

10

Why Spinoza is not an Eleatic Monist (Or Why Diversity Exists)

Yitzhak Y. Melamed

Eternal Master, who reigned supreme
Before all of creation was drawn

(Attributed to Salomon Ibn-Gabriel)

Introduction¹

'Why did God create the World?' is one of the traditional questions of theology. In the twentieth century this question was rephrased in a secularized manner as 'Why is there something rather than nothing?'² While creation – at least in its traditional, temporal, sense³ – has little place in Spinoza's system, a variant of the same questions puts Spinoza's system under significant pressure. According to Spinoza, God, or the substance, has infinitely many modes. This infinity of modes follow from the essence of God. If we ask: 'Why must God have modes?', we seem to be trapped in a real catch. On the one hand, Spinoza's commitment to thoroughgoing rationalism demands that there must be a reason for the existence of the radical plurality of modes.⁴ On the other hand, the asymmetric dependence of modes on the substance seems to imply that the substance does not *need* the modes, and that it can exist without the modes. But if the substance does not need the modes, then why are there modes at all? Furthermore, Spinoza cannot explain the existence of modes as an arbitrary act of grace on God's side since Spinoza's God does not act arbitrarily. Surprisingly, this problem has hardly been addressed in the existing literature on Spinoza's metaphysics, and it is my primary aim here to draw attention to this problem.⁵

In the first part of the chapter I will present and explain the problem of justifying the existence of infinite plurality modes in Spinoza's system. In the second part of the chapter I consider the radical solution to the problem according to which modes do not really exist, and show that this solution must be rejected upon consideration. In the third and final part of the chapter I will suggest my own solution according to which the essence of God is *active* and it is this feature of God's essence which requires the flow of modes

from God's essence. I also suggest that Spinoza considered radical infinity and radical unity to be roughly the same, and that the absolute infinity of what follow from God's essence is grounded in the absolute infinity of God's essence itself.

10.1 The problem

Spinoza defines a mode at the very opening of the *Ethics*.

Eld5: By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived [Per modum intelligo substantiae affectiones, sive id, quod in alio est, per quod etiam concipitur].

A mode is an affection, i.e. a quality which depends on its substance both for its existence (it is 'in another') and for its conception (it is 'conceived through another'). In contrast to the mode, a substance is defined as being 'in itself' and 'conceived through itself.'

Eld3: By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed [Per substantiam intelligo id quod in se est et per se concipitur, hoc est id cuius conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei, a quo formari debeat].⁶

A mode depends on its substance in order to be and be conceived while the substance does not depend on another thing. The first proposition of part one of the *Ethics* relies on the two definitions above in order to state that the substance is *prior* to its modes.

E1p1: A substance is prior in nature to its affections [Substantia prior est natura suis affectionibus].

Spinoza's understanding of the substance–mode relation as exhibiting an asymmetric dependence of the modes on the substance is in line with the standard view of this relation among early modern philosophers.⁷

From the two definitions and the proposition above one could conclude that a state of affairs in which the substance exists without having any modes is possible. However, Spinoza is also committed to strict necessitarianism, i.e., the view that whatever is possible is actual and in fact, necessary, and that whatever is not necessary is not possible.⁸ Spinoza also thinks that God, the unique and infinite substance, has modes. In one of the most central propositions of the *Ethics*, Spinoza proves that modes must follow from the essence of God.

EIp16: From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect) [Ex necessitate divinae naturae infinita infinitis modis (hoc est, omnia, quae sub intellectum infinitum cadere possunt) sequi debent].

Thus, given EIp16 it seems that a state of affairs in which God exists without its modes is strictly impossible since the flow of the modes from God's essence or nature is necessary. Indeed, Spinoza stresses this point toward the end of Part One of the *Ethics*. In EIp33, Spinoza argues that

Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced [Res nullo alio modo, neque alio ordine a Deo producti potuerunt, quam productae sunt].

And in the second scholium to this proposition he claims,

God can never decree anything different, and never could have, or that God was not before his decrees, and cannot be without them [Deum ante sua decreta non fuisse, nec sine ipsis esse posse] (II/75/15).

God's decrees are the effects, i.e., the modes which follow from God's essence, and according to the scholium above God cannot be without his effects, or modes.⁹

One way of putting the problem in sharp relief is by considering the relation between the realms¹⁰ Spinoza terms '*natura naturans*' and '*natura naturata*'. Spinoza explains this important distinction in EIp29s:

Before I proceed further, I wish to explain here – or rather to advise [the reader] what we must understand by *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. For from the preceding I think it is already established that by *Natura naturans* we must understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, or such attributes of substance as express an eternal and infinite essence, i.e. (by P14C1 and P17C2), God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause.

But by *Natura naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, or from any of God's attributes, i.e., all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God.

