

RÉGIS' INTERPRETATION OF THE NATURE OF GOD AND HIS REFUTATION DE L'OPINION DE SPINOZA

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L'usage de la raison et de la foy ou l'accord de la foy et de la raison (Paris 1704)¹ by Pierre Sylvain Régis can be considered his last attempt to defend the new philosophy. In this work Régis aims at demonstrating the possibility of establishing an agreement between faith and reason, but his ambition is also to protect «Radical Cartesianism»² from attacks of censorship. *L'usage* contains many theories expressed in the main Régis's work: the *Système de philosophie* (Paris 1690)³. Both are characterized by a reinterpretation of the Cartesian metaphysics on empirical basis through the empirical interpretation of the relations between substance and modes and by an epistemology based on the importance of experience for the advancement of scientific knowledge. While the *Système* obtained the *privilège* from the king for the publication only eight

¹ RÉGIS 1704. See SCHMALTZ 2005, pp. 80-96.

² See SCHMALTZ 2002.

³ PIERRE SYLVAIN RÉGIS, *Système de philosophie, contenant la logique, la métaphysique, la physique et la morale*, 3 voll. in-4°, Paris, Imprimerie Denys Thierry aux depens d'Anisson, Posuel et Rigaud libraires à Lyon, 1690. *Privilège* du 21 octobre 1688, *Registré* le 11 juin 1690, *Achévé d'imprimer* le 29 juillet 1690. *Tome I*, Logique, Métaphysique, Physique I-II; *tome II*, Physique III-IV; *tome III*, Morale. *Compte rendu au Journal des Sçavans. Du Lundy 4 Septembre 1690*, Paris, Jean Cusson 1690, pp. 429-36. In 1691 were printed two new editions of Régis's *Système*: it was reprinted in Lyon in seven volumes (PIERRE SYLVAIN RÉGIS, *Système de philosophie, contenant la logique, la métaphysique, la physique et la morale*, 7 voll. in-12°, Lyon, Anisson, Posuel et Rigaud 1690) and in Amsterdam in three volumes (PIERRE SYLVAIN RÉGIS, *Cours entier de philosophie, ou système general selon les principes de M. Descartes contenant la logique, la métaphysique, la physique et la morale*, 3 voll. in-4°, Amsterdam, Huguetan 1691).

years after the author's request, the approbation for the printing of *L'usage* was immediately accorded. The reason of the different attitude of the institutions towards two works by the same author can be located in a different way of divulging the contents: the *Système* tries to diffuse Descartes's thought among a wider audience by presenting his philosophy in a systematic way, *L'usage* takes the defence of the Christian faith as an excuse for presenting principles against the philosophy approved by the Church. Therefore, *L'usage* is philosophically innovative, historically emblematic and theologically interesting: it expresses the empirical interpretation of Descartes's thought, the impact of the censure on Cartesian philosophy in the second half of 17th Century France and it presents an interpretation of the nature of God as an alternative to Descartes and Spinoza. Régis' *L'usage* ends with a *Refutation de l'opinion de Spinoza, touchant l'existence et la nature de Dieu*. Through this *Refutation* he tries to hide the spinozistic implications of his interpretation of God by focusing the attention of the reader both on the dangers of Spinoza's theological thought and on the obscurity of many definitions concerning the existence and the nature of God as presented in Spinoza's *Ethica*⁴.

1. God's intellect and will in Spinoza and Régis

One of the most interesting aspects of *L'usage* is Régis' interpretation of God's nature, which is in some points similar to those of Spinoza. Régis gives

⁴ Traditional positions as the only rational distinction between will and intellect in God become paradigm of heresy and are rejected after the printing of Spinoza's *Ethica*.

prominence to the divine will as a measure of the power of God⁵, but he states that the action of the will of God involves at the same time the action both of His power and His intellect. As a pure act God can not have any potential faculty: to the contrary, his faculties have to be all and always actual. The science and the will of God, together with the power, act at the same time, without either distinction or priority of nature and of time as well. Even if these three faculties are the same thing in God, it is possible to consider the divine power as a force that performs the orders of the will and what the science requires:

non seulement la puissance de Dieu ne differe pas de son acte, elle ne differe pas même de la science ni de sa volonté (...), si ce n'est peut-estre d'une distinction de raison, entant que la puissance de Dieu est considerée comme un principe qui execute ce que la volonté ordonne et ce que la science dirige, bien que ces trois choses soient reellement les mêmes en Dieu⁶.

Therefore, according to Régis, the distinction between power, intellect and will in God is merely rational. This kind of distinction is made by man in order to understand an action that, regarded in itself, is inconceivable for the human mind. Because of his limited nature, man tries to understand the divine creation by likening the functioning of the divine faculties to the human ones; this is the reason why, for Régis, this sort of comparison has to be taken as a mere rational speculation without any foundation in the reality. Régis states that «tous les êtres que Dieu connoit, ne sont et n'ont de realité, d'es-

⁵ See RÉGIS 1704, pp. 85-86: «Il est même visible que comme Dieu ne fait rien hors de luy que ce qu'il veut faire, sa volonté est, à cet égard, la mesure de sa puissance, c'est à dire qu'il ne peut faire que ce qu'il veut. En effet, s'il avoit la puissance de faire quelque autre chose, en quoy cette puissance consisteroit-elle? (...) Or il est certain qu'il n'y a rien de possible ni d'impossible que ce que Dieu a rendu tel par sa volonté (...). Il faut donc conclure que Dieu ne peut faire que ce qu'il veut et que s'il avoit la puissance de faire quelque autre chose, cette puissance seroit une puissance de rien».

⁶ RÉGIS 1704, p. 84.

sence ou d'existence que parce qu'il veut la leur donner tres librement»⁷, but he affirms at the same time that God created the world thanks to His reason and His knowledge. Indeed, even if in God «il n'y a point de connoissance ni d'esprit ni de corps, qui precede sa volonté»⁸, since the action of the divine will is simultaneous to the one of the intellect, in some way it implies some knowledge. That is why it is possible to distinguish three different faculties in order to explain their functioning in a purely rational succession, which is radically different from the temporal one. In fact the latter could not be referred either to the eternal and immutable nature of God or to the functioning of His faculties:

Toutefois, bien que la connoissance de Dieu a des choses qui sont hors de luy, suppose un decret de sa volonté, cela n'empêche pas neanmoins que nous ne puissions assurer (...) qu'il y auroit de la temerité à dire que Dieu a fait le monde sans raison et sans connoissance; car il a esté prouvé que si l'action de l'entendement de Dieu ne precede pas l'action de sa volonté d'une priorité de temps ni de nature, elle la precede au moins d'une priorité de raison, c'est à dire, d'une priorité fondée sur notre maniere de concevoir, laquelle suffit pour pouvoir dire (...) que Dieu ne fait rien sans connoissance⁹.

According to Régis divine intellect and will are linked in terms of interdependence, that is to say that the action of one of them involves the action of the other:

c'est donc une chose assurée que Dieu ne voit les creatures dans son essence ni dans ses perfections, mais dans sa volonté, entant que sa volonté donne l'être à tous les choses. il ne sert de rien de dire que Dieu agit raisonnablement et par consequent avec connoissance, car cela ne veut pas dire que la connoissance de Dieu precede de quelque priorité de temps ou de nature la détermination de sa volonté; cela signifie seulement que la détermination de la volonté de Dieu n'est

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

jamais sans la connoissance, ni la connoissance sans la determination de la volonté¹⁰.

This kind of representation of God can be considered in some points similar to that of Spinoza, who states that the intellect and the will are the same faculty in God¹¹. Like Spinoza, Régis admits the identity of thought and will in God on one side and the necessity of His nature on the other side by supposing that the nature of God determines the action of His will. In fact, since the divine knowledge can not be considered apart from the determinations of the Will of God,

(...) il est evident que la nature de Dieu étant de penser et vouloir parfaitement, Dieu doit penser et vouloir toutes choses, tant celles qui sont en luy que celles qui sont hors de luy; avec cette difference pourtant que Dieu pense et veut les choses qui sont en luy par la necessité de sa nature, et qu'il ne pense et ne veut les choses qui sont hors de luy que par necessité de sa volonté. Mais soit qu'il pense ou veuille par la necessité de sa nature, soit qu'il pense ou veuille par la necessité de sa volonté, il pense et veut toujours toutes choses, et toutes à la fois, parce qu'il est de sa nature de penser et de vouloir tout, et de penser et vouloir sans succession. Mais si la pensée de toutes choses est la propre substance de Dieu, cette pensée ne suppose rien qui la devance et qui luy donne une nouvelle modification; car si Dieu pense toujours à toutes les choses, et tout à la fois, il ne doit point recevoir de nouvelles modifications pour penser, mais son seul être, entant que pensant, luy doit faire connoitre toutes les choses actuelles et possibles. La pensée de toutes choses ne vient donc point à Dieu par succession, mais il la possède parce qu'il est de sa nature de penser à tout. Cela n'empêche pas néanmoins que Dieu n'apperçoive chaque chose tres distinctement, et avec

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹¹ According to Spinoza God is pure mind (*pura mens*), since it doesn't exist the free will as faculty choice in God and God's action is His essence. As he explains in the Appendix to the first part of the *Ethica*, God's essence and action are regulated by necessity. Spinoza's principle represents an alternative to the doctrine concerning the creation of a finite world by a God provided with intellect and will different from His own essence. Since God is pure act, God must act through His essence. According to the dutch philosopher neither God nor human beings act according to final causes, although in the case of humans, we erroneously believe that we do. All human ideas follow necessarily from God's essence and are as determined by that essence as are the laws that govern bodies.

la même netteté que s'il n'en appercevoit qu'une seule, parce qu'il est de sa nature de penser à tout, avec distinction¹².

Régis grounds his theory of creation on God's essence and almightiness, rather than on His goodness. Like the God of Spinoza, the God of Régis can therefore be considered an impersonal God. Furthermore, by supposing that God causes infinite modes necessarily, Régis adopts the same model of divine causality of Spinoza. Both suppose that God acts according to the laws of his own nature without being compelled by anybody¹³, in this sense He can be defined as « free cause ». Since intellect and will are the very essence of God, the world could not have been created in an order different from the actual¹⁴. Indeed, all the things subdued to God's power are provided with a necessary and perfect existence, as His power consists on His necessary and perfect essence¹⁵. Like Spinoza, Régis also supports the view that God is essentially active, and provided with an infinite power and productiveness. According to this view, the common image of God as provided with intellect and will (that is to say that first of all He knows the possible and only then He decides what kind of possibility is better to be realized through a free act of the will) has to be considered a kind of a superficial anthropomorphism¹⁶: men are used to

¹² RÉGIS 1704, pp. 100-101.

