explanation.

¹¹⁰ *Epistle* LIV. *CW*, 899. Note that by “created thing” Spinoza means “that which presupposes nothing except God in order to exist.” Cf. *CM*, II, x. C I.333.

¹¹¹ *KV*, I, ii, 2. C I.66.

¹¹² *Ibid.* note 2.

if something derives its existence from itself, and not from some cause, it is indeed unlimited and infinite.¹¹³

In Spinoza's challenge, he uses the exact same words when addressing the proponent of limited substances who accepts that a substance is limited through its cause, which is necessarily God: "If it is limited through its cause, that must be either because its cause could not or would not give more."¹¹⁴ Spinoza rejects both of these possibilities, for to say "that he could not have given more is contrary to his omnipotence."¹¹⁵ That he could have, but would not, smacks of envy, which is not in any way in God, who is all goodness and fullness."¹¹⁶ The reason Spinoza doesn't reproduce this argument in the *Ethics* is that it depends upon his proof of the existence of God, which doesn't occur until Proposition XI, whereas in the *Short Treatise* Spinoza has already demonstrated in the previous chapter "That God Is."

Spinoza's proof in the *Ethics* that substance is infinite is by *ex absurdo contradictorio*. We know from Spinoza's definitions and demonstrations that there cannot be more than one substance having the same attribute (Proposition V) and that existence belongs to the essence of substance (Proposition VII). Since this is the case, Spinoza argues, then the existence that pertains to the essence of substance must either be finite or infinite existence. The existence of substance cannot be finite, for that which is finite in its kind "can be limited by another of the same nature." If it were the case that substance existed as finite, it would have to be limited by another substance of the same nature or essence, whose essence also involves existence. But this would mean that there would exist two substances of the same attribute, which is an absurdity by Proposition V. It follows from Spinoza's proof that substance cannot exist as finite, along with his proof that the essence of substance involves existence, that it exists as infinite. In the first scholium that follows this proof, Spinoza says that it follows from the proof that existence pertains to the nature of substance alone that substance is infinite. This is due to the fact that being infinite is an absolute affirmation of the existence of some nature, whereas being finite is in part a negation. Assuming a finite substance in part denies existence to the nature of substance, which by Proposition VII is an absurdity.

¹¹³ CSM II.95.

¹¹⁴ KV, I, ii, 5. C I.67.

¹¹⁵ Cf. CM, II, ix.

¹¹⁶ KV, I, ii, 5. C I.67.

XI. Misconceptions of Substance

Spinoza gives a long scholium to account for misconceptions people may have by this first unit of propositions.¹¹⁷ These misconceptions are largely due to the fact that people judge things confusedly, especially by not being accustomed to knowing things through their first causes.¹¹⁸ This error arises when one does not distinguish between the modifications of substance and substance itself. In this case, one does not truly understand how a thing is produced, and this is the reason why they ascribe characteristics to substance that do not properly belong to it. This false connection is due to an obscured kind of knowledge. Later in the *Ethics*, Spinoza will link this to the imagination, which takes vague instances and random experience (*experientia vaga*) acquired through the senses. This 'knowledge' from singular things represented through the senses is "mutilated, confused, and without order for the intellect."¹¹⁹ This kind of knowledge is what Spinoza refers to as "the only cause of falsity,"¹²⁰ and when this inadequate knowledge reigns alone there is a reversal of causes.¹²¹ This is why Spinoza says: "So it happens that they fictitiously ascribe to substances the beginning which they see that natural things have; for those who do not know the true causes of things confuse everything and without any conflict of mind feign that both trees and men speak, imagine that men are formed both from stones and from seed, and that any form whatever is changed into any other."¹²² Although Spinoza's full discussion on this topic appears later in the *Ethics*, this statement should be taken as an early note of caution not to obscure the order of causes by letting the imagination rule the intellect. Although we can form ideas of certain things which do not really exist outside of the intellect, for example, unicorns, the essences of such things are ultimately contained in God, an infinite substance that does exist. However, the truth of the existence of substance is contained within its essence alone, and thus cannot be conceived except as existing. The truth of Proposition VII is so clear, says Spinoza, that it shouldn't be necessary to give a proof of it, for "if men would attend to the nature of substance, they would have no doubt at all of the truth of Proposition VII. Indeed, this proposition would be an axiom to everyone, and would be numbered among the common notions."¹²³ Thus, if one has a clear and distinct idea of substance, yet doubts whether it exists, this is the same as saying that one has a true idea, yet doubts

¹¹⁷ Curley: "Because this scholium relates more to Proposition VII than to Proposition VIII, some scholars have thought it a marginal note misplaced by the original editors. But both the NS and the OP put it here, and as Gebhardt notes, it is subsequently referred to by Spinoza as the second scholium to Proposition VIII. Probably the reason for its placement here is that Spinoza conceives the first eight propositions to form a natural unit, and this scholium touches on a number of the themes of that unit." C 412-413, n.

¹¹⁸ This point will be elaborated on in a later set of propositions, beginning with Proposition XVI.

¹¹⁹ *Ethics*, II Proposition XL, Schol. II. C I.477.

¹²⁰ *Ethics*, II, Proposition XLI. C I.478.

¹²¹ Causes appear to us as effects, and effects appear to us as causes.

¹²² *Ethics*, I, Proposition VIII, Schol. II. C I.413.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

whether it is false. Alternatively, if one holds that substance is created, this is the same as holding that a false idea has become true. To clarify why this is the case, if it is the case that substance is created, then there was a time in the past that substance had no existence. If substance had no existence, then the idea of it was a false idea until substance was created, which means that a false idea *became* a true idea. While it is not an absurdity to think this way about finite things that have an essence which is neutral with respect to their existence, it is an absurdity to think this way about an eternal and infinite substance whose essence necessarily involves existence. This is precisely the error that results from the reversal of causes. Nothing more absurd can be conceived than doubting a clear and distinct idea or substance or maintaining that substance is created, and thus existence of substance (like its essence) is an eternal truth.

XII. Relation of Substance and Attribute

Spinoza now moves to the relation between substance and attribute. Recall that Definition IV states that an attribute is “what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence.”¹²⁴ Spinoza says that it follows from this definition alone that “the more reality or being each thing has, the more attributes belong to it.”¹²⁵ This proof only holds if we can use the terms essence and reality interchangeably. This is clearly the case for Spinoza, as in the Preface to the Fourth Part of the *Ethics*, he states: “By perfection in general I shall, as I have said, understand reality, i.e., the essence of each thing insofar as it exists and produces an effect, having no regard to its duration.”¹²⁶ Spinoza also states: “By reality and perfection I understand the same thing.”¹²⁷ Thus, he is saying that the more essence each thing has, the more attributes belong to it. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza similarly says:

For of a being which has some essence, [some] attributes must be predicated, and the more essence one ascribes to it, the more attributes one must also ascribe to it. So if a being is infinite, its attributes must also be infinite, and that is precisely what we call a perfect being.¹²⁸

Wolfson rightly notes that the proposition as it stands is incomplete, as only the major premise is given.¹²⁹ However, Spinoza reproduces this proposition in both

¹²⁴ *Ethics*, I, Definition IV. C I.408.

¹²⁵ *Ethics*, I, Proposition IX. C I.416.

¹²⁶ C I.546.

¹²⁷ *Ethics* II, Def. VI.

¹²⁸ *KV*, I, ii. C I.70.

¹²⁹ Wolfson, I, 139.

*Epistle IX*¹³⁰ and the scholium to Proposition X,¹³¹ adding the minor premise and conclusion. The full argument runs as follows:

1. The more reality or being each thing has, the more attributes belong to it (Definition IV).
2. Substance possesses infinite reality or being (Proposition VIII).
3. Therefore, substance has *infinite* attributes (Proposition X, Scholium).¹³²

Here, the very complicated interpretive issue arises in Spinoza, namely what to make of his statement that there are *infinite* attributes. The issue itself is too large and complicated to give a detailed account of here, as that discussion is not the purpose of this paper. However, the issue is important enough not to pass by without comment. There is certainly a large division among scholars of how to interpret the issue.

Abraham Wolf has provided an excellent discussion of the topic.¹³³ According to Wolf, the doctrine of an infinite number of attributes has been misconstrued by commentators and expositors. It is true that Spinoza speaks of God or substance and consisting of infinite attributes, and this 'infinite' refers to the number of attributes. However, Wolf states: "It is a sheer blunder to translate Spinoza's *infinite* by *innumerable*. And it is this mistranslation that is at the root of the trouble. By *infinite* Spinoza means *complete* or *all*."¹³⁴ Wolf's evidence for this view is Spinoza's repeated positive use of the term *infinite* and his usage of the term *perfect* (i.e., complete) or *all* as the equivalent of *infinite*. For instance, in the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza says: "*Nature is a being of which all attributes are predicated.*"¹³⁵ Wolf argues that nobody could think of describing two attributes as *innumerable* attributes, though they may well be *all* the attributes. In his interpretation, Spinoza does not posit innumerable attributes at all: "He only knew of two attributes, and as a cautious thinker, he had, of course, to allow for the

¹³⁰ "Nothing is more evident to us than that we conceive each being under some attribute, and that the more reality or being a being has the more attributes must be attributed to it." C I.195.

¹³¹ "Nothing in nature is clearer than that each being must be conceived under some attribute, and the more reality, or being it has, the more it has attributes which express necessity, or eternity, and infinity."

¹³² In the *Short Treatise*, a parallel argument is given: "Because we have already found previously that there must be an infinite and perfect being, by which nothing else can be understood but a being of which all in all must be predicated. For of a being which has some essence, [some] attributes must be predicated, and the more essence one ascribes to it, the more attributes one must also ascribe to it. So if a being is infinite, its attributes also must be infinite, and that is precisely what we call a perfect being." KV, I, ii, 17.

¹³³ *Spinoza's Conception of the Attributes of Substance*. in: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 27 (1926 - 1927), pp. 177-192. An address delivered to the meeting of the Aristotelian Society on February 21, 1927, to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the death of Spinoza.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹³⁵ KV, I, ii, 27.

possibility of other attributes unknown to man, since Spinoza did not regard man as the measure of all things. He accordingly posited ‘infinite or all the attributes,’ in the sense of ‘certainly two, possibly more.’¹³⁶ That Spinoza is thinking in this manner is further reinforced by what he says in the third part of the *Ethics*: “The Body cannot determine the Mind to thinking, and the Mind cannot determine the Body to motion, to rest or to anything else (if there is anything else).”¹³⁷

That when Spinoza says substance or God has *infinite* attributes he means *all* attributes is further supported by the way in which he uses the term *infinite* in the *Ethics*.¹³⁸ For example, in Proposition XVI Spinoza says: “infinitely many things... (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect).”¹³⁹ Also, in the scholium to Proposition XVII, he says: “infinitely many things...i.e., all things.”¹⁴⁰ Also, in the second part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza equates the statement that “God can think infinitely many things” with “all things.”¹⁴¹ It is quite clear, then, that Spinoza uses the term *infinite* to mean *all or everything*.¹⁴²

Next, Spinoza states that “each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself.”¹⁴³ Since an attribute is what the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence (Definition IV), it must (by Definition III) be conceived through itself. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza says:

Of attributes, which are of a self-existing being; these require no genus, or anything else through which they are better understood or explained; for since they, as attributes of a being existing through itself, exist through themselves, they are also known through themselves.¹⁴⁴

A difficulty arises from Spinoza’s scholium to Proposition X, where he says:

It is evident that although two attributes may be conceived to be really distinct (i.e., one may be conceived without the aid of the

¹³⁶ *Spinoza’s Conception of the Attributes of Substance*, 190.

¹³⁷ *Ethics*, III, Proposition II. C I.494.

¹³⁸ Bennett’s discussion of this topic is quite helpful. See: *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, 75-79.

¹³⁹ C I.424.

¹⁴⁰ C I.426.

¹⁴¹ *Ethics* II, Proposition III, Dem. C I.449. Joachim has suggested that Spinoza was somewhat reluctant to say that God subsists ‘of *all* Attributes,’ since ‘all’ could be taken to imply a sum and therefore finiteness. See Joachim’s *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*, 41.

¹⁴² For further discussion on his issue, see: Curley, *BGM*, 19-30, Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, 75-79, Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 51, Aaron Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza’s Method*, 63, Wolfson, I, 134, 225-226; II, 341-345.

¹⁴³ *Ethics*, I, Proposition X. C I.416.

¹⁴⁴ *KV* I, vii, 10. Earlier in the same passage Spinoza says: “We have already seen that the attributes (or as others call them substances) are things, or, to put it better and more properly a being existing through itself; and that this being therefore makes itself known through itself. We see that other things are only modes of those attributes, and without them can neither exist nor be understood.”

other), we still can not infer from that that they constitute two beings, *or* two different substances. 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.¹⁴⁵

The difficulty is how we can say that there are many attributes and only one substance? The simple solution to this problem might be to say that substance is identical with the many attributes. But this only creates a more menacing problem, namely that doing so is to treat substance as an aggregate, which goes against the indivisibility of substance.¹⁴⁶ The problem we are left to solve is stated by Edwin Curley as follows:

How can we remain true to Spinoza's language, which regularly speaks of substance as a complex, in which each of the attributes is an element, without suggesting that substance could somehow be decomposed into various elements, or that some of these elements might exist apart from the others?¹⁴⁷

XIII. Spinoza's Proofs of the Existence of God

Wolfson has categorized these first ten propositions of the *Ethics* as a challenge to medieval philosophers.¹⁴⁸ According to Wolfson, Spinoza's starting point in this challenge was his definition of God at the beginning of the *Ethics* as a reproduction of a definition found in a standard work of a popular medieval Jewish philosopher.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ *Ethics*, I, Proposition X. Schol. C I.416.

¹⁴⁶ Proposition XIII. Spinoza argues that it involves a contradiction to say that substance is an aggregate.

¹⁴⁷ *BGM* 29-30. Cf. Appendix.

¹⁴⁸ *Wolfson* I, 158.

¹⁴⁹ Wolfson refers to Crescas's student, Joseph Albo. In his 15th century work, *Ikkarim*, he gives an exposition of the principles of Judaism prevalent in his medieval time. "God, blessed be He, must be free of imperfections." (*Ikkarim*, I, 15) "He must possess power and will and the other attributes without which He could not be thought of as perfect." (*Ikkarim*, I, 15) "All the attributes of perfection that are predicated of God or are conceived to exist in Him are predicated of Him and are conceived to exist in Him only in the sense in which they imply perfection but in none of the senses in which they would imply imperfection." (*Ikkarim*, II, 21) The attributes of God must be infinite in number: "It must be understood that the perfections which exist in God are infinite in number," and infinite in time and perfection: "When we ascribe to God any of the attributes by which He may be described, whether negative or positive, that attribute must be taken to be infinite in two respects, infinite in time and infinite in perfection or importance." (*Ikkarim*, II, 25) Wolfson states that "here, infinite as applied to God means that He possesses an infinite number of attributes each of which is eternal and infinitely perfect." To quote Albo: "It is with reference to

At this point, in order to give both a summary of the first ten propositions and the purpose they serve for Spinoza's proof of the existence of God, I will provide a long quotation from Wolfson describing Spinoza's method in his challenge. According to Wolfson, Spinoza addresses his opponents as follows:

All you medievals,¹⁵⁰ to whatever school of thought you may belong, have builded your philosophies on the conception of a God epitomized by you in a formal definition which contains four characteristic expressions. You say that God is (1) an *ens* in the highest sense of the term, by which you mean that He is a being who exists necessarily. You also say that He is (2) 'absolutely infinite,' by which you mean that He is (3) 'a substance consisting of infinite attributes,' (4) 'each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence' (Def. VI). God so defined you call absolute substance; you differentiate Him from the world which you call conditional substance, and then you declare that the relation between the absolute substance and the conditional substance is like that of creator to created. In opposition to you, I deny at the very outset the existence of a God outside the world and of His relation to the world as creator. Still, unaccustomed to dispute about mere names, I shall retain your own term substance as a philosophic surrogate to the pious name God, and in your own terms I am going to unfold a new conception of the nature of God and of His relation to the world...To begin with, I shall abandon your distinction between absolute substance and conditional substance, but shall use the term substance in that restrictive sense in which you use the expression absolute substance. Then, what you call conditional substance,¹⁵¹ or the world, I shall call mode. Furthermore, unlike

this that the Cabalists designated God by the term Infinite (*En Sof*), to indicate that the perfections which are to be found in Him are infinite in the three senses in which we have mentioned." (*Ikkarim*, II, 25) God is defined as infinite in the number of attributes, and each attribute is infinite in time and perfection. The full exposition of this view in relation to Spinoza can be found in *Wolfson*, I, 116-119.

¹⁵⁰ Note that Wolfson is referring to the philosophical beliefs of the Jewish medieval philosophers, and the universal acceptance amongst these philosophers of the belief that God and the world are absolutely separate and homonymous. There are, of course, parallels between the beliefs of Jewish medieval philosophers and other medievals, including the Scholastics.

¹⁵¹ Wolfson has explained what is meant by conditional substance: "Mediaeval dualism considers God as something essentially different from the world. God is pure form; the world is material. As a corollary of this, the world is conceived to have all the imperfections of which God as pure spirit is free. The world is furthermore the creation of God; the world is thus called conditional being whereas God is absolute being. Since creation is assumed to be in time, the world is still further contrasted with God as the created substance with the uncreated substance or as the temporal with the eternal. The creation of the world was not by a single act but rather by a process of emanation. Matter did not come directly from God; it has made its appearance at a certain stage in the devolution of the issue of divine thought. God is pure thought, and His only activity is thinking. But as His thinking is a creative power, it becomes objectified in a thought, known as

you, I shall not describe the relation of substance to mode as that of creator to created, but rather as that of whole to part, or, to be more exact, as that of universal to particular (Defs. II and V; Axioms I and II; Prop. I). The reason for my disagreeing with you on the question of the causal relation between God and the world is that I find your doctrine of creation, however you may try to explain it, an untenable hypothesis (Props. II-VI). Barring this difference between us, a difference which, I must confess, is fundamental and far-reaching in its effect, I am going to describe my substance in all those terms which you make use of in describing your God. Like your God, my substance is (1) the highest *ens*, for existence appertains to its nature (Prop. VII). (2) It is also absolutely infinite (Prop. VIII). (3) Furthermore, it consists of infinite attributes (Prop. IX). (4) Finally, each of its attributes expresses eternal and infinite essence (Prop. X). I have thus described my substance in all those terms which you use in your formal definition of God. Consequently, as I am now to reproduce your proofs of the existence of God to prove the existence of my substance, I shall bracket together the terms God and substance and say: 'God, or substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists' (Prop. XI). Having made it clear by this time what I mean by the term God, I am no longer afraid of being misunderstood. Hereafter I shall drop the term substance and use in its stead the term God. And so he does.¹⁵²

Spinoza asserts that: "God, or a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists."¹⁵³ In the *Fifth Meditation*, Descartes says: "Since I have been accustomed to distinguish between essence and existence in everything else, I find it easy to persuade myself that existence can also be separated from the essence of God, and hence that God can be thought of as not existing."¹⁵⁴ However, in the *First Set of Replies*, Descartes removes the difficulty by demonstrating that it is through

Intelligence, which, while immaterial like God himself, according to one of the prevailing views, is of a less perfect order, inasmuch as by its nature it is only a possible being, having a cause for its existence. The thought of this Intelligence, which is said to possess a dual nature, objectifies itself in another Intelligence and a sphere. So the process goes on until at a certain stage crass matter appears which is the basis of the sublunar world. The world thus possesses imperfections which are not found in the original thinking essence of God. In the language of Spinoza these mediaeval contrasts between God and the world are expressed in the phrases 'infinite substance' and 'finite substance.' It is Spinoza's purpose in his discussion of 'What God Is' to abolish this dualism between the thinking essence of God and the material, or extended, essence of the world, to identify God with the wholeness of nature, and to conclude 'that we posit extension as an attribute of God.'" Wolfson, I, 96-97.

¹⁵² Wolfson, I, 158-160.

¹⁵³ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XI. C I.417.

¹⁵⁴ CSM II.46.

God's necessary existence as opposed to his possible existence that his essence is not distinguished from existence: "Possible existence is contained in the concept or idea of everything we clearly and distinctly understand; but in no case is necessary existence contained, except in the case of the idea of God."¹⁵⁵ Spinoza adopts the same method as Descartes in the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, where he defines *Being* as: "*Whatever, when it is clearly and distinctly perceived, we find to exist necessarily, or at least to be able to exist.*"¹⁵⁶ He goes on to say that from this definition, or description, "it is easy to see that being should be divided into being which exists necessarily by its own nature, or whose essence involves existence, and being whose essence involves only possible existence."¹⁵⁷ It is the *necessary existence* as he classified in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* that Spinoza holds to belong to God.

The idea behind all of Spinoza's proofs of the existence of God¹⁵⁸ is that if it is granted that anything is actual, then it must be granted that God is of necessity actual. In *Epistle XII*, Spinoza clarifies that the force of this argument lies not in the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes, "but only in the supposition that things which do not exist necessarily by their own nature are not determined to exist by a thing which does exist necessarily by its own nature."¹⁵⁹ Indeed, Spinoza's first proof is *ex absurdo contradictorio*.

XIV. First Proof

The first proof tells us that God is substance, and since his existence is self-determined, he necessarily exists. What is unexpressed is the postulate that there is *something*, a modal being, which exists and implies a self-determined substance.¹⁶⁰ That Spinoza did not include this in his proof in the *Ethics* is due to the fact that it goes without saying that by denying the existence of anything, you are asserting that you exist.¹⁶¹ And by asserting your existence as a modal being

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* II.83.

¹⁵⁶ *CM*, I, i.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ The first, second, and fourth proofs are ontological, while the third proof is cosmological.

