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## Spinozistic expression as signification

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### ABSTRACT


I propose a new interpretation of Spinoza's obscure but important concept of 'expression'. Any account of Spinozistic expression must be able to fulfil two principal requirements. First, it must be able to accommodate all the relevant cases of 'to express' (*exprimire*) posited by Spinoza in the *Ethics*. Second, it must be able to deal with the fact that for Spinoza all instances of 'to express' are instances of 'to involve' (*involvere*). By taking both 'to express' and 'to involve' as coextensive with 'to conceive', contemporary accounts of Spinozistic expression satisfy the latter requirement, but they fail to satisfy the former. In this article, I dispute the claim that for Spinoza 'to express' is coextensive with 'to conceive'. I argue instead that Spinoza understands *exprimire* as natural signification: for Spinoza, 'to express' is coextensive with 'to be a natural sign of'. I show that this interpretation is not only able to successfully deal with both requirements of Spinozistic expression, but also offers a novel and textually supported insight to Spinoza's understanding and use of the elusive concept of 'expression'.

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### Introduction

The relation of expression is pervasive throughout the *Ethics* and plays a prominent role in Spinoza's system. In his works preceding the *Ethics*, Spinoza employs this relation to refer either to linguistic expression or to the representational nature of ideas.<sup>1</sup> This is also how most of Spinoza's contemporaries explicitly used this relation.<sup>2</sup> But since Spinoza posits that each attribute of the only substance – including Extension – expresses the essence of the

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<sup>1</sup>For example, Spinoza holds that the ideas that the intellect forms absolutely "express infinity" (TEI, 108). The abbreviation 'TEI' here refers to the *Treatise on The Emendation of The Intellect*. References refer to Paragraph.

<sup>2</sup>Hence, Rene Descartes claims that words express concepts (*Principles of Philosophy*, I.74), and Thomas Hobbes posits that that expression occurs in speech (*Elements of Philosophy*, III.1) and words (*Elements of Philosophy*, VI.11). Similar accounts can be found in Arnauld and Nicole (*Logic or the Art of Thinking*, I.11) and Franco Burgersdijk (*Monitio Logica*, I.1).

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substance, it is clear that his understanding of ‘to express’ (*exprimere*) in the *Ethics* must go beyond words and ideas. In this context, one would expect from Spinoza an explicit account of what should be understood by non-linguistic and non-mental expression. And yet he does not provide such an account. The ambiguity of the concept of expression might help to explain why the study of Spinozistic expression has been widely neglected. Although recently there have been three important attempts to shed light on Spinoza’s use of this relation,<sup>3</sup> as one commentator put it, “an account of Spinoza’s understanding of expression is still a desideratum. While the term is widely used, I am not aware of any good account of this central notion” (Melamed, “Building Blocks”, 102). The aim of this paper is to contribute to the efforts of finding such an account.

Let us begin by noting that, on close inspection, Spinoza’s use of ‘to express’ in the *Ethics* allows us to distinguish two requirements that any account of Spinoza’s understanding of *exprimere* must be able to fulfil.

Any account of Spinoza’s understanding of *exprimere* must be able to accommodate all the relevant cases of ‘to express’ posited by Spinoza. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza uses this relation in three principal ways:

### *Attribute-essence expression*

Each attribute of a substance, such as Thought or Extension, must express eternal and infinite essence.<sup>4</sup> Hence, for Spinoza each attribute:

Expresses the reality, or being of substance. (E1p10s)

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<sup>3</sup>Michael Della Rocca (“Spinoza’s Substance Monism”), Zachary Gartenberg (“Spinozistic Expression”), and Samuel Newlands (*Reconceiving Spinoza*) have recently attempted to shed some light on Spinoza’s use of this relation.

<sup>4</sup>Given the lack of articles in the Latin, it is controversial whether for Spinoza each attribute expresses *an* essence of *a* substance, *an* essence of *the* substance, *the* essence of *a* substance, *the* essence of *the* substance, *the* essence of substance, essence of *the* substance, *an* essence of substance, essence of *a* substance, or essence of substance. Arthur D. Smith (“Spinoza, Gueroult, and Substance”) follows Martial Gueroult (*Spinoza I-Dieu*) in holding that for Spinoza there is a plurality of substances and believes that each attribute expresses both *the* essence of *a* one-attribute substance and *the* essence of *the* absolutely infinite substance constituted by the sum of all one-attribute substances. Other commentators, such as Samuel Newlands (*Reconceiving Spinoza*) and Edwin Curley (*Behind the Geometrical Method*) hold that for Spinoza there is only one substance but that this substance can have several essences. For them, each attribute expresses *an* essence of *the* substance. However, for most commentators Spinoza believes that there is only one substance, and that this substance has only one essence. Thus, they hold that for Spinoza each attribute must express *the* essence of *the* only substance: God – see for example, Gilles Deleuze (*Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*), Michael Della Rocca (“Spinoza’s Substance Monism”), Yitzhak Melamed (“Building Blocks”), Zachary Gartenberg (“Spinozistic Expression”), Martin Lin (*Being and Reason*), or Tad Schmaltz (*The Metaphysics of the Material World*). Since textual evidence supports the widely accepted view that Spinoza is a substance monist and evidence for the claim that Spinoza believes that a thing can have a plurality of essences is lacking, here I follow these commentators in that for Spinoza there is only one substance, and that this substance has only one essence. If we accept this, the options on the table are as follows: either each attribute expresses *the* essence of *the* substance, *the* essence of substance, *the* essence of *a* substance – although there is only one substance – or essence of substance. The interpretation of expression that I put forward in this paper is compatible with all these readings.

Expresses eternal and infinite essence. (E1p11)

Expresses the essence of substance. (E1p14d)

Expresses the essence of the Divine substance. (E1p19d)

### *Mode-attribute expression*

Spinoza holds that each mode of an attribute expresses its attribute. For Spinoza, an idea is a mode of Thought and a body is a mode of Extension. Thus, he believes that each idea must express Thought and each body must express Extension. For example:

Singular things are modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way. (E3p6d)

By body I understand a mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God's essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing. (E2d1)

Singular thoughts, or this or that thought, are modes that express God's nature in a certain and determinate way. (E2p1)

The essence of man is an affection, or mode, which expresses God's nature in a certain and determinate way. (E2p10c)

### *Idea-body expression*

Finally, Spinoza believes that each idea must express a body:

Each mind expresses the actual existence of its related body. (E5p21d)

The ideas we have of bodies "must indicate or express a constitution of the Body". (E3ExpAffects)

The idea of an affection of the human Body expresses the nature of the body. (E2p29d)

In God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human Body, under a species of eternity. (E5p22)

Thus, although Spinoza does not explain what he means by 'to express', any cogent account of Spinozistic expression must be able to account for all Attribute-Substance Expression, Mode-Attribute Expression, and Idea-Body Expression. In what follows, I refer to this as the Range Requirement of Spinozistic expression.