¹³ Spinoza, *Ethica*, I, P17, GEBHART 1925 (hereafter G), II, 17, 2-7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I, P32, G, II, 28, 19-20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I, P34, G, II, 32, 36.

¹⁶ « (...) si ad aeternam Dei essentiam intellectus scilicet et voluntas pertinent, aliud sane per utrumque hoc attributum intelligendum est, quam quod vulgo solent homines. Nam intellectus et voluntas, qui Dei essentiam constituerent, a nostro intellectu et voluntate toto coelo differre deberent, nec in ulla re, praeterquam in nomine, convenire possent; non aliter scilicet, quam inter se conveniunt canis signum coeleste, et canis animal latrans. Quod sic demonstrabo. Si intellectus ad divinam naturam pertinet, non poterit, uti noster intellectus, posterior (ut plerisque placet), vel simul natura esse cum rebus intellectis, quandoquidem Deus omnibus rebus prior est causalitate (per coroll. 1. prop. 16.); sed contra veri-

attribute to God their own features without caring that «quapropter res, quae et essentiae et existentiae alicuius effectus est causa, a tali effectu differre debet tam ratione essentiae, quam ratione existentiae»¹⁷. Régis underlines that the meaning of the word «power» is different as it is assigned to God rather than to man. According to him, human and divine power are similar only because of the habit:

il faut donc reconnoitre que la puissance de Dieu differe de celle de l'homme, en ce que l'homme peut faire ce qu'il ne fait pas, au lieu que Dieu estant un être simple, ou pour mieux dire, un acte pur, il ne peut avoir aucune puissance qui soit ni qui puisse estre separée de l'acte. Ainsi quand nous disons que Dieu a la puissance d'agir, ce n'est pas au même sens que nous disons que nous avons cette puissance, car nous sçavons par experience que notre puissance est souvent separée de l'acte, et la raison nous enseigne clairement qu'en Dieu la puissance et l'acte sont toujours une même chose. C'est pourquoy quand nous dirons dans la suite que Dieu peut faire des choses qu'il ne veut pas faire, nous ne parlerons pas à la rigueur, comme on doit faire dans un Traité Philosophique, mais seulement comme nous avons accoutumé de parler des nous memes, lors qu'il s'agit de notre puissance et de notre volonté¹⁸.

tas et formalis rerum essentia ideo talis est, quia talis in Dei intellectu existit obiective. Quare Dei intellectus, quatenus Dei essentiam constituere concipitur, est revera causa rerum tam earum essentiae, quam earum existentiae; quod ab iis videtur etiam fuisse animadversum, qui Dei intellectum, voluntatem et potentiam unum et idem esse asseruerunt. Cum itaque Dei intellectus sit unica rerum causa, videlicet (ut ostendimus) tam earum essentiae, quam earum existentiae, debet ipse necessario ab iisdem differre tam ratione essentiae, quam ratione existentiae. Nam causatum differt a sua causa praecise in eo, quod a causa habet. (...) Quapropter res, quae et essentiae et existentiae alicuius effectus est causa, a tali effectu differre debet tam ratione essentiae, quam ratione existentiae. Atqui Dei intellectus est et essentiae et existentiae nostri intellectus causa; ergo Dei intellectus, quatenus divinam essentiam constituere concipitur, a nostro intellectu tam ratione essentiae, quam ratione existentiae differt, nec in ulla re, praeterquam in nomine, cum eo convenire potest, ut volebamus. Circa voluntatem eodem modo proceditur, ut facile unusquisque videre potest» (*ibid.*, I, P17 S, G, II, 18, 31 - 19, 31).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, P17 S, G, II, 19, 23-25.

¹⁸ RÉGIS 1704, p. 83.

On the basis of this distinction, Régis, like Spinoza, states that «la puissance de Dieu ne differe pas de son acte»¹⁹ and that «elle ne differe pas même de sa science et de sa volonté»²⁰. Also the reasons on which the difference between human nature and God's nature is grounded are therefore similar in some points to those theorized by Spinoza. For Régis God's intellect and will are not really or qualitatively ("modally") different, since «la puissance de Dieu ne differe pas de son acte»²¹ and «elle ne differe pas même de sa science et de sa volonté»²². Furthermore according both to the Aristoteleian argument that «l'effet doit differer de sa cause en tout ce qu'il reçoit d'elle» and to the christian precept that «notre volonté reçoit son essence et son existence de la volonté de Dieu», Régis states the complete distinction between Human will and God's will, which have «rien de commun (...) que le nom»²³.

2. Régis's definition of God's nature : the *ens perfectissimum* and His attributes

Régis grounds his definition of the nature of God on the supreme divine perfection and on its difference from the human nature. Since God is the *ens perfectissimum*, He has to be considered «infini en degrez de perfection et non pas en parties»²⁴; Régis points out that «il y a une difference essentielle entre

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82. Régis specifies that the divine infinity can not be compared to the material infinity, which lies in an extension without either boundaries or limits and which was ascribed by the ancient philosophers to the nature of the first Principle, without caring that

actual extension can not be separated from the limit and, therefore, that the notion of material infinity is absurd. In this way he implicitly refutes Spinoza's substantialistic notion of God. This notion, in fact, besides including the notion of *Deus absolute infinitus* shared by Régis himself, implies moreover, in contrast to the view of the French philosopher, the infinity and the eternity of the extended substance which exists in God: see SPINOZA, *Ethica*, I, P15 S: G, II, 57, 10-15: «Omnia, inquam, in Deo sunt et omnia, quae fiunt, per solas leges infinitae Dei naturae fiunt et ex necessitate eius essentiae (ut mox ostendam) sequuntur. Quare nulla ratione dici potest, Deum ab alio pati, aut substantiam extensam divina natura indignam esse; tametsi divisibilis supponatur, dummodo aeterna et infinita concedatur. Sed de his impraesentiarum satis». Régis aims at avoiding the spinozistic implications of his theory, which, despite his prudence, has considerable analogies with those of the dutch philosopher. Régis specifies therefore that, since God is not affected by any positive difference, He can not be limited either in the finiteness of the actual extension (which, as always measurable and circumscribed in some particular figure, is necessarily limited and finite; nor in the finiteness of the thinking substance, which, even if it is not finite quantitatively, is «finie en nature» – since, being different and distinct from the extended substance, «elle est déterminée à une certaine espece d'être»– (see RÉGIS 1704, pp. 80-81). This objection had been anticipated by Spinoza himself, who criticises those who conceive the substance as divisible (and, therefore, finite) by stating that they trust their imagination instead of their intellect. The dutch philosopher contrast the false infinite beside his notion of real infinite, or infinite of the intellect, which he defines *infinitum actu*: «ii prorsus garriunt, ne dicam insaniunt, qui substantiam extensam ex partibus, sive corporibus ab invicem realiter distinctis, conflata esse putant. Perinde enim est, ac si quis ex sola additione et coacervatione multorum circolorum quadratum, aut triangulum, aut quid aliud, tota essentia diversum, conflare studeat. Quare omnis illa farrago argumentorum, quibus substantiam extensam finitam esse ostendere philosophi vulgo moliuntur, sua sponte ruit: omnia enim stentiam explicare possumus; substantiae vero per aeternitatem, hoc est infinitam existendi, sive invita Latinitate, essendi fruitionem. Ex quibus clare constat, nos modorum existentiam et durationem, ubi, ut saepissime fit, ad solam eorum essentiam non vero ordinem naturae attendimus, ad libitum, quin ideo, quem eorum habemus conceptum destruamus, determinare, majorem minoremque concipere, atque in partes dividere posse: Aeternitatem vero et substantiam, quandoquidem non nisi infinitae concipi possunt, nihil horum pati posse, quin simul eorum conceptum destruamus. Quare ii prorsus garriunt, ne dicam insaniunt, qui substantiam extensam ex partibus, sive corporibus ab invicem realiter distinctis, conflari putant. Idem enim est, ac si quis ex sola additione et coacervatione multorum circolorum, quadratum, aut triangulum, aut quid aliud, tota essentia diversum, conflare studeat. Quare omnis illa farrago argumentorum, quibus substantiam extensam finitam esse ostendere philosophi vulgo moliuntur, sua sponte ruut. Omnia enim illa argumenta substantiam corpoream ex partibus conflata supponunt. Ad eundem etiam modum alii, qui, postquam sibi persuaserunt, lineam ex punctis componi, multa invenire potuerunt argumenta, quibus ostenderent, lineam non esse in infinitum dibivisibilem» (SPINOZA, *Ep. 12*, G, IV, 55, 11 - 56, 4). According to Spinoza, the imagination leads men to link the concepts of time, number and measure to the

être infiniment et être une collection d'êtres infinis»²⁵. Hence it follows that God is an «Etre absolument parfait et (...) infini»: as such, He «n'a aucune borne en aucun sens»²⁶ and «il ne peut avoir aussi en aucun sens ni degrez ni difference soit essentielle soit accidentelle, ni maniere precise d'etre»²⁷. Because of the lack of both positive differences and particular determinations, for Régis God is not ontologically identified and therefore He is beyond the substantiality. The view that God is «l'esprit parfait et supersubstantiel»²⁸ has several implications for the relationship between God's nature in itself and the attributes by which it could be described. Since God is not affected by any distinction, the attributes of God «ne sont pas distincts de la nature divine par une distinction réelle, ni modale, ni formelle, mais seulement par une distinction de raison»²⁹; the divine attributes are intrinsic to God's nature in itself and they are nothing but its constitutive elements. They are uncreated and they are the very essence of God. They depend on God «comme de leur cause formelle, et non pas comme de leur cause efficiente»³⁰, this is the reason why

concept of substance; however, since these concepts are mere *auxilia imaginationis*, they can not be conceived as provided with real infinity: «Inde clare videre est, cur multi, qui haec tria cum rebus ipsis confundebant, propterea quod veram rerum naturam ignorabant, infinitum actu negarunt. Sed quam misere ratiocinati sint, judicent mathematici, quibus hujus farinae argumenta nullam moram injicere potuerunt in rebus ab ipsis clare distincteque perceptis. Nam, praeterquam quod multa invenerunt, quae nullo numero explicari possunt; quod satis numerorum defectum ad omnia determinandum patefacit; multa etiam habent, quae nullo numero adaequari possunt, sed omnem, qui dari potest, numerum superant. Nec tamen concludunt, talia omnem numerum superare ex partium moltitudine; sed ex eo, quod rei natura non sine manifesta contradictione numerum pati potest» (*Ibid.*, 59, 21-34). See SAVAN 1994, LUCASH 2011, LÆRKE 2013.