¹⁵⁹ *Epistle XII*: "The more recent Peripatetics have, as I think, misunderstood the demonstration by which the Ancients tried to prove God's existence. For as I find in a certain Jew, called Rab Chasdai (Crescas), it runs as follows: if there is an infinite regress of causes, then all things that are will also have been caused; but it does not pertain to anything which has been caused, to exist necessarily by the force of its own nature; therefore, there is nothing in Nature to whose essence it pertains to exist necessarily' but the latter is absurd; therefore, the former is also. Hence, the force of this argument does not lie in the impossibility of there being an actual infinite or an infinite regress of causes, but only in the supposition that things which do not exist necessarily by their own nature are not determined to exist by a thing which does exist necessarily by its own nature." *C I.205*.

¹⁶⁰ See Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*, 52.

¹⁶¹ This Cartesian notion would be familiar to any contemporary philosopher of Spinoza.

you are implying the existence of substance. Spinoza holds that everyone admits that something is real, for even if one doubts the existence of everything including one's own existence, one must exist in order to doubt one's own existence. Since this is the case, it follows that God has necessary existence.

If we were to take any existing thing from experience, and think out all that its being involves, its reality will either *expand*, and force itself into being, or it will *dissolve* until you are forced to conceive the whole nature of things, realizing that the experience that was a starting point is only a fragment within the whole.¹⁶² The finite starting point vanishes and in its place is the necessity, complete, and infinite whole that is Spinoza's God. That God is not one amongst other self-conditioned things gives Spinoza's argument weight, as the whole is implied by each and every piece of modal existence. Thus, Spinoza says that unless the whole is, nothing can be nor be conceived.¹⁶³ Thus, as Joachim points out, because there is nothing real except God on which his being could depend, he is *causa sui*, and therefore not contingent. Further, his existence must be conditioned by himself or identical with his essence. To deny his existence is to deny that anything has existence.

According to Joachim, the ontological argument understood in this way avoids Kant's criticism.¹⁶⁴

If you apply the ontological argument to anything except the whole and unique system of experience, Kant's criticism is unanswerable. If existence is necessarily included in the idea of God, then 'God must exist' is an analytical judgment. It is contradictory to think the subject without the predicate: but—as Kant pointed out—it is not in the least contradictory to think neither subject nor predicate. You cannot conceive God without conceiving him to exist, if existence is included in the content of his idea: but you need not conceive God at all. But the cogency of this reasoning disappears the moment that God stands for the whole Reality. Then you cannot get rid of the subject of your analytical judgment without removing that which all and any experience involves: you cannot refuse to conceive God without ceasing to think or doubt or feel, in short, without ceasing to be. Hence, there is obviously a fundamental connexion between the uniqueness and the self-determined existence of God.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² This analogy is from Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*, 53.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Kant. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. A598/B626. Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*, 54.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 54-55.

XV. Second Proof

The second proof makes use of the *principle of sufficient reason*. Spinoza clearly defines the *principle of sufficient reason* in the *PPC*, the eleventh axiom states: “Nothing exists of which it cannot be asked, what is the cause, or reason, why it exists.”¹⁶⁶ The note to this axiom says:

Since existing is something positive, we cannot say that it has nothing as its cause (by Axiom VII).¹⁶⁷ Therefore, we must assign some positive cause, or reason, why [a thing] exists—either an eternal one, i.e., one outside the thing itself, or an internal one, i.e., one comprehended in the nature and definition of the existing thing itself.¹⁶⁸

This is the same reasoning that underlies the second axiom in the *Ethics*: “What cannot be conceived through another, must be conceived through itself.”¹⁶⁹ The *principle of sufficient reason* is also given by Spinoza at the beginning of his second proof, where he says:

For each thing there must be assigned a cause, *or* reason, as much for its existence as for its nonexistence. For example, if a triangle exists, there must be a reason *or* cause why it exists; but if it does not exist, there must also be a reason *or* cause which prevents it from existing, *or* which takes its existence away.¹⁷⁰

Spinoza’s application of the *principle of sufficient reason* in the *Ethics* is more radical than his axiom in the *PPC*, where it had only been all *existing* things that require a reason or cause for their existence, whereas in the *Ethics* both *existing* and *non-existing* things require a reason or cause that explain why it is that they exist or do not. Further, Spinoza implies that non-existing things are prevented by a cause or reason from existing.¹⁷¹

A thing’s existence must either be: 1) logically impossible, 2) logically possible, or 3) logically necessary. A thing’s existence is logically impossible when a cause or reason prevents it from existing. For example, a ‘square circle’ is logically impossible, since it contains an inherent contradiction. Thus, the reason or cause that prevent them from existing is internal rather than external. Things which have an essence that contains no contradiction, or, in other words,

¹⁶⁶ *PPC*, I, Axiom XI. C I.246.

¹⁶⁷ Axiom VII states: “No actually existing thing and no actually existing perfection of a thing can have nothing, *or* a thing not existing, as the cause of its existence.” C I.244.

¹⁶⁸ C I.246.

¹⁶⁹ *Ethics* I, Axiom II. C I.410.

¹⁷⁰ *Ethics* I, Proposition XI, Dem. II. C I.417.

¹⁷¹ Spinoza had discussed the nature of *Chimeras* in *CM*, I, i. Chimeras are verbal ideas, which exist neither in the intellect nor in the imagination.

are logically possible, exist as long as there is no external cause that prevent them from existing. This contains all of the ordinary objects, or modes, of our everyday experience. One might object that since there are so many competing essences that contain no internal contradiction, why isn't it the case that they are all actually existing. The answer is that since their existence depends on external causes, i.e. the order of things external, they are only actualized if the order of things opens up a spot for them. The reason for their existence or nonexistence is in the order of things rather than in their essence. Finally, a thing's existence is logically necessary if there isn't a reason or cause which prevents it from existing. The difference between logically necessary existents and logically possible ones is that while it is the case that a certain logically possible thing exists of necessity, this existence only applies to a certain 'slot' where things external allow for it to exist. While it exists of necessity *now*, its existence does not follow from its essence, but from the order of causes outside its existence. It does not have the same necessary existence as that which is logically necessary, since it is dependent upon things other than itself to exist.

Hence, Spinoza says: "The reason why a circle or 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 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."¹⁷² While the essence of a logically impossible thing prevents it from existing, the essence of a logically necessary thing involves existence. Since this is the case, Spinoza argues, God must necessarily exist if there is no reason or cause preventing his existence.

Such a cause or reason preventing God's existence would have to either be in God's essence or outside of it. If the cause or reason is external, it is either a substance of a different nature or the same nature. However, if it were of the same nature, that would prove that God exists, since there is nothing distinct from God to prevent his existence. We have already shown that *in nature there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute* (Proposition V). If the substance is of a different nature, then it would have nothing in common with God, as *two substances having different attributes have nothing in common with one another* (Proposition II). Further, two substances that have nothing in common cannot be understood through one another (by Axiom V), and thus the other substance isn't capable of preventing God from existing. Thus, since the cause or reason isn't external to God, then if God doesn't exist, it must be internal. But it is an absurdity to affirm that a Being absolutely infinite and supremely perfect has an essence which involves a contradiction. Therefore, there is no reason or cause which takes God's existence away, and hence God necessarily exists.

¹⁷² *Ethics* I, Proposition XI, Dem. II. C I.417.

XVI. Third Proof

Spinoza's next demonstration reflects Descartes' cosmological proof from the *Third Meditation*. In that proof, Descartes reasons from effect to cause, or, from our consciousness of our own existence to the existence of God.¹⁷³ His argument begins with the inquiry of whether I, who have an idea of a being more perfect than myself, could exist if such a being didn't exist. He then presents the question: "From whom, in that case, would I derive my existence? From myself, presumably, or from my parents, or from some other being less perfect than God?"¹⁷⁴ Descartes' conclusion is that my existence must derive from God. With this principle of God as the source of our beginning to exist, there is also the principle of *preservation*, or *conservation*. This addition allows the proponent of a cosmological argument to respond to the objection that the universe itself is eternal and has no beginning. Thus, Descartes states: "It is clear enough that an infinite regress is impossible here, especially since I am dealing not just with the cause that has produced me in the past, but also and more importantly with the cause that preserves me at the present moment."¹⁷⁵ A traditional cosmological argument would run as follows:¹⁷⁶

- 1) Everything that begins to exist into existence has a cause.
- 2) The universe began to exist.
- 3) Therefore, the universe has a cause.

In the *Third Meditation*, Descartes holds that effects must contain as much reality as their causes, and since we have an idea of God, we cannot be the cause of this idea. Further, only an infinitely perfect being could be the cause of this idea. Spinoza utilizes Descartes' reasoning in his third proof. We have an idea of our own existence as finite beings and an idea of God's existence as an infinite being. Now, there are three possibilities as to the truth of these ideas:

- 1) They are both false, and thus *nothing* exists.
- 2) Only the idea of our own existence is true, which entails that "what now necessarily exists are only finite beings."
- 3) They are both true, and thus "an absolutely infinite Being exists."

¹⁷³ Descartes' cosmological proof is *anthropological*, reasoning from man's existence to the existence of God, unlike Plato's proof in the *Timaeus*, which reasons from the existence of the world to the existence of its cause. The argument in *Timaeus* 28a-c is as follows: "Everything that comes to be must of necessity come to be by the agency of some cause, for it is impossible for anything to come to be without a cause...Now as to the whole universe or world order [*kosmos*]...there is a question we need to consider first...Has it always existed? Was there no origin from which it came to be? Or did it come to be and to take its start from some origin? It has come to be...Further, we maintain that, necessarily, that which comes to be must come to be by agency of some cause."

¹⁷⁴ CSM II.33.

¹⁷⁵ CSM II.34

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Plato's *Timaeus* 28a-c, above.

The first possibility is rejected, since we exist. The second possibility is also rejected, because “if what now necessarily exists are only finite beings, then finite beings are more powerful than an absolutely infinite Being. But this, as is known through itself is absurd.” The importance of Descartes’ argument becomes evident:

If I derived my existence from myself [and were independent of every other being], then I should neither doubt nor want, nor lack anything at all; for I should have given myself all the perfections of which I have any idea, and thus I should myself be God. I must not suppose that the items I lack would be more difficult to acquire than those I now have. On the contrary, it is clear that, since I am a thinking thing...it would have been far more difficult for me to emerge out of nothing than merely to acquire knowledge of which I am ignorant...If I had derived my existence from myself, which is a greater achievement, I should certainly not have denied myself the knowledge in question, which is something much easier to acquire, or indeed any of the attributes which I perceive to be contained in the idea of God; for none of them seem any harder to achieve. And if any of them were harder to achieve, they would certainly appear so to me, if I had indeed got all my other attributes from myself, since I should experience a limitation of my power in this respect.¹⁷⁷

Spinoza gives this same argument in his favorite style, *ex absurdo contradictorio*. For if we exist and God doesn’t exist, then we have existence through ourselves, as Descartes says: “I derived my existence from myself.” If this is the case, then the idea which we have of our own existence is more powerful than the idea we have of God’s existence, since “to be able not to exist is to lack power, and conversely, to be able to exist is to have power.”¹⁷⁸ But we have an idea of ourselves as finite beings and God as an infinite being. Thus, the possibility that only the idea of our own existence is true is contradictory. Since the first two possibilities have been shown to be false, the last one must be true, namely that God, a being absolutely infinite, necessarily exists.¹⁷⁹

XVII. Fourth Proof

Spinoza’s fourth proof is more interesting than his third, for he tells us: “I wanted to show God’s existence a posteriori, so that the demonstration would be

¹⁷⁷ CSM II.33.

¹⁷⁸ *Ethics* I, Proposition XI, Dem. III. C I.418.

¹⁷⁹ For a more detailed discussion, see Wolfson, I, ch. vi.

perceived more easily—but not because God’s existence does not follow a priori from the same foundation.”¹⁸⁰ The purpose of the third proof is to give a simple demonstration of a proof that can alternatively, and preferably, be arrived at a priori.

Spinoza gives a simple outline of this ontological proof:

- 1) To be able to exist is power.
- 2) The more reality a thing has, the more power it has to exist.
- 3) Therefore, God, an absolutely infinite being, has, of himself, an absolutely infinite power of existing.
- 4) From this it follows that God exists absolutely.¹⁸¹

At first sight, this proof seems quite obscure and unclear. For what, exactly, is the definition of *power*? Spinoza answers this question for us in the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, where he states that God’s *power* is not distinguished from his *essence*:

Some claim that God’s *Immensity* is threefold: immensity of essence, of power, and of presence;¹⁸² but that is foolish, for they seem to distinguish between God’s essence and his power. But others have also asserted the same thing more openly, when they say that God is everywhere through his power, but not through his essence¹⁸³—as if the power of God were distinguished from all his attributes, *or* his infinite essence. Nevertheless it cannot be anything else. For if it were something else, it would be either some creature or something accidental to the divine essence, which the divine essence could be conceived to lack. But both alternatives are absurd. For if it were a creature, it would require the power of God in order to be conserved, and so there would be an infinite regress. And if it were something accidental, God would not be a most simple being, contrary to what we have demonstrated above.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ *Ethics* I, Proposition XI, Schol. C I.418.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 8, 3.

¹⁸³ Cf. *Ibid.* I, 25, 5.

¹⁸⁴ *CM*, II, iii. The demonstration that God is a simple being that Spinoza refers to is from *PPC*, I, Prop. XVII: “If God were composed of parts, the parts would have to be at least prior in nature to God (as everyone will easily concede). But that is absurd (for God is prior in causality to the essence and to the existence of things). Therefore, he is an entirely simple being.” In that work it is argued that God is prior in causality to the essence and existence of things because (as stated in the third proof) whatever exists is preserved by the power of God alone, and thus God is the cause of things with respect to their essences. C I.260, 320-321.

From this it is evident how Spinoza's proof is ontological, for it argues from the essence of God, or, what is the same, his power, and concludes that he necessarily exists. There is a similar argument found in Descartes' *First Set of Replies* to Caterus:

When we attend to the immense power of this being, we shall be unable to think of its existence as possible without also recognizing that it can exist by its own power; and we shall infer from this that this being does really exist and has existed from eternity, since it is quite evident by the natural light that what can exist by its own power always exists. So we shall come to understand that necessary existence is contained in the idea of a supremely powerful being, not by any fiction of the intellect, but because it belongs to the true and immutable nature of such a being that it exists.¹⁸⁵

Spinoza notes that "there may be many who will not easily be able to see how evident this demonstration is, because they have been accustomed to contemplate only those things that flow from external causes."¹⁸⁶ In other words, they contemplate things from effect to cause, rather than from cause to effect, which is the nature of this proof. Such people see that things which quickly come to be, or which are easily able to exist, also quickly perish. Likewise, they conceive that things which are more complex do not exist as easily.

Spinoza says that this objection can be answered by noting that he is not speaking of things which come to be from external causes, but rather of substances that can be produced by no external cause. The objection only applies to things which owe their existence to an external cause. Spinoza's statement, "for things that come to be from external causes—whether they consist of many parts or of few—owe all the perfection or reality they have to the power of the external cause," reflects what Descartes says in the *Third Meditation*: "There must be at least as much [reality] in the cause as in the effect."¹⁸⁷ Thus, the existence of things that come from an external cause arises *only* from the perfection of that cause, and not from their own perfection. Any perfection substance has is not owed to an external cause, and so its existence *must* follow from its own essence. Spinoza concludes: "Hence its existence is nothing but its essence."¹⁸⁸

The objection washes away because perfection asserts the existence of a thing, rather than limiting it, while imperfection does take it away. In fact, there is nothing whose existence we can be more certain of than the existence of an absolutely infinite, or perfect, Being, which Spinoza calls God. This proof "will be

¹⁸⁵ CSM II.85.

¹⁸⁶ *Ethics* I, Proposition XI, Schol. C I.418.

¹⁸⁷ CSM II.34.

¹⁸⁸ *Ethics* I, Proposition XI, Schol. C I.419.

clear even to those who are only moderately attentive,” and since God’s essence excludes all imperfection, and involves absolute perfection, all reasons of doubting God’s existence will be removed.

XVIII. The Indivisibility of Substance

Spinoza now attends to the indivisibility of substance. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza devotes the first chapter to the subject, ‘That God Is,’ and the second chapter to the subject, ‘What God Is.’ Similarly, now that he has demonstrated that God exists in Proposition XI of the *Ethics*, the following propositions discuss what God is, or, more specifically, what the nature of God is.¹⁸⁹ Spinoza states in Proposition XII: “No attribute of a substance can be truly conceived from which it follows that the substance can be divided.”¹⁹⁰ Proposition XII doesn’t tell us that an attribute can’t be divided, since I can conceive of distinct modes of extension, not just extension as a whole. Likewise, I can distinguish concepts of thought from each other, and don’t need to conceive of all thoughts as a whole. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza states: “A thing composed of different parts must be such that each singular part can be conceived and understood without the others.”¹⁹¹ In the same passage Spinoza provides an illustration: “For example, in a clock that is composed of many different wheels, cords, etc., I say that each wheel, cord, etc., can be conceived and understood separately, without needing [the understanding of] the whole as a whole.”¹⁹²

However, while I can conceive of the attributes as divisible in this way, this division doesn’t imply that substance itself is divided. For example, when an extended body is broken in two, substance itself is not broken in two, suffering division. Spinoza is not an atomist,¹⁹³ and the notion that substance, or the whole, is the sum total of a finite number of divisible points is absolutely rejected by him. This is evident from his statement in the *Short Treatise*:

Division, then, or being acted on, always happens in the mode, as when we say that a man perishes, or is destroyed, that is only understood of the man insofar as he is a composite being and

¹⁸⁹ The structure of the opening chapters of the *Short Treatise* reflects, albeit a rough reflection, the structure of the *Ethics*. The chapter following ‘What God Is’ will be ‘How God is a Cause of All Things,’ which will correspond to Propositions XV-XVIII in the *Ethics*. Following that chapter is a discussion ‘Of God’s Necessary Actions,’ which corresponds to Propositions XXIX and XXXIII of the *Ethics*.

¹⁹⁰ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XII. C I.419.

¹⁹¹ KVI, ii, 19. C I.71.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ethics*, II, Proposition XIII, Lemma VII: “The whole of nature is one Individual, whose parts, i.e., all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change to the whole Individual.” Spinoza offers a long proof of the proposition: “There are no atoms.” C I.268-269. Cf. Descartes *Principles*, II, 20. CSM I.231-232.

mode of substance, and not the substance itself on which he depends.¹⁹⁴

The problem Spinoza is addressing is the *continuum* problem. This problem states that since extension, space, or matter are *continuous* quantities, it follows that however small the amount of space you divide, you can always divide it again to reach a smaller amount. This process goes on to infinity, such that we never arrive at a smallest point. If it is the case that there is no smallest point, then no amount of points, however many, can satisfy a complete unit or whole. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza states why the whole can't merely be the sum of its parts: "If it did consist of parts, it would not be infinite through its nature...But it is impossible that parts could be conceived in an infinite Nature, for all parts are, by their nature, finite."¹⁹⁵ As Spinoza says in the first proposition of the *Ethics*, "*Substantia prior est natura suis affectionibus*," in other words, the whole is prior to its parts. Space as a whole, for example, is a single and uniform thing, and it is only within space that we specify divisions.¹⁹⁶ But it isn't the parts that construct space, but the space that constructs the parts. Just as in the first proposition, space is logically prior to a part of space. Without space, there are no parts of space.

In the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Spinoza provides a full chapter on God's simplicity. He gives a proof that God is not something composite, from which it follows that he is *simple*:

Since it is clear through itself that component parts are prior in nature at least to the thing composed, those substances by whose coalition and union God is composed will necessarily be prior in nature to God himself, and each one will be able to be conceived through itself, although it is not attributed to God. Then, since they must be really distinguished from one another, each one will also necessarily be able to exist through itself without the aid of the others; and so, as we have just said, there could be as many gods as there are substances from which God would be supposed to be composed. For since each one is able to exist through itself, it will have to exist of itself, and therefore will also have the power of giving itself all the perfections which we have shown to be in God...But since nothing more absurd than this can be said, we conclude that God is not composed of a coalition and union of substances.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ KVI, ii, 22. C I.72.

¹⁹⁵ KVI, ii, 19. C I.71.

¹⁹⁶ This is similar in nature to duration.

¹⁹⁷ CM, II, v. C I.324.

It might be objected that Spinoza is making contradictory statements when he says that God is infinite and that God is simple. This objection is the same issue the medieval philosophers faced who asserted that God is absolutely infinite and absolutely simply. According to Wolfson, what was meant by simplicity is threefold: the denial of the existence in God of accidental qualities, the denial of essential attributes, i.e., the metaphysical or logical distinction of genus and species in the divine nature, and the denial of the distinction of essence and existence in the divine nature.¹⁹⁸ Whether Spinoza's conception is the same as this medieval view of simplicity cannot be said for sure, but Spinoza makes strikingly similar statements. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza says that "God is not a species of any genus,"¹⁹⁹ i.e., in God there is no distinction of genus and species. This passage not only echoes Maimonides,²⁰⁰ but, as Edwin Curley also notes, it echoes Aquinas.²⁰¹ We know that Spinoza also agrees that there is no distinction of essence and existence in the divine nature. Wolfson points to the second scholium of Proposition VIII to show that Spinoza also agrees that accidental qualities inhere in substance.²⁰² Almost in the words of Maimonides, Spinoza says that those who attribute accidental qualities to substance do so "because they do not distinguish between the modifications of substances and the substances themselves."²⁰³ Spinoza does hold that God is *infinite* and *simple*, but it is clear that Spinoza agrees with a medieval thesis that God is *simple* in the sense that he is not an aggregate of parts, nor is he composed of an inner plurality in his essence.²⁰⁴

His proof of Proposition XII in the *Ethics* is similar to his statement in the *Cogitata Metaphysica*. He argues that if it were the case that a substance could be divided, the parts into which it would be divided would either retain the nature of the substance or would not. If the parts retain the nature of substance, then it follows from Proposition VIII that each part is infinite, and also from Proposition VII that each part is also its own cause. Further, by Proposition V each part has to consist of a different attribute, for two or more substances can't share an attribute. From all this it follows that many substances are formed from the division of one substance, which has already been shown to be an absurdity by Proposition VI, namely that one substance can't be produced by another substance. Also, it has been shown in Proposition II that two substances having different attributes have nothing in common with one another. This means that the parts would have nothing in common with their whole, and by Definition IV and Proposition X, it follows that the whole could *be* and *be conceived* without its parts, *quod absurdum esse nemo dubitare poterit*.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁸ Wolfson, I, 113-115.