A second requirement of any account of Spinozistic expression emerges because, as all three of the most influential works on Spinoza's understanding of this relation have acknowledged, for Spinoza every instance of the 'to express' relation is coextensive with an instance of the 'to involve' relation

(*involvere*).<sup>5</sup> This reading is supported by the fact that Spinoza uses the terms *involvere* and *exprimere* interchangeably. For example, he claims that an idea of an affection of a human body “does not involve adequate knowledge of the Body itself, or does not express its nature adequately” (E2p29d). Spinoza also posits that “by God’s attributes are to be understood what (by E1d4) expresses an essence of the Divine substance, i.e. what pertains to substance. The attributes themselves, I say, must involve it itself” (E1p19d). Moreover, he claims that “the formal being of ideas is a mode of thinking ... that expresses, in a certain way, God’s nature insofar as he is a thinking thing. And so (by E1p10) it involves the concept of no other attribute of God” (E2p5d). From this reading it follows that a cogent account of Spinozistic expression must be consistent with the fact that for Spinoza each instance of *exprimere* in the Range Requirement of expression is coextensive with an instance of *involvere*. In what follows, I refer to this as the Involving Requirement of Spinozistic expression.

Any account of Spinozistic expression must be able to satisfy both its Range Requirement and its Involving Requirement. The plan for this paper is as follows. In Section 2, I show that by rendering ‘to express’, ‘to involve’, and ‘to conceive’ as coextensive, the accounts of Della Rocca, Newlands and Deleuze satisfy the Involving Requirement of Spinozistic expression but fail to satisfy Spinoza’s Range Requirement of expression. Thus, I contend that these accounts are all unsatisfactory. In Section 3, I present my account of Spinozistic expression. I defend the claim that for Spinoza a thing expresses another thing if and only if the former thing is a natural sign of the latter. Since a natural sign is not sufficient for adequately conceiving the thing signified, for Spinoza, expressing cannot be coextensive with conceiving. In Section 4, I argue that my account of expression as natural signification successfully deals with the Range Requirement of Spinozistic expression. Finally, in Section 5, I posit that Spinoza understands ‘to involve’ as a necessary natural connection between two things that can be instantiated by diverse metaphysical relations. I show that since under this reading ‘to express’ and ‘to involve’ are coextensive, my account is also consistent with the Involving Requirement of Spinozistic expression.

## Della Rocca, Newlands, and Deleuze on expression and conception

Michael Della Rocca, Samuel Newlands, and Gilles Deleuze are amongst the few Spinoza scholars that have explicitly engaged in clarifying the nature

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<sup>5</sup>Both Michael Della Rocca (“Spinoza’s Substance Monism”) and Samuel Newlands (*Reconceiving Spinoza*) posit that for Spinoza ‘to express’ and ‘to involve’ are coextensive. However, as it will later be clear, Newlands’ understanding of *involvere* differs from that of Della Rocca.

of Spinozistic expression. All hold that for Spinoza ‘to express’ is coextensive with ‘to conceive’. Crucially, they do so because they believe that for Spinoza the ‘to involve’ relation is coextensive with the ‘to conceive’ relation.<sup>6</sup> In this section, I show that although these interpretations obviously satisfy the Involving Requirement, they fail to satisfy the Range requirement of Spinozistic Expression.

### *Della Rocca’s interpretation*

Della Rocca (“Spinoza’s Substance Monism”, 20) believes that Spinoza accepts the following claim:

x involves y if and only if x is sufficient for conceiving y.<sup>7</sup>

Della Rocca holds that for Spinoza the claim that x is sufficient for conceiving y should be read as the claim that the concept of x must be formed through the concept of y (“Spinoza’s Substance Monism”, 18).<sup>8</sup> This claim is in turn equivalent to the claim that x is explained by, or in terms of y. Thus, for Spinoza the fact that a substance is conceived through itself should be read as the fact that it is self-explanatory. Now, to support the equivalence between ‘to involve’ and ‘to conceive’, Della Rocca points us towards Spinoza’s claim that two substances with different attributes have nothing in common (“Spinoza’s Substance Monism”, 18). Spinoza demonstrates this by equating the claims that a substance, by definition (E1d3), must be conceived through itself and thus that “each [substance] must be in itself and be conceived through itself, or the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other” (E1p2d). Della Rocca reads this as entailing that x is conceived through y if and only if x involves y and thus that ‘to involve’ and ‘to be conceived through’ must be coextensive. Since *exprimere* and *involvere* are

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<sup>6</sup>However, as it will later be clear, their understanding of the meaning of *involvere* is different.

<sup>7</sup>Zachary Gartenberg has recently provided a refined version of Della Rocca’s formulation:

Necessarily, x expresses y if and only if x is sufficient for conceiving of y.

Gartenberg explains this as follows: “for any object x and property  $\phi$ ,  $\phi$  expresses (the essence of) x just in case: (i) x is  $\phi$  and (ii) there is a determinate conception,  $\psi$ , such that the parameters for individuating  $\psi$  correspond to the parameters for individuating  $\phi$ ” (“Spinozistic Expression”, 5). Hence, the facts that  $\phi$  is a property of x and that  $\phi$  is isomorphic to  $\psi$  are both constitutive of what it is for Extension to be an expression of (the essence of) x. For Gartenberg this formulation reflects the fact that although ‘to express’ and ‘to conceive’ are coextensive, it is not the case that everything that is true of one is true of the other. Although Gartenberg’s provides a rich view on the properties of expression, since for him expression is sufficient for conceiving, for the purposes of this section what is relevant is that his account is subject to the same objections as Della Rocca’s.

<sup>8</sup>Della Rocca believes that the ‘to involve’ relation holds only between concepts. By ‘concept’ I will understand here an idea. One consequence of this reading is that all involving relations hold only between modes of Thought. Thus, the claim that my body involves Extension should be read as the claim that an idea of my body involves an idea of Extension. This is consistent with Della Rocca’s idealistic account of the attributes. I agree with Della Rocca in that Spinoza equates the conceptual and the psychological but, as will later be clear, I disagree in that for Spinoza ‘to involve’ and ‘to conceive’ are coextensive.

also coextensive, 'to express' and 'to conceive' must also be coextensive. Crucially, Della Rocca believes that for Spinoza 'x is conceived through y' means that the concept of y is necessary for the concept of x. For example, if a mode is conceived through an attribute, then the concept of that attribute is necessary for conceiving of that mode. In turn, this entails that the concept of that mode is sufficient for conceiving of that attribute.

