

The Necessity of Finite Modes in Spinoza

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Abstract: It is standard to think that in Spinoza's system, all things are necessary and in no sense contingent. However, in his classic book, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, published in 1969, Edwin Curley argues based on the proposition 28 of the first part of the *Ethics* that Spinoza endorses necessitarianism of only a modest kind, according to which when it comes to finite modes, there is a sense in which they are contingent. In this paper, I revisit Curley's argument. Commentators have responded to Curley's argument, showing that Spinoza's remarks on infinite modes entail that finite modes can in no sense be contingent. But this alone falls short of dispelling Curley's misgivings about the standard interpretation, for it remains unexplained why Curley is wrong in thinking that the proposition 28 supports his moderate necessitarian interpretation. In defense of the standard interpretation, I bolster the usual response to Curley in greater detail than has been done in the literature and explain why, *pace* Curley, the proposition 28 plays no evidential role in support of Curley's interpretation.

Subject Areas: the history of philosophy, early modern philosophy, Spinoza

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1. Introduction

Spinoza attempts to establish necessitarianism in the first part of the *Ethics* which he takes as a foundation for his views about human mind and human freedom which are main themes in the later parts.¹⁾ According to Spinoza's

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necessitarianism, all things are necessary in the strongest sense possible. God is absolutely necessary, and modes are equally necessary as they follow from the absolutely necessary God. For Spinoza, all things - i.e., God and modes - are necessary, leaving no room for ways things might have been otherwise.

In his classic book, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, published in 1969, however, Edwin Curley argues that Spinoza endorses necessitarianism of a modest kind. It is true that for Spinoza, whatever exists is in some sense necessary. But according to Curley, Spinoza's system allows for a sense in which finite modes are contingent. While distinguishing between infinite and finite modes, Spinoza says in E1p28 that unlike infinite modes, finite modes follow from God's nature insofar as it is considered to be modified by another finite mode. Curley claims that this remark on finite modes in E1p28 suggests that for Spinoza, there could have been a different series of finite modes from the actual one, and the contingency of finites modes is thereby unavoidable.²⁾

Curley's claim rests upon the idea that Spinoza's system allows for the possibility of a different series of finite modes from the actual one. But this can't be right. Spinoza offers as an example of a mediate infinite mode what he calls 'the face of the whole Universe', referring us to the passage in the second part of the *Ethics* that discusses the nature of bodies. Upon examination, the face of the whole Universe is the total series of finite modes. So, for Spinoza, the actual series of finite modes is an infinite mode that is fixed and eternal,

1) It might be claimed, though, that for Spinoza's purposes, determinism without necessitarianism is enough and thus that the role of Spinoza's necessitarianism should not be exaggerated. For this claim, see Huenemann (2018). But I believe that it is necessitarianism, not mere determinism, that is required for Spinoza's purposes. But we may sidestep this issue as our discussion will not turn on it.

2) References to Spinoza's *Ethics* (E) are cited by using the following abbreviations: 'a' for axiom; 'p' for proposition; 'd' for demonstration; 's' for scholium; 'le' for lemma; 'def' for definition; 'pre' for preface. So, for example, 'E1a1' means the axiom 1 of the first part of the *Ethics*. English translations of the *Ethics* are from Curley (1994). For references to the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and the *Short Treatise*, abbreviations 'TIE' and 'KV' are used. English translations of TIE, KV and all cited letters are all from Morgan and Shirley (2006).

which suggests that the actual series is necessary and in no sense contingent. There is no merely possible series of finite modes.

This much has been well noted in the literature. But this alone is not enough to eradicate the unease Curley feels that motivates his argument. Indeed, it seems clear enough that what Spinoza says about infinite modes shows that the actual series of finite modes is an infinite mode which is necessary and in no sense contingent and thus that finite modes are in no sense contingent. However, this is not to say that Curley is wrong in thinking that Spinoza's remark on finite modes in E1p28 implies that there could have been a different series of finite modes from the actual one. If Curley is right, Spinoza's system is in danger of being incoherent.

Thus, Curley's argument may be taken to establish a disjunctive claim: (i) for Spinoza, finite modes are in some sense contingent; or (ii) Spinoza's system is incoherent as his remark in E1p28 is committed to the contingency of finite modes. Surely, the second disjunct is no less problematic than the first. So, for the purpose of defending the standard interpretation, it is far from satisfying to point out, based on Spinoza's thought about infinite modes, that for Spinoza, finite modes are in no sense contingent. What remains to be done is to explain how E1p28, despite the appearance to the contrary, is not in trouble with Spinoza's strong necessitarianism.

My aim in the paper is to defend the standard interpretation against Curley's argument. I argue first that the first disjunct (i) is false by arguing, in greater detail than has been done in the usual response, that for Spinoza, the actual series of finite modes is an infinite mode. (Section 4) I then argue that the second disjunct (ii) is not true either, arguing that E1p28 is concerned with finite modes insofar as they are conceived to be singular things by the imagination, not by the intellect, which for Spinoza can hardly serve as a basis for genuine metaphysical possibilities for them. (Section 5)

Much of Curley's argument first appeared in his book *Spinoza's Metaphysics*. But Curley, together with Walski, has recently added another piece of evidence

in support of the moderate necessitarian interpretation. My discussion is directed mainly at Curley's original argument. And the new argument of Curley and Walski is not as powerful as the original one. Nevertheless, it is worth considering the new argument as it will help us see what is really at stake in the debate. Before embarking on the main discussion, I address Curley and Walski's new argument (Section 3) right after making a brief overview of Spinoza's necessitarianism (Section 2).

2. Spinoza's necessitarianism

According to Spinoza, whatever is, is either in itself or in another (E1a1). That is, whatever exists is a substance or a mode (E1d3/E1d5). Spinoza devotes the first half of the first part of the *Ethics* to establishing facts about a substance: a substance or God is necessary by its essence (E1p7/E1p11), infinite (E1p8), indivisible (E1p13) and unique (E1p14). In the remainder of the first part, he discusses modes (infinite and finite) and their relations to God: infinite modes (whether immediate or mediate) follow from the absolute nature of God (E1p21-23) and finite modes follow from the nature of God not absolutely but with a modification (E1p28).

In E1p29d, Spinoza succinctly summarizes the discussion: God (*Natura naturans*) exists as an essentially necessary and unique substance and all other things (*Natura naturata*) necessarily follow from his nature (either insofar as the nature of God is considered absolutely or insofar as it is considered to be modified in a certain way). Thus, he goes on to conclude: “[in] nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.”

In E1p33d, Spinoza offers a proof for this necessitarian conclusion. Suppose, for reductio, that things could have been produced by God in another way or order. Then, since all things necessarily follow from the nature of God, God's

nature could have been other than it now is. This entails that there could have been two or more Gods, which contradicts the already established uniqueness of God. Thus, “[things] could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced.” Given God’s nature, necessitarianism is inevitable.

Spinoza’s necessitarianism is counterintuitive. You exist, but you might not have existed. You are reading this paper, but you might not have been reading it. Or so we normally think. If Spinoza is right, however, these mundane modal judgments are all false. Spinoza is well aware that his view is counterintuitive and non-commonsensical. This does not prevent him from holding onto what the intellect leads us to. Instead, he attempts to explain away the ordinary verdict that there are contingencies in nature. In E1p33s1, Spinoza locates the source of ordinary contingency talk in our ignorance as follows:

Since by these propositions 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, I wish now to explain briefly what we must understand by contingent - but first, what [we must understand] by necessary and impossible.

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. And a thing is also called impossible from these same causes - namely, either because its essence or definition involves a contradiction or because there is no external cause which has been determined to produce such a thing.

But a thing is called contingent only because of a defect of 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.

Spinoza's thought seems to be clear. For Spinoza, nothing is contingent, and everything is necessary. If there is a sense in which things are contingent, the sense is at best epistemic: the source of contingency does not lie in things but in our ignorance. This remark of Spinoza's provides us with a powerful reason for thinking that Spinoza endorses necessitarianism of the strongest kind.

