

Spinoza's Essentialism in the *Short Treatise*

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Introduction

It is not, as such, very contentious to read Spinoza as a clear proponent of metaphysical essentialism. But the extent to which his thought revolves around essences, or natures, in the early *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* is, I believe, nevertheless striking. In what follows, I attempt to trace the rather consistent essentialist thread that runs through the whole work. This allows us not only to better understand the work itself but also to obtain a firmer grasp of the nature of Spinoza's entire philosophical enterprise. In many ways, the essentialism we find in the *Short Treatise* is in line with Spinoza's mature thought; but there are also significant differences, and discerning them throws light on the development of Spinoza's philosophy.

The Basic Features of Essences

Right from the abrupt start of the *Short Treatise*, much of Spinoza's argumentation relies on a particular notion of essence or nature.¹ The very first note is especially revealing:

Understand the definite nature [*natuur*], by which the thing is what it is, and which cannot in any way be taken from it without destroying it, as it belongs to the essence [*wezen*] of a mountain to have a valley, or the essence of a mountain is that it has a valley. This is truly eternal and

¹ Here, as elsewhere in Spinoza's works, I understand Spinoza to use the two terms interchangeably; perhaps "nature" has a somewhat less technical ring to it.

immutable, and must always be in the concept of a mountain, even if it does not exist, and never did.²

Thus, it can be said that essences are, for Spinoza, those features of reality that make things the individuals they are.³ The passage also makes clear that there is a close linkage between essences and the concepts of things that have those essences. From the *Ethics* we know that Spinoza came to endorse the (traditional) view that each thing has a definition that expresses the essence of the thing. *Short Treatise* is less explicit about this, but we do find clear indications that this is, in fact, something that Spinoza presupposes already in the early work. Consider, for instance, the following:

But since we do not have, of the remaining attributes, such a knowledge as we have of extension, let us see whether, having regard to the modes of extension, we can discover *a more particular definition, which is more suited to express the essence of our soul.*⁴

Evidently, a definition captures the concept of its object and thereby expresses the essence of that object. And as the first quote evinces, these concepts do not contain anything temporal in them; that a mountain must have a valley “must always be in the concept of a mountain.”⁵

The beginning of the *Short Treatise* illuminates other important aspects of Spinoza’s essentialism as well. Spinoza writes:

Whatever we clearly and distinctly understand to belong [*behooren*] to the nature of a thing, *we can truly affirm of that thing.*⁶

And slightly later in a marginal note, we can read the following:

That other Ideas [of things other than infinite attributes] exist is, indeed, possible, but not necessary. But whether they exist or not, their essence is always necessary like the Idea of a triangle, or that of the soul’s love without the body, etc., so that even if I thought at first that I had feigned them, afterwards I would still be forced to say that they are and would be no less the same, even if neither I nor any other man had ever thought of them. That is why they are not feigned by me, and *also must have*

² KV I 1 | G I/15/21–26 | C 61.

³ It should be noted that these features are, as the passage states, eternal and immutable; cf.: “[T]he essence of a thing is immutable” (KV II 15 | G I/80/6–7 | C 121).

⁴ KV app 2 | G I/120/7–11 | C 155, emphasis added.

⁵ KV I 1 | G I/15/25–26 | C 61. Cf.: “As note 1 says, a mountain without a valley, for example, would cease to be a mountain, and that is why the valley belongs [. . .] to the nature of the mountain” (Boss, *L’enseignement de Spinoza*, 9).

⁶ KV I 1 | G I/15/9–11 | C 61, emphasis added.