Illuminating as it is, Della Rocca's account fails to satisfy two instances of the Range Requirement of Spinozistic expression: Attribute-Essence Expression and Idea-Body Expression. Let us begin with the former. On Della Rocca's reading Spinoza's claim that each attribute expresses the essence of God means that each attribute is sufficient for conceiving of God's essence – and hence that each attribute is sufficient for explaining that essence. But then conceiving of the essence of God, must be necessary for conceiving of that attribute. Thus, on this reading it would be necessary to conceive of an essence consisting of all attributes to conceive or explain each attribute. The problem is that Spinoza believes that each attribute is conceived through itself; that is, each attribute is self-explanatory (E1p10s). Consequently, Della Rocca's account cannot accommodate Attribute-Essence expression.

Let us turn now to Idea-Body Expression. Under Della Rocca's reading this can be translated as the claim that the concept of the mind is formed through the concept of the body. If we frame expression only in this way, then this relation would be limited to concepts; that is, to the realm of modes of Thought. Under this reading the mind would never express a mode of Extension. The problem with the reading is that it restricts Mind-Body expression to the relation between a second order and a first order idea. But Spinoza explicitly posits that each mind expresses the actual existence of its related body (E5p21d). Thus, the relation of expression holds between a mind and a body, and not only between a concept of the body and a concept of that concept.

### *Newlands' interpretation*

Newlands agrees with Della Rocca that for Spinoza 'to express' and 'to involve' are coextensive with 'to conceive'. However, Newlands' understanding of *involvere* differs from that of Della Rocca.<sup>9</sup> Newlands believes that for Spinoza, x involves y if and only if the concept of x is contained in the concept of y. Newlands (*Reconceiving Spinoza*, 24 n. 32) believes that his reading of 'to involve' fits well with one of the possible translations of

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<sup>9</sup>For Newlands, 'to conceive' is an attribute-neutral relation and hence is not restricted to the attribute of Thought (*Reconceiving Spinoza*, 247). I believe that Della Rocca has convincingly shown that Newlands' separation between the conceptual and the psychological is not sufficiently supported by the text and comes with a high cost ("Rationalism", 14). However, the objections that I raise in this section against Newlands' account are not based on his understanding of the nature of the conceptual, but on his notion of *containment*.

*involvere*, which is 'to wrap-up' or 'to contain'. And from this translation it follows that the claim that a mode is involved in its attribute means that the concept of that mode is contained in the concept of that attribute. Since 'to express' is coextensive with 'to involve', for Newlands it follows that

whenever *x* expresses *y*, *x* is conceived through *y* and the feature of *y* that *x* expresses is contained in the concept of *y*.

*(Reconceiving Spinoza, 23)*

Newlands' account satisfies the Mode-Attribute instance of the Range Requirement of Spinozistic expression. A mode both expresses and is contained in the concept of its attribute. Crucially, Newlands' account also satisfies the Attribute-Essence instance of the Range Requirement. On this reading, the claim that each attribute expresses the essence of God is coextensive with the claim that each attribute is involved or contained in the concept of God. This seems correct, for Spinoza defines God as the substance consisting of all attributes.

But Newlands' reading does not satisfy Idea-Body expression. To see why this is so, note that under Newlands' interpretation, this instance of the Range Requirement of Spinozistic expression would be translated as follows: whenever my mind expresses my body, (a) my mind is conceived through my body and (b) the feature of my body that my mind expresses is contained in the concept of my body. There are two principal problems with this reading. First, according to this, an idea of a body – my mind – must be conceived through that body. The problem is that it is not clear how a mind can be conceived through a body. Moreover, given the conceptual barrier between attributes, this seems impossible – as we have seen, for Spinoza a mode can only be conceived through its attribute (E2p6d). Second, according to this reading the feature of my body that my mind expresses is contained in the concept of my body. This would amount to saying that the feature of my body that my mind expresses is contained in my mind, for Spinoza believes that my mind is the concept of my body. But a feature of the body can only be contained in a mind objectively; that is, as a mode of Thought. Thus, we find ourselves again with the unacceptable outcome that Spinoza's claim that the mind expresses the body should be read as the claim that a mode of Thought expresses another mode of Thought.

### *Deleuze's interpretation*

According to Gilles Deleuze, for Spinoza the expression relation has two aspects: to explicate and to implicate or to involve. Consider the case of *x* expressing *y*. According to Deleuze (*Expressionism in Philosophy*, 16), this would mean that *x* somehow *unfolds y*, whereas *y* remains *imprinted* in *x*. Unfortunately, Deleuze does not provide much detail on exactly how these terms such be understood. But note that since under this account my body



*unfolds* the attribute of Extension and the attribute is somehow *imprinted* in my body, and given that Spinoza believes that mode follows from its attribute and that the mode cannot be conceived without its attribute, Deleuze's reading seems to accommodate Mode-Attribute expression.

It is, however, less clear that Deleuze's account satisfies Attribute-Essence expression. The claim that an attribute *unfolds* God's essence cannot be read in the same sense as the claim that a mode unfolds an attribute. For Spinoza, modes follow from their attribute, but attributes do not follow from God's essence. Rather, they somehow constitute this essence. More problematic still is the claim that God's essence remains *imprinted* in each attribute. Spinoza believes that God consists of all attributes. But I find it hard to see in what sense all attributes could remain *imprinted* in each attribute.

Let us turn now to Idea-Body expression. Since my mind is an idea that represents my body, there is a relevant sense in which my body is *imprinted* in my mind. The same does not seem to be true, however, for the claim that my mind *unfolds* my body, since Spinoza believes that there is a conceptual and causal barrier between attributes. It could be argued that it is not the case that my mind does not unfold my body, but only the concept of my body. But as we have seen, Spinoza believes that an idea expresses the existence of a body, and not only the concept of the body. It then seems that Deleuze's account of expression fails to satisfy the Idea-Body expression.

## Expression as signification

I have argued that, by making *concupere* coextensive with *involvere* and hence with *exprimere*, the interpretations of Della Rocca, Newlands, and Deleuze fail to accommodate the Range Requirement of Spinozistic expression. In what follows, I provide an account of Spinoza's understanding of *exprimere* that is not coextensive with *concupere* and that is both consistent with the Involving Requirement and the Range requirement of Spinozistic expression. I begin by showing in the next section that Spinoza understands all instances of expression, including those that are non-linguistic and non-mental, as signification; that is, as the indication or manifestation of one thing by a sign. I posit that, if this is so, for Spinoza natural expression must exhibit the main characteristics of natural signification. In the following sections, I show that, when these characteristics are considered, both the range requirement and the involving requirement of Spinozistic expression are satisfied.