Curley disagrees. He thinks that despite the appearance to the contrary, the standard interpretation is wrong, and Spinoza is committed only to moderate necessitarianism. I will consider his original argument in Section 4. But in the next section, I will consider the new argument that Curley put forward together with Walski about thirty years after the original argument was offered. The new argument is very brief. It will be instructive to take a closer look at it because considering the argument will uncover misguided ideas that might question the standard interpretation and thereby help us see what is really at stake in the present interpretive debate.

3. Two ways necessities are grounded

Earlier I said that in E1p33s1 Spinoza strengthens his strong necessitarian view. Ironically, Curley and Walski (1998) think of the passage as supporting the moderate necessitarian interpretation. First, they draw attention to the fact that, in E1p33s1, Spinoza distinguishes two ways in which a thing is called necessary: on the one hand, God is necessary by reason of his essence; on the other hand, finite modes are necessary not by reason of their essence but by reason of their cause.

In E1p33s1, Spinoza says that it is not by reason of their essence that finite modes are necessary. Curley and Walski think that in so doing, Spinoza implies that finite modes are not necessary or contingent "in relation to their essence", and "as a consequence, there is a sense in which any particular finite mode might not have existed." Thus, "in addition to the actual world, in which we

exist,” they say, “there are, in Leibniz’s language, other possible worlds in which we do not exist — presumably because in those possible worlds our finite causes ... also do not exist” (1998, p. 241). According to Curley and Walski, this guarantees the sense in which finite modes are contingent.

At first glance, Curley and Walski’s argument might appear to have some plausibility. A moment’s reflection, however, suggests that their argument is misguided. Spinoza says in E1p33s1 that it is not by their essence that finite modes are necessary right after proving in E1p33d that all things including finite modes are necessary. So, in E1p33s1, Spinoza has no intention to question the necessity of finite modes or to offer a sense in which they are not necessary. Spinoza’s concern there is rather to elucidate *how* their necessity is *grounded* under the assumption that the necessity of finite modes is not questionable.

For Spinoza, a thing is necessary by reason of its essence or by reason of its (external) cause. The essence of a substance involves existence. So, a substance exists necessarily. The necessity of a substance is thus grounded. On the other hand, the essence of a finite mode does not involve existence. Nonetheless, a finite mode exists necessarily, for its existence is caused by a substance. The necessity of a finite mode is thus grounded. Thus, the way the necessity of a substance is grounded differs from the way the necessity of a finite mode is grounded. However, this is not to say that a finite mode is necessary in a different sense from the one in which a substance is necessary.³⁾

Cheol-Soo is a Korean citizen. He is so by being born to Korean parents. Johnathan is a Korean citizen. He is so by being naturalized. Cheol-Soo’s Korean citizenship is grounded in one way, and Johnathan’s another way. But the fact that the way Johnathan’s Korean citizenship is grounded is different from the way Cheol-Soo’s is does not imply that Johnathan is a Korean citizen in a

3) This shows that for Spinoza, essentiality and necessity come apart: it does not lie in the essence of a finite mode that it exists, but it is necessary that it exists. For a contemporary revival of the notion of essence that is not reducible to the notion of necessity, see Fine (1994), Lowe (2008), and Oderberg (2011).

different sense from the one in which Cheol-Soo is a Korean citizen. If someone is a Korean, she is a Korean in an unequivocal sense no matter how the citizenship is grounded so long as its citizenship has its legitimate source. There is no sense in which a naturalized Korean is not a Korean.

Similarly, what Spinoza says in E1p33s1 provides no reason for thinking that there is a sense in which a finite mode is not necessary or contingent.⁴⁾ All Spinoza says is that it is not by reason of their essence that finite modes are necessary. What follows from this is only that for Spinoza, there are two ways in which the necessity of a thing is grounded. Spinoza nowhere says, and what he says does not entail, that there are thereby two senses in which a thing is necessary. It is mistaken to infer, as Curley and Walski do, from the fact that for Spinoza, it is not by reason of their essence that finite modes are necessary that there is some sense in which for Spinoza, they are not necessary.⁵⁾

Curley and Walski's argument should be questionable perhaps even by their own lights. Curley and Walski claim that for Spinoza, finite modes are in some sense contingent, but they never say that for Spinoza, infinite modes also are in some sense contingent. But their argument is so strong as to commit them to the view that even infinite modes are in some sense contingent. Note that what they say about finite modes is equally applicable to modes in general. For Spinoza,

4) How Cheol-Soo's Korean citizenship is grounded differs from how Johnathan's citizenship is grounded. Yet, the citizenship of Cheol-Soo's and that of Jonathan's lie in the same source - i.e., the legal authority: they achieved their citizenship by virtue of being approved by the legal authority. How God's necessity is grounded differs from how finite modes' necessity is grounded. Yet, the necessity of God and that of finite modes lie in the same source - i.e., God's essence: God's existence follows from God's essence, and finite modes follow from God's essence (or, to be more precise, the nature of an attribute of God).

5) McDaniel (2017) has recently argued that there are plural senses of 'exist' and thus that there are different kinds of existence. His guiding observation is that there is an analogy of existence in a medieval sense of the term. I believe McDaniel's argument is wanting for the same reason for which Curley and Walski's argument is. What follows from the analogy of existence is only that there are plural ways in which the existence of a thing is grounded, which falls short of showing that there are plural senses in which a thing exists or that there are different kinds of existence. For a more detailed discussion, see Han (2022). Cf. Matthews (1995).

every mode whether finite or infinite exists not by reason of its essence. Only a substance exists by reason of its essence. So, if Curley and Walski are right in thinking that finite modes are in some sense contingent because their necessity is not by reason of their essence, they must also think that infinite modes are in some sense contingent because their necessity is not by reason of their essence.

Would Curley and Walski be willing to insist that not just finite modes but also infinite modes are in some sense contingent? I think not. In E1p21, Spinoza says that some things or modes follow immediately from the nature or essence of God, regarding them as eternal and infinite.⁶⁾ Since these infinite modes follow *immediately* from God's essence, call them 'immediate infinite modes.' In the following proposition E1p22, Spinoza says that some things or modes follow from the nature of God not immediately but through the mediation of another infinite mode. Since these infinite modes follow mediately from God's essence, call them 'mediate infinite modes.' If we take a closer look at the nature of following-from in Spinoza, we will see that for Spinoza, infinite modes whether immediate or mediate are necessary and in no sense contingent.

John being unmarried *logically* follows from his being a bachelor: in this case, following-from holds in virtue of the meaning of relevant words (such as non-logical words 'man' and 'bachelor' on the one hand and logical expressions 'and' and 'or' on the other). On the other hand, in Spinoza's use of the term, following-from is not a logical or conceptual-cum-semantic relation. When he says that a mode follows from God's essence, he does not mean to make a

6) I assume that Spinoza's use of 'things' here is meant to talk about modes. Spinoza often uses the term 'thing' ('res') instead of 'mode' in many places such as E1p21, E1p24, E1p27, and E1p28. In particular, Spinoza uses the term 'mode' instead of 'thing' in 1p23 while continuing his discussion of what he refers to by 'thing' in the preceding propositions. In E1p25c, he says 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", where his use of the term 'or' (*sive*) suggests his assimilation of (particular) things to modes. Spinoza also explicitly uses 'thing' and 'mode' interchangeably in E2p8. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me to justify my terminological assumption.

logical or semantic claim. He rather means to make a metaphysical claim - a claim whose truth is supposed to be based not on the meaning of relevant words (whether logical or non-logical) but on the essences or natures of things at issue.⁷⁾

How is following-from in Spinoza to be understood if it is not a logical relation? Spinoza distances himself from the Aristotelian tradition (against, for example, anthropocentric final causation). But it is undeniable that many of the notions employed in Spinoza's philosophy have Scholastic roots. Following-from is one of them. In the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle distinguishes between demonstrative and merely deductively valid arguments. Consider the following:

- (1) Heavenly bodies which do not twinkle are near.
- (2) Planets are heavenly bodies which do not twinkle.
- (3) Therefore, planets are heavenly bodies which are near.

The argument (1)-(3) is deductively or logically valid. But in Aristotle's sense, this is not a demonstrative argument. We may infer (3) from (1) and (2). But we may not be able to explain why (3) is true based on (1) and (2): it is not that planets (are heavenly bodies which) are near because they (are heavenly bodies which) do not twinkle. (1) and (2) serve to base a valid inference to (3) but fail to serve as an *explanation* of (3).