¹⁹⁹ *KV*, I, vii, 3. C I.88.

²⁰⁰ *Moreh Nebukim*, I, 52.

²⁰¹ *Summa Theologiae*, I, 3, 5.

²⁰² Wolfson, I, 116.

²⁰³ *Ethics*, I, Proposition VIII, Scholium II. C I.413.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Appendix.

²⁰⁵ "Which is absurd, as no one will be able to doubt."

Now that Spinoza has demonstrated that the parts can't retain the nature of the whole [substance], he moves to the second possibility if substance could be divided, namely that the parts will not retain the nature of substance. If this is asserted, he says, "then since the whole substance would be divided into equal parts,²⁰⁶ it would lose the nature of substance, and would cease to be."²⁰⁷ This is absurd by Proposition VII, for it pertains to the nature of substance to exist.

Whereas in Proposition XII where Spinoza establishes that no attribute can be conceived from which it follows that the substance can be divided, Proposition XIII attempts to establish that an absolutely infinite substance is indivisible. His proof is similar to the previous proposition. He argues that if an absolutely infinite substance were divisible, the parts would either retain the nature of the absolutely infinite substance or they would not. If it were the case that they retained the nature of the absolutely infinite substance, then there would be more than one substance of the same nature, which is absurd by Proposition V. If they do not retain its nature, then an absolutely infinite substance would not exist. But it has already been shown that an absolutely infinite substance, namely God, does exist by Proposition XI. Therefore, God is indivisible.

The corollary he provides tells us that it follows from these propositions that no substance, nor attribute of a substance, i.e. the corporeal conception of substance, is divisible. While we can conceive of matter as divisible in certain respects, "insofar as it is a substance,"²⁰⁸ that is, as an attribute of substance, it is not divisible. The nature of substance can't be conceived except as infinite. Thus, "by a part of substance nothing can be understood except a finite substance,"²⁰⁹ which is a contradiction since it has already been shown that substance is necessarily infinite by Proposition VIII.

XIX. The Conceptual Priority of God

Spinoza now sets out to clarify the ontological status of God as a substance. He says: "Except God, no substance can be or be conceived."²¹⁰ God is not only the only substance that exists, but is also the only substance that can be conceived. From Proposition V it has been shown that in nature there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute, and from Proposition XI that God, a substance with infinite attributes, necessarily exists. Since God has infinite, or all possible, attributes, his existence makes it impossible for any other substance to

²⁰⁶ Curley points to Gebhardt's explanation as to why Spinoza assumes that the parts would be equal: "Spinoza assumes that if substance can be conceived to be divided at all, then it can be conceived to be divided into equal parts. So the case of an equal division is the only one that need be considered." C I.419 n.

²⁰⁷ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XII, Dem. C I.419.

²⁰⁸ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XIII, Corol. C I.420.

²⁰⁹ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XIII, Schol. C I.420.

²¹⁰ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XIV. C I.420.

exist, for if another substance existed, it would have to share an attribute with God, which is a violation of Proposition V. This is Spinoza's full argument for *monism*, the view that there is only one substance that exists, or can exist. His argument can be formulated as follows:

- 1) God, a substance with every possible attribute, must necessarily exist. (Proposition XI)
- 2) There cannot exist two substances that share an attribute. (Proposition V)
- 3) Therefore, there is only one substance, namely God. (Proposition XIV)

It follows from this that God is *unique*, as we have previously explained. And here Spinoza declares that God's uniqueness follows from the fact that "in Nature there is only one substance, and that it is absolutely infinite."²¹¹ In the second corollary, Spinoza says that it also follows "that an extended thing and a thinking thing are either attributes of God, or²¹² affections of God's attributes."²¹³ This statement isn't as clear as what Spinoza will say in the first two propositions of Part Two of the *Ethics*, that "Thought is an attribute of God, or God is a thinking thing,"²¹⁴ and "Extension is an attribute of God, or God is an extended thing."²¹⁵

Spinoza includes a description of our understanding of God's attributes in the *Short Treatise*:

After the preceding reflections on Nature we have not yet been able to find in it more than two attributes that belong to this all-perfect being. And these give us nothing by which we can satisfy ourselves that these would be the only ones of which this perfect being would consist. On the contrary, we find in ourselves something which openly indicates to us not only that there are more, but also that there are infinite perfect attributes which must pertain to this being before it can be called perfect. And where does this Idea of perfection come from? It cannot come from these two, for two gives only two, not infinitely many. From where, then? Certainly not from me, for then I would have had to be able to give what I did not have. From where else, then, than from the infinite attributes themselves, which tell us that they are, though they so far do not tell us what they are. For only of two do we know what they are.²¹⁶

Our idea of God is explained by Spinoza as *clear*, because man "understands his 'attributes,' which he could not produce because he is imperfect."²¹⁷

²¹¹ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XIV, Corol. I. C I.420.

²¹² By Axiom I: "Whatever is, is either in itself or in another."

²¹³ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XIV, Corol. II. C I.420.

²¹⁴ *Ethics* II, Proposition I. C I.448.

²¹⁵ *Ethics* II, Proposition II. C I.449.

²¹⁶ *KV*, I, n. C I.63-64.

²¹⁷ *KV*, I, i, 9. C I.64.

In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza lists three reasons why he holds that all the attributes in Nature are only one, single being:

1. Because we have already found previously that there must be an infinite and perfect being, by which nothing else can be understood but a being of which all in all must be predicated. For of a being which has some essence, [some] attributes must be predicated, and the more essence one ascribes to it, the more attributes one must also ascribe to it. So if a being is infinite, its attributes must also be infinite, and that is precisely what we call a perfect being.
2. 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.
3. Because, as we have already seen, one substance cannot produce another, and if a substance does not exist, it is impossible for it to begin to exist. We seem however, that in no substance (which we nonetheless know to exist in Nature) is there, so long as it is conceived separately, any necessity of existing. Since no existence pertains to its particular essence, it must necessarily follow that Nature, which comes from no cause, and which we nevertheless know to exist, must necessarily be a perfect being, existence belongs.²¹⁸

Yet although extension and thought are attributes of God, they “do not exhaust God’s nature,” for “The Absolute is more than Thought and Extension, though our intelligence apprehends only them.”²¹⁹

XX. The Impossibility of a Vacuum and the Infinity of Extension

Spinoza states in Proposition XV that “whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.”²²⁰ Since it is the case that except for God, no substance can be, or be conceived (by Proposition XIV), and also that modes cannot be conceived without substance (by Definition V), it follows that all existent modes can only be, or be conceived, in the divine nature. And since it is the case that except for substances and modes there is nothing (by Axiom I),

²¹⁸ KV, I, ii, 17, C I.69-70.

²¹⁹ Joachim. *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*, 39.

²²⁰ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XV. C I.420.

everything is in God and nothing can be conceived without God.²²¹ This means that everything, not excluding matter, is in God.²²²

Spinoza now turns to an important concern that had also troubled him in his early writings. This concern is the rejection of extension as an attribute of God. According to Spinoza, “*everyone* who has to any extent contemplated the divine nature denies that God is corporeal.”²²³ This reflects the complete medieval denial of God as a material cause. Spinoza says that this denial arises from their defining body as “any quantity, with length, breadth, and depth, limited by some certain figure.”²²⁴ If this is in fact what body is, then it would be an absurdity to say that an absolutely infinite being, God, has such a limited nature. It does not seem possible to maintain that extension is an attribute of God, “for since extension is divisible, the perfect being would consist of parts.”²²⁵

Spinoza presents a refutation of this denial of extension as an attribute of God, showing that extension isn’t necessarily divisible and composed of parts. Just as he had previously done in his demonstration of Propositions XII and XIII, Spinoza distinguishes between extension as an attribute and a mode, the former being *simple* and the latter being divisible. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza gives a detailed account of this distinction:

Concerning the parts in Nature, we say (as we said before) that division never occurs in the substance, but always and only in the modes of substance. So if I want to divide water, I divide only the mode of the substance, not the substance itself; the substance is always the same, [though] now [it is the substance] of water, now [the substance] of something else. Division, then, or being acted on, always happens in the mode, as when we say that a man perishes, or is destroyed, that is only understood of the man insofar as he is a composite being and mode of substance, and not the substance itself on which he depends.²²⁶

Spinoza argues that if extension is not an attribute of God, that is, if extension is not contained within the divine nature, then God would have had to create it as a substance distinct from himself, which is absurd, for “if things have nothing in common with one another, one of them cannot be the cause of the other,”²²⁷ and “a substance cannot be produced by anything else.”²²⁸ Thus, Spinoza says: “By

²²¹ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XV, Dem. C I.420.

²²² Wolfson claims that the first fifteen propositions are all a criticism of the immateriality of God, which culminates in the statement in Proposition XV: “Whatever is, is in God.” Wolfson, I, 302.

²²³ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XV, Schol. C I.421. Italics are my emphasis.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *KV*, I, ii, 18. C I.70.

²²⁶ *KV*, I, ii, 11-12. C I.72.

²²⁷ *Ethics*, I, Proposition III. C I.410.

²²⁸ *Ethics*, I, Proposition VI, Corol. C I.412.

what divine power could it be created? They are completely ignorant of that. And this shows clearly that they do not understand what they themselves say.”²²⁹

The first argument that Spinoza attributes to his opponents deals with is the claim that since matter consists of parts, it cannot be infinite and thus cannot pertain to God. They argue, for example, that if matter is infinite, and we divide it in two parts, each part will either be finite or infinite. If they are said to be finite, then two finite parts compose an infinite, which is absurd. If they are said to be infinite, then there is one infinite twice as large as another, which is also absurd, for one infinite can't be greater than another infinite. They also argue that if an infinite quantity is measured by parts that are each equal to a foot, then it will consist of infinitely many parts each equal to a foot. If it is measured by parts that are each equal to an inch, then it will consist of infinitely many parts each equal to an inch. Therefore, one infinite number is twelve times the size as the other, which is absurd. From these three arguments, they conclude that matter is finite, and cannot belong to God's essence.

The second argument of Spinoza's opponent states that since God is a supremely perfect being, he can't be acted upon. Matter, however, is divisible, and thus can be acted upon. From this, it follows that matter cannot belong to God's essence. It is likely Descartes that is the voice of Spinoza's opponent here, for he says in the *Principles*:

There are many things such that, although we recognize some perfection in them, we also find in them some imperfection or limitation, and these therefore cannot belong to God. For example, the nature of body includes divisibility along with extension in space, and since being divisible is an imperfection, it is certain that God is not a body.²³⁰

According to Descartes, being divisible into parts is a way of being acted upon. Thus, if all matter is divisible, it is passive, and cannot belong to God's essence.

To refute these arguments, Spinoza begins by stating that the absurdities from which his opponents infer that *extended substance*, or matter, is finite follow “from the fact that they suppose an infinite quantity to be measurable and composed of finite parts.”²³¹ Rather than showing that *corporeal substance* is finite, their arguments only show that infinite quantity is not measurable, and that it is not composed of parts. Since Spinoza holds that infinite quantity is neither measurable nor composed of parts, “so the weapon they aim at us, they really turn against themselves.”²³² Spinoza asks: “If corporeal substance could be so divided that its parts were really distinct, why, then, could one part not be

²²⁹ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XV, Schol. C I.421.

²³⁰ *CSM* I.200. *Principles*, I, 23. Cf. Spinoza's *PPC*, I, Prop. XVI, Dem. C I.260.

²³¹ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XV, Schol. C I.423.

²³² *Ibid.*

annihilated, the rest remaining connected with one another as before?”²³³ If one part can be annihilated, then it would either leave a vacuum or the other parts would have to fill its place.

To understand how Spinoza formulates his response, we must look to what Descartes says about a vacuum. Descartes had argued that there is no real difference between space and corporeal substance [extension]. To recognize that there is no difference between them, he asks us to attend to the idea of some body, i.e. a stone, and remove all that is non-essential to the nature of body from it. Hardness must be excluded, “since if the stone is melted or pulverized it will lose its hardness without thereby ceasing to be a body.”²³⁴ Color is excluded, “since we have often seen stones so transparent as to lack color.”²³⁵ Heaviness is also excluded, “since although fire is extremely light it is still thought of as being corporeal.”²³⁶ Lastly, cold and heat and all other such qualities are excluded, “either because they are not thought of as being in the stone, or because if they change, the stone is not on that account reckoned to have lost its bodily nature.”²³⁷ With all of these non-essential qualities removed, Descartes concludes that there is nothing left in our idea of the stone except that it is something extended in length, breadth, and depth. And this idea is what comprises the idea of space.²³⁸

Spinoza is clearly following Descartes, as he produces a similar argument for the proposition that “the nature of body, or matter, consists in extension alone.”²³⁹ Spinoza justifies this claim by the fact that “the nature of the body is not taken away when the sensible qualities are taken away,”²⁴⁰ that is, “even though the hardness, weight, and rest of the sensible qualities are separated from a body, the nature of the body will still remain whole,”²⁴¹ as Descartes explains above. It follows from this proposition, says Spinoza, that “space and body do not really differ,”²⁴² because space and extension do not really differ.

What follows from this is Spinoza’s rejection of a *vacuum*, which is the basis for his argument that matter is not divisible into distinct parts. In the *Ethics*, he says that “there is no vacuum in nature (a subject I discuss elsewhere),”²⁴³ which must refer to what he says in his *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, as he does

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *CSM* I.227.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ By space, he is referring to both a space which is full of bodies, and also a space which is called ‘empty,’ by which he means a space that contains nothing perceivable by the senses. Cf. *Principles*, II, 17.

²³⁹ *PPC*, II, Prop. II. C I.267.

²⁴⁰ *PPC*, II, Prop. II, Dem. C I.267.

²⁴¹ *PPC*, II, Prop. I. C I.267.

²⁴² *PPC*, II, Prop. II, Corol. C I.267.

²⁴³ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XV, Schol. C I.423.

not mention the topic again in the *Ethics*.²⁴⁴ Spinoza is certainly referring to what he says of the proposition that “it involves a contradiction that there should be a vacuum.”²⁴⁵ Since the definition of a vacuum is “extension without corporeal substance,”²⁴⁶ it follows from what has already been said that this means body without body, which is absurd. That is, bodies between which nothing lies must touch one another. Spinoza holds it as an axiom that “nothing has no properties,” or, as Descartes says, “nothingness possesses no attributes or qualities.”²⁴⁷

Spinoza references a fuller explanation of this in Descartes’ *Principles*.²⁴⁸ The inclination to suppose that a vacuum can exist is formed by a prejudice we have formed. Descartes tells us that when we ordinarily use the term *empty*, we are not referring to a place or space in which there is absolutely nothing, but to a place in which there is none of the things that we think ought to be there. For example, we say that a pitcher that we use to hold water is empty when it is full of air, or when a fishpond is full of water, we still call it empty if it has no fish in it. However, we call space empty if it contains nothing perceivable by the senses, although it is full of self-subsistent matter. We fall into error because normally the only things we attend to in our thoughts are those which are detected by our senses. Thus, when we are not attentive in our understanding of the terms ‘empty’ and ‘nothing,’ says Descartes, “we may suppose that a space we call empty contains not just nothing perceivable by the senses but nothing whatsoever.”²⁴⁹ And this is just as fallacious as thinking that the air in a jug isn’t a subsistent thing because we usually think of it as empty when it contains nothing but air. Descartes says:

When there is nothing between two bodies they must necessarily touch each other. And it is a manifest contradiction for them to be apart, or to have a distance between them, when the distance in question is nothing; for every distance is a mode of extension, and therefore cannot exist without an extended substance.²⁵⁰

Jonathan Bennett clarifies what underlies the reasoning of Spinoza and Descartes:

If we pump all the air out of a jar, what is left in it? There cannot be literally *nothing* left, for if there were nothing between the two sides they would be contiguous. We might try to get out of allowing that

²⁴⁴ This statement, along with Spinoza’s statement in the Scholium of Proposition XIX that references the *PPC*, are evidence that the *PPC* is more than just an exposition on a philosophy that Spinoza rejects.

²⁴⁵ *PPC*, II, Proposition III. *C* I.268.

²⁴⁶ *PPC*, II, Definition V. *C* I.263.

²⁴⁷ *CSM* I.196.

²⁴⁸ *Principles*, II, xvii-xviii. *CSM* I.230.

²⁴⁹ *CSM* I.230.

²⁵⁰ *CSM* I.231.

there is *something* in the jar by saying that there is a *distance* between its sides. But Descartes has a good reply to this. Distance, he says, is a mode—a property or quality or measure—and there must be something it is *of*: you can have a mile of road, or a yard of fabric, but you cannot have a sheer mile or a naked yard. The moral is that the jar must still contain something extended: it may lack mass, solidity, impenetrability, etc., but it must be something with size and shape—not a nothing with size and shape, a case of size and shape which aren't of anything.²⁵¹

XXI. Psychological Explanation of Dividing Quantity

Spinoza now turns to a psychological explanation of the human inclination to divide quantity. He distinguishes between conceiving through the *imagination* and conceiving through the *intellect*. The conception we have of quantity as it is in the imagination is finite, divisible, and composed of parts, while the conception we have of quantity as it is in the intellect is infinite, *unique*, and indivisible. Spinoza says that this is sufficiently plain to everyone who knows how to distinguish between the intellect and the imagination.²⁵²

Descartes provides an example in the *Third Meditation* of such a distinction:

There are two different ideas of the sun which I find within me. One of them, which is acquired as it were from the senses and which is a prime example of an idea which I reckon to come from an external source, makes the sun appear very small. The other idea is based on astronomical reasoning, that is, it is derived from certain notions which are innate in me (or else it is constructed by me in some other way), and this idea shows the sun to be several times larger than the earth. Obviously both these ideas cannot resemble the sun which exists outside me; and reason persuades me that the idea which seems to have emanated most directly from the sun itself has in fact no resemblance to it at all.²⁵³

²⁵¹ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 100.

²⁵² This line of thinking was evident in Spinoza's early writing. He says in *TdIE* § 87: "From this it is also established how easily they can fall into great errors, who have not accurately distinguished between imagination and intellection. Such errors as: that extension must be in a place, that it must be finite, that its parts must be really distinguished from one another, that it is the first and only foundation of all things, that it occupies more space at one time than at another, and many other things of the same kind, all of which are completely opposed to the truth." C I.38-39.

²⁵³ *Meditation III*, CSM II.27. Cf. *Discourse on Method*, Part iv: "It seems to me that trying to use one's imagination in order to understand these ideas (of God and the soul) is like trying to use one's eyes in order to hear sounds or smell odours—though there is this difference, that the sense of sight gives us no less assurance of the reality of its objects than do the senses of smell

Spinoza inherits a deep criticism of the imagination from Descartes, who describes it as “the deceptive judgment” that “botches things together.”²⁵⁴ Thus, Spinoza later tells us that an imagining (*imaginatio*) “is an idea by which the Mind considers a thing as present, which nevertheless indicates the constitution of the human Body more than the nature of the external thing.”²⁵⁵

While the senses tell us that we can separate the physical world into distinct objects, i.e., we can chop things in half and we can grind things into powder, the whole of extension is a single whole. This is why Spinoza says that it follows from the distinction of the imagination and the intellect that “matter is everywhere the same” and “parts are distinguished in it only insofar as we conceive matter to be affected in different ways, so that its parts are only distinguished *modally*, but not *really*.”²⁵⁶

This distinction isn’t thoroughly explained in the *Ethics*, and is derived again from Descartes.²⁵⁷ Consider what Spinoza says in the *Cogitata Metaphysica*:

The *modal* distinction is shown to be twofold: there is that between a mode of a substance and the substance itself, and that between two modes of one and the same substance. We know the latter from the fact that, although either mode may be conceived without the aid of the other, nevertheless neither may be conceived without the aid of the substance whose modes they are. The former is known from the fact that, although the substance can be conceived without its mode, nevertheless, the mode cannot be conceived without the substance.²⁵⁸

The parts can’t be distinguished *really* because they are not distinct things, since they are both parts that are extended. As Descartes says, “strictly speaking, a *real* distinction exists only between two or more substances.”²⁵⁹ For two things to be really distinct, it must be the case that one can be understood without the aid of the other.²⁶⁰ The distinction of parts of matter is *modal*, and Spinoza’s example in the *Ethics* clarifies this point. He says:

and hearing, while neither our imagination nor our senses could ever assure us of anything without the intervention of our intellect.” CSM I.129.

²⁵⁴ *Regulae*, Rule III. CSM I.14. In the Preface to Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, he similarly classifies the “delusions” of the imagination as “childish absurdities” next to dreams. *Complete Works of Spinoza*, pg. 388.

²⁵⁵ *Ethics*, IV, Prop. IX, Dem. C I.551.

²⁵⁶ *Ethics*, I, Prop. XV, Schol. C I.424.

²⁵⁷ *Principles*, I, 60-61. CSM I.213-214.

²⁵⁸ *CM*, II, v. C I.323.

²⁵⁹ CSM I.213.

²⁶⁰ *CM*, II, v. C I.323.