*a subject [subjectum] outside me, which is not me, a subject without which they cannot be.*⁷

So I see now that the truth, essence or existence of any thing does not depend on me. For as has been shown in connection with the second kind of Ideas, they are what they are without me, whether according to their essence alone or according to their essence and existence together. I find this to be true also—indeed much more so—of this third, unique idea [of a necessary being]: not only does it not depend on me, but on the contrary *he alone must be the subject of what I affirm of him, so that if he did not exist, I would not be able to affirm anything at all of him*, though I can do this of other things, even if they do not exist. [I find] also that *he must be the subject of all other things*.⁸

Read together, the upshot is that what can be affirmed of a thing is affirmed of a *subject*. This can be read as a sign of Spinoza endorsing an important element of the traditional substance/accident ontology. In it, substances, or things, are *subjects of accidents* that can be predicated of substances. Further evidence for this can be found later in the first part of the *Short Treatise*, when Spinoza contends:

[W]e have already found previously that there must be an infinite and perfect being, by which nothing else can be understood but a being of which all in all must be predicated [*een wezen, van 't welke alles in allen moet gezeid worden*]. For of a being which has some essence, [some] attributes must be predicated, and the more essence one ascribes to it, the more attributes one must also ascribe to it.⁹

So obviously, the “all in all” does not consist of essential features only. Thus, more seems to “belong” to the nature of a thing than only those features constitutive of it, namely also attributes or things that come with the essence—in traditional terms, accidents. For Spinoza’s God, of course, finite things also count among these accompanying features. Attributes, properties, or features always have a subject—presumably, some particular thing—of which they can be predicated.¹⁰ Moreover, those subjects exist outside the cognitive agent.¹¹

⁷ KV I 1 | G I/17/15–21 | C 63, emphases added.

⁸ KV I 1 | G I/17/25–33 | C 63, emphases added.

⁹ KV I 2 | G I/23/18–24 | C 69–70, emphasis added.

¹⁰ In this respect, the *Short Treatise* has much to offer to the discussion concerning predication (see, e.g., Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, chap. 1; Jarrett, “The Concepts of Substance and Mode in Spinoza”; Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, chap. 4; Carriero, “On the Relationship Between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics”; Melamed, “Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance”; Viljanen, “Spinoza's Ontology”).

¹¹ Cf. note 24 below.

From this we can draw the conclusion, I think, that also essences always must have a subject; they must be essences *of some thing*.

To summarize what Spinoza has taught us thus far, things are the individuals they are in virtue of essences, immutable and eternal features of reality capturable by a definition, the bearers of which are subjects of predication. However, Spinoza says little to explicate *why* he so quickly introduces essences in the *Short Treatise*, so an explication of this cannot but remain somewhat conjectural. I would like to suggest that, unlike for many of us, it never was a live option for him to think that reality might not have true structure, intelligibility, and stability. Or, to put it differently, I do not believe that Spinoza ever seriously entertained taking what may be called the Heraclitean route; rather, he works within the Platonic framework (in a wide sense). From this point of departure, it certainly seems evident that there must be something responsible for the intelligibility and identity of things—certain features of reality itself.¹² And Spinoza calls these features essences or natures, obviously feeling no need to revise the traditional philosophical landscape in this respect. If this is, at least roughly, an appropriate line of interpretation, it is in fact rather understandable that these features cannot be temporal entities that go in and out of existence: this would disqualify them from being objects of real knowledge, that is, of true cognition that can be had only of permanent things. Thus, the definitions of essences cannot contain temporal determinations in them, for otherwise the very core of things would be out of the reach of our intellect—an intolerable situation for anyone convinced that reality is cognizable with our intellect.

A further notable feature of the essentialism of the *Short Treatise* is its rather straightforward endorsement of the view that essences are *individual*, unique to their possessors:

But we have rightly regarded this as indicating their ignorance; for *all and only the particulars have a cause, not the universals, because they are nothing*.

God, then, is a cause of, and provider for, only particular things. So if particular things have to agree with another nature, they will not be able to agree with their own, and consequently will not be able to be what they truly are. E.g., if God had created all men like Adam was before the fall, then he would have created only Adam, and not Peter or Paul. But God's true perfection is that *he gives all things their essence, from the least to the greatest*; or to put it better, he has everything perfect in himself.¹³

¹² For more on this, see my *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*, 10–11.