7) In his influential paper on Spinoza's necessitarianism, Garrett (1991, p. 101) says that following-from in Spinoza can't be understood as a kind of entailment in contemporary classical logic and says that "if the Spinozist 'following-from' relation is to be identified with a kind of entailment at all, it must be identified with the entailment relation of a 'relevance logic' one whose relevance condition is satisfied only by priority in the causal order of nature." Garrett thinks that (a) following-from in Spinoza is not a kind of entailment in contemporary logic, and he also seems to think that (b) the Spinozist following-from may be understood as a logical relation if it is based on some non-classical logic like relevance logic. I agree with Garrett about (1). But I don't agree about (b). In most of relevance logics, (AB) is inferable or follows from A. I don't think that this is validated in Spinoza's use of the term. For Spinoza, whether something follows from another is not a formal matter that can be determined purely by formal-logical rules.

(2) is a truth about planets, but (2) does not pertain to the nature or essence of planets. This is why (1) and (2) fail to be explaining. Planets by essence are heavenly bodies which are near.⁸⁾ Unlike an accidental fact about planets, the essence of planets can play an explanatory role. Consider the following:

- (1') Heavenly bodies which are near do not twinkle.
- (2') Planets are heavenly bodies which are near.
- (3') Therefore, planets are heavenly bodies which do not twinkle.⁹⁾

(1') and (2') explain why (3') is true: planets (are heavenly bodies which) do not twinkle because planets (are heavenly bodies which) are near. The inferential order of (1')-(3') aligns with the explanatory order of the relevant facts which are based on the essence of planets. This argument is not just logically valid but also demonstrative.

This naturally suggests that following-from in the Aristotelian tradition is what underlies an essentialist-explanatory relation in demonstrations. Planets do not twinkle because they are near. This is grounded in the fact that a heavenly body's failing to twinkle follows from its being near which is the essence of planets. As several commentators have convincingly argued, Spinoza is Aristotelian on that score. Spinoza says that the definition of a thing is said to "explain the inmost essence of the thing" (TIE 95),¹⁰⁾ which fits nicely with the Aristotelian framework in which "a definition is an account [logos] that signifies the

8) This construal of the essence of planets might be questioned. But whether that is an accurate one is not to the point. If one takes issue with it, she may replace it with whatever she takes as an accurate construal of the essence of planets.

9) While Fine (1994) revived the Aristotelian conception of essence in contemporary metaphysics, proponents of the Finean view have not paid due attention to the nature of the relationship between essence and explanation. For a notable exception, see Koslicki (2012) from which I borrowed the examples of merely deductive and demonstrative arguments above.

10) "For a definition to be called perfect, it will have to explain the inmost essence of the thing, and to take care not to use certain *propria* in its place." (TIE 95)

essence” of a thing,¹¹⁾ while properties that follow from the essence of the thing are necessary properties or propria. For Spinoza, God’s modes exist because God is what he is in his essence. Modes follow from God’s essence as propria of God.

Spinoza assimilates the essence of a thing to the power of the thing - i.e., the striving or its conatus by which “it does anything and strives to persevere in its being” (E3p7d).¹²⁾ This helps us see why Spinoza says that God is the efficient cause of modes (E1p16d). For Spinoza, modes follow from God’s essence. Given the assimilation of essence to power, this can be taken to mean that for Spinoza, modes are produced by God’s power. Modes are propria of God that follow from God’s essence as causal results of the exercise of God’s efficient causal power. God is the efficient cause of his modes as his propria. Causation in this case is causation within a thing or immanent causation - or, in the Scholastic terms, emanation. For Spinoza, following-from is efficient causation qua immanent causation.^{13),14)}

11) Aristotle, *Topics* I.5; trans. Reeve & Miller (2015), p. 264.

12) For Spinoza’s assimilation of God’s essence to God’s power, see also E1p34. For Spinoza, reality also amounts to power (E2def6, E2p49s, and E4pref).

13) The thought that properties of a substance are efficiently caused by that substance is salient in Aquinas and other medieval Aristotelians. See Carriero (1995), pp. 259-60. That the relationship between a substance and its modes in Spinoza should be understood along this line of thought has been pointed out by several commentators. See, e.g., Carriero (1995); Della Rocca (2008); Viljanen (2008; 2011); Melamed (2009; 2013, Ch.4); and Zylstra (2020).

14) For Spinoza, a thing is the efficient cause of its properties qua its propria that follow from the essence of the thing. In the Scholastic tradition, properties of a thing are said to inhere in the thing, where properties are not universals but particular accidents or states. What we have seen is this: for Spinoza, (i) x follows from the essence of y iff x is caused by y in the sense of efficient causation qua immanent causation, and (ii) x follows from the essence of y iff x inheres in y (or x is a property of y). (i) and (ii) have been accepted by many commentators. (See Carriero 1995; Della Rocca 2008; and Melamed 2009.) But it isn’t uncontroversial. Curley (1969), for example, claims that for Spinoza, (i) is false, while only a variant of (ii) is true, according to which x is caused by y in the sense of efficient causation qua transeunt causation, not immanent causation. (For Spinoza, efficient causation divides into two kinds: immanent and transeunt. In Letter 60, he says that “an efficient cause can be internal as well as external. See also E1p18.) It is a matter of

Following-from in Spinoza is immanent causation or emanation, not a logical relation. So, from the fact that God is what he is in his essence, it doesn't *logically* follow that the modes he in fact has exist. There is a *logical* sense in which even if God is what he is in his essence, the modes might not have existed. However, this should not tempt us into thinking that there is a *metaphysical* sense in which even if God is what he is in his essence, the existence of the modes is not necessary. In E1p16s, Spinoza says:

I think I have shown clearly enough (see p16) that from God's supreme power, or infinite nature, infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, i.e., all things, have necessarily flowed [effluxisse], 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. (my italics)

It is a necessary feature of a triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles. For Spinoza, the necessary feature of a triangle is due to its nature: having that is a proprium of a triangle that follows from its essence. For Spinoza, following-from is immanent causation, not logical entailment. So, there is a logical sense in which three angles of a triangle might not be equal to two right angles. But this is not to say that there is a *metaphysical* sense in which three angles of a triangle are not equal to two right angles. Insofar as a triangle is what it is in its essence, there is no genuine possibility that three angles of a triangle are not equal to two right angles. The same goes for our case. From God's essence, God's modes follow in a non-logical sense. So, there might be a logical sense in which the modes do not follow from God's essence. Yet, there is no metaphysical sense in which God's modes might not have existed.

controversy whether for Spinoza, it is true that (iii) x follows from the essence of y iff x is predicated of y. Many commentators who accept (i) and (ii) also accept (iii). But Carriero (1995) is a notable exception. I accept (i) and (ii), but I am noncommittal about (iii).

According to Spinoza, from the nature of each attribute of God, a mode immediately follows. It is an immediate infinite mode. From the immediate infinite mode, another mode immediately follows. It is a mediate infinite mode. From the mediate infinite mode, yet another mode immediately follows. It is another mediate infinite mode. And this will go on and on infinitely. For Spinoza, for each attribute of God, there is one immediate infinite mode and infinitely many mediate infinite modes with a linear hierarchy.¹⁵⁾ So, any infinite mode whether immediate or mediate is directly connected to the attribute of God via a chain of immediate following-from. This being the case, it seems inevitable that infinite modes are in no sense contingent. Infinite modes following from God's nature through a chain of immediate following-from can't be God's *contingent* modes just as necessary features following immediately from the nature of a geometrical figure through a chain of immediate following-from can't be its *contingent* features.

The consideration thus far seems to be enough of a refutation of Curley and Walski's argument. Curley and Walski argue that for Spinoza, finite modes are in some sense contingent on the ground that Spinoza thinks that it is not by reason of their essence that finite modes are necessary. If this is right, they would also have to claim that infinite modes are in some sense contingent because Spinoza thinks that it is not by reason of their essence that infinite modes are necessary. But for Spinoza, infinite modes are necessary and in no sense contingent. Curley and Walski's argument fails.