## Linguistic expression

Let us begin by acknowledging that Spinoza recognizes both linguistic expression and non-linguistic expression. Linguistic expression is the

expression of ideas or things by words. Thus, if  $x$  linguistically expresses  $y$ ,  $x$  must be a word. Linguistic expression is recognized by some of the most prominent philosophers of Spinoza's time, including some of Spinoza's main influences, such as Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, Franco Burgersdijk, Rene Descartes, and Thomas Hobbes. Crucially, Spinoza also uses *exprimere* in this sense. For example, he posits that words might express things positively or negatively (TEI, 96) and he refers to the relation between parables and the expressive aspect of scripture (Ep.21).

But what does it mean for a word to express an idea? Let us begin by considering that in Spinoza's time linguistic expression was commonly used as equivalent of linguistic signification. This equivalence is accepted by Descartes in the second set of replies of the *Meditations*. Descartes posits there that by 'idea' he understands

the form of any given thought, immediate perception of which makes me aware of the thought. Hence, whenever I *express something in words*, and understand what I am saying, this very fact makes it certain that there is within me *an idea of what is signified by the words* in question.

(CSM II, 113. Emphasis added)

To illustrate what he understands by idea, in this passage Descartes says that when he expresses something in words, and if he understands what he is saying, he can be certain that these words signify an idea. Consider a case in which Descartes utters the words 'the sun'. According to Descartes, if he understands what he says, he can be certain that the words 'the sun' signify his idea of the sun. If 'the sun' is a linguistic expression, then this must be a sign of some idea – the idea of the sun. Conversely, if the idea of the sun has 'the sun' as its verbal sign, then the words 'the sun' must express the idea of the sun.

The equivalence between linguistic signification and linguistic expression is also recognized by Burgersdijk when discussing axioms, such as 'the whole is greater than its part'. According to Burgersdijk, in these cases,

*knowing only the Signification of the Words by which they are express'd*, the Truth of them cannot but be apparent. For he who knows what signifies a Whole, and what a Part, and what to be greater, cannot be ignorant that a Whole is greater than a Part, &c.

(*Monitio Logica*, II.23. Emphasis added)

Here, Burgersdijk is saying that knowing that the words 'the whole is greater than its part' are a sign of the idea that the whole is greater than its part is sufficient for accepting that what these words express is a true idea. But knowing that the words 'the whole is greater than its part' express the idea that the whole is greater than its part is necessary to knowing that these words are a sign of that idea.

Crucially, Spinoza accepts this equivalence in the following passage:

[names] are established according to the pleasure and power of understanding of ordinary people, so that they are only *signs* of things as they are in the imagination, but not as they are in the intellect. This is clear from the fact that the names given to things that are only in the intellect, and not in the imagination, are often negative (for example, infinite, incorporeal, etc.), and also from the fact that they *express* negatively many things that are really affirmative, and conversely (for example, uncreated, independent, infinite, immortal).

(TEI, 89)

Spinoza is discussing here the fact that words can cause many errors. The problem is that some names have been designated as signs of things as they are in the imagination and not as they are in the intellect; that is, some names signify modes of thought that do not correspond to things in reality. From this fact, Spinoza concludes that in some cases words can only express negatively things as they are in the intellect. Thus, the claim that some words are signs of things in the mind that do not correspond to things in reality is treated as equivalent to the claim that some words express things only as they are in the mind and not as they are in reality.

We have seen that in Spinoza's time the claim that *x* linguistically expresses *y* was treated as equivalent to the claim that *x* linguistically signifies *y*, and that Spinoza accepts this equivalence. This is illuminating, since although the nature of expression was not explicitly analysed by Spinoza's contemporaries, the nature of signification was thoroughly discussed. The notion of 'sign' available in Spinoza's time has its origins in Augustine. For Augustine, "a sign is a thing which of itself makes some other thing come to mind besides the impression that it presents to the senses" (*On Christian Teaching*, II). In Scholastic philosophy, an influential account of signs was that of Roger Bacon, who posits that a sign "is something that, once presented to a sensory faculty or an intellect, designates something to that intellect" (*On Signs*, I.1). The relation between sign and signified is thus a relation between one thing – the sign – whose existence makes present or manifests another thing – the signified. This much of the general understanding of signs of Augustine and Bacon was preserved amongst some of Spinoza's most notable contemporaries whose works were part of his library. Thus, for Hobbes, in order to communicate what is learned it is necessary "that there be certain signs, by which what one man finds out may be manifested and made known to others" (*Elements of Philosophy*, I.2). This notion of signs is also present in Johannes Clauberg, who believed that "the sign is that which makes known or indicates some thing" (quoted in Savini, *Johannes Clauberg*, 250). In the same line, for Arnauld and Nicole "the nature of the sign consists in prompting in the senses the idea of the thing symbolized by means of the idea of the symbol" (*Logic*, I.4). In all cases, the principal characteristic of any sign is to indicate or manifest another thing: the thing signified. Thus, if linguistic signification and linguistic expression are

equivalent, we can conclude that *x* expresses *y* if and only if *x* indicates or manifests *y*, where *x* is a placeholder for a word and *y* for an idea.

### Natural expression

We have seen that for Spinoza and his contemporaries linguistic signification was considered equivalent to linguistic expression. We have also seen that to express something linguistically should be understood as to indicate or manifest that thing with words. But the instances in the Range Requirement of Spinozistic expression are not merely linguistic. Is natural expression also equivalent to signification? I argue that it is.

Spinoza seems to accept the equivalence between natural signification and natural expression when he says that that the ideas we have of bodies “must *indicate* or *express* a constitution of the Body”. Further support that he accepts this equivalence appears when we consider the claim that “it follows clearly that sins, because they *indicate* nothing but imperfection, cannot consist in something that *expresses* essence, as Adam’s decision or its execution do” (Ep.19). Here an instance of an indication that is not linguistic is being equated with an instance of expression. Moreover, Spinoza refers to affects both as signs and as expressions in similar contexts. Thus, he says that “For whenever anyone imagines his own actions, he is affected with Joy (by P53), and with a greater Joy, the more his actions express perfection ...” (E3p55s) and he also claims that “tears, sighs, fear, and other things of that kind ... are signs of a weak mind” (E4p45c2s), and that “Confidence and Despair, Gladness and Remorse are signs of a mind lacking in power” (E4p47s).