Natura naturans is the realm of God's essence, i.e., substance and its attributes. Spinoza provides three characterizations of this realm. It is 'in itself', 'conceived through itself', and constitutes God as a free cause, as cause that is determined to act by itself alone (see EId7 and EIp17). *Natura naturata* is the realm of modes, i.e., of what follows from God's essence (EIp16). In EIp29s

Spinoza stresses that *Natura naturata* cannot be or be conceived without *natura naturans*. In contrast, *natura naturans* does not depend on the existence of *natura naturata*, hence it is not the case that *natura naturans* needs *natura naturata* in order to be or be conceived. Why then does *natura naturata* exist and not only *natura naturans*? Or in other words, why are there modes at all? The question seems to be perfectly clear and legitimate, and therefore Spinoza's rationalism commits him to provide an answer to this question. Yet, it is not clear where one should turn in order to find the answer. *Natura naturata* is caused by *natura naturans* and therefore it should be explained by *natura naturans* (E1a4). Yet, *natura naturans* is defined as ontologically and conceptually self-sufficient, and therefore it seems that the self-sufficiency of *natura naturans* should allow for (rather than ban) the existence of *natura naturans* without *natura naturata*.¹¹

So far we discussed the question of the reason for the existence of any modes at all. A closely related, yet distinct, problem is how to explain the flow of the radical diversity of *natura naturata* from the indivisible unity of *natura naturans*. In proposition 12 and 13 of part 1 of the *Ethics* Spinoza argues that both the substance and attributes are strictly indivisible.

EIp12: No attribute of a substance can be truly conceived from which it follows that the substance can be divided [Nullum substantiae attributum potest vere concipi, ex quo sequatur, substantiam posse dividi].

EIp13: A substance which is absolutely infinite is indivisible [Substantia absolute infinita est indivisibilis].

The infinitely many attributes of Spinoza's God are not parts of God (or of God's essence), since this would conflict with EIp12. Rather they are infinitely many adequate conceptions of one and the same substance.¹² According to EIp16, from the unity and indivisibility of *natura naturans* follow *infinita infinitis modis* (which could be translated as either 'infinitely many things in infinitely many modes' or alternatively 'an infinity in infinite ways'). From EIp16 Spinoza derives the corollary that 'God is the efficient cause of all things which can fall under an infinite intellect' (EIp16c1). For Spinoza, the intellect – and even more so, the infinite intellect – cannot err.¹³ Thus, EIp16c1 clearly implies that God is the cause of all things. The plenitude of *infinita infinitis modis* of *natura naturata* seems to outstrip any diversity that we may find in *natura naturans*. Even if we consider the infinity of attributes as constituting real diversity (rather than diversity of conceptions of one and the same *res*), it seems that when *natura naturans* flow into *natura naturata* it refracts further into another infinity which Spinoza stresses in the double infinity of the expression '*infinita infinitis modis*'.¹⁴ It seems that within each attribute the flow from *natura naturans* into *natura naturata* involves refraction from unity and indivisibility into a plenitude of radical plurality and divisibility.¹⁵ But

what is the reason for this further refraction? If in the realm of *natura naturans* each attribute is strictly indivisible, why does the flow to *natura naturata* bring about any further diversity? What justifies the emergence of the many from the indivisible one?¹⁶

10.2 First attempt at a solution: acosmism

One radical solution to the problems we have discussed in the previous section is simply to deny that Spinoza ascribes any reality to *natura naturata*. This view of Spinoza was widely advocated among the German and British Idealists.¹⁷ Shortly after Spinoza's death, several writers were already suggesting that Spinoza's philosophy was a revival of ancient Eleatic monism, which rejects the reality of change and diversification. Bayle makes this association quite explicitly in several passages in his dictionary,¹⁸ while Leibniz argues (against Malebranche) that to claim that 'all things are only some evanescent or flowing modifications and phantasms, so to speak, of the one permanent divine substance' is to endorse 'that doctrine of most evil repute, which a certain subtle and profane writer recently introduced into the world, or revived [*pessimae notae doctrinam nuper scriptor quidam subtitit, at profanus, ubi inveniit vel renovavit*] – that the very nature or substance of all things is God'.¹⁹ There is little doubt that the 'subtle but indeed irreligious' writer in question is Spinoza, and it is quite plausible that the revived doctrines are those of the Eleatics.

Almost a century later, with the emergence of German Idealism, the identification of Spinoza with Eleatic monism became the standard view.²⁰ Hegel, for example, announces:

Taken as a whole this constitutes the Idea of Spinoza, and it is just what was 'to *sein*' to the Eleatics [Dies ist im ganzen die Spinozistische Idee. Es ist dasselbe, was bei den Eleaten das *sein*]... Spinoza is far from having proved this unity as convincingly as was done by the ancients; but what constitutes the grandeur of Spinoza's manner of thought is that he is able to renounce all that is determinate and particular, and restrict himself to the One, giving heed to this alone.²¹

A crucial impetus to the propagation of this view was the new understanding of Spinoza as a radical religious thinker, whose position was the complete opposite of atheism. According to this understanding – first suggested by Salomon Maimon in 1792²² – Spinoza does not deny the reality of God, but rather the reality of the world ('cosmos') of finite things and diversification.²³

In Spinoza's system the unity is real while the diversity is merely ideal. In the atheistic system it is just the other way around. *The diversity is*

real and grounded in the very nature of things, while the unity, which one observes in the order and regularity of nature, is consequently only coincidental; through this unity we determine our arbitrary system for the sake of our knowledge.

