

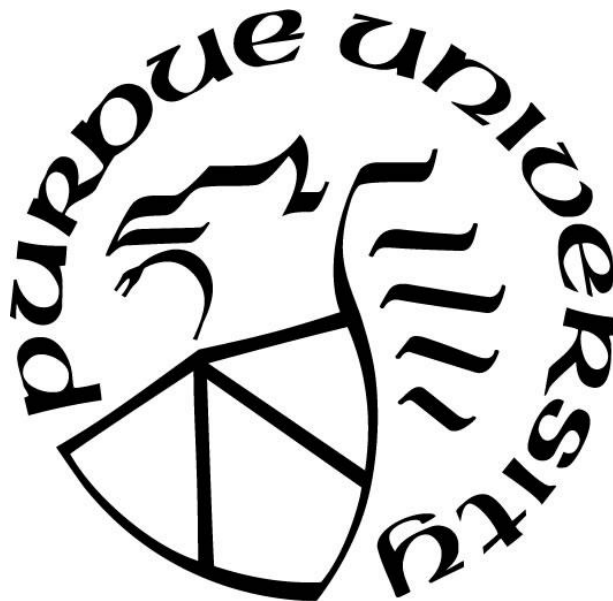
**“IT IS OF THE NATURE OF REASON TO REGARD THINGS AS  
NECESSARY, NOT AS CONTINGENT”:  
A DEFENSE OF SPINOZA’S NECESSITARIANISM**

by  
**Brandon Rdzak**

**A Dissertation**

*Submitted to the Faculty of Purdue University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of*

**Doctor of Philosophy**



Department of Philosophy  
West Lafayette, Indiana  
August 2021

**THE PURDUE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL  
STATEMENT OF COMMITTEE APPROVAL**

**Dr. Daniel Frank, Chair**

Department of Philosophy

**Dr. Jan Cover**

Department of Philosophy

**Dr. Michael Jacovides**

Department of Philosophy

**Dr. Christopher Martin**

Philosophy & Religious Studies Department, University of Toledo

**Approved by:**

Dr. Christopher L. Yeomans

*For Aga*

It is observed by arithmeticians that the products of 9 compose always either 9 or some lesser product of 9 if you add together all the characters of which any of the former products is composed. ... To a superficial observer so wonderful a regularity may be admired as the effect of either chance or design; but a skillful algebraist immediately concludes it to be the work of necessity, and demonstrates that it must forever result from the nature of these numbers. Is it not probable, I ask, that the whole economy of the universe is conducted by a like necessity, though no human algebra can furnish a key which solves the difficulty? And instead of admiring the order of natural beings, may it not happen that, could we penetrate into the intimate nature of bodies, we should clearly see why it was absolutely impossible they could ever admit of any other disposition? So dangerous is it to introduce this idea of necessity into the present question! And so naturally does it afford an inference directly opposite to the religious hypothesis!

David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have come to fruition without the support I've received from many. I owe a debt of gratitude to my advisor, Dan Frank, for his patience, kindness, and sage-like guidance. I want to thank Mike Jacovides, Jan Cover, and Chris Martin for their helpful comments, suggestions, and encouragement. I am grateful to Neal Grossman, Georgette Sinkler, David Svolba, and John Whipple for getting me hooked on philosophy and for preparing me for graduate studies. To my friends and colleagues—Alex Gilman, Alzbeta Hajkova, Berman Chan, Dan Linford, Davis Kuykendall, Dwight Lewis, Elaine Blum, James Mollison, Jim Elliott, Joe Krylow, Joel Johnson, Jonathan Fuqua, Josh Folk, Lacey Davidson, Mark Satta, Ryan van Nood, Stephen Setman, Tiffany Montoya, Uygur Abaci, and Vince Jacobson—I owe many thanks for their dialogue, feedback, and collegiality. I also want to thank my parents, Robert W. Rdzak and Joy Rdzak, and my two brothers, Robert S. Rdzak and Jonathan Rdzak, for their encouragement through my academic pursuits. Finally, I especially want to thank my loving wife, Agnieszka Rdzak, and our son, Erik Rdzak. This project wouldn't be possible if it weren't for their love, patience, and sacrifice.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiv
ABSTRACT.....	xv
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Spinoza & Necessitarianism .....	1
Spinoza’s Ontology .....	2
Is Spinoza a Necessitarian? .....	8
Determinism vs. Necessitarianism .....	9
Semi-necessitarianism vs. Necessitarianism .....	12
The Principal Aim of this Project .....	13
Why Defend Spinoza’s Necessitarianism? .....	14
Getting Past the Impasse.....	14
The Principle of Sufficient Reason.....	16
A Gap in Spinoza Studies .....	17
A Roadmap of the Chapters.....	18
CHAPTER 1. THE CAUSAL STRUCTURE OF SPINOZA’S ESSENTIALISM.....	22
1.1 Essentialism?.....	22
1.2 Some Background of Spinoza’s Essentialism.....	23
1.2.1 Aristotle .....	23
1.2.2 Aquinas & Suarez .....	29
1.2.3 Descartes.....	32
1.3 Spinoza’s Essentialism.....	36
1.3.1 Causation .....	36
1.3.2 Definition, Essence, & Proprium.....	41
1.3.3 Power, Essence, & Accident.....	49
1.3.4 Conceptual Essentialism, Dynamic Essentialism, & the Primacy of Power .....	54
1.4 Spinoza’s Modal Reductionism .....	61
1.4.1 Necessary by Reason of Essence or Cause.....	62
1.4.2 God’s Definition & Necessity .....	63

1.4.3	Amodal Essentialism .....	65
1.5	Conclusion .....	66
CHAPTER 2.	SPINOZA ON LAWS OF NATURE .....	68
2.1	An Essentialist Interpretation of Laws.....	68
2.2	The Nature of Law .....	68
2.2.1	Necessity of Nature.....	70
2.2.2	Dependence on a Necessity of Nature .....	72
2.2.3	Universal Scope .....	73
2.3	The Locus of Law .....	75
2.3.1	Duration & Eternity .....	76
2.3.2	The Duration & Eternity of Modes.....	79
2.3.3	Eternal Truth .....	81
2.3.4	Laws of Nature: Eternal Truths in the Immediate Infinite Mode of Thought .....	84
2.4	The Nested Nomological Order .....	87
2.5	Laws of Nature & Necessitarianism .....	89
CHAPTER 3.	SPINOZA ON MODALITY.....	93
3.1	Modal Metaphysics.....	93
3.2	Necessity & Impossibility.....	95
3.2.1	Intrinsic Impossibility .....	98
3.2.2	Intrinsic Necessity .....	100
3.2.3	Extrinsic Necessity .....	101
3.2.4	Extrinsic Impossibility.....	104
3.3	Possibility.....	106
3.3.1	Intrinsic Possibility .....	106
3.3.2	Intrinsic Possibility & Modal Status.....	108
3.3.3	The Scope of Intrinsic Possibility.....	110
3.4	Necessitarianism & the Scope Problem.....	111
3.4.1	Ideas of Nonexistent Modes .....	113
3.4.2	Contingency.....	118
3.4.3	The Scope of the Metaphysical Modalities .....	122
3.5	Modal Reductionism Redux .....	124

CHAPTER 4. SPINOZA’S NECESSITARIANISM & THE ESSENTIALIST FOUNDATION OF ETHICS 1p16 .....	128
4.1 Spinoza’s Necessitarianism?.....	128
4.2 Ethics 1p16 & Spinoza’s Commitment to Necessitarianism .....	129
4.2.1 The Significance of 1p16.....	130
4.2.2 The Argument for Necessitarianism from 1p16 .....	133
4.3 Three Problems for the Argument from 1p16.....	135
4.3.1 The Quantification Problem .....	135
4.3.2 The Adequacy Problem .....	137
4.3.3 The Equivocation Problem .....	139
4.4 Recap of Spinoza’s Essentialism .....	142
4.5 Spinoza’s Essentialism & the Demonstration of Ethics 1p16 .....	144
4.5.1 “Infinite Intellect” & “Properties” .....	145
4.5.2 The Demonstration of 1p16.....	147
4.6 Reply to the Three Interpretive Problems .....	153
4.6.1 Reply to the Quantification Problem .....	154
4.6.2 Reply to the Adequacy Problem .....	156
4.6.3 Reply to the Equivocation Problem.....	158
4.7 Some Difficulties for the Essentialist Interpretation of Ethics 1p16 .....	164
4.7.1 How Does the Finite Follow from the Infinite?.....	164
4.7.2 How Can Finite Modes be Propria of God? .....	165
4.7.2.1 A Deflationary Account of Propria .....	166
4.7.2.2 Eternalism .....	167
4.8 Semi-Necessitarianism & Ethics 5p6.....	169
CHAPTER 5. WHO’S AFRAID OF MODAL COLLAPSE?: A DEFENSE OF SPINOZA’S NECESSITARIANISM .....	173
5.1 Introduction.....	173
5.1.1 Recap of Spinoza’s Necessitarianism.....	173
5.1.2 The Consensus View of Spinozistic Necessitarianism .....	175
5.1.3 Aims.....	177
5.2 The Indispensability Argument for Contingency .....	178



5.2.1	The Basic Argument .....	178
5.2.2	The Essence Problem.....	183
5.2.3	The Generalization Problem .....	184
5.2.4	The Counterfactual Problem.....	185
5.2.5	The Absurdity of Necessitarianism?.....	188
5.3	Reply to the Indispensability Argument for Contingency .....	189
5.3.1	Reply to the Essence Problem .....	189
5.3.2	Reply to the Generalization Problem.....	193
5.3.3	Reply to the Counterfactual Problem .....	196
5.4	Conclusion .....	200
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....		201

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

## Abbreviations of Spinoza's Works

### Editions of Spinoza

- G Spinoza, B. d. (1925). *Spinoza Opera* (Vols. 1-4). (C. Gebhardt, Ed.) Heidelberg, DE: Carl Winter.
- C Spinoza, B. d. (1985-2016). *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (Vols. 1-2). (E. Curley, Ed. & Trans.) Princeton University Press.
- S Spinoza, B. (2002). *Spinoza: Complete Works*. (M. L. Morgan, Ed., S. Shirley, Trans.) Hackett Publishing Company.
- SK Spinoza, B. d. (2018). *Ethics Proved in Geometrical Order*. (M. J. Kisner, Ed., M. Silverthorne, & M. J. Kisner, Trans.) Cambridge University Press.

English translations of Spinoza's works are from C unless otherwise indicated. I cite C by volume and page number when helpful or necessary, separated by a period without spacing (e.g., C 2.45). The original Latin of Spinoza's works are from G, cited by volume number, page number, and by line number when helpful, also separated by a period without spacing (e.g., G 4.60.13-15). I italicize Latin quotations (and occasionally un-italicize the Latin quotations when the English translation is italicized). References to SK and S are cited by page number (e.g., S 53).

### Spinoza's *Ethics*

For references to the *Ethics* (*Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*), I use an Arabic numeral specifying parts 1-5, followed by the abbreviations below unless otherwise indicated:

app	appendix
a	axiom
c	corollary
d	definition (when appearing after number part)
d	demonstration (in all other cases)
da	definition of the affects (end of part 3)
exp	explanation
lem	lemma
pref	preface
post	postulate

p            proposition  
s            scholium

For example, 2d1 is definition 1 of part 2 of the *Ethics*, and 4p63d is the demonstration of proposition 63 of part 4 of the *Ethics*. Following Jonathan Bennett (1984), I sometimes use a comma without spacing to indicate multiple non-adjacent references within the same part of the *Ethics* so as to cut down on redundancies. So, 1p11,14 refers to propositions 11 and 14 of part 1 of the *Ethics*. When quoting propositions of the *Ethics*, I remove the original italics. Cases in which C italicizes “or” in Curley’s English translation indicate a Latin *sive/seu* (e.g., “God, *or* Nature”), suggesting an equivalence.

### Spinoza’s Other Works

CM            *Metaphysical Thoughts (Cogitata Metaphysica)* (appendix to DPP)

DPP            *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy (Renati des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae Pars I & II)*

Ep            Spinoza’s Letters (*Epistolae*)

KV            *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being (Korte Verhandeling van God de Mensch en deszelfs Welstand)*

TdIE            *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione)*

TP            *Political Treatise (Tractatus Politicus)*

TTP            *Theological-Political Treatise (Tractatus Theologico-Politicus)*

For simplicity in exposition, I refer to KV as the *Short Treatise* and TdIE as the *Treatise on the Intellect*. References to CM, KV, TP, and TTP are each cited with Arabic numerals by part, chapter, and/or section when applicable, separated by a period without spacing. So, for example, CM 2.10.3 is part 2, chapter 10, section 3 of the *Metaphysical Thoughts*; and TTP 14.2 is chapter 14, section 2 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*. For citing DPP, I use the same abbreviations and references as the *Ethics* where applicable due to its geometrical style. So, DPP 1a9 is part 1, axiom 9 of *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy*. References to Ep are followed by a space and an Arabic numeral. So, for example, Ep 6 refers to letter 6 of Spinoza’s correspondence.

## Abbreviations of Other Works

### St. Thomas Aquinas

- SCG      Aquinas, T. (1955-1957). *Summa Contra Gentiles*. (J. Kenny, Ed., & J. F. Anderson, Trans.) O.P. Hanover House. Retrieved January 29, 2019, from <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/ContraGentiles.htm>. Cited by book, chapter, and section, separated by a period without spacing (e.g., SCG 2.30.11).
- ST      Aquinas, T. (1947). *The Summa Theologica*. (Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Trans.) Retrieved January 29, 2019, from <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/summa/index.html>. Cited by part, question, answer, and reply, when applicable (e.g., ST 1q77a6).
- EE      Aquinas, T. (1997). *On Being and Essence*. (R. T. Miller, Trans.) Robert T. Miller. Retrieved January 29, 2019, from <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/aquinas-esse.asp>. Cited by chapter (e.g., EE 1).

### Aristotle

All references to the works below are from Aristotle. (1984). *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Vols. 1-2). (J. Barnes, Ed.). Princeton University Press.

<i>Cat</i>	<i>Categories</i>
<i>Met</i>	<i>Metaphysics</i>
<i>EN</i>	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>PA</i>	<i>Parts of Animals</i>
<i>Phys</i>	<i>Physics</i>
<i>APo</i>	<i>Posterior Analytics</i>
<i>Top</i>	<i>Topics</i>

Cited by book, chapter, and section, where applicable, separated by a period without spacing (e.g., *Met* 5.2). This is followed by page number, column letter, and line number, where applicable, according to the Greek text of Immanuel Bekker's 1831 standard edition of Aristotle (e.g., 1013a24).

## **Rene Descartes**

- AT Descartes, R. (1964-1976). *Oeuvres de Descartes* (Vols. 1-7). (C. Adam, & P. Tannery, Eds.) Paris: J. Vrin. Cited by volume and page number, separated by a period without spacing (e.g., AT 7.64).
- CSM Descartes, R. (1984-1985). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Vols. 1-2). (J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, & D. Murdoch, Eds. & Trans). Cambridge University Press. Cited by volume and page number, separated by a period without spacing (e.g., CSM 2.45).
- CSMK Descartes, R. (1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Vol. 3). (J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, & A. Kenny, Eds. & Trans.) Cambridge University Press. Cited by volume and page number, separated by a period without spacing (e.g., CSMK 3.217).

## **Gottfried Leibniz**

- L Leibniz, G. (1969). *Philosophical Papers and Letters* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). (L. Loemker, Ed. & Trans.) Reidel Publishing Company. Cited by page number.
- T Leibniz, G. (1985) *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*. (E. M. Huggard, Trans.) Open Court. Cited by section number.
- AG Leibniz, G. (1989). *Philosophical Essays*. (R. Ariew, & D. Garber, Eds. & Trans.) Hackett Publishing Company. Cited by page number.

## **Francisco Suarez**

- DM Suarez, F. *Metaphysical Disputations* (*Disputationes Metaphysicae*). Cited by disputation, section, and subsection number (e.g., DM 32.1.2).
- AJF Suarez, F. (1994). *On Efficient Causality: Metaphysical Disputations 17, 18, and 19*. (A. J. Freddoso, Trans.) Yale University Press. Cited by page number.
- BSM Suarez, F. (1998). *Metaphysical Disputations*. In R. Ariew, J. Cottingham, & T. Sorrell (Eds.), *Descartes' Meditations: Background Source Materials* (J. Cottingham, Trans., pp. 29-50). Cambridge University Press. Cited by page number.

- SP 1 Suarez, F. (2012). DM XII.2. (Penner, S. Trans.) Sydney Penner. Retrieved from [http://www.sydneypenner.ca/su/dm\\_12\\_2.pdf](http://www.sydneypenner.ca/su/dm_12_2.pdf). Cited by page number, separated by a period without spacing (e.g., SP 1.1).
- SP 2 Suarez, F. (2012). DM XXVII. (Penner, S. Trans.) Sydney Penner. Retrieved from [http://www.sydneypenner.ca/su/DM\\_27.pdf](http://www.sydneypenner.ca/su/DM_27.pdf). Cited by page number, separated by a period without spacing.
- SP 3 Suarez, F. (2013) Disputatio Metaphysica 32, Sect. 1. (Penner, S. Trans.) Sydney Penner. Retrieved from [https://www.sydneypenner.ca/su/DM\\_32\\_1.pdf](https://www.sydneypenner.ca/su/DM_32_1.pdf). Cited by page number, separated by a period without spacing.