Spinoza’s acceptance of the equivalence between expression and signification beyond linguistic expression should not come as a surprise. This is consistent with the Latin etymology of *exprimere*, since one of the principal senses of this term is ‘to manifest’.<sup>10</sup> Hence, just as smoke ‘indicates’, ‘reveals’, or ‘manifests’ fire, each mind ‘indicates’, ‘reveals’, or ‘manifests’ the body to which it is naturally connected. Moreover, at least one prominent philosopher of Spinoza’s time also seems to accept this equivalence. According to Leibniz:

It is also clear that some expressions have a basis in *nature*, while others are *arbitrary*, at least in part, such as the expressions which consist of words or characters. Those which are founded in nature either require some similarity, such as that between a large and a small circle or that between a geographic region and a map of the region, or require some connection such as that between a circle and the ellipse which represents it optically, since any point whatever on the

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<sup>10</sup>Both Deleuze (*Expressionism*, 15) and Gartenberg (“Spinozistic Expression”, 2 n. 2) point towards the Latin etymology of *exprimere* to show how for Spinoza ‘to express’ may well be synonymous with ‘to manifest’.

ellipse corresponds to some point on the circle according to a definite law ...  
 Similarly every entire effect represents the whole cause, for I can always pass  
 from the knowledge of such an effect to a knowledge of its cause.  
 (*Philosophical Papers and Letters*, G. VII, 263–64)<sup>11</sup>

Leibniz's division of expression in arbitrary and natural expression and his chosen terminology in this passage are almost identical to the taxonomy of signs available to Spinoza. According to Clauberg (*Old and New Logic*, I.7.82) and Arnauld and Nicole (*Logic*, I.4), there are two ways in which signs can be classified: according to their origin, signs can be divided between *conventional* or *arbitrary signs*, on the one hand, and *natural signs*, on the other.<sup>12</sup> Whereas the words involved in linguistic expression are considered paradigmatic cases of conventional or *arbitrary signs*, natural objects are considered paradigmatic cases of non-linguistic or *natural signs*.

The equivalence between natural signification and natural expression seems to be accepted by Spinoza, is consistent with the etymology of *exprimere*, and is implied in Leibniz's between *natural* and *arbitrary* expression and his chosen terminology. Acknowledging this equivalence sheds an important light on Spinoza's obscure concept of expression. If x naturally expresses y if and only if x is a natural sign of y, then the main characteristics of *natural signs* must belong to x. But what are the main characteristics of *natural signs*? First, *natural signs* indicate, reveal, or manifest in virtue of their own nature. This contrasts with *arbitrary signs*, which indicate or manifest a thing because they have been instituted or assigned that role by an intellect in a social context. Thus, for Clauberg:

smoke is the *natural sign* of fire, because through its own nature it [smoke] represents it [fire]. But ivy is an *arbitrary sign* that there is wine for sale, because it has been instituted for that signification by an intellectual cause.  
 (*Old and New Logic*, I.7.82)<sup>13</sup>

And for Arnauld and Nicole:

[natural signs] do not depend on human fancy, as an image that appears in a mirror is a *natural sign* of what it represents, and others that are only instituted or conventional, whether they bear some distant relation to the thing symbolized or none at all. Thus words are *conventional signs* of thoughts, and characters are conventional signs of words.

(*Logic*, I.4)

'The sun is a star', the words that signify my idea that the sun is a star, have been conventionally instituted to indicate that idea. Thus, this is an

<sup>11</sup> Leibniz wrote this passage shortly after meeting Spinoza.

<sup>12</sup> This classification is also recognized by Augustine (*On Christian Teaching*, II), Roger Bacon (*On Signs*, I.1), and Hobbes (*Elements of Philosophy*, I.2).

<sup>13</sup> This example seems to have been taken from Augustine (*On Christian Teaching*, II).

example of an *arbitrary sign*. But smoke is a *natural sign* of fire because it indicates or manifests fire in virtue of its own nature, and not due to the intellect designating smoke as the sign of fire. Clouds are a sign of rain because by their nature they are linked to rain, and not because some intellect has assigned that role to them. Thus, the first characteristic of natural signification is:

### *Naturalness*

A *natural sign* is so in virtue of its nature, and not because an intellect, based on convention or arbitrarily, has assigned this role to it.

Now, a *natural sign* must be regularly linked or connected to the thing signified. For Arnauld and Nicole some *natural signs* can be evidence of what they signify, for example, ‘breathing is a sign of life in animals’ and facial expressions are signs of movements in the soul, while other signs are probable, for example, “pallor is only a probable sign of pregnancy in women” (*Logic*, I.4). For Hobbes, “those things we call SIGNS are the *antecedents of their consequents, and the consequents of their antecedents, as often as we observe them to go before or follow after in the same manner*”, and thus

a thick cloud is a sign of rain to follow, and rain a sign that a cloud has gone before, for this reason only, that we seldom see clouds without the consequence of rain, nor rain at any time but when a cloud has gone before.

*(Elements of Philosophy, I.2)*

Let us call this characteristic:

### *Connection*

A *natural sign* must be naturally connected to the thing signified.

Crucially, *natural signs* indicate things, but they are not necessarily conceptual. For example, smoke indicates fire without being an idea of fire. Thus, a conceptual connection is not necessary for natural signification. Of course, an idea – or concept – can be a natural sign. A true and adequate idea of the Sun indicates the existence of the Sun. But it is important to acknowledge that from the fact that an idea indicates a thing it does not follow that this is an adequate of that thing. For example, my adequate idea of the Sun both signifies and adequately represents the Sun. But since there is a natural connection between each attribute and its modes, my idea of the Sun – just as any other idea of mine – also indicates my mind. But from this it does not follow that my idea of the Sun is an adequate idea of my mind.<sup>14</sup> Thus, an idea can express a thing, without that idea thereby being an adequate idea or conception of that thing. Call this characteristic:

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<sup>14</sup>Burgersdijk’s distinction between *formal* and *material signs* (*Inst. Met* I.28) can help making this point clearer. My concept of the sun is a *formal sign* of the sun insofar as it represents the sun. However, my concept of the sun is also a *material sign* of my mind: it indicates my mind without representing it.

### *Inadequate knowledge*

It is not necessarily the case that through a *natural sign* one can know the essence of what is signified.

### *The properties of expression*

Let me conclude this section by noting that it can be argued that if expression and signification are equivalent, they must share the same formal properties. But is this the case? I believe that this question can be answered in the affirmative. First, both expression and signification are transitive. Spinoza believes that my mind expresses Thought and that this attribute expresses the essence of God, and he also says that each mode expresses God. By the same token, following Arnauld and Nicole, one could say that since smoke is a sign of fire and fire is a sign of oxygen, smoke is a sign of oxygen. Second, both Spinoza's use of expression in the *Ethics* and the most common understanding of signification of his time present these relations as non-symmetrical. Thus, Spinoza says that a mode expresses an attribute and that an attribute expresses God's essence, but he does not say that an attribute expresses a mode or that God's essence expresses an attribute. The same is true for the example of smoke and fire mentioned in most accounts of signification available to Spinoza.<sup>15</sup> Finally, both expression and signification are reflexive under the same condition. Arnauld and Nicole admit for the possibility of a thing being a sign of itself but only insofar as the same thing is presented to the mind in two different states. For them, "the same thing in a particular state can be the symbol and in another state the thing symbolized" (*Logic*, I.4). Thus, they hold that man preaching can be a symbol of a man in a room. By the same token, Spinoza believes that the things that express and the things being expressed are all properties of one and the same thing: God.