It is inconceivable how one could turn the Spinozistic system into atheism since these two systems are the exact opposites of each other [my emphases]. Atheism denies the existence of God, Spinozism denies the existence of the world. Rather, Spinozism should be called 'acosmism'.²⁴

Interestingly, Maimon contrasts Spinoza's position not only with atheism but also with Leibniz's view. The latter is taken to be a mere compromise between Spinozism and atheism, one which asserts the reality of both God and the diversified world.²⁵ (Doubtless few Leibnizians would be happy to find themselves described as *more* atheistic than Spinoza). These claims of Maimon initiated a radical change in the perception of Spinoza and in the next four decades we find them echoed time and again.²⁶ The person who throughout the eighteenth century was unquestionably taken as a damned atheist became a 'God intoxicated man',²⁷ in whose system there is 'too much God [*zu viel Gott*]'.²⁸ Hegel's endorsement of the acosmist interpretation of Spinoza had an enormous and lasting impact on nineteenth and early twentieth century perceptions of Spinoza both on the continent and in England.²⁹

One of the main elements of the acosmist reading of Spinoza was the view of the plurality of modes and attributes as a mere illusion. Thus, Hegel writes:

Parmenides has to reckon with illusion and opinion, the opposites of being and truth; *Spinoza likewise, with attributes, modes, extension, movement, understanding, will, and so on*.³⁰

Hegel stresses the unreality of modes in several other crucial places in his discussions of Spinoza.³¹ If modes are merely illusory then the question of the reason for their flow from the substance becomes far less urgent.³² Hegel's response to our question is indeed quite radical. It simply rejects our very assumption that there *are* modes.

Despite the boldness and charm of the acosmist reading, I believe it must be ultimately rejected.³³ In the following, I summarize very briefly some of the main problems with this reading. (1). *Third Kind of Knowledge* – the third kind of knowledge 'proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things' (E2p40s2). Spinoza's discussion of the third kind of knowledge in part five of the *Ethics* makes clear that it pertains to the knowledge of *finite* modes – such as our bodies, and minds as well (see, for example, E5p22 and E5p31). But were the finite modes mere illusions, why would they be the objects of

the (adequate) third kind of knowledge? (2). *Elp36* – we have seen that in *Elp16* Spinoza claims that the modes are just what follow necessarily from God's nature or essence. In *Elp36* ('Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow'³⁴) Spinoza argues that everything, including God's nature, *must* have some effects. But, if the modes (i.e. the effects of God's nature) were illusory, then God's nature would not really have any effects.³⁵ (3) *The Parallelism among the Attributes* – in *E2p7s* Spinoza argues that the order and connection of causes in all attributes is the same.³⁶ This doctrine bluntly contradicts the acosmist reading of Spinoza, insofar as it clearly asserts the existence of a plurality of entities. Simply put, were Spinoza's substance a singular, undifferentiated, entity, it would be pointless to speak of any 'order' or 'connection' among things, since no plurality would obtain in such a world. (4) *Knowledge of God via Knowledge of Finite Nature* – in the fourth chapter of the TTP, Spinoza claims that 'we acquire a greater and more perfect knowledge of God as we gain more knowledge of natural things [res naturales]' (*III/60*).³⁷ Were finite things ('natural things') merely illusory, it would make little sense that by engaging with such illusions we could promote our knowledge of God. Spinoza continues by making the point even more explicit: 'To put it another way, since the knowledge of an effect through its cause is nothing other than the knowledge of the property of that cause [*causae proprietatem aliquam cognoscere*], the greater our knowledge of natural things, the more perfect is our knowledge of God's essence, which is the cause of all things' (*III/60/11–12*). Knowledge of finite things increases our knowledge of God, since these finite things are nothing but God's properties (or rather, *propria*), which follow from God's essence.³⁸ Clearly, granting such an elevated status to finite things (i.e., being properties of God) is hardly consistent with viewing them as illusions. (5) *Falls under the Intellect* – in *Elp16* Spinoza equates the *infinita infinitis modis* which follow from God's essence with 'everything which can fall under an infinite intellect [*omnia, quae sub intellectum infinitum cadere possunt*]' For Spinoza, the only cause of error is the imagination, while the perceptions of the intellect are always adequate (*E2p41*). Thus, what 'falls under' the intellect cannot be an illusion.³⁹ (6) *Only Nothingness has no Properties* – Spinoza subscribes to the view that reality comes in degrees and like Descartes he accepts that only nothingness has no properties;⁴⁰ the more reality or being [less] a thing has the more properties or attributes belong to it (*Elp10s* and *Elp16d*). Since God is real, it must have properties. In fact, since God is absolutely infinite and most real, it must have infinitely many attributes.⁴¹

Interestingly, Spinoza uses the last consideration not only in order to argue that God must have infinitely many attributes (*Elp10s*), but also to justify the infinite abundance of modes that follow from God's essence (*Elp16d*). Thus, the last consideration not only helps refute the acosmist interpretation, but also provides some motivation for the existence of modes: the flow of the modes from God's essence must result from the definition of God as

an absolutely infinite being. We can thus conclude that the acosmist interpretation – which cuts the problem of explaining the flow of modes at its roots – cannot be right. I turn now to suggesting an alternative solution to our problem.

10.3 The suggested solution: modes as necessitated by God's activity and absolute infinity

We have already seen Spinoza's claim in *Elp33s2* that 'God cannot be without his decrees.' Spinoza makes a closely related claim in *E2p3s*. *E2p3* itself states:

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

In the scholium to this proposition Spinoza criticizes the vulgar and anthropomorphic conception of God's power that ascribes to God free will. God's actions, claims Spinoza, are just as necessary as the flow of ideas in God's understanding. Then, he makes the following statement:

We have shown in *IP34* that God's power is nothing except God's active essence. And so it is *as impossible for us to conceive that God does not act as it is to conceive that he does not exist* [*Deinde Propositione 34. partis I. ostendimus, Dei potentiam nihil esse, praeterquam Dei actuosam essentiam; adeoque tam nobis impossibile est concipere, Deum non agere, quam Deum non esse*].