¹³ KV I 6 | G I/43/5–17 | C 87, emphases added.

To my mind, the way in which Spinoza shifts from the denial of universals to talking about particular things and God giving “all things their essence, from the least to the greatest” is most easily understood as follows: each and every particular thing is endowed with its individual essence, whereas strictly speaking there are no universals and thus no essences common to many things.¹⁴ Moreover, the “from the least to the greatest” passage suggests that there is a *continuum* of individual essences. Perhaps one could say that a certain area in that continuum is such that its occupants can be called, for instance, human beings, most probably because they share certain features (such as a complex structure of bodies in a certain ratio of motion and rest).

More evidence for this reading can be found in the second part of the *Short Treatise*:

That belongs to the nature of a thing without which the thing can neither exist nor be understood: but this is not sufficient; it must be in such a way that the proposition is always convertible, viz. that what is said also can neither be nor be understood without the thing.¹⁵

This, of course, is the forerunner of E2d2, which definitely pushes the reader to regard essences as individual—and has, in fact, generally been taken as a piece of evidence for the individuality of essences.¹⁶

Indeed, I believe that all the aforementioned features of Spinoza's essentialism can be found unchanged in the *Ethics* as well, even though the definition of essence comes as late as in the beginning of the second part of the masterpiece. It can thus be observed that the *Short Treatise* displays some of its author's essentialist tendencies more openly than the *Ethics* (for instance, that eternal and immutable essences form a crucial starting point for proper philosophy, and that things can be predicated of other things) and others less openly (that definitions express essences and that from these definable essences many things necessarily follow).

The Ontological Status of Essences

The aforesaid sheds light on what Spinoza means by essences. However, relatively little, if anything, has been said about the ontological status of essences. Are they real entities? Or perhaps beings of reason? How do the essences of finite things relate to that of God? In what follows, I attempt to provide some answers to these questions.

¹⁴ In “The Framework of Essences in Spinoza's *Ethics*,” Christopher Martin calls the latter “species-essences.”

¹⁵ KV II pref. | G I/53/30–34 | C 94.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Martin, “The Framework of Essences.”

As far as I can see, in the *Short Treatise* the first—and rather puzzling—statement concerning these issues is located in a marginal note to the second chapter:

To say here that the nature of the thing required this [limitation], and therefore it could not be otherwise, is to say nothing. For the nature of the thing cannot require anything unless it exists. If you say that one can nevertheless see what belongs to the nature of a thing that does not exist, that is true *as regards existence*, but not at all *as regards essence*.

In this lies the difference between *creating* and *generating*: *creating*, then, is bringing a thing about *as regards essence and existence together*; but in *generating* a thing comes about *as regards existence only*. Therefore, there is no creating in Nature, but only generating.

So if God creates, he creates the nature of the thing together with the thing. And so he would be envious if (being able but not willing) he had created the thing in such a way that it would not agree with its cause *in essence and existence*.

But what we here call *creating* cannot really be said to have ever happened, and we mention it only to show what we can say about it, once we make the distinction between *creating* and *generating*.¹⁷

Now it may be asked, how can Spinoza say that “the nature of a thing cannot require anything unless it exists”? And what does the next sentence, “[i]f you say that one can nevertheless see what belongs to the nature of a thing that does not exist, that is true *as regards existence*, but not at all *as regards essence*,” mean? And why is creation not possible, only generation? As it is, the note appears rather mysterious, obviously resting on a number of presuppositions.

