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Spinoza's Monism II: A Proposal

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Abstract: An old question in Spinoza scholarship is how finite, non-eternal things transitively caused by other finite, non-eternal things (i.e., the entities described in propositions like *E1p28*) are caused by the infinite, eternal substance, given that what follows either directly or indirectly from the divine nature is infinite and eternal (*E1p21–23*). In “Spinoza’s Monism I,”¹ I pointed out that most commentators answer this question by invoking entities that are indefinite and sempiternal, but argued that perhaps we should not be so quick to assume that in Spinoza’s system, an infinite and eternal substance could cause such indefinite, sempiternal entities. But if such eternal-durational causation is denied, then it seems harder to see how Spinoza’s system could be coherent: if Spinoza holds that the infinite, eternal substance cannot cause *anything* that is not infinite and not eternal, then how can he also hold that *all* things are modes immanently caused by substance (*E1p15*, *E1p18*, *E1p25*)? In this essay, I explain how Spinoza’s system could be understood in light of a denial of eternal-durational causation. On the interpretation I offer, God is the cause of all things and all things are modes because the *essences* of *all* things follow from the divine nature and *all* essences enjoy infinite, eternal reality as modes immanently caused by the infinite, eternal substance. The same non-substantial essences can also be conceived as enjoying non-infinite, non-eternal reality, but so conceived, they are enduring, finite (or sempiternal, indefinite) entities that cannot be conceived as modes caused by and inhering in the one infinite, eternal substance. I conclude by pointing out that if we take this interpretive route, we do have to understand Spinoza as committed to acosmism, or a denial of the reality of the world – at least the world of enduring, finite things.

1 Introduction

A common view in the 17th-century, one which Descartes calls a “manifest truth,” is that a transcendent, infinite, eternal God not only creates formal reality that

1 “Spinoza’s Monism I,” in the previous issue of this journal.

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is finite (or indefinite), but also continues to sustain that reality over time after creation.² That view figures in the Third Meditation:

All of the time of my life can be divided into innumerable parts, each of which is entirely independent of the others, so that from the fact that I existed a short time ago, it does not follow that I ought to exist now, unless some cause as it were creates me again in this moment, that is, conserves me.³

Whatever the precise details (e. g., whether there is just one continuing divine act of creation or an infinity of distinct acts), Descartes held that an eternal, infinite God sustains finite (and perhaps indefinite) things in their formal reality over time.⁴

Descartes can be understood as holding two “dualist” views, each including a thesis regarding substances and a corresponding thesis regarding causation. First, there is the familiar dualism of created minds and bodies: minds and bodies are really distinct formally real created substances, and while each kind of substance has its own principal attribute, this difference in attribute does not preclude there being causal interaction (*secundum fieri*) between minds and bodies.⁵ Second, there is the dualism of God and created substances just mentioned: a unique, eternal, immutable, infinite, necessary substance – God – sustains the very being (*esse*), or formal reality, of created substances over time.

Spinoza, of course, denies the first dualist view. Spinoza can acknowledge that the Cartesians are correct that thought and extension are conceivable independently of each other: thinking reality and extramental extended reality are each conceived through themselves (*E1p10*) and each “may be conceived to be really distinct” (*E1p10s*). But Spinoza holds that the Cartesians go wrong in

² AT VII.369f. See also AT VII.48f., 111, 165, 168f., and AT III.429. For my purposes here, the details of Descartes’ view of divine conservation are not important: what is important is that God sustains things in their very being in or over time. For more discussion of Descartes’ view of divine causation *secundum esse*, see Schmaltz 2008, 71–83.

³ AT VII.48f. (cf. AT VIII.13). The created world is *indefinite* (AT VIII.52, AT VIII.14f.). I do not take the tensed language of “[God] has existed from eternity and will abide for eternity” (AT VII.68) to show that Descartes’ God is sempiternal; it is because God is (timelessly) eternal that it is true at all times that God exists (timelessly).

⁴ The target is upstream from the Cartesian thesis that because “conservation differs solely in reason from creation,” there must be “some cause that as it were creates me at this moment, that is, conserves me” (AT VII.49. Cf. AT VII.165). This thesis presupposes the intelligibility of the causal relation between God and creatures.

⁵ AT V.347 and V.403f., AT VII.88, AT IXA.213, and AT XI.359–62. For discussion, see Broughton 1986, Gorham 1999, and Schmaltz 2008.

failing to see that causation must be understood within an attribute and in failing to appreciate that one cannot take the conceptual independence of the attributes to indicate that there is not just one substance that can be conceived under different attributes.

What about the second Cartesian “dualism”? Spinoza denies that there are created substances: there is *one* substance and that substance's *modes*. So, it is obvious – and has long been recognized as obvious – that Spinoza denies the part of the second Cartesian dualist view that posits created *substances* distinct from God. However, I think Spinoza is more critical of the causal thesis associated with this dualism than has been appreciated. Because Spinoza refers to the things in *E1p28* as *modes*, and because he says God immanently causes *all* modes, commentators have understandably sought a way of causally linking the infinite and eternal God and enduringly real finite things. However, as I argued in “Spinoza's Monism I,” an eternal, infinite substance's immanent causation of something non-eternal and non-infinite – even if that something is sempiternal and indefinite – involves an inexplicable shift in realities that renders the immanent causation (and inherence of effect in the cause) hard to understand. If only intelligible causation is genuine causation, then eternal-durational, infinite-indefinite causation has got to go.

But if an infinite, eternal God cannot cause anything enduring, even if that thing is everlasting and indefinite, then how can God be the cause of *all* things?

Here is the proposal I will explore here. God, conceived under any attribute, can only be properly conceived as eternal and infinite: the divine essence can only be conceived as enjoying eternal and infinite formal reality, and substance can only be conceived as caused by substance. Yet each of the essences following with necessity from the divine nature can be conceived, within the same attribute, *either* as enjoying non-eternal (enduring) and non-infinite (finite or indefinite) formal reality or as enjoying eternal and infinite formal reality. What cause(s) or effect(s) something depends not just on the attribute it is conceived under, but also on whether the formal reality its essence is conceived as enjoying is infinite and eternal or non-infinite and non-eternal. If an essence is conceived as enduringly real, then it is a thing that only has enduringly real transitive causes and effects.⁶ But that *same essence* can be conceived as having eternal, infinite formal reality, in which case it is something immanently caused by and inhering in the

⁶ This is so whether the enduring thing is finite or indefinite. In the former case, its causes and effects include other finite enduring things (as well as itself; see LeBuffe 2018, ch. 1, for discussion), while in the latter case, its cause will be itself at some temporally prior point and its effects will be itself at some temporally posterior point.

eternal and infinite substance.⁷ The eternal, infinite substance is the cause of *all things* because a) all essences follow from the divine nature and b) every one of these essences is, conceived *sub specie aeternitatis*, an eternal, infinite mode caused by the eternal, infinite substance.⁸

On this proposal, an eternal, infinite substance's immanent causation of its modes does not involve an inexplicable shift in realities: modes immanently caused by the infinite, eternal substance are literally ways in which substance's own infinite, eternal reality is modified.⁹ Yet the proposal does require that we interpret Spinoza's claims that finite, enduring things are 'modes' (see, e.g., *E1p25c*) not as claims that those things are in the infinite, eternal substance *qua* finite and enduringly real things, but as claims that the *essence* of each of those things is, when conceived as enjoying infinite and eternal reality, a mode in substance. Strictly speaking, all *modes* of the infinite, eternal substance are infinite and eternal.¹⁰ The proposal also requires, more dramatically, that we read Spinoza as a kind of acosmist, someone who denies the world, or *cosmos*: if enduring, finite formal reality cannot be understood as caused by God, properly conceived, then that enduring, finite reality turns out to be *ersatz* reality.