Elp34 reads:

God's power is his essence itself [*Dei potentia est ipsa ipsius essentia*].

Dem.: For from the necessity alone of God's essence it follows that God is the cause of himself (by *P11*) and (by *P16* and *P16C*) of all things.

The above passages from *E2p3s* and *Elp34* seem to show that for Spinoza God's essence (i.e. *natura naturans*) must be active, and that it is just as impossible for *natura naturans* not to be active as it is impossible for it not to exist. This insight might advance us significantly toward an answer to our question. Consider now a state of affairs (which, as we have just seen, is strictly impossible for Spinoza) in which *natura naturans* presumably exists without *natura naturata*. Can *natura naturans* still have any causal efficacy? Well, it could still cause *itself*, and thus would have causal efficacy. But would it be proper to describe such a state of affairs as active? I do not think so.

In a hypothetical world in which only *natura naturans* exists, and in which *natura naturans* is just causing itself, *natura naturans* would be just as

active as it is passive. The same causal relation that supports ascription of activity to *natura naturans* (insofar as *natura naturans* is the cause or agent of the action) would equally support ascription of passivity to *natura naturans* (insofar as *natura naturans* is also the effect or patient of the same act). In other words, in the absence of *natura naturata*, the self-causing activity of *natura naturans* would make it 'beyond action and passion,' and this I think Spinoza is not willing to allow since the activity of *natura naturans* is essential to it.

Thus, it would seem that *natura naturans* generates *natura naturata* by virtue of its own character as an active entity. In other words, the reason for the existence of *natura naturata* lies in the nature of *natura naturans*. In the same way that it is essential for *natura naturans* to be infinite (see E1d6), it is equally essential that *natura naturans* be active. But in order for *natura naturans* to be active it must cause *natura naturata*.

As far as I can see, this explanation provides a prima facie good and deep explanation for the generation of *natura naturans*, but we still have to address our other question. Why does the unity and divisibility of *natura naturans* turn into, or flow into, the radical plurality of the *infinita infinitis modis* of *natura naturata*? The answer to this question appears to be even more surprising.

Spinoza defines God as an 'absolutely infinite being':

E1d6: By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence [Per Deum intelligo ens absolute infinitum, hoc est, substantiam constantem infinitis attributis, quorum unumquodque aeternam, et infinitam essentiam exprimit].

He then turns to explain why God must be defined as *absolutely* infinite:

E1d6e: I say absolutely infinite, not infinite in its own kind; for if something is only infinite in its own kind, we can deny infinite attributes of it but if something is absolutely infinite, whatever expresses essence and involves no negation pertains to its essence.

For Spinoza, a proper definition expresses the essence of the thing defined.⁴² Hence, absolute infinity must belong to God's essence. Indeed, on several occasions Spinoza ascribes absolute infinity to *natura naturans*. Thus, for example, in E1p16d he speaks about the 'divine nature that has absolutely infinite attributes [*natura divina infinita absolute attributa habet*]' (E1/60/27). Thus, God's absolute infinity does not emerge only at the realm of *natura naturata*, but is already present in the realm constituting God's essence: *natura naturans*. Hence, the absolute infinity of *infinita infinitis modis* which flows from God's essence has its ground in the absolute infinity of God's

essence. Yet, one could and should press the question further. How can *natura naturans* be on the one hand absolutely infinite, yet, on the other hand, unified to the extent that it is indivisible? It is true that for Spinoza both infinity and uniqueness are *not* numerical. On several occasions Spinoza stresses that it is improper to call God 'one [*unum*]'; since number, including the number one, doesn't pertain to God's essence.⁴³ Instead, Spinoza claims, we can only say that God is 'unique [*unicum*]' (E1p14c1). Relying on this claim one could perhaps argue that for Spinoza radical unity and infinity are not only not opposed but perhaps even identical (under this reading). This infinity and uniqueness are opposed to number and finite quantity). This is, I think, an interesting suggestion that demands a close study of Spinoza's understanding of number and infinity.⁴⁴ Yet, even if this last, speculative, claim turns out to be right, we could and should ask ourselves two further questions. First, does *natura naturata* have any feature that distinguishes it from *natura naturans*? In E1p4, Spinoza makes a claim that seems to be his own formulation of the Identity of Indiscernibles that rules out brute difference.⁴⁵ Thus, if *natura naturata* is to be in any sense distinct from *natura naturans* there must be some qualitative feature that distinguishes the two. This qualitative feature could have been the mere activity of *natura naturans* as opposed to the fact that *natura naturata* is being acted on. But, as has been noted before, Spinoza seems to suggest another crucial difference between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*: the former, but not latter, is indivisible. Thus, our original question may now come and haunt us again: Why does the indivisibility of *natura naturans* flow into the divisibility of *natura naturata*? Since *natura naturans* is the cause of *natura naturata*, how can we explain the appearance of divisibility in the effect which was never present in the cause?