I would suggest that the note turns on a specific theory about the relationship between God’s attributes and finite things. According to this theory, finite things are contained in the attributes. The latter appendix to the *Short Treatise* states this in unambiguous terms: “But it should be noted in addition that these modes, when considered as not really existing, are nevertheless equally contained [*begreepen*] in their attributes.”¹⁸ Moreover, and in line with the tenet that essences form the core of things, Spinoza states precisely that essences are contained in the attributes. For instance, the following passage indicates this:

The true essence of an object is something which is really distinct from the Idea of that object, and this something (by a3) either exists really, or is contained in another thing which exists really and from which one cannot distinguish this essence really, but only modally; *such are all the essences*

¹⁷ KV I 2 | G I/20/23–38 | C 67.

¹⁸ KV app 2 | G I/119/20–23 | C 154–155.

*of things we see which, when they did not previously exist, were contained in extension, motion and rest, and which, when they do exist, are distinguished from extension not really, but only modally.*¹⁹

So all the essences of bodies were contained in extension already before their existence; and even existing bodies are only modally distinct from their attribute. Moreover, in the attribute of thought there are ideas that “track” precisely the essences of things of different attributes (such as extension): “[N]o thing is in God’s infinite intellect unless it exists formally in Nature[.]”²⁰ Moreover:

That the most immediate mode of the attribute we call thought has objectively in itself the formal essence of all things, so that if one posited any formal things whose essence did not exist objectively in the above-named attribute, it would not be infinite or supremely perfect in its kind[.]²¹

This, in fact, is Spinoza’s point of departure for the explanation he gives in the *Short Treatise* of the mind-body union; however, discussing it would take us too far afield.²² For the present purposes, it suffices that we note that the essences of things are contained in the attributes, and of those essences the immediate mode of the attribute of thought forms ideas, whereby become constituted also human minds.

This is not the only occurrence of the containment theory of essences in early Spinoza. In the *Metaphysical Thoughts* we find the following passage:

Hence we can easily reply to the questions that are usually raised concerning essence. These questions are as follows: whether essence is distinguished from existence? and if it is distinguished, whether it is anything different from the idea? and if it is something different from an idea, whether it has any being outside the intellect? The last of these must surely be granted.

To the first question we reply by making a distinction: in God essence is not distinguished from existence, since his essence cannot be conceived without existence; but in other things it does differ from and certainly can be conceived without existence. To the second we say that a thing that is conceived clearly and distinctly, *or* truly, outside the intellect is something different from the idea.

But again it is asked whether that being outside the intellect is by itself or has been created by God. *To this we reply that the formal essence neither*

¹⁹ KV app 1, p4d | G I/116/8–17 | C 152, emphasis added.

²⁰ KV I 2 | G I/22/14–16 | C 68–69.

²¹ KV app 2 | G I/117/18–23 | C 152–153.

²² For an interpretation of the mind-body union that coheres well, I believe, with the account given in the *Short Treatise*, see Koistinen, “Desire and Good in Spinoza,” 222–223.

*is by itself nor has been created, for both these presuppose that the thing actually exists. Rather it depends on the divine essence alone, in which all things are contained. So in this sense we agree with those who say that the essences of things are eternal.*²³

This is very much in line with what we have seen Spinoza claim in the *Short Treatise*. Essences are real entities, but not independent of the attributes.²⁴ It thus seems to be one of Spinoza's most deeply entrenched convictions that finite things are modes—entities of a particular subclass of properties or qualities, namely such that they cannot be or be conceived without the attribute which they modify (evidently through their essences). To contrast this with a very different type of (necessary) property: for instance, hotness was traditionally seen to always follow from fire, and the former most certainly can be or be conceived without the latter. So understandably, it is through God “all things that have any essence [. . .] are what they are[.]”²⁵

A particularly interesting feature of Spinoza's attribute/mode ontology in the *Short Treatise* finds an expression in the following passage:

And because there is no inequality at all in the attributes, nor in the essences of the modes, there can be no particularity in the Idea, since it is not in Nature. But *whenever any of these modes put on their particular existence, and by that are in some way distinguished from their attributes (because their particular existence, which they have in the attribute, is then the subject of their essence), then a particularity presents itself in the essences of the modes, and consequently in their objective essences, which are necessarily contained in the Idea.*²⁶

The thesis is thus that only when things become actual, or when they are generated into actuality, essences come to be distinguished from each other. This claim is in interesting tension with 2p8 of the *Ethics*. That proposition states, “[t]he ideas of singular things, or of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended in God's infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of the

²³ CM I 2 | G I/238–239 | C 304–305, latter emphasis added.