²⁵ RÉGIS 1704, p. 82.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

they are necessary. Since attributes do not depend on divine will, they are not subject to a temporal and changeable existence, but they belong to the metaphysical and necessary world. Régis distinguishes the absolute attributes of God from that kind of attributes that, even if are still related to God, need some creatures «existantes ou possibles, ausquelles ils se rapportent»³¹; in fact, while the first ones concern «Dieu considéré en luy-même» and they can be therefore defined «attributs absolus», the second ones are «ceux qui se rapportent aux creatures» and they can be called «attributs respectifs»³²:

on appelle attributs absolus ceux qui appartiennent à Dieu considéré en luy même, et l'on nomme attributs respectifs ceux qui se rapportent aux creatures. Par exemple, l'éternité, l'immutabilité, la simplicité, l'infinité, etc. sont des attributs absolus, parce qu'ils ne regardent que Dieu même. Au contraire la bonté, la puissance, la justice, la miséricorde, etc. sont des attributs respectifs, parce qu'ils supposent des creatures existantes ou possibles, ausquelles il se rapportent³³.

If one considers God in Himself it is evident that «l'esprit parfait et super-substantiel, est un, simple, incapable de changement, absolument infini, complet, éternel, nécessaire, incompréhensible, tout-puissant (...)»³⁴. Régis proves deductively that all these qualities are necessary consequences of the divine nature. Concerning the unity of God, it is a consequence of the divine infinity, which involves the indivisibility:

(...) puisque Dieu est infini, il est aussi indivisible: car tout infini divisible est impossible; mais si Dieu est indivisible, il est un d'une unité supreme, qui consiste en ce qu'il est indivisible en soy, et tellement distinct de toutes qu'il n'a rien de commun avec elles³⁵.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

The unity, as divine attributes, means the indivisibility of the infinite God's nature and is therefore different from the mere mathematical unit. Mathematical units are «des especes de quantité» which added together generate a finite and divisible quantity; while the divine unity «ne peut estre le principe d'aucun nombre» and it can only be «infiniment un»³⁶ because it is «infiniment un»³⁷:

cette unité de Dieu dit plus que le plus grand nombre: car tout nombre est fini, et l'unité de Dieu est infini: c'est pourquoy quand on dit d'un côté que Dieu est un, et de l'autre que le ciel est un, ces deux unitez ensemble ne font pas le nombre deux, parce que le nombre deux est composé d'unitez numeriques, qui sont des especes de quantité, ce qui ne peut convenir à Dieu, dont l'unité estant supreme et infinie, ne peut estre le principe d'aucun nombre. D'où il s'ensuit que les creatures sont des unitez qui composent des nombres lors qu'on les ajoute les unes aux autres, mais qui n'ajoutent rien à l'unité de Dieu qui est infiniment un; car on ne peut rien concevoir qui soit plus un que ce qui l'est infiniment³⁸.

First of all, God is unique because of the unity of His essence and His existence, which render His nature indivisible and incommunicable and which has not to be confused with the mathematical unit, that is infinitely divisible and multipliable. The unity of God is not only a consequence of His infinity, but it is also an essential condition of His essence; if God were divisible *mathematically*, the divine perfection could be divided into two or more beings, each one without the perfections of the other, so that the divine perfection would lose its absoluteness and would become relative to the properties of the several beings in which it would be divided. The divine perfection would therefore be divided in different perfections which would only maintain their absolute character of perfection in respect to the property represented.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

Je dis que Dieu (que je ne distingue pas de l'Esprit parfait), est un, pour marquer que s'il y avoit deux ou plusieurs Dieux, nul ne seroit un Etre parfait; parce que chacun manqueroit de perfections de l'autre: ce qui fait voir que quand je dis que Dieu est un, je n'entens pas qu'il soit un de l'unité, qui est un principe de nombre, et par consequent un espece de quantité, car cette unité rendroit Dieu capable de multiplication. J'entens qu'il est un d'une unité d'être et d'essence, qui rend chaque chose indivisible et incomunicable³⁹.

Secondly, since God «est un, d'une unité d'être et d'essence», His nature has to be simple. His essence can not be composed of substances and modes, subjects and accidents «parce que le sujet et la substance marquent la puissance de recevoir quelques modes ou accidens, et les modes et les accidens dénotent celle d'estre reçus dans quelque sujet ou dans quelque substance; ce qui ne peut convenir à Dieu (...)»⁴⁰. Thirdly, God is «incapable de changement» because nothing exists either inside Him or outside Him which has the power to change His nature; in fact, according to Régis, «si il y avoit quelque chose de tel, Dieu dépendroit de ce qui auroit cette puissance, ce qui repugne»⁴¹. Fourth, since He is perfect, God must be complete in Himself, that it is to say that «il ne peut s'unir à un autre être pour composer avec luy un tout plus parfait qu'il n'est»⁴². Fifth, as perfect, infinite and oversubstantial, the nature of God is subsistent itself. Sixth, because of the absolute infinity of His nature, God can not be assigned to any species or gender. Régis applies to God Aristotle's definition of the being and of the one

car s'il étoit compris sous un genre, ce genre seroit l'être; et selon Aristote, l'être ne peut estre un genre, car le genre suppose des differences qui sont hors de luy; et il n'y a point de differences qui soient hors de l'être, car le non- être ne peut estre une difference. Dieu ne peut donc estre sous un genre. Il ne peut

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

estre non plus dans un'espece, car l'espece est composé de genre et de différence⁴³.

Since He transcends both genders and species, God can not be affected by any particular determination, so that He can not even be considered as an individual:

car l'individu suppose l'espece, comme l'espece suppose le genre; or Dieu ne suppose ni l'un ni l'autre. Il n'est donc pas un individu, il n'a donc aucune détermination particuliere, si ce n'est celle de n'en pouvoir avoir aucune⁴⁴.

The last two divine attributes are the consequence of the previous six. Since God (as infinite, perfect and oversubstantial) «est un, simple, incapable de changement, absolument infini, complet, éternel et nécessaire», He can not be but incomprehensible and omnipotent. In particular, the incomprehensibility is connected to the fact that «ses perfections sont si élevées (...), qu'elles surpassent notre connoissance»⁴⁵; while the omnipotence explains the total self-sufficiency of God and the dependence of every single being on Him.

Je dis que Dieu est tout puissant (...), pour marquer qu'il repugne à la nature de Dieu qu'il y ait quelque chose qui n'en dépende pas, non seulement quant à sa nature et à son existence, mais encore quant à son ordre et à sa possibilité⁴⁶.

Régis explains human incomprehensibility of God's nature starting from the definition of comprehensibility. Since the comprehension is possible only if «la puissance qui connoit a autant d'étenduë que l'objet connu», according to Régis it is self evident that God can be understood only by Himself; God is the only one to have a cognitive power as wide as His own perfections. On

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

the contrary, the cognitive power of man is not able to understand the divine nature, which is therefore

incomprehensible à notre égard, c'est à dire qu'il est tel que la connoissance, que nous en avons, est beaucoup au dessous de celle que nous en aurions, si nous le connoissons de la maniere la plus excellente dont il peut estre connu⁴⁷.

As the divine nature can not be understood by man, it can not be described or defined. God can not be defined because real definitions require a gender and a difference, but it has been demonstrated that the nature of God has neither gender or difference; furthermore, since the description «fait connoître les choses par les accidens qui leur sont propres (...)»⁴⁸ and since the divine nature is not be affected by proper accidents, God can not even be described. Finally, the divine nature is even undemonstrable because every demonstration requires a definition.

On such premises Régis concludes that one can give only a «simple explication» of divine existence and nature, that is, a display of what is contained in the comprehension of the idea of the Perfect Being. Even if our explanation of divine nature is a mere exposition of what is contained in His innate idea, such *explicatio* requires an empirical groundwork. After having rooted out in his mind the innate idea of God, man, in order to understand its nature, has to understand the potential objects of his knowledge. Since God is known through an idea, He has to be placed in one of the categories that are object of knowledge. According to Régis human knowledge requires experience. It is through the latter that man can inductively explain divine nature. Experience, indeed, allows us to grasp the features of divine nature in rela-

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

tion to the human faculties and it is therefore the starting point of rational speculation. Such speculation, on the basis both of which has been empirically stated and of the innate idea of God, enables man to infer the very characteristics of divine nature in itself. Therefore Régis divides the *explication* of God's nature in two parts: the former is grounded on experience, the latter has its premise on the idea of God. It is due to this strategy that Régis can both put the notion of divine nature in the boundaries of human knowledge and to guarantee the peculiarity of God's essence. The first part of the *explicatio*, is performed by considering the nature of our spirit and his ways of knowledge; for Régis «il faut remarquer que nous sçavons par experience que la nature de notre esprit est telle que nous ne pouvons rien connoitre que des corps et des esprits, ou des modes des corps et des esprits»⁴⁹; from this, it follows that «nous sommes donc obligez de reconnoitre, ou que nous n'avons pas aucune notion de la nature de Dieu; ou, si nous en avons quelq'une, que sa nature consiste dans une de ces trois choses»⁵⁰. The first hypothesis has to be rejected because it is not possible that man can not perceive God's nature at all, since man has the idea of the Perfect Being in his mind.

3. Régis on divine nature

In order to make clear the notion of divine nature, man has, first of all, to show whether it consists in the modes of the body, in the modes of the spirit, in the body or in the spirit. As they are not provided with an ontologi-

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* The «trois choses» to which Régis refers are «les corps», «les esprits» and «les modes du corps et de l'esprit».

cal independence, both modes and bodies can not be the selfsame of divine nature. Indeed, the former rely on substances as their subjects of inherence. On the other hand, the latter depend on «plusieurs causes etrangeres», leading Régis to ascribe them the highest perfection:

nous sommes donc obligez de reconnoitre , ou que nous n'avons aucune notion de la nature de Dieu; ou, si nous en avons quelqu'une, que sa nature consiste dans une de ces trois choses. Or nous ne pouvons pas dire qu'elle consiste dans les modes du corps et de l'esprit, d'autant que tous les modes sont essentiellement dépendans des substances, et par consequent essentiellement imparfaits. Nous ne dirons pas non plus qu'elle consiste dans le corps, d'autant que le corps est encore imparfait, parce qu'il depend de plusieurs causes étrangères⁵¹.