Summary

In the current chapter I have attempted to draw attention to an important problem in Spinoza's philosophy that so far has hardly been addressed. I argued that Spinoza must provide an explanation for the existence of the diversity of things that follows from the unity of God's essence, and that providing such an explanation is not a trivial task. In the second part, I have considered the acosmist interpretation of Spinoza suggested by the German Idealists which solves the problem simply by ascribing to Spinoza the rejection of the reality of finite things and diversity. I have pointed out several considerations that tell strongly against this reading of Spinoza. In the third part of this chapter I have argued that *natura naturans* must generate *natura naturata* not because it lacks anything but rather because activity is an essential feature of *natura naturans* itself which requires causation that is not merely reflexive. Finally, I have attempted to explain the emergence of radical diversity from God's indivisible essence. While some crucial questions

still remain, I hope this chapter made significant progress in addressing most aspects of the question originally posed.

Notes

Is Spinoza an existence, or priority, monist? Oddly enough in his excellent, influential, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on 'Monism,' Jonathan Schaffer lists Spinoza under *both* headings. As far as I can see, the source of this confusion is that Schaffer's definition of *priority monism* is not precise enough and lumps together a variety of priority relations. Thus, it would seem that according to Schaffer's rather loose understanding of priority, even a view which (i) grants priority to the cause over the effect, and (ii) affirms the existence of an ultimate cause for anything that is, should qualify as *bona fide* 'priority monism.' While I find Schaffer's distinction between existence and priority monism very helpful, I believe it needs more fine tuning in order to avoid confusing priority monism with existence monism on the one hand (as in the case specifying Spinoza's kind of monism), with pluralist views (e.g., monotheism) on the other hand.

1. Unless otherwise marked, all references to the *Ethics*, the early works of Spinoza, and Letters I–29 are to Curley's translations. In references to the other letters of Spinoza I have used Shirley's translation (henceforward S). I use the following standard abbreviations for Spinoza's works: TIE – *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* [*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*], TTP – *Theological-Political Treatise* [*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*], DPP – *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy* [*Principia Philosophiae*], KV – *Philosophiae Parts I & II*, CM – *Metaphysical Thoughts* [*Cogitata Metaphysica*], KV – *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being* [*Korte Verhandlung von God de Mensch en deszelfs Weisheit*], Ep. – *Letters*. Passages in the *Ethics* will be referred to by means of the following abbreviations: a-(x)iom, c-(orollary), p-(re)position, s-(cholium) and app-(endix); 'd' stands for either 'definition' (when it appears immediately to the right of the part of the book), or 'demonstration' (in all other cases). Hence, E1d3 is the third definition of part I and E1p16d is the demonstration of proposition 16 of part I. I am indebted to Steven Nadler, Mike LeBuffe, and Phillip Goff for helpful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.
2. See Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, I. For two insightful analytic discussions of this questions, see Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, 115–164, and Rundle, *Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing*.
3. In the early *Cogitata Metaphysica* Spinoza frequently refers to creation and 'created things' though it is not clear that even at this stage he takes creation as a process occurring in time (see CM II x).
4. On Spinoza's strict commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason (i.e., the claims that everything must be explainable), see Della Rocca, Spinoza, Ch. 1, and Melamed and Lin, 'The Principle of Sufficient Reason.'
5. For a notable exception see Steven Nadler's essay in this volume. Our chapters pursue different strategies to address this question.
6. On the development of Spinoza's definitions of substance and mode in the early drafts of the *Ethics*, see my article, 'The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics.'
7. Scholarly debates about the relation: Curley and Della Rocca do not challenge the asymmetric nature of the dependence.
8. For a statement of Spinoza's necessitarianism, see E1p33. For an excellent discussion of this issue, see Garret's, 'Spinoza's Necessitarianism.'