²⁴ But they are independent of the cognitive agent; recall:

But whether they exist or not, their essence is always necessary like the Idea of a triangle, or that of the soul's love without the body, etc., so that even if I thought at first that I had feigned them, afterwards I would still be forced to say that *they are and would be no less the same, even if neither I nor any other man had ever thought of them*. That is why they are not feigned by me, and also must have a subject outside me, which is not me, a subject without which they cannot be. (KV I 1 | G I/17/15–21 | C 63, emphasis added)

For an argument that Spinoza is here developing further the line of thought Descartes presents in the Fifth Meditation, see my *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*, chap. 1.

²⁵ KV II 18 | G I/88/9–10 | C 128.

²⁶ KV app 2 | G I/119/23–32 | C 155, emphases added.

singular things, *or* modes, are contained in God's attributes." The corollary is also instructive:

From this it follows that so long as singular things do not exist, except insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, their objective being, *or* ideas, do not exist except insofar as God's infinite idea exists. And when singular things are said to exist, not only insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, but insofar also as they are said to have duration, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration.²⁷

Now it is one thing to say that ideas of non-actual things exist only in God's infinite idea and have duration only when their objects have duration, and quite another to say that the essences that are the objects of ideas are not distinguished from each other until they become actualized. In fact, given that the whole point of E2p8 is to show how we can have ideas of non-actual things, the proposition would not get off the ground without the premise that essences that are comprehended in attributes alone can be distinguished from each other. What Spinoza says in E2p8 (and its corollary and scholium) clearly presupposes that (formal) essences are distinct and thereby can be objects of ideas even when they are not actual. I would suggest that this difference stems from the fact that still in the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza was rather far from the full-fledged theory of the eternal and temporal realms on which much of the *Ethics* is built.²⁸ So from early on, Spinoza endorsed the view that essences are contained in the attributes; however, this view underwent some important changes. To my mind, the *Metaphysical Thoughts* indicates that formal essences rather rapidly gained a more robust ontological status,²⁹ their identity not being really dependent on temporal matters from that work onward.

Essences and Causality

Quite early in the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza states that "no thing through itself [*door zig zelfs*] seeks its own destruction[.]"³⁰ The phrase "through itself" already

²⁷ E2p8c.

²⁸ I would thus agree with Martial Gueroult and Charles Jarrett. The former argues that in the *Short Treatise*, the essence of a mode "is absorbed in the undifferentiated being of the attribute" (*Spinoza II*, 99), but in the *Ethics* essences have "actual reality distinct from the actual reality of their existence" (p. 101). The latter notes that the passage of the second appendix to the *Short Treatise* is "evidently a precursor" of E2p8, 2p8c, and 2p8s and comments on it as follows: "Unlike the doctrine of the E[thics], however, his position in this passage is that neither the modes, their essences nor their ideas are distinct from the attributes until they come to exist. That is, the modes (or essences of modes) are particulars, distinct from the attributes and from each other, only when they exist temporally" (Jarrett, "The Development of Spinoza's Conception of Immortality," 162).

²⁹ See, however, Huenemann, "The Middle Spinoza," 219.

³⁰ KV I 1 | G I/18/13–14 | C 64.

strongly suggests that no nature or essence can destroy its possessor—the “itself” here is most probably that what an essence determines.³¹ This is confirmed by a much later passage stating “[f]or nothing *by its own nature* seeks its own destruction.”³² These passages prefigure E3p4, “[n]o thing can be destroyed except through an external cause.” So we know what things do *not* do in virtue of their essences: they do not act in self-destructive ways. Destructive factors must come from outside, and it is presumably the essence that draws the boundary between the inside and the outside.