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The scope of the metaphysical modalities.....	122
Figure 2. An illustration of intrinsic possibility and intrinsic impossibility. ....	198

## ABSTRACT

There is longstanding interpretive dispute between commentators over Spinoza's commitment to *necessitarianism*, the doctrine that all things are metaphysically necessary and none are contingent. Those who affirm Spinoza's commitment to the doctrine adhere to *the necessitarian interpretation* whereas those who deny it adhere to what I call *the semi-necessitarian interpretation*. As things stand, the disagreement between commentators appears to have reached an impasse. Notwithstanding, there seems to be no disagreement among commentators on the question of necessitarianism's philosophical plausibility as a metaphysical view: the doctrine is wildly untenable. This consensus view is more relevant to the interpretive debate than few have recognized, since leading semi-necessitarian commentators take the doctrine's alleged absurdity to be one of the most compelling reasons (if not *the* most compelling reason) to prefer their reading over the necessitarian interpretation: for, as a matter of methodological principle, great philosophers like Spinoza should not be ascribed ridiculous views in the absence of better evidence.

This dissertation seeks to defend Spinoza's commitment to necessitarianism on both the interpretive and philosophical fronts. I argue not only that the necessitarian interpretation of Spinoza is more plausible than the semi-necessitarian interpretation on textual grounds, but that Spinoza's necessitarianism is a serviceable philosophical view whose tenability has been almost entirely overlooked and perfunctorily rejected. The principal basis upon which I build this defense is Spinoza's rich and fascinating view of essences—what I simply refer to as his *essentialism*. Spinoza's essentialism forms the bedrock of his metaphysics and is significant not least because it underlies and informs doctrines like his necessitarianism. Spinoza's essentialism supplies resources to answer not just interpretive problems associated with necessitarianism, but philosophical challenges to the plausibility of the doctrine. My defense of Spinoza's



necessitarianism on philosophical grounds also offers a novel way of getting past much of the current interpretive impasse among commentators by effectively undercutting the methodological motivation for the semi-necessitarian reading. In addition to my defense on the interpretive front, then, my defense on the philosophical front provides supplementary reason to *a fortiori* favor the necessitarian reading of Spinoza.

# INTRODUCTION

## Spinoza & Necessitarianism

Necessitarianism is the *de re* modal doctrine that affirms the absolute or metaphysical necessity of all things and their features.<sup>1</sup> It is the view, in other words, that whatever is actual is necessary ( $(\forall x)Fx \rightarrow \Box Fx$ ), that nothing is contingent ( $\sim(\exists x)\Diamond Fx \ \& \ \sim\Box Fx$ ) or—to put it in contemporary philosophical parlance—that the only possible world is the actual world ( $(\exists!w)\Diamond w \ \& \ w$ ). Necessitarianism has startling implications that fly in the face of common sense and intuition. Consider, for example, how it seems genuinely possible for the Chicago Cubs to have lost the 2016 World Series despite the fact that they actually won it. But if necessitarianism is true, it is no less impossible for the Chicago Cubs to have lost the 2016 World Series than for  $2+2$  to have been 5.

Does Spinoza affirm necessitarianism? A cursory look at what he says both within and about his *Ethics* appears to offer confirmation:

In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way. (1p29)

Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced. (1p33)

For whatever is in God's power must (by 1p34) be so comprehended by his essence that it necessarily follows from it, and therefore necessarily exists, q.e.d. (1p35d)

But because this [fatal necessity of all things and actions] is the principal foundation of everything in the treatise [*Ethics*] I had intended to publish, I want to explain briefly here in what way I maintain [it]... For I do not in any way subject God to fate, but I conceive that everything follows with inevitable necessity from the nature of God, in the same way everyone conceives that it follows from the nature of God that God understands himself. (Ep 75|G 4.31 1a-312a)

---

<sup>1</sup> I characterize necessitarianism in the form of a *de re* modal doctrine because I take Spinoza's concerns to be primarily with the modality of *things*, not of propositions or statements (cf. Mason, 1986; 1997, pp. 51-84). However, necessitarianism might also be characterized in the form of a *de dicto* modal doctrine—for example, that for any proposition  $p$ , if  $p$  is true, then necessarily  $p$  ( $(\forall p)p \rightarrow \Box p$ ).

Spinoza certainly takes everything to be necessary in *some* sense. However, it is complex and controverted whether that sense amounts to full-blown necessitarianism or something less.

As an instructive (but ultimately unsuccessful) first pass at answering the question whether Spinoza is a necessitarian—or at least whether he is committed to the view—I want to indulge the thought that a resolution may be found by first tallying up what sorts of things exist according to Spinoza, and then determining whether the modal status<sup>2</sup> of those things are necessary. Proceeding in this manner will congenially serve to introduce not just Spinoza’s ontology, but the state of the secondary literature on Spinoza’s commitment to necessitarianism.

## **Spinoza’s Ontology**

Spinoza is up front about his ontological commitments: whatever there is falls into the category of either *substance*, *attribute*, or *mode* (1p4d). Consider each category in turn.

Spinoza defines a *substance* as an ontologically and conceptually independent being, the existence and understanding of which is completely self-contained: “By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed” (1d3). As will become clearer below, this marks a notable departure from the traditional Aristotelian notion of substance, according to which individual cats, human beings, or oak trees are quintessential substances. Put simply, such substances are ultimate subjects or bearers of features (see *Cat 2-5*|1a17-4b19). *Being black-haired*, *fuzzy*, and *mischievous*, for example, inhere in my cat, *Storm*, the bearer of those features. But for Aristotelians, *Storm* is not himself a feature that inheres in a further thing, say, the sunny meadow

---

<sup>2</sup> As the context here suggests, I am using the term “modal status” in the contemporary sense concerned with possibility, impossibility, necessity, and contingency, and not in the sense related to the ontological category of modes. My later uses of the term should be understood likewise.

that he frequents. As a substance, Storm is a self-subsisting entity that enjoys a special independent status: *being black-haired*, etc., depends for its being on Storm, but Storm does not depend for his being on something further in the way that his features depend on him (see *Met* 7.1|1028a30-1028b1).

Not entirely unlike Aristotle's is Descartes' notion of substance (CSM 2.114; see also Melamed, 2013b, pp. 12-16). However, his considered view differs from the Aristotelian's to at least the extent he emphasizes the independent being of a substance as that "which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence" (CSM 1.210). This is also why, for Descartes, the notion of substance does not apply univocally to God and creatures. Strictly speaking, only God is a substance because his existence depends on nothing distinct from himself; creatures like Storm can only be considered substances in the equivocal sense that they depend on God for their existence.

Spinoza is willing to go along with much of this (see Carriero, 1999). For him, substances are indeed the ultimate bearers of their features and independent beings. However, Spinoza denies substantiality to things like cats, human beings, and oak trees, even in an equivocal sense. His reason for doing so is straightforward: they strictly fail to be ultimate bearers of features; those things are not *truly* independent beings. While features like *being black-haired*, *fuzzy*, and *mischievous* may depend on Storm, Storm is not an independent being: his existence is ontologically and conceptually dependent on things apart from himself because he cannot be or be conceived without reference to the being and conception of other things, such as factors in his external environment or his feline parents. What's more, Storm is a divisible being composed of parts upon which the whole of him depends for existence (e.g., his heart, lungs). By contrast, substances *qua* independent beings cannot have parts because they would then depend on

something further and distinct from themselves for being. So, substances must be mereologically simple and indivisible (1p12-13,15s). In effect, when it comes to alleged quintessential substances like Storm, Spinoza takes his predecessors to be misapplying the notion of substance if not unwilling to follow the concept to its logical conclusion.

We can better appreciate what Spinozistic substances are by turning to the closely related notion of *attribute*: “By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence” (1d4). Akin to Descartes’ notion of “principal attributes” (CSM 1.210-211), Spinoza takes an attribute to be a fundamental way of being: an irreducible and positive feature expressing the essence of substance, which can neither depend on, nor be explained in terms of, any deeper feature of the substance.<sup>3</sup> Following Descartes, Spinoza admits the attributes of *extension* and *thought* into his metaphysics (roughly corresponding to what we might call *physical being* and *mental being*, respectively; see 2p1-2). For Spinoza, however, extension and thought are not the only attributes that there are, but rather the only two attributes we can know among infinitely many others (see Ep 63-64). What’s more, a substance can have more than one attribute (1p10s), ultimately giving rise to his so-called *parallelism* of the attributes and their contents (see 2p7,c,s). As such, the attributes are fundamental ways of expressing the same substance in distinct, isomorphic manners, such that for anything spatially extended in three dimensions, for example, there is an exactly corresponding mental expression of it in thought (between which there is neither ontological nor conceptual dependence, for otherwise the attributes would not be fundamental expressions of substance—and likewise for any other of its attributes).

---

<sup>3</sup> Bennett (1984, pp. 47-50), Nadler (2006, p. 56), and Newlands (2015) helpfully describe Spinoza’s notion of attribute in a similar way. As we’ll see shortly, attributes as *irreducible* or *fundamental ways of being* contrasts nicely with how they describe modes as *reducible* or *derivative ways of being*.

All of this converges in Spinoza's claim that all attributes find expression in the one and only substance that can be, which he identifies with God, "a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence" (1d6). This, in few words, is the doctrine of *substance monism*: "Except God, no substance can be or be conceived" (1p14) and "in Nature there is only one substance" (1p14c1).<sup>4</sup> As it becomes clearer later, however, there is not one substance "in Nature" as if the whole of reality were some domain that exceeds and contains God. Rather, the one substance that Spinoza identifies with God is also *identical with Nature*, as he indicates in the celebrated phrase, *Deus sive Natura*—"God, or Nature"<sup>5</sup> (4pref|G 2.206, 4p4d; cf. 1p29s). Put simply, it is by virtue of God's absolute infinitude that his comprehensive being dissolves any distinction between himself and Nature (cf. Ep 35-36).

Finally, in contrast to substance and attribute is a *mode* or *modification*, which Spinoza defines as an ontologically and conceptually dependent being: "By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived" (1d5). In other words, modes are derivative ways of being that presuppose a substance; they are things that depend on, and are explained in terms of, the attributes of substance to which they belong. However, since God is the only substance that modes can be both in and conceived through, Spinoza concludes that "[w]hatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God" (1p15). The *body* of Storm, therefore, is not just a corporeal mode of the attribute of extension, but an expression of the nature of God insofar as God is an extended thing (2p2). And in a parallel

---

<sup>4</sup> For some excellent explanation and discussion of Spinoza's substance monism in general, see Curley (1988, pp. 3-36), Della Rocca (2002), and Newlands (2015). See also Garrett (1990, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Curley italicizes the English term "or" in his translations to indicate when Spinoza uses the Latin term *sive* or *seu*, which usually signifies an equivalence rather than an alternative (see C 1.xv and C 2.610-612).

fashion to extension and the body of Storm, the *mind* of Storm is not just a mental mode of the attribute of thought, but an expression of the nature of God insofar as God is a thinking thing (2p1).

As this indicates, modes like Storm, while utterly dependent on God for being, are not quite *creatures* in the way that traditional theism understands them. While Spinoza occasionally adopts the traditional vocabulary of creation to describe modes' relation to God (see, e.g., KV 1.9), he is unequivocal that God is no omnibenevolent, personal creator who freely wills to produce his modes *ex nihilo* with the good of human beings in view (1app|G 2.77-83).<sup>6</sup> As result of Spinoza's unrelenting anti-anthropocentrism, God is a decidedly impersonal being that produces modes *ex Deo* and for the sake of no one. Modes flow or emanate out of God's being because that is a consequence of his infinitely robust, efficacious nature. Some of this was already suggested with Spinoza's claim that modes are "in" God. But this is remarkably more radical than it may initially suggest. Modes are not "in" God merely in the sense that they are *causally dependent* on God, or even *spatially contained* in him. Rather, modes are "in" God in the sense that they *inhere* as adjectival features or states of the divine substance.<sup>7</sup> In that case, individual things like cats, human beings, and oak trees, *qua* modes, stand in relation to God akin to the feature of *being fuzzy* (etc.) stands to Storm on the more traditional views of substance.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> See also Ep 4|G 4.14; Ep 6|G 4.36; 1p15s|G 2.57; and 4pref|G 2.205-209.

<sup>7</sup> In other words, the nature of the ontological "in" relation that modes stand in to substance consists in more than (i) spatial containment or (ii) causal dependence, but (iii) inherence. I am unaware of contemporary commentators who defend the first option while denying (ii) and/or (iii). While (i) is entailed by (iii) insofar as modes inhere in extension, such a reading is mistaken not least because God has other attributes than extension, in which modes must exist "in" him and in a way that does not reference spatial containment (e.g., modes of thought). Curley is known for defending something like (ii) but denying (iii) and presumably (i) as well (1969, pp. 2-81; 1988, pp. 36-48). However, his reading has been heavily disputed in the literature by defenders of (iii): see, e.g., Carriero (1999), especially Melamed (2013, pp. 3-60; 2018) and Nadler (2008) (cf. Jarrett, 1977). Pierre Bayle (1991, pp. 300-338) appears to be one of the first commentators to articulate (iii), which is arguably the standard interpretation of Spinoza. In my view, the inherence reading of Spinoza, (iii), is correct.

<sup>8</sup> Because this remark reveals a certain interpretation of Spinoza's monism, it may be worth saying something here about the ontological status of substance and its modes as concrete objects or individual "things" in their own right. In some relatively recent debate surrounding the work of Jonathan Schaffer (2012, 2016), a fundamental question about Spinoza's monism has been whether it falls under one of two views. The first is *existence monism*, the view that there exists exactly one concrete thing (the world, as it were). The second is *priority monism*, the view that there exists

Be that as it may, the ontology of modes is also more complex than the isolated example of Storm may let on. Modes fall into one of two kinds and make up a vast causal nexus (1p21-28). On the one hand, colloquial and familiar examples such as Storm are instances of *finite modes*, also referred to by Spinoza as *singular things* (1d2, 2d7). These modes are determinate, limited, and transitory features of substance, conditioned by time and place, and follow from other finite modes:

Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity. (1p28)

Finite modes inhabit a dynamic cosmos filled with other finite modes, all causally interacting with each other, and subject to generation and destruction. Altogether, the totality of such singular things forms an infinite series or system of finite modes.

Then, on the other hand, there are *infinite modes* (1p21-23). These modes are unlimited, universal, and fixed features of substance, unconditioned by time and place, which follow from God's attributes in one of two ways. The so-called *immediate infinite modes* follow from God's attributes (i.e., from God's "absolute nature") immediately and unmodified by any other mode.

---

exactly one concrete thing constituting a fundamental whole (the world), and that this whole is prior to its non-fundamental proper parts—i.e., prior to the concrete things within the whole. Schaffer (2012, p. 38), for instance, takes Spinoza to be a priority monist whereas Della Rocca (2008, pp. 33; 2012) takes Spinoza to be an existence monist. In my view, the suggestion that Spinoza does, or must, fit into either of the above two categories of monism is a mistake. I think Guigon (2012) has convincingly argued that *substance monism* is another category of its own, to which Spinoza rightly belongs, and which best fits him on textual grounds. Substance monism is compatible with the existence of many objects or things, namely, substance and modes. (So, Spinoza is at least committed to denying that thing-hood implies substance-hood.) And while Spinoza affirms the ontological and conceptual priority of substance over its modes, that priority is not one of a whole over its parts. For Spinoza, substance is indivisible and without parts (see 1p12-13,15). What's more, he maintains that the parts of any composite object are prior to their whole (see, e.g., Ep 35/G 4.181.24-26). Nevertheless, in light of the recent revival of "acosmist" readings of Spinoza in response to the old Hegelian problem of how a real diversity of finite things and change can follow from an indivisible, simple substance, there may be some philosophical pressure on Spinoza toward existence monism. On this, see the volume, *Spinoza and German Idealism*, edited by Förster and Melamed (2012), along with Melamed (2012), Nadler (2012), and Yenter (2014).



The so-called *mediate infinite modes*, however, follow from God's attributes mediately and modified by a preceding mode (presumably the immediate infinite modes). Thus, the infinite modes form a causal system or series of modes as well.<sup>9</sup> While such modes are bound to strike us as peculiar and highly obscure,<sup>10</sup> it has become increasingly common among expositors of Spinoza to describe one or both of the infinite modes as standing to finite modes just as the laws of nature govern the unfolding of particular events.

### **Is Spinoza a Necessitarian?**

With the categories just explained, we may finally tally up what there is in Spinoza's ontology: God—the sole substance with all attributes—the infinite modes, and the finite modes. This puts us in a position to now ask whether the things that exist in Spinoza's ontology are necessary, in order to determine his commitment to necessitarianism.