7 Cf. D. Garrett's 2009 interpretation of "formal essences." Although Garrett agrees that the (eternal) formal essence of a thing is an infinite mode, I am not sure he agrees that the reality this essence enjoys is timelessly eternal (rather than sempiternal). According to Garrett, the formal essence of a singular thing is the "omnipresent modification or aspect of an attribute of God that consists in the attribute's general capacity to accommodate – through the general laws of its nature as an attribute – the actual existence of a singular thing of the given specific structure whenever and wherever the series of actual finite causes should actually determine it to occur." This "general modification of the attribute" follows from more general laws of nature and is, like the laws of nature, "permanent and pervasive" (D. Garrett 2009, 290. Cf. Martin 2008, Ward 2011). Garrett's description is at least compatible with understanding extension's "general capacity to accommodate [...] the actual existence" of a body as a capacity of extension understood as something *enduring*: it is because *enduring* extended reality has the permanent and pervasive features it has (the laws of nature and the formal essence following from them) that it can, given certain actual finite, determinate modifications, come to be modified in some finite, determinate way.

8 Melamed thinks the distinction *natura naturans/natura naturata* coincides with the distinction *eternal/durational* (Melamed 2013, 110 f.). On my view, the distinctions do not coincide, as *natura naturata* can be considered either as eternal, infinite modes or as enduring finite (or indefinite) things. But *natura naturata* implies *natura naturans'* activity, so perhaps '*natura naturata*' is the term to use when we want to consider things *as modes inhering in substance*. This would fit with *E1p29s*'s claim that *natura naturata* are "modes of God's attributes *insofar as they are considered as things which are in God*" (my emphasis).

9 See "Spinoza's Monism I," Section 3.2.

10 See Primus 2019, in which I argue that *E1p21–23* can be read as supporting the conclusion that an infinite, eternal substance's effects can *only* be infinite and eternal modes.

In Section 2, I spell out some more details and answer some objections. In Section 3, I address a few textual difficulties. My aim in these sections is not to establish, beyond any doubt, that Spinoza's *Ethics* must be understood as I propose; I just want to say enough to convince readers that the proposal is worth exploring further.

In the concluding Section 4, I turn to the acosmist consequence of the interpretation. I will not deny that acosmism brings with it its own perplexities; one might even conclude that an acosmist implication is a *reductio ad absurdum* of an interpretation. But, despite the puzzles, I think this kind of acosmist interpretation nevertheless has this going for it: it can explain why Spinoza thought that accepting his metaphysical framework would be so transformative – as well as why accepting it would be so hard.¹¹

2 The One and the Sameness of Essences

I first want to acknowledge that if one begins with certain views about the *one-and-the-sameness* of minds and bodies, then it will seem confused to hold that there could be another dimension of one-and-the-sameness in Spinoza's system (viz. the one-and-the-sameness, within an attribute, of an infinite, eternal mode and a non-infinite, non-eternal thing).

According to one view, although bodies are only characterized in terms of *extension* and predicates that presuppose extension (e.g., size, shape, and motion) and minds are only characterized in terms of *thought* and predicates that presuppose thought (e.g., affirmation), a mind and a body are *one and the same thing* if they have all of the same "attribute-neutral" properties: e.g., if they endure for the same amount of time and have the same number of effects and causes.¹² If one is thinking of one-and-the-sameness this way, then it does seem confused to think that an infinite, eternal mode and a non-eternal, non-infinite thing could be *one and the same thing*. After all, it seems there are no neutral features through which we can understand the one-and-the-sameness of eternal, infinite modes and non-eternal, non-infinite things. The *attribute-neutral* properties of enduring for some determinate time or having a certain number of causes certainly won't suffice: eternal, infinite modes never cease to be and have an

¹¹ I will not focus so much on the cognition involved in accepting Spinoza's metaphysical framework (but see Primus 2017 and forthcoming).

¹² See Della Rocca 1996, Jarrett 1991, Newlands 2012, Rice 1999.

eternal, infinite God as their cause, but enduring, finite things do cease to be and do not have an eternal, infinite God as their immanent cause.

Many interpreters have held that Spinoza's claim that a mind and body are *one and the same* is the claim that they are numerically identical, in fact just *one* formally real thing conceived in different ways.¹³ If one is thinking of the one-and-the-sameness of minds and bodies along these lines, then it will again seem absurd to suppose that one and the same thing could be conceived either as eternally, infinitely formally real or enduringly, finitely formally real. At any given time, only some of the things that will ever be enduringly real are at that time enduringly real, whereas at any given time, all the things that will ever be eternally real are eternally real. There is an imbalance in the ledger: there are always *more* eternally formally real things than enduringly formally real things. The entities on each side of the eternal-durational divide are numerically *distinct* formally real things, not the *same* formally real things conceived in different ways. Moreover, if only the formal reality of eternal, infinite modes is intelligible and real, then the claim that an infinite, eternal mode and a finite, enduring thing are one and the same is nonsensical: one and the same formally real thing cannot be conceived as either real or not real.

On my proposal, however, the one-and-the-sameness of a mind and a body is the one-and-the-sameness of an *essence*: one and the same essence can be conceived either as real in extension or as real in thought (that is, conceived as a representation of the body).¹⁴ The one-and-the-sameness of an eternal, infinite mode and a non-eternal, non-infinite thing can also be understood as the one-and-the-sameness of an essence: they are one and the same essence conceived as enjoying different flavors of formal reality and as having different causes.

The reading is compatible with necessitarianism: there is just *one* order of essences following from the divine nature. Conceived as formally real *sub specie durationis*, the order is expressed as a transitive causal series of enduring things.¹⁵

¹³ For critical discussion of this view, as well as citations, see Marshall 2009 and Garrett 2017.

¹⁴ I follow Hübner (see 2015 and 2019) in understanding the parallelism of mind and body primarily in terms of the mind's representation of the body. For another view according to which a mind and body are understood as having the same *essence*, see Morrison ("Spinoza on Mind, Body, and Numerical Identity," ms.). I say more about the one-and-the-sameness within an attribute below.

¹⁵ The "Physical Digression" after E2p13 might not be a complete treatise on physics, but it does indicate how Spinoza thought of transitive causation among bodies. How transitive causal interactions go is determined by the essences of bodies (the specific properties of the involved bodies) and by features common to all bodies (what is "equally in the part and whole" (cf. E2p37–39)). These features likely include those the Euclidean "common notions" and postulates track, as well as laws of motion. I do not think Spinoza holds that the general properties described by laws of nature are sempiternal, indefinite entities whose formal reality is over and above the

Conceived as formally real *sub specie aeternitatis*, the order is expressed as an immutable order of eternal truths, each eternal truth an eternal, infinite mode immanently caused by and inhering in substance.¹⁶

2.1 Neutral Essences as *Geometrical* Essences

What more can be said about these essences that are attribute- and formal reality-neutral, or can be conceived as either enjoying eternal, infinite reality or enduring, finite (or indefinite) reality, and either as enjoying reality in thought or reality in extension? I think these attribute- and formal-reality neutral essences can be characterized *geometrically*.¹⁷ Although one might think that geometry is limited to characterizing what is formally real in extension, it should be noted

formal reality of finite, non-sempiternal bodies. Such properties are *equally* in the part (e. g., any finite enduring body) and in the whole (all finite, enduring bodies considered as an indefinite, sempiternal individual). Thanks to an anonymous referee for prompting me to say a bit more about laws of nature here.