In the *Short Treatise*, the discussion on causation largely focuses on God’s causality. One of the major points—if not the major point—Spinoza wants to drive home is that God is the immanent or internal cause.³³ This is made clear already before the analysis of God’s causality in the third chapter of the first part—“outside God, there is nothing, [. . .] he is an immanent cause”³⁴—and much in the two dialogues revolves around this.³⁵ The way in which Theophilus puts the discussion concerning the immanent or internal cause in essentialist terms, “[t]he essence of a thing does not increase through its union with another thing,”³⁶ indicates that it is precisely the essence that is the internal cause. Moreover, in the discussion it is made clear that an essence makes a *whole* with its effects and does not change in causing the effects.³⁷

So in virtue of his essence, God is the immanent cause of his effects. But does the same model apply to finite things? When Spinoza begins to discuss striving—*prima facie* a causal notion—of finite things, this would seem to be the case:

For it is evident that no thing, through its own nature, could strive for its own destruction, but that on the contrary, each thing in itself has a striving to preserve itself in its state, and bring itself to a better one.³⁸

However, it may still be asked, in what sense is this striving causal? And what is its relation to God’s immanent causality? Here the following passage is highly relevant:

Freedom of the Will is completely inconsistent with a continuous creation, viz. that the same action is required in God to preserve [a thing]

³¹ For an analysis of the phrases *a se* and *in se* in the *Ethics*, see my *Spinoza’s Geometry of Power*, 69–73.

³² KV II 17 | G I/86/14–15 | C 127, emphasis added.

³³ “[A]n immanent or internal cause (which is all one, according to me)” (KV II 26 | G I/110/22–23 | C 148).

³⁴ KV I 2 | G I/26/18–19 | C 72.

³⁵ See esp. G I/30/20–31 | C 76.

³⁶ G I/31/29–30 | C 77.

³⁷ G/31/30 | C 77. “The whole is only a being of reason” “made of various *united* individuals” (I/32–33, emphasis added). It should be noted that remaining unchanged in causing one’s effects is a traditional mark of the emanative cause.

³⁸ KV I 5 | G I/40/7–10 | C 84. See also KV II 7 | G I/68/8–9 | C 110.

in being as to create it, and that without this action the thing could not exist for a moment. If this is so, nothing can be attributed to [the will]. But one must say that God has created it as it is; for since *it has no power to preserve itself while it exists, much less can it produce something through itself*. If someone should say, therefore, that the soul produces the volition of itself, I ask: from what power? Not from that which was, for that no longer exists. Nor from that which it now has, for it does not have any by which it could exist or endure for the least moment, because it is continuously created. *So because there is no thing which has any power to preserve itself or to produce anything, the only conclusion left is that God alone is, and must be, the efficient cause of all things, and that all Volitions are determined by him.*³⁹

This sounds very occasionalistic indeed. Given this, it seems rather obvious that, strictly speaking, finite things have *no* power of their own. The following striking statement is in line with this:

[W]e are truly God's servants—indeed, his slaves [. . .]. For if we were left to ourselves, and so did not depend on God, there would be very little, or nothing, that we could accomplish[.]⁴⁰

Despite this, there are passages in which Spinoza talks about finite things in seemingly causal terms. For instance, he says that “[t]he more essence a thing has, the more it also has of action and the less of passion.”⁴¹ Moreover,

[s]ince God's essence is infinite, it has an infinite action, and an infinite negation of passion [. . .]; consequently, the more things, through their greater essence, are united with God, the more they also have of action, and the less of passion[.]⁴²

Still more important, there are also places in which Spinoza talks about causal powers of finite things, at least about that of mind: “[I]t [the intellect] can produce ideas in itself, and outside itself effects agreeing well with its nature”; “from what has been said it is also clear which things are in our power and are subjected to no external causes.”⁴³ When this and the claims concerning striving are read together with the passage invoking occasionalism, it seems that there is a notable tension in Spinoza's thought about these matters.