Régis concludes that the very nature of God is spirit itself. Indeed, even if the nature of the thinking substance is imperfect as the body is, it is possible to state through a reflective act at least two possible degrees of imperfection. The second part of the *explication* is therefore performed through the will, which, after having abstracted the general idea of bodies and spirits, enables man to acknowledge that bodies and spirits are not equally imperfect and, therefore, are «également incapables de constituer la nature divine»⁵². By considering body and spirit, it is possible to disregard their imperfection and consider only their perfections. As created beings they are equally dependent and imperfect, while, as they are considered in themselves, they are identified through their own perfections. Indeed,

(...) si nous y faisons reflexions, nous trouverons qu'il a cette difference entre le corps et l'esprit, que toutes les perfections du corps sont melées de quelque default qui marque leur dépendance, et que celles de l'esprit, considéré en luy-même et sans restriction, n'en ont aucun⁵³.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

In fact, according to Régis' nominalism, if we consider the body in a general perspective, it can only exist as a concept relying on the very existence of the intellect. On the other hand, if we consider «l'esprit en luy-même et sans restriction», it is possible to infer its actual existence even without all its particular features. In fact, before having been placed in the world of phenomena and out of it, the spirit can exist in itself as a singular⁵⁴:

(...) le corps (...) s'il est considéré comme quelque chose de general, il a le default de ne pouvoir exister que dans l'entendement qui le conçoit; (...) au lieu que l'esprit, considéré en luy-même et sans restriction, est un être singulier existant par luy-même, qui n'est divisible ni mobile, et qui par consequent ne dépend d'aucune cause étrangere ; d'où il faut conclure que Dieu est l'Esprit parfait et supersubstantiel⁵⁵.

Spiritual substance, therefore, does not depend on any external cause and, in some manner, it is perfect. Thus, Régis concludes that nature of God is spirit itself. However, as it is the very supreme being, divine nature is necessarily a spirit more perfect than ours.

Il faut donc conclure que la nature de Dieu consiste dans l'esprit: mais elle ne consiste pas dans l'esprit qui ressemble à celui qui constituë notre nature, car

⁵⁴ Régis seems to use implicitly St. Thomas's distinction between singularity and individuation. The latter defines the individuation as a function of the bodily matter, while he asserts that the singularity of a being is due to the fact that it is: *ens et unum convertuntur*. «Unum dupliciter dicitur. Est enim unum quod convertitur cum ente, et est unum quod est principium numeri. Loquendo de uno quod convertitur cum ente, non est determinatum ad genus quantitatis, immo invenitur in omnibus entibus» (AQUINAS, *In I Sent.*, d. 24, q. 1, a. 2, ad 1). «Alio modo dicitur "unum" quod est principium numeri, qui est discreta quantitas, causatus ex divisione materiae vel continui: et talis non est nisi in materialibus» (ID., *In II Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 3, ad 1). In agreement with St. Thomas Régis states that everything which is actual can not be but singular in order to affirm the existence *in se* of the spiritual substance as *ens singularis*, independently of the link with a particular body. Régis uses the thomistic distinction between singularity and individuation to stress the difference between soul as linked to the body and as part of the world of phenomena, and the soul as spirit subsistent in itself.

⁵⁵ RÉGIS, *L'usage*, p. 65.

nous sçavons par experience que l'esprit qui constituë notre nature est imperfect et dépendant⁵⁶.

Given such perfection and since human spirit is a substance, divine nature is a « oversubstantial » spirit.

4. Régis against Spinoza

Through his strategy, Régis supports the necessary recourse to experience in order to start any cognitive process, and at the same time he carries on a *critique* to Spinoza⁵⁷. Such criticism is twofold. First of all it has a meth-

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵⁷ The empirical interpretation of theory of knowledge can be plausibly attributed to the antispinozistic tendency that animates the work of 1704 and that became explicit in the *Refutation de l'opinion de Spinoza* in appendix of the work; the *Refutation* is mentioned by Dourtous de Mairan – together with De Versé's *Impie convaincu* (AUBERT DE VERSÉ 1681), Huet's *De concordia* (HUET 1690), Poiret's *Fundamenta atheismi eversa* (POIRET 1685), Lamy's *Nouvel Atheïsme renversé* (LAMY 1696), the article «Spinoza» in Bayle's *Dictionnaire* (BAYLE 1697, art. Spinoza) and Fénelon's *Réfutation du Spinozisme* (FRANÇOIS FÉNELON 1718, «Réfutation du Spinozisme» in FÉNELON 1718, II^e partie, chapitre 3) – among the «prétendues réfutations» (*Mairan à Malebranche*, Béziers 17 Septembre 1713, in MALEBRANCHE 1947, p. 103) to the spinozistic system. To Régis's *Réfutation* replied Boulainvilliers (DE BOULAINVILLIERS 1973; see FESTA 1996, pp. 311-312). De Vet (DE VET 1996, pp. 91-94) states that in his *Histoire des Ouvrages des Sçavans* Basnage counts Régis's *Système* among the works with spinozistic implications – together with Maius's *Dissertationes Sacrae* (MAIUS 1690: reviewed in DE BEAUVAL, *Histoire des Ouvrages des Sçavans. Mois de July 1691*, art. XIX, pp. 504-7) and Salier's *Historia Scholastica* (SALIER 1689: reviewed in DE BEAUVAL, *Histoire des Ouvrages des Sçavans. Mois de Septembre 1690*, art. II, pp. 13-22) –; according to my opinion Basnage interprets Régis's *Système* in an antispinozistic tone: «après avoir ainsi fait connoître le plan general de ce Système avec assez d'étenduë, il suffira que sans entrer dans un long detail, nous insistions sur quelque article particulier de chaque Volume. Rien ne nous paroît plus digne d'être choisi dans le premier que ce qui est au Chap. 12 de la I Partie de la Metaphysique et qui est une preuve tout-à-la fois metaphysique et de sentiment contre l'absurde et monstreuse opinion des Spinozistes, qui par un déreglement dont la nature humaine ne paroîtroit jamais capable, si l'experience ne nous l'aprenoit, s'imaginent au milieu de leurs maladies et de leurs ignorances, qu'ils ne sont pas distincts de l'Estre souverainement parfait» (DE BEAUVAL, *Histoire des Ouvrages des Sçavans. Mois de*

odological character consisting on the very way Régis supposes we can conceive the nature of God. His criticism stands, moreover, in his use of the concept of «oversubstantial» being. From a methodological stand point whereas Régis sees in experience the condition for the knowledge of God, Spinoza defines divine nature by considering nothing but God and the concept of substance. Substance is defined by Spinoza «id quod in se est et per se concipitur; hoc est id cuius conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei, a quo formari debeat»⁵⁸, and it is identified with God Himself. Given the identity of God with substance, Spinoza deduces all divine characteristics from the very concept of substance. The identity of God and substance entails the identification of God with every being/creature. Therefore, whereas Régis attempts to overrun Descartes's dualism by considering movement itself as a *medium*⁵⁹, Spinoza rebuts dualism through monism. According to Spinoza there is no reality but God. God is the source of any reality as it is the unity from which

Janvier 1691, art. X, p. 232). Concerning Régis's *Refutation* see DEL PRETE 2011, pp. 194-199; see also VERNIÈRE 1954, I, pp. 253-4.

⁵⁸ Spinoza, *Ethica*, I, Def. III: G, II, 1, 14-16.

⁵⁹ Régis justify the cartesian principle of the conservation of motion, by stating that formal motion can be considered as a substance: «et il ne serviroit de rien de dire que la volonté de Dieu estant immuable, elle ne peut produire immédiatement le mouvement, d'autant que le mouvement est quelque chose de successif et de changeant: car il est aisé de répondre, que quoy que le mouvement formel soit quelque chose de successif et de changeant quant à ses modes, il est néanmoins immuable quant à sa substance. Or Dieu ne produit immédiatement que la substance du mouvement formel, car pour les modes de ce mouvement, ils dépendent immédiatement des creatures. (...) On dira, peut-être, qu'on conçoit bien que les substances sont des êtres permanens, parce qu'elles subsistent en elles-mêmes, mais qu'on ne conçoit pas que le mouvement formel, qui est un mode, puisse estre considéré comme une substance. Toutefois on peut répondre que, comme les substances ne sont dites des êtres permanens qu'entant qu'elles procedent immédiatement de la volonté de Dieu, qui est immuable, par la même raison le mouvement formel pris substantiellement doit estre considéré comme une substance, parce qu'il procede immédiatement de la même volonté. C'est pour cette raison que le mouvement formel ne peut jamais changer quant à sa nature, ni quant à sa quantité» (RÉGIS 1704, pp. 142-143).

plurality originates. Régis objects Spinoza his defining God as a substance provided with infinite attributes, identifying divine nature with the totality of beings and ascribing to God extension and thought. According to Régis such characterisation «repugne (...) à la simplicité de la nature de Dieu» since

(...) si cette pensée et cette étendue sont quelque chose d'universel, Dieu sera aussi quelque chose de general; et si cette pensée et cette étendue sont quelque chose de reel et de positif, Dieu sera un assemblage de tous les corps et de tous les esprits, c'est à dire, que, comme il n'y aura point d'esprit qui ne soit une portion de la pensée de Dieu, il n'y aura aussi point de corps qui ne soit une portion de son étendue⁶⁰.

In his *Refutation de l'opinion de Spinoza*, Régis reasserts, moreover, the essential difference between «la pensée qui constituë l'essence de Dieu» and «celle qui constituë l'essence de l'esprit»; such difference, according to Régis, has been noticed also by Spinoza, who falls in contradiction by ascribing to God the thought as essential attribute.

(...) Spinoza prouve dans la premiere Proposition de la seconde partie que Dieu est une substance qui pense. Il fait voir encore dans la quatrième lettre, que la substance qui pense, qui est Dieu, est éternelle, simple, infinie, et c'est à dire qu'elle a toutes les proprieté que nous avons attribuées à Dieu.

Il ne faut pas s'imaginer pourtant que la pensée qui constituë l'essence de Dieu soit de même nature que celle qui constituë l'essence de l'esprit: ces deux pensées n'ont entr'elles rien de semblable que le nom. En effet, selon Spinoza luy-même, l'esprit n'est infini que dans son genre; et par la sixième Proposition Dieu est infini absolument⁶¹.