16 I do not wish to imply that to conceive something *sub specie durationis* is to conceive it *wholly* inadequately: if one has an adequate idea of a *property* of a body, one can conceive of that property as the property of an *enduring, finite* body (see E5p4). An anonymous referee contended that conception *sub specie aeternitatis* is equivalent to cognition of things as necessary, or cognition that is not from some temporal or spatial vantage point; *sub specie aeternitatis* conception, according to this suggestion, does not require that one conceive of a thing as real as an eternal mode. I will not be able to provide a complete response here, but I suspect there are multiple senses of *sub specie aeternitatis* conception discernible in the *Ethics*, one sense corresponding to cognition of the second kind, reason, and the other sense corresponding to cognition of the third kind, *scientia intuitiva*. An atemporal, non-perspectival apprehension of how certain properties necessitate other properties is associated with reason; the transitive causal series of enduring, finite things can be conceived not from some indexical present, but *sub specie aeternitatis*. Granted, this sense of *sub specie aeternitatis* conception does not require that one conceive of anything as real as an eternal mode. Yet I think the sense of *sub specie aeternitatis* conception corresponding to *scientia intuitiva* does require conceiving of the formal reality of things as eternal, infinite modes immanently caused by and inhering in God. See Primus forthcoming for more discussion.

17 Geometric properties and essences may be extension- and thought-neutral, but I admit that it is unclear whether a *geometrically* characterized essence could be conceived in any other attribute. I am tempted to agree with Melamed 2013 that there is a representational parallelism of thought and each of the infinity of attributes besides extension. If geometry characterizes essences that can be conceived under either extension or thought, perhaps *schmeometry* characterizes essences that can be conceived under either *schmextension* or thought. The *schmeometrically* characterizable essences and the *geometrically* characterizable essences may be one and the same essences, but I admit that I am not sure how *this* one-and-the-sameness is to be understood.

that the *objectively real* cubes, triangles, and circles in thought are also characterized geometrically: a representation of a cube is distinguished from the representation of other bodies because it represents a *cube*.¹⁸ Geometry is plausibly neutral along the eternal-durational dimension as well. Whether cubes, triangles, and circles are conceived as enduring and finite bodies or as true and immutable natures,¹⁹ they are still characterizable in the same geometric terms.²⁰

Granted, this proposal does treat the essences of what is not substance differently from the attributes, or what “the intellect perceives to be the essence of substance.” While it may make sense to conceive of a *circle* as real in thought or real in extra-mental extension, as a true and immutable nature or as something finite and enduring, it does not make sense to keep an *attribute* fixed and conceive that attribute as enjoying different formal realities. The attribute of extension, for example, must be formally real *as* extension.²¹

This is, I think, what we should expect: the essence of substance is distinctive (see, e. g., *E1p20*). Nevertheless, both an attribute and a non-substantial essence both satisfy the definition of essence (*E2def2*). An attribute is that without which a substance can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without substance. A non-substantial essence is that without which a thing – whether that thing is an infinite, eternal mode or a finite, enduring thing – can neither be nor be conceived. The non-substantial essence is also that which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing: an essence is always

18 To say that the attribute-neutral essences are characterized geometrically does not mean that there are not other attribute-specific features: an idea conceived qua representational content can be characterized geometrically, but the idea conceived qua the *activity of thinking* some content will be characterized in attribute-specific terms – e. g., as *affirmation* of the geometrically-characterized content. I understand the distinction between the “idea” and the “idea of the idea” to track these two ways of conceiving of an idea. See Primus 2021.

19 In Primus 2019, I argue that we can understand infinite, eternal modes to be Spinoza’s version of what Cartesian true and immutable natures.

20 The idea that geometry is attribute- and formal-reality neutral is no odder than the view that a geometer does not need to take a stand on the ontology of mathematical objects to do their job: whether a geometer conceives of a cube as real in thought or real in the extramental extended world, real as a true and immutable nature or real as something finite and enduring, they can prove the very same theorems. Yet one might still object that what is *non-spatial* – what is in thought or what is in eternal, infinite extension, which, following Peterman 2015, may not be spatial either – cannot be characterized geometrically. I suspect that Spinoza, perhaps taking inspiration from Cartesian analytic geometry, does not take “geometry” so narrowly: *one and the same* thing can be considered in spatial, graphical terms or in non-spatial algebraic terms.

21 I read Spinoza as endorsing ontological pluralism: each attribute specifies a fundamental manner of existence. See Garrett 2017 for a sophisticated model of how to understand God, substance, and the attributes that incorporates such ontological pluralism.

conceived as enjoying some reality, either as a finite, enduring thing or as an eternal truth (where eternal truths enjoy infinite, eternal reality as modes of the infinite, eternal substance).²²

2.2 Ways to Conceive an Essence

It is worth pausing here to survey the diverse ways a non-substantial essence can be conceived; this will begin to clarify how the attribute dimension of the system intersects with the formal-reality dimension of the system.

Consider an essence that plays a prominent role in the *Ethics*, the essence of a human body, a particular *ratio* of constituent parts in motion and rest (*E2*lemma5). Conceived under the attribute of extension, the essence enjoys formal reality outside of thought: this is the formally real human body. However, there are *two* ways the essence can be conceived to be formally real outside of thought. There is the finite, enduring human body: this is the essence of the human body enjoying non-infinite, non-eternal formal reality. The human body, as well as each of its constituent parts, is a finite, enduring extended thing striving to persevere in its finite, enduring formal reality (*E3*p7); the essence of the human body is conceived as *persisting* over time despite changes in its constituent parts (*E2*lemmas 4–7). The finite, enduring human body (and its constituent parts) come (and cease) to be by the transitive causal activity of other finite, enduring bodies (*E1*p28).

And there is the body conceived to be an infinite, eternal mode of the infinite, eternal extended substance (below I try to dispel the sense that it is absurd to suppose that the essence of the body could be conceived to be real as an infinite, eternal mode). Infinite, eternal reality is not divisible into parts; the *ratio* here is not conceived as a pattern that persists through changes in enduring finite parts of a body, but is instead conceived as an *eternal* truth. The infinite, eternal body,

²² See footnote 23 below. Here one could wonder (and an anonymous referee did wonder) how *kind* essences (e. g., *man*, *human being*) fit into my account. This deserves more discussion than I can give it here, but here are a few remarks. The essences of particular human beings are, conceived under the attribute of extension, essences of particular bodies. If the same set of properties of extension is part of each one of these essences, then that set of properties is the kind essence *human body*. Any finite, enduring human body can be conceived either in terms of its individuating essence (what makes it the very body it is and not another body), or in terms of the kind essence (what makes the body a *human* body). So, there is a sense in which one and the same *kind* essence can be conceived either as an infinite, eternal mode or as an enduring, finite thing, although when it is conceived in the latter way, it is not, strictly speaking, some *specific* finite, enduring human body, but just a finite, enduring body only insofar as it is a *human* body. See Hübner 2016 for a recent discussion of kind essences.

like all infinite, eternal modes (E1p21–23), is immanently caused by and inheres in the infinite, eternal extended substance.