God is unequivocally necessary and cannot be otherwise according to Spinoza: “God, or a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists” (1p11).<sup>11</sup> The same appears true of the infinite modes: “Every mode which exists necessarily and is infinite has necessarily had to follow either from the absolute nature of some attribute of God, or from some attribute, modified by a modification which exists necessarily and is infinite” (1p23). It is also tempting to think that Spinoza says as much of the finite modes

---

<sup>9</sup> Bennett (1984, p. 113) and other commentators maintain a common view that the series of infinite modes that follows from God is finite, consisting of one immediate infinite mode and one mediate infinite mode (or perhaps one mode of each per attribute). While this is a very tempting and even appealing reading, Melamed (2013, pp. 119-120) has pointed out that the view is at odds with Spinoza's commitments on the matter. At 1p36, Spinoza writes that “[nothing] exists from whose nature some effect does not follow.” And at 1p22, Spinoza implies that only something infinite can follow from something infinite. Putting these two claims together, the result is that for every infinite mode, another (presumably mediate) infinite mode must follow as an effect. Spinoza thus seems committed to an infinite cascading series of infinite modes, not a finite series of infinite modes.

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Leibniz says as much while lamenting that Spinoza never provides an example of the infinite modes in the *Ethics* (L 202).

<sup>11</sup> On Spinoza's proofs for God's existence, see Garrett (1979) and Lin (2007). See also Jarrett (2009, pp. 133-139).

on the basis of 1p28, already quoted at length above: “Every singular thing, *or* any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause...” (1p28). It is tempting to read this passage as affirming the necessity of finite modes because finite modes are features or effects that owe their existence to determinate causes—which bear a necessary connection to their effects: “From a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow” (1a3).<sup>12</sup> So, the finite modes of the infinite causal series also appear necessary and incapable of being otherwise. In that case, it would appear that Spinoza *is* a necessitarian.

### ***Determinism vs. Necessitarianism***

Notwithstanding the conclusion of the previous section, settling Spinoza’s commitment to necessitarianism is not so simple. There is indeed no question about the necessity of God himself, and there is little if any question about the necessity of the infinite modes.<sup>13</sup> There is also no question about the necessity of the finite modes *given* their respective causes in the series. But it would be a mistake to think this last concession is enough to confirm Spinoza’s commitment to necessitarianism. For even if each finite mode follows its cause in the series necessarily, that doesn’t tell us that each finite mode is necessary all-things-considered, nor that their given causal antecedents are necessary all-things-considered.

---

<sup>12</sup> Related to 1a3, Spinoza’s subsequent axiom may be worth noting: “The knowledge [*cognitio*] of an effect depends on, and involves [*involvit*], the knowledge of its cause” (1a4). This axiom likewise indicates a necessary connection between cause and effect, but goes even further by suggesting that a rational conception of nature in some way tracks or corresponds to the necessary connections between causes and effects. Spinoza’s notion of *involvement* (cited in 1a4) bears this out: “For to say that A must involve [*involvere*] the concept of B is the same as to say that A cannot be conceived without B” (2p49d) (cf. 1p11d2, 2d2, and 2p7). In that case, it is as impossible to conceive of an effect without its cause as it is for there to be some effect which fails to follow from its cause.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Curley and Walski (1999, pp. 248-249) on the necessity of the infinite modes.

To see this, consider the following simple schematization of a series  $S$ , with a partial snapshot of the finite modes that are its members ( $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$ ), where “ $\rightarrow$ ” designates the direction of the cause-effect relation from left to right:

$$S = \{ \dots x \rightarrow y \rightarrow z \dots \}.$$

Provided that  $z$  is necessary *given*  $y$ , and that  $y$  is necessary *given*  $x$ , all that is settled about  $S$  is that  $y$  and  $z$  are causally inevitable on the condition that  $z$  is *given*; but it is not settled that  $y$  and  $z$  are absolutely or metaphysically necessary. For if  $x$  is contingently given—if  $x$  could be otherwise—then  $y$  and  $z$  are also contingently given—and thereby could be otherwise—despite following as a necessary consequence of  $x$ .<sup>14</sup> If the causal antecedents of a finite mode could be otherwise in this way, Spinoza’s view of the necessity of finite modes would amount to little more than a kind of *determinism*, the view that the state of the world at any moment is an inevitable consequence of the conjunction of

(a) prior states of the world

and

(b) the laws of nature.

In more Spinozistic terminology, finite modes would only inevitably follow from

(a) preceding finite modes in the causal series

together with

(b) some infinite mode.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Spinoza seems to recognize something like this point when he writes: “if the contingent thing is contingent because its cause is contingent [with respect to its existence], then that cause must also be contingent because the cause that produced it is also contingent [with respect to its existence,] and so on, to infinity” (KV 6.3|G 1.41) (cf. Koistinen 2003, pp. 289-291).

<sup>15</sup> I say “*some* infinite mode” because there is dispute over how laws relate to the immediate and mediate infinite modes, let alone the finite modes. For some discussion of this, see chapter 2.

The problem this poses for discerning Spinoza's commitment to necessitarianism is that determinism—while compatible with a rejection of contingency—does not by itself guarantee the metaphysical necessity of each finite mode in the causal series. To have this guarantee, both (a) and (b) would have to be metaphysically necessary.

Indeed, even if—as Spinoza maintains—the members of a series like *S* are both infinite in number and deterministically ordered (so that each member is inevitable given its preceding member in the sequence), this would not settle the all-things-considered modal status of *x*, *y*, and *z*. For it is still a question whether *S as a whole* is contingently given. And if contingently given, there could be an alternative, deterministic series *T* (or perhaps even no series at all) that obtains instead of *S*, since determinism is perfectly consistent with many possible worlds in which alternative series of finite modes exist.

Of course, Spinoza also maintains the metaphysical necessity of the laws of nature (see TTP 6). But this does little to ameliorate the problem just stated. While a form of determinism that affirms the absolute necessity of the laws is closer to necessitarianism than most, it *still* leaves room for finite modes to be otherwise: for if *z* is inevitable given the conjunction of *y* and the metaphysically necessary laws of nature, it remains unsettled whether *y* itself is contingently given, or even whether *S as a whole* is contingently given. To be sure, there would be fewer possible worlds by virtue that there would be none in which the laws of nature could be otherwise. Nevertheless, there would be many possible worlds housing alternative series of finite modes that are compatible with those same laws.

So, determining whether Spinoza is committed to necessitarianism, on at least any surface-level reading, is far from straightforward. This is not to mention many more contentious and knotty

issues than I have had the space to introduce above, all of which have preoccupied commentators of Spinoza for at least a half-century.

### *Semi-necessitarianism vs. Necessitarianism*

For reasons like those just noted, commentators of Spinoza are generally divided into two camps on the question of his necessitarianism.<sup>16</sup> According to one camp, the difficulty associated with determining Spinoza's commitment to necessitarianism is basically indicative of the extent to which he takes finite modes to be necessary. And that is why he is committed to *some* contingency in his metaphysics despite initial appearances to the contrary. We may refer to this reading of Spinoza as *the semi-necessitarian interpretation*. God and the infinite modes are absolutely or metaphysically necessary, but the deterministic series of finite modes as a whole—and its individual members by extension—are contingent.<sup>17</sup> This reading's most influential defense was formulated by Edwin Curley in his landmark book, *Spinoza's Metaphysics* (1969, pp. 82-117; cf. 1988, pp. 48-50), and later developed in more detail together with Gregory Walski (Curley & Walski, 1999).<sup>18</sup>

By contrast, the opposing camp maintains that Spinoza is committed to the denial of contingency *tout court*: absolutely nothing could be otherwise than it is—not God, not the infinite modes, and not the deterministic series of finite modes as a whole, including its individual members.<sup>19</sup> Commentators of this persuasion adhere to what we may simply refer to as *the*

---

<sup>16</sup> For two excellent overviews of the debate, see Martin (2010, pp. 25-34) and Newlands (2013).

<sup>17</sup> I believe the term “semi-necessitarianism” is apt to distinguish the view from mere determinism as defined above. While both determinism and semi-necessitarianism are consistent with the contingency of the entire series of finite modes, determinism doesn't stake a claim on the metaphysical necessity of the laws of nature. So, semi-necessitarianism differs from determinism at least insofar as it affirms the metaphysical necessity of the laws.

<sup>18</sup> Another notable contribution to this reading has been made more recently by Martin (2010).

<sup>19</sup> The two competing interpretations are commonly referred to in the literature as *moderate necessitarianism* and *strict necessitarianism*, respectively. I find these terms unhelpful, and so I have opted to call them by different names.

*necessitarian interpretation* as I described it in the opening of this Spinoza & **Necessitarianism**.<sup>20</sup>

The most influential defense of this reading has been formulated by Don Garrett (1999a), who built upon some of the earlier work of Jonathan Bennett (1984, pp. 111-124).<sup>21</sup>

With the competing interpretations juxtaposed in this way, we can see that there is basic agreement among commentators on the modal status of God and the infinite modes, and that their disagreement boils down to the modal status of finite modes. However, there is also a question of necessitarianism's philosophical plausibility as a metaphysical view, which is more relevant to the interpretive debate than few have recognized. While this question has not received much explicit attention in Spinoza studies, there seems to be no lack of agreement on its answer: *necessitarianism is wildly untenable*. But perhaps this goes without saying for a view so offensive to common sense and intuition. After all, it seems to imply that no one could fail to act otherwise than they do, any more than the sum of the angles of a triangle could fail to be 180°. In fact, some semi-necessitarian commentators take this apparent absurdity to be the primary reason (or at least, one of the most compelling reasons) to prefer their reading of Spinoza over the necessitarian reading, as we will soon see.

### **The Principal Aim of this Project**

This dissertation is both an interpretive and philosophical defense of Spinoza's commitment to necessitarianism. I maintain not only that the necessitarian interpretation of Spinoza is more

---

<sup>20</sup> For other important contributions to this reading, see Carriero (1991), Koistinen (1998; 2003), and Huenemann (1999). See also Garrett (2018a), Griffin (2008), Jarrett (2009), and Huenemann (2018).

<sup>21</sup> Of course, there are other interpretations that could be added to the debate. Bennett (1984, pp. 111-119; 1996, pp. 74-76), for example, has voiced the view that Spinoza is committed to both necessitarianism and its denial, whereas Delahunty (1985, pp. 155-165) believes that Spinoza is simply not clear enough to commit himself to either necessitarianism or its denial. For the purposes of this dissertation, I presume that these readings are mistaken. From what I can tell, the debate subsequent to the publications of Garrett (1999a) and Curley and Walski (1999) has largely distilled into the semi-necessitarian and necessitarian readings. On the coherence of Spinoza's necessitarianism, also see Koistinen (1998) and Mason (1986).

plausible than the semi-necessitarian interpretation on textual grounds, but that Spinoza's necessitarianism is a serviceable philosophical view whose tenability has been almost entirely overlooked and perfunctorily rejected. The principal basis upon which I build this defense is Spinoza's rich and fascinating view of essences—what I simply refer to as his *essentialism*. Spinoza's essentialism forms the bedrock of his metaphysics and is significant not least because it underlies and informs doctrines like his necessitarianism. Spinoza's essentialism supplies resources to answer not only interpretive problems associated with necessitarianism, but also philosophical challenges to the plausibility of necessitarianism.

But before I outline the chapters of this dissertation, I want to explain why I believe a defense of necessitarianism on Spinoza's behalf is worth serious consideration.

### **Why Defend Spinoza's Necessitarianism?**

#### **Getting Past the Impasse**

For some time now, the debate between semi-necessitarian and necessitarian commentators has remained at a stalemate, as both parties have respectively laid claim to formidable interpretive arguments and supporting textual evidence. While it is my view that the interpretive arguments and textual evidence favors the necessitarian reading of Spinoza, I suspect that additional considerations will be needed to get past the current impasse. In particular, I think that some progress can be made via philosophical considerations supplementing the interpretive and textual ones.

Initially, however, philosophical considerations might seem to speak *against* the interpretation that I wish to defend. This is because Spinoza's necessitarianism, as a metaphysical view, is liable to seem absurd. As Steven Nadler (2006) has pointed out: "The fear is that with

necessitarianism comes the loss of a number of crucial distinctions – between necessary and contingent truths, between essential and accidental properties of things – and an inability to account for such important conceptual tools as counterfactuals” (p. 107n22). By contrast, semi-necessitarianism as a metaphysical view does not involve such worries on account that it preserves the contingency of finite things.

Indeed, this contrastive observation between the two readings points to one of the purportedly most persuasive reasons to adopt the semi-necessitarian interpretation (a reason that might even be considered to hold if, on balance, the necessitarian interpretation of Spinoza has some exegetical advantages in its favor). As Curley and Walski (1999) explain:

We defend the view that Spinoza is committed to allowing for the existence of a plurality of possible worlds... We think this ought to be the default interpretation of Spinoza. It is, as Bennett says “tremendously implausible” that this is the only possible world. We operate on the methodological principle that views which are tremendously implausible should not be attributed to the great, dead philosophers without pretty strong textual evidence. (p. 242)<sup>22</sup>

In other words, an important motivating factor of the semi-necessitarian reading is born out of *charity* to the great philosopher that Spinoza is. By contrast, the necessitarian interpretation presumably fails to be charitable to Spinoza because necessitarianism itself is so manifestly ridiculous as to indicate philosophical incompetence on the part of anyone who would hold it. In effect, Spinoza needs to be saved from being attributed such a ludicrous position if his texts allow it.

Contrary to the bleak picture all of this may seem to paint for a project like mine, I believe that my defense of Spinoza’s necessitarianism holds promise as a way of getting past the current interpretive impasse. For if, as I believe, I can show that Spinoza’s wholesale rejection of contingency is *not* tremendously implausible—that it does *not* generate the philosophical costs

---

<sup>22</sup> For some debate over this methodology, see Curley (2019) and Melamed (2013a).



thought to accompany it—my defense would effectively undercut the application of the methodological principle motivating the semi-necessitarian reading.<sup>23</sup> In addition to my interpretive arguments, then, my defense would provide supplementary philosophical reason to *a fortiori* favor the necessitarian interpretation of Spinoza.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Principle of Sufficient Reason**

A defense of Spinoza's necessitarianism may also have bearing beyond Spinoza studies. Over the last few decades, necessitarianism has received a surprising amount of negative attention in contemporary metaphysics, and particularly in connection with the recent revival of work on the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). In one of its many classic formulations, the PSR states that there is a sufficient reason or adequate cause for each thing, accounting for why it is so and not otherwise.<sup>25</sup> While the PSR has been more often associated with the metaphysical rationalism of Leibniz (who coined the principle), this association has been shifting to Spinoza due to the recent explosion of research into his metaphysical rationalism and the apparent way he structures his philosophy around the PSR (see, e.g., Della Rocca, 2008; Goldstein, 2012; and Lin, 2018).<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> This of course assumes that the methodological principle—at least as Curley and Walski take it—is sound to begin with. While I am inclined to think it is unsound in this instance (see Melamed, 2013a), I am also willing to grant it for the sake of argument.

<sup>24</sup> A related reason why a defense of Spinoza's necessitarianism is worth consideration is because it has implications for Spinoza's relevance. As I indicated above, necessitarianism is the central tenet of Spinoza's highly systematic *Ethics*. This is arguably confirmed in his chief doctrines. (See, e.g., 2p44-47, 2p49s|G 2.135-136, 4app1-32 (esp. 4-7 and 32), 5pp1-20. See also Huenemann (2018), Garrett (1999a, pp. 125-126; 2018b, pp. 190-194), and chapter 4 of this dissertation, §4.8.) But if necessitarianism really is absurd—and if, as I believe, Spinoza held such a view—the relevance of his doctrines that presuppose necessitarianism would be greatly diminished. While Spinoza's philosophy may always be *historically* significant, readers who look to thinkers of the past for at least *tenable* philosophical insights into contemporary issues would have good reason to look elsewhere than Spinoza. My defense might then be considered an indirect defense of Spinoza's relevance.

<sup>25</sup> The version given above is a *de re* form of the PSR, though it is more common in contemporary discussions to formulate the PSR in a *de dicto* form—for example, as the principle that every true proposition *p* has a sufficient explanation *q*, whereby *q* entails *p* if *q* sufficiently explains *p*.

<sup>26</sup> For Leibniz's PSR, see, e.g., *Monadology*, §32 (AG 217). For Spinoza's PSR, see, e.g., 1p11d2. For some discussion of Spinoza's PSR in the present dissertation, see chapters 1 and 3.

One consensus clearly emerges from the literature on the PSR: as intuitively attractive as the principle might seem on its face, the PSR is *necessarily false*, at least in its classical formulations. The most well-known arguments for this are made by Peter van Inwagen (1983, pp. 202-203) and Bennett (1984, pp. 114-116), who both argue that the PSR leads to the indefensible Spinozistic conclusion of necessitarianism.<sup>27</sup> Today, this implication is often hailed as not only a *reductio* of the PSR, but as *the chief objection* to the principle (see Lin, 2012; and Dasgupta, 2016). However, if my defense is successful in showing that Spinoza's necessitarianism is *not* untenable, then this would open up a path by which the consensus on the PSR may be challenged as well. My defense would show that the cost of necessitarianism, even if implied by the PSR, may not be as high as philosophers have assumed.