Since Spinoza also underlines the incommensurability of human and divine thought, according to Régis it is not possible to justify Spinoza's characterisation of God as a thinking substance. The excess of perfections in God's thought will be reduced, indeed, to an accident of thought or to his essence. Following the aristotelian principle according to which «les accidens ne

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 499.

changent pas d'espece», Régis denies that such "superabundance" of perfection could be an accident. In which case, thought as an attribute of God would be «de même nature que celle qui est l'attribut de l'esprit»⁶². Therefore, the «excès de perfection dans la pensée de Dieu» is to be traced back only to essence. This implies, according to Régis, the impossibility to ascribe to the nature of God the essential attribute of thought. Indeed, if God is essentially more perfect than human spirit, it follows that «la pensée, qui est l'attribut de Dieu, est de nature différente de celle qui est l'attribut de l'esprit»⁶³ and, by consequence, the relation between the two kind of spirits can not be of inherence but only of causality. Régis aims at showing the "ontological uniqueness" and the difference of God in respect of created beings. Such difference and "ontological uniqueness" can not be held according to Spinoza's philosophy. In fact, Régis ascribes to God the feature of "over-substantiality" in order to underline the ontological uniqueness of God:

(...) la pensée, qui est l'attribut de Dieu, est de nature différente de celle qui est l'attribut de l'esprit, c'est à dire que ces deux pensées n'ont rien de commun que le nom. En effet, la pensée de Dieu existe par elle-même, et la pensée de l'esprit n'existe qu'en elle-même. La pensée, qui est l'attribut de Dieu, ne reçoit aucune modification; et la pensée qui est l'attribut de l'esprit en reçoit plusieurs. La pensée qui est l'attribut de Dieu n'est compris dans aucune genre ni dans aucune espece; et la pensée qui est l'attribut de l'esprit est compris dans tous les deux. Enfin la pensée de Dieu est une d'une unité suprême et absoluë, et la pensée de l'esprit est un d'une unité de nombre, laquelle demontre pluralité et par consequent imperfection. Donc la pensée de Dieu est d'une ordre supérieur à la pensée de l'esprit. Donc elle est la pensée supersubstantielle (...). Donc la pensée n'est ni l'attribut ni le mode de Dieu, contre la pretention de Spinoza⁶⁴.

Both the term "supersubstantiel" and the thesis that modes cannot inhere in God are used by Régis to strengthen the distinction between God and

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 500.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

substance, making his philosophy different from that of Spinoza and Descartes. This can be noticed in Régis' *Réfutation* of the XIVth proposition of Spinoza's *Ethica*, according to which «*praeter Deum nulla dari neque concipi potest substantia*»⁶⁵ and that is demonstrated by Spinoza affirming that:

cum Deus sit ens absolute infinitum, de quo nullum attributum, quod essentiam substantiae exprimit, negari potest (per defin. 6.), isque necessario existat (per prop. 11.), si aliqua substantia praeter Deum daretur, ea explicari deberet per aliquod attributum Dei, sicque duae substantiae eiusdem attributi existent, quod (per prop. 5.) est absurdum; adeoque nulla substantia extra Deum dari potest et consequenter non etiam concipi. Nam si posset concipi, deberet necessario concipi, ut existens; atqui hoc (per primam partem huius demonst.) est absurdum. Ergo extra Deum nulla dari, neque concipi potest substantia⁶⁶.

Even if admitting that God is an absolute infinite Being and that He necessarily exists, Régis contends that God cannot be reduced to a mere substance. Indeed, he states that one of the properties of the essence of substance is its being a receptacle of modes, this, in fact, «*ne convient nullement à Dieu, dont le propre est d'exister par soy et de ne recevoir rien en soy*».

Régis' refutation of Spinoza is based on three main points: first, he attempts to make irrefutable his theory about the human knowledge; second, his intent is to defend himself from the charges of Spinozism; third, he aims at overcoming the difficulties of Descartes' explication of the nature of God by maintaining the Cartesian notion of *causa sui*. Such arguments are functional to each other, that is, they are three different aspects of one strategy.

5. Régis against Spinoza on human knowledge: bodies and ideas

⁶⁵ SPINOZA, *Ethica*, I, P14, G, II, 12, 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, I, P14 D, G, II, 12, 6-15.

Régis vindicates the essential role of body for the production of ideas: such thesis, however is put in danger by the spinozistic implications of his philosophy. Such implications can be acknowledged besides his concealed theory of an “impersonal” God, in his characterisation of divine nature and attributes. In the fourth of the eight definitions at the beginning of his *Ethics*, Spinoza defines attributes as «that which the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of substance». Because such definition implies a reference to our perception of God and since substance is defined by Spinoza as the unity of all the attributes, Régis can conclude that attributes as they are different from each other, are what we can perceive of the essence of substance. According to Spinoza, indeed, an attribute is what constitutes the very essence of substance, distinguished from it only by reason. Since substance has infinite attributes, substance in itself is indifferent in respect of every single attribute. Therefore it can not be perceived by intellect in such “indifference” but according to the attributes; these are the essence of substance, being its first phenomenon in respect of intellect. This is made clear in the letter of Spinoza to De Vries of february 1643, in which he gives a single definition of substance and attributes:

per substantiam intelligo id, quod in se est et per se concipitur; hoc est, cujus conceptus non involvit conceptus alterius rei. Idem per attributum intelligo, nisi quod attributum dicatur respectu intellectus, substantiae certam talem naturam tribuentis (...). Haec, inquam, definitio satis clare esplicat, quid per substantiam sive attributum intelligere volo. Vultis tamen, quod minime opus est, ut exemplo explicem, quomodo una eademque res duobus nominibus insigniri possit. Sed ne parvus videar, duo adhibeam. Primum: dico, per Israelem intelligi tertium Patriarcham, idem per Jacobum intelligo, quod nomen Jacobi ipsi imponebatur propterea quod calcem fratris apprehenderat. Secundum: per planum intelligere volo id, quod omnes radios lucis sine ulla mutatione reflectit; idem

per album intelligo, nisi quod album dicatur respectu hominis planum intuentis⁶⁷.

Attributes, beside being the essence of substance are the conditions of its intelligibility. In summary, if attributes express the essence of substance, such expression has to be understood in respect of intellect which does not belong to substance in itself: «intellectus actu, sive is finitus sit sive infinitus, ut et voluntas, cupiditas, amor etc. ad naturam naturatam, non vero ad naturantem referri debent»⁶⁸. In the same way, Régis affirms that «les attributs de Dieu ne sont pas distincts de la nature divine par une distinction réelle, ni modale ou formelle, mais seulement par une distinction de raison»⁶⁹. Like Spinoza, moreover, Régis underlines that the attributes characterising divine nature are always positive: the absolute perfection of God, indeed, contradicts every negation. He underlines that notwithstanding all the attributes being defined by man in a negative way, the meaning of such definitions is always positive:

il y en a qui divisent les attributs de Dieu en positifs et en négatifs; mais cette division n'est que de nom, car il n'y a rien de plus positif que les attributs de Dieu qu'on nomme négatifs. Par exemple, estre immense, incompréhensible, indépendant, infini, etc. sont des termes qui signifient quelque chose de très positif dans les choses auxquelles on les attribue, qui ne se rencontre pas dans les choses bornées, finies, compréhensibles, dépendants, etc. Ainsi ces termes, quoiqu'ils soient négatifs, ont une signification très positive, comme il arrive lorsque, pour exprimer une chose grande, on dit qu'elle n'est pas petite; ce qui peut tromper les ignorants, mais qui ne trompe jamais ceux qui sont plus attentifs aux choses qu'aux mots⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ SPINOZA, *Ep. 9*, G, IV, 46, 2-5.

⁶⁸ Id., *Ethica*, I, P31, G, II, 27, 30-32. The same statement can be found in *Ep. 9* to de Vries: «(...) puto me satis clare et evidenter demonstrasse, intellectum, quamvis infinitum, ad naturam naturatam, non vero ad naturam naturantem» (G, IV, 41, 18-24).

⁶⁹ RÉGIS 1704, p. 92.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

What is upheld by Régis on being divine attributes absolutely positive is with the definition of God provided by Spinoza. Indeed, Spinoza, after having stated that God is «ens absolute infinitum, hoc est, substantiam constantem infinitis attributis, quorum unumquodque aeternam et infinitam essentiam exprimit»⁷¹, clarifies his statement writing that:

dico absolute infinitum, non autem in suo genere. Quicquid enim in suo genere tantum infinitum est, infinita de eo attributa negare possumus; quod autem absolute infinitum est, ad eius essentiam pertinet, quicquid essentiam exprimit et negationem nullam involvit⁷².

6. Régis' and Spinoza's notion of God as infinite

Like for Spinoza, the notion of God is defined as the absolute infinity of a perfect essence by Régis as well. According to Spinoza, since the essence of a substance is expressed by attributes, every attributes must belong to what is absolutely infinite, without any negation. Spinoza and Régis support the positive nature of divine attributes with the same argument, that is the impossibility to determine the divine nature. Indeed, whereas Régis explicitly denies that divine nature can be affected by any determination, Spinoza reaches the same conclusion in a more actual way. Spinoza distinguishes the absolute infinity from the infinity “in suo genere” in order to clarify that only the first kind of infinity belongs to God. Whereas infinity *in suo genere* expresses the infinity in respect of any particular determination, and thus it can be ascribed only to attributes, absolute infinity is what any infinite attribute has to be ascribed to. However, such distinction is also supported by Régis: in justifying the divine attribute of unity, Régis recourses to a *reductio ad absurdum* in order to show that divine nature is indivisible and inscrutable. He states that if di-

⁷¹ Spinoza, *Ethica*, I, Def. VI, G, II, 1, 22-25.

⁷² *Ibid.*, I, Def. VI E, G, II, 2, 2-7.

vine perfection would be divisible, it would be divided into several perfections different, actually, from each other. While maintaining the highest degree of perfection such perfections will lose their absolute infinity. Therefore, Régis implicitly accepts the distinction between infinity *in suo genere* and absolute infinity drawn by Spinoza, though he denies such distinction formally⁷³. The passage below confirms that Régis knows Spinoza's distinction :

(...) comme tout ce que Dieu peut produire a des degrez de possibilité qui remontent à l'infini, aucun de ces degrez n'est infini; d'où il s'ensuit encore que tous les êtres qui Dieu produit sont des êtres imparfait et dépendans. Ce qui trompe en cecy les plus fins, c'est qu'ils se persuadent que Dieu estant parfait ne peut produire rien d'imparfait; d'où ils concluent que toutes les creatures sont parfaites, ce qui est vrai aussi, mais non pas au sens qu'ils l'entendent; car ils entendent qu'elles sont parfaites absolument, et elles ne sont parfaites que dans leur genre. Par exemple: l'étenduë et la pensée sont parfaites chacun dans son genre, parce que chacune est ce qu'elle est aussi parfaitement qu'elle le peut estre; mais elles ne sont pas parfaites absolument. Car il y a cette difference entre les choses qui sont parfaites absolument et celles qui ne le sont que dans leur genre: que les premieres excluent toutes sortes de negation et de privation, et que les dernieres en admettent un grand nombre: ainsi, par exemple, bien que le corps et l'esprit soient parfaits chacun dans son genre, ils ne le sont pas absolument, parce que l'un est privé des perfections de l'autre⁷⁴.