The same essence can be conceived under the attribute of thought as objectively real, as representing a formally real human body.²³ This is one way of conceiving the human mind (E2p13). However, there are two ways the essence can be conceived to be objectively real in thought. There is the *objectively real* finite, enduring body, or the representation of the finite, enduring body as formally real in extension and as a body coming to be from the transitive causal activity of other finite, enduring bodies, and the *objectively real* infinite, eternal body, or the representation of the infinite, eternal body as formally real in extension and a mode immanently caused by and inhering in the infinite, eternal extended substance.²⁴

Conceived under the attribute of thought as *formally* real, the essence is not an idea or representation of the body, but an idea of the *idea* of the body. What Spinoza means by the “idea of the idea” (E2p21) is obscure, but I take one of Spinoza’s points to be that we can conceive of the mind either as a representation (the objectively real body) or as the activity of thinking that representation.²⁵ Here too there is a distinction to be made. There is the human mind conceived as the act of thinking about the finite, enduring human body: the representational content (the objectively real finite, enduring human body) and the formally real act of thinking that content are one and the same thing conceived within the attribute

23 One might object that the idea of the *essence* of the human body might not be an idea of the *formally real human body*. Since existence is not part of non-substantial essences, it seems one can have an adequate idea of the *essence* of a non-substance without having an idea of that essence as existing, or as enjoying formal reality. I acknowledge that existence is not part of any (non-substantial) essence, and I think Spinoza would agree that one can decouple an actual, striving body’s essence from finite, enduring reality and conceive the body’s essence apart from any enduring, finite reality. But I think this is compatible with the view that an adequate idea of the “decoupled” essence is nevertheless the idea of something enjoying reality – viz., eternal, infinite reality, the reality of a mode necessarily caused by and inhering in the one eternal, infinite substance (however, whether one understands that the (eternal) reality of this decoupled essence is the reality of a *mode* of God depends on whether one has the right conception of God and God’s causation of things). See “Spinoza’s Monism I,” Section 2, and Primus forthcoming.

24 Here one might agree that there is an idea of the essence as enjoying eternal, infinite formal reality in extension but resist holding that such an idea is an idea of the human body, instead insisting that an idea of the human body must be an idea of an enduring, finite, and actual human body. I concede that this idea of the body is not an idea of the body as it is ordinarily conceived: it is axiomatic that “we feel a certain body” to be affected (E2a4), and the body that is felt is a finite, enduring thing. Yet I do not think we need to deny that an essence given *sub specie aeternitatis* in extension is also the human body or that an idea of this given essence is an idea of the human body (see E5p22–23).

25 See Primus 2021.

of thought. And there is the human mind conceived as the act of thinking about the body as something with infinite and eternal formal reality: the objectively real representational content (the objectively real infinite, eternal human body) and the formally real act of thinking that content are one and the same thing conceived within the attribute of thought. Put another way, if what is thought about is finite and enduring, then the act of thinking itself is formally real as something finite and enduring; a finite, enduring thought comes to be (and ceases to be) by the transitive causal activity of other finite, enduring thoughts.²⁶ If what is thought about is infinite and eternal, then the act of thinking itself is formally real as something infinite and eternal, and is immanently caused by the infinite, eternal substance (conceived under the attribute of thought).²⁷

2.3 An Objection

One might object that the essences of some things (e.g., cubes) are such that when they enjoy formal reality, they must enjoy *finite* formal reality, while the essences of other things (e.g., the “infinite individual” of *E2lemma7s*) are such that when they enjoy formal reality, they must enjoy *infinite* formal reality. If this is the case, however, then it is not a universal truth that *one and the same essence* can be conceived either as enjoying finite formal reality or infinite formal reality. A cube can *only* be conceived as something finite. The infinite individual can *only* be conceived as something infinite.

I agree that there is a difference between the cube and the individual described in *E2lemma7s*. And I agree that an essence determines whether, when

²⁶ In a human mind, many, if not most, representations of enduring bodies will be inadequate. For one thing, each such body has an infinity of causes; a finite mind does not have the capacity to cognize all the causes necessitating the coming to be of a thing, and so the idea, conceived as a representation of the particular body, will be a confused representation of the body. Furthermore, an explanation of why some human mind comes to have an idea of a particular enduring body at a particular time may also be extraordinarily complex. A human body is at any time causally affected by an infinity of other bodies, but only some representations of bodily affections rise to the level of conscious awareness; a full account of why a mind is aware of some things and not others, or why some ideas are stronger or more powerful than others, may involve an infinity of factors.

²⁷ The act of thinking in this latter case is adequate cognition, an act of *understanding*. That understanding something eternal and infinite (e.g., God's nature) means that one's own mind is *also something eternal* is, I think, a central claim in *Ethics* Part V (see especially *E5p23d*, *E5p29–31*). The more a mind can understand eternal things, the more the mind is eternal and the more its activity is God's own activity of understanding (see *E5p33*, *E5p36*, *E5p39*). See Primus forthcoming.

the thing enjoys enduring formal reality, it is a thing limited by other things (like a cube) or is something that is not limited by anything else (like the individual). A finite, enduring cube would not be a *cube* if it were not spatially limited: to be a cube, there must be extended reality beyond the cube's bounds that is not the cube's own extended reality. And the sempiternal, indefinitely extensible individual would not be what it is if it were not spatially *unlimited*: to be the individual it is, it must be the case that any extended reality beyond any imposed spatial bound is still the individual's own reality.

However, I wish to note that I think there are, in Spinoza's system, *two* ways to not be a finite thing. The enduring, sempiternal individual is non-finite in the sense that it is *indefinite*, and its reality can still be thought of as composed of finite parts. But there is also what is non-finite because it is *infinite* in the non-indefinite sense: while Descartes thought that *only* God's reality is properly infinite, Spinoza can be understood as holding not just that God has modes, but also that each of these modes can also be understood as infinite in the non-indefinite sense. The essence of the cube and the essence of the individual (or any other essence) can both be conceived to enjoy infinite formal reality.

To understand what this means, first consider what it is for the *divine* essence to enjoy infinite formal reality. Being infinite is an "absolute affirmation of the *existence* of some nature" (E1p8s1, my emphasis). The divine essence *extension* is (by nature) formally real and is not lacking in the formal reality department: there is no "amount" of (eternal) formal reality that extension could have but does not in fact have – indeed, to think of the reality in gradable "amount" terms is to misapprehend it. For extension to be an essence of *substance*, it must enjoy infinite and eternal reality.

Now take the essence *cube*. This essence can be conceived as finite. When *cube* is conceived as an actual, enduring thing that is real outside of thought, it can be thought of as lacking some reality that it is consistent with its nature to have: the cube would still be a *cube* if it were bigger than it in fact is or endured for longer than it in fact does.