### **A Gap in Spinoza Studies**

Finally, I think that my defense will fill a gap in Spinoza studies with import for contemporary philosophy. To my knowledge, publications explicitly attempting to rebut the philosophical untenability of Spinoza's necessitarianism are almost nonexistent.<sup>28</sup> So, there is territory to be

---

<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it seems to be a standard expectation that contemporary defenders of weaker formulations of the PSR explain how they address the threat of necessitarianism if they hope for a serious hearing. See, e.g., Alexander (2008), Della Rocca (2003, 2010), Gale and Pruss (1999), Lin (2012, 2018), O'Connor (2008, pp. 65-85; 2014), Pruss (2006, 2009, 2011, pp. 228-234), and Rowe (1998, pp. xiv-xvii, 103-114).

<sup>28</sup> While Don Garrett (1999a), for example, defends the coherence of Spinoza's necessitarianism on interpretive grounds, its philosophical import is limited (but also see Garrett, 2018). Michael Griffin (2008) attempts to defend Spinoza on interpretive and some philosophical grounds. But as Griffin admits, he has some serious reservations about the later (so, the extent to which Griffin defends the tenability of Spinoza's necessitarianism is unclear). On both textual and philosophical grounds, Perler (2011) attempts to defend Spinoza's necessitarianism as well; but as with Garrett's defense, the philosophical import of Perler's defense is limited. Dasgupta (2016) attempts to formulate a broad philosophical defense of necessitarianism on contemporary grounds that is very much in the spirit of Spinoza. However, Dasgupta's defense is almost entirely unconcerned with the interpretive dispute and textual details connected to Spinoza's necessitarianism in particular. While my defense in the dissertation overlaps with the work of the aforementioned philosophers, it also differs in important respects. A principal difference lies in the extent to which I further develop the details of Spinoza's views. And where Dasgupta's defense remains a work of contemporary metaphysics, my dissertation is an attempt to contribute to Spinoza studies in way that has import for a defense of Spinoza's necessitarianism on contemporary metaphysical grounds. In short, I attempt to amass the resources for a fuller textually supported philosophical defense of Spinoza's necessitarianism. The culmination of this is chapter 5.

navigated in the literature. While I do not consider this dissertation to be a complete defense of Spinoza's necessitarianism, I believe that it is a step in that direction.

### **A Roadmap of the Chapters**

I lay the groundwork for my defense in **chapter 1** by explaining Spinoza's essentialism. I begin by setting up some historical background of Spinoza's conception of essences with a selective survey of notable essentialist predecessors: Aristotle, Aquinas, Suarez, and Descartes. This serves to not just contextualize Spinoza's thought, but inform many of the otherwise puzzling aspects of his view. As I develop Spinoza's essentialism, two central features of my interpretation emerge. The first is that Spinoza's essentialism is continuous with Aristotelian-scholastic thought insofar as it consists in a distinction between *essence*, *property* (i.e., *proprium*), and *accident*. But more than this, I believe that the distinction is an illuminating heuristic with significant potential to explain the inner workings of Spinoza's system. While other commentators also recognize the tripartite distinction in Spinoza's thought, I believe that it can be seen as playing a much more pervasive role than is usually afforded to it. The second central feature of my interpretation falls out of my reading that Spinoza systematically glosses the essences of things in both conceptual and dynamic terms, which I refer to as *conceptual essentialism* and *dynamic essentialism*, respectively. The former is specific to God's attribute of thought and corresponds to Spinoza's characterization of things' essences and relata in explanatory and logical terms, whereas the latter is a trans-attribute gloss that corresponds to his characterization of things' essences and relata in terms of efficient causal power. Ultimately, I argue that dynamic essentialism characterizes the ground floor of Spinoza's metaphysics across God's attributes, also making efficient causation the fundamental relation for Spinoza. I explain that one consequence of all this with later bearing on

Spinoza's necessitarianism is his *modal reductionism*, according to which the *necessity* in things is ultimately to be explained in terms of his essentialism.

In **chapter 2**, I turn to Spinoza's view of laws of nature. To explain what laws of nature are, I make the case for what I call *the essentialist interpretation of laws*. Continuous with the program of the previous chapter, I maintain that laws of nature are not just grounded in things' essences but describe the properties and accidents that follow from the essences of things. I then throw additional light on Spinoza's view of laws by turning to the question of how they are situated in his overall metaphysics. The answer, I believe, is that laws of nature are eternal truths contained in God's immediate infinite mode. My case for this serves multiple purposes. It not only clarifies Spinoza's conception of law but introduces and contextualizes various Spinozistic tenets that will flow into later chapters of the dissertation. More than this, however, my case ultimately provides the materials to defend Spinoza's necessitarianism on both interpretive and philosophical grounds. While I reserve the latter for chapter 5, I conclude chapter 2 by arguing that the essentialist interpretation of laws blocks an important consideration often cited in support of the semi-necessitarian reading, namely, that the basis of the laws itself is not sufficient to give rise to the series of finite modes as a whole.

In **chapter 3**, I explain Spinoza's views on modality. While it may initially seem that there is not much to explain for a philosopher committed to the coextension of necessity, possibility, and actuality, I show that Spinoza's modal metaphysics is remarkably nuanced when unpacked in light of his essentialism. My interpretation turns particularly on the thesis that the metaphysical modalities are bifurcated along lines of Spinoza's distinction between essence and existence. One of the most significant results of this is that it effectively provides Spinoza with a double notion of possibility: possibility *with respect to essence* and possibility *with respect to existence*. The

distinction is especially significant because, as I argue, Spinoza does not think that everything possible with respect to essence is also possible with respect to existence (i.e., there are essences that are never instantiated). This result, however, threatens the necessitarian pedigree of my reading with the problem of how Spinoza can be a genuine necessitarian unless all possibilities with respect to essence come to exist at some time or other. If not, my concession of such possibilities is liable to look suspiciously like the admission of contingency into Spinoza's metaphysics, and thus that my reading is really a tacit form of semi-necessitarianism. But I argue that Spinoza remains a *bona fide* necessitarian on my reading, and that the alleged threat of contingency fails to get traction because it conflates the two notions of possibility that my reading separates. I conclude by completing the modal reductionism I began in chapter 1, according to which necessity, impossibility, and possibility are ultimately explained in terms of Spinoza's essentialism.

In **chapter 4**, I take up a keystone proposition of the *Ethics* that is not just considered crucial for Spinoza's overall project, but central in the debate over his commitment to necessitarianism—namely, 1p16: “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways [*modis*]”.<sup>29</sup> The proposition is important for the interpretive dispute because (among other things) it appears to furnish a powerful argument for the metaphysical necessity of the finite modes and, by extension, a powerful reason to favor the necessitarian reading over the semi-necessitarian reading. In this chapter, I formulate such an argument. However, the precise meaning and implications of 1p16 have been the subject of much controversy, and the success of necessitarian arguments based on 1p16 seem to largely turn on whether associated difficulties with the text can be resolved—each potentially blocking the

---

<sup>29</sup> I've slightly modified Curley's original translation of *modis* (“modes”) as “ways”.

metaphysical necessity of finite modes. To defend my argument that 1p16 commits Spinoza to necessitarianism, I first develop an interpretation of 1p16 in light of his essentialism, which then places me in a position to take on the difficulties associated with 1p16. To shore up my overall case, I address some anticipated concerns with my essentialist interpretation of 1p16, and then conclude the chapter with an argument that semi-necessitarianism is in fact incapable of sustaining the weight of at least one of Spinoza's ethical doctrines.

Finally, in **chapter 5**, I ultimately construct a philosophical defense of Spinoza informed by the preceding chapters. As I've already indicated, there is a consensus among commentators that Spinoza's necessitarianism is wildly untenable. But this raises the question of justification. *On what grounds is necessitarianism so allegedly absurd?* Interestingly, there is remarkably little to be found by way of an explicit answer to this question, let alone one that isn't stingy on details or brisk in its engagement with Spinoza. With what little I have to go on, I attempt to develop the best available case for the consensus view, which I refer to as *the indispensability argument for contingency*. The basic idea in terms suggested by Bennett (1984, p. 114) is that necessitarianism is absurd because contingency is indispensable to doing serious philosophy. For without contingency, one cannot make distinctions, for example, between essential and accidental features, nomological and accidental generalizations, or counterpossible and counterfactual conditionals. Despite the bleak picture this paints for Spinoza, I show that the resources available to him—supplied by the foregoing chapters—are sufficient to effectively rebut the indispensability argument. Ultimately, it is Spinoza's essentialism that affords him the means to do serious philosophy while also rejecting contingency. The result is that the consensus on the philosophical untenability of Spinoza's necessitarianism is unjustified.

# CHAPTER 1. THE CAUSAL STRUCTURE OF SPINOZA'S ESSENTIALISM

## 1.1 Essentialism?

By *essentialism* I understand the view that things possess some of their features *essentially*,<sup>30</sup> or simply that things have an *essence* or *nature*.<sup>31</sup> So characterized, the opening definitions of the *Ethics* reveal that Spinoza is an essentialist. Indeed, a look at Spinoza's demonstrations shows that essence underlies his most important doctrines such as substance monism (1p14), necessitarianism (1p29, 1p33), intuitive knowledge (2p40s2), the *conatus* (3p4-6), and epistemic eudaimonism, according to which our highest blessedness consists in knowing the essence of God and what follows from his essence (2pref|G 2.84, 4app4).<sup>32</sup> In fact, essence is so pervasive in the *Ethics* that one would be hard pressed to find even a single page that does not refer explicitly to the nature of some object.

Arguably, then, not only is Spinoza's essentialism vital to his philosophical project, but his project "can neither be nor be conceived without" his essentialism, as he might put it (2d2). To that end, the aim of the present chapter is to explain Spinoza's essentialism, and specifically those aspects of the view that will, in later chapters, have bearing on Spinoza's necessitarianism and the availability of responses to objections to his necessitarianism. I begin §1.2 by surveying essentialist threads of thought in some historical predecessors of Spinoza: Aristotle, Aquinas, Suarez, and Descartes. This background sets up and informs §1.3, in which I explain Spinoza's rich

---

<sup>30</sup> As a general characterization, specifics need not concern us, or at least not yet (e.g., whether or not such essences are transcendent or immanent, universal or particular, real or nominal, etc.). My general characterization passes over an additional constraint sometimes included in the definition of essentialism: that things have accidents in addition to their essences. However, this additional constraint seems too narrow to capture all views that recognize essences. For example, there are so-called "maximal essentialists" who take every feature of a thing to be essential to it (see Robertson & Atkins, 2016, §3). Perhaps Leibniz would be an example (see, e.g., AG 40-42).

<sup>31</sup> The terms "essence" and "nature" are interchangeable for Spinoza. See, e.g., 1d1 and 1p16d.

<sup>32</sup> On essence and eudaimonism, also see 1app|G 2.77, 5p20s|G 2.294, and 5p42. Cf. TTP 4.10-12|G 3.59-60.

essentialism but also highlight where it meets the historical threads of the previous section. And then finally, in §1.4, I explain an implication of Spinoza's essentialism based on the foregoing sections and argue that essence is prior to modality.

## 1.2 Some Background of Spinoza's Essentialism

Despite Spinoza's well-known departures from the accepted philosophical views of his day, his essentialism shares a good deal in common with that of his Aristotelian, scholastic, and Cartesian predecessors.<sup>33</sup> So before explaining Spinoza's essentialism, it will be helpful to survey some of his precursors. Doing so lends credence to the view that there was an entrenched essentialist tradition leading up through the early modern period with which Spinoza would be familiar. I believe that such a survey also informs Spinoza's own essentialism, thus paving the way for a deeper understanding of his metaphysics in general and his necessitarianism in particular.

In what follows, I first sketch what I take to be the most philosophically relevant threads of essentialism found in Aristotle's thought (§1.2.1). This is his tripartite distinction between *essence*, *property* (or *proprium*), and *accident*. I then turn to show that various developments of the distinction can be found in the scholastic thought of Aquinas and Suarez (§1.2.2), as well as in the early modern thought of Descartes (§1.2.3).

### 1.2.1 Aristotle

For Aristotle, causation informs his essentialism. It will thus prove useful to begin a survey of Aristotle's essentialism with some discussion of how he understands causation. The notion of a

---

<sup>33</sup> This has become widely recognized in Spinoza scholarship. See Carriero (1991; 1999), Curley (1969, pp. 108-113), Garrett (1999a, pp. 113-114; 1999b, pp. 322-323; 2002, pp. 137-138ff), Jarrett (1977), Martin (2008a; 2008b, pp. 5-38), Melamed (2013b, pp. 12-14, 50-51; 2018), Parkinson (1990), Viljanen (2008; 2009; 2011, pp. 33-53), and Wolfson (1934, vol. 1, pp. 61-78).



cause as employed by Aristotle is remarkably broader and richer than the rather narrow and sparse notion that may come to mind post David Hume. The post-Humean notion of a cause may conjure up images of, say, the consequent motion of a billiard ball  $x$  following its collision with billiard ball  $y$ . But for Aristotle, this illustration only captures *one* kind of cause. The complete account of a thing  $x$  should include *four* kinds of cause, each of which explains or grounds a different aspect of  $x$ , namely: (i) what changed or initiated a state of  $x$ , (ii) what  $x$  is made of, (iii) what  $x$  is for, and (iv) what  $x$  is (*Met* 5.2|1013a24-1013b4; also see *Phys* 2.3|194b16-34).

The first of these Aristotelian causes—instanced in the above billiard ball example—is (i) *the efficient cause*, which initiates or produces change, or brings something about from potentiality to actuality: “That from which the change or the freedom from change begins, e.g. the man who has deliberated is a cause, and the father a cause of the child, and in general the maker a cause of the thing made and the change-producing of the changing” (*ibid.*). (ii) *The material cause* is the recipient matter or passive stuff out of which a thing is made: “that from which (as immanent material) a thing comes into being, e.g. the bronze of the statue and the silver of the saucer” (*ibid.*). (iii) *The final cause* is the *telos*, purpose, or goal of some thing or activity: “The end, i.e. that for the sake of which a thing is, e.g. health is the cause of walking” (*ibid.*). Lastly—and perhaps most importantly for what is to follow below—there is (iv) *the formal cause* of a thing: its “form or pattern... (e.g. the ratio 2:1 and number in general are causes of the octave)” (*ibid.*). This form or pattern is the *essence* of a thing, “what it is said to be in virtue of itself”, or simply “what something is” (*Met* 7.4|1029b13-14, 1030a2-3). The essence of a thing is its deepest structural features that not only actively unify and make it the kind of thing that it is but individuates it from other kinds of thing. An intimately related idea to this is “the formula of the essence”—what Aristotle elsewhere refers to as its *definition*—which serves as an account that accurately captures and

explains the essence (*Met* 7.5|1031a13-14).<sup>34</sup> This sort of definition is neither stipulative nor semantic, but rather *genetic*. Akin to a blueprint that explains the requirements for constructing a bridge, or a detailed recipe for a cake, the definition of a thing captures and explains its essence by stating the requirements for its generation.

To illustrate all four causes (in no particular order) with a single example, *the material cause* of Hillary Clinton is flesh and bone. Yet, what makes Clinton the kind of thing that she intrinsically is must be something else in addition to the matter out of which she is composed, especially since other things are also composed of flesh and bone. This “something else” is Clinton’s *formal cause*: the particular way in which her matter is organized or structured according to her form or essence. Concomitantly, the definition of what Clinton is *qua* human being would be *a rational animal*. This captures the most central characteristics of Clinton by specifying what is required to bring her into being; and in doing so, it specifies what it is in virtue of which Clinton is the kind of thing that she is—her rational animality—which distinguishes her from other kinds of things that aren’t characteristically rational and animal. In this way we can also see that, for Aristotle, Clinton is a substantial compound of matter and form working together: her matter is the passive recipient of her form, the active principle of organization. Clinton’s parents are her *efficient cause*, at least insofar as they initially brought her into existence. And lastly, *the final cause* of Clinton—her natural end or purpose—consists in rational activity above all else, which accords with her most distinctive defining features *qua* human being (see *EN* 1.7|1097b-1098b).

---

<sup>34</sup> See also *APO* 2.10|93b29 (cf. *Top* 1.5|101b6-7; *APO* 2.2|89b23-90a34). More exactly, Aristotle takes a definition to capture the essence of *x* and individuate *x* as a species through both its *genus* (a broad kind under which *x* falls), e.g., *triangle*, and its *difference* (a feature of *x*, or narrow kind under which *x* falls, that uniquely distinguishes *x* from other things in the same genus), e.g., *isosceles* (*APO* 2.13) (cf. Aquinas, ST 1q3a5). For my purposes, the details of Aristotle’s theory of definition need not concern us above.

In addition to the *essential* features that define things, Aristotle tells us that they have *non-essential* features as well, some of which are nonetheless intimately related to their essences:

Since of what is proper to anything part signifies its essence, while part does not, let us divide the proper into both the aforesaid parts, and call that part which indicates the essence a definition, while of the remainder let us adopt the terminology which is generally current about these things, and speak of it as a property. (*Top* 1.4|101b19-23)

This is to say that not every feature “proper” to a thing (those inseparable and necessary features of a thing) constitutes its essence. Some such features lie outside the thing’s essence but are nevertheless dependent on and unique to all members of its kind; such features are therefore not included in the thing’s definition but are nonetheless entirely explained by it. This sort of feature, according to Aristotle, is a *property* (also known as, perhaps confusingly, an *essential attribute*, *essential property*, *necessary property*, *proprium*, *proper accident*, or *necessary accident*). “A property is something which does not indicate the essence of a thing, but yet belongs to that thing alone, and is predicated convertibly of it” (*Top* 1.5|102a18-30).