We conceive that water is divided and its parts separated from one another—insofar as it is water, but not insofar as it is corporeal substance. For insofar as it is substance, it is neither separated nor divided. Again, water, insofar as it is water, is generated and corrupted, but insofar as it is substance, it is neither generated nor corrupted.²⁶¹

The distinction is between particular modes of matter or corporeal substance and the general corporeal substance itself. The point of this example is that while it is the case that we conceive water to be divided and its parts separated (via the *imagination*), that is, particular instances of water are present at different times, water itself considered as H₂O does not come in or out of being, but its components have always existed as modes of extension. Hence, Spinoza says in a letter to Henry Oldenburg: “Men are not created, but only generated, and that their bodies already existed before, though formed differently. It may, indeed, be inferred, as I cheerfully acknowledge, that if one part of matter were annihilated, the whole of Extension would also vanish at the same time.”²⁶²

His point is presented more clearly in the *Short Treatise*, where he says:

Concerning the parts in Nature, we say (as we said before) that division never occurs in the substance, but always and only in the modes of substance. So if I want to divide water, I divide only the mode of the substance, not the substance itself; the substance is always the same, [though] now [it is the substance] of water, now [the substance] of something else. Division, then, or being acted on, always happens in the mode, as when we say that a man perishes, or is destroyed, that is only understood of the man insofar as he is a composite being and mode of substance, and not the substance itself on which he depends.²⁶³

To conclude, Spinoza has already refuted the first argument, that extension cannot be infinite because matter is composed of parts, and an infinite cannot be measured by parts. He did this by showing that his opponents’ arguments do not show that corporeal substance is finite, but rather than an infinite quantity cannot be measured and is not composed of parts. Our perceived distinction of the parts is a *modal* distinction, and not a *real* distinction. There are no gaps in the attribute of extension, since it has been shown that a vacuum is impossible. The second argument, that extension cannot belong to God’s nature as a supremely perfect being, since matter is divisible and thus passive, is also refuted first on the same grounds that it is based on the supposition that matter is divisible into *real* parts that are distinct. However, Spinoza says, this divisibility (if it existed) would not

²⁶¹ *Ethics* I, Proposition XV, Schol. C I.424.

²⁶² *Epistle* IV. C I.172.

²⁶³ *KVI*, 2, xi-xii. C I.72.

necessarily entail that extension is unworthy of the divine nature. He has already shown by Proposition XIV that apart from God there can be no substance by which the divine nature would be acted on. All things are in God, and all things that happen, happen only through the laws of God's infinite nature, following from the necessity of his essence. Since this is the case, "it cannot be said in any way that God is acted on by another, or that extended substance is unworthy of the divine nature, even if it is supposed to be divisible, so long as it is granted to be eternal and infinite."²⁶⁴ God is *unique* and essentially active, and since extension cannot be said to *act* upon God, it cannot be said to detract from the divine nature or essence.

XXII. The Eight-fold Classification of God as Cause

In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza devotes a chapter to the subject: *How God is a Cause of All Things*. His classification of God as cause in the *Ethics* from Propositions XVI-XVIII (and XXVIII, Schol.) correlates to his eight-fold classification in the *Short Treatise*, which is presented as follows:

<i>Ethics</i> , I	<i>Short Treatise</i> , I, iii
Prop. XVI	7. Universal ²⁶⁵ cause, general cause
Prop. XVI, Corol. I	1. Emanative, productive, active, efficient cause
Prop. XVI, Corol. II	4. Cause through himself (essential)
Prop. XVI, Corol. III	6. First, initial cause
Prop. XVII, Corol. I	5. Principal cause
Prop. XVII, Corol. II	3. Free cause
Prop. XVIII	2. Immanent cause
Prop. XXVIII, Schol.	8. Proximate ²⁶⁶ cause ²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ *Ethics* I, Proposition XV, Schol. C I.424.

²⁶⁵ Shirley's translates *universal cause*, Curley translates *general cause*. The original Dutch is "Algemeene oorzaak."

²⁶⁶ Cf. *TdIE* § 96

²⁶⁷ It has been shown (C I.80 n., Wolfson, I, 303, Wolf's commentary on the *Short Treatise*, pg. 190-195) that Spinoza's terminology of causes is borrowed from the Dutch logician Franco Burgersdijck's *Institutiones Logicae*. The table presented here demonstrates the order in which Spinoza discusses the eight ways in which God is a cause in the *Ethics* compared to the *Short Treatise*. A similar table is found in Wolfson, I, 304, without my addition of the eighth cause as given in *Ethics* XXVIII, Schol. Wolfson notes: "However, while Spinoza has borrowed the scheme and terminology from Burgersdijck, he has made free use of it for his own purpose. The causes enumerated in this list are what the medievals themselves would have ascribed to God, but when used by Spinoza there is an implication that these causes are more truly applicable to his own conception than to theirs."

As I have already noted, Wolfson has interpreted the first fifteen propositions of Book I of the *Ethics* as a criticism of the immateriality of God, which culminates in Proposition XV's statement that whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God, meaning that everything, *including matter*, is in God. He interprets the remaining propositions of Book I as a criticism of the conceptions of the causality of God.²⁶⁸ There is a bridge between these two issues by which the assertion that God is immaterial by his nature, which was universally accepted in medieval philosophy, led the medievals to deny that God was a material cause. For example, in Maimonides' discussion that *God is the Primal Cause*,²⁶⁹ he states:

It has been shown in the science of physics that everything, except the First Cause, owes its origin to the following four causes:—the material, the formal, the efficient, and the final. These are sometimes proximate, sometimes remote, but each by itself is called a cause. They also believe—and I do not differ from their belief—that God, blessed be He, is the efficient, the formal, and final cause.²⁷⁰

Thus, since Maimonides rejects that the essence of God can be material, he rejects that God can be a material cause, and asserts that God is the efficient, formal, and final cause. On the other hand, since Spinoza asserts that the attribute of extension is in God's essence, he holds that God is the material cause. Unlike Maimonides, Spinoza will end up removing the classification of God as the final cause.²⁷¹ For Spinoza, then, God is the efficient, formal, and material cause. If we accept Wolfson's interpretation of Spinoza's criticism, then the second point of critique in Spinoza's first book of the *Ethics* is a direct result of the first. That is, Spinoza holds that the medievals err in rejecting that extension can belong to God's nature, which culminates in Proposition XV and its Scholium, and it is this false conception of God's nature that gives rise to a false conception of the causality of God in medieval philosophy.

In the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Spinoza tells us that *creation* is “an activity in which no causes concur except the efficient” and that a *created thing* is “that which presupposes nothing except God in order to exist.”²⁷² Maimonides had previously identified the three causes in his statement: “Aristotle has already explained that in Nature the efficient cause of a thing, its form, and its final cause are identical.”²⁷³ Spinoza is making the same identification, but with the efficient,

²⁶⁸ Wolfson, I, 302.

²⁶⁹ First Cause.

²⁷⁰ *Moreh Nebukim*, I, 69. Quoted from Wolfson, I, 302, based off of Friedländer's translation, Vol. I, pg. 261.

²⁷¹ *Ethics*, I, Appendix.

²⁷² *CM*, II, x. C I.334.

²⁷³ *Moreh Nebukim*, III, 13.

formal, and material cause, and not the final cause. Spinoza therefore holds that the most applicable term for God is the efficient cause. Wolfson says this is so because “even as a material and formal cause, it is only through the active properties of extension and thought that God is conceived as cause” and God is “efficient in the most general sense of active and as the sum of all conditions that make for causality.”²⁷⁴

In the beginning of his chapter on God’s causality in the *Short Treatise* Spinoza says that since one substance cannot produce another, and God is a being of which all attributes are predicated, it follows “that all other things cannot in any way exist or be understood without or outside him. So we have every reason to say that God is a cause of all things.”²⁷⁵

XXIII. Universal Cause (1)

Spinoza first treats God as a *universal* or *general* cause. In Burgersdijck, the efficient cause is divided into universal and particular. The “Universal is *that which concurs* with other Causes, with the *Same Efficiency*, to the producing of *many Effects*,” and “a Particular *only* which by its Efficiency produces but one Effect.”²⁷⁶ Similarly, Spinoza says of the universal cause in the *Short Treatise*: “God is also a general [universal] cause, but only in the respect that he produces different things. Otherwise, such a thing can never be said of him. For he does not need anyone to produce effects.”²⁷⁷ I believe that Spinoza moved the order of causes to place the universal cause first in order to show a further inconsistency from the medieval denial of extension as an attribute of God that results in a false conception of God’s causality. If God is pure simple form, and “a simple element can only produce one simple thing,”²⁷⁸ then that which emanates from God can only be one simple Intelligence and it must be the case that matter emerges somewhere else later on in the emanative process. If this is the case, then Wolfson is right that while God can be considered the indirect cause of ‘many effects,’ he is the direct cause of only one simple thing.²⁷⁹ Thus, according to the classification above of *universal* and *particular* cause, this conception of God is that of a *particular* cause and not a *universal* cause. Hence those who agree with, for example, Aquinas, are mistaken when they say: “nothing can be among beings, unless it is from God, Who is the universal cause of all being. Hence it is

²⁷⁴ Wolfson, I, 303. Wolfson refers to the *Short Treatise*, II, xxv, where Spinoza says: “Substance, because it is the principle of all its modes, can with much greater right be called an agent, rather than one acted on.” C I.72.

²⁷⁵ KV, I, iii. C I.80.

²⁷⁶ *Institutiones Logicae*, XVII, pg. 66.

²⁷⁷ KV, I, iii. C I.81. Brackets are my addition.

²⁷⁸ *Moreh Nebukim*, II, 22.

²⁷⁹ Wolfson, I, 305.

necessary to say that God brings things into being from nothing.”²⁸⁰ Spinoza’s God, on the other hand, is a *universal* cause, for he is the direct cause of extended and thinking modes. Further, while medieval philosophers agreed that God was infinite, they held that God did not, or ever will, create the infinite things which he has in his mind. For Spinoza, this is clearly not the case. God produces everything in the scope of his infinite intellect, and the world is thus as infinite as God, consisting of an infinite number of modes. God is a universal cause because the world is the full expression of his being.²⁸¹ If the world were finite, then Spinoza’s God would be a *particular* cause. Thus, Spinoza tells us in Proposition XVI: “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.)”²⁸²

XXIV. Efficient Cause (2)

Efficient causation is the agency producing the result, or, as Burgersdijck says: “An Efficient is an External Cause *from which a thing proceeds by a true Causality.*”²⁸³ In the *Short Treatise*, when Spinoza classifies God as an efficient cause, he says that “God is an emanative or productive cause of his actions, and in respect to the action’s occurring, an active or efficient cause. We treat this as one thing, because they involve each other.”²⁸⁴ Whereas in Maimonides, the modes follow from God by an efficient causation that specifically involves emanation from the action of an immaterial being upon material objects,²⁸⁵ in Spinoza this distinction of incorporeal and corporeal agency does not exist. Thus, Spinoza concludes in the First Corollary of Proposition XVI that “God is the efficient cause of all things which can fall under an infinite intellect.”²⁸⁶ As is said in the Book of Psalms: “For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, I, 45.2.

²⁸¹ Wolfson, I, 306.

²⁸² C I.424.

²⁸³ *Institutiones Logicae*, XVII, pg. 58.

²⁸⁴ KV, I, iii. C I.80.

²⁸⁵ *Moreh Nebukim*, II, 12: “God being incorporeal, and everything being the work of Him as the efficient cause, we say that the Universe has been created by the Divine influence, and that all changes in the Universe emanate from Him. In the same sense we say that He caused wisdom to emanate from Him and to come upon the prophets. In all such cases we merely wish to express that an incorporeal Being, whose action we call ‘influence,’ has produced a certain effect.”

²⁸⁶ C I.425.

²⁸⁷ *Psalms* 36:9.

XXV. Cause through himself (3)

God as an efficient cause is divided into cause *per se*²⁸⁸ and cause *per accidens*.²⁸⁹ In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza merely tells us that this will become more evident in a later discussion. Turning to Burgersdijck, he defines a *cause by itself* as “that which as it is such, produces an Effect of its own Council, and agreeable to its Natural Disposition,” and a *cause by accident* as that “which not as such, or else besides its own Council or Natural Propension.”²⁹⁰ What this means is that an essential cause, or cause by itself, is that which produces something of its own kind. An accidental cause, on the other hand, is that which produces something that is not of its own kind. Therefore, from the medieval conception of God as immaterial and the world as material, that is, not of his own kind, it follows that God is an *accidental cause*. However, since for Spinoza the world is not of a different kind than God, he says in the Second Corollary of Proposition XVI: “It follows...that God is a cause through himself and not an accidental cause.”²⁹¹

XXVI. First Cause (4)

In the Third, and last, Corollary to Proposition XVI in the *Ethics*, Spinoza says that “it follows” that God is the *absolute causam primam*, that is, “absolutely the first cause.”²⁹² In the *Short Treatise*, the first cause is also called the “initiating cause.”²⁹³ Spinoza again shows his minimalism by saying nothing else on the topic. Jonathan Bennett is right when he says of Spinoza that “his minimalism often leads him to underexpress his thought.”²⁹⁴ However, by looking into Burgersdijck’s logic, we can clarify exactly what Spinoza means. Burgersdijck tells us that an efficient cause is divided into *First* and *Second*. “*The First is that which depends upon none*” and “*the Second, which depends upon the First.*”²⁹⁵ Further, there are two ways in which a cause is *First*: 1) absolutely, or 2) in its own Genus.²⁹⁶ That which is absolutely the first cause is that “on which all things depend; both when they are Made, Exist, and Operate...The Cause absolutely First is only *One*, to wit, *God*. For all things depend on God, both as to their *Making, Being and Operating.*”²⁹⁷ What Saint Paul says about our relation to God

²⁸⁸ Cause through himself, or, cause by itself.

²⁸⁹ Accidental cause.

²⁹⁰ *Institutiones Logicae*, XVII, pg. 61.

²⁹¹ C I.425.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ KV, I, iii, 6. C I.81.

²⁹⁴ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, 98.

²⁹⁵ *Institutiones Logicae*, XVII, pg. 65.

²⁹⁶ In its own kind.

²⁹⁷ *Institutiones Logicae*, XVII, pg. 66.

can be said for all beings: “for in him we live, and move, and have our being.”²⁹⁸ Yet, the proponents of the view that matter is not within God’s essence cannot rightly say that God is the *first cause*. For if it is said that the material world was created by God, but that God could not produce matter but only through his subsequent emanations, it follows that God is dependent upon his emanations.²⁹⁹ And since this is the case, then the God that is not the material cause cannot be a *first cause*, for the first is that which depends upon none, as Burgersdijck has said. Therefore, it is Spinoza’s God, and not the medievals’ God, who is an *absolutely first cause*, for he produces everything, including matter, by the necessity of his divine nature, depending on nothing else.

XXVII. Principal Cause (5)

In the *Ethics*, the next set of classifications of God as cause follows from his demonstration of Proposition XVII: “God acts from the laws of his nature alone, and is compelled by no one.”³⁰⁰ Since it is the case that from the necessity of the divine nature *alone*, absolutely infinite things follow (Proposition XVI), and nothing can be or be conceived without God (Proposition XV), there can be nothing outside of God that determines him to action. It follows from this that God acts from the laws of his nature alone, compelled by no one.³⁰¹ The First Corollary of Proposition XVII tells us that it follows from this demonstration that “there is no cause, either extrinsically, or intrinsically, which prompts God to action, except the perfection of his nature.”³⁰² This parallels Spinoza’s statement in the *Short Treatise* that “God is a principal cause of the effects he has created immediately, such as motion in matter, etc., where there can be no place for the subsidiary cause, which is confined to particular things (as when God makes the sea dry by a strong wind,³⁰³ and similarly in all particular things in Nature).³⁰⁴ Burgersdijck divided the efficient cause into the *Principal* and the *less Principal*. He describes a *Principal* as “*that which produces the Effect by its own Virtue*” and a *Less Principal* as that “*which inserves the Principal towards its producing the Effect.*”³⁰⁵ A Principal Cause is said to be either equal to or nobler than the effect, but never more, whereas the less principal, insofar as it causes, is always

²⁹⁸ Acts 17:28. It is quite astonishing how popular this specific passage was for early modern philosophers: cf. Malebranche, SAT 235; Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge* §149; Leibniz, NE 149-150; Locke, *Essay* II.xiii. §26.

²⁹⁹ Wolfson I, 308.

³⁰⁰ C I.425.

³⁰¹ *Ethics* I, Proposition XVII, Dem. C I.425.

³⁰² *Ethics* I, Proposition XVII, Corol. I. C I.425.

³⁰³ *Exodus* 14:21: “And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.”

³⁰⁴ KV, I, iii, 5. C I.80-81.

³⁰⁵ *Institutiones Logicae*, XVII, pg. 62.

inferior to the effect. Thus, Burgersdijck says: “When we compare the Effect with the Cause we are to *consider* the Cause as *it is such*; that is, according to that *Virtue* by which it causes, when the *Virtue* of the Cause is *such* as that it contains *in it*, whatever is in *the Effect*, it is said to be a *principal Cause*.”³⁰⁶ Since God’s action flows from his own nature, and is compelled by no cause, extrinsically, or intrinsically, it can be said that God is a *principal cause*.

XXVIII. Free Cause (6)

Spinoza’s next classification of God as cause returns to his definitions of *free* and *necessary*, from which he now classifies God as a *free* cause. Definition VII states: “That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone. But a thing is called necessary, or rather compelled, which is determined by another to exist and to produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner.”³⁰⁷ Wolfson has pointed out that *the problem of freedom* in medieval philosophy is sometimes alternatively called *the problem of possibility*.³⁰⁸ For example, the discussion of freedom in Crescas is stated as: “An exposition of the view of him who believes that the nature of possibility exists,” and, “An exposition of the view of him who believes that the nature of possibility does not exist.”³⁰⁹ Wolfson links this same way of addressing the problem in the *Short Treatise*, where Spinoza asks the question: “Whether there are any contingent things in Nature, viz. whether there are any things that can happen and also can not happen.”³¹⁰ In the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Spinoza distinguishes between *possibility* and *contingency*. He says that “a *thing* is called *possible*, then, *when we understand its efficient cause, but do not know whether the cause is determined*. So we can regard it as possible, but neither as necessary or as impossible.”³¹¹ On the other hand, “if...we attend *to the essence of the thing alone, and not to its cause, we shall call it contingent*.”³¹² He clarifies this by saying: “We shall consider it as midway between God and a chimaera, so to speak, because we find in it, on the part of its essence, neither any necessity of existing (as we do in the divine essence) nor any impossibility *or inconsistency* (as we do in a chimaera).”³¹³ A thing is *possible*, then, when it is made necessary by a cause, and a thing is *contingent* when it is possible in consideration of its own essence, that is, its essence does not necessitate its existence nor does it

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 62-63.

³⁰⁷ *Ethics* I, Def. VII. C I.409.

³⁰⁸ Wolfson I, 309.

³⁰⁹ *Or Adonai* II, v, 1-2.

³¹⁰ *KV*, I, vi, 2. C I.85.

³¹¹ *CM*, I, iii, 9. Cf. *Ethics*, IV, Definition IV. C I.308, 546.

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ *Ibid.*

involve a contradiction.³¹⁴ However, Spinoza does not think much about the distinction between these two terms, and says of those who would equate the two, that he “shall not contend with him...For I am not accustomed to dispute about words. It will suffice if he grants us that these two are nothing but a defect in our perception, and not anything real.”³¹⁵ Thus, Wolfson is right when he says that Spinoza wishes to eliminate the idea that anything in nature is possible *per se*, for “everything which is possible *per se* is necessary in consideration of its cause.”³¹⁶ The term possible *per se* is merely a logical distinction, which represents no actual thing in nature. Hence, Spinoza says: “If he attends to nature and how it depends on God, he will find that there is nothing *contingent* in things, that is, nothing which, on the part of the thing, can either exist or not exist, or as is commonly said, be a *real contingent*.”³¹⁷ Since this is the case, there are only two divisions of existing things: 1) that which is necessary by its cause, and 2) that which is necessary by its own nature. Spinoza’s definition of freedom, then, involves this distinction. Put simply, that which is necessary by its own nature is *free* and that which is necessary by its cause is *compelled*, or merely called *necessary*. This is why Spinoza says in the *Short Treatise*: “True freedom is nothing but [being] the first cause, which is not in any way constrained or necessitated by anything else, and only through its perfection is the cause of all perfection.”³¹⁸

According to Wolfson, there is a deeper criticism behind Spinoza’s God as a free cause than what I have already said.³¹⁹ This lies in the medieval conception of God’s causality as an act of will, power, or intelligence, typically used in connection with creation, which is found in Saadia, Maimonides, and Judah ha-Levi. Maimonides holds that all three are identical in God.³²⁰ Maimonides admits that God cannot do the logically impossible, i.e., “produce a square with a diagonal equal to one of its sides, or a solid angle that includes four right

³¹⁴ It is interesting to compare this with Leibniz’s essay *On Freedom* (1689?). Leibniz states: “When I considered that nothing happens by chance or by accident (unless we are considering certain substances taken by themselves), that fortune distinguished from fate is an empty name, and that no thing exists unless its own particular conditions [*requisitis*] are present (conditions from whose joint presence it follows, in turn, that the thing exists), I was very close to the view of those who think that everything is absolutely necessary [and judged that being possible is the same as actually existing at some time], who judge that it is enough for freedom that we are uncoerced, even though we might be subject to necessity, and close to those who do not distinguish what is infallible or certainly known to be true, from what is necessary. But the consideration of possibles, which are not, were not, and will not be, brought me back from this precipice. For if there are certain possibles that never exist, then the things that exist, at any rate, are not always necessary, for everything that never exists would be impossible.” The English in brackets was first included, then deleted by Leibniz. AG 94.

³¹⁵ CM, I, iii, 9. C I.308.

³¹⁶ Wolfson I, 310.

³¹⁷ CM, I, iii, 10. C I.308.

³¹⁸ KV, I, iv, 5. C I.82.

³¹⁹ Wolfson, I, 312.