15) In other words, for each attribute of God, only one infinite mode follows immediately from the nature of the attribute, and for every infinite mode, from the infinite mode, only one infinite mode immediately follows. So, no two infinite modes can follow immediately from an infinite mode. For the details of this feature of infinite modes, see Melamed (2013), Ch. 4.

4. The face of the whole Universe as the total mediate infinite mode

For Spinoza, God is necessary and in no sense contingent as his essence involves existence. Immediate infinite modes are necessary and in no sense contingent as they follow immediately from God's essence that involves existence. Mediate infinite modes are necessary and in no sense contingent as they follow from God's essence via a chain of immediate following-from. For Spinoza, God and infinite modes are necessary and in no sense contingent. How about finite modes? For Spinoza, finite modes after all follow from God's essence in a certain way. Doesn't this show that finite modes are also necessary and in no sense contingent?

Curley thinks not. In E1p28, Spinoza talks about a peculiar way in which finite modes follow from God's essence. According to Curley, this peculiarity makes room for a sense in which unlike God and infinite modes, finite modes are not necessary and contingent. In E1p28, Spinoza says:

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.

But what is finite and has a determinate existence could not have been produced by the absolute nature of an attribute of God; for whatever follows from the absolute nature of an attribute of God is eternal and infinite. It had, therefore, to follow either from God or from an attribute of God insofar as it is considered to be affected by some mode.

Infinite modes follow from God's essence through a chain of immediate following-from. But, according to Spinoza, finite modes do not follow from God's essence in that way. A finite mode follows from God's essence only *relative to some other finite mode*.

According to Curley, this remark of Spinoza's strongly suggests that there is a sense in which finite modes are contingent. A finite mode is in character singular, while, claims Curley, infinite modes are in character general. Thus, Curley thinks, a finite mode can't follow from infinite modes. A finite mode (or a particular fact about it) can follow from infinite modes (or general facts about them) only together with another finite mode (or a particular fact about it).

More specifically, Curley's thought is this. For simplicity, let us focus on God's attribute of Extension among infinitely many others. According to Curley, for Spinoza, infinite modes are laws of nature. In case of the attribute of Extension, laws of nature are perhaps fundamental mechanical laws. Laws of nature by themselves do not imply any singular fact about a finite mode as they are general in character. To imply one, they need to be helped with another singular fact about a finite mode.¹⁶⁾ For example, Curley writes:

The singular fact that body a fell 4.9m is causally dependent on the singular fact that it started from rest and fell freely for one second toward a body having such-and-such mass and radius and the general nomological fact that this is what bodies do under those conditions (Curley 1969, p. 54).

Take a finite mode *f*. Clearly, *f* is in some sense necessary: *f* is necessitated relative to another finite mode *f'* under the laws of nature. Likewise, *f'* is

16) This way of explaining a finite mode is akin to Hempel's deductive-nomological model of explanation. See Hempel and Oppenheim (1945). That Curley understands the explanation of a finite mode in the Hempelian model of explanation seems to show that Curley's reading is implausible. The nature of explanation in the Hempelian model is logical. But, as has been seen in the last section, the nature of explanation in Spinoza is immanent causation or emanation which is in character not logical.

necessitated relative to yet another finite mode f'' under the laws of nature. And so on to infinity. There is an infinite series of necessitated finite modes. For Curley, this is what Spinoza attempts to say in E1p28.

According to Curley, this paves the way to a sense in which finite modes are contingent. Call a total series of finite modes 'a universe.'¹⁷ The actual series of finite modes $f-f'-f''\dots$ is then the actual universe. Must we think that for Spinoza, there is no possible universe other than the actual one? Curley thinks not. Suppose that there is a possible finite mode f^* that is not compossible with f . Given Spinoza's remark in E1p28, f^* is necessitated relative to another finite mode $f^{*'} under the laws of nature. Likewise, $f^{*'}$ is necessitated relative to yet another finite mode $f^{*'}$ under the laws of nature. And so on to infinity. Consider this total series of finite modes, $f^*-f^{*'}-f^{*'}$... Surely the new total series obeys the constraint Spinoza sets in E1p28 on the relation between God and finite modes, for it was constructed on the model that Curley thinks Spinoza presupposes. How then, asks Curley (and Walski), can Spinoza "escape the conclusion that there is more than one possible [universe]" (1998, p. 247)? If the conclusion is inevitable, the alternative universe $f^*-f^{*'}-f^{*'}$... that does not include f might have existed. So, f might not have existed.$

At first glance, Curley's argument looks plausible. On reflection, however, it is not as compelling as it might first seem. Curley's argument amounts to this: f is contingent because in Spinoza's system, the actual universe is contingent - that is, there is a possible universe alternative to the actual one. His argument rests upon the claim that there is a merely possible universe. Thus, if, contrary to Curley's claim, the actual universe is necessary and in no sense contingent, the argument fails. And indeed, it seems quite clear that Spinoza would regard the actual universe as necessary and in no sense contingent because he would regard it as an infinite mode - more precisely, a mediate infinite mode.

As we have considered, in the first part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza talks about

17) Of course, a total series of finite modes is not a linear series but a total network of all finite modes.

infinite modes, dividing them into immediate and mediate infinite modes. But from what he says there, it remains unclear what would be infinite modes he has in mind. It doesn't come as a surprise that he was asked to give examples of infinite modes. In a letter to G. H. Schuller (Letter 64), Spinoza answers the question as follows:

Lastly, the examples you ask for of the first kind [i.e., immediate infinite modes] are: in the case of thought, absolutely infinite intellect; in the case of extension, motion and rest. An example of the second kind [i.e., mediate infinite modes] is the face of the whole Universe, which, although varying in infinite ways, yet remains always the same. See Scholium to Lemma 7 preceding Pr. 14, II.

Since we focus on the attribute of Extension, let's see what Spinoza offers as examples of immediate and mediate infinite modes under the attribute of Extension. What Spinoza thinks is the immediate infinite mode?¹⁸⁾ As Spinoza makes clear in the above passage, his answer is quite clear and straightforward: what follows immediately from the nature of the attribute of Extension is motion-and-rest. What then are mediate infinite modes? Spinoza is less explicit about it. In the passage, he says that the face of the whole Universe is an example of a mediate infinite mode. But it is not so clear what he means by the face of the whole Universe.

It is hard to find a clue in that letter as to what the face of the whole Universe is. But we can see what Spinoza has in mind by considering the scholium of the lemma 7 between propositions 13 and 14 in the second part of the *Ethics* to which he refers us - a passage often called 'the physical digression', where he discusses the nature of bodies or individuals in the attribute of Extension.¹⁹⁾

18) Recall that only one infinite mode follows immediately from the nature of each attribute.

19) Here I will follow Spinoza in using 'body' and 'individual' interchangeably as suggested in Lemma 4.

The physical digression divides into two sections. In the first section, Spinoza discusses simplest bodies or individuals, and in the second, he discusses composite bodies or individuals.

According to Spinoza, simplest bodies are bodies which are distinguished from one another by motion and rest, and speed and slowness.²⁰) How then are composite bodies to be understood? Spinoza says:

When a number of bodies, whether of the same or of different size, are so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another; or if they so move, whether with the same degree or different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner, we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose one body or individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies.

On this conception of composite individuals, composite individuals can retain their nature while being affected in many ways. A composite individual is what it is in virtue of a fixed ratio in which its parts communicate their motions to each other. So, a composite individual remains the same insofar as the ratio remains the same whether or not some parts are replaced by others (Lemma 4), whether or not the parts composing it become greater or less (Lemma 5), whether or not the parts are compelled to alter the motion from one direction to another (Lemma 6), and whether or not it as a whole is at rest or moves in whatever direction (Lemma 7).