In Aristotle’s view, then, it is property of Barack Obama that he is *risible* (capable of laughter at humor). Risibility is a necessary and unique property of Obama and generally of all and only human beings (i.e.,  $x$  is human just in case  $x$  is risible). But risibility doesn’t constitute what it is for Obama to be human. The feature isn’t deep enough to qualify as essential because it entirely presupposes and is formally caused by (and is thus grounded in or explained by) deeper features of Obama, namely, his human essence, and in particular his *animal* capacity for vocalizing laughter together with his *rational* capacity for understanding the punch line of a joke.

The essence-property distinction, however, is not limited to what we might think of as metaphysically “concrete” things (animals, plants, rocks, etc.). It is a noteworthy aspect of Aristotle’s essentialism—one that continued through the early modern period (see Viljanen, 2011, p. 43)—that even “abstract” geometrical objects have formally caused properties in virtue of their

essences (*APo* 1.4-5|73a21-74b4; *PA* 1.3|643a28-31). For example, it's a property of triangles that *the sum of their interior angles equals two right angles*. This feature not only is necessary and unique to triangles but is explained by the core characteristics that determine their essence, as captured in their definition—say, the triangle's *being a closed, rectilinear, three-sided figure*.

As the last two examples suggest, the essence of a thing consists in the whole of its *fundamental* features, whereas the properties are its *derivative* features. Relative to the thing itself, its fundamental features are those that are *not* explained by and dependent on any deeper feature of the thing, whereas its derivative features *are* explained by and dependent on some deeper feature (or features) of the thing (see Gorman, 2005, pp. 284ff).<sup>35</sup> Thus, a “property” in the Aristotelian sense of the term is far narrower than the sense prevalent in contemporary philosophy that refers to virtually *any* feature or predicate of a thing. In the contemporary sense, a necessary and unique feature of a thing is no more a property than those that it may have contingently and in common with other kinds of things. So, to avoid confusion between these two senses of “property”, I'm making two stipulations at this juncture. First, the term “property” in subsequent quotations should be understood in the Aristotelian sense unless otherwise noted; and second, I will henceforth refer to the Aristotelian term “property” as “*propria*” (singular: “*proprium*”), which is also customary in the Latin tradition.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> It's perhaps worth emphasizing that fundamentality here is *relativized* to the features of *x*. Thus, by *fundamental*, I do not mean that such features of *x* must be *absolute*, as in metaphysically primitive or unexplained by anything deeper than (and in some sense external to) *x*'s fundamental features. However, the fundamental features of *x* might also be absolute depending on what *x* is. When we get to Spinoza, if *x* is a *mode* of substance conceived under the attribute of *extension* (say), then *x*'s essence will be fundamental relative to itself but derivative relative to extension, since *x* is explained in terms of a deeper (and in some sense external) relation to extension. But if *x* is substance conceived under the attribute of extension, the fundamental feature in question will be fundamental in both the relative and absolute sense.

<sup>36</sup> The Latin term “*proprietates*” (singular: “*proprietas*”) sometimes comes closer to the broad, contemporary sense of “property”. However, it doesn't seem uncommon for “*proprietates*” to be used interchangeably with “*propria*”. (including the writings of Aquinas and Suarez). Spinoza is no exception on this matter either, as Garrett (2002, pp. 138, 156-157n26) and Melamed (2013, pp. 49-60, 92n14) have pointed out—see, e.g., TdIE 95.

The other non-essential feature that things have, according to Aristotle, is an *accident* (also known as, perhaps confusingly again, an *extraneous accident*, *non-necessary accident*, or *non-essential accident*). “An accident is something which may either belong or not belong to some self-same thing, as (e.g.) being seated may belong or not belong to some self-same thing” (*Top* 1.5|102b4-8). An accident is what changes in a thing without affecting its essential features. Like *propria*, accidents are non-essential features of things that (to some extent) presuppose, depend on, and are explained by their subject’s essential features. But unlike *propria*, a thing remains the “self-same thing” with or without accidents, and so accidents are separable from their subjects.

Aristotle sometimes suggests that the above analysis doesn’t quite get at the heart of what accidents are.<sup>37</sup> The reason why accidents may or may not belong to a thing is because accidents are features explained not only by their subject’s essence, but by something in addition to and outside of their subject’s essence—by something in virtue of which the subject undergoes change and acquires the accidents. Consider, for example, the accident of Socrates *being seated*. This presupposes not only Socrates himself but also an occasion to sit—say, a vacant chair and a desire to sit (both of which lie outside of Socrates’ essence). Of course, Socrates may also be *unseated* and thus not have the above accident if there is no occasion for Socrates to sit. But in either case, Socrates is still the “self-same thing”. Whether he is seated or not seated, he is himself in virtue of his essence and not in virtue of there being or not being an occasion to sit. Importantly, however, if Socrates has the accident of being seated, he has it in virtue of both his essence and something outside his essence.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., *Cat* 2-4|1a16-3b23; *APo* 1.4|73a34-73b24; and *Met* 5.6-11|1015b16-1019a14, 7.5|1030b14-1031a14.

<sup>38</sup> The account I’ve provided here is of course incomplete, selective, and simplified given my aims of emphasizing certain threads of Aristotle’s thought that are relevant to Spinoza’s essentialism. What Aristotle’s essentialism amounts to in more precise detail is a matter of debate that I don’t intend to enter. For example, in describing his essentialism, the *Topics* seem to highlight *modal* features of things; the *Metaphysics* seem to highlight merely *descriptive* features of things; and the *Posterior Analytics* seem to highlight *explanatory* features of things. It is unclear

### 1.2.2 Aquinas & Suarez

The Aristotelian distinction just sketched between essences, propria, and accidents is echoed in quintessential scholastic thought. Two figures that especially exemplify such thought are Thomas Aquinas and Francisco Suarez. Aquinas is perhaps the most influential philosopher of the medieval period; and Suarez, in Armand Maurer's reckoning, is "significant in the history of philosophy as the main channel by which scholasticism came to be known by modern classical philosophers" (Maurer, 1982, p. 356).<sup>39</sup> Both philosophers also seem to be significant background for Spinoza's remarkably scholastic *Metaphysical Thoughts* appended to the only work he published under his own name, *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*. In Edwin Curley's estimation, however, "Suarez was probably the most important" (C 1.223; also see Viljanen, 2011, p. 38). But of particular interest with Aquinas and Suarez in relation to Spinoza (and Descartes, as we'll see) are the more conspicuous *dynamic* and *conceptual* glosses they give their descriptions of essences in relation to propria.<sup>40</sup> So, in what follows my primary focus will be to highlight such glosses.

Aquinas tells us that an essence is "what is signified by the definition indicating what the thing is" (EE 1). Propria, in turn, proceed as necessary consequences of essences. But the nature of this procession is dynamic and Neoplatonic—it is one whereby propria "emanate", "naturally result", and "flow from" essences as effects proceed from their causes:

---

whether these pick out different aspects of a single, coherent account, or incompatible, competing accounts (see Robertson & Atkins, 2016, §2; Cohen, 2016, §§7-9). In any case, such questions need not concern us.

<sup>39</sup> This is especially apparent with respect to Suarez's views on efficient causation that I will touch on below. As Stephen Schmid (2015) explains: "Suárez's account of causality is surely remarkably modern in that it assigns a central role to efficient causes. Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes, and many other mechanist philosophers of the 17th century will join him in doing so" (p. 118).

<sup>40</sup> See also Carriero (1991, pp. 50-54), Viljanen (2008, 2009, 2011, pp. 33-53), and Wolfson (1934, pp. 61-78).

The powers of the soul are its natural properties. But the subject is the cause of its proper accidents... Therefore the powers of the soul proceed from its essence as their cause. (ST 1q77a6; see also reply 2)<sup>41</sup>

The emanation of proper accidents from their subject is not by way of transmutation, but by a certain natural resultance; thus one thing results naturally from another, as color from light (ST 1q77a6, reply 3; see also EE 5).

[T]here is absolute necessity in things from the order of their essential principles to the properties flowing from their matter or form; a saw, because it is made of iron, must be hard; and a man is necessarily capable of learning. (SCG 2.30.11)

Unlike propria, however, the power of an essence isn't causally sufficient by itself to account for its accidents. A thing's accidents only result from interactions with things external to its essence: "with regard to the extraneous accident, the subject is receptive only, the accident being caused by an extrinsic agent" (ST 1q77a6; see also SCG 2.30.12-13).

In addition to the dynamic role played by essences in their production of propria, essences also play a conceptual one. Aquinas tells us that nothing is understood unless conceived through its formal cause: "nature is what we call everything that can in any way be captured by the intellect, for a thing is not intelligible except through its definition and essence" (EE 1). And in ideas of the essences of things, their propria follow because conceptually contained therein: it is "[proper] accidents that follow from the existence the essence has in the intellect" (EE 3).

Similar threads are also found in Suarez, some even more pronounced. The essence, nature, or form of a thing is "what makes [something] such and such a thing, and what essentially distinguishes it from other things" (DM 15.11.4|BSM 44). Propria, in turn, proceed from the activity inherent in essences as the dynamic locus from which the being of their propria emanate:

[T]he accidental properties, especially those that follow upon or are owed [to a substance] by reason of its form, are caused by the substance not only as a material cause and final cause but also as an efficient cause through a natural resulting...

---

<sup>41</sup> Cf. ST 1q77a6ad2: "The subject is both the final cause, and in a way the active cause, of its proper accident. It is also as it were the material cause, inasmuch as it is receptive of the accident. From this we may gather that the essence of the soul is the cause of all its powers, as their end, and as their active principle; and of some as receptive thereof."

[I]t is probable that the substantial form has a certain power for having its proper accidents emanate from it. (DM 18.3.4|AJF 93; see also DM 18.3.3|AJF 92).<sup>42</sup>

However, Suarez's view of the efficient cause whereby propria emanate from the essences of things is stronger than it would appear (see Schmaltz, 2008, pp. 24-44; Viljanen, 2011, pp. 37-41; Schmid, 2015). According to his notably Neoplatonic *influxus* account of causation, Suarez tells us that "a cause is a principle per se inflowing being to something else", whereby "inflowing"... is the equivalent of 'giving or communicating being to something else'" (DM 12.2.4|SP 1.3).<sup>43</sup> This rather general definition of *cause* is an *efficient cause* "on which [the effect] depends, through an action" (DM 17.1.6|AJF 10). And Suarez goes so far as to claim that "efficient causes most properly inflows being. Matter and form, however, do not as properly inflow being as compose it through themselves. And therefore for this reason it seems that the name 'cause' is said in the first place of efficient causes" (DM 27.1.10|SP 2.7). Thus, in a departure from Aristotle who takes efficient causation to be that which produces change and remains distinct from material and formal causation,<sup>44</sup> Suarez seems to take efficient causation to be ontologically (and conceptually) prior to material and formal (but not final) causation, since they respectively inflow passive and active being into effects.<sup>45</sup> Material and formal causes are assimilated into efficient causes at least insofar as they can be viewed as instances of the more general, paradigmatic *influxus* account of causation.

---

<sup>42</sup> On Suarez's general view of causation, a helpful overview is provided by Schmaltz (2008, pp. 24-44). Also see Schmid (2015).

<sup>43</sup> For some extended, general discussion of Neoplatonic *influxus* accounts of causation and related themes in medieval and early modern philosophy, see O'Neill (1993) and Hillman (2010).

<sup>44</sup> Some commentators also consider Suarez's view of essences as efficient causes to be a point of departure from Aquinas' view as well (Des Chene, 1996, pp. 158-161). Cf. Viljanen (2011, p. 39) and Suarez (DM 18.3.4|AJF 93).

<sup>45</sup> As Pasnau (2011) notes regarding the formal cause, "scholastic philosophers transformed the notion of what a form is, replacing what was for Aristotle primarily a metaphysical principle of explanation with something much more like an internal efficient cause" (p. 549). He later adds that form plays a "crucial and ongoing causal role" of "serving as the principal internal cause of a thing's various properties and operations" (p. 551).



Because things' essences are emanative efficient causes that confer being to their propria, Suarez likens essences to first causes or "principal principles" that constitute "the source of the entire *esse* and of all the properties" (DM 18.3.4|AJF 93).<sup>46</sup> Consideration of this "natural connection between a form and its properties", moreover, allows one to discern their *conceptual* relation in virtue of "the *per se* ordering that obtains between them" (DM 18.3.4|AJF 93; see also DM 38.2.8-9|BSM 32-33). Propria, in other words, are also deducible from the efficient causal activity conceived to be inherent in essences. By contrast, accidents bear no such dynamic and conceptual connections to essences because of their mutability and dependence on things external to their subject (DM 32.1.4|SP 3.4; DM 18.2.3, 18.3.2|AJF 52-53, 92).

### 1.2.3 Descartes

Descartes is widely recognized as one of the most significant influences on Spinoza. That's a sentiment reflected not only in standard introductions to Spinoza's thought, but also by Spinoza's corpus itself. In fact, the only work that Spinoza published in his lifetime under his own name was his geometrical exposition of Cartesianism, *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*. It is therefore worthwhile to consider some threads of Cartesian thought on essences (many of which are continuous with the foregoing) in order to explain Spinoza's views on the matter in the subsequent section.

Descartes is well-known for his rejection of Aristotelian-scholastic doctrines in physics—for example, that of final causation or substantial forms (CSMK 3.221; CSM 1.89, 202; CSM 2.39). In their stead, Descartes would appeal solely to mechanistic, teleologically-blind efficient

---

<sup>46</sup> This is a bit of a simplification that leaves out discussion of a thing's dependence on God. See Schmaltz (2008, pp. 36-44) and Suarez (DM 18.3.4|AJF 93). Cf. Aristotle (*Meta* 5.1|1012b33-1013a23).

causation.<sup>47</sup> But despite his explicit departures from Aristotelian and scholastic thought, elements of the tradition—especially Suarez—can be found in Descartes’ philosophy.<sup>48</sup> In his exchange with Antoine Arnauld on God and causation, for instance, Descartes explains that he takes “the whole essence of a thing to be its formal cause”, and that in doing so he is “simply following the footsteps of Aristotle” (CSM 2.169).<sup>49</sup> And as for the categories of proprium and accident, they briefly appear in his *Principles of Philosophy*, 1.59:

And the fact that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides is a *property* belonging to all and only right-angled triangles. Finally, if we suppose that some right-angled triangles are in motion while others are not, this will be a universal *accident* of such triangles. (CSM 1.213; original emphasis)<sup>50</sup>

Similar to what we saw in Aquinas and Suarez, there is also the dynamic and conceptual role that essences play. This is especially apparent in the unique case of God, whose essence not only conceptually contains his existence, but is in some sense the causal source of his existence. Consider first the conceptual role of essences in Descartes’ famous ontological argument. Analogous to the way in which “various properties can be demonstrated of the triangle, for example that its three angles equal two right angles” (CSM 2.45), or in which “the idea of a mountain [cannot] be separated from the idea of a valley” (CSM 2.46), Descartes maintains that he can demonstrate God’s existence. Since the concept of God is of a being to whose essence belongs every perfection, and because existence is a perfection (or at least *necessary existence* is a perfection), it is inseparable from God’s essence, and thus God’s concept implies his existence.

---

<sup>47</sup> This is one respect in which Descartes would also prove to be one of the biggest influences on Spinoza’s even more ambitious naturalistic project. See, e.g., CM 2.12|G 1.280.14-32; 1app|G 2.78-81, 5pref.

<sup>48</sup> This is especially the case regarding Suarez’s *Disputations* in comparison with Descartes’ *Meditations*. See, e.g., BSM 29-50. See also Schmaltz (2008, pp. 11-12, 24-48).

<sup>49</sup> Descartes is not entirely forthcoming about the details of his own essentialism. See, e.g., CSM 2.44-47, 54-55, 114 (defs. 9 and 10), 155, 263; CSMK 3.200, 284. Cf. KV 2pref|G 1.50.19-34; DPP 2a2; CM 1.2; 2d2, and 2p10s.

<sup>50</sup> In a letter to Regius (December, 1641), Descartes explains that “the term ‘accident’ means anything which can be present or absent without its possessor ceasing to exist” (CSMK 3.200).

Just as the concept of a geometrical object allows one to infer that certain propria belong to it in virtue of its essence, so also may one infer that existence (or at least necessary existence) belongs to God in virtue of its being contained in his essence: “in the case of God necessary existence is in fact a property in the strictest sense of the term, since it applies to him alone and forms a part of his essence as it does of no other thing” (CSM 2.263; see also 2.117).<sup>51</sup>

A similar theme is expressed in dynamic terms in Descartes’ discussions of God’s self-causation (see Hübner, 2015, pp. 206-211). He maintains that there is a sense in which God confers existence upon himself by appeal to “the analogy of an efficient cause to explain features which in fact belong to a formal cause, that is, to the very essence of God” (CSM 2.168). Reminiscent of Suarez’s *influxus* account (§1.2.3), Descartes describes efficient causation in his Third Meditation as a kind of bestowing of being or (as he prefers to phrase it) a giving of reality or perfection:

Now it is manifest by the natural light that there must be at least as much <reality> in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause. For where, I ask, could the effect get its reality from, if not from the cause? And how could the cause give it to the effect unless it possessed it? It follows from this both that something cannot arise from nothing, and also that what is more perfect – that is, [what eminently] contains in itself more reality – cannot arise from what is less perfect. (CSM 2.28; see also CSM 1.198-199; cf. DM 2.1.1, 30.1.9-12|BSM 33-35)

So, effects must have at least as much reality as contained in their efficient (and total) causes.