9. This does not necessarily mean that God *depends* on the modes, since, as I will shortly argue, God must generate the modes by virtue of a feature that belongs to his essence.
10. I call *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* 'realms' since both are populated by *res* (though at least in the case of *natura naturans* there is only one *res* at stake. I take the distinction between Spinoza's substance and the attributes as a distinction of reason. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see my 'The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics,' Part II).
11. The question of the reason for the existence of modes in Spinoza continues another traditional problem in metaphysics (in addition to the question about the reasons for God's creation). Traditionally, accidents were considered to depend *asymmetrically* on their substance, yet some medieval writers held that substances cannot be without their accidents. See Normore, 'Accidents and Modes,' 674–5. Similarly in the *Monadology* (§ 21) Leibniz argues that the Monad (which is prior to its states) cannot subsist without some property [*affection*].
12. For a discussion of the relation between the substance and its attributes, see Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem*, 157–71, and Melamed 'The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics,' Part II.
13. 'Knowledge of the first kind is the only cause of falsity, whereas knowledge of the second and third kind is necessarily true' (E2p41). Knowledge of the first kind is 'opinion or imagination' (E2p40s2).
14. For a more detailed discussion, see my 'Spinoza's Metaphysics of Thought,' KV I/26/8–16.
15. Indeed, Spinoza stresses explicitly that modes and only modes are divisible. See 16. This question has a long history as well. If the created world contains a plurality of things and God is simple, it seems that the effect of a simple being can be diverse. However, many medieval philosophers adhered to the view that the effect of a simple being must be simple itself too (since otherwise, the diversity would be brute). See Maimonides, *Guide* II 22 (P II 317).
17. For a discussion of the German Idealist interpretation of Spinoza as an 'acosmist,' see my 'Salomon Maimon and the Rise of Spinozism,' and 'Acosmism or Weak Individualism?' For the British Idealists' reading of Spinoza, see Parkinson, 'Spinoza and British Idealism.' Parts of the current section of this chapter are adopted from my 'Acosmism or Weak Individualism?.'
18. See the entries 'Xenophanes' and 'Zeno of Elea' (remark K). Spinoza's own claim in Letter 73 that he sides 'with all the ancient philosophers [*cum omnibus antiquis Philosophis*]' in asserting that all things are in God might tempt the reader to think that Spinoza himself associated his views with the Eleatics. However, Spinoza's discussion of Zeno's argument against the reality of motion is highly critical (DPP I1p6s| I/192–6) and clearly defends the reality of movement and change.
19. Halics mine, 'On Nature Itself, or On the Inherent Force and Actions of Created Things' (1698) (Gerhard IV, 508–9) Loemker, 502). Cf. Adams, *Leibniz*, 132. For further texts in which Leibniz associates Spinoza with Eleatic philosophy, see his annotations to Oldenburg's Letter from October 1676 (A VI–3, 370), and §21 of the *Discours sur la theologie naturelle des Chinois* (1716). I am indebted to Mogens Laerke for the latter reference.
20. See for example Maimon's *Streifereien*, 40–1 (*Gesammelte Werke* IV 62–3): 'Spinoza behauptet nach dem Parmenides "nur das Reelle, vom Verstande begriffene existiert, was mit dem Reellen in einem endlichen Wesen verknüpft ist, ist bloß

die Einschränkung des Reellen, eine Negation, der keine Existenz beigelegt werden kann'. Similarly, Schopenhauer repeatedly claims that 'Spinoza was a mere reviver of the Eleatics' (*Parerga und Paralipomena*, vol. 1, 71, 76–77). An interesting work in this context is *Natur und Gott nach Spinoza* by Karl Heinrich Heydenreich (1789). Reprinted in the *Aetas Kantiana* series (Nurn. 98). Brussels 1973). The book discusses at length Spinoza's philosophy and its contemporary interpretation in the form of a dialogue between Parmenides and Xenophanes. I am unaware of any major discussion of Spinoza in this period (roughly 1790 to 1840) which fails to make this association.

21. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3 pp. 257–8, cf. the same lectures, vol. 1 p. 244, and Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, 376.

22. The view of Spinoza as annihilating individual things is already mentioned in Jacobi's *Über der Lehre der Spinoza* (1785, 1789). While there is no doubt, to my mind, that Maimon read Jacobi's discussion of Spinoza (and clearly Hegel was strongly influenced by Jacobi's writing on Spinoza), it is not at all clear that Jacobi ascribed to Spinoza the same acosmistic position as Maimon and Hegel did. Jacobi suggests that for Spinoza finite things are not real (i.e., are *non-entia*) in very few passages (Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 220–1 (§§. XII and XIX) *Werke*, I, 1, 100 and 102), and the issue was far less central to his reading of Spinoza in comparison with those of Maimon and Hegel. Furthermore, Jacobi thought that Spinoza's strict and consistent rationalism led to the annihilation of the infinite as well as the finite, i.e., it led to nihilism and atheism. Maimon may have had this view of Jacobi in mind, but gave it a different twist, far removed from Jacobi's original contention, by arguing that Spinoza was a radical religious thinker who denied the reality of anything but God. For a very helpful discussion of Jacobi's view on the reality of finite things in Spinoza, see Franks, *All or Nothing*, 10, 95 and 170.

23. Maimon himself endorsed the very same view (i.e., 'acosmism') in his early Hebrew manuscript, written (mostly) in 1778, before his migration to Germany and his first encounter with Spinoza's writings: 'It is impossible to conceive any other existence but His, may he be blessed, no matter whether it is a substantial or an accidental existence. And this is the secret of the aforementioned unity [that God is the cause of world in all four respects: formally, materially, efficiently and finally], namely, that only God, may he be blessed, exists, and that nothing but him has any existence at all'. (*Hesheq Shelomo* (Hebrew: Solomon's Desire), 139. My translation and emphasis). Cf. my article, 'Salomon Maimon and the Rise of Spinozism in German Idealism', 79–80.

24. 'Es ist unbegreiflich, wie man das spinozistische System zum atheistschen machen konnte, da sie doch einander gerade entgegengesetzt sind. In diesem wird das Dasein Gottes, in jenem aber das Dasein der Welt geleugnet. Es müßte also eher das akosmische System heißen.' (*Lebensgeschichte*, 217. This passage, like many other theoretical passages, is omitted in Murray's translation. The present translation is mine).

25. Maimon, *Lebensgeschichte*, 217.

26. 'For Spinoza the absolute is substance, and no being is ascribed to the finite: his position is therefore monotheism and acosmism. So strictly is there only God, that there is no world at all; in this [position] the finite has no genuine actuality' (Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, 432). For similar claims by Hegel, see the same work, page 377, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, page 281, and *The Encyclopedia Logic*, pages 10, 97 and 226–7. For Hegel's criticism of the 'popular' view which asserts the reality of both God and the world of finite

things, see *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, 280–1: 'Reason cannot remain satisfied with this also, with indifference like this' [*Die Vernunft kann bei solchen auch, solcher Gleichgültigkeit nicht stehengeblieben*].