³²⁰ *Moreh Nebukim*, I, 53.

angles.”³²¹ Further, he says, “it is impossible that God should produce a being like Himself, or annihilate, corporify, or change Himself,” and “the power of God is not assumed to extend to any of these impossibilities.”³²² Yet, when the question is raised that “to say of God that He can produce a thing from nothing or reduce a thing to nothing is...the same as if we were to say that He could...produce a square the diagonal of which be equal to its side, or similar impossibilities,”³²³ Maimonides answers the question of Creation by saying: “He willed it so; or His wisdom decided so.”³²⁴ Maimonides holds that “He...produced from nothing all existing things such as they are by His will and desire.”³²⁵

In the previous Corollary to Proposition XVII, Spinoza had said “there is no cause, either extrinsically or intrinsically, which prompts God to action, except the perfection of his nature.” Spinoza is attempting to remove the notion of will and design from God’s causality, placing creation *ex nihilo* next to the other logical impossibilities. Maimonides holds that God is “perfect, incorporeal...above all kinds of deficiency.”³²⁶ Thus, God can’t be said to have any kind of imperfection in his nature, including deficiencies in his will or intellect. Hence, Spinoza responds: “I know there are many who think they can demonstrate that a supreme intellect and free will belong to God’s nature. For they say they know nothing they can ascribe to God more perfect than what is the highest perfection in us.”³²⁷

There is, however, a deeper criticism in Spinoza’s scholium to Proposition XVII. Wolfson links Spinoza’s criticism to the view held by Abraham Herrera, who had said that God as the first cause acts not from the necessity of His nature but by the counsel of His intellect and the choice of His free will. In the Kabbalah, the question had been raised whether God could create the infinite number of things in his intellect or whether his power of creation was limited to that which he has created?³²⁸ In response to this, Herrera makes the following two remarks: “If God had acted from His own nature and by necessity, He would have inevitably produced everything that is in His power, which would be infinite,” and “since God has created by will and design, He has purposely created only a part of that which is in His intellect, in order to be able to create other and more perfect things.”³²⁹ Herrera tells us that an infinite number of things have not been brought into existence because God does not act by the necessity of his infinite nature. Instead, it is because “He acts only by the freedom of His will and purpose...that He has brought into existence and created finite things” and “for every one of the

³²¹ *Moreh Nebukim*, III, 15. Cf. II, 13, Second Theory. These two examples are contrary to Euclid i., 47 and xi., Prop. 21.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ *Moreh Nebukim*, II, 13.

³²⁴ *Moreh Nebukim*, II, 25.

³²⁵ *Moreh Nebukim*, II, 13.

³²⁶ *Moreh Nebukim*, I, 35.

³²⁷ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XVII, Schol. C I.426.

³²⁸ Wolfson, I, 314.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 314-315.

created things, however excellent it may be, He is able to produce something more excellent.”³³⁰ Spinoza certainly appears to be directly attacking this view when he says:

Moreover, even if they conceive God to actually understand in the highest degree, they still do not believe that he can bring it about that all the things he actually understands exist. For they think that in that way they would destroy God’s power. If he had created all the things in his intellect (they say), then he would have been able to create nothing more, which they believe to be incompatible with God’s omnipotence. So they preferred to maintain that God is indifferent to all things, not creating anything except what he has decreed to create by some absolute will...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.³³¹

There is an explicit criticism of his opponents ascribing will and intellect to God as homonymous terms. Again, we find in Maimonides that there is only a resemblance between God’s knowledge and our knowledge in name, for his “essence is in no way like our essence” and people are misled by this homonymity because “only the words are the same, but the things designated by them are different; and therefore they came to the absurd conclusion that that which is required for our knowledge is also required for God’s knowledge.”³³² Of God’s will, Maimonides also says: “The term ‘will’ is homonymously used of man’s will and of the will of God, there being no comparison whatever between God’s will and that of man.”³³³ Spinoza characterizes what follows from this common view:

If intellect and will do pertain to the eternal essence of God,³³⁴ we must of course understand by each of these attributes something different from what men commonly understand. For the intellect and will which would constitute God’s essence would have to differ entirely from our intellect and will, and could not agree with them in anything except in name. They would not agree with one another any more than do the dog that is a heavenly constellation and the dog that is a barking animal.³³⁵

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 315.

³³¹ *Ethics* I, Proposition XVII, Schol. C I.426.

³³² *Moreh Nebukim*, III, 20.

³³³ *Moreh Nebukim*, II, 18.

³³⁴ Spinoza denies that intellect or will should be ascribed to the essence of God in Proposition XXXI.

³³⁵ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XVII, Schol. C I.426-427.

As Wolfson notes, Spinoza likely means to convey “that since intellect and will are applied to God only homonymously, they are meaningless terms, and consequently God’s activity might as well be described as following from the necessity of His nature.”³³⁶ This is justified by Spinoza’s statement on the same topic in his letter to Hugo Boxel:

Since...it is commonly and unanimously admitted that God’s will is eternal and has never been indifferent, and therefore they must also necessarily grant (note this well) that the world is the necessary effect of the divine nature. Let them call it will, intellect, or any name they please, they will still in the end come to realise that they are expressing one and the same thing by different names. For if you ask them whether the divine will does not differ from the human will, they will reply that the former has nothing in common with the latter but the name; and furthermore they will mostly admit that God’s will, intellect, and essence or nature are one and the same thing.³³⁷

In the *Moreh Nebukim*, Maimonides places both chance and necessity in opposition to creation as an act of God’s will. Those who follow Epicurus, says Maimonides, “believe that the existing state of things is the result of accidental combination and separation of the elements and that the Universe has no Ruler or Governor.”³³⁸ Hence, chance denies the existence of any cause in creation, for “there is none that rules or determines the order of the existing things.”³³⁹ Maimonides places necessity in opposition to creation as an act of God’s will because he believes that God *could* have refrained from creating the world, or he *could* have designed it differently. It is still a common religious belief today that our existence is a gift of God’s will in a benevolent act of creation. However, Spinoza attempts to differentiate between chance and necessity, and in doing so, demonstrate that “if God is assumed to act by a will whose laws are unknown to us, His activity really amounts to chance.”³⁴⁰ In the same epistle to Hugo Boxel, Spinoza gives an account of his view on the question as to whether the world was made by chance:

My answer is that, as it is certain that chance and necessity are two contrary terms, so it is also clear that he who affirms that the world is the necessary effect of the divine nature is also denying that the world was made by chance, whereas he who affirms that God could

³³⁶ Wolfson I, 317.

³³⁷ *Epistle LIV. CW*, 898.

³³⁸ *Moreh Nebukim*, II, 13.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, n.

³⁴⁰ Wolfson, I, 318.

have refrained from creating the world is declaring in an indirect way that it was made by chance, since it proceeded from an act of will which might not have been.³⁴¹

It might be objected, though, that Spinoza is making an equivocation and introducing some other definition of chance. However, the view that Spinoza is attacking can be located. Wolfson outlines three views from the Middle Ages that existed in regard to the relation of God to the world and God's knowledge of the world.³⁴² The first view is strikingly similar to the position Spinoza is attacking in the above passage, namely that God is the *arbitrary creator* of the world who, having created it, is the *arbitrary ruler* of it. Both the creation and governance of the world are considered as the exercise of two faculties in God, that is, his *free will* and *power*. These faculties are conceived after the manner of free will and power in man, though they are infinitely superior to those of man and *absolutely arbitrary*, as God is independent of any external conditions or circumstances. This view is described by Wolfson as "primarily the uncritical opinion of the common masses of believers."³⁴³ He notes that this was presented as a philosophical system by a branch of the Moses Kalam, which is restated in Maimonides.³⁴⁴

According to this view, God's will and power are conceived as absolute, unlimited, and unchecked by any rule. Creation, as a free exercise of will and power, is furthermore a continuous act, and every event is a direct creation of God. Existence is a succession of specially created events. It is analogous to the theory of divine concurrence alluded to elsewhere by Spinoza,³⁴⁵ though, I must say, the two views are not necessarily identical, for the Kalam denies not only natural causality but also uniformity of action in nature, inasmuch as it assumes God's will to be absolutely arbitrary, whereas divine concurrence does not necessarily assume God's will to be absolutely arbitrary; it is rather an intelligent will; and hence, barring the possibility of miracles, divine concurrence does not deny uniformity of action in nature. Spinoza characterizes such views as views which make everything dependent upon chance, and deny natural causality altogether.³⁴⁶

It is only fitting that Wolfson refers to Spinoza's epistle to Hugo Boxel at the end of this passage. In the second part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza also says: "By God's

³⁴¹ *Epistle* LIV. *CW*, 898. The footnote mentions that the position described and criticized here is the same one that Leibniz will later hold in his *Théodicée*.

³⁴² Wolfson, II, 12.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ *Moreh Nebukim*, I, 73-76; III, 17, Third Theory.

³⁴⁵ *Ethics*, I, Appendix.

³⁴⁶ Wolfson, II, 12-13.

power ordinary people understand God's free will and his right over all things which are, things which on that account are commonly considered to be contingent."³⁴⁷

Spinoza holds that the attribution of will to the essence of God is no different than explaining things by chance, which likewise implies a denial of causality. Hence, his statement: "Tell me, pray, whether you have seen or read any philosophers who have maintained that the world was made by chance, taking chance in the sense you give it, that God had a set aim in creating the world and yet departed from his resolve."³⁴⁸

XXIX. Immanent Cause (7)

In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza's acceptance of the *principle of sufficient reason* leads him to ask: "Whether there is any thing in Nature of which one cannot ask why it exists?"³⁴⁹ Spinoza mentions that in asking this we are also indicating through what *cause* a thing exists. Spinoza defines a *cause* as that which if it "did not exist, it would be impossible for this something to exist."³⁵⁰ Note that Spinoza isn't imposing any arbitrary definition of a cause as his own. Consider Crescas' definition of *cause*:

For by a cause is meant that the existence of which implies the existence of an effect and should the cause be conceived not to exist the effect could not be conceived to exist.³⁵¹

Spinoza's third and fourth axioms certainly echo this.³⁵² That being said, Spinoza proceeds to discuss the nature of the cause:

We must seek this cause, then, either in the thing or outside it. But if someone asks what rule we should follow in this investigation, we say it does not seem that any at all is necessary. For if existence belongs to the nature of the thing, then certainly we must not seek the cause outside it. But if existence does not belong to the nature of the thing, then we must always seek the cause outside it. And

³⁴⁷ *Ethics*, II, Proposition III, Schol. C I.449.

³⁴⁸ *Epistle LVI. CW*, 903.

³⁴⁹ *KV*, I, vi, 4. C I.86.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ *Or Adonai*, I, i, 3.

³⁵² Axiom III: "From a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow." Axiom IV: "The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause." C I.410.

since the former is only true of God, this shows (as we have already proven before) that God alone is the first cause of everything.³⁵³

Spinoza states in Proposition XVIII: “God is the immanent,³⁵⁴ not the transitive,³⁵⁵ cause of all things.”³⁵⁶ Burgersdijck divides the efficient cause into *immanent* and *transient* cause. He describes the *immanent* as “that which produces the Effect in its self,”³⁵⁷ and the *transient*, “out of it self.”³⁵⁸ In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza says that God “is an immanent and not a transitive cause, since he does everything in himself, and not outside himself (because outside him there is nothing).”³⁵⁹ This is precisely how Spinoza demonstrates that God is the immanent cause of all things in the *Ethics*. For since it is the case that everything that is, is in God, and must be conceived through God (by Proposition XV), God must be the cause of all things which are in him (by Proposition XVI, Corol. I). That is, God is the efficient cause of all things which can fall under an infinite intellect. Further, there can be no substance, or thing in itself, which is outside God (by Proposition XIV). It follows, says Spinoza, that God “is the immanent, not the transitive cause of all things.”³⁶⁰

Since this is the only time Spinoza uses the term *immanent* in the *Ethics*, it is necessary to look into Spinoza’s other writings to give a thorough explanation of what it means to be an *immanent* cause. In a late epistle to Henry Oldenburg, Spinoza describes his conception of God as “far different from that which modern Christians are wont to uphold. For I maintain that God is the immanent cause, as the phrase is, of all things, and not the transitive cause.”³⁶¹ He describes this view as the affirmation that all things “are in God and move in God.”³⁶² More important is his reference in the *Short Treatise* to “an immanent or internal cause (which is all one, according to me)”³⁶³ Note that transcendent is not the same as transient, for Spinoza uses the term *transcendens* to mean logically greater or more general.³⁶⁴ Thus, it is not a contradiction to say that God is a transcendent immanent cause. It is evident from all that has been said up to now that when Spinoza denies that God is a transitive cause of all things, he is denying that God is an external cause that is spatially separate from the world or that he is an immaterial cause separate from the world. When Spinoza says that God is an immanent cause, he is denying that God is an external and separable, hence immaterial, cause from the world. As Spinoza says in the *Short Treatise*, “the

³⁵³ KV, I, vi, 4. C I.86.

³⁵⁴ *Immanens*.

³⁵⁵ *Transiens*.

³⁵⁶ C I.428.

³⁵⁷ *Institutiones Logicae*, XVII, pg. 58.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 59.

³⁵⁹ KV, I, iii, 2. C I.80.

³⁶⁰ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XVIII, Dem. C I.428.

³⁶¹ *Epistle LXXIII*. CW, 942.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ KV, II, xxvi, 7. C I.148.

³⁶⁴ *Ethics*, II, Proposition XL, Schol. I. C I.476. CM, I, vi. C I.312-313. Wolfson, I, 322.

effect of an internal cause remains united with its cause in such a way that it makes a whole with it.”³⁶⁵

The meaning of God’s immanence, and his unity with all things, does not mean that God is in things as the soul is traditionally conceived to be in the body, but instead, as Wolfson interprets Spinoza, “all things are in God as the less universal is in the more universal or, to use Spinoza’s own expression, as the parts are in the whole.”³⁶⁶ Although the universal does not exist separately from the particulars, it is not identical with them either. Hence, Wolfson says of God: “Being thus the immanent cause of all things in the sense that He is inseparable from them but still logically distinct from them, God may also be said to transcend them according to the old meaning of the term ‘transcendence,’ namely, that of being logically distinct and more general.”³⁶⁷

XXX. Proximate Cause (8)

In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza says: “God is the proximate cause of those things that are infinite and immutable, and which we say that he has created immediately; but he is, in a sense, the remote cause of all particular things.”³⁶⁸ This corresponds to a passage in the *Ethics*, which is found in the Scholium of Proposition XXVIII: “God is absolutely the proximate cause of the things produced immediately by him, and not [a proximate cause] in his own kind, as they say. For God’s effects can neither be nor be conceived without their cause.”³⁶⁹ Spinoza says that this follows from Proposition XV. Burgersdijck had divided the efficient cause into the *proxima* (next) and the *remote*. The next, says Burgersdijck, “is that which produces the *Effect immediately*.”³⁷⁰ The remote, on the other hand, is that “which produces *the Effect* by means of some *more neighbouring Cause*.”³⁷¹ This is very obscure, and it is necessary to point out yet another passage in Spinoza to understand what he means by a *proximate* cause. In the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, Spinoza discusses the causal relations between singular, changeable things, and the fixed and eternal things. He points out that the essences of singular, changeable things are not derived from their *series*, that is, their order of existing, because this order is composed only of extrinsic denominations. This order is only circumstance, which tells us nothing of the “inmost essence of things.” This essence is to be found *only* in the fixed and eternal things, and the laws inscribed in them, which Spinoza calls their

³⁶⁵ KV, I, ii, *Second Dialogue*, 3. C I.77.

³⁶⁶ Wolfson, I, 323-324. See also Spinoza, *Epistle XXII*.

³⁶⁷ Wolfson, I, 325.

³⁶⁸ KV, I, iii, 2. C I.81.

³⁶⁹ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XXVIII, Schol. C I.433.

³⁷⁰ *Institutiones Logicae*, XVII, pg. 67.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

“true codes,” from which singular things derive their order and coming to be. He continues:

Indeed these singular, changeable things depend so intimately, and (so to speak) essentially, on the fixed things that they can neither be nor be conceived without them. So 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.³⁷²

Through a close reading of this passage, we can uncover what Spinoza means by classifying God as a proximate cause. It is obvious that when Spinoza says that the “singular, changeable things depend...essentially, on the fixed and eternal things” he means that the modes cannot be nor be conceived without God as the efficient cause, whose essence and existence are one and the same. When he says that the fixed and eternal things are the “genera of the definitions of singular, changeable things, and the proximate cause of all things” because of their “presence everywhere” and “extensive power,” he means that substance under one of its infinite attributes provides the *first* cause and universal genus for all finite things. The definition of a finite thing, then, gives us the proximate cause, which is the *first* cause as modified in a certain way in one of the attributes of substance. In the demonstration of Proposition XVI, Spinoza refers to an attribute of substance as a kind of *genus*: “Since the divine nature has absolutely infinite attributes, each of which also expresses an essence infinite in its own kind [genus], from its necessity there must follow infinitely many things in infinite modes.”³⁷³ Wolfson makes a controversial claim that substance has the character of a *summum genus*, and concludes that “Spinoza’s substance is inconceivable, and its essence indefinable and hence unknowable.”³⁷⁴ This view

³⁷² *TdIE* § 101. C I.41.

³⁷³ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XVI, Dem. C I.425. The bracketed word is my addition. Curley and Shirley both translate *genere* as *kind*. The original Latin is: “Cum autem natura divina infinita absolute attributa habeat (per definitionem 6) quorum etiam unumquodque infinitam essentiam in suo genere exprimit, ex ejusdem ergo necessitate infinita infinitis modis.”

³⁷⁴ Wolfson I, 76. There are numerous critics of this view. See: H. F. Hallett’s review of Wolfson’s *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, Curley’s *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, pg. 36, and John Carriero’s *Monism in Spinoza*. Joseph Ratner specifically criticizes Wolfson’s statement in his paper, *In Defense of Spinoza*. I will reproduce an excerpt from his criticism here: “Professor Wolfson’s general conclusion concerning the nature of Substance is what is most striking and interesting. He concludes that ‘Spinoza’s substance is inconceivable, its essence undefinable, and hence unknowable.’ Truly a remarkable pronouncement, when we consider that Spinoza defined substance, and that this chapter is supposed to be about that definition. Even if Wolfson would want to maintain that Spinoza defined one of the properties, or an accident of substance, not its essence (something he could hardly maintain), his statement would be no less distressing, since he maintains also that substance is unknowable. And if substance is unknowable so are modes (I, Def. V) and since nothing besides these two is granted beyond the intellect (I, 4) it follows we can never know anything—not even that Substance is a whole transcending the sum of modes

is clearly false, for Spinoza states in Proposition XLVII of the second part of the *Ethics* that we can have knowledge of God's essence: "The human mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence."³⁷⁵ John Carriero criticizes Wolfson, and states that "what has the character of *summa genera* in Spinoza's metaphysics are the attributes of substance, and while it follows that attributes are undefinable (because they are not conceived through anything else), he does not regard them as unknowable."³⁷⁶ This view is much more plausible, and fits in with Spinoza's reference to the attributes as infinite in their own genus.

God is absolutely the proximate cause of things which are produced *immediately* by him, that is, the infinite modes that are the totality of modes within a certain attribute. These are infinite and immutable, unlike finite modes. It is only as a *first* cause that God is a proximate cause, for God depends on none, and embraces all possible genera, that is, his attributes. The unchanging laws cannot be conceived without their cause, which is God, and the finite modes which depend on these laws cannot be conceived without them. God is the proximate cause by *immediately* being the cause of these laws, or infinite and eternal modes. In a very loose sense, God is also a *remote* cause. For the effects of the infinite and eternal modes are finite modes, and hence God causes the finite modes through the "neighbouring cause" of the infinite modes. However, since everything is in God, he is not separate from his effects. What Spinoza means by infinite and finite modes will be explained in the section below on modes.

XXXI. Duration and Time

Spinoza describes duration as "an attribute under which we conceive the existence of created things insofar as they persevere in their actuality."³⁷⁷ Similarly, Descartes says: "We should regard the duration of a thing simply as a mode under which we conceive the thing in so far as it continues to exist."³⁷⁸ There are, however, three differences between Descartes' and Spinoza's definitions: 1) Descartes calls duration a *mode*, and Spinoza calls it an *attribute*. 2) Descartes only says in so far as it perseveres to *exist*, whereas Spinoza uses first the term *existence* like Descartes, but then adds the term *actuality* in the

which is the universe—(not necessarily excluding its being immanent, too). And yet, contrariwise, Spinoza maintained, differing from both Descartes and Maimonides, that 'the human mind possesses an *adequate* knowledge of the eternal and infinite *essence* of God' (II, 47). Besides, it would be somewhat difficult, were Wolfson correct, to explain why 'the highest good of the mind is the knowledge of God and the highest virtue of the mind is to know God' (IV, 28). The inspiration of the *amor Dei intellectualis* would, on the same principle, be pure charlatanism."

³⁷⁵ *Ethics* II, Proposition XLVII. C I.482.

³⁷⁶ Carriero, *Monism in Spinoza*, in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*.

³⁷⁷ *CM*, I, iv, 1. C I.110.

³⁷⁸ *Principles*, I, 55. CSM I.211.

statement *insofar as they persevere in their actuality*. 3) Descartes simply says *thing*, whereas Spinoza speaks of *created things*.

Wolfson argues that Spinoza's move to holding that duration is an attribute, rather than a mode, was at the suggestion of Descartes himself, even though in Descartes' formal definition, he refers to duration as a mode. Descartes says: "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 mode but an attribute."³⁷⁹ Spinoza uses the term *attribute* here in a loose sense of thinking in a general way of what is in a substance.

There is great importance in the term *existence* used here. Spinoza's addition of the term *actuality* in his explanation of *existence* emphasizes that it is existence rather than *motion* that is required for the conception of duration. Again, Descartes says: "For the duration which we understand to be involved in movement is certainly no different from the duration involved in things which do not move."³⁸⁰ It also emphasizes that there is no duration in beings which have no existence (fictitious beings, beings of reason). To be clear in his statement, when Spinoza adds existence "insofar as they persevere in their actuality," this means that existence must be an actual existence and not one which is only in thought.