Analogized to divine self-causation, Descartes’ basic idea seems to be that since the eminent reality

---

<sup>51</sup> Descartes suggests here and above that existence is a proprium of God. A number of concerns arise with this suggestion. For one, since essences are prior to their propria, it would then seem that God’s essence incoherently provides himself with existence prior to God’s existing. Perhaps Descartes would be open to embracing this consequence (cf. Cartesian divine voluntarism). But perhaps he could also say that only God’s *necessity* or *necessary existence* is a proprium, prior to which is God’s amodal existence (in fact, this view is one that I go on to attribute to Spinoza below in §1.4). It’s not clear what this means for divine simplicity, but Descartes may not need to go either route above if he doesn’t genuinely accept the category of proprium into his conceptual scheme, contrary to any impressions he gives in his published works. His conception of essence appears to commit him to this, according to which a feature *F* is essential to *x* just in case *x* is necessarily *F* (CSM 2.54-55, 155). In that case, Descartes would presumably say that Aristotelian-scholastic propria are essential features of things. This raises the further question of why he refers to propria at all. But then again, Descartes seems willing to pay some lip service in his published works to certain scholastic views held by Catholic *intelligentsia* which he probably did not hold himself. (Descartes’ exchanges with Arnauld or Bourdin in the *Objections and Replies*, for instance, seems to have some elements of this.)

of God's existence is at least as real as that contained in his essence, God can be thought in some sense to "give" himself existence by virtue of his essence. In this way, God's "own essence is the eminent source which bestows on him whatever we can think of as being capable of being bestowed on anything by an efficient cause" (CSM 2.168).

Descartes explains in his *Replies* that the analogous sense of "efficient cause" in God's special case is *not* (i) "the strict sense" of an *external* efficient cause that confers existence on an effect distinct from itself. That would absurdly imply that God somehow exists as a literal effect prior to and outside himself as cause—as if God, before having any reality, somehow gave himself reality. But *neither* is the sense of "efficient cause" to be taken in (ii) "the negative sense" in which God simply *lacks* an efficient cause of his existence. God is no exception to the Cartesian Principle of Sufficient Reason requiring that there be some (positive) "cause or reason [*causa sive ratio*]" for the existence of each thing—an efficient cause or at least an explanation (CSM 2.116|AT 165; see also CSM 2.78-80, 166). Descartes explains that senses (i) and (ii) overlook "a third possibility, namely, 'the positive essence of a thing', to which the concept of an efficient cause can be extended" (CSM 2.167). And it is this (iii) "positive sense" that pertains to God's self-causation: his existence "depends on the real immensity of his power; hence, when we perceive this, we are quite entitled to think that in a sense he stands in the same relation to himself as an efficient cause does to its effect, and hence that he derives existence from himself in the positive sense" (CSM 2.80). His positive essence is the source of his power to exist as a cause, or at least as it confers intelligibility on his existence and explains it, suggested by Descartes' ontological argument.

Descartes' point, so far as I understand him, seems to be this. God's efficient cause is neither external to himself nor a mere absence of some cause; and because the divine *essence* is in fact a positive *cause* (albeit a *formal* one, strictly speaking) that uniquely provides God with reality,

there is a sense in which—in dynamic terms—God’s essence is to his existence as an efficient cause inflows being into its effect. God thus seems to satisfy the principle that everything has a “cause or reason” by virtue of being his own efficient cause. At the very least, Descartes can maintain via his conceptual gloss that the concept of God’s essence contains his (necessary) existence, providing the reason for God’s existence and making it intelligible akin to the way an *explanans* stands to its *explanandum*.<sup>52</sup>

### 1.3 Spinoza’s Essentialism

As we just saw, the notions of essence, proprium, and accident form an established tripartite distinction in the Aristotelian-scholastic tradition through Descartes. Along the way, we also saw the conceptual and dynamic ways that philosophers described essences and their relations. Plausibly, these essentialist ideas were some with which Spinoza would have been familiar. However, I believe that Spinoza was more than familiar with such ideas: he arguably assimilates them into his own metaphysics, upon which he constructs a unique rationalist scaffolding of his own. In the present section, I outline Spinoza’s essentialism. My aim is to both highlight those features of Spinoza’s thought that are continuous with the foregoing historical background and introduce themes that will prove important for explaining and defending Spinoza’s necessitarianism in subsequent chapters.

#### 1.3.1 Causation

We’ve seen that causation plays an important role in the essentialist thought of Aristotle, Aquinas, Suarez, and Descartes. The same holds true for Spinoza, and so his view of causation merits some

---

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Suarez: “although God does not have a true and real cause, nevertheless certain *rationes* of him are conceived by as if they were causes of others” (DM 12, prologue|SP 1.1-2).

explanation before delving into the details of his essentialism. As we will see—to a more radical extent than his predecessors—Spinoza arguably takes the *efficient cause* to be the paradigmatic instance of causation, prior to all other kinds of cause.

But first consider a general distinction about causes that Spinoza makes when explaining a version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. He writes: “there must be, for each existing thing, a certain cause on account of which it exists” and “this cause... either must be contained in the very nature and definition of the existing thing (*viz. that it pertains to its nature to exist*) or must be outside it” (1p8s2|G 2.50). This is to say that every existing  $x$  has a cause of its existence, located either *intrinsically* to  $x$  or *extrinsically* to  $x$  (cf. 1p17c1). More exactly, this distinction is to say:

$x$ 's existence is *intrinsically caused* just in case  $x$  exists by virtue of  $x$ 's essence, i.e., just in case  $x$ 's existence follows from the essence of  $x$ , and

$x$ 's existence is *extrinsically caused* just in case  $x$  exists by virtue of a cause  $y$  that is external to and independent of  $x$ , i.e., just in case  $x$ 's existence follows from  $y$  and  $x \neq y$ .

Spinoza explains later (1p11d2) that that there must also be an intrinsic or extrinsic cause of any  $x$  that does *not exist*, but at present this need not concern us. (I note it here to indicate that the distinction above is restricted to existence. I discuss the distinction as it pertains to existence and nonexistence in chapter 3, §3.2.)

This distinction bifurcates Spinoza's whole ontology which, as I explained in the Spinoza's Ontology, consists of only one substance, God, and the innumerable non-substantial things that are God's modes. Spinoza maintains in the *Ethics* that God is “self-caused” (*causa sui*): he is a being “whose essence involves existence, *or* that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing” (1d1; see also 1p7,d, 1p11,d). As for modes, “God is absolutely the first cause” (1p16c3), “the only cause of all things” (2p10cs), or “the immanent... cause of all things” in him (1p18). A Spinoza puts it succinctly elsewhere: “God [is] the first cause of all things, and also the cause of

himself’ (KV 1.1.10|G 1.18.24). So, everything in Spinoza’s ontology admits of a cause for its existence: God is *intrinsically caused*, and modes are *extrinsically caused* (and ultimately by God).

The fundamental nature of this intrinsic and extrinsic causation, ultimately rooted in God, is *efficient causation*. As Spinoza remarks to Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus in correspondence: “I understand the efficient cause to be both internal and external” (Ep 60|G 4.271.4-5; see also 1p33s1). This can also be gleaned in the *Ethics* on the basis of 1p16: “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways [*modis*],<sup>53</sup> (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect.)”<sup>54</sup> From 1p16, Spinoza infers that “God is the efficient cause of all things” (1p16c1), of both their existence and essence (1p25,s). In unqualified terms, Spinoza later reveals that 1p16 and efficient causation are inextricably linked when he explains that “nothing belongs to the nature of anything except what follows from the necessity of the nature of the efficient cause” (4pref|G 2.208.4-6). This efficient causation applies not only extrinsically to modes, but intrinsically to God as well: for Spinoza cites 1p16 to also show that “God must be called the cause of all things in the same sense [*eo sensu*] in which he is called the cause of himself” (1p25s). Like Descartes’s view of divine self-causation (§1.2.3), the implication here is that God is nothing less than the efficient cause of himself because the sense in which he is the cause of all things is nothing less than an efficient cause. Consequently—like we saw from Suarez (§1.2.2)—the efficient cause is that in which other causes are to be assimilated.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> I’ve slightly modified Curley’s original translation of 1p16 by replacing his rendering of *modis* (“modes”) with what I take to be a more accurate term (“ways”).

<sup>54</sup> This passage suggests a thesis about causation for which Spinoza is probably most well-known, namely, that there is a necessary connection between cause and effect. I touch on this topic in chapter 3.

<sup>55</sup> In KV 1.3, for example, Spinoza explains various respects in which God is the cause of all things (e.g., first cause, immanent cause) as just different ways in which God is an *efficient cause*. Arguably, Spinoza’s notion of an efficient cause also subsumes the role served by Aristotle’s (i) efficient, (ii) formal, (iii) material, and—when applicable—(iv) final causes (cf. Garrett, 1999b). This can be seen in the way that each Aristotelian cause bears on God’s efficient causation of modes according to Spinoza. For example, God is a cause that (i) initiates or changes their existence (1p16c1-3, 1p24c, 1p25); (ii) produces their essence or form (1p25, 2p8,c,s; cf. 5p31,d); (iii) provides their matter (1app|G 2.83; CM 2.7|G 1.262.12-15); and does so without (iv) a purpose or end in view (1app|G 2.80). To the extent

There's also good reason to think that Spinoza understands efficient causation akin to the Neoplatonic *influxus* account that we also saw from Aquinas and Suarez as an inflowing of being (§1.2.2), and from Descartes as a bestowing of reality or perfection (§1.2.3).<sup>56</sup> This can be seen by first considering that Spinoza describes efficient causation as a relation wherein causes give to their effects what they have or contain in themselves:

We say that God is an *emanative* or productive cause of his actions, and in respect to the action's occurring, an active or *efficient cause* [of all things]... (KV 1.3.2|G 1.35; emphasis added)

[N]o cause can produce more than it has in itself... (KV 2.24.4|G 1.104.27-28; see also Ep 4|G 4.14 and 1p17s|G 2.63.17-19)

I have shown clearly enough (*see 1p16*) that from God's supreme power... infinitely many things... *have necessarily flowed*, or always follow... (1p17s|G 2.62; emphasis added; see also 4pref|G 2.208.4-6)

And as for the content of the effects that emanate, flow, or are had by efficient causes, it consists in reality, perfection, or being:

For things that come to be from external causes... owe all the perfection or reality they have to the power of the external [efficient] cause... (1p11s|G 2.54.21ff; see also 1p33s1|G 2.74.5ff)

God is not only the cause of things' beginning to exist, but also of their persevering in existing, *or* (to use a Scholastic term) God is the cause of the being of things. (1p24c; see also 1p25, 2p10cs).

All of this is neatly summed up by Spinoza when he paraphrases a Cartesian axiom regarding efficient causation:

Whatever reality, *or* perfection, there is in any thing, exists formally [i.e., actually or as perfectly]... in its first and adequate [efficient] cause. ... For if it were supposed that there was either nothing in the cause, or less in the cause than in the effect, then the nothing in the cause would be the cause of the effect. But this (by

---

that human beings set ends and admit of a *summum bonum*, Spinoza suggests that such final causation is to be reductively explained in terms of efficient causation (1app|G 2.77-83, 4pref|G 2.207, 4d7). Apart from the reductionism I've proposed above, at least two other commentators understand Spinoza to say in effect that God fulfills (i)-(iii). See, e.g., Bayle (1991, pp. 301, 311, 332, 335), remarks N and DD of his *Dictionary*, and volume 1 of Wolfson (1934, vol. 1, p. 302).

<sup>56</sup> This is also argued for at some length by Lin (2004, pp. 29-33; 2006, pp. 343-347).



DPP 1a7) is absurd. So not anything can be cause of an effect, but only that in which there is every perfection which is in the effect... at least formally. (DPP 1a8; cf. Ep 4; 2d6 and 4pref)<sup>57</sup>

As the above passages suggest, the efficient causal activity exhibited by anything—including God—is completely general. This is a result of Spinoza’s so called “naturalism” (cf. Della Rocca, 2008, pp. 4-8), according to which everything without exception exists and acts according to one and the same fixed and universal causal laws (see 3pref; TTP 6).<sup>58</sup> So, those same causal laws that describe God’s activity also describe the activity of modes (see also chapter 2). This is reflected in the status of modes as determinate expressions of God on a qualified scale (1p25c).<sup>59</sup> Like God, modes not only share in being extrinsic causes of other modes, but to the extent that already existent modes persevere in their being and immanently cause their own states (just as God immanently causes his own modes as states of himself), modes also share in being intrinsic causes (see 1p18, 1p22-23, 1p28, 3d1-3, 3p4-8, 4d8, 4p2-7, and 5p31).<sup>60</sup>

Once this account of causation is situated in the framework of Spinoza’s essentialism, we will have not only a general account of Spinozistic causation, but a full-blooded account of essentialism that I believe to be at the heart of Spinoza’s metaphysics (§1.3.4).

---

<sup>57</sup> This is why, in response to Henry Oldenburg’s “contention that God has nothing formally in common with created things”, Spinoza replies that he has “maintained the complete opposite of this” (Ep 4|G 4.14; cf. Ep 6|4.36). DPP 1a8 is Spinoza’s statement of Descartes’ causal axiom, the ellipses of which omit mention of “eminently”. My omissions are meant to accurately reflect Spinoza’s considered view on the matter, which can be inferred from two things. First, Spinoza commits himself to Descartes’ causal axiom by endorsing DPP 1p11 and 1p19 (the former in Ep 35 and the latter in *Ethics* 1p19s, for example), both of which deductively rely on DPP 1a8 via 1p9. And second, Spinoza firmly rejects the aspect of the causal axiom used by Descartes (and other scholastics) to argue for God’s *eminent containment* of all perfections that are formally in creatures (see, e.g., KV 1.1.8, 2.19.5; Ep 4|G 4.14; cf. 1p15s|G 2.57.13-17). Hence my omission. For some excellent discussion of Spinoza’s rejection of eminent containment, see Newlands (2015).

<sup>58</sup> I go on to discuss Spinoza’s conception of laws of nature in chapter 2.

<sup>59</sup> For further development of the idea that modes are determinate expressions of God, see Garrett (2002, pp. 138-141). Also see §1.3.4, below.

<sup>60</sup> For the reasons stated in this section, I suspect that Spinoza’s use of the term “cause”, when stated without qualification (as it often is), is basically synonymous with “efficient cause”.

### 1.3.2 Definition, Essence, & Proprium

There doesn't appear to be any single passage in Spinoza's corpus that neatly sums up his notion of essence.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps the closest statement is one found in a marginal note to the early *Short Treatise*, where Spinoza remarks in a rather familiar Aristotelian-scholastic fashion that the essence of a thing is "the definite nature, by which the thing is what it is" (KV 1.1, note a|G 1.14-15).<sup>62</sup> Fortunately, a good deal more about essence can be made conspicuous by turning to Spinoza's theory of definitions, with which some familiarity will also prove useful later on.

Consider Spinoza's following remarks related to definition (cf. Della Rocca, 1996a, pp. 88ff):

[E]very definition, *or* clear and distinct idea, is true. (Ep 4|G 4.13)

[A] definition... is one which serves to explain a thing whose essence only is sought... For because [it] has a determinate object, it ought to be true. ... So a definition... explains a thing as it is [NS:<sup>63</sup> in itself] outside the intellect—and then it ought to be true... a definition is concerned solely with the essences of things or of their affections... (Ep 9|G 4.42-43; see also CM 1.2|G 1.238.30-32; 1a6)

[W]e can give no definition of anything without at the same time explaining its essence... (CM 1.2|G 1.239.25-27)

[T]he true definition of each thing neither involves nor expresses anything except the nature of the thing defined. ... E.g., the definition of the triangle expresses nothing but the simple nature of the triangle. (1p8s2|G 2.50; cf. Ep 34)

For the definition of any thing affirms, and does not deny, the thing's essence, *or* it posits the thing's essence, and does not take it away. (3p4d)

---

<sup>61</sup> One might take 2d2 to be such a passage. However, I'm not convinced that 2d2 is in fact Spinoza's definition of essence, let alone that it neatly sums that conception up. I touch on why this is so at the end of this section.

<sup>62</sup> The authenticity of some notes in the *Short Treatise* is disputed. Some are clearly authentic; for others, their authenticity is unclear; and for other still, their authenticity is dubious. The note I've quoted above (note a) seems to be authentic. For some discussion of these matters, see Curley's editorial preface to the *Short Treatise* (C 1.46-53).

<sup>63</sup> In the Curley translation, "NS" refers to the posthumous Dutch edition of Spinoza's works, *De Nagelate Schriften van B.D.S.* (1677). Curley inserts brackets citing NS to indicate Dutch variations from the original Latin.