The fact that Spinoza refers us to this exposition of the nature of bodies helps

20) This suggests that Spinoza's conception of corporeal bodies is not the same as the dominant mechanistic conception of his time on which geometrical qualities such as size and shape are characteristic primary qualities of bodies. So, in a certain respect, Spinoza is closer to the Aristotelian than to the Cartesian in that in the Aristotelian tradition, primary qualities are hotness, coldness, dryness, and wetness which are like motion and rest dynamical, not geometrical. For primary and secondary qualities in the medieval era, see Pasnau (2011).

us see what Spinoza means by the face of the whole Universe. Note that simplest bodies are bodies individuated in terms of their motion or rest - i.e., speed. Thus, as Schmaltz (1997, p. 206) points out, for Spinoza, simplest bodies may be taken as various ways or modes motion-and-rest is. Given that motion-and-rest is the immediate infinite mode in the attribute of Extension, simplest bodies are various modes that follow directly from the immediate infinite mode. Simplest bodies (taken together) are the mediate infinite mode of the first degree. Given simplest bodies taken as various modes of motion-and-rest, there are various individuals simplest bodies form by constituting a fixed ratio in which they communicate their motions to each other. These individuals may be taken as modes that follow directly from the simplest bodies. Given that simplest bodies are the mediate infinite mode of the first degree, these individuals (taken together) are the mediate infinite mode of the second degree. Clearly, this process goes on and on infinitely.

Now consider all the mediate infinite modes of all degrees: the 1st degree mediate infinite mode (i.e., simplest bodies) following from motion-and-rest; the 2nd degree mediate infinite mode following from the 1st degree mediate infinite mode; the 3rd degree mediate infinite mode following from the 2nd degree mediate infinite mode; and so on. Call them ‘the total mediate infinite mode.’ The total mediate infinite mode comes down to the total series or network of all bodies. It is the whole of nature or the actual universe. After explaining the nature of bodies in the physical digression, Spinoza says that “we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one individual, whose parts, that is, all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole individual.” Now it becomes clear that the face of the whole Universe Spinoza offers as an example of a mediate infinite mode in Letter 64 amounts to the whole of nature he describes as one individual in the physical digression. For Spinoza, the whole of nature or the actual universe is an infinite mode - more specifically, the total mediate infinite mode.²¹⁾

That the whole of nature or the actual universe is an individual might not be

intuitively clear, for it seems to be beyond our imagination to see the fixed ratio in which all parts of it communicate their motions to each other. It seems that Spinoza was aware of this qualm. In a letter to Oldenburg (Letter 32), Spinoza has us imagine a little worm living in the blood. For the worm, each particle of the blood itself might be conceived as an individual but not as part of another individual. For the worm, it might be hard or even impossible to imagine that there is an individual of which all the particles are part. This is so because one can imagine an individual by imagining a fixed ratio in which all its parts communicate their motions to each other, which is made possible only by imagining the individual against some other body external to it. Yet, the worm is blind to nothing external to the blood. Clearly, this is beyond the ken of the worm's imagination. Nevertheless, the blood exists as an individual.

We live in the actual universe just as the worm does in the blood. For us, it is hard or even impossible to imagine that there is an individual of which all the existing finite things are part. This is so because one can hardly imagine the individual by imagining a fixed ratio in which all the finite parts communicate their motions to each other, which is made possible only by imagining the individual against some other body external to it. Yet, this seems impossible

21) Here, the face of the whole Universe is said to be a composite individual with many parts. Doesn't this show that the face of the whole Universe is not an infinite mode as Spinoza thinks that an infinite being is not divisible into parts? (I thank an anonymous referee for taking issue with my argument along the line of this question.) For Spinoza, things may be conceived by imagination or by intellection. The face of the whole Universe is conceived to be divisible into parts if it is conceived by the imagination. If, on the other hand, it is conceived by the intellect, it is conceived to be indivisible, and bodies are *in* it as propria but not parts of it. See, for example, E1p15[V.]: If someone should now ask why we are, by nature, so inclined to divide quantity, I shall answer that we conceive quantity in two ways: abstractly, or superficially, as we [NS: commonly] imagine it, or as substance, which is done by the intellect alone [NS: without the help of the imagination]. So if we attend to quantity as it is in the imagination, which we do often and more easily, it will be found to be finite, divisible, and composed of parts; but if we attend to it as it is in the intellect, and conceive it insofar as it is a substance, which happens [NS: seldom and] with great difficulty, then (as we have already sufficiently demonstrated) it will be found to be infinite, unique, and indivisible. I will return to this in greater detail in Section 5.

because there is no body external to it as it is supposed to be the *whole* Universe. This is not to say that the whole of nature or the actual universe does not exist as an individual. The ratio in which all the bodies in the actual universe communicate their motions to each other is what can be known to us not by the imagination but by the intellect. All the bodies in the actual universe might be seen as disordered. But, as Spinoza says at the outset of the letter, it is called disorderly only “in relation to our imagination.” It may well be ordered to the intellect.

It is not questionable that for Spinoza, the actual universe is an infinite mode. As has been considered in the last section, for Spinoza, infinite modes are necessary and in no sense contingent. In Spinoza’s system, despite the appearance to the contrary, the actual universe is a unique possible universe. There is no merely possible universe. As Della Rocca (2008, pp. 77-8) pointed out, this is in keeping with Spinoza’s God. As Spinoza says in E1p16d, the more reality or power the essence of a thing involves, the more properties or modes follow from its essence.²²⁾ For Spinoza, following-from is efficient causation: whatever follows from God’s essence is efficiently caused by God. Thus, if there were possible universes that didn’t actually follow from God’s essence, that would imply that there are modes not caused by God in which case, God’s power is limited, which is absurd. So, for Spinoza, there is no actualizable and yet unactualized universe alternative to the actual universe.

Someone might claim in defense of Curley that even if there is a possible universe that didn’t actually follow from God, that would not indicate a limitation of God’s power. Last night, you were deciding whether to have coffee or tea after dinner. You chose tea. But this doesn’t imply that you didn’t have a power to choose coffee. It shows only that you didn’t exercise that power. Why can’t we think that God had a power to produce another universe alternative to the actual universe, without exercising that power to actualize it?

22) Recall that for Spinoza, essence amounts to power and reality.

This model of divine causation is akin to the Leibnizian one, according to which God finds the best of all possible universes by his intellect and chooses and causes it to exist by his will. However, this is exactly the model of divine causation Spinoza warns us to be wary about. For Spinoza, “God does not produce any effect by freedom of the will” (E1p32c1). God is free not by reason of freedom of the will. He is free in that he “exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone” (E1def7). The existence of a merely possible universe appears to be real in relation to our imagination. We may ‘separate’ the actual universe or the total series of bodies from God and ‘attach’ a new total series to God. This can be done in abstraction or by our imagination. But for Spinoza, in light of the intellect, this isn’t real.²³⁾

For Spinoza, the actual universe is the face of the whole Universe as the total mediate infinite mode, and it is the only possible universe. So, the actual universe and finite modes therein are necessary and in no sense contingent. This seriously undermines Curley’s claim that for Spinoza, finite modes in the actual universe might not have existed because there might have been a possible universe in which they don’t exist.²⁴⁾

5. Finite modes conceived as singular things

Spinoza considers the face of the whole Universe or the actual universe as an infinite mode which is necessary and in no sense contingent. However, making

23) That Spinoza’s God is not akin to Leibniz’s God with respect to ‘creation’ of the actual universe is also attested by the fact that Spinoza, *pace* Descartes, denies pure will as a separate faculty of mind in addition to judgment. For Spinoza, judging amounts to affirming. See Della Rocca (2003).

24) The idea that Curley’s view is problematic because the actual universe is a mediate infinite mode has been pointed out by several commentators such as Garrett (1991), Schmaltz (1997), Della Rocca (2008), and Melamed (2013) though they do not provide an argument devoted to responding to Curley’s argument in detail as I do here.

this point is not enough to eradicate the unease Curley feels that motivates his argument. Curley's claim is that Spinoza's remark on finite modes in E1p28 implies that for Spinoza, finite modes are in a sense contingent. Unless it is shown that this claim is wrong, what follows is only that Spinoza is incoherent vis-à-vis the modal status of finite modes. What to be done in defense of the standard interpretation is to show that contrary to Curley's claim, Spinoza's remark in E1p28 is not committed to the contingency of finite modes. This is the task I will take up in the rest of the paper.