To sum up, I have shown that for Spinoza 'to express' and 'to signify' are equivalent. Crucially, this equivalence applies both to linguistic and natural expression. If this is so, then for Spinoza natural or non-linguistic expression must have the characteristics of natural signification. In what follows, I show that my reading of expression as equivalent to natural signification can successfully accommodate both the Range Requirement and the Involving Requirement of Spinozistic expression.

### **Natural signification and the range requirement of Spinozistic expression**

In this section, I defend the claim that we can successfully deal with the two principal requirements of Spinozistic expression by considering the principal

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<sup>15</sup>This example is presented in what seems to be a non-symmetrical fashion by Arnauld and Nicole (*Logic*, I.4); Bacon (*On Signs*, I.1); and Clauberg (*Old and New Logic*, I.7). An exception here seems to be Hobbes (*Elements of Philosophy*, I.2).

characteristics of natural signification (i) *Naturalness*, (ii) *Connection*, and (iii) *Inadequate knowledge*. I begin by showing in this section how this account accommodates the Range Requirement of Spinozistic Expression. In the next section, I turn to its Involving Requirement.

### *Attribute-essence expression*

As we have seen, the interpretation of Della Rocca fails to accommodate Attribute-Essence expression. I suggest that this problem is solved once we acknowledge that Spinozistic expression shares the main characteristics of natural signification.

- (i) Note that the fact that there is an attribute does naturally indicate or signify that there is an eternal essence. Since each attribute is an attribute of a substance, from the fact that there is one attribute one can infer that there is a substance. For example, if an intellect perceives Extension, that intellect can infer that there must be a substance whose essence is constituted by that attribute. The same goes for Thought and every other attribute.<sup>16</sup> Thought and Extension are each individually sufficient for indicating that there is an eternal and infinite essence, and they do so in virtue of their nature as attributes, and not in virtue of convention. This reading is consistent with the last paragraph of E1p10s, where Spinoza says that “if someone now asks by what *sign* [*signum*] we shall be able to distinguish the diversity of substances, let him read the following propositions, which show that in Nature there exists only one substance, and that it is absolutely infinite. So that *sign* [*signum*] would be sought in vain”. This passage follows Spinoza’s explanation that from our *conception* of two attributes “we still cannot infer from that that they constitute two beings, or two different substances” because “each *expresses* the reality, or being of substance” (E1p10s. Emphasis added). To illustrate, call a substance with Thought and Extension as its two sole attributes *STE*, and two substances each with one of these attributes, *ST* and *SE*. If each attribute is sufficient for conceiving of the essence of a substance, as Della Rocca suggests, then through the knowledge of the attribute of Thought the intellect would know whether the substance expressed by Thought is *STE* or *ST*. But what Spinoza holds in this passage is that our knowledge of Thought cannot give us this knowledge. Spinoza says here that although Thought *expresses* eternal and infinite essence, this attribute

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<sup>16</sup>In turn, the fact that there must be an attribute is indicated by its modes (E2p1 and E2p2).



alone cannot give us knowledge of *STE*. And the same goes for Extension.<sup>17</sup>

- (ii) It is certainly the case that each attribute is naturally connected to God's essence. This must be so because each attribute constitutes an eternal and infinite essence (E1d4).<sup>18</sup> It can be objected that the connection between an attribute and an essence is radically different from that between fire and smoke or between a cloud and rain. In these examples the natural link between sign and signified is a causal connection. But for Spinoza an attribute is not an effect of a substance. However, recall that the link between a natural sign and what this signifies does not need to be causal; it is sufficient that there is a natural connection between them. Thus, for Arnauld and Nicole "facial expressions, which are signs of movements in the soul, are *joined* to the emotions they signify" (*Logic*, I.4. My emphasis), but they do not believe that these are caused by the movements of the soul. For Spinoza, each attribute is connected to a substance because each attribute must somehow constitute the essence of a substance. In this way, each attribute indicates the essence of substance and thus that there is a substance. What we have here, then, is an instance of an essence of a substance indicating itself through each of its attributes.<sup>19</sup>
- (iii) From the fact that an attribute expresses the eternal essence of a substance, it does not necessarily follow that the knowledge of that attribute gives adequate knowledge of that essence, as Della Rocca posits. All one can infer is that an attribute is a necessary indication of eternal and infinite essence. Consequently, my interpretation avoids the objection faced by Della Rocca's account that one can conceive a substance whose essence consists of all attributes through one of its attributes considered in isolation from the rest. A substance can only be adequately conceived through the sum of all its attributes.<sup>20</sup> To put it differently, although each attribute is sufficient for indicating

<sup>17</sup>Another way of reading E1p10 is negatively: since there is not a plurality of substances – as Spinoza is about to show in E1p11 – any attribute expresses the essence of the substance and not different essences of different substances. However, I believe that since in E1p10 he has not yet established substance monism, it is preferable to read this proposition in its own terms.

<sup>18</sup>I remain agnostic as to Spinoza's understanding of the relation of constitution and follow Della Rocca in that for Spinoza attributes *somehow* constitute the essence of substance ("Spinoza's Substance Monism", 19). I assume that the concept of an attribute at least tracks down something pre-existing in the substance (e.g. Melamed, "Building Blocks") and is not something purely subjective. Since on my reading expression and conception part ways, my interpretation has the additional advantage of making the 'to express' relation compatible with objectivist readings of the attributes.

<sup>19</sup>Both Johannes Clauberg (qtd. in Savini, *Johannes Clauberg*, 250–1), and Arnauld and Nicole (*Logic*, I.4) accept that a thing can be a natural sign of itself.

<sup>20</sup>Hence, my interpretation avoids Noa Shein's Illusory Knowledge objection against objectivists ("False Dichotomy"). This is so because my claim is not that substance cannot be known through its attributes, but that a substance can only be known through the totality of its attributes.

God and necessary for conceiving God, in isolation of all other attributes no attribute is sufficient for adequately conceiving of God; that is, for conceiving God's essence.<sup>21</sup>

### *Mode-attribute expression*

Let us now see if my interpretation of expression as natural signification can accommodate Spinoza's claim that the modes of an attribute expresses that attribute.