Spinoza again pushes this idea that duration requires an actually existent object when he says that: "Duration is an affection of existence, not of the essence of things."³⁸¹ By essence, Spinoza is referring to the concept of a thing which *may or may not* have existence outside of our mind, i.e., chimeras. Later, when Spinoza discusses creation, the point that duration depends upon actually existent things is expressed more clearly: "We can imagine neither time nor duration before creation, but these latter have begun with things...Wherefore, duration presupposes, or at least, supposes created things."³⁸² As Spinoza clearly points out, his usage of the term creation is not the traditional *coming into being* out of nothing that we are still so familiar with. Spinoza's idea of the existence of *created things* only means that things conceived as having duration must have their existence dependent upon a cause, and whether they had a beginning in time or not makes no difference. Spinoza has already said that duration is to be attributed to things only in so far as their "essence is conceived clearly without any existence."³⁸³

³⁷⁹ *Principles*, I, 56. CSM I.211-212.

³⁸⁰ *Principles*, I, 57. CSM I.212.

³⁸¹ *CM*, II, i, 2. C I.316. In the second part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza offers a similar description in the demonstration of Proposition XXX: "Our body's duration depends neither on its essence...nor even on God's absolute nature...but...it is determined to exist and produce an effect from such causes...Therefore, the duration of our Body depends on the common order of nature and the constitution of things." C I.471.

³⁸² *CM*, II, x, 5. C I.334-335.

³⁸³ *CM*, II, x, 7. C I.335. In so far as their existence is not necessary by their own nature but must be brought about by a cause.

Wolfson raises the question whether existence and duration are identical. He points out that the scholastics held three different positions in answering this question: 1) duration and existence differ from each other *in re* and *realiter*, meaning that they are separable and each can be conceived without the other. 2) the difference between them is a *modal* difference, like that which exists between a substance and a mode or between two modes (Bonaventure, Bañez, and other Thomists), 3) duration and existence are *inseparable* though *distinct*, with the distinction being one of reason (Ockham, Scotus, Biel, Suarez). Descartes also describes these three distinctions in his *Principles of Philosophy*.³⁸⁴ Spinoza clearly accepts the third position. Descartes' definition of a *conceptual distinction* (a distinction of reason) is: "a distinction between a substance and some attribute of that substance without which the substance is unintelligible."³⁸⁵ Descartes goes on to say that: "since a substance cannot cease to endure without also ceasing to be, the distinction between a substance and its duration is merely a conceptual one."³⁸⁶ Spinoza's reasoning seems to strikingly similar, when he says: "It clearly follows that duration is only distinguished by reason from the whole existence of a thing. For as you take duration away from the thing, you take away just as much of its existence."³⁸⁷

Next Spinoza says that we can take the duration of a thing, "but to determine this duration, we compare it to the duration of other things which have a certain and determinate motion. *This comparison* is called *time*."³⁸⁸ Spinoza gives a similar definition of time in the *Ethics*: "Nobody doubts that time, too, is a product of the imagination, and arises from the fact that we see some bodies move more slowly than others, or more quickly, or with equal speed."³⁸⁹ This is again found in Descartes, where in the *Principles* he states: "But in order to measure the duration of all things, we compare their duration with the duration of the greatest and most regular motions which give rise to years and days, and we call this duration 'time.'"³⁹⁰ Spinoza thus ends up drawing the same conclusion as Descartes, that time adds nothing to duration, but is a being of reason: "Yet nothing is thereby added to duration, taken in its general sense, except for a mode of thought,"³⁹¹ and "Time, therefore, is not an affection of things, but only a mere mode of thinking, *or*, as we have already said, a being of reason. For it is a mode of thinking that serves to explain duration."³⁹² Duration is a mode of existence, and time is a mode of duration.

³⁸⁴ *Principles*, I, 60-62.

³⁸⁵ *Principles*, I, 62. CSM I.214.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ *CM*, I, iv, 1. C I.330. Cf. *Principles*, I, 55-57.

³⁸⁸ *CM*, I, iv, 2. C I.330.

³⁸⁹ *Ethics*, II, Proposition XLIV, Scholium. *CW*, 269-270. The Samuel Shirley translation is used in this quotation, because Curley's translation is less clear on this point.

³⁹⁰ *Principles*, I, 57. CSM I.212.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

³⁹² *CM*, I, iv, 2. C I.310.

The same account of time that is found in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* is also found in *Epistle XII*, though Spinoza uses the term *modes* as equivalent to *created things*. These terms refer to those things whose essence does not necessarily involve existence.³⁹³ He thus describes duration as that by means of which we can only explain the existence of modes. From the fact that we can ‘determine’ duration, time arises for the purpose of doing so. To Spinoza, time is merely a mode of thinking, but it is specifically a mode of imagining.³⁹⁴ The point of these statements is to emphasize that time is not something in the things outside of us, but it is only existent in the imagination, which is not a *real* existence.

To sum up Spinoza’s account of duration, there are two characteristics he gives it:

- 1) The existence of an object conceived under the attribute of duration must be only a possible existence, which depends on God as an efficient cause.³⁹⁵ This differentiates *duration* from *eternity*.
- 2) Duration is to be conceived as *unlimited, unmeasured, and undetermined*. This differentiates duration from *time*.

As a final point on duration, he defines it as the “*indefinite* continuance of existing.”³⁹⁶ His description of duration as indefinite fits perfectly with the twofold characteristics of duration outlined above.

Next, to sum up his account of time, we note that it has no essential difference from duration, though it is merely a limited portion of duration. We saw that Spinoza speaks of duration as *indefinite time*, whereas he will later contrast this with *definite time*.³⁹⁷ He also refers to time as “determinable duration”³⁹⁸ and thus he sometimes says “duration or time”³⁹⁹ as if the two terms mean the same to Spinoza.

XXXII. Eternity

Moving on to the definition of eternity, it should be noted that the notion of eternity had a special role throughout the entire medieval period, as God was always considered under some aspect of eternity.⁴⁰⁰ The duality of meanings for

³⁹³ This point will be emphasized in Spinoza’s description of eternity.

³⁹⁴ Hobbes had said that time is a phantasm of motion.

³⁹⁵ *Created things* in *Epistle XII*, *modes* in *CM*.

³⁹⁶ *Ethics*, II, Def. V. C I.447.

³⁹⁷ *Ethics*, III, Proposition VIII. C I.499.

³⁹⁸ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XXI, Dem. C I.430.

³⁹⁹ *Ethics*, I, Def. VIII. C I.409.

⁴⁰⁰ Wolfson argues that there arose a division of the definition of eternity in the time of Plato. This was due, he argues, to the distinction that Plato made between the world of ideas (which is

eternity are simply: 1) exclusion of time, and 2) infinite time. In the medieval Jewish philosophy that Spinoza was brought up under, the passage in the book of *Isaiah* 44:6 was of specific importance in relation to God's eternity, and was a popular passage for interpretation. This passage reads that God is the *first* and the *last*. Maimonides said that this is simply a negation of God's having been created, and Crescas follows him in this.⁴⁰¹ Judah ha-Levi said that this is a negation of God's having been preceded by anything (first), and of His ever coming to an end (last). Similarly, this has a specific relation to the idea of eternity being identified with immovability and immutability. God was immovable, is immovable, and will be immutable. Joseph Albo said that these terms simply mean that God has absolute independence of any temporal relations, and eternity as applies to God excludes duration (and time). Spinoza was familiar with all of these views, and it is noticeable that he placed specific attention on Albo's conclusion that God alone has necessary existence by his own nature, as compared with all other things, which have only possible existence.

The conclusion reached by Albo is of importance to us because this simply means that in God his essence and his existence are identical, which is Spinoza's basis for God's existence.⁴⁰² From this basis, Albo then says that eternity is to be defined as identity, uniformity, and immutability. So a notion of eternity in this sense must involve *necessary existence*, but what else? Eternity is a permanence (the ever-fixed) while time is a constant change or motion (the never-fixed). Thus, time, even if conceived as an infinite time is of a different meaning than eternity, since even an infinite time is not a permanence. We can conclude from this that for Spinoza eternity can not simply be taken to mean an endless time. Eternity is what differentiates God (the whole) from other beings (the parts). Spinoza expresses this view in his explanation of the definition of eternity⁴⁰³ when he says that eternity can't be explained by duration and time, even if they are conceived without beginning or end. This marks the erroneous usage of the term eternity, as it is still used today when describing the 'eternity of the world' as meaning eternal duration in time. In the *Cogitata Metaphysica*,⁴⁰⁴ Spinoza describes two defective uses of the term *eternity*:

- 1) When we say that the world has existed from eternity.

beginningless) and the world of sense (which has a beginning in creation). This constitutes one definition of eternity as the antithesis of time, and the complete exclusion of any kind of temporal relations. The other definition is found in Aristotle, where eternity simply means an endless time, but not necessarily the exclusion of temporal relations. The Platonic conception of eternity involves a permanence, unity, immutability, and indivisibility. "Time is the moving image of eternity." (*Timaeus* 37d)

⁴⁰¹ *Moreh Nebukim*, I, 57. *Or Adonai* I, iii, 3. On the views of these Jewish philosophers on time, see Wolfson I, 363. Cf. also his *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, and *Crescas on the Problem of Divine Attributes*.

⁴⁰² *Ethics*, I, Proposition XI. C I.417.

⁴⁰³ *Ethics*, I, Def. VIII. C I.409.

⁴⁰⁴ *CM*, II, i. C I.315-318.

- 2) When we say things which do not *exist* are eternal, i.e. the pure essence of a thing.

What Spinoza means by the second defective use is that when Descartes refers to axioms as eternal truths,⁴⁰⁵ this is not sufficient to be eternal in the same sense that God is. For, while eternal truths may be unchanging, which satisfies one aspect of eternity, they are not existence which necessarily follows from its own nature, essence involving existence. Eternity is only applicable to what Spinoza calls “real beings”, and only to the first being, who is causeless and infinite as undetermined. It is no surprise that later, when Spinoza outlines the three kinds of knowledge, or ways in which the existence of a thing may be known: 1) the way of *perception*, 2) the way of *reason*, 3) the way of *intuition*; it is only the latter kind of knowledge that is able to arrive at the existence of God as the only true eternal being. Spinoza thus says in Proposition XIX: “God is eternal, or all of God’s attributes are eternal.”⁴⁰⁶ Since God’s essence and existence are one and the same, God’s attributes are immutable.⁴⁰⁷

XXXIII. Modes

The next step in Spinoza’s metaphysics is to explain how the modes *follow* from substance.⁴⁰⁸ I will begin with the preliminary question: why must substance produce modes at all? Spinoza gives a thorough answer to this in Proposition XVI, which we have already discussed in the section on God as the universal cause. In this proposition, Spinoza tells us that from the necessity of the divine nature there *must* follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes. Spinoza holds it to be evident that the greater something is, or, the more essence something has, the greater the number of properties which follow from its essence. Only a finite number of properties can follow from a finite essence. Since God’s essence is the greatest, the greatest number of properties *must* necessarily follow from his essence. This is why Spinoza says that infinitely many modes follow from God’s essence, since his essence is infinite. His argument is given as follows:

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 that really do follow necessarily from it (i.e., from the very essence of the thing); and that it infers more

⁴⁰⁵ *Principles*, I, 49. CSM I.209.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XIX. C I.428.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XX, Corol. II. C I.428-429.

⁴⁰⁸ Considering the language of the corollaries to Proposition XVI, the modes following from substance isn’t to be distinguished from the causal relation of God and modes.

properties the more the definition of the thing expresses reality, i.e., the more reality the essence of the defined thing involves. But since the divine nature has absolutely infinite attributes (by Def. VI), each of which also expresses an essence infinite in its own kind, from its necessity there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect), q.e.d.⁴⁰⁹

Spinoza endorses a *principle of ontological plenitude*,⁴¹⁰ according to which the maximal number of compossible objects actually exists.⁴¹¹ I think Samuel Newlands is absolutely correct when he says that Spinoza's motivation for the *principle of ontological plenitude* derives from the *principle of sufficient reason* itself, "since if the actual world were sub-maximal, non-existing but intrinsically possible, objects would have no reason for not existing, a brute fact."⁴¹² It simply follows from the *principle of sufficient reason* that if there is any "ontological space to be filled, it must be filled."⁴¹³ The medieval appeals to the will of God⁴¹⁴ aren't a sufficient explanation, for "it can't simply be that God decided, *ab initio*⁴¹⁵ and without further explanation, to make a less than full world."⁴¹⁶ Spinoza's world is the *best* of all possible worlds, not merely because it is the *only* possible world, but because it is a world that lacks nothing, since it encompasses the *fullness* of Being.

XXXIV. Immediate Infinite Modes

For Spinoza, the modes have different relations to substance. The modes which follow directly from substance are the *immediate* infinite modes,⁴¹⁷ and the modes which follow directly from the immediate infinite modes are the *mediate* infinite modes.⁴¹⁸ The finite modes, on the other hand, do not follow *directly* from substance. The infinite immediate modes are those "fixed and eternal things," following directly from God's nature, that are the "proximate causes of all things."⁴¹⁹ Spinoza is clearly describing the immediate infinite modes when he

⁴⁰⁹ *Ethics* I, Proposition XVI, Dem. C I.425.

⁴¹⁰ For a great discussion on the principle of plenitude in Spinoza, see the chapter on 'Plenitude and Sufficient Reason in Leibniz and Spinoza' in Arthur Lovejoy's *Great Chain of Being*, 144-182.

⁴¹¹ Cf. Samuel Newlands, *Spinoza's Modal Metaphysics*. The term *compossible* was first used by Leibniz in a letter to Louis Bourget in December 1714. (G III, 572-576/L 661-663)

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁴ See, above pg. ?

⁴¹⁵ From the beginning.

⁴¹⁶ Samuel Newlands, *Spinoza's Modal Metaphysics*.

⁴¹⁷ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XXI.

⁴¹⁸ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XXII.

⁴¹⁹ *TdIE* § 101. C I.41.

says that “God is the proximate cause of those things that are infinite and immutable, and which we say that he has created immediately.”⁴²⁰ The immediate infinite modes are what Spinoza calls *Natura naturata*. In the *Short Treatise*, he tells us that motion is the immediate infinite mode of extension, and intellect, the immediate infinite mode of thought:

Turning now to universal *Natura naturata*, or those modes or creatures which immediately depend on, or have been created by God—we know only two of these: Motion in matter, and Intellect in the thinking thing. We say, then, that these have been from all eternity, and will remain to all eternity, immutable, a work truly as great as the greatness of the workman.⁴²¹

While Spinoza holds that motion is an essential aspect of extension, it is a controversial topic in interpretation. In that same chapter in the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza says of motion that “it belongs more properly to a treatise on Natural science than here.”⁴²² A mysterious footnote⁴²³ indicates that Spinoza wished to revise his account of motion. Near the end of Spinoza life, Tschirnhaus requested a clarification of motion. His epistle reads: “If time and opportunity permit, I humbly beg you to let me have the true definition of motion, together with its explanation.”⁴²⁴ Unfortunately, Spinoza’s reply isn’t helpful: “As for your other questions, namely, concerning motion, and those which concern method, since my views on these are not written out in due order, I reserve them for another occasion.”⁴²⁵ These are Spinoza’s words just over two years before his death, and during that time, his health seriously declined due to either tuberculosis or silicosis.

While it may be the case that Spinoza never revised his views on motion, he holds that under the attribute of extension, “motion and rest”⁴²⁶ is the immediate infinite mode. We might take this to mean that mobility is entailed by the nature of extension, and thus extended things are necessarily mobile. But this is a weaker version than Spinoza’s statement in the *Short Treatise* that motion itself is the infinite immediate mode of extension.⁴²⁷ This means that motion-and-rest follow from the nature of extension. When Spinoza discusses the nature of extension in the second part of the *Ethics*, he asserts that from the fact that “all bodies agree

⁴²⁰ KV, I, iii, 2. C I.81.

⁴²¹ KV, I, ix, 1. C I.91.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

⁴²³ As Curley and Gueroult suggest, the footnote was likely written by someone privy to Spinoza’s plans, possibly in a dictation.

⁴²⁴ *Epistle LIX*. CW, 911.

⁴²⁵ *Epistle LX*, CW, 913.

⁴²⁶ *Epistle LXIV*, CW, 919.

⁴²⁷ KV, I, ix. C I.91-92.

in certain things,”⁴²⁸ by which he means that they “involve the concept of one and the same attribute”⁴²⁹ it follows that “now they move, now they are at rest.”⁴³⁰

This is quite the opposite of the Cartesian account of motion. For Descartes had said that it is the case that extension can be put into motion, motion itself doesn’t follow from the nature of extension. An external source is needed to put extension into motion, which is why Descartes says that “God is the primary cause of motion; and he always preserves the same quantity of motion in the universe.”⁴³¹ Spinoza is quite aware of his departure from Descartes,⁴³² for he holds that extension is the cause of motion. To support this view, we must consider what Spinoza calls *Natura naturans*. In the *Short Treatise*, he says:

By *Natura naturans* we understand a being that we conceive clearly and distinctly through itself, without needing anything other than itself (like all the attributes which we have so far described), i.e., God. The Thomists have also understood God by this phrase, but their *Natura naturans* was a being (as they called it) beyond all substances.⁴³³

In the *Ethics* he describes *Natura naturans* as “what is in itself and conceived through itself, or such attributes of substance as express an eternal and infinite essence, i.e. God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause.”⁴³⁴ Recall, that a free cause is that which is determined to act by itself alone, and exists from the necessity of its nature alone.⁴³⁵ Substance as *Natura naturans* has an intrinsic active power. This position is justified by Proposition XXXIV, where Spinoza claims that God’s power is his essence itself: “For from the necessity alone of God’s essence it follows that God is the cause of himself and of all things. Therefore, God’s power, by which he and all things are and act, is his essence itself.”⁴³⁶ Spinoza’s God is substance and isn’t an efficient cause external to finite substance, as Descartes held. Since the attributes constitute God’s essence, God’s power to act belongs to substance and the attributes. In the attribute of extension, God’s power is expressed *immediately* as motion.⁴³⁷

⁴²⁸ *Ethics*, II, Proposition XIII, Lemma II. C I.459.

⁴²⁹ *Ethics*, II, Proposition XIII, Lemma II, Dem. C I.459.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴³¹ *Principles*, II, 36. CSM I.240. Cf. also *The World*, ch. 6. CSM I.94.

⁴³² Cf. *Epistle LXXXIII*. CW, 958.

⁴³³ *KV*, I, viii. C I.91.

⁴³⁴ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XXIX, Schol. C I.434.

⁴³⁵ *Ethics*, I, Def. VII. C I.409.

⁴³⁶ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XXXIV, Dem. C I.439.

⁴³⁷ On this theme, see Nadler’s *Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction*, 92.

XXXV. Joachim on Motion in Spinoza's System

As Joachim notes, Spinoza's theory of the intelligible structure and constitution of the physical world, and its derivation from the attribute of extension was never set out "systematically and in final form."⁴³⁸ The significance of what Spinoza has to say on this is, says Joachim, is made sufficiently clear by comparing and contrasting it with the Cartesian theory. According to Descartes, God created matter as something extended in three dimensions. At the same time God created, and implanted in matter, a definite quantity of motion-and-rest, which is maintained *per solum suum concursum ordinarium*.⁴³⁹ For Descartes, since the physical world is nothing but three-dimensional space, which is substantiated into matter, and divided and articulated by motion, it must be, says Joachim, explained in accordance with the principles of geometry and kinetics. It is impossible for this to be the case for Spinoza, for there is only one substance. No constituent part of matter is substantial in the way Descartes holds that it is, nor is matter as a whole. For Spinoza, there is no inert matter. The substance underlying extension is "God or Nature—i.e., the Absolute Individual which eternally creates and, in creating, sustains the created as modes or affections of itself."⁴⁴⁰ According to Joachim, Descartes' assumption of a physical substratum compelled him to invoke a separate creative act to introduce motion into matter *ab extra* to overcome the inherent inertia of the supposed corporeal substance. Thus, Spinoza's correction of the Cartesian conception of matter leads him to also correct the Cartesian conception of motion.⁴⁴¹

Both Spinoza and Descartes hold that the total quantity of motion-and-rest in the physical world is eternally the same. The infinite and eternal mode, what Joachim calls "the eternal constant,"⁴⁴² flows inevitably as the immediate intrinsic effect of the attribute of extension.⁴⁴³ From the deduction in the eternal descent of modes which it exhibits, the first and 'most immediate' mode is motion-and-rest, which Spinoza describes in the second appendix of the *Short Treatise* as "that

⁴³⁸ Joachim, *Spinoza's Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione: A Commentary*, 67.

⁴³⁹ "Merely by his regular concurrence." Descartes, *Principles*, II, 36. CSM I.240.

⁴⁴⁰ Joachim, *Spinoza's Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione: A Commentary*, 68. Note that the usage of the term *created* here is used in the same sense as above, pg. ?

⁴⁴¹ More particularly, Joachim argues that Spinoza "assigns to motion a different and more fundamental role than Descartes had given to it in the constitution of the physical world and its contents." Cf. *Epistle LXXXI, LXXXIII*.

⁴⁴² Joachim, *Spinoza's Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione: A Commentary*, 68.