Curley's guiding idea is that given the relationship a finite mode bears to infinite modes as Spinoza understands it in E1p28, the contingency of a finite mode is unavoidable. I think that this very idea is mistaken, for it seems to me that on close examination, whatever the relationship suggested in E1p28, Spinoza's remark on finite modes has no implication as to whether finite modes are necessary or contingent in the first place. It is a recurring theme in Spinoza that things may be conceived inadequately or adequately, depending upon whether it is conceived by imagination or by intellection. In E1p28, Spinoza talks about finite modes as conceived by *imagination*. And how finite modes are conceived by imagination has no role to play in determining the modal status of finite modes which can only be apprehended by intellection. Or so I will argue.

Let us look more closely Curley's reading of E1p28 in detail. According to Curley, for Spinoza, a finite mode is in character singular, while infinite modes are laws of nature which are in character general; and due to this fundamental difference between the two, a finite mode does not follow from infinite modes (unless it is made relativized by another finite mode), which makes the contingency of a finite mode inevitable. Curley's reading is based on the idea that for Spinoza, infinite modes are laws of nature which are in character general. Let me call it 'Curley's thesis.' I find Curley's reading problematic because Curley's thesis seems to me deeply un-Spinozist.

On Curley's thesis, for Spinoza, infinite modes are laws of nature.²⁵⁾ As we have seen, Spinoza offers motion-and-rest as the immediate infinite mode that

follows immediately from the attribute of Extension. Motion-and-rest is featured in the actual mechanist laws of nature, and laws of nature are supposed to be pervasive throughout the realm of Extension, which is the characteristic feature of infinite modes.²⁶⁾ Indeed, it is not implausible to think that in Spinoza, infinite modes are laws of nature.²⁷⁾

It is undeniable that for Spinoza, infinite modes have a close connection to laws of nature. However, this is not to say that Spinoza thinks that infinite modes *are* laws of nature. In TIE 101, while explaining how the essences of particular mutable things are to be known, Spinoza says that they are “to be sought only from the fixed and eternal things, and at the same time from the laws of nature as inscribed in these things as in their true codes, which govern the coming into existence and the ordering of all particular things.” Here, by the fixed and eternal things, Spinoza refers to infinite modes.²⁸⁾ For Spinoza, laws of nature are *inscribed* in infinite modes as in their true codes, which govern the production of particular things. Laws of nature are themselves not infinite modes but ‘inscriptions’ about them.

How then should we understand this relation between laws of nature and infinite modes in a literal sense? According to Spinoza, infinite modes produce finite modes. So, they have a power to produce finite modes. The power isn’t random. It is exercised in principled manners. Perhaps, what Spinoza is trying to say is that laws of nature *represent* the “codes” of infinite modes by which the power of infinite modes is exercised. For Spinoza, the power of a thing is the essence of the thing. Spinoza’s thought then is after all that laws of nature

25) For Curley’s view of the relation between infinite modes and laws of nature, see Curley (1969), pp. 58-62.

26) See E3pre: “the laws and rules of Nature, according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are always and everywhere the same.”

27) Indeed, Curley is not alone in identifying Spinoza’s infinite modes with laws of nature. See, for example, Martin (2008).

28) I will say a lot more about the fixed and eternal things shortly. Ward (2011) also identifies ‘infinite modes’ of E1p21 with ‘the fixed and eternal things’ of TIE 101.

are an *account* of the essence of infinite modes. Note that for Spinoza as in Aristotle, the definition of a thing is an account of the essence of the thing. We may then naturally think that in Spinoza, laws of nature are the definition of infinite modes.

In the Aristotelian tradition, the usual definition of man is that man is a rational animal. From this point of view, the definition of a thing is general in character, which is repeatably true of many things. This might tempt one into thinking that laws of nature qua the definition of infinite modes are in character general, which are repeatably true of many things. However, this is not how Spinoza understands the definition of a thing.²⁹⁾ Spinoza's *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, as its subtitle suggests, is meant to guide us to the true knowledge of things. According to Spinoza, we can gain the true knowledge of things by seeking the definition of them. So, knowing "the conditions of a good definition" is a key to undertaking his epistemological project (TIE 94). What conditions are to be met if the definition of a thing is to be good? Spinoza puts forward two requirements: first, the definition of a thing must include its proximate cause; and second, all the propria of the thing must be deducible from the definition (TIE 96).

For Spinoza, the definition of infinite modes must be the one that includes the proximate cause of them. Consider motion-and-rest - the immediate infinite mode in the attribute of Extension. The laws of nature as the definition of it must include the proximate cause of it. And the proximate cause of it is God or God's essence - i.e., the attribute of Extension. God's essence isn't a general feature like a universal. God's essence is God's power. No general feature is a power. God's essence as the proximate cause of the immediate infinite mode is in character singular. So, the definition of the immediate infinite mode that must include the proximate cause of it is singular in character. Clearly, this is

29) For more on the difference between Spinoza's conception of essence and the traditional Aristotelian conception, see Carriero (2013) and Carriero (2019).

equally applicable to the definition of any other infinite mode. For Spinoza, the definition of any infinite mode must include its proximate cause and thus be singular in character.³⁰⁾

Thus, for Spinoza, the laws of nature are singular in character as they are the definition of infinite modes which must include their proximate cause. Of course, laws of nature are usually characterized in terms of general propositions. Those general propositions may partly account for the essence or power of infinite modes. But as long as they remain general and thus fail to include their proximate cause, for Spinoza, they fail to be a complete account of the essence of infinite modes. General statements about laws of nature ought to be regarded as only a partial description of the essence or power of infinite modes.

In practice, in inferring a fact about a particular event from laws of nature, one may take laws of nature as general facts whose instance is the fact about the event in question. This usual practice is innocuous for the purpose of *predicting* an event. To predict an event, all one needs is a logically valid argument whose conclusion is the occurrence of the event. However, predicting an event is one thing, and explaining an event is completely another.³¹⁾ To explain an event, it is not enough to have a logically valid argument. As has been seen above, the argument must also be a demonstration whose order of inference aligns with the order of immanent causation or emanation based on the essence of a thing in question. Perhaps, this is what Spinoza has in mind when he says that “the most secure conclusion is to be drawn from some particular affirmative essence, i.e., from a true and legitimate definition. For, starting from universal axioms alone,

30) On the Finean model of essence along the line of Fine (1994), the essence of a thing is assimilated to the definition of it, while assuming that the definition of a thing is an explanation of what the thing is. I think that the Finean model is limited in that given that the definition of a thing is an explanation of what the thing is, the definition of a thing cannot include a singular element which is indispensable for the essence of the thing. See Han (2023).

31) The guiding idea behind Hempel’s model of explanation is that explanation and prediction are in nature the same. In lights of the Aristotelian and the Spinozist tradition, Hempel’s model does not get off the ground in the first place because explaining is fundamentally different from predicting.

the intellect cannot descend to particulars, since axioms are of infinite extension and do not determine the intellect to contemplate one particular thing rather than another.” (TIE 93-4)

The consideration so far puts Curley’s thesis into serious doubt. On Curley’s thesis, for Spinoza, infinite modes are laws of nature. But this doesn’t seem right. For Spinoza, infinite modes are not laws of nature. Rather, laws of nature are an account of the essence or power of infinite modes - that is, the definition of infinite modes. On Curley’s thesis, for Spinoza, infinite modes are in character general as they are laws of nature which are in character general. But this doesn’t seem right either. For Spinoza, laws of nature are in character singular, for the definition of infinite modes must include the proximate cause of infinite modes.

For Spinoza, infinite modes are neither laws of nature nor general in character. It might be claimed that this can’t be right because it conflicts with Spinoza’s remark on infinite modes in the *Short Treatise*. In KV18, Spinoza divides the whole of Nature into *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. Identifying *Natura naturans* with God, he goes on to divide *Natura naturata* into a general and a particular, saying that “[the] general consists of all the modes which depend immediately on God... the particular consists of all the particular things which are produced by the general mode.” It is clear that for Spinoza, *Natura naturata* are modes. What Spinoza refers to by ‘the general’ then should be infinite modes. Doesn’t this show that for Spinoza, infinite modes are general as Curley’s thesis suggests?