However, while Spinoza uses the distinction between infinity *in suo genere* and absolute infinity in order to claim that the essence of the absolutely infinite substance is formed by an infinite number of essences (each one infinite

⁷³ Régis denies again and again in his work that God's nature could be affected by any kind of distinction either generic or specific (see RÉGIS 1704, pp. 65, 81, 89, 92, 485). According to the cartesian philosopher divine attributes can be distinguished one from the other through a mere rational distinction and they can not be reduced to any gender; insomuch as there is not any analogy between divine perfections and human ones: «il faut ajouter que, comme nous allons à la connoissance des perfections invisibles en Dieu par les perfections visibles des creatures, il est très convenable de parler, dans le langage ordinaire, des perfections de Dieu comme de celles des creatures; pourveu toutefois qu'on ne s'imagine pas que les perfections de Dieu conviennent ni en genre ni en espece avec les perfections des creatures: il faut penser au contraire que les perfections divines n'ont aucun rapport avec les perfections des creatures que celui qui est entre la cause et son effet» (*ibid.*, p. 89).

⁷⁴ RÉGIS 1704, p. 82.

with respect to its specific gender) expressing a unique and indivisible essence, Régis uses such distinction in order to emphasize the distance between God and created beings. In fact, unlike Spinoza, Régis stresses that God's perfection lies in not containing any kind of distinction (neither generic nor specific). Thus, contrary to the created beings, God

est l'Etre absolument parfait et l'Etre infini: parce qu'il n'est privé ni des perfections du corps ni des perfections de l'esprit, d'autant qu'il n'est dans leur genre ni dans leur espece. Or puisque Dieu est infini, il est aussi indivisible, car tout infini divisible est impossible; mais si Dieu est indivisible, il est un d'une unité supreme, qui consiste en ce qu'il est indivisible en soy, et tellement divisé de toutes les creatures qu'il n'y a rien de commun avec elles⁷⁵.

It is noteworthy that Régis uses the spinozistic distinction between infinity *in suo genere* and absolute infinity in relation to bodies and spirits on one hand, and in relation to divine attributes of uniqueness and indivisibility on the other. Régis aims at avoiding spinozistic ontologism. In order to prevent such ontologism, Régis states, like Spinoza, that divine nature is indivisible, unique, eternal, immutable and infinite, but, unlike Spinoza, he uses these features of God's nature to infer His absolute transcendence. Régis fears the outcomes of Spinoza's ontologism in respect to bodies and spirits. In fact, from the proposition 14, Spinoza deduces the corollary that «*rem extensam et rem cogitantem, vel Dei attributa esse, vel affectiones attributorum Dei*»⁷⁶. In particular, in the propositions 1 and 2 of the second part of his *Ethics*, the dutch philosopher demonstrates that thought and extension are two of the infinite attributes of God, starting from the definition of mode. The latter is formally different from Spinoza's definition of substance and it is similar to

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Spinoza, *Ethica*, I, P14 CII, G, II, 12, 21-22.

Régis's definition of mode. According to Spinoza modes are «*substantiae affectiones, sive id quod in alio est, per quod etiam concipitur*»⁷⁷. In agreement with both Régis and the scholastic tradition, Spinoza defines "modes" that which do not exist as a constitutive part of an essence, but as its expression or manifestation. Therefore, according to Spinoza, the mode can exist only in connection to the existence of a substance. Similarly to Spinoza, Régis states that «*tous les modes sont essentiellement dépendantes des substances, et par conséquent essentiellement imparfaits*»⁷⁸, since they «*dénotent la puissance d'être reçus dans une substance*»⁷⁹. Furthermore, Régis agrees with Spinoza in claiming that modes have to be considered as self-determinations of the substance eternally immanent to it, even if their existence and their notion are not necessary for the concept and the existence of substance⁸⁰; but, while for Régis this is due to the immediate dependence of the substance on God, according to Spinoza this is due to the identification of the substance with God.

If on one side Régis states that

pour parler (...) clairement des substances, il faut dire qu'elles n'ont rien de réelle, de concevable, ou de nommable que ce que Dieu leur a donné en les produisant avec une souveraine indifférence et une parfaite liberté; et qu'il est impossible de concevoir que l'action libre de Dieu ait eu pour objet une substance et qu'elle ne luy ait pas donné une existence actuelle, parce que dans la substance (qui est un être simple par rapport aux êtres modaux) l'essence et l'existence sont une même chose. D'où il s'ensuit qu'on ne peut pas attribuer à une substance un degré de possibilité qui soit distingué de celui de l'actualité. Or l'idée que nous avons de substances ne peut les représenter comme possible, elle le représente donc, comme actuelles; et si elle les représente comme actuelles, les substances existent donc actuellement, selon le principe général que nous avons établi qu'on peut assurer d'une chose tout ce qu'on conçoit claire-

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, I, Def. V, G, II, 1, 20-21.

⁷⁸ RÉGIS 1704, p. 64.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁸⁰ If substance needed modes in order both to exist and to be conceived, it could not be that which exists *in se* and which is conceived *per se*.

ment renfermé dans l'idée qui la représente. D'où l'on peut tirer cette conséquence fondamentale, qui pourra tenir lieu d'un grand principe: que tout aussi tost qu'on pense à une substance, il est absolument nécessaire que Dieu luy ait donné par création ce qu'on y apperçoit, et qu'il suffit de la connoître pour estre assuré de son existence actuelle. En effect si quelque substance n'avoit pas reçu de Dieu l'existence, il en faudroit parler comme d'une chose qui ne seroit en aucune façon, et en ce cas ce discours ne pourroit estre autre chose qu'une idée chimerique, qui n'auroit point d'objet⁸¹.

On the other side, according to Spinoza both the necessity of the existence of the substance and its conceivability depend on its identification with the divine nature. He affirms that «quicquid est in Deo est, et nihil sine Deo esse neque concipi potest»⁸²; in fact, according to the Dutch philosopher

praeter Deum nulla datur neque concipi potest substantia, hoc est res, quae in se est et per se concipitur. Modi autem sine substantia nec esse, nec concipi possunt; quare hi in sola divina natura esse et per ipsam solam concipi possunt. Atqui praeter substantias et modos nil datur. Ergo nihil sine Deo esse, neque concipi potest⁸³.

Finally, both philosophers state that, since modes inhere in substances eternally and necessarily without taking part in their essence, a substance without modes does not exist, even if the essence of the substance does not involve them. But, whereas for Régis the eternal and necessary inherence of modes to the substance is caused by the immutability of divine will, for Spinoza it is due to the dependence of modes on the eternal and infinite attributes of God. Régis asserts that modes have been created by God as possibilities immanent in substances and that they are therefore eternally present in them, even if the most of them «demeurera éternellement, ou du moins peut demeurer dans le degré de pure possibilité, sans avoir d'existence actuelle»⁸⁴.

⁸¹ RÉGIS 1704 p. 125.

⁸² Spinoza, *Ethica*, I, P15, G, II, 12, 24-25.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, I, P15 D, G, II, 56, 27 - 57, 1.

⁸⁴ RÉGIS 1704, p. 124.

In fact, since «estre mode ou chose modale et avoir dans son sujet une possibilité réelle distinguée et separable de l'existence actuelle, sont absolument la même chose»⁸⁵, modes themselves can be represented as possible; but, if we consider modes as inherent in substances immediately created by God, they have to be considered actually existent as inseparable from substances themselves which exist necessarily once they have been created:

il n'est pas de même des substances que de modes. L'idée des modes peut les représenter comme possibles, parce que le modes, lors meme qu'il n'existent pas, sont contenus dans la puissance des substances; au contraire l'idée de substances ne peut jamais les représenter comme possibles et elle le représente toujours comme actuellement existantes, dont la raison est que les substances, estant comme tirées du neant par creation, elles ne sont contenues dans la puissance d'aucun sujet (...)⁸⁶.

7. Spinoza and Régis: two different interpretation of the nature of modes

Régis therefore doesn't accept Spinoza's interpretation of the nature of modes. In order to explain the eternal and necessary inherence of modes in substances, Spinoza makes reference to divine attributes. Spinoza states that modes are particular specifications of the attributes of the divine substance; they can be infinite (like, for example, motion as modification of the absolute nature of the substance) or finite (such as the single things). Both finite and infinite modes are subjected to attributes. However, according to Spinoza, while infinite modes are part of the nature and of the properties of the substance (*natura naturans*), finite modes are the effects of the immanent causality of the substance (*natura naturata*). Infinite and eternal modes are pervasive features of the universe, each of which follows from the divine nature insofar

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

as it follows from the absolute nature of one or another of God's attributes (examples include motion and rest under the attribute of extension and infinite intellect under the attribute of thought). Thus they fall into the circle of eternal and infinite things that arise from the nature of substance:

quicquid ex aliquo Dei attributo, quatenus modificatum est tali modificatione, quae et necessario et infinita per idem existit, sequitur, debet quoque et necessario et infinitum existere⁸⁷;

Res particulares nihil sunt nisi Dei attributorum affectiones, sive modi, quibus Dei attributa certo et determinato modo exprimuntur⁸⁸.

It follows that

omnis modus, qui et necessario et infinitus existit, necessario sequi debuit vel ex absoluta natura alicuius attributi Dei, vel ex aliquo attributo modificato modificatione, quae et necessario et infinita existit⁸⁹.

Since God can be conceived by man only through His attributes and since mode «in alio est, per quod concipi debet»⁹⁰ and it inheres in the substance, it can not be conceived but by a divine attribute. In fact

modus (...) in alio est, per quod concipi debet (per defin. 5.), hoc est (per defin. 5) in solo Deo est et per solum Deum concipi potest. Si ergo modus concipitur necessario existere et infinitus esse, utrumque hoc debet necessario concludi sive percipi per aliquod Dei attributum, quatenus idem concipitur infinitatem et necessitatem existentiae, sive (quod per defin. 8. idem est) aeternitatem exprimere, hoc est (per defin. 6. et prop. 19.) quatenus absolute consideratur. Modus ergo, qui et necessario et infinitus existit, ex absoluta natura alicuius Dei attributi sequi debuit; hocque vel immediate (de quo prop. 21.) vel mediante aliqua modificatione, quae ex eius absoluta natura sequitur, hoc est (per prop. 22) quae et necessario et infinita existit⁹¹.