⁴⁴³ Joachim explains how knowledge fits into this picture: "The clear and adequate knowledge, which we have or can obtain of the physical world, would, therefore, in Spinoza's view, take the form of a systematic philosophical (i.e., 'mathematical') 'deduction'. Starting from the intuitive conception of *Natura Naturans qua* extension, the deductive movement would proceed to demonstrate the necessary logical sequence of stage after stage in its eternal self-fulfillment—in its self-explication, or self-evolution, as *Natura Naturata qua* extended. In the end, therefore, the deductive movement would reach and comprehend the *ultimate individuations* of substance under the attribute of extension—i.e., the *finite* eternal modes, which are the 'essences' of the perceptible or phenomenal bodies, would be 'deduced' and known in their mutual relations and in their derivation from, and dependence upon, the First Cause." *Ibid.*, 68.

which, in order to exist, needs no other mode in the same attribute.”⁴⁴⁴ Joachim states:

Spinoza conceived it *both* as the eternally constant whole, *and* as the originative source, of all movements and rests in the physical world. It is the whole, of which they are all parts; the universal, of which they are the dependent and derivative particulars. And, being thus a genuine or concrete universal (prior to, and the system of, its particulars), it is—Spinoza maintains—a genuine, eternal, singular or individual.⁴⁴⁵

Motion-and-rest is what Spinoza describes in the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* as one of the *fixed and eternal things*.⁴⁴⁶ Using Aristotelian terminology, Joachim tells us that motion-and-rest us first in the modal system of extension both really and logically, for “it must *be* if anything is to be, and it must be known if anything is to be known, in the physical world.”⁴⁴⁷ There are a number of objections that have been raised against Spinoza’s theory of motion-and rest,⁴⁴⁸ but a full discussion of these would be a large digression away from Spinoza’s metaphysics into Spinoza’s physics. Now that I have presented the objections, I pass them on. Joachim concludes his account of Spinoza’s account of motion-and-rest with some further difficulties:

In Spinoza’s theory of the physical world, then, motion (i.e., ‘motion-and-rest’) is fundamental and primary—not, as in the Cartesian doctrine, co-ordinate with, or secondary to, matter or mass. He seems in fact to be feeling after—to have projected and in part to have worked out—a physics, or philosophy, of the corporeal world, which would reduce everything to, and explain everything in terms of, motion-and-rest, including matter or mass or mathematical

⁴⁴⁴ KV, Appendix II, footnote. C I.153.

⁴⁴⁵ Joachim, *Spinoza’s Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione: A Commentary*, 69.

⁴⁴⁶ *TdIE* §100-101. C I.41.

⁴⁴⁷ Joachim, *Spinoza’s Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione: A Commentary*, 69.

⁴⁴⁸ Joachim lists a few: “How, e.g., can the eternally constant whole, the universal or omnipervasive individual, of which all movements and rests (and, therefore, in ultimate analysis, all physical changes and properties) are parts or particulars—how can it *also* be a single mode in the eternal sequence or hierarchy of modes, the first stage in the self-evolution of the power which constitutes the physical world?” “Is it really possible to *deduce* anything whatever from the conception of the whole—whether from *Natura Naturans* conceived as the single and indivisible power or attribute of extension, or from motion-and-rest as the proximate, commensurate, and total ‘expression’ of that power?” “Is it not a commonplace of logic, a familiar and indisputable doctrine, that our thought, in deducing, never proceeds *from* the whole; that it moves always from part to part *within* the whole (or within a whole) and in accordance with its dominant character or the principles of its totality?” *Ibid.*

solidity itself.⁴⁴⁹ And yet, if this was indeed the main trend of Spinoza's thought, he never entirely freed himself from reminiscences of the Cartesian doctrine. Throughout his writings, the conception of matter or body or three-dimensional extension (*Quantitas*) survives, quite inconsistently, side by side, with the conception of motion-and-rest. It is not merely that the modes of extension are constantly referred to as 'bodies,' or that Spinoza speaks, e.g., of this or that body 'being in,' or 'having and maintaining,' its proportion of motion to rest.⁴⁵⁰ Such language is natural and could be justified on the grounds of convenience and clarity of exposition. But Spinoza, in spite of his criticism of Descartes, still thinks of the intelligible structure of the physical world as woven (so to speak) out of two distinct sets of principles—the laws of extension and the laws of motion; and even in the *Ethics* he still appears to postulate certain minimal corpuscles, certain atomic solids, as the bearers of, and not themselves reducible to, motion and rest.⁴⁵¹

XXXVI. Wolf on the Dynamic Character of Reality and Motion

Abraham Wolf draws attention to Spinoza's dynamic character of the universe, which is made evident when his conception of extension is compared with the Cartesian theory. It is a common assumption, says Wolf, that because both Descartes and Spinoza both use the same term, extension, that they both mean the same thing. Wolf stresses that this is a grave mistake. On the Cartesian conception, matter is nothing else but extension, and it is by nature inert. The result of this view is that Descartes had to invoke a *deus ex machina* in order to create matter, to maintain its existence, to impart motion-and-rest to it, and to keep the quantity of motion-and-rest constant. "Altogether, the Cartesian

⁴⁴⁹ *KV*, II, Preface, 7. "Each and every particular thing that comes to exist becomes such through motion and rest. The same is true of all modes in the substantial extension we call body." *C I*.95.

⁴⁵⁰ *KV*, II, Preface, 10, 12. "But out body had a different proportion of motion and rest when we were unborn children, and later when we are dead, it will have still another. Nevertheless, there was before our birth, and will be after our death, an Idea, knowledge, etc., of our body in the thinking thing, as there is now. But it was not, and will not be at all the same, because now it has different proportions of motion and rest." "So if such a body has a preserves its proportion—say of 1 to 3—the soul and the body will be like ours now are; they will, of course, be constantly subject to change, but not to such a great change that it goes beyond the limits of from 1 to 3; and as much as it changes, so also the soul changes each time." *C I*.95-96.

⁴⁵¹ Joachim points to Meyer's Preface to Spinoza's *PPC*; *Epistle XXXII*; *Ethics*, II, Propositions XIII, XIV; and *TdIE* § 39, 108. Joachim argues that in the *TdIE* Spinoza insists that the perception of motion presupposes the perception of *quantity*. Joachim, *Spinoza's Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione: A Commentary*, 70-71.

philosophy not only treats God like an outsider, but works Him terribly hard in keeping this sorry scheme of things together.⁴⁵²

Spinoza's universe is one which is self-sufficient, autonomous, perfectly rational, free from external interference, and free from arbitrariness or caprice.⁴⁵³ Spinoza is thus strongly opposed to the Cartesian theory of matter as merely extension and inert, for the physical universe could not be the result of such a conception of matter. In Spinoza's correspondence, Tschirnhaus reminded him that Descartes maintained that he could not deduce the variety of things from 'Extension' "in any other way than by supposing that this was an effect produced in Extension by motion started by God."⁴⁵⁴ But it is this assumption of miracles that Spinoza views as unphilosophical. According to Wolf, Spinoza has a dynamic conception of matter, a kind of:

Physical Energy, which expresses itself in the infinite mode of motion and rest, which consequently need not be introduced miraculously from outside the material world...the dynamic interpretation of extension makes the relation of motion and rest (or energy of motion and energy of position) to extension intelligible...For how can motion be logically derived from extension? Motion implies extension; but extension does not imply motion. If therefore, Spinoza admitted only logico-mathematical relations, then motion should have been the attribute and extension it's mode...what he did say, already in the *Short Treatise*, was that extension is 'the power to produce' motion and rest (or kinetic and potential energy, as we might say).⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵² Wolf, *Spinoza's Conception of the Attributes of Substance*, 185.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴ *Epistle LXXXII. CW*, 956-957.

⁴⁵⁵ Wolf, *Spinoza's Conception of the Attributes of Substance*. 186. Wolf notes: "the subsequent history of science has abundantly justified Spinoza's dynamic or kinetic conception of matter as against the inert conception of matter held by Descartes and all his contemporaries as well as some of the most distinguished successors. Descartes, for instance, could only explain the movements of the planets by invoking, not only the aid of God, but also the machinery of æther vortices to carry the planets. Even Newton could not do without the æther, and for much the same reason. But after Newton's formulation of the law of universal gravitation, a marked change came about in the scientific world. In spite of Newton's opposition to it, the view generally accepted, and actually advocated by Cotes in his Preface to the second edition of the *Principia*, was that gravitation is inherent in matter as such, so that the motion of matter need not be accounted for by reference to external agencies; only changes of motion (in direction, etc.) need be accounted for in that way. Since then till the present day, the kinetic conception of matter has grown so much in favour that 'matter' has almost been displaced by energy or 'fields of force,' an expression that may well remind us of Spinoza's conception of a dynamic Extension. Of course, I do not for a moment desire to claim for Spinoza the credit for the new physical conceptions. But I think that he deserves great credit for having suggested so long in advance a metaphysical basis for these modern ideas in Physics." *Ibid.*, 186-187.

The problem of motion is one that a mind can easily get lost in, but what is evident is that Spinoza is not thinking of extension as Descartes had defined it. Spinoza clearly states in his epistle to Tschirnhaus that Descartes has a faulty definition of matter:

With regard to your question as to whether the variety of things can be demonstrated a priori solely from the conception of Extension, I think I have already made it quite clear that this is impossible. That is why Descartes is wrong in defining matter through extension; it must necessarily be explicated through an attribute which expresses eternal and infinite essence.⁴⁵⁶

What can be said is that Spinoza believes that a reasonable notion of matter and extension must be a notion of dynamic matter and extension. Dynamism in the extended realm is understood in terms of motion-and-rest such that motion and rest are ways (or modes) of being dynamically extended. In the mental realm, this same dynamism is reflected in representation and volition. In the end, this leaves little difference between extension and motion-and-rest.⁴⁵⁷

XXXVII. The Absolutely Infinite Intellect

Conversely, the immediate infinite mode of thought is what Spinoza calls in *Epistle LXIV* the “*absolutely infinite intellect*.”⁴⁵⁸ By this he means God’s actual thinking of everything. Steven Nadler interprets the absolutely infinite intellect as “the infinite and eternal set of adequate ideas composing God’s intellect. It is, in essence, a perfect knowledge of everything.”⁴⁵⁹ This is a very fruitful interpretation, considering what Spinoza says of the mode of thought which immediately depends on God in his discussion of *Natura naturata* in the *Short Treatise*: “As for Intellect in the thinking thing, this too is a Son, product or immediate creature of God, also created by him from all eternity, and remaining immutable to all eternity. Its sole property is to understand everything clearly and distinctly at all times.”⁴⁶⁰ Further, Spinoza calls this infinite immediate mode in Proposition XXI “God’s idea”⁴⁶¹ and in one of the last propositions of the *Ethics*, Spinoza identifies “God’s eternal and infinite intellect”⁴⁶² as a collection of eternal minds or ideas. This justifies Nadler’s claim that “the absolutely infinite intellect is

⁴⁵⁶ *Epistle LXXXIII. CW*, 958.

⁴⁵⁷ I am indebted to Michael Della Rocca for discussing and pointing this out to me.

⁴⁵⁸ *Epistle LXIV. CW*, 919.

⁴⁵⁹ Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction*, 90.

⁴⁶⁰ *KVI*, ix, 2. *C I.92*.

⁴⁶¹ *Ethics I*, Proposition XXI, Dem. *C I.429*.

⁴⁶² *Ethics V*, Proposition XL, Scholium. *C I.615*.

a collection of ideas constituted by God's infinite thinking of the eternal essences of things."⁴⁶³

XXXVIII. Mediate Infinite Modes

The *mediate* infinite modes are even more obscure. In Proposition XXII, Spinoza describes these modes by stating that these modes do not follow directly from the divine nature, but from "some attribute of God insofar as it is modified by a modification which, through the same attribute, exists necessarily and is infinite."⁴⁶⁴ What is even more daunting for interpreters of Spinoza is the fact that he doesn't indicate what the mediate infinite modes of extension and thought are. We are all indebted to Tschirnhaus for asking Spinoza to clarify what these modes are, through his friend Georg Schuller. Spinoza was pressed to "have examples of those things produced by the mediation of some infinite modification."⁴⁶⁵ While Spinoza had provided Tschirnhaus with the examples of the immediate infinite modes: motion-and-rest in extension, and the absolutely infinite intellect in thought, he only provides one example of a mediate infinite mode: *facies totius universi*.⁴⁶⁶ The *facies totius universi*, varies in infinite ways, yet always remains the same. Spinoza references the Scholium to Lemma VII in the second part of the *Ethics*, from which we can infer that the *facies totius universi* is likely an example of extension, since Spinoza does not directly tell us which attribute it belongs to.

What exactly Spinoza means by *facies totius universi* is a controversial interpretive issue. Martial Gueroult seems to interpret this as the totality of all existing material things, the infinite and eternal series of the existing finite modes of extension. This is "the series of existing bodies that durationally realize the eternal essences of bodies that, as we saw, can be regarded as the contents of the immediate infinite mode in Extension."⁴⁶⁷ On this view, which is expanded upon by Steven Nadler, the *facies totius universi* is the entirety of the contents of the physical universe, "all particular bodies and all their relations throughout all time—considered as an eternal, infinite set and as an individual in its own right."⁴⁶⁸ This is what Spinoza means when he replies to Schuller and Tschirnhaus, that the *facies totius universi*, "although varying in infinite ways, yet

⁴⁶³ Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction*, 91.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXII. C I.430.

⁴⁶⁵ *Epistle* LXIII. *CW*, 917.

⁴⁶⁶ "The face of the whole universe." See *Epistle* LXIV. Spinoza references *Ethics* II, Proposition XIII, Schol., but as Michael Morgan says in a footnote that in the *Ethics* "Spinoza does not use the expression, 'face of the entire universe', but speaks of conceiving the whole of nature as one infinite individual whose parts vary in infinite ways without any change in nature itself." *CW*, 919, n.

⁴⁶⁷ Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction*, 95. Gueroult, *Spinoza*, I, 309-324.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

remains always the same.”⁴⁶⁹ On this account, the overall proportion of motion-and-rest is always the same among the variations of “ever-changing material things.”⁴⁷⁰ The reference Spinoza gives to Schuller and Tschirnhaus from the second part of the *Ethics* discusses “how a composite Individual can be affected in many ways, and still preserve its nature.”⁴⁷¹ A particular body which is composed of simpler parts preserves its identity “because its component parts nonetheless maintain a particular ratio of motion and rest among themselves.”⁴⁷² Spinoza was very aware of the Cartesian principle of the preservation of the proportion of motion-and-rest in the universe. Thus, Nadler says that by “proceeding upwards, through more composite individuals made up of such composite bodies, and so on, one finally reaches the material universe itself as the ultimate composite individual.”⁴⁷³ This is supported by Spinoza’s statement of macrocosm and microcosm: “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.”⁴⁷⁴

There is a long history in philosophy of this conception of man as a small universe. Plato, in the *Timaeus*, describes the universe as a resembling “more closely than anything else that Living Thing of which all other living things are parts”⁴⁷⁵ and as a “single visible living thing, which contains within itself all the living things whose nature it is to share its kind.”⁴⁷⁶ Later in the *Timaeus*, he describes the structure of man as an imitation of the spherical form of the cosmos: “Copying the revolving shape of the universe, the gods bound the two divine orbits into a ball-shaped body, the part that we now call our head. This is the most divine part of us, and master of all our other parts.”⁴⁷⁷ In the *Physics*, Aristotle refers to animal life as a “small world.”⁴⁷⁸ The analogy of man as a small universe and the universe as a great man appears in Judah ha-Levi⁴⁷⁹ and Maimonides.⁴⁸⁰ While Spinoza follows these men in singling out man, his motivation differs from theirs, for he does not believe that man holds a special place in the universe. Wolfson describes Spinoza’s position adequately, when he says: “In singling out man from the innumerable particular things in nature, Spinoza was not motivated by the belief that man occupies a place which is unique in nature, but rather was he motivated by the belief that man is a part of nature and that he epitomizes in himself, as it were, the whole of nature.”⁴⁸¹

⁴⁶⁹ *Epistle LXIV, CW*, 919.

⁴⁷⁰ Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction*, 95.

⁴⁷¹ *Ethics* II, Proposition XIII, Lemma VII, Schol. C I.461.

⁴⁷² Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction*, 95.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ethics* II, Proposition XIII, Lemma VII, Schol. C I.462.

⁴⁷⁵ *Timaeus* 30c.

⁴⁷⁶ *Timaeus* 30d.

⁴⁷⁷ *Timaeus* 44d.

⁴⁷⁸ *Physics*, VIII, 252b, 2 17-28.

⁴⁷⁹ *Kuzari*, IV, 3.

⁴⁸⁰ *Moreh Nebukim*, I, 72.

⁴⁸¹ Wolfson, II, 7.

On Spinoza's view the whole of physical nature follows from the attribute of extension combined with the immediate infinite mode of motion-and-rest. As Nadler puts it, "take matter, add motion, and you get a world of particular individuals."⁴⁸² Thus, Nadler's interpretation answers the problem of change in Spinoza, that is, the question of how it is that change exists in the modes while substance and its attributes are unchanging. While change exists on the level of particular physical individuals, the physical universe itself as the overall proportion of motion-and-rest is eternal and immutable. Thus, an infinite mode is also eternal and immutable.

But how, one might wonder, do the infinite modes exist of necessity? Spinoza tells us that anything which follows from something that exists of necessity, necessarily exists itself.⁴⁸³ Since the immediate infinite modes follow from God, who necessarily exists, they exist of *absolute* necessity.⁴⁸⁴ Further, the mediate infinite modes must exist of *absolute* necessity, since they follow from the immediate infinite modes. Thus, Spinoza says in the demonstration of Proposition XXIII:

Therefore, the mode, which exists necessarily and is infinite, has had to follow from the absolute nature of some attribute of God—either immediately (see Proposition XXI) or by some mediating modification, which follows from its absolute nature, i.e. (by Proposition XXII), which exists necessarily and is infinite.⁴⁸⁵

It is evident from this how Spinoza conceives of both kinds of infinite modes as necessary. God's essence *immediately* gives rise to certain aspects of the world. Each of the infinite immediate modes is infinite through its cause, and has an infinity of parts that are inseparable. The mediate infinite mode encompasses all of the relations of motion-and-rest in extension and of the ideas in the realm of thought. Spinoza accounts for the rise of finite things by interposing infinite modes between God and finite modes.

⁴⁸² Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction*, 96.

⁴⁸³ *Ethics*, I, Proposition XXI: "All the things which follow from the absolute nature of any of God's attribute have always had to exist and be infinite, or are, through the same attribute, eternal and infinite." C I.429.

⁴⁸⁴ I distinguish *absolute* from *hypothetical* necessity. Something exists with *hypothetical* necessity if it necessarily follows from a cause, but its cause does not necessarily exist. On the other hand, something exists with *absolute* necessity if it necessarily follows from a cause, and its cause necessarily exists.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXIII, Dem. C I.431.

XXXIX. Finite Modes and Acosmism

The last thing to account for in the realm of modes is the particular existents, the modes which are “determined by another to exist and to produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner.”⁴⁸⁶ While these finite modes follow from the infinite modes, there is yet another distinction. Finite modes include the individual eternal essences of particular things, found in the immediate infinite modes, and the actually existing particular things that instantiate those essences in time, found within the mediate infinite modes.⁴⁸⁷

God is the efficient cause of all things, as we have said. Spinoza reminds us of this in Proposition XXV: “God is the efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence.”⁴⁸⁸ For, as Spinoza tells us, “if you deny this, then God is not the cause of the essence of things; and so (by Axiom IV) the essence of things can be conceived without God. But (by Proposition XV) this is absurd. Therefore God is also the cause of the essence of things.”⁴⁸⁹ It is this fact that brings to light the importance of God as an immanent cause. As we have seen, Spinoza demonstrates in Proposition XV that whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God. It follows from this that “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.”⁴⁹⁰ Thus, the finite modes of the attribute of extension are particular bodies, and the finite modes of the attribute of thought are particular ideas or minds. It is the immanence of God’s causality that defines modes, for there is nothing outside of God, and everything that exists, must be *in* God. Nothing in Nature can be separated from its causal system, not even man. This is why Gilles Deleuze declares:

A finite mode cannot be separated: 1. by its essence, from the infinity of other essences that all agree with one another in the infinite immediate mode; 2. by its existence, from the infinity of other existing modes that are causes of it under different relations implied in the mediate infinite mode; 3. or finally, from the infinity of extensive parts that each existing mode actually possesses under its own relation.⁴⁹¹

It might appear that there is a contradiction in Spinoza’s reasoning, for how can the finite follow from the infinite? There has been a strange tendency in history to accuse Spinoza of *acosmism*, championed by Solomon Maimon and G. W. F. Hegel. Acosmism is the view that God is real, and the world, or *cosmos*, of finite

⁴⁸⁶ *Ethics* I, Def. VII. C I.409.

⁴⁸⁷ This view is from Steven Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction*, 98.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXV. C I.431.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXV, Dem. C I.431.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXV, Corol. C I.431.

⁴⁹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 92.

things, is not real; the acosmist thus admits of only one ultimately real being, namely God. Consider Maimon's characterization of Spinoza:

In this [Spinoza's] system unity is real, but diversity is merely ideal. In the atheistic system it is just the other way around. The diversity is real and grounded in the very nature of things, while the unity, which one observes in the order and regularity of nature, is consequently only coincidental; through this unity we determine our arbitrary system for the sake of our knowledge. It is inconceivable how one could make the Spinozistic system into atheism since these two systems are the exact opposites of each other. Atheism denies the existence of God, Spinozism denies the existence of the world. Rather, Spinozism should be called 'acosmism.'⁴⁹²

While it may be tempting to place Spinoza in the category of acosmism, for he does hold that there is only one substantial reality, he clearly isn't an acosmist.⁴⁹³ As Yitzhak Melamed points out, there are four key doctrines in Spinoza that conflict with the acosmist reading. While three of the four are doctrines from later parts in the *Ethics*, one of them is Spinoza's assertion in Proposition XVI that "from the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes."⁴⁹⁴ Melamed explains how this doctrine conflicts with an acosmist reading of Spinoza:

Spinoza claims that the modes are just what follow necessarily from God's nature or essence. Furthermore, in Proposition XXXVI ("Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow") makes clear that everything, including God's nature, must have some effects. But, if the modes (i.e., the effects of God's nature) were illusory, then God's nature would not really have any effects.⁴⁹⁵

Melamed's account draws its strength from Spinoza's endorsement in Proposition XVI of the *principle of ontological plenitude*. The finite modes follow from the infinite because the series of finite modes itself is infinite. There are, in fact, an infinite number of finite modes within each series. The series of finite modes under an attribute is the infinite mode of that attribute, and follows from

⁴⁹² "Es ist unbegreiflich, wie man das spinozistische System zum atheistischen machen konnte, da sie doch einander gerade entgegengesetzt sind. In diesem wird das Dasein Gottes, in jenem aber das Dasein der Welt geleugnet. Es müsste also eher das akosmische System heißen." *Salomon Maimon's Lebensgeschichte*, 217. Translation by Yitzhak Melamed, *Acosmism or Weak Individuals? Hegel, Spinoza, and the Reality of the Finite*, 79-80.