I would suggest that we understand the issue as follows. Evidently, God is the only true cause. Through their essences, some things can be said to be more

³⁹ KV II 16 | G I/82/23–38 | C 123, emphases added.

⁴⁰ KV II 18 | G I/87/5–9 | C 127–128.

⁴¹ KV II 26 | G I/110/8–9 | C 147.

⁴² KV II 26 | G I/111/5–10 | C 148.

⁴³ KV II 26 | G I/112/9–16 | C 149.

united than others with this cause and thus to be more active.⁴⁴ But from this it does not follow that they would be causes, properly speaking. This would, in turn, explain Spinoza's curious way of talking about essences of things as allowing of degrees: we have already encountered the phrase "more essence," which occurs in several places.⁴⁵ This strikes me as a cumbersome expression, and one may wonder why Spinoza adopts it—why does he not just say that one thing has more power than another? One possible explanation for this is that because of the occasionalistic tendencies he displays in the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza wants here to avoid talking about finite things' power, which could hardly be understood in non-causal terms. So to render all this as consistent as possible with the occasionalism-invoking passage (in KV II 16), I would suggest that in the *Short Treatise*, talk about actions or causal powers of things is, in fact, metaphorical. In the final analysis, it is only God who has power, whereas finite things have none. It is as if Spinoza considers the power of the universe in terms of a zero-sum game and concludes that since God is omnipotent, there is no power left for anything else to have. The following passage is put in terms of being, but gives some textual support for this reading: "God alone has being, and all other things have no being, but are modes."⁴⁶ The claim that modes have no being may appear surprising; but as having causal power is one traditional mark of real being, this is in fact in concordance with the occasionalistic strain of the *Short Treatise*.

Of course, as we know, in the *Ethics* this position is emphatically discarded. One reason for this might be that it is difficult to see in what sense things can be said to "strive" to preserve their existence and even promote it, if what really happens is that God just recreates them anew in certain states. Still a more important reason—probably the major reason—for this change, I would be inclined to think, is that Spinoza came to the conclusion that within his monistic system there is no problem in finite things having power of their own: a substance can full well cause effects via its properties (or modes);⁴⁷ God's absolutely infinite power is modified or "channeled through" (the essences of) finite things.⁴⁸ So, in fact, the monistic framework can offer a rather beautiful solution to what was called the problem of secondary causation.

⁴⁴ *Ethics* contains passages that say that we can participate in God's nature to a varying degree; see E2p49s2 | G II/135/34–35; 4p45c2s; 4app31. I am grateful to Andrew Youpa for pointing this out to me.

⁴⁵ In addition to KV II 26 | G I/110/8 | C 147, see KV II 15 | G I/79/35 | C 120–121; KV II 25 | G I/107/30–31 | C 145; KV II 26 | G I/111/8 | C 148. Cf. also: "Those are the actions of men who have a great perfection or essence" (KV II 18 | G I/87/28–30 | C 128).

⁴⁶ KV II 5 | G I/64/20–21 | C 107.

⁴⁷ On this, see Koistinen, "Causation in Spinoza," 68.

⁴⁸ For more on this, see my *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*, 75.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that the *Short Treatise* is to a great extent based on, and offers an elaborate expression of, a specific brand of essentialist metaphysics. This, in turn, informs us of the development of Spinoza's thought. It would seem that Spinoza's notion of essence remained rather stable throughout his career, but its ontological status underwent some changes. Moreover and most important, unlike the *Short Treatise*, the *Ethics* makes it very clear that all essences, not just that of God, are causally efficacious.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ I would like to acknowledge that the work on this chapter has been financially supported by the Academy of Finland (project numbers 127410 and 275583) and the Turku Institute for Advanced Studies.