This essence can also be conceived as something eternal, as a true and immutable nature. I think it is plausible to suppose that *cube*, conceived as a true and immutable nature, is *infinite* in the sense that it, like *extension*, cannot be conceived as lacking some formal reality that it could have. A true and immutable nature cannot be conceived as *less* (or more) eternal than it is; there is no "amount" of (eternal) formal reality that *cube*, conceived in this way, could have but does not in fact have.

Granted, the essence *cube* is not the essence *triangle*, so there is a sense in which one can always deny something of *cube* and affirm that it *is not something*. Spinoza says that "being finite is really, in part, a negation" (E1p8s1), but I do not

think that denying that the essential properties of a triangle belong to the essence of a cube is a “negation” that makes the cube finite: this negation has to do with the *essence*, not the existence or formal reality the essence enjoys.²⁸ To be finite is to deny *existence* to a nature (E1p8s1).

Furthermore, while one essence may determine other essences (e.g., the essence *triangle* determines the essence *scalene triangle*), the determination of one true and immutable nature by another true and immutable nature is a determination of *essences*, of properties by properties, not of the reality those essences or properties enjoy. One true and immutable nature does not make any other true and immutable nature more or less real than it is.²⁹

One might point out that an eternal *cube* is not a substance, so there is a sense in which an eternal cube does lack reality. Yet I do not think *this* sort of negation means that the cube is finite either. A finite cube's reality is limited by the reality of other finite things: there is some reality that the cube could have but, because of these other things, does not have (i. e., it is because of these other things that the cube was destroyed at a certain time or that it was one size rather than another size). But an eternal cube would not be a *cube* if it were substance; in this case, there is not some eternal reality that the *cube* could have but does not have.

The essence *cube* can be conceived as an *infinite* and eternal mode. The same goes for the essence of the human body, the essence of a human mind,³⁰ and the essence of the “infinite individual.” When the essence of the “infinite individual” is conceived *sub specie aeternitatis*, its reality cannot be thought of as composed of parts, as indefinitely divisible, or as always extending beyond any bound. *Sub specie aeternitatis*, the individual's reality is, like the reality of other essences conceived *sub specie aeternitatis*, *infinite*.

Spinoza equates reality and perfection (E2def6). Finite (and indefinite) reality is gradable: it seems some enduring things are more perfect – more real –

²⁸ Extension is not thought, so in this same sense, an attribute is *not something* (however, the same cannot be said of *God*, which can be conceived under an infinity of attributes).

²⁹ See E5p40s. There may be some essences E (square circles) that are impossible given other essences F and G (squares and circles), but it is inapt to conceive of these E-essences as possibly real modes that are precluded from having eternal, infinite reality by F- and G-essences; rather, E-essences are not possibly real. Whether the essence of, say, a unicorn should be placed in the same category as E-essences is not a topic I can take up here.

³⁰ In E5p40s, Spinoza claims that the human mind “insofar as it understands, is an eternal mode of thinking, which is determined by another eternal mode of thinking, and this again by another, and so on.” Given that Spinoza cites E1p21 – a proposition about *infinite* and eternal modes – as helping to establish this claim, I think that the eternal modes discussed here are *infinite* as well.

than others, with the “infinite individual” the most real or perfect of all.³¹ On the proposal I have presented here, it will turn out that even this most real, most perfect enduring thing cannot be caused by the infinite, eternal substance; even this most real enduring thing is, in the end, not really real. However, the *essence* of the individual can be conceived as an infinite, eternal mode whose infinite, eternal reality is immanently caused by substance. And so conceived, the individual is not more real or more perfect than any other essence: all essences are infinite, eternal modes.³²

3 Some Textual Objections

One might object that my interpretation does not hew closely enough to important texts. A passage from Letter 12 is sometimes taken as evidence that for Spinoza, substance is the *only* thing that can be understood as eternally real:

“we conceive the existence of substance as of an entirely different kind from the existence of modes. This is the source of the difference between eternity and duration. It is to the existence of modes alone that we can apply the term duration [...]” (G IV 54 f.)

Here Spinoza seems to say that 1) substance is the *one and only* thing that can be eternal, and 2) modes are the only things to which we can “apply the term duration,” so 3) the existence of substance is of an entirely different kind from the existence of modes because substance is solely eternal and modes are solely enduring.³³

Yet there is another way of reading this text: 1) substance *can only* be conceived as eternally formally real, but 2) we can “apply the term duration” *as well as* the term eternity to that which is not substance, so 3) the existence of substance is of an entirely different kind from the existence of modes. This way of

31 In E5p40, Spinoza ties perfection and reality to activity. Any finite thing both acts and is acted on; the indefinite individual composed of all finite things is not acted on.

32 Descartes held that bracketing what ideas represent, all ideas, as modes of a thinking substance, are on ontological par (see AT VII.40). Spinoza extends this point in a new way: there is parity of the formal reality of ideas *sub specie aeternitatis*. But there is not just parity of the reality of ideas, as modes conceived under the attribute of extension are also on par. While the ontological parity of things conceived as infinite, eternal modes can be known with certainty, there is not such knowledge of the parity of the (ultimately ersatz) reality of *indefinite*, enduringly real things: it is not necessary that “things which cannot be adequately expressed by any number” are equal (G IV 61).

33 Schmaltz 2015 and Melamed forthcoming.

taking this text accords with my proposal: substance's essence can only be conceived as eternal and infinite, but modes' essences can be conceived as either eternal or as enduring.³⁴

A more sweeping objection is that the proposal conflicts with positions it is simply obvious Spinoza presents in Part I of the *Ethics*. According to the standard reading of Part I of the *Ethics*, the "infinite modes" are a proper subset of modes.³⁵ Spinoza discusses the modes whose existence is infinite (E1p21–23) and then turns to *other* modes whose existence is finite (E1p28). There is, in short, a partition: some of an infinite, eternal substance's effects are infinite and eternal (and/or sempiternal), while the rest are finite and non-eternal. On the interpretation I have suggested here, there is no such partition: strictly speaking, *all modes* of an infinite, eternal substance are infinite, eternal modes. Whatever is finite (or indefinite) and enduringly real cannot be immanently caused by – or coherently conceived as inhering in – the infinite and eternal substance.

I do not think it is at all obvious that the text must be understood along the lines of the standard reading. E1p21–23 can even be understood as establishing that *everything* caused by the infinite, eternal substance must have eternal (not merely sempiternal) and infinite (not merely indefinite) reality.³⁶ Spinoza does shift the discussion to enduring, finite things by E1p28. But instead of taking this shift to indicate that Spinoza has moved from discussing the set of an infinite, eternal substance's effects comprised of *infinite* modes to the (disjoint) set comprised of *finite* modes, we can instead take the shift to indicate that Spinoza has moved from discussing essences conceived as enjoying eternal and infinite formal reality to *those same essences* conceived as enjoying enduring and finite (or indefinite) formal reality. In what follows, I sketch my alternative to the standard account of some of the main moves of *Ethics* Part I.

Spinoza begins his *Ethics* by arguing for a proper conception of substance and God: God is the one eternal, infinite (and not merely indefinite), necessarily existing substance that can be conceived under different attributes (to E1p14). The next major move is to argue that given what God is, God's effects must be an infinity of modes necessarily following from, and caused by, God's (necessarily existing) nature (E1p15–18). The stretch of text from E1p19–23 establishes further conclusions about these effects. Because, under any attribute, substance

³⁴ Elsewhere in Letter 12, Spinoza talks of duration "flowing" from eternal things (G IV.56). This is, admittedly, suggestive of eternal-durational causation. Whether Spinoza's discussion of the varieties of infinity meshes with my proposal is a question I will address elsewhere.