27. *Novas Schriften*, III 651.

28. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, 282.

29. Among the British Idealists there was a tendency to moderate some aspects of the acosmist reading (Joachim, for example, occasionally claims that modes are only 'in part illusory' (*A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*, 112)), but the general outline of this interpretation was endorsed by both Caird and Joachim. For Caird's and Joachim's Hegelian readings of Spinoza, see Parkinson, 'Spinoza and British Idealism'. The identification of Spinoza with Eleatic philosophy reaches its peak in Koljeve's discussion of the 'acosmism of Parmenides–Spinoza' (*Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 106 (n. 3), 123–5).

30. 'So bekommt Parmenides mit dem Scheine und der Meinung, dem Gegenteil des Seins und der Wahrheit, zu tun; so Spinoza mit den Attributen, den Modis, der Ausdehnung, Bewegung, dem Verstande, Willen usf'. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 98 (Italics mine).

31. 'In Spinozism it is precisely the mode as such which is untrue; substance alone is true and to it everything must be brought back. But this is only to submerge all content in the void, in a merely formal unity lacking all content' (*Science of Logic*, 328). 'No truth at all is ascribed to finite things or the world as a whole in [Spinoza's] philosophy' (*Encyclopedia Logic*, 227 [§ 151a]). '[T]he understanding is ranked by Spinoza only among affections, and as such has no truth' (Italics mine. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, III 269. Cf. III 280–1, 288). Cf. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, I 377 and 432. On the unreality of attributes, see *Science of Logic*, 98 and 538.

32. We might still have to provide an explanation for the alleged illusion of the existence and flow of modes from the nature of God.

33. For consideration that provide prima facie support for the acosmist reading, see my 'Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics,' Part II. For an impressive contemporary defense of this reading, see Della Rocca, 'Rationalism, Idealism, Monism and Beyond.'

34. 'Nihil existit, *ex cuius natura aliquis effectus non sequatur*'. This (mostly neglected) proposition states a principle that should properly be termed 'the principle of sufficient effect': everything must have an effect (and not only a cause, as the principle of sufficient reason stipulates).

35. See Parkinson ('Hegel, Pantheism and Spinoza', 455) for a similar argument. This argument is somewhat less conclusive since *natura naturans* could just cause itself and thus satisfy Elp16.

36. '[W]hether we conceive nature under the attribute of Extension, or under the attribute of Thought, or under any other attribute, we shall find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes, i.e., that the same things follow one another.'

37. Translation modified. Spinoza makes similar claims in several other texts. See, for example, Esp24.

38. On Spinoza's modes as God's *propria*, see my 'Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance,' §6.

39. Furthermore, in Elp16d Spinoza insinuates that the intellect infers [concluding] the modes.

40. See Spinoza, Ep. 9 (IV/44/34–45/25), and Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I 52.

41. See EIP10s and Ep. 9 (IV/144/34–45/25).
 42. See TIE § 95 and Ep. 34.
 43. 'With regard to the demonstration that I establish in the Appendix to my Geometrical Proof of Descartes' Principles, namely that God only be improperly called one or single, I reply that a thing can be called one or single only in respect of its existence, not of its essence. For we do not conceive things under the category of numbers unless they are included in a common class... It is clear that a thing cannot be called one or single unless another thing has been conceived which, as I have said, agrees with it. Now since the existence of God is his very essence, and since we can form no universal idea of his essence, it is certain that he who calls God one or single has no true idea of God, or is speaking of him very improperly' (Ep. 50). For a helpful discussion of this important passage, see Geach, 'Spinoza and the Divine Attributes', 21–23.
 44. For Spinoza's view on the nature of mathematics and mathematical objects, see Ramon, *Qualité et quantité*, and Melamed, 'The Exact Science of Nonbeings'.
 45. EIP4: 'Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another, either by a difference in the attributes of substance or by a difference in their affections.' For a discussion of EIP4 and the Identity of Indiscernibles, see Della Rocca, *Representation*, 131–2.

Bibliography

- Adams, Robert Merrinew. *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
 Bayle, Pierre. *Dictionnaire historique et critique par Mr. Pierre Bayle*. Amsterdam: Compagnie des Libraires, 1702.
 —, 5 volumes. *The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr. Peter Bayle*. London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1997.
 Caird, John. *Spinoza*. Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1888.
 Curley, Edwin. *Spinoza's Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969.
 Della Rocca, Michael. *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
 —, *Spinoza* (New York: Routledge 2008).
 —, 'Rationalism, Idealism, Monism and Beyond' in Förster and Melamed (eds.), *Spinoza and German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).
 Descartes, René. *Oeuvres de Descartes* [AT]. 12 volumes. Edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery. Paris: J. Vrin, 1964–76.
 Franks, Paul W., *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005.
 Geach, Peter T., 'Spinoza and the Divine Attributes' *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* (1971), 15–27.
 Hegel, G.W.F. *Gesammelte Werke (Kritische Ausgabe)*. Hamburg: Meiner, 1968.
 —, *The Science of Logic*. Translated by A.V. Miller. London: Allen and Unwin, 1969.
 —, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Edited by Peter C. Hodgson. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984.
 —, *Werke*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986.
 —, *The Encyclopedia Logic*. Translated and edited by T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting and H.S. Harris. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991.
 —, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. 3 volumes. Translated by E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simson. London: University of Nebraska Press 1995.