In Spinoza's view, a definition in the most philosophically significant sense of the term is a true affirmative (positive) concept that clearly and distinctly expresses a thing's essence alone, as it is really outside the intellect. Put simply, a definition explains only the essence of a thing.<sup>64</sup>

Spinoza is consistently adamant about the requirement that a definition should explain *only* the essence of a thing. He expands on the requirement in notable passage from his early *Treatise on the Intellect*, not only revealing Aristotelian-scholastic *propria* in his thinking, but making his notion of essence clearer:

To be called perfect, a definition will have to explain the inmost essence of the thing, and to take care not to use certain *propria* in its place. ... If a circle, for example, is defined as a figure in which the lines drawn from the center to the circumference are equal,<sup>65</sup> no one fails to see that such a definition does not at all explain the essence of the circle, but only a property [*propriatatem*] of it. ... [I]t matters a great deal concerning Physical and real beings, because the properties [*propriates*] of things are not understood so long as their essences are not known. (TdIE 95; see also 3da6exp)

There are at least four notable things in the above passage. Most obviously, the first is that Spinoza recognizes things' *propria* (a term interchangeable with *propriates*<sup>66</sup>) as distinct from their "inmost essence". The second is that Spinoza notes the importance of not confusing a thing's *propria* with its essence. This is merely another way of stating the requirement that definitions explain a thing's essence *alone*. For, while *propria* are convertible with the essences of things they inhere in, *propria* don't explain the essences of things: rather, the essences of things explain their *propria*. For as we've already seen, these *propria* are formally caused by essences—they're derivative features in virtue of their subject's fundamental features. The third is Spinoza's claim

---

<sup>64</sup> See also CM 1.3|G 1.241; 3da20exp, 5a2; and Ep 60.

<sup>65</sup> That is, if a circle is defined as a closed, curved figure on which all points are equidistant to some other point, etc.

<sup>66</sup> Once again, any subsequent quotations that use the term "property" or "properties" should be understood in the narrow sense of *proprium* and *propria* unless otherwise indicated. As I mentioned before, Spinoza at TdIE 95 uses the Latin term *propria* interchangeably with *propriates* ("properties"), despite the latter sometimes having a broader sense for early moderns (Garrett, 2002, pp. 138, 156-157n26; Melamed, 2013b, pp. 49-60, 92n14). I share Garrett's suspicion that in the TdIE and *Ethics*, all of Spinoza's uses of *propriates* refer to properties in the narrow sense of *propria*. In fact, I suspect that nearly all of Spinoza's uses of *propriates* refer to *propria*.

that his example of a bad definition is an obvious one that “no one fails to see”. This indicates that the Aristotelian-scholastic distinction between essences and propria was one with which both he and his early modern audience would be familiar (§§1.2.2-1.2.3). And finally, the example of a circle reflects Spinoza’s deep commitment to the Euclidean geometrical method. For not only does he go on to rigorously emulate the geometrical method himself in the *Ethics*, but he considers it to be a “standard of truth” entirely concerned with essences and propria:

So they maintained it as certain that the judgments of the Gods far surpass man’s grasp. This alone, of course, would have caused the truth to be hidden from the human race to eternity, *if Mathematics*, which is concerned not with ends, *but only with the essences and properties [proprietas] of figures, had not shown men another standard of truth.* (1app|G 2.79.30-34; emphasis mine)<sup>67</sup>

Next, consider Spinoza’s requirement that a definition should *explain* the essence of a thing. This is so when the definition includes the concept of the thing’s efficient cause (Ep 60; cf. 1p8s2). If the thing being defined is a *mode*, the efficient cause in question must be the immediately preceding “proximate” cause. “E.g., according to this law, a circle would have to be defined as follows: it is the figure that is described by any line of which one end is fixed and the other movable. This definition clearly includes the proximate cause.” (TdIE 96)<sup>68</sup> As such, the definition describes what would directly produce the circle’s existence.<sup>69</sup> Naturally, this proximate cause must be an extrinsic cause of the circle since geometrical shapes are modes, and therefore depend for their existence on factors outside themselves. By contrast, if *God* is the entity being defined, the efficient

---

<sup>67</sup> See also the end of 3pref: “Therefore, I shall treat the nature and powers of the Affects, and the power of the Mind over them, by the same Method by which, in the preceding parts, I treated God and the Mind, and I shall consider human actions and appetites *just as if it were a Question of lines, planes, and bodies.*” (G 2.138; emphasis mine). Cf. Hume (1998, pp. 56-57), *Dialogue IX*.

<sup>68</sup> As Curley (1988, p. 166n31) points out, this example shows Hobbes’ influence on Spinoza (cf. 1a4). See Thomas Hobbes (1999, p. 188), *De Corpore Politico* 1.1.5.

<sup>69</sup> Spinoza describes this causal requirement on definitions in a few different ways throughout his corpus that I suspect to be equivalent. See, e.g., Ep 34|G 4.179.29-30; TdIE 96; TTP 4.4|G 3.58.20-21; 1p8s2|G 2.50.28-29, 1p28s, 3p4d; and Ep 60; cf. 1a4. What’s more, Spinoza’s requirement seems rather Aristotelian since to understand what something is involves understanding its cause or reason: “So, as we say, to know what it is is the same as to know why it is” (*APo* 2.2|90a32).

cause in question cannot be a proximate cause because God would then depend on something outside himself, contrary to his status as a substance (1p6c). Rather, God’s efficient cause must be intrinsic (Ep 60).<sup>70</sup> These considerations reveal not only how a definition explains the essence of a thing, but also that definition in general is *genetic* according to Spinoza. The defining concept of  $x$  explains its essence by giving us the formula or recipe for  $x$ , specifying the conditions that *generate*  $x$ ’s existence,<sup>71</sup> i.e., conditions which would instantiate  $x$ ’s essence if satisfied.<sup>72</sup>

These considerations also point to a couple noteworthy distinctions operating in the background of Spinoza’s theory of definitions. The first is a distinction Spinoza inherited from scholastics between the *essence* (*essentia*) and *existence* (*existentia*) of things, which respectively indicate *what* a thing is and *that* a thing is (see, e.g., DM 31.6.13-15|BSM 45-46). Modes are subject to the essence-existence distinction since “[t]he essence of things produced by God [i.e., modes] does not involve [*involvit*] existence” (1p24; see also 1a7, 1p24c, 1p25); and “to say that A must involve [*involvere*] the concept of B is the same as to say that A cannot be conceived without B” (2p49d). Since the essence of modes can be conceived without existence,<sup>73</sup> the essence neither depends on nor presupposes their existence.<sup>74</sup> But the converse does not hold: “For things

---

<sup>70</sup> In Spinoza’s *Treatise on the Intellect* (TdIE 96-97), the above considerations correspond to two sets of conditions laid out for defining a created thing (mode) and an uncreated thing (God). But Spinoza apparently changed his mind about some conditions. He initially maintained that a definition of an uncreated thing must not cite any causes. But later we find that God is *causa sui* and must be defined through a cause as much as anything else (1d1, 1d6, 1p7, 1p8s2, 1p11d1; and Ep 60). Also see Parkinson (1990, pp. 56-57). For some recent discussion of Spinoza’s theory of definitions, see Schliesser (2018, pp. 167-171).

<sup>71</sup> This seems to be in line with Spinoza’s remarks on generation (and creation) in a footnote to KV: “*creating*, then, is bringing a thing about *as regards essence and existence together*; but in *generating* a thing comes about *as regards existence only*” (KV 1.2.5, note c|G 1.20; cf. 1p25). So, generation of  $x$  is production of  $x$ ’s existence but not  $x$ ’s essence.

<sup>72</sup> If existence is the instantiation of essence, then as Lin (2007, p. 277n14) points out, the essence of a mode  $x$  seems to be something like a first-order property, whereas the *existence* of  $x$  seems to be something like a second-order property that essences have if instantiated.

<sup>73</sup> Moreover, to simply conceive of a mode  $x$  at all (that is, to clearly and distinctly form the concept of  $x$ ) is to conceive of  $x$ ’s essence, irrespective of whether  $x$  exists. Della Rocca (1996a, pp. 84-106) has argued for this at length.

<sup>74</sup> For purposes of brevity, I’m assuming here (somewhat simplistically) that  $x$  is distinct from  $y$  just in case  $x$  can be conceived without  $y$ . To see finer-grained distinctions than this, see, e.g., Spinoza (CM 2.5 and 1p15s|G 2.59), as well as Suarez (DM 7.1.18-19,2.8|BSM 49) and Descartes (CSM 1.213-215, 2.54).

are distinguished by what is first in their nature, but this essence of things is prior to their existence” (KV app2.10, note b|G 1.119). So, the existence of modes depends on and presupposes their essence, indicating that the existence of modes cannot be conceived without their essence.<sup>75</sup> More exactly, Spinoza explains that the essence of modes (or at least of finite modes) is itself an eternal modification comprehended in God’s attributes, whereas the existence of modes is their duration, i.e., the instantiation of their essence at some particular time and place (CM 1.2; 2p8,c; see also chapter 2, §2.3).<sup>76</sup> Unlike modes, however, God is not subject to the essence-existence distinction. Rather, God’s essence involves (*involvit*) existence (1p11d1), and therefore his essence cannot be conceived except as instantiated.<sup>77</sup> In fact, God’s essence and existence are so inextricable that Spinoza tells us that they are “one and the same” (1p20d).

Essence and existence inform the second distinction underlying Spinoza’s theory of definitions. For lack of better terms, this is the distinction between a *monadic* definition and *dyadic*

---

<sup>75</sup> So far as I understand Spinoza, this indicates that essences have *being* (*esse*) outside the intellect, i.e., as having an ontological status irrespective of existence, or that they can in some sense *be* without existence. By this, however, I don’t mean to suggest that Spinoza takes the *being* of a mode’s essence to be altogether different from that of their *existence* (eternity and duration aside). Admittedly, Spinoza frequently refers to the ontological status of essence and existence in a way that is unhelpful, and even encouraging of confusing locutions like “the *existence* of essence and the *existence* of existence” (e.g., at TdIE 55, 1p24-35, and 2p10cs|G 2.93.20-24; cf. Lærke, 2017). But at one point in CM, Spinoza helpfully characterizes the essence-existence distinction for created things (modes) as a division “of being”: “*being of Essence* is nothing but that manner in which created things are comprehended in the attributes of God”, but “*being of Existence* is the essence itself of things outside God, considered in itself. It is attributed to things after they have been created by God.” (CM 1.2|G 1.238; see also G 1.237) This more congenially captures what Spinoza apparently struggles to say elsewhere, namely, that that the being of essence and the being of existence express God’s univocal and comprehensive being (even if the former is eternal and the latter is durational).

<sup>76</sup> Apart from anticipating some elements of Leibniz’s platonic view of essences (see, e.g., T 42), Spinoza’s thought on the matter resembles Descartes’ doctrine of “true and immutable natures”, according to which the essences of things irrespective of existence are the objects of true ideas or eternal truths outside the intellect, and therefore are “not merely nothing” (CSM 2.44-45; cf. 2.45-49). See also Descartes’ *Principles*, 1.48-50 (CSM 1.208-209), and Viljanen (2011, pp. 12-18). However, none of this is to suggest that there are no points at which Spinoza diverges from Descartes. While each of them agrees that essences depend on God, for example, Spinoza rejects Descartes’ notorious voluntarism in which God indifferently creates eternal truths out of an arbitrary act of will or power. Spinoza rather maintains that eternal truths *qua* modes follow from God as a necessary consequence of his nature (1p33s2|G 2.76).

<sup>77</sup> As Spinoza writes in CM 1.2: “in God essence is not distinguished from existence, since his essence cannot be conceived without existence; but in other things [apart from God] it does differ from and certainly can be conceived without existence” (G 1.238.26ff). See also TdIE 52ff; KV 1.1, note d|G 1.17.25-33, KV 1.2|G 1.20, KV app1p4d|G 1.116; CM 1.2|G 1.237-239; and 1p17s|G 2.63. Cf. Viljanen (2015).

definition, i.e., between a definition that includes one and two components, respectively. Because modes are subject to the essence-existence distinction, their individual definitions are dyadic: each should include the joint concepts of the mode's essence and the conditions for instantiating the mode's essence (see Schliesser, 2018, pp. 167-171). The definition of a mode, in other words, brings together two things: its essence and its proximate (extrinsic) cause, both of which would (if given) result in the mode's existence as effect.<sup>78</sup> God's definition, by contrast, is monadic. Since he is not subject to the essence-existence distinction, the concept of God's nature includes the conditions for instantiating his essence, which is to say that God's existence is intrinsically caused (see Ep 60).<sup>79</sup>

Now, once one obtains the perfect definition of a thing, one has the materials to understand its inmost essence. And in turn, the concept of the thing's inmost essence should be adequate material to understand its extra-definitional propria.

We require a concept, *or* definition, of the thing such that when it is considered alone, without any others conjoined, all the thing's properties can be deduced from it (as may be seen in this definition of the circle). For from it we clearly infer that all the lines drawn from the center to the circumference are equal. (TdIE 96)

To know which of the many ideas of a thing is sufficient for deducing all its properties [*proprietates*], I pay attention to one thing only: that the idea *or* definition of the thing expresses the efficient cause. (Ep 60|G 4.270)<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> In this way, the proximate cause of a mode explains its essence insofar as it contains its instantiation as effect (just as every cause contains its effect). This seems to be the idea behind the final axiom of the *Ethics*: "The power of an effect is defined by the power of its cause, insofar as its essence is explained or defined by the essence of its cause" (5a2, cf. 1a4).

<sup>79</sup> In footnote 34, I noted that Aristotle defines and individuates *x* as a species through *x*'s *genus* and *difference*. It is perhaps worth pointing out here that Spinoza rejects this Aristotelian method of forming definitions because it fails to generalize to God. Spinoza's reasoning (*contra* Wolfson 1934, vol. 1, p. 76) is that there can be no highest genus through which God can be defined on the Aristotelean view, and therefore no attribute through which God's essence could be knowable to us (KV 1.7; cf. KV 2pref|G 1.53). But if God's essence is unknowable, then so is everything else, because nothing is understood unless conceived through God's essence (cf. 2p10cs). In Spinoza's mind, this is *reductio ad absurdum* of the Aristotelian method of definition. For some discussion of this point, see Curley (1969, pp. 28-36).

<sup>80</sup> Spinoza's notion of definition might then be stated schematically as  $D(y) = D((Ey \ \& \ xCy) \rightarrow I(Ey))$ . Here,  $D(y)$  is definition of  $y$ ;  $Ey$  is the essence of  $y$ ;  $xCy$  signifies that  $x$  is the proximate cause of  $y$ ;  $I(Ey)$  is the instantiation of  $y$ 's essence (or simply the existence of  $y$ , as an effect of  $x$ ); and " $\rightarrow$ " is Spinoza's following-from relation (see §1.3.4). A

This last point highlights certain conceptual connotations in Spinoza's theory of definitions. The clear and distinct idea or definition that explains a thing's essence, and the explanatory deduction or inference of a thing's propria therefrom, are not limited to our concepts as the geometrical example of the circle might suggest. As Spinoza might put it, such concepts are not mere modes of thinking, lacking in reality outside our minds. Because a definition explains a thing as it is outside the intellect, the propria inferred from a thing should reflect the propria that follow from its essence independent of concepts in finite intellects.<sup>81</sup> For this reason, if the propria implied by the definition of a circle are instantiated in time and place—say, if the circle is produced on paper in the way Spinoza requires—then its propria will really follow from, or be caused by, the circle (albeit simultaneously with the circle's construction). Like we saw in the section on Aquinas and Suarez (§1.2.2), Spinoza's talk of essences and propria in terms of true *definitions*, *ideas*, *deductions*, and *inferences* (etc.) seems to be a *conceptual* gloss which, in the intellect, reflects the operations of essences outside the intellect in explanatory and logical terms. Arguably, this conceptual gloss of essences is why Spinoza appears to sometimes treat definitions and essences interchangeably (see Melamed, 2013b, pp. 50-51), even though it may not always be accurate for him to do so.<sup>82</sup>

---

definition of *y* should also permit the deduction of all of *y*'s propria (propria which are strictly extrinsic to the definition, though contained in it implicitly):  $D(y) \rightarrow Py$ , where  $Py$  is any proprium of *y*.

<sup>81</sup> This is a consequence of how Spinoza explains definitions, e.g., at Ep 4|G 4.13, Ep 9|G 4.42-43 and CM 1.2|G 1.238.30-32. See also 1a6 and 2p7.

<sup>82</sup> Definition and essence seem to only be clearly interchangeable with respect to God, but not with respect to modes. This is because (as I explained above) God's definition is monadic, whereas modes' definitions are dyadic and thus their essences are not the only objects of their individual definitions. Be that as it may, granted Spinoza's attribute parallelism in which corresponding modes of the attribute of thought and any other attribute are different aspects of one and the same thing (2p7,s), Spinoza may be entitled to use definition interchangeably with essence given that definitions *qua* true ideas of objects (1a6) involve the essences they define. But it's a long-standing worry tracing back at least to Arthur Schopenhauer's celebrated dissertation, *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (1974, pp. 17-23), that Spinoza conflated definitions and essences, or—as the worry is more often expressed—that Spinoza conflated logical or conceptual connection on the one hand with causation on the other. For some defense of Spinoza on this point, see Hübner (2015). Also see Garrett (1999a, pp. 105-106).