³⁵ See, for example, entries in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: Newlands 2018a, Shein 2018.

³⁶ For a detailed defense and reconstructions, see Primus 2019.

is eternal (E1p19) and God's essence and (eternal, infinite) existence are one and the same (E1p20), the *propria* following with necessity from God's essence (E1p16) will have eternal and infinite existence as well (E1p21–23). God's effects are modifications of existence itself, insofar as it follows from the definition of the eternal thing (E1def8): God's existence and essence are conceived as an eternal truth (E1def8, E1p20c1), and so the infinity of what follows with necessity from the divine essence (E1p16) are *also* all eternal truths. So, it is not just that every one of God's effects is a mode – it is also the case that every one of God's effects has, as a mode in and caused by eternal and infinite substance, eternal and infinite reality (cf. E5p30d).

E1p24, “the essence of things produced by God does not involve existence,” is an important reminder. I take it that the “things produced by God” are the entities Spinoza has just discussed in E1p21–23; Spinoza clarifies here that the essences of God's modes do not involve existence. If their essences *did* involve existence, they would, by E1def1, be *self-caused*, existing “only from the necessity of [their] nature[s]”; anything that is *produced* (i. e., caused) *by God* is not self-caused.³⁷ If one takes a thing produced by God and considers the essence on its own, one will find that the essence does not involve existence.

Take the true and immutable nature of a triangle. If we consider the essence on its own, attending to just the properties that make the triangle a triangle and not something else, we will realize that the triangle does not exist by the necessity of its nature, but by the necessity of its cause. In the corollary, Spinoza underscores that it is not just that we see that the triangle does not exist, by its nature, as something eternal, infinite, and necessary; we also see that there is nothing in the triangle's essence that specifies anything about the triangle coming to exist in time or enduring for any period of time. It thus follows that – “to use a Scholastic term” – God is the cause of the very being of things [*Deum esse causam essendi rerum*] (E1p24c).

Yet in the corollary Spinoza also seems to assert exactly what I have argued he denies: namely, that God, the one and only eternal, infinite, self-causing substance, is the cause of the reality of things conceived as *enduring in time*: “God is not only the cause of things' beginning to exist [*incipiant existere*], but also of their persevering in existing [*in existendo perseverant*].”

We can read E1p24c as Spinoza's assertion that the account of the immanent causation of modes he has just supplied in E1p21–23 is an account of how God, conceived as the infinite, eternal substance, causes the very being of things –

³⁷ That is, what is produced by God are not substances. Cf. E1p6, “one substance cannot be *produced* by another substance” (my emphasis).

here *infinite, eternal modes*. But it is also possible that *E1p24c* is the beginning of a shift to a discussion of enduring, finite things: the essences of enduring, finite things do not include existence either, so if they enjoy enduring, finite reality, they must have been *caused* to have that reality. Is there a sense in which God is that cause?

No and a (qualified) yes. As we know from *E1p15s*, there is the *intellectual* conception of an attribute, e. g., extension, *as substance*. If we conceive of extension as *substance*, then it is infinite and eternal, and is the sustaining cause of infinite, eternal modes. Being infinite is, as I discussed in the last section, an *absolute* affirmation of the existence of some nature (*E1p8s1*); *E1p21–23* concern what follows from, or is caused by, the divine nature when the divine nature is conceived in this *absolute* way, as infinite (and eternal). In the strict sense, God, conceived as, e. g., infinite and eternal extended substance, is *not* the cause of any enduring, finite body.

But the answer could also be a qualified yes. One can think of extension not as enjoying infinite, eternal formal reality, but as enjoying indefinite, enduring formal reality. This is the imaginative way of thinking about extension: on this way of taking extended reality, it will be “found to be finite, divisible, and composed of parts” (*E1p15s*). In *E1p24c*, Spinoza could be indicating that an attribute of God, taken in this imaginative way, is – in a sense to be specified – a cause of the coming to be and continued endurance of things.

This could be where Spinoza is headed. As we will see in *E1p28*, things with “finite and determinate existence” follow from or are “determined to exist and produce an effect by God or an attribute of God insofar as it is modified by a modification which is finite and has a determinate existence” (*E1p28d*). The cause of the coming to be and continued endurance of things with “finite and determinate existence” are things with “finite and determinate existence”; such things are not modes of God, the *infinite, eternal* substance, but are modifications of an enduring, divisible, sempiternal extended substratum. I return to *E1p28* below.

In *E1p25*, Spinoza argues that the existence *and* essence of things are caused by God. All essences – “everything which can fall under an infinite intellect” (*E1p16c1*) – follow with necessity from the divine nature (*E1p16*): in causing his own nature to exist as an infinite, eternal substance, God thereby causes all essences following from that nature to exist as infinite, eternal modes. “God must be the cause of all things in the same sense in which he is called the cause of himself” (*E1p25s*).³⁸

³⁸ But this does *not* mean that substance's self-causing essence pertains to a thing's essence (*E2p10s*).

Yet *E1p25c* seems contrary to my interpretation: “particular things are nothing but affections of God’s attributes, that is, modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.” The demonstration, Spinoza says, is evident from *E1d5*, “by mode I understand the affections of substance,” and *E1p15*, “whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.” The next time Spinoza uses “particular things [*res particulares*]” is *E2p31*, when it is clear that he is talking about enduring, finite things (“we can have an entirely inadequate cognition of the duration of the singular things which are outside us”). This suggests that when he says “particular things” in *E1p25c*, he *does* have finite, enduring things in mind and is asserting that such things are *modes* immanently caused by God.

Here is how I take *E1p25c*. In this argumentative context, the statement that particular things are modes will be a highly jarring claim. Spinoza has (at least as I read him) just argued that *all* modes of God must be eternal and infinite (*E1p21–23*). Yet *E1p24* and *E1p25* enable us to understand how the tension is to be relieved. According to *E1p25*, God is the cause of the *essences* of *all* things; the *essence* of any particular thing must be one of the infinity of essences following from the divine nature (*E1p16*). The essences of non-divine things do not involve *any* existence (*E1p24*), whether infinite and eternal or finite and enduring, so the essence of any particular thing *can* be conceived as enjoying infinite, eternal formal reality rather than finite, enduring formal reality. When the thing’s essence is conceived as enjoying infinite, eternal reality, it is a mode of the infinite, eternal substance; as we know from *E1p15*, “whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be conceived without God.” Take any enduring, finite thing: it is in and conceived through the infinite, eternal substance – it is just not in and conceived through the infinite, eternal substance *qua* an essence thought of as enjoying enduring, finite reality.

What properties a thing has determines how it interfaces with other things. *E1p26* and *E1p27* can be understood as making the point that because God is the cause of the essences of all things (*E1p25*), God is the cause of these determinations, since what properties a thing has is determined by its own essence and the essences of other things. “A thing which has been determined to produce an effect has necessarily been determined this way by God; and one which has not been determined by God cannot determine itself to produce an effect” (*E1p26*), and “a thing which has been determined by God to produce an effect cannot render itself undetermined” (*E1p27*).