- (i) Notice first that if my reading is correct, for Spinoza each mode naturally indicates its attribute. Since each mode must be a mode of an attribute, the existence of a mode naturally signifies or manifests to the intellect the existence of an attribute.<sup>22</sup> Thus, my body does not manifest or indicates Extension because this role has been conventionally or arbitrarily assigned to it. Rather, my body manifests Extension in virtue of its own nature; that is, because it is the nature of my body to be an affection of Extension.
- (ii) There must be a natural connection between a mode and an attribute that makes it the case that that mode indicates that attribute. For Spinoza the modes of an attribute follow necessarily from that attribute. Consequently, the existence of a mode indicates or manifests the existence of an attribute.
- (iii) From the fact that a body indicates Extension it does not follow that this body is sufficient for conceiving of that attribute. Just as I can know that smoke indicates fire in virtue of their causal link, without having an adequate concept of smoke or an adequate concept of fire, I can know that each body, in virtue of depending upon an attribute for its being, manifests that upon which it depends without knowing adequately the nature of either thing. Spinoza believes that each body expresses the attribute of Extension. Since bodies are not in themselves and cannot be conceived through themselves, from the existence of each body, I can infer that there must be some thing from which that body has followed – something in which that body is and through which it can be conceived.<sup>23</sup> But from the

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<sup>21</sup>This is compatible with Melamed's claim that Spinoza is following Suárez and distinguishes attributes by reasoned reason – a distinction that is recognized by the intellect as pre-existing in nature ("Building Blocks", 102). It is also consistent with the fact, not recognized by Melamed, that Suárez believes that a distinction of reasoned reason must involve inadequate conceptions of what is being thus distinguished (DM 7, I. 5).

<sup>22</sup>This seems to be Spinoza's route in E2p1 and E2p2.

<sup>23</sup>Note that from the existence of a finite mode one can also infer the existence of other finite modes. One can even press this point further and argue that a finite mode indicates all other finite modes. Shein has convincingly argued that finite modes are in one sense infinite, since they "actively partially

existence of a body alone I cannot adequately know *what is* that thing from which a body follows. For example, although the existence of the wax indicates a further thing, the existence of the wax is not sufficient for us forming an adequate conception of that further thing. To do this, we need to conceive that thing – Extension – through itself. Moreover, it is only through the concept of Extension that we can form an adequate concept of the wax. I suggest that this consistent with what Spinoza says in the following passage: “There is the Perception that we have when the essence of a thing is inferred from another thing, but not adequately. This happens, either when we infer the cause from some effect, or when something is inferred from some universal, which some property always accompanies” (TEI, 19). Spinoza expands on this in a footnote to this passage:

When this happens, we understand nothing about the cause except what we consider in the effect. This is sufficiently evident from the fact that then the cause is explained only in very general terms, e.g. *Therefore there is something, Therefore there is some power, etc.* Or also from the fact that the terms express the cause negatively, *Therefore it is not this, or that, etc.* In the second case something clearly conceived is attributed to the cause on.

(TEI, 19, footnote f)

Here, Spinoza explains that an inference from effect to cause does not provide adequate knowledge of essences.<sup>24</sup> An idea is produced by an attribute and this manifests, indicates, or reveals that there must be that attribute. But an attribute can only be adequately conceived through itself, and it is only through an attribute that one can adequately conceive of a mode. Thus, the effects of God, produced by each of its attributes, express the active nature of each attribute. However, no single mode is sufficient for having an adequate concept of its attribute. Each attribute must be conceived through itself.

### *Idea-body expression*

Both the interpretations of Della Rocca and Newlands fail to accommodate Idea-Body expression. I suggest that this problem is solved once we acknowledge that Spinozistic expression shares the main characteristics of natural signification. On my reading, the claim that the mind expresses the body should be understood as the claim that the existence of my mind naturally

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determine the totality of finite modes” (“Not Wholly Finite”, 438). If this is so, each finite mode of Extension, indicates the face of the whole universe.

<sup>24</sup>It will later be clear that on my reading this does not conflict with E1a4, the claim that “the knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause”, because I do not believe that for Spinoza the ‘to involve’ relation is an umbrella term for different metaphysical relations, and not necessarily a conceptual relation.

signifies or indicates the existence of my body; that is, that each mind manifests a body.

- (i) The existence of my mind indicates the existence of my body in virtue of its own nature, and not in virtue of convention.
- (ii) My mind must be a sign of my body, there must be a natural connection between my mind and my body that goes beyond mere necessary coexistence.

Note that both (i) and (ii) are satisfied because Spinoza posits things follow in the same order from each attribute, then to every mode of Thought corresponds to a mode of Extension (E2p7). Hence, from the existence of any mode of an attribute we can infer the existence of a parallel mode in each of the remaining attributes. In this way, from the existence of my mind – a mode of Thought – I can infer the existence of a mode that occupies the same position in the order of Extension – my body.<sup>25</sup> Crucially, the natural connection between the mind and the body obtains due to the doctrine of parallelism. For Spinoza, in each attribute we find “one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes, i.e. that the same things follow one another” (E2p7s). This sameness in order guarantees that to each mode of an attribute necessarily corresponds a mode in each of all other attributes.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the natural connection between modes of different attributes is not constitution or causation, but the fact that they occupy an analogous ‘position’ in the order and connection of things.<sup>27</sup>

- (iii) If expression is understood as natural signification, the existence of a mode of an attribute must indicate the existence of mode of another attribute without necessarily giving adequate knowledge of that mode. Note that this is obviously true. We have seen that Spinoza believes that each mode is conceived through an attribute and that each mode is only known through its attribute. Thus, from the fact that the existence of my mind indicates the existence of my body, it does not follow that my body can only be conceived through my mind: my body can only be conceived through the attribute of Extension. Consequently, my reading

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<sup>25</sup>In this, my reading of parallelism seems close to that of Gueroult (*Spinoza II-L’Ame*, 64–91). However, a crucial distinction here is that my interpretation does not posit a plurality of substances.

<sup>26</sup>Spinoza believes that in the case of my mind and my body there is also an intentional connection. I do not deal with this connection for two reasons. First, I believe that for Spinoza this obtains in part in virtue of the same order and connection of things (E2p13s). Second, since it does not depend on the intentional connection between ideas and things, my account of Mind-Body expression can apply in principle to modes of any attribute.

<sup>27</sup>Here, I adopt Chantal Jaquet’s view (*Affects*, 18) that for Spinoza modes of different attributes, such as my mind and my body, concur logically and chronologically in virtue of the equality of their power – or, to borrow Della Rocca’s term, in virtue of being analogous *chunks* of the equal power of each attribute.

avoids the problem faced by Della Rocca's interpretation that from the fact that the mind expresses the body it follows that conceiving of the mind is sufficient for conceiving of the body. Moreover, my reading does not imply, as Newlands' interpretation does, that the concept of the mind is contained in the concept of the body. Finally, it does not imply, as Deleuze's interpretation does, that my mind *unfolds* my body. All my interpretation implies is that from the fact that there is a mind one can infer that there must be a parallel mode in each attribute, including the attribute of Extension.

I have shown that my reading of expression as natural signification deals satisfactorily with the Range Requirement of Spinozistic expression. But if my account is to be consistent with Spinoza's use of *exprimere*, it must also accommodate the Involving Requirement of Spinozistic expression; that is, I need to show that even though for Spinoza *exprimere* is not coextensive with *concipere*, it is still coextensive with *involvere*. I turn to this issue in the following section.