⁴⁹³ For a close study of this topic, see Yitzhak Melamed, *Acosmism or Weak Individuals? Hegel, Spinoza, and the Reality of the Finite*.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ethics* I, Proposition XVI, C 1.424.

⁴⁹⁵ Melamed, *Acosmism or Weak Individuals? Hegel, Spinoza, and the Reality of the Finite*, 90.

causes that are infinite.⁴⁹⁶ As Denton Snider remarks of Spinoza's system: "The links of the chain are finite modes, but the total chain is the infinite mode."⁴⁹⁷

In Proposition XXVI Spinoza states: "A thing which has been determined to produce an effect has necessarily been determined in this way by God; and one which has not been determined by God cannot determine itself to produce an effect."⁴⁹⁸ There is a parallel between the concept of a thing being *determined to act* and *determined to exist*, as Spinoza will soon bring out, that is, God determines things both to exist and to act. Since these finite modes are not the causes of themselves, they cannot *act* unless they are determined to do so. All modes, including human beings, can no more determine themselves to action than they can determine themselves to existence. This means that free will is an illusion. When Spinoza says in Proposition XXVII that "a thing which has been determined by God to produce an effect, cannot render itself undetermined,"⁴⁹⁹ he means to tell us that we don't even have the freedom to do nothing. As he states later, "men are deceived in that they think themselves free, an opinion which consists only in this, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined."⁵⁰⁰

In Proposition XXVIII, Spinoza gives an account of finite causality that has been quite puzzling to interpreters:

Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity.⁵⁰¹

As Edwin Curley says of this proposition, "many commentators have wondered how the finite causality affirmed here could be consistent with the divine causality affirmed in Propositions XXVI and XXVII."⁵⁰² For in Proposition XXVI, Spinoza says that it is God who determines finite modes to action, whereas now in Proposition XXVIII, Spinoza says that finite modes are determined to act by other finite modes. Steven Nadler reconciles these two propositions, since finite things are modes of God:

⁴⁹⁶ See Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction*, 99.

⁴⁹⁷ Snider, *Modern European Philosophy: The History of Modern Philosophy, Psychologically Treated*, 204.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXVI. C I.431.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXVII. C I.432.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ethics* II, Proposition XXXV, Schol. C I.473.

⁵⁰¹ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXVIII. C I.432.

⁵⁰² C I.432, n.

Every causal relationship among finite things is a function both of those finite things themselves and of the infinite things (natures and laws) that govern the behavior of those finite things. Every event in nature stands at the intersection of the two causal nexuses: a ‘horizontal’ nexus within which a thing is temporally and causally related to (infinitely many) prior and posterior things; and a ‘vertical’ nexus within which a thing and its relationship to other things is causally related to eternal principles, culminating in Nature’s attributes. Proposition XXVIII refers to the first causal nexus and Proposition XXVI refers to the second one. As the finite thing is embedded in its horizontal relationship to infinitely many other finite things, the infinite series of causally related finite things (a mediate infinite mode) is in turn embedded in—and derives its necessity from—a vertical relationship to higher infinite modes and, ultimately, substance itself. The infinite chain of finite causes itself is brought into being by the infinite causes. Or, as one commentator so elegantly puts it, every finite mode is brought about by (or deducible from) an infinite series of other finite causes and a finite series of infinite causes.⁵⁰³

On this account, God doesn’t determine finite things directly, as he does the immediate infinite modes, but indirectly, insofar as God is modified both by the infinite modes and by other finite modes.⁵⁰⁴ As Spinoza says in the demonstration to Proposition XXVIII, every singular thing must “follow from, or be determined to exist and produce an effect by God or an attribute of God insofar as it is modified by a modification which is finite and has a determinate existence.”⁵⁰⁵ Because of this, everything ultimately depends on God, either immediately (immediate infinite modes), or mediately, through infinite things alone (mediate infinite modes), or through both infinite and finite things (finite modes). Spinoza concludes Proposition XXVIII by reminding us that “all things that are, are in God, and so depend on God that they can neither be nor be conceived without him.”⁵⁰⁶

XL. Causality and Logic

It is an axiom for Spinoza that “from a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for

⁵⁰³ Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction*, 100-101. The commentator he references is Edwin Curley. See Curley’s *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 48.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 101.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXVIII, Dem. C I.432.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXVIII, Schol. C I.433.

an effect to follow.”⁵⁰⁷ By this axiom, causes necessitate their effects. Applied to God, who in an uncaused efficient cause of everything else, all things which exist are causally grounded in God. Things that exist either follow from God directly or indirectly (by more immediate effects of God). For “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.)”⁵⁰⁸

A problem here arises that must be dealt with, namely the charge that Spinoza assimilates the relation of causality to the relation of logical implication, and that he is not warranted in doing so. The proponent of this objection might say that there is a difference between an effect necessarily following from its cause and two things being logically connected. Further, the objector might say that logical necessity is what holds between propositions, as in geometry, and not between cause and effect. This objection is nothing new, as its underlying basis was made popular by the Scottish philosopher David Hume. A final Humean point to this objection is the following: the necessity of causal relationships is dependent upon a nomological necessity. This means that talk of one thing being the cause of another is an appeal to how the laws of nature happen to imply a relation between two things. The point is that while we hold it to be contrary to a law of nature that, for example, the speed of light is 670, 616, 629 miles per hour, it does not follow without demonstrating that the laws of nature are themselves logically necessary that the speed of light couldn't have been different. While affirming *a* and denying *a* is a logical contradiction, on this view just because *a* causes *b* it does not follow that there is a logical contradiction in affirming *a* and denying *b*.

Spinoza would not be willing to say that one thing can cause another without having the same necessity of logical propositions. Edwin Curley offers a discussion of this objection, where he first justifies that it makes sense to make this objection to Spinoza.⁵⁰⁹ He points out that Spinoza characterizes the relationship between substance and mode by saying that God is the cause of the things that are in him, that he has produced them or determined them, or that they *follow* from him. It is this *following* from which implies a relation of logical implication between substance and mode. Consider also the geometrical analogy given by Spinoza:

I have shown clearly enough (see Proposition XVI) 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.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁷ *Ethics* I, Axiom III. C I.410.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ethics* I, Proposition XVI. C I.424.

⁵⁰⁹ Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics* 45.

⁵¹⁰ *Ethics* I, Proposition XVII, Schol. I. C I.426.

It is clear, as Curley notes, that Spinoza thinks the relation between God and modes is not merely a necessary relation, but a relation that is logically necessitated.

Leibniz commented on this specific passage, objecting: “one cannot prove by any argument that things follow from God as properties follow from the triangle, nor is there an analogy between essences and existing things.”⁵¹¹ Leibniz seems to hint that the relation of logical implication obtains only between essences, and that it is absurd to talk of logical implication between existing things. Answers to these objections have been less than impressive. This is likely due to the fact that, as Curley points out, “if all things do follow from God in this way, then it ought to be possible, in principle, to deduce the existence of particular finite beings from the existence of the Infinite Being. Spinoza does not carry out any such deduction, which has been variously interpreted as a flaw in the system or as a natural defect of human knowledge.”⁵¹² Failure to present satisfactory and comprehensive responses to these objections arises from the lack of textual support.

I believe that we can respond to this objection by saying that, for Spinoza, the relation of causal dependence isn't to be assimilated with logical implication, but instead that the relation of causal dependence is to be assimilated to a relation of conceptual dependence.⁵¹³ On this view, to say that *a* causes *b* is to say that *b* is conceived through *a*, or that *b* conceptually depends on *a*.

Be that as it may, Spinoza has no use for a distinction between things following from God's essence and properties following from the essence or definition of a thing. For Spinoza, all things are necessary because the laws of nature are themselves necessary.

A thing is called necessary either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause. For a thing's existence follows necessarily either from its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause.⁵¹⁴

Though, as Steven Nadler has pointed out,⁵¹⁵ it is false to read Spinoza distinguishing between two different *kinds* of necessity: logical or metaphysical vs. causal. Rather, Spinoza is informing us that there are two different *ways* that something is necessitated: internally and externally. There is no differentiation of two separate kinds of necessity, for internal and external necessity are both *absolute* necessity. When something is *internally* necessitated, it derives its

⁵¹¹ AG 278.

⁵¹² Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics* 46. Cf. Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*, 99ff and 120.

⁵¹³ I am indebted to Michael Della Rocca for pointing this out to me. See also his article *Rationalism Run Amok*.

⁵¹⁴ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXXIII, Schol. I. C I.436.

⁵¹⁵ Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction* 87.

necessity from its essence.⁵¹⁶ That which is *externally* necessitated derives its necessity from antecedent conditions. All such antecedent conditions depend on God as the efficient cause, whose existence is necessitated by his essence, i.e., from an *internal* necessity. Thus, whether something is determined by a conceptual or logical necessity or by a causal necessity doesn't make a difference. Thus, we can at least begin to respond to the critics of Spinoza. that he is justified in claiming that from God's infinite nature 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."⁵¹⁷ For in the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Spinoza writes: "For if men understood clearly the whole order of Nature, they would find all things just as necessary as are all those treated in Mathematics."⁵¹⁸

XLI. Necessitarianism

Now that I have given an outline of causality and logic in relation to absolute necessity, I will turn to Spinoza's rejection of contingency and his argument for necessitarianism. Spinoza was content on removing the idea of contingency from metaphysics altogether. This was an extremely radical move, and one that gained him a great deal of attention.

God is an infinite and eternal dynamic substance of which nothing is excluded from its nature. We have seen that there are two necessary and eternal effects of God: the immanent laws of nature, or infinite series of atemporal essences, and the world of existing things, which are mediated through the first effect of God. This modal world we know so well are merely instantiations of the eternal essences or laws of nature in time. All things are ultimately dependant on and determined by God's nature or essence, and God depends no external substance. It follows that since God exists necessarily,⁵¹⁹ nothing *could have been* otherwise than it is.

We have already seen Spinoza's early views on contingency.⁵²⁰ In Proposition XXIX of the *Ethics* Spinoza boldly states: "In nature nothing is contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way."⁵²¹ It is important to be clear about Spinoza's meaning of the term *contingent*, for he seems to employ the term in two different ways in the *Ethics*. He often uses the term to mean that which is *causally undetermined*. However, in the Fourth Part of the *Ethics*, he distinguishes between *contingent* and *possible*.

⁵¹⁶ God's necessity is derived *internally*, for his essence involves existence.

⁵¹⁷ *Ethics* I, Proposition XVII, Schol. I. C I.426.

⁵¹⁸ *CM* II, ix. C I.332

⁵¹⁹ That is, it couldn't be the case that God doesn't exist.

⁵²⁰ Cf. God as Free Cause.

⁵²¹ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXIX. C I.433.

I call singular things contingent insofar as we find nothing, while we attend only to their essence, which necessarily posits their existence or which necessarily excludes it.⁵²²

I call the same singular things possible, insofar as, while we attend to the causes from which they must be produced, we do not know whether those causes are determined to produce them.⁵²³

In this second sense of *contingency*, something is contingent when it is a middle-ground between necessary and impossible. It is not necessary by reason of its essence nor is it impossible because its essence involves a contradiction. However, something contingent in this sense is still necessitated by reason of its cause, but is not necessitated by reason of its essence. This sense of contingency exists in Spinoza's system, but this is not the same sense of contingency that Spinoza is referring to when he says: "I have shown more clearly than the noon light that there is absolutely nothing in things on account of which they can be called contingent."⁵²⁴ Spinoza is attacking the first sense of contingency as that which is *causally undetermined*, that which he defines as *possible* in the Fourth Part of the *Ethics*.

Spinoza's argument that nothing is contingent rests on his ability to demonstrate three things: that all things have been determined by God to exist, to exist in a certain way, and to produce effects in a certain way. He argues in Proposition XXIX that whatever is, is in God. However, God can't be called contingent, for God exists necessity. The modes also follow from God necessarily and not contingently, and God is the cause of modes in their existence and as they are considered to produce an effect. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza says:

If the contingent thing is contingent because its cause is contingent [with respect to its existence], then that cause must also be contingent because the cause that produced it is also contingent [with respect to its existence,] and so on, to infinity. And because we have already proven *that everything depends on one single cause*, then that cause would also have to be contingent. And this is plainly false.⁵²⁵

If God had not determined them, then it impossible, not contingent, that they should determine themselves. Since they have been determined by God, it is also impossible, not contingent, that they should render themselves undetermined. Consider Axiom III: "From a sgiven determinate cause the effect

⁵²² *Ethics* IV, Definition III. C I.546.

⁵²³ *Ethics* IV, Definition IV. C I.546.

⁵²⁴ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXXIII, Schol. I. C I.436.

⁵²⁵ *KV*, I, vi, 3. C I.85-86.

follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow.”⁵²⁶

This leads Spinoza to assert: “Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced.”⁵²⁷ Since all things follow from God’s *given* nature, and have been determined by God’s nature to exist (in a certain way) and to produce effects in a certain way, it follows that if the order of Nature *could be* different, then God’s nature *could be* different, and therefore this other nature of God would necessarily *have to exist*. Thus, there would be two substances, which is absurd. It follows, says Spinoza, that things could have been produced in no other way or order. Spinoza describes that what we call contingency in the sense of being causally undetermined, is merely an inadequate conception of the order of Nature:

A thing is called contingent only because of a defect in our knowledge. For if we do not know that the thing’s essence involves a contradiction, or if we do know very well that its essence does not involve a contradiction, and nevertheless can affirm nothing certainly about its existence, because the order of causes is hidden from us, it can never seem to us either necessary or impossible. So we call it contingent or possible.⁵²⁸

It is evident that Spinoza is going much further than the typical *hard determinist* thesis that everything is causally determined to its existence and to bring out the effects that it does. But for Spinoza, additional premise of the necessitarian position that this causal order couldn’t have been otherwise seems to him much more consistent. Both the essences and laws of things and the world of existing things are an absolutely necessary effect of God. Whatever follows from the absolute nature of any of God’s attributes (or from some attribute of God insofar as it is modified by a modification) have always had to exist and be infinite, or are, through the same attribute, eternal and infinite.⁵²⁹ Substance and its attributes are logically necessary *by reason of its essence*, while the infinite modes have a logical necessity *by reason of its cause*. As Steven Nadler puts it: “These things (including ‘the face of the whole universe’) could not possibly have been otherwise, but that is because they have been necessarily determined by something that, in and of itself, could not possibly have been otherwise.”⁵³⁰ Thus, the finite modes, as the constituents of a series that itself could not possibly have been otherwise, are also absolutely necessary.⁵³¹ For Spinoza, we live in the

⁵²⁶ *Ethics* I, Axiom III. C I.410.

⁵²⁷ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXXIII. C I.436.

⁵²⁸ *Ethics* I, Proposition XXXIII, Schol. I. C I.436.

⁵²⁹ *Ethics* I, Propositions XXI, XXII. C I.429-430.

⁵³⁰ Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction*, 106.

⁵³¹ Nadler notes that each finite mode is both causally and logically necessary via the combination of infinite modes and other finite modes. Because the infinite modes are absolutely necessary, and because the series of prior finite events is infinite (from which it follows that there is no

best of all possible worlds because we live in the only possible world, but one which is maximally ontologically rich.

XLII. A Final Note: The Problem of Attributes⁵³²

Spinoza's theory of attributes has left scholars with perplexing interpretive issues. Descartes had defined the attribute of a substance as its essence, and concludes that each substance has only one attribute. Spinoza gives us a different definition of an attribute as that which the intellect perceives of a substance as constituting its essence, hence not limiting substances to having only one attribute. The difficulty in interpretation is largely due to the translation of the Latin word *tanquam*. As countless interpreters of Spinoza have pointed out, the word can mean either "as if, but not in fact" or "as in fact." Both Shirley and Curley translate Spinoza's definition of attribute as that which the intellect perceives of a substance "as constituting its essence." The use of the term "intellect" in Spinoza's definition is likewise ambiguous, and it isn't immediately clear whether Spinoza is referring to the infinite intellect or a finite intellect. How we interpret what Spinoza means by both of these terms is necessarily tied up with how we conceive the reality of the attributes. Spinoza claims that there is one substance with multiple attributes. Scholars are at odds at how to make sense of this based on Spinoza's definition of attribute. For if an attribute is that which constitutes the essence of substance, then it seems to follow that Spinoza's substance has multiple essences. On the other hand, if an attribute does not constitute the essence of substance, then it follows that Spinoza is claiming that the attributes only appear to us "as if" they constitute its essence. Some scholars have taken the *subjectivist* side, which claims that the attributes do not *really* constitute the essence of substance, but only appear to. Other scholars take the *objectivist* side in this argument, and claim that each attribute pertains to the essence of substance.

member of that series that is not necessitated by some prior causes and therefore could have been different) there is no particular thing or event that could have been otherwise. Cf. Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction*, 106-107.

⁵³² I have decided to attach a brief summary of a problem mentioned earlier in the paper: the problem of attributes. Note that the many issues that arise from this problem require much more focus and space than this work can offer them. However, they can't be passed by without mention. Wolfson, Bennett, Hallett, Donagan, Curley, Della Rocca, Parchment, and Deveaux have all formulated different interpretations of this problem.

XLIII. Subjectivism

Wolfson gives the most famous argument for a subjectivist interpretation of the attributes.⁵³³ According to Wolfson, Spinoza holds that the two attributes are in reality one essence, and merely appear to us to be distinct. Wolfson points to the subjective language in which Spinoza continually describes attributes, which he holds isn't accidental. Wolfson's Spinoza considers universals, with the exception of one universal, namely, substance, as subjective concepts.⁵³⁴ He points to Spinoza's claim in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* that attributes are distinguished by reason.⁵³⁵ To Wolfson, the subjective interpretation disposes of the difficulty that accompanies the objective interpretation: "How can that essence be one and self-identical, while its constituents are many, heterogeneous, and unrelated, is a question which is hopeless of solution."⁵³⁶ Wolfson points to Proposition X to seal his argument: "Each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself."⁵³⁷ The Scholium to this says:

It is evident that although two attributes may be conceived to be really distinct (i.e., one may be conceived without the aid of the other), we still can not infer from that that they constitute two beings, *or* two different substances. 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.⁵³⁸

Wolfson says: writes that this passage implies that the two attributes appear to the mind as being distinct from each other, however, in reality, they are one. This is so, argues Wolfson, because Proposition X tells us that attributes, like substance, are *summa genera* (conceived through itself). Therefore he argues that the two attributes must thus be one and identical with substance. Further, Wolfson notes that the attributes are not conceived by the mind one after the other or deduced from the other, and have always been in substance together, being conceived by us simultaneously. Thus, he urges, the attributes are only different words that express the same reality and being of substance.⁵³⁹ Wolfson holds that Spinoza follows the traditional conception of attributes found in medieval Jewish rationalism.⁵⁴⁰ In other words, Spinoza's theory of attributes reflects the following statement made by Joseph Albo:

⁵³³ Wolfson, I, 142-157. "Relation of Attribute to Substance."

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.* 152-153.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.* 153. *CM*, I, 3.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.* 153.

⁵³⁷ *Ethics*, I, Proposition X. *C* I.416.

⁵³⁸ *Ethics*, I, Proposition X, Schol. *C* I.416.

⁵³⁹ Wolfson, I, 156.

⁵⁴⁰ Wolfson, I, 142.

When I awaken from my reflections upon the plurality of attributes I begin to realize that all the attributes are nothing but intellectual conceptions of those perfections which must needs exist in Thy essence but which in reality are nothing but Thy essence.⁵⁴¹

XLIV. Objectivism

While the subjectivist account might be appealing, it has serious flaws. Spinoza is no Kantian, and the subjectivist reading presents him along very Kantian lines. The most striking problem with the subjectivist account is that it conflicts with a number of passages in the *Ethics* that indicate that attributes have real and objective existence. The subjectivist account undermines the passages in the *Ethics* that support the claims that the attributes are really distinct and that they really do constitute the essence of substance. Consider the following passage:

God (by Proposition XIX) and all of his attributes are eternal, i.e. (by Definition VIII), each of his attributes expresses existence. Therefore, the same attributes of God which (by Definition IV) explain God's eternal essence at the same time explain his eternal existence, i.e., that itself which constitutes God's essence at the same time constitutes his existence. So his existence and his essence are one and the same, q.e.d.⁵⁴²

The most persuasive argument that the attributes are really distinct is based on Spinoza's demonstration of Proposition X, that each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself:

For an attribute is what the intellect perceives concerning a substance, as constituting its essence (by Definition IV); so (by Definition III) it must be conceived through itself, q.e.d.⁵⁴³

Since it is the case that all intellects conceive of the attributes as really distinct, it follows that the infinite intellect of God must also conceive of the attributes as really distinct. Since the infinite intellect understands everything truly, it must be the case that the attributes are really distinct. But what support is there for the claim that the attributes constitute the essence of substance? In Proposition III of the second part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza says:

⁵⁴¹ *Ikkarim*, II, 25

⁵⁴² *Ethics*, I, Proposition XX, Demonstration. C I.428. Consider also *Ethics*, I, Proposition IX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, and *Ethics*, II, Proposition I and II.

⁵⁴³ *Ethics*, I, Proposition X, Demonstration. C I.416.

In God there is necessarily an idea, both of his essence and of everything that necessarily follows from his essence.⁵⁴⁴

If the subjectivist reading were correct it would follow that God misunderstands his own essence, which clearly contradicts the preceding proposition. It appears that the objectivist position has solved out problems. But, this solution generates a new problem: How can one substance have a multitude of distinct essences? Spinoza claims in the Scholium to Proposition X that “it is far from absurd to attribute many attributes to one substance.”⁵⁴⁵ This problem is notoriously complicated, and attempting to solve the many issues that arise from the problem of attributes would require a study devoted to this problem alone.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ethics*, II, Proposition III. C I.449

⁵⁴⁵ *Ethics*, I, Proposition X, Scholium. C I.416

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