E1p28 can be read as making explicit that if an essence is conceived, under some attribute, to be formally real in the way finite, enduring things are real, then it must be (transitively) caused and determined by other finite, enduring things – and not caused, either immediately (by *E1p21*) or mediately (by *E1p22*), by the infinite, eternal substance.

In *E1p28s*, Spinoza offers what looks like an important summary. The text is, however, highly obscure:

Since certain things had to be produced by God immediately, namely, those which follow necessarily from his absolute nature, and others (which nevertheless can neither be nor be conceived without God) had to be produced by the mediation of these first things, it follows:

- I. That God is absolutely the proximate cause of the things produced immediately by him, and not in his own kind, as they say. For God's effects can neither be nor be conceived without their cause (by *E1p15* and *E1p24c*).
- II. That God cannot properly be called the remote cause of singular things, except perhaps so that we may distinguish them from those things that he has produced immediately, or rather, that follow from his absolute nature. For by a remote cause we understand one which is not conjoined in any way with its effect. But all things that are, are in God, and so depend on God that they can neither be nor be conceived without him.

The text does admit of different readings.³⁹ Yet I think it can be read in a way that (mostly) accords with what I have suggested in this essay. Spinoza begins by referring to things “produced by God immediately [*a Deo immediate produci*], namely, those which follow necessarily from his absolute nature.” While the use of ‘immediately’ might lead one to think that Spinoza is referring only to the entities described in *E1p21*, he could be referring to *all* the entities following either directly or indirectly from God’s “absolute nature.” When an attribute is conceived as the infinite, eternal *substance*, everything that substance causes is an infinite, eternal *mode*.

It follows from this that an infinite, eternal God’s production, or causation, of the formal reality of God’s modes is as *immediate* – as unmediated – as can be. There is no intervening reality between the reality of substance and the reality of its modes: as an immanent cause, God is *absolutely* the proximate cause of the being of all things.⁴⁰ This is not causation in his own kind, in the sense that God is not causing other *substances*. A substance, according to Spinoza, has its reality in virtue of its essence, or is a *causa sui*, whereas modes have their reality in virtue of being *caused* to have that reality.

In the first lines of the scholium, Spinoza contrasts the things produced immediately with “other things” that had to be produced by means of, or by the mediation of (*mediantibus*), these immediately produced modes. I take these “other things” to be the things described in *E1p28*.⁴¹ I grant that the claim that the things of *E1p28*

³⁹ See Giancotti 1991 for a survey of options.

⁴⁰ I take Spinoza’s citation of *E1p24c* to imply that divine sustaining causation is under discussion in this stretch of *E1p28s*.

⁴¹ See Gueroult 1968, 342, and Curley 1969, 70 f.

are produced by God *by means of* the entities discussed in *E1p21–23* does not fit with the interpretation I have offered here. I have argued that there is not a causal interface between enduring, finite things and the infinite, eternal substance; this passage suggests that the entities of *E1p21–23* do serve as some sort of causal intermediary (perhaps by being sempiternal features of the enduring world).

I think it is worth noting, however, that as far as I can tell, Spinoza does not say more about such mediation elsewhere in the *Ethics*. *E1p21–23* are not cited in discussions of how enduring, finite things are causally related to an infinite, eternal substance. These propositions are instead employed when Spinoza contrasts enduring, finite things (e. g., actual, enduring human bodies) and infinite, eternal modes (see *E2p11d*, *E2p30d*, *E4p4d*), or says that the human mind, insofar as it understands, “is an eternal mode of thinking” (*E5p40s*).

Setting aside the awkwardness of the “mediation” claim, we can, I think, understand the last part of the scholium as follows. The infinite, eternal substance is not *properly* called the remote cause of singular (enduring, finite) things: the essences of all things enjoy reality as infinite, eternal modes caused by the infinite, eternal substance. When the same essences are conceived as enjoying enduring and finite reality, then they are singular things caused by other singular things; so conceived, an infinite, eternal God will seem like a “remote cause” that is not “conjoined in any way with its effect.” Any enduring, finite thing is not, *qua* enduring, finite thing, in the infinite, eternal substance, but it – its essence – is in the infinite, eternal substance as an infinite, eternal mode: “all things that are, are in God, and so depend on God that they can neither be nor be conceived without him.”

4 Acosmism

Curley famously observed that it seems like Spinoza would be making a category mistake if he held that actual, concrete *things* are modes inhering in substance.⁴² I think Curley was onto something here. As I have suggested, we need not assume that finite, enduring things are, *as* finite, enduring things, *modes* whose reality is the eternal, infinite substance’s reality modified, or are things that are *in* an eternal, infinite substance as properties are in a thing.⁴³ Indeed, I think Spinoza

⁴² Curley 1969, 18; cf. Curley 1988, 31. Curley allows that Spinoza’s infinite, eternal God is a necessary (albeit not sufficient) cause of finite, enduring things (see “Spinoza’s Monism I,” Section 1).

⁴³ Cf. Renz, who provides different arguments for the conclusion that finite individuals are *not* modes inhering in or deducible from God (Renz 2018, 44, 67, 262)

could concede that others, including Cartesians, are not entirely off-base in holding that an infinite, eternal God is transcendent: Spinoza could agree with such interlocutors that an infinite, eternal God *is* properly conceived as something apart from finite, enduring things.

But, as I have also suggested, we can still think Spinoza is committed to everything being a mode inhering in substance, where a mode is a way that the infinite, eternal reality of substance is: the essences of *all* things *are* real as infinite, eternal modes inhering in and immanently caused by the infinite, eternal substance. We can hold that in coming to know necessary properties of a body or a mind, we are coming to know divine *propria*.⁴⁴

Note that if we read Spinoza as I have suggested, then Spinoza can be understood as simply sidestepping a major debate that occupied the attention of many medieval and early modern thinkers. That debate concerned how to balance God's causal activity in the world – including God's sustaining activity of the very being of things, God's activity *secundum esse* – with finite, enduring things' productive activity *secundum fieri*.⁴⁵ On my interpretation, Spinoza held that finite, enduring things' transitive causation does not interface at all with the activity of an infinite, eternal God: just as it is confused to hold that minds causally interact with bodies, it is confused to hold that an infinite, eternal God creates or is otherwise involved in the goings-on of an enduring world. The project of explaining the coming to be of an enduring, finite thing needs to be sequestered from the project of explaining the very being of things as caused by an infinite, eternal God.

Yet on this account, once one engages in the latter project after having observed the “proper order of philosophizing” (E2p10s) and after having come to the right (Spinozan) conception of God and divine causation, it seems one has to acknowledge that enduring, finite things figuring in the former project are not, in fact, genuinely real. One will understand that although the *essences* of enduring, finite things are intelligible,⁴⁶ their non-eternal, non-infinite reality is not. Such

⁴⁴ There is an enormous literature on inherence, causation, and predication in Spinoza. For the view that modes inhere in and are caused by substance, but that predication is not fundamental in Spinoza's thinking about inherence, see Carriero 1995 (especially 246 n4 and 262f. n38). For the view that both causation and inherence can be analyzed in terms of conceptual relations, see Newlands 2010 and 2018. For a recent critical discussion of Curley's interpretation, see Melamed 2013, 3–60, and Lin 2019, ch. 5.