### Natural signification and the Involving Requirement of Spinozistic expression

Why should one believe that for Spinoza *involvere* is coextensive with *concipere*? As Alan Gabbey observes, although Spinoza uses *involvere* in its various forms 116 times in the *Ethics*, he never explains what he understands by this term, and it is far from obvious what should one understand by this term in the context of Spinoza's metaphysics ("Spinoza, Infinite Modes, and the Infinite Mood", 47–8 n.10). In the absence of indication, *involvere* has been translated mainly as 'to involve', but this is not entirely illuminating.<sup>28</sup> Gabbey sums up the problem as follows:

I have a good idea of what is involved in writing a paper on Spinoza and the infinite modes, but I have only a vague idea of what the English translators' Spinoza has in mind when they have him claim that "the essence of things produced by God does not involve existence".

("Infinite Mood", 47–8 n.10)

I suggest that a charitable reading of Spinoza's account of *involvere* should begin by looking for a translation that does not render untenable one or more of the instances of *exprimere*. Fortunately, a translation of *involvere* which is both textually supported and compatible with the Range Requirement of Spinozistic expression emerges when we consider that *involvere* can also be translated as 'to roll to' or 'roll into' any thing (Lewis et al., *A Latin Dictionary*). On this reading, to say that x involves y is equivalent to say that there

<sup>28</sup>The translations of the *Ethics* of all Curley, Shirley, Parkinson, and Kisner feature *involvere* as 'to involve'.

is a link from *x* to *y*. This translation emphasizes the idea of a connection between two things and allows us to read *involvere* as an umbrella term for this connection. In Spinoza's system, this kind of connection can be generated by any of the different metaphysical relations that he acknowledges, including constitution and causation. Thus, there is a link from an effect to its cause and from a constituent to that which is constituted by it. If *involvere* is understood in this way, it is still coextensive with *exprimere* understood as signification. To see why, recall first that that *x* naturally signifies *y* if and only if (i) *x* indicates *y* in virtue of the nature of *x*, (ii) there is a *natural connection* between *x* and *y*, and (iii) the knowledge of *x* does not entail knowledge of the essence of *y*. Note that given (ii), all instances of *exprimere* must be instances of *involvere*: if *x* naturally expresses *y*, then *x* involves *y*. On the other hand, since *involvere* consists in a natural connection or link between two things, and given that this natural connection underpins the fact that (i) one thing indicates the other in virtue of its nature and the fact that (iii) it is not necessarily the case that one can conceive of one thing through the other, if the existence of *x* is naturally connected to the existence of *y*, then *x* manifests or indicates the existence of *y*; that is, *x* expresses *y*.

On my interpretation, for Spinoza *involvere* and *concipere* are coextensive. However, it is not the case that *involvere* is coextensive with *concipere*. This cannot be so because although the fact that *x* is conceived through *y* is sufficient for the fact that *x* involves *y*, it is not the case that the fact that *x* involves *y* is sufficient for *x* to be conceived through *y*. Let us begin with the claim that *concipere* is sufficient for *involvere*. Consider the case of my mind, a mode of Thought that consequently must be conceived through that attribute (E1d5). For Spinoza there is a natural connection between my mind and the attribute of Thought: the fact that Thought is the cause of the essence of my mind (E1a3). Now, Spinoza posits that "the knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause" (E1a4). The claim here is that to know or conceive a thing we need to know its cause. Since Thought is the cause of the essence of my mind, to know the essence of my mind I must know Thought. Hence, in cases where a causal connection at play, 'to conceive' entails 'to involve'. Since 'to involve' and 'to express' are coextensive, in this case 'to conceive' is sufficient for 'to express'. Thus, in the case of the relation between mode and attribute, 'to conceive' is sufficient for 'to involve'. The same logic seems to be in place when Spinoza holds that each substance "must be in itself and be conceived through itself, or the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other" (E1d3). As Della Rocca and Newlands rightly suggest, Spinoza does equate the claim that a thing is conceived through itself and the claim that the concept of that thing does not involve the concept of any other thing. The fact that *x* is conceived through itself – that is, the fact that *x* is a substance – entails that there

can be no connection between the concept of *x* and the concept of any other thing outside *x*.

But on my reading of *involvere* as the natural link between two things it is not the case that *involvere* is sufficient for *concipere*. To see why this is so, recall that we have seen that for Spinoza each idea involves a body – for example, my mind involves my body. According to my interpretation of *involvere*, this means that there is a natural connection between my mind and my body. But we have seen that this connection is not causal. Rather, the connection between my mind and my body obtains because since things caused by each attribute follow in the same order, my mind – a mode of Thought – is necessarily parallel to my body – a mode of Extension. Crucially, Spinoza does not hold that from the fact that *x* involves *y* in this non-causal way it follows that one can conceive one through the other. The same is true of Spinoza's claim that each attribute involves an eternal and infinite essence. Under my interpretation what Spinoza means here is that there is a natural connection between each attribute and an eternal and infinite essence. In turn, this natural connection obtains given the metaphysical relation of constitution: according to Spinoza each attribute necessarily constitutes an eternal and infinite essence. But on this reading, the fact that *x* is naturally connected to *y* via the constitution of *y* by *x* does not entail that *y* is conceived through *x* because the link at play is not causal. To put it differently, in non-causal connections, *involvere* is necessary but not sufficient for *concipere*.

We have seen that 'to involve' should be understood as the natural link or connection between two things. This connection can obtain through any of the metaphysical relations recognized by Spinoza. We saw that on this reading, *concipere* is sufficient for *involvere*. But *concipere* and *involvere* are not coextensive because *involvere* is not sufficient for *concipere*. Since on my interpretation the coextensiveness between 'to conceive' and 'to involve' is broken, it follows that 'to express' is not coextensive with 'to conceive'. However, it is still the case that 'to express' is coextensive with 'to involve'. In this way, my account accommodates the Involvement requirement of Spinozistic expression without violating its Range Requirement.

## Conclusion

I posited that any account of Spinozistic expression must be able to fulfil two requirements. First, it must be able to accommodate all the relevant cases of 'to express' posited by Spinoza in the *Ethics*. Second, it must be able to deal with the fact that for Spinoza all instances of 'to express' are instances of 'to involve'. I disputed the claim that for Spinoza 'to express' is coextensive with 'to conceive'. I argued that, instead, Spinoza understands *exprimere* as natural signification: for him, 'to express' is coextensive with 'to be a natural sign of'. I showed that this interpretation not only is able to successfully deal with both

requirements of Spinozistic expression, but also offers a novel and textually supported insight to Spinoza's understanding and use of the elusive concept of 'expression'.

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Abbreviations:

- C Corollary
- Def Definition
- D Demonstration
- P Proposition
- S Scholium

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