⁸⁷ Spinoza, *Ethica*, I, P22, G, II, 22, 17-20.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, I, P25 C, G, II, 24, 10-12.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, I, P23, G, II, 22, 25-28.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, P23 D, G, II, 22, 30.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, I, P23 D, G, II, 22, 30 - 23, 10.

Unlike infinite modes, finite and temporal modes are simply the singular things that populate the universe. Modes of this type follow from the divine nature as well, but do so only as each follows from one or another of God's attributes insofar as it is modified by a modification that is itself finite and temporal (examples include individual bodies under the attribute of extension and individual ideas under the attribute of thought). Finite modes are created by God as efficient cause, that is to say that their essence does not involve the existence⁹². From a causal standpoint, the finite modes of Spinoza can be likened to the modes of Régis: they both imply, in fact, a direct efficient causality by God. First of all, according to Spinoza modal things depend on God because He «non tantum est causa efficiens rerum existentiae, sed etiam essentiae»⁹³; individual things, therefore, «Dei attributorum affectiones, sive modi, quibus Dei attributa certo et determinato modo exprimuntur»⁹⁴. Like Spinoza, Régis believes that both the essence and the existence of modal things depend on God. While Spinoza claims that they both depend on divine nature itself, Régis states that the essence of modes depends on divine will⁹⁵ and that their existence depends on second causes:

il y a donc cette difference entre l'essence des choses modales et leur existence, qui consiste dans des modes actuels, que la premiere depend uniquement de la volonte de Dieu, qui la produit immediatement par luy même, et que la seconde dépend non seulement de la volonte de Dieu, mais encore des creatures

⁹² See *ibid.*, I, P24, G, II, 23, 12.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, I, P25, G, II, 23, 27-28.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, I, P25 C, G II, 24, 10-12.

⁹⁵ See RÉGIS 1704, p. 131. Régis states that «l'essence des choses modales (...) depend uniquement de la volonte de Dieu qui la produit immediatement par luy-même». Even if Régis usually refers to the divine will in connection to God's creative act, he believes that divine will is the same as divine intellect; Régis's notion of God has some spinozistic features.

dont Dieu se sert comme des causes prochaines pour produire les choses modales⁹⁶.

According to Régis modal things are the result of the interaction between bodies and motion. He distinguishes two different kind of movement: the efficient motion and the formal motion. The former is nothing but the divine will as first agent producing all things, while the latter is the quantity of motion that has been created by God and that can be defined as continuous interaction between bodies. According to Régis, if on one side God creates the motion directly, the way in which the continuous interaction between bodies performs in the world of phenomena depends on the features of the bodies that are involved in the action. Such interaction occurs only in time, from which God is completely exempt and in which He can act only through the created beings. While the essence of modes is produced immediately by God's will as first cause, their existence is produced directly by the created beings as second causes and only indirectly by God as first cause:

il n'en est pas de même de l'existence des choses modales que de leur essence. Il vient d'estre prouvé que leur essence depend immediatement de la volonté de Dieu; l'existence, au contraire, des choses qui arrivent dans le monde selon les loix du mouvement ne depend pas seulement de Dieu, elle depend encore et immediatement des causes secondes, car il ne faut pas s'imaginer que Dieu produise jamais rien de successif par luy-même immediatement⁹⁷.

It follows that, while the mere possibilities of the future development of modes have been placed in substances directly by God, the actions of modal things themselves are determined not only by God, but also by created things. Even if Spinoza ascribes both the existence and the essence of modes to the substance itself, it is possible to find in his system a double causality

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

similar to that pointed out by Régis. If on one hand Spinoza states that the substance is *unique* and that everything that exists is nothing but an affection of it, in order to secure the infinity of such substance the dutch philosopher has to admit that God can cause the finite only through another finite affection. Thus, in the proposition XXVIII of his *Ethics* he asserts that:

quodcumque singulare, sive quaevis res quae finita est et determinatam habet existentiam, non potest existere nec ad operandum determinari, nisi ad existendum et operandum determinetur ab alia causa, quae etiam finita est et determinatam habet existentiam; et rursus haec causa non potest etiam existere neque ad operandum determinari, nisi ab alia, quae etiam finita est et determinatam habet existentiam, determinetur ad existendum et operandum, et sic in infinitum⁹⁸.

8. Régis's solution about the effectiveness of efficient causality: God, motion and the world of phenomena

Ultimately Spinoza also acknowledges the determination of both the existence and the action of modes by another finite cause and he justifies it as follows:

quicquid determinatum est ad existendum et operandum, a Deo sic determinatum est. At id, quod finitum est et determinatam habet existentiam, ab absoluta natura alicuius Dei attributi produci non potuit; quicquid enim ex absoluta natura alicuius Dei attributi sequitur, id infinitum et aeternum est. Debit ergo ex Deo, vel aliquo eius attributo sequi, quatenus aliquo modo affectum consideratur; praeter enim substantiam et modos nil datur et modi nihil sunt, nisi Dei attributorum affectiones. At ex Deo vel aliquo eius attributo, quatenus affectum est modificatione, quae aeterna et infinita est, sequi etiam non potuit. Debit ergo sequi, vel ad existendum et operandum determinari a Deo, vel aliquo eius attributo, quatenus modificatum est modificatione, quae finita est et determinatam habet existentiam. Quod erat primum. Deinde haec rursus causa, sive hic modus debuit etiam determinari ab alia, quae etiam finita est et determinatam habet existentiam et rursus haec ultima ab alia, et sic semper in infinitum⁹⁹.

⁹⁸ Spinoza, *Ethica*, I, P28, G, II, 25, 2-9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, P28 D, G, 25, 11-30.

If we compare Spinoza's and Régis's theories about causality, we can conclude that the latter succeeds in solving the problem about the connection between finite and infinite that the first left unsolved. By considering motion as a *medium*, Régis can justify both the relationship between God and the created beings and preserve the independence of bodies and spirits from God, trying to avoid spinozistic ontologism on one side and cartesian dualism on the other. Spinoza uses his theory about modes and attributes in order to solve cartesian dualism, demonstrating that thought and extension are attributes of the same substance: God. After having asserted that «nullas res singulares praeter corpora et cogitandi modos sentimus, nec percipimus»¹⁰⁰ and assuming that particular thoughts «are modes which, in a certain conditioned manner, express the nature of God», Spinoza states that

competit ergo Deo attributum, cuius conceptum singulares omnes cogitationes involvunt, per quod etiam concipiuntur. Est igitur cogitatio unum ex infinitis Dei attributis, quod Dei aeternam et infinitam essentiam exprimit, sive Deus est res cogitans¹⁰¹.

Finally, following the same argumentative scheme, Spinoza demonstrates that «extension attributum Dei est, sive Deus est res extensa»¹⁰². Spinoza aims at establishing the unity of being that Descartes had broken, but he does not solve the old cartesian problem concerning the real communication between bodies and spirits. According to Spinoza, since causal relations exist only among modes falling under the same attribute, it is not possible for finite modes falling under one attribute to act upon and determine finite modes falling under another attribute. When applied to modes falling under

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, II, Ax. V, G, II, 42, 6-8.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, II, P1 D, G, II, 42, 15-19.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, II, P1, G, II, 42, 30.

those attributes of which, according to the dutch philosopher, we have knowledge – thought and extension – this has an enormously important consequence. There can be no causal interaction between ideas and bodies. This does not mean that ideas and bodies are unrelated to one another. Indeed, it is one of the best-known theses in the *Ethics* that the lines of causation that run among them are strictly parallel; according to Spinoza «ordo et connexio idearum idem est, ac ordo et connexio rerum»¹⁰³. In the demonstration of this proposition Spinoza says that it is a consequence of the fact that «effectus cognitio a cognitione causae dependet et eandem involvit»¹⁰⁴ (that is the fourth axiom of the first part of his *Ethics*) and leaves it at that. Nevertheless, it is apparent that this proposition has deep foundations in his substance monism. As thought and extension are not attributes of distinct substances, so ideas and bodies are not modes of distinct substances. They are «una eademque (...) res, sed duobus modis expressa»¹⁰⁵. If ideas and bodies are one and the same thing, however, their order and connection must be the same. The doctrine of substance monism in this way insures that ideas and bodies, though causally independent, are causally parallel.

Several analogies with the spinozistic system notwithstanding, Régis disapproves Spinoza for blending a theological-metaphysical view of the world with a scientific one. Actually, Spinoza's substance monism can not justify an empiricist theory of knowledge, like Régis's. Régis, therefore, states the existence of different substances, trying to avoid, at the same time, the ambiguousness of Descartes's theory of substances. By stating the existence of

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, II, P7, G, II, 45, 21-22.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, I, A4, G, II, 2, 27-28.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, II, P7 S, G, II, 46, 9.

three different substances, Descartes had to acknowledge that the term “substance” has a different meaning if referred to God or to finite substances. The ambiguity of the term “substance” had been pointed out by Descartes himself in his *Principia Philosophiae* where, on one side he stated that «istud nomen Deo et creaturis non conveniat univoce»:

per substantiam nihil aliud intelligere possumus, quam rem quae ita existit, ut nulla alia re indigeat ad existendum. Et quidem substantia quae nulla plane re indigeat, unica tantum potest intelligi, nempe Deus. Alias uero omnes, non nisi ope concursus Dei existere posse percipimus. Atque ideo nomen substantiae non conuenit Deo et illis uniuoce, ut dici solet in Scholis, hoc est, nulla eius nominis significatio potest distincte intelligi, quae Deo et creaturis sit communis¹⁰⁶.

On the other side he underlined that «the term ‘substance’ applies to mind and body in the same sense»:

possunt autem substantia corporea et mens, siue /25/ substantia cogitans, creata, sub hoc communi conceptu intelligi, quod sint res, quae solo Dei concursu egent ad existendum¹⁰⁷.