Not really. Spinoza’s distinction between the general and the particular should not lead us to the idea that for Spinoza, infinite and finite modes are categorially different: infinite modes are general like universals, while finite modes are singular like particulars. Spinoza is a firm espouser of naturalism and denies any illegitimate categorial distinction without good reason. For Spinoza, God is the cause of all things. Modes whether infinite or finite are all results of God’s efficient causal activity. This being the case, it is hard to think that infinite

modes are in category different from finite modes. For Spinoza, modes have an essence. The essence of a thing is the power of the thing. Modes whether infinite or finite are the same in that they have an essential power. Infinite and finite modes are of the same category.

How then should we understand Spinoza's distinction between the general and the particular? Note that Spinoza says that the general are all the modes which depend *immediately* on God. Perhaps, what Spinoza has mind by the general are not infinite modes in general but *immediate* infinite modes - i.e., motion-and-rest in the attribute of Extension. If this is right, Spinoza's distinction between the general and the particular is not the one between infinite and finite modes but the one between immediate infinite modes on the one hand and all other modes on the other. What then is the sense in which immediate infinite modes are the general?

Motion-and-rest in essence has a power, and as we have seen through the physical digression, this power is a power to produce all possible bodies in general. Bodies are either simplest ones or composite ones. The power of motion-and-rest can produce simplest bodies by forming certain degrees of speed. The power of motion-and-rest can produce composite bodies composed of simplest bodies by forming a certain fixed ratio in which the simplest bodies communicate to their motions to one another. Similarly, for any composite body, the power of motion-and-rest can produce it. Motion-and-rest is the general in that it has a *general power* to produce all bodies in the greatest scope possible.

If immediate infinite modes are general in this sense, we don't need to think that for Spinoza, immediate infinite modes are general like universals - 'general' in Curley's intended sense. Immediate infinite modes have a general power, but this is not to say that they are themselves general. It rather follows that immediate infinite modes must be singular in character as they are in essence powers. If immediate infinite modes are singular, so are mediate infinite modes. For Spinoza, infinite modes whether immediate or mediate are singular in character as capable of producing things.

Infinite modes are time and again characterized as “fixed and eternal” by Spinoza. This should not lead to the thought that infinite modes are therefore general in character: if something is eternal, it is abstract; and if it is abstract, it is general. But this train of thought must be stopped. For Spinoza, being eternal does not entail being general.

Spinoza says that “our most important task is to seek knowledge of particular things” because “the more individualized an idea is, the more distinct it is, and therefore the clearer it is” (TIE 98). So, according to Spinoza, our ideas must be deduced from “real beings ... in accordance with the chain of causes from one real being to another real being, and in such a manner as never to get involved with abstractions and universals, neither inferring something real from them nor inferring them from something real” (TIE 99). On the other hand, Spinoza warns us that “by the series of causes and real beings [he does] not here mean the series of mutable particular things, but only the series of fixed and eternal things” (TIE 100). What we pursue in seeking knowledge of particular things is their essence. But the series of mutable particular things has no connection with their essence while “[the] essence is to be sought only from the fixed and eternal things” (TIE 101).

It is not hard to see what Spinoza means by the fixed and eternal things. In the last section, we saw that for Spinoza, the face of the whole Universe is the total mediate infinite mode: the totality of simplest bodies, composite individuals composed of the simplest bodies, composite individuals composed of the composite individuals composed of the simplest bodies; and so on. But this should be read with great care. When a mediate infinite mode is said to follow immediately from another infinite mode, what follows is the nature or essence of the mediate infinite - something that can be known not by the first kind of cognition (i.e., imagination) but by the second/third kind of cognition (i.e., intellect). For example, when individuals are said to follow immediately from simplest bodies, what follow are their natures or essences - that is, either fixed ratios in which simplest bodies communicate their motions to each other (i.e.,

natures of those individuals conceived by the second kind of cognition or the reason) or conatuses that strive to preserve the ratios (i.e., natures of those individuals conceived by the third kind of cognition or the intuition).³²⁾ The natures or essences of these individuals are fixed and eternal things. The face of the whole Universe qua the total mediate infinite mode is the total series or network of bodies qua *fixed and eternal things*.

After distinguishing between the series of fixed and eternal things from the series of mutable particular things and emphasizing that we should pay attention to the former, Spinoza says in TIE 101 that the fixed and eternal things are singular despite the appearance to the contrary:

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.

Thus, it is clear that Spinoza thinks that the face of the whole Universe or the mediate infinite mode, while eternal and infinite, is *singular*. For Spinoza, being eternal does not entail being general.

32) Several commentators assume that for Spinoza, a thing has two kinds of essence, formal and actual, to the effect that its formal essence is a certain form that precedes its existence and the actual essence of it is its existence as its conatus. See, for example, Martin (2008), Garrett (2009), and Ward (2011). But I disagree. As indicated above, I think that for Spinoza, the formal essence of a thing is the essence of the thing insofar as it is conceived by the second kind of cognition or the reason, while the actual essence of the thing or the conatus of it is the essence of the thing insofar as it is conceived by the third kind of cognition or the intuition. For an interpretation along this line, see Laerke (2017). (See also Brandom 1976.) In E2p8, Spinoza talks about formal essences of nonexistent things, which complicates the matter. But I believe that this remark of Spinoza's must not mislead us into separating the formal essence of a thing from the actual essence (conatus) of it. Furthermore, against the universalist interpretation (e.g., Martin 2008, Garrett 2009, Hübner 2015), I also think that Spinoza has the individualist conception of essence. For a classic discussion of Spinoza's essence along the line of the individualist interpretation, see Della Rocca (1996). But here is not the right place to address these larger issues.

For Spinoza, the face of the whole Universe is singular. But this is not to say that for Spinoza, the face of the whole Universe is *a singular thing* in the technical sense of the term as Spinoza defines it in E2d7 as follows:

By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing.

If the face of the whole Universe is a singular thing in this sense, it must be finite and have a determinate existence. But this can't be right. The face of the whole Universe is not finite: it is an infinite mode. It does not have a determinate existence either: it is eternal so that its existence is an eternal truth with no spatiotemporal contour.

The face of the whole Universe is not a singular thing. But as we have already seen in the last section, for Spinoza, it is an individual: there is a fixed ratio in which all bodies in it communicate their motions to each other to the effect that it has a conatus that strives to preserve the ratio. So, for Spinoza, the face of the whole Universe is an individual but not a singular thing. It might also be the case that something is a singular thing but not an individual in Spinoza's sense. Weighing myself, I hold a rock on my shoulder. I and the rock together move the needle of the scale in a certain way. The rock and I are the cause of the movement of the needle of the scale. Yet, the rock and I might not compose an individual as there doesn't seem to be a fixed ratio in which the rock and I communicate their motions to each other.

Thus, for Spinoza, it is one thing that something is a singular thing (*res singularis*); and it is another that it is an individual (*individuum*). As we have just considered, the two notions differ in extension. And there is also a conceptual difference which is crucial to our discussion. According to Spinoza's definition in E2d7, whenever there is a singular thing *x*, there are individuals *Y* that

concur in one action and are thereby the cause of one effect. This is possible only if there is something *z* other than *Y* to the effect that *Y* do something to *z*. A singular thing is a thing that can be understood only against another thing. So, there being a singular thing presupposes there being at least two things. The concept of a singular thing involves the concept of number. This has an important implication. In a famous letter to Lodewijk Meyer on infinity (Letter 12), Spinoza says that “Measure, Time and Number are nothing other than modes of thinking, or rather, modes of imagining.” Thus, for Spinoza, a singular thing is something we apprehend by the imagination. It is a being about which we have the first kind of cognition.