⁴⁵ See Freddoso 1991 and 1994 for an overview and a discussion of various strategies for maximizing God's causal involvement while allowing creatures to have some genuine causal efficacy.

⁴⁶ I suggested above that these essences can be characterized geometrically: if geometry is intelligible, then these essences will be too. In this essay, I have assumed that Spinoza is entitled to there being an infinity of non-divine, geometrically-characterizable essences, but one could legitimately wonder whether a plurality of distinct essences is, in the end, unintelligible as well

reality cannot be coherently conceived as caused by God, and what is not caused by God is not real, as *all there is* is the one infinite, eternal substance and its modes. The tangible, concrete formal reality one has always felt one's own body and affecting bodies to have (E2a4) – reality that had hitherto likely been taken to be absolutely, undeniably real – turns out to be *ersatz* reality.

The thread I have followed through Spinoza's system thus leads to acosmism, albeit an acosmism only about enduring, finite reality.⁴⁷ God causes the very being of the world, but the world that is sustained is not the changing world of finite things interacting with other finite things in time, but an immutable world of eternal, infinite modes in an eternal, infinite substance.⁴⁸

The interpretation privileges the intelligibility of an infinite, eternal God and God's causation of things. What is left unexplained is why any essence is conceived as an enduring, finite thing transitively caused by other enduring, finite things in the first place. We have part of an explanation. A finite, enduring body can be conceived under the attribute of thought as a *representation* of the finite, enduring body; as I suggested in Section 2.3, if what is represented is finite and enduring, then the act of thinking itself is formally real as something finite and enduring. So that a mind can conceive of things as enjoying enduring, finite formal reality hinges on the body enjoying enduring, finite formal reality.

But this, of course, just presupposes that a body is conceived as formally real as an enduring, finite thing. The problem is that the body enjoying enduring, finite formal reality is not really real; that essences are conceived as enjoying enduring and finite formal reality is a fact, but, to echo Joachim, “a fact for

(see Della Rocca 2012). I have also assumed that Spinoza is entitled to assert a plurality of attributes. For some classic arguments that Spinoza is in fact committed to the attribute of *thought* being the only genuine attribute, see Pollock 1880, Martineau 1882, and Joachim 1901. For arguments that a Spinozan commitment to intelligibility leads to a denial of the reality of relations, including the representation relation between thought and extension and the constitution relation between an attribute and substance, see Della Rocca 2006.

⁴⁷ Cf. Della Rocca 2008a, 50–52, and Caird 1888, 281. Youpa also claims that “durational existence is not real in the same sense as an eternal existence” and is “an inferior kind of existence,” since “existence in the strict sense is eternal existence” (Youpa 2011, 310). Yet Youpa resists the acosmist conclusion, arguing that singular things partake, in varying degrees, in eternal existence (where a thing that produces more effects partakes more in eternal existence). For a helpful overview of various other “acosmist” and “idealist” interpretations of Spinoza, see Newlands 2011a and 2011b.

⁴⁸ Hegel also argued for an acosmist reading of Spinoza, according to which “all this that we know as the world” is denied; there is “no such thing as finite reality” (Hegel 1995, 281). On my reading, although finite, enduring things are not real, their essences enjoy infinite, eternal reality in God, and so are as real as anything that is not substance itself can be.

which no place can be found in Spinoza's conception of the ultimate nature of things."⁴⁹

This is a serious issue. To avoid attributing an acosmist view to Spinoza, one could challenge one or more of my interpretation's starting points. For example, I have assumed that substance's reality is timelessly eternal and infinite, but one could instead try to argue that substance's reality is not to be understood as timelessly eternal or infinite, but as a sempiternal and indefinite (where being indefinite here does not imply actual divisibility).⁵⁰ Or perhaps substance's formal reality is just a more generic existence that is not *itself* infinite and timelessly eternal but is such that it causes itself to have two kinds of modifications, infinite and timelessly eternal ones or finite (or indefinite), enduring ones. Or, if one wants to retain a view of substance's reality as timelessly eternal and infinite, one could challenge the contention that Spinoza set such a high bar for the intelligibility of divine causation, or else explain how an infinite and eternal substance's immanent causation of enduring, sempiternal formal reality (with a transitive causal structure) is, despite the considerations I pointed to in "Spinoza's Monism I,"⁵¹ intelligible after all.

Despite the difficulties attending the acosmist interpretation I have presented here, I think the interpretation nevertheless accords with the main claim of *Ethics* Part V: namely, that understanding the metaphysical system Spinoza presents in the *Ethics* is affectively transformative.⁵² Affects are "affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections" (E3def3). Insofar as one thinks of oneself and other things as enduring and finite, one will think there is some basis for affects: so conceived, other things do diminish or increase one's enduring, finite reality and power. But once one comes to a proper understanding of metaphysics, one understands God and God's relation to things, and one realizes that what an eternal, infinite God sustains – what is genuinely real – is not a world of enduring, finite minds and bodies, but rather a world of essences enjoying reality as infinite, eternal modes, which can be conceived under different attributes. Once one understands that one's own body (or mind) is real as an infinite, eternal mode, one recognizes that its reality is not such that it can be

⁴⁹ Joachim 1901, 112.

⁵⁰ The analogy between substance and water in E1p15s could be taken to imply that corporeal substance is sempiternal and indefinitely extensible (and divisible, at least in thought).

⁵¹ See also the reconstructions of propositions E1p21–23 in Primus 2019.

⁵² It is one thing to understand (and affirm, by E2p49) the metaphysical system via reasoning through the *Ethics*, it is another thing to understand and affirm the nature of God and things by the flash of insight that is *scientia intuitiva* (see Primus forthcoming).

impinged upon by other things or prevented by other things from having reality it could have.⁵³ One sees, that is, that one's reality is not *affected* or *destroyed* by other things, since infinite, eternal modes neither diminish nor enhance each other's infinite, eternal formal reality. It seems plausible, at least to me, that if one can conceive of oneself and things in this way, then one will be "hardly troubled in spirit" and enjoy "true peace of mind" (E5p42s).^{54,55}

- AT Descartes, *Œuvres de Descartes*. Eds. Ch. Adam/P. Tannery, 1964–74.
 'AT VII.41f.' stands for volume VII, pages 41 to 42
- CM Spinoza, *Cogitata Metaphysica*
- E Spinoza, *Ethics*; 'E1p15' stands for *Ethics*, part one, proposition 15
- Ep Spinoza, Letters
- G Spinoza, *Spinoza Opera* (4 vols.). Ed. by C. Gebhardt. Heidelberg, 1972/[1925]
- PPC Spinoza, *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*

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53 See esp. E5p22–23 and E5p29–30. The eternal world is still a world that one "feels" – an experience of understanding something is an experience one has as an eternal mind (see E5p23s). What is understood and the act of understanding are *eternal*, so "remain" after the destruction of the enduring, finite human body (I discuss this more in Primus forthcoming. See also Rutherford 1999). On the view I have explored here, what "remains" turns out to be all there really ever was.

54 This is not to say that having adequate ideas of the necessary relations between *properties* of enduring, finite things, or recognizing the necessity of enduring things' determinations of other enduring things, is not affectively salutary. My point is just that there is room, in Spinoza's system, for an even more dramatic affective transformation, and that this transformation comes about when one realizes that it is only one's reality as an infinite, eternal mode that is fully intelligible and genuinely real.

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