- Heidegger, Martin. *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1953).
 Heidemreich, Karl Heinrich. *Natur und Gott nach Spinoza*. Leipzig: Joh. Gottfr. Müllererschen, 1789 (*Aetas Kantiana*, Bruxelles 1973).
 Jacobi, F.H., *Werke*. Edited by Klaus Hammacher and Walter Jaeschke. Hamburg: Meiner, 1998.
 —, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Alwilil*. Translated and edited by George di Giovanni. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994.
 Joachim, Harold H. *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901.
 Koljeve, Alexandre. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by James H. Nichols. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969.
 Leibniz, G.W. *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*. 7 volumes. Edited by C.J. Gerhardt. Berlin: Weidman, 1875–90. [Reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1965. Cited by volume and page].
 —, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*. Translated and edited by Leroy F. Loemker. 2nd edition. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989.
 —, *Philosophical Essays*, translated and edited by Roger Ariew and Dan Garber (Hackett: Indianapolis, 1989).
 Maimon, Salomon. *Gesammelte Werke* [GW]. Edited by Valerio Verra. Hildesheim: Olms, 1965–1976.
 —, *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*. Edited by Zwi Batscha. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1984. [Orig. 1792–3].
 —, *Autobiography*. Translated by J. Clark Murray. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001.
 —, *Hebber Shelomo* (Hebrew: *Solomon's Desire*). Posen 1778. Manuscript 8°6426 at the National and University Library, Jerusalem.
 Melamed, Yitzhak Y., 'On the Exact Science of Nonbeings: Spinoza's View of Mathematics' *Iyuni – The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 49 (2000): 3–22.
 —, 'Salomon Maimon and the Rise of Spinozism in German Idealism,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42 (2004), 79–80.
 —, 'Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance: The Substance–Mode Relation as a Relation of Inherence and Predication,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 78 (2009), 17–82.
 —, 'Acosmism or Weak Individualism? Hegel, Spinoza, and the Reality of the Finite,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 44 (January 2010), 77–92.
 —, 'The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance, Attributes and Modes' in Michael Della Rocca (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
 —, 'Spinoza's Metaphysics of Thought,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, forthcoming.
 Melamed, Yitzhak and Lin, Martin, 'Principle of Sufficient Reason,' *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/sufficient-reason/>
 Nadler, Steven, 'Spinoza's Monism and the reality of the finite' in Gott, Philip (ed.), *Spinoza on Monism* (Palgrave: 2011).
 Normore, Calvin G., 'Accidents and Modes' in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Robert Pasnau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), vol. 2, 674–85.
 Novalls, *Novalls Schriften*. Edited by Richard Samuel, Hans Joachim Mähl, and Gerttrud Schulz. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960–1988.
 Nozick, Robert, *Philosophical Explanations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

- Ramond, Charles. *Qualité et quantité dans la philosophie de Spinoza*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995.
- Rundle, Bede. *Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Parkinson, G.H.R., 'Hegel, Pantheism and Spinoza.' *Journal of the History of Idea* 38 (1977): 449–59
- , 'Spinoza and British Idealism: The Case of H.H. Joachim.' *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 1 (1993): 109–23.
- Schaffer, Jonathan, 'Monism,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward Zalta (ed.), URL= <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/monism/>
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. *Parerga and Paralipomena*. Translated by E.F.J. Payne. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Spinoza, *Opera* [G], 4 volumes. Edited by Carl Gebhardt. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925.
- , *The Collected Works of Spinoza* [C]. Vol. 1. Edited and translated by Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- , *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. 2nd ed. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001.
- , *The Letters* [S]. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995.

11

Spinoza's Monism and the Reality of the Finite

Steve Nadler

The label 'monism' is notoriously ambiguous. Its metaphysical ramifications depend essentially on that to which the 'oneness' is supposed to apply: Is there only one *thing*? Or is ontological uniqueness being ascribed only at the level of *type*? And if the latter, does this mean that there is only a single type of thing in the universe (e.g., Berkeley's and later Leibniz's claim that only mind-like things are real)? Or does it mean, less restrictively, that there are many types of thing but only one instance of each type (e.g., there is only one mind or thinking thing; only one body or material thing; etc.) And, to take the metaphysically more interesting, Eleatic scenario, if there is only one thing – what has been called 'existence monism'² – then what are we to make of the apparent reality and plurality of individual items that populate the world around us?

In this essay, I propose to address some of these questions on Spinoza's behalf by examining a long-standing and oft-debated problem in his metaphysics: Does Spinoza's monism have the consequence that the division of mundane reality into particular individual things is only illusory? I argue that Spinoza, while a monist about substance, nonetheless does not deny (nor is he inadvertently committed to denying) the reality of particular individual things, or what he calls 'finite modes.' I shall do this by showing that a plurality of finite things with ontological integrity is not merely a brute fact but can be made to fit into (and thus justified by) his deductive system. In this way, we will have fewer reasons to be tempted by the acosmic or phenomenalist interpretation of his metaphysics, most prominently promoted by Hegel but defended as well by some recent commentators, according to which the breaking up of reality into singular individuals is only a matter of perception.

I

Let us begin with a brief overview of the non-negotiable elements of Spinoza's metaphysics.