On the other hand, the concept of an individual does not involve the concept of number. There being an individual does not presuppose there being something other than the individual. An individual exists if there is a fixed ratio in which its parts communicate their motions to each other. This alone indicates nothing as to whether there is something external to the individual or not. Let *x* be an individual. This alone does not tell us anything about whether there is another individual outside it or not: *x* might be an individual in the face of the whole Universe in which case there is an individual outside *x*; and *x* might be the face of the whole Universe itself in which case there is no individual outside *x*. This suggests that an individual is what we may apprehend by the intellect. It is a being about which we have the second or third kind of cognition.³³⁾

That an individual is apprehended only by the intellect seems to be inevitable,

33) That Spinoza uses ‘a singular thing’ and ‘an individual’ differently has been noted in the literature. See, for example, Garrett (2008, p. 11, n. 14) and Melamed (2013, pp. 74-9). These commentators seem to think that all individuals are singular things, though not vice versa. But as I explained above, I think that for Spinoza, not all individuals are (conceived to be) singular things. Melamed (2013, p. 74) thinks that Spinoza’s uses of ‘a singular thing’ and ‘an individual’ are meant to express two kinds of *finite* units. But I don’t think that Melamed’s characterization is accurate. The face of the whole Universe can be conceived to be an *infinite* individual, while it can also be conceived to be a singular thing and finite. In my view, Spinoza’s uses of ‘a singular thing’ and ‘an individual’ are meant to express two ways things are conceived.

considering the way an individual is defined in the physical digression. Knowing an individual is knowing the fixed ratio in which its parts communicate their motions to each other. Knowing the fixed ratio is through intellection, not imagination. Of an individual cognized by the intellect, one might attempt to apprehend it by the imagination. Then, insofar as it is apprehended by the imagination, it should be conceived as a singular thing. Toward the end of the letter on infinity (Letter 12), Spinoza says:

From all that I have said one can clearly see that certain things are infinite by their own nature and cannot in any way be conceived as finite, while other things are infinite by virtue of the cause in which they inhere; and when the latter are conceived in abstraction, they can be divided into parts and be regarded as finite.³⁴⁾

According to Spinoza, certain things are infinite by their own nature, and these infinite beings can in no way be conceived as finite. Only God is infinite in that way. On the other hand, certain things are infinite by virtue of their cause, and these infinite beings would be conceived to be finite and divisible if they are conceived in abstraction or, in other words, by the imagination. Infinite modes are infinite in this way. So, if infinite modes are to be conceived to be infinite in this way, they must be conceived by the intellect through their proximate cause which ultimately goes back to God's essence. So, infinite modes are conceived to be infinite insofar as they are apprehended by the intellect. On the other hand, infinite modes would be conceived to be finite if they are conceived by the imagination. Imagine the face of the whole Universe. This is possible only if we conceive it as having a boundary as if there is something or space outside it, ending up conceiving it as a singular thing, not an individual.

34) See also note 21.

Spinoza says that the face of the whole Universe or the total mediate infinite mode (i.e., the fixed and eternal things) is singular. By doing so, Spinoza does not mean that the number of the face of the whole Universe is 1. Singularity in this context is not a numerical notion which is essentially a relative one. Conceiving the face of the whole Universe as singular (not as a singular thing) is conceiving it absolutely, not in relation to something outside it but through the definition of it that accounts for the inmost essence of it (TIE 95).

I am now in a position to explain why Spinoza's remark on finite modes in E1p28 has no evidential role to play in favor of the moderate necessitarian interpretation. It bears repeating the passage:

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.

Here, Spinoza talks about how a finite mode is determined to exist. Note, however, that a finite mode in this passage is conceived as a singular thing - a thing that is conceived to be distinguished from something else outside it and thus has a determinate existence with a spatiotemporal boundary. Here Spinoza talks about finite modes insofar as they are conceived in abstraction or by the imagination.

Insofar as finite modes are conceived to be singular things by the imagination, the face of the whole Universe must also be conceived by the imagination to be finite and divisible into these singular things as its parts. This being the case, there is no wonder that finite modes thus conceived do not follow from the face of the whole Universe in the intended sense. As has been seen, for Spinoza, that

finite modes follow from the face of the whole Universe is that they are emanated from it as propria of it. Insofar as finite modes are parts of the face of the whole Universe, however, they are not propria of it because for Spinoza, propria of a thing are in the thing but not parts of it.³⁵⁾

Recall that in TIE 100, Spinoza says that “it should be noted that by the series of causes and real beings I do not here mean the series of mutable particular things, but only the series of fixed and eternal things.” In order to see the face of the whole Universe as the infinite mode, it must be conceived by the intellect, not by the imagination, through its proximate cause - i.e., God’s essence. Then, the face of the whole Universe is not conceived to be composed of singular things with a determinate existence but conceived to be a series or network of fixed and eternal essences of them - i.e., either a series of fixed ratios as formal essences insofar as they are conceived by the reason or a series of conatuses as actual essences insofar as they are conceived by the intuition. Finite modes would then be conceived to follow from the face of the whole Universe as its propria.³⁶⁾

Now we can see how Spinoza’s remarks on finite modes can coherently be understood. For Spinoza, the actual universe or the face of the whole Universe is necessary and in no sense contingent. So, insofar as finite modes are adequately conceived in terms of their eternal essences as propria of the face of the whole Universe, they are necessary and in no sense contingent. On the other hand, finite modes may be inadequately conceived as singular things with a determinate existence. Then, each of these modes as a singular thing must be conceived to be determined to exist in terms of another. But this provides us with no reason for thinking that each of them is in some sense contingent. For the modal profile

35) In this regard, Spinoza follows Aristotle and other scholastics: “By ‘in a subject’, I mean what is in something, not as a part, and cannot exist separately from what it is in.” (Aristotle, *Categories* 1a20).

36) Wilson (1983) argues that the cognition of things following from God in E1p16 is meant to be *scientia intuitiva* which is the third or the highest kind of cognition.

of finite modes must be determined through the adequate idea of them by the intellect, not by the imagination.

6. Conclusion

I have argued in defense of the standard interpretation that for Spinoza, everything is necessary and in no sense contingent. Spinoza says that finite modes are necessary not by reason of essence. This is not to say that finite modes are in a sense contingent. All this implies is that the necessity of finite modes does not have its source in their essence. The necessity of finite modes is grounded in God's essence, not in theirs. Spinoza says that when finite modes are conceived to be singular things, each of them follows from infinite modes not absolutely but relative to another finite mode. This is not to say that finite modes have ontological independence of some sort from God's essence. All this suggests is that to conceive finite modes adequately, they must be conceived not to be singular things qua parts of the face of whole Universe but to be modes or *propria* of it qua immanent causal results.³⁷⁾

37) Part of this paper was written a long while ago when I was a graduate student under the advice of Michael Della Rocca. I should like to thank Michael for having inspired me to appreciate the power of Spinoza's thinking not only through his historical portrait of Spinoza but also through the development of a Spinozist system of his own (Della Rocca 2010; Della Rocca 2020) which is perhaps even more Spinozist than Spinoza's. I also thank anonymous referees for very helpful comments and suggestions.

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국문초록

스피노자에 있어 유한 양태의 필연성

한성일

【주제분류】 철학사, 근대철학, 스피노자

【주요어】 스피노자의 윤리학, 필연론, 유한 양태, 스피노자, 켈리

【요약문】 스피노자 체계에서 모든 것은 필연적이고 어떠한 의미에서도 우연적이지 않다는 것은 표준적인 견해이다. 표준적 견해에 반대하여, 에드윈 켈리는 1969년에 출간된 그의 고전 [스피노자의 형이상학]에서 스피노자의 윤리학 1부, 명제 28에 기반해 스피노자가 온건한 형태의 필연론을, 즉 모든 것은 필연적이나 유한 양태만큼은 어떤 의미에서 우연적이란 견해를 제시하고 있다고 논증한다. 이 논문에서, 필자는 켈리의 논증을 재고한다. 통상 해석가들은 무한 양태에 대한 스피노자의 진술이 유한 양태가 어떠한 의미에서도 우연적이지 않다는 것을 함축함을 보임으로써 켈리의 논증에 응답한다. 하지만 이러한 점을 지적하는 것만으로는 표준 해석에 대해 켈리가 가지고 있는 우려를 잠식시키기에 충분치 않다. 왜냐하면, 이런 응답은 명제 28이 그의 온건 필연론 해석을 지지한다는 켈리의 주장이 왜 틀렸는지 설명하고 있지 않기 때문이다. 표준 해석을 옹호하기 위해 필자는 기존 문헌에서 다루었던 것보다 더 자세한 방식으로 기존 응답을 더욱 보강하고, 켈리가 생각하는 것과 달리 명제 28이 왜 켈리의 해석을 지지하지 못하는지 설명한다.

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