Descartes tried to avoid problematic implications by stating that referred to God the term “substance” means a thing which exists in such a way that it does not need anything else in order for it to exist, while referred to created bodily substance and created mind (or thinking substance) such term means a kind of things which need nothing other than *God* in order to exist. Despite his attempt to clarify the ambiguousness of his theory of substance, Descartes can not avoid to fall into an aporia: in fact, the two definitions formally annul each other. Therefore, while Spinoza tries to solve cartesian dualism by stating that thought and extension are both attributes of God, Régis overcomes it by asserting that in the world of phenomena there are two sub-

¹⁰⁶ Descartes, *Princ. Phil.*, I, LI: AT VIII-1 24.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, I, LII, AT VIII-1 24-5.

stances which have been created by a God that, as transcendent, has to be considered oversubstantial and that these substances can communicate through the movement.

By considering God as over-substance, Régis can both save God's transcendence and maintain the cartesian notion of God as guarantor of eternal truth as well¹⁰⁸. Moreover, Régis make use of motion to explain the modifications of bodies and souls and, therefore, their relationship. As Tad M. Schamltz has pointed out, Régis's view of motion requires a fundamental revision of Descartes's ontology¹⁰⁹. For Régis the union of soul and body lies in the mutual dependence between spiritual thoughts and bodily motion. If Desgabets stated that there is an atemporal substance that allows for the possibility of bodily modes, but also that there are temporal modes of the substance that provide the basis for the temporality of our own thoughts, Régis pushes Desgabets's theory to its extreme consequences by claiming that, while from a metaphysical point of view *res cogitans* and *res extensa* are two heterogeneous and separate substances, as parts of the human being they are involved in the world of phenomena and they are hence subject to time and to the change connected with it. According to Régis, since the formal motion is the condition of possibility of both time and duration, the union of soul and body has to be realized through it. He states that in the physical world soul and body do not appear as substances but they are the formal reason of par-

¹⁰⁸ See *Descartes à Mersenne* (Amsterdam, 27 Mai 1630), AT, I, p. 152: «il est certain qu'il [*scil.* Dieu] est aussi bien auteur de l'essence comme de l'existence des créatures: or cette essence n'est autre chose que ces vérités éternelles, lesquelles je ne conçois point émaner de Dieu, comme les rayons du Soleil; mais je sais que Dieu est auteur de toutes les choses, et que ces vérités sont quelque chose, et par conséquent qu'il en est l'auteur». Concerning Régis's theory of eternal truths see SCRIBANO 1988, pp. 83-139.

¹⁰⁹ See SCHMALTZ 2003, pp. 737-762.

ticular human beings. Thus, Régis considers individual thoughts and bodies as modes of the human being, which, formally, has to be considered a modal being. The union of soul and body is therefore ascribed not to the entirety of their beings but to their own actions. Since modes are the result of the interaction between formal motion and bodies, in Régis' view the modes of thought can be created by nothing but the movement previously modified. Régis claims that secondary causality is involved in both body-body and mind-body relations. In body-body case, the production of modes is grounded in a freely created formal motion, and in the mind-body case God brings it about that the thoughts in a human soul and the motions in its body stand in a certain causal relation. Régis rejects therefore both the occasionalism of Malebranche and Lelevel and the causal parallelism of Spinoza.

Even if Régis theory of modes is in some points similar to that of Spinoza¹¹⁰, Régis distances himself from the author of the *Ethics* by stating that the actual existence of modal beings depends directly on movement and only indirectly on God. Therefore, though considering God as both first cause and *causa sui*, the french philosopher can justify real action of second causes in the world of phenomena.

Il n'y a point d'être modal dont l'existence actuelle ne dépende d'une ou de plusieurs de ces especes de mouvement; ce qui est si vrai que si Dieu cessoit pour un moment de mouvoir la matiere, tous les êtres modaux periroient, et la matiere ne seroit plus pendant ce moment qu'une étendue homogene et par tout semblable à elle-même, sans aucune distinction réelle et actuelle des parties; c'est à dire que la matiere retourneroit au même instant où nous supposons qu'elle estoit avant qu'elle fut muë, pour faire entendre que la matiere n'a jamais esté un seul instant de temps sans mouvement, et que, si nous l'y supposons, ce n'est que par abstraction.

L'existence des êtres modaux spirituels ne dépend pas moins de certaines manieres de mouvement que celle des êtres modaux corporels (j'entens par

¹¹⁰ WARD 2011, pp. 19-46.

êtres modaux spirituels l'âme avec ses pensées, entant qu'elles dependent de quelques manieres du mouvement du corps, auquel elle est unie), car il est constant que si les manieres du mouvement du corps ne sont pas la cause formelle des pensées de l'âme, elles en sont au moins la cause efficiente, seconde ou instrumentelle: ce qui fait que les pensées de l'âme ne sont pas moins passegeres que les manieres du mouvement desquelles elles dependent¹¹¹.

By inserting a second order of causality in the created world, Régis can use some notions similar to those of Spinoza without sharing their dangerous implications. Thanks the elevation of God to a over-substance, the order proposed by Régis shifts by one degree with respect to the order theorized by Spinoza: in particular, the divine attributes of Régis's system can be compared with the divine properties of Spinoza's system, while the attributes that Spinoza ascribes to God can be considered similar to the substances described by Régis and to their attributes.

9. Régis's refutation of Spinoza

In order to clarify these notions the French philosopher inserts at the end of his *L'usage* a refutation of Spinoza, which aims at underlining the differences between the two systems. Régis's refutation focuses on the concepts of substance, attribute, mode and God. Since Régis's aim is to set the world of phenomena apart from the divine substance, first of all he criticizes the spinozistic notion of substance as *causa sui*. According to Régis, as created directly by God, the substance has to be considered existent *in se* but not *per se*. For this reason the author of *L'usage* disapproves Spinoza's definition of God as «substance». Thus, while Spinoza in proposition XI of the first part of his *Eth-*

¹¹¹ RÉGIS 1704, p. 149.

ics states that «Deus, sive substantia constans infinitis attributis, quorum unumquodque aeternam et infinitam essentiam exprimit, necessario existit»¹¹² and he demonstrates such proposition in this way:

si negas, concipe, si fieri potest, Deum non existere. Ergo eius essentia non involvit existentiam. Atqui hoc est absurdum. Ergo Deus necessario existit ¹¹³;

Régis criticises such proposition both by denying the identification of God with the substance and by underlining that, since divine attributes are nothing but the human way to consider the perfect being, they are estrinsic to God's essence.

J'avoue que si Dieu n'existoit pas, son essence ne renfermeroit pas son existence; ce qui est absurde. Mais cette absurdité ne vient pas, comme Spinoza le pretend, de ce que les substances n'ont point de cause; car Dieu n'est point une substance, mais un Etre superieur à la substance. Elle vient cette absurdité de ce que Dieu existe par soy meme absolument. Il faut ajouter, que non seulement Dieu n'est pas une substance, mais meme, qu'il n'a point d'attribut, au moins intrinseque: ce qui fait voir que si Dieu existe necessairement, comme il le fait, ce n'est pas par les raisons que Spinoza en donne¹¹⁴.

In order to ground his objection to Spinoza's identification of God with the substance further, Régis underlines the essential difference between the attributes of substance and divine attributes and states that thought and extension are attributes of substance.

Les attributs qui expriment l'essence de la substance sont l'étenduë, la pensée, la propriété d'exister en soy et celle de recevoir des modes; ce qui ne convient nullement à Dieu, dont le propre est d'exister par soy, et de ne recevoir rien en soy. Donc Spinoza ne démontre pas qu'on ne puisse concevoir aucune substance, excepté Dieu¹¹⁵.

¹¹² Spinoza, *Ethica*, I, P11, G, II, 8, 23-25.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, I, P11 D, G, II, 8, 27-29.

¹¹⁴ RÉGIS 1704, pp. 495-496.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 498.

Régis' refutation of the IV definition¹¹⁶ of the first part of Spinoza's *Ethics* highlights his attempt to distance himself from the spinozistic notion of attributes:

Spinoza nous enseigne bien dans cette definition que l'attribut est ce que l'esprit apperçoit de la substance comme constituant son essence; mais il ne nous dit pas que, comme la substance peut estre considerée en trois manieres, sçavoir selon son genre, selon ses especes, et selon ses individus, il y a aussi trois sortes d'attributs; sçavoir des attributs generiques, des attributs specifiques, et des attributs numeriques. L'attribut generique distingue les substances des modes; l'attribut specifique distingue les substances d'une espece des substances d'une autre espece; et l'attribut numerique fait differer entre elles les substances de la meme espece. Ce qui est si necessaire à remarquer, qu'il est impossible sans cela d'éviter la confusion¹¹⁷.

Relying on the difference between divine attributes and the attributes of the substance and according to his idea of God, Régis declares that only created substances can be subject to modifications and he numbers thought and extension among the substantial attributes. Thanks to this strategy Régis can prevent the spinozistic implications that invalidate his empiricist theory of knowledge, which is grounded on Régis' conception of modes. According to Régis' view, modes belongs to the world of phenomena and they represent the principle of intelligibility of substances, just as divine attributes enable man to represent God's nature (without, however, understanding it). Thus, Régis in the *Refutation de l'opinion de Spinoza* states that:

il faut donc entendre par le mot de mode, une disposition accidentelle, non de la substance en general, mais de la substance en particulier. Ajoutez encore, qu'il n'est pas moins de l'essence de la substance de pouvoir recevoir de modes, qu'il est de l'essence des modes d'exister dans les substances; ce qui fait que les mots de substance et de mode, sont correlatifs (...) ¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁶ It is the definition of attribute.

¹¹⁷ RÉGIS 1704, pp. 483-484.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 484.

On one side, therefore, the function of modes in respect to substances can be compared to the function of attributes in respect of God's nature; on the other side, according to Régis, modes themselves are radically different from divine attributes; the latter are connaturated to divine essence, while the relationship between modes and substances is merely accidental:

le mode c'est la maniere dont une chose est tournée, en sorte qu'elle est changée seulement a l'égard de quelques accidens, sans que ce qui luy est essential, soit changé; ainsi le pli fait à un papier est une modification qui n'apporte point un changement essentiel, comme pourroit faire l'embracement, parce qu'un papier brulé n'est plus un papier¹¹⁹.

In the system of Régis the notion of mode has an opposite function to the one they have in Spinoza's system. The author of the *Ethics* uses modes to justify the existence of finite things in spite of his ontologism. On the contrary, in Régis' system the notion of mode is essential for justifying the existence of the world of phenomena, which depends on God but which has at the same time his own reality; in Régis' system, modes become therefore the basis to ground the evidence on experience and to adopt the methodological principle according to which sensations are the starting point of knowledge.

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¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, *Dictionnaire des termes propres*, Vvv.

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