All of this, I believe, puts us in a position to more precisely state Spinoza's rather Aristotelean-scholastic conception of essence in juxtaposition with *propria*. The essence of a thing, or the whole of its essential features, consists in the thing's fundamental features. Because these features are those by virtue of which it is the very thing that it is—features that are not caused or explained by any other feature of the thing—they altogether form the essence of the thing. The *propria* of a thing, in turn, are the derivative features it has by virtue of its fundamental features alone. Because such features fail to be fundamental to the thing—because they are proximately caused or explained solely by the thing's essential features—*propria* do not form the thing's essence.

This appears to be consistent with Spinoza's closely related definition of “what belongs to the essence of a thing” (2d2), often cited in the context of Spinoza's conception of essence.<sup>83</sup> It reads:

I say that to the essence of any thing belongs [*pertinere*] [a] that which, being given, the thing is [NS: also] necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily [NS: also] taken away; or [b] that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing. (2d2; see also KV 2 pref[G 1.53])

Putting aside the question of whether (a) and (b) are in fact equivalent statements of one and the same definition, consider (b). It says that a feature *F* belongs to the essence of *x* just in case *x* cannot be conceived without *F* and *F* cannot be conceived without *x*. What does this mean? Despite the suggestive modal phrasing (“cannot” or “can neither”), this rendering of 2d2 is *not* to say that the essence of a thing consists in the features that are logically necessary and sufficient for its existence.<sup>84</sup> Such a reading implies the contradiction that a thing's non-essential *propria*, because

---

<sup>83</sup> As this suggests, I would be reluctant to say that 2d2 is Spinoza's definition of essence. See Donagan (1988, p. 59), Della Rocca (1996a, pp. 84-85), Garrett (2010, p. 104), and others.

<sup>84</sup> Commentators who take this reading include Bennett (1984, pp. 61, 233), Parkinson (1990, p. 59), Viljanen (2011, pp. 73-74) and Hübner (2014, p. 126; see also 2015, pp. 212-213; 2016, pp. 60-61). However, it is unclear to me that

convertible, are also its essential features. A better reading is that Spinoza is, at least in part, making a deeper point about the fundamentality of a thing's essential features. When 2d2 says that  $x$  cannot be conceived without  $F$  and vice versa, this is to say that  $F$  is fundamental to  $x$ —and therefore essential to  $x$ —and vice versa (cf. 1d3, 1d5, 1p15; see also §1.4, below). For this reason, God cannot be conceived without his attributes—his fundamental, essential features—and vice versa (see Garrett 1999a: 113, 129n16). As such, this is basically Spinoza's conception of essence as I've explained it above.<sup>85</sup>

### 1.3.3 Power, Essence, & Accident

The textual evidence for the conclusion that Spinoza assimilated something like the Aristotelian-scholastic category of accident into his essentialism is much less straightforward than that of essence and proprium. This point is frequently taken for granted by commentators who assume, with little textual evidence, that accidents are an obvious category of Spinoza's essentialism.<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless, once attention is called to certain passages in Spinoza's corpus, there is a strong case to be made that accidents are a category of his essentialism.

One of the best places to look is Spinoza's metaphysical psychology in part three of his *Ethics*. There, human beings' affective states not only serve as good candidates for Aristotelian-

---

such a reading would actually capture Viljanen's and Hübner's considered views. Their excellent work on Spinoza's notion of essence leads me to suspect that they would, if pressed, claim something more like the reading I propose (see, e.g., Viljanen, 2011, pp. 33-53; Hübner, 2015, p. 212n58).

<sup>85</sup> Be that as it may, there is reason to think that this reading of 2d2 may be mistaken (luckily, nothing significant of my essentialist reading of Spinoza seems to ride on it). For example, the way that Spinoza uses 2d2 in some places suggests that it is broad enough to include not only essential features but also propria as that which belongs to the essence of a thing. This is supported by 2p49d, where Spinoza explicitly argues on the basis of 2d2 that a triangular proprium belongs to the essence of a triangle. For this and other reasons, I am inclined to think 2d2 is more confusing and unhelpful in discerning Spinoza's conception of essence than not. I nonetheless discuss it above because of how frequently 2d2 comes up in discussions of Spinoza's notion of essence. I intend to address these and related matters in detail on another occasion.

<sup>86</sup> See, e.g., Carriero (1991, pp. 65-74), Garrett (1999a, pp. 111-112), and Melamed (2013, p. 51). My criticism is not that such commentators are mistaken, but rather that they fail to show their work when claiming that accidents belong to Spinoza's essentialism, something that in my view is not *prima facie* obvious.

scholastic accidents but make a conspicuous display of how Spinoza's essentialism grounds his psychology. What's more, in addition to the conceptual gloss that we saw Spinoza give his essentialism in the previous section, he additionally glosses essences *dynamically* in terms of *power* and (*efficient*) *causation*, similar once again to Aquinas, Suarez, and Descartes (§§1.2.2-1.2.3). This is on display in the following passage, for example:

From the given essence of each thing some things necessarily follow (by 1p36), and things are able [to produce] nothing but what follows necessarily from their determinate nature (by 1p29). So the power of each thing, *or* the striving by which it (either alone or with others) does anything, or strives to do anything—i.e. (by 3p6), the power, *or* striving, by which it strives to persevere in its being, is nothing but the given, *or* actual, essence of the thing itself, q.e.d. [*quare cujuscunque rei potentia sive conatus quo ipsa vel sola vel cum aliis quidquam agit vel agere conatur hoc est (per propositionem 6 hujus) potentia sive conatus quo in suo esse perseverare conatur, nihil est praeter ipsius rei datam sive actualem essentiam. Q.E.D.*] (3p7d)

First consider the description of essence in this passage, and then the way that effects relate to essence. The “given, *or* actual” essence of any thing is the formal being or reality it has outside the intellect, which Spinoza characterizes as *power* (*potentia*) or *striving* (*conatus*). Spinoza rejects the idea that the essence of a given thing is inert; rather, it does things from the activity of its own nature, and naturally exerts itself so as to persevere in being. It is the essence of a given thing to be powerful and cause effects.<sup>87</sup> Hence, to borrow a term from Valtteri Viljanen (2011), we may think of the causally efficacious essence of a thing as its *intrinsic power* (p. 65), a term that integrates what I earlier referred to as an *intrinsic cause* (§1.3.1).

Next, consider the way that effects relate to essence. By virtue that the intrinsic power of *x* is given, 3p7d states that “some things necessarily follow”, namely, *effects* of *x*'s intrinsic power.

---

<sup>87</sup> See also TTP 16.4: “Now the supreme law of nature is that each thing strives to persevere in its state, as far as it can by its own power, and does this, not on account of anything else, but only of itself. From this it follows that each individual has the supreme right to do this, i.e. (as I have said), to exist and have effects as it is naturally determined to do.” (G 3.189; emphasis added) Cf. Ep 83.

This is a result of 1p36—“Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow”—a proposition that Yitzhak Melamed (2013b) aptly calls “the principle of sufficient effect” (p. 80n85). What’s more, 3p7d says in a parenthetical that the effects that follow in things are considered “either alone or with others [*vel sola vel cum aliis*]”. These effects are *affections* or simply *affects*, which inhere in things as features or states (cf. 4app1)—for example, love, hate, or noble desire. But the kind of affect that a thing has depends on the affect’s proximate causal source and how it modifies the existential resilience of its subject.

This is elucidated by Spinoza’s opening definitions of the third part of the *Ethics*, which notably exhibit both his conceptual and dynamic glosses of his essentialism:

3d1: I call that cause adequate whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it. But I call it partial, *or* inadequate, if its effect cannot be understood through it alone. (see also 1a4)

3d2: I say that we act [*agere*] when something happens, in us or outside us, of which we are the adequate cause, i.e. (by 3d1), when something in us or outside us follows from our nature, which can be clearly and distinctly understood through it alone. On the other hand, I say that we are acted on [*pati*] when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause. (see also KV 2.5.8)

3d3: By affect I understand affections of the Body by which the Body’s power of acting [*agendi potentia*] is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections.

*Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I understand by the Affect an action [actionem]; otherwise, a passion [passionem].*

When Spinoza considers the effects that follow from the intrinsic power of things *vel sola vel cum aliis* at 3p7d, I believe that what he has in mind correspond to things’ *actions* and *passions*.

Putting the above definitions together, we can extract a general account of action and passion for things and their corresponding ideas:

*A* is an *action* (*actionem*) of *x* just in case *A* is an affect of *x* that is adequately caused by *x*’s essence, i.e., just in case *A* is an affect of *x* that follows from, and is intelligible through, the intrinsic power of *x* alone.

*P* is a *passion* (*passionem*) of *x* just in case *P* is an affect of *x* that is inadequately or partially caused by *x*'s essence, i.e., just in case *P* is an affect of *x* that follows from, and is intelligible though, the intrinsic power of *x* together with the causal activity of some *y* external to and independent of *x*.<sup>88</sup>

Arguably, actions refer to propria, or adequately caused effects of propria.<sup>89</sup> In that case, what it is for *x* to *act* (*agere*) is for *x* to produce or manifest its propria.<sup>90</sup> But of particular interest are passions, which arguably refer to accidents.<sup>91</sup> This looks especially clear from Spinoza's physical axiom underlying his notion of a psycho-physical passion: "All modes by which a body is affected by another body follow both from the nature of the body affected and at the same time from the nature of the affecting body" (2a1" | G 2.99; see also 3p1,3, 4app1-2).<sup>92</sup> And so, what it is for *x* to have a passion—or equivalently, to be *acted on* (*pati*)—is for *x* to have accidents.

However strong this case may be, Spinozistic passions only provide *indirect* textual evidence that Spinoza integrated accidents into his metaphysics.<sup>93</sup> Arguably, there is also some

---

<sup>88</sup> While Spinoza's opening definitions above may suggest that actions and passions concern only human beings, his remarks elsewhere indicate otherwise. See, e.g., 1p17,d,c1-2, 5p17; and KV 2.24.2 (esp. G 1.104.10-13). What's more, Spinoza implies that there are affections of bodies that neither increase nor diminish their power of acting (3post1, which rests on 2post1 and 2lem5,7). So, in addition to actions and passions, there are neutral affections of things. This raises the question of whether neutral affects are actions or passions. An answer can be found by considering the case of human beings. Since actions by human beings are always conducive to their good (4app1-6), neutral affects in human beings—features that are conducive neither to our good nor evil—would seem to be passions of some harmless variety.

<sup>89</sup> See also, e.g., TdIE 108 | G 2.38.21-24; KV 1.2.29 | G 1.27.19-24, KV 2.26; 3p7d (in particular, see the Latin), and 3pref | G 2.138.19ff. In fact, some actions are adequately caused by a thing's adequately caused affects according to Spinoza, in which case some actions are propria of propria (see 3p59s). Spinoza is thus committed to higher-order propria of things. This should perhaps not be too surprising considering, for instance, Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Effect and his view that (as I maintain in ch. 4, §4.5 and §4.7) all of God's modes are his propria (which in turn have propria in virtue of their own essences, and so on).

<sup>90</sup> I say "manifest" because propria seem to be, if not include, *dispositions* that are manifested in the presence or absence of certain stimuli. While human beings have the proprium of being *risible*, for example, this does not imply that every human being manifests laughter at humor at all times (because the stimulus may be absent), although it does imply that every human being has that disposition at all times.

<sup>91</sup> See also, e.g., TdIE 73; 2p49s | G 2.136.23ff, 3pref | G 2.138.19ff, 4p2-4c.

<sup>92</sup> What's more, it is a principal aim of the *Ethics* to free human beings from harmful passions by means of modifying our causal relations to external things (4app1-6, 5pref), indicating that things may or may not have a given accident or passion depending on whether the thing stands in certain extrinsic causal relations.

<sup>93</sup> Della Rocca (1996b, p. 203) also points out that 3p8 is an indirect commitment to thing's non-essential features—features that I think can be seen as accidents.

*direct* textual evidence for the same conclusion in some of his early writings. For example, in a (coincidental) discussion of the passions in the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza says:

[T]he foundation of all good and evil is love falling on a certain object. For whenever we do not love that object which alone is worthy of being loved, i.e. (as we have already said), God, *but love those things which through their own kind and nature are corruptible*, there follow necessarily from that hate, sadness, etc., *according to the changes in the object loved (because the object is subject to many accidents [toevallen],<sup>94</sup> indeed to destruction itself)*. (KV 2.14.4|G 1.77.24-31; emphasis added)

I believe that the parenthetical in the above passage is confirmation that Spinoza accepts the Aristotelian-scholastic idea of accidents (see also KV 2.5|G 1.63). This is clear from the characteristics that Spinoza ascribes the object of one's misplaced love, all of which are *subsumed* under the category of accident: *being corruptible, changeable, and destructible*.<sup>95</sup> It is also clear from consideration of the nature of these characteristics, each of which belongs to an object in virtue of its causal relations to external things.<sup>96</sup> As such, the accidents Spinoza speaks of are arguably those of the Aristotelian-scholastic sort.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> The Wolf translation also renders the Dutch term *toevallen* as “accidents” (S 78).

<sup>95</sup> As this suggests, I think Spinoza will have to say that accidents cannot belong to substance and are exclusive to modes, strictly speaking. I touch on this in §1.4, below, but also see chapter 4, §4.5.

<sup>96</sup> For reasons of space, I forego the details of Spinoza's views on corruption, change, and destruction. But on corruption, see KV 2.5|G 1.62-63 (cf. 1d2, 2d7) and 2p31d,c. On change, see CM 2.4|G 1.255.24-25, the physical digression in the *Ethics* after 2p13s (G 2.97-103), and 5a1. On destruction, see KV 2.26|G 1.110, 3p4-8, and 4a1.

<sup>97</sup> Interestingly, there is also the early 1661 correspondence with Henry Oldenburg, where Spinoza describes his ontology as one of substance and “modification, or Accident [*per modificationem autem, sive per Accidens*]” (Ep 4|G 4.13-14; cf. 1p4d). (This passage and related considerations also receive some extended discussion in Melamed (2018).) The interchangeability of *accidentia* with *modes* indicates that Spinoza is referring to *accidentia* in a generic, broad sense referring to all of a thing's non-essential features—a sense that therefore differs from the narrow notion of accidents I have been concerned with so far. As we've seen, modes capture features that follow from either a thing's essence alone (what I have called *propria*) or a thing's essence together with extrinsic causes (what I have called *accidents* in its narrow sense). In Aristotelian-scholastic contexts, a generic reference to *accidentia* would capture the same non-essential features of things, namely, proper *accidentia* (*propria*) or extrinsic *accidentia* (*accidents*). So, Spinoza's *accidens* in Ep 4 seem to imply the notion of an accident in the narrow sense—at least for things that stand in external causal relations. But of course, with respect to a Spinozistic substance—an ontologically and conceptually independent being standing in no inter-substantial causal relations—its *accidentia* can be nothing other than *propria* (see ch. 4, §4.5.1). But with respect to the further features of substance's *accidentia* (the *accidentia* of *accidentia*, or higher order *accidentia* of substance, e.g., passions inhering in a finite mode of substance), such features will include the narrow sense of accidents resultant from extrinsic causes.

By way of closing the present section, I want to hark back to Spinoza's theory of definitions and briefly answer the following question: where does the *existence* of a mode fit within the categories of Spinoza's essentialism? It seems to me that existence must be an *accident* of modes (cf. KV app1p4d|G 1.116; Jarrett, 2001). As I argued above, the essence of modes neither depends on nor presupposes their existence. Put simply, no mode  $x$  exists by virtue of what it is. Rather,  $x$  exists by virtue of *both* its essence *and* its proximate cause: by virtue of its essence insofar as  $x$ 's instantiation depends on and is structured according to  $x$ 's essence, and by virtue of its proximate cause insofar as the instantiation of  $x$ 's essence depends on and is contained in something outside and independent of  $x$ . The existence of  $x$  is the convergence of its essence and an existence-bestowing extrinsic cause. So, existence can be neither an essential feature nor a proprium of modes. It is thus an accident of modes.

#### **1.3.4 Conceptual Essentialism, Dynamic Essentialism, & the Primacy of Power**

In the last two sections (§§1.3.2-1.3.3), I interpreted Spinoza as glossing his essentialism as both conceptual and dynamic. This naturally raises some questions about their status in his metaphysics. So, in the present section I want to clarify the status of Spinoza's conceptual and dynamic glosses, which I'll respectively refer to as *conceptual essentialism* on the one hand, and what Viljanen (2011) calls *dynamic essentialism* on the other (pp. 5, 73).

Is it a subjective or mind-dependent matter that essences may be characterized conceptually or dynamically? It is not: Spinoza takes his glosses to correspond to something real. When described conceptually, for example, Spinoza refers to ideas of essences as "clear and distinct" and "true", as explaining things as they are "in themselves" and "outside the intellect" (see §1.3.2). In Suarezian and Cartesian terms that Spinoza himself adopts, those essences have at least as much

*formal* or *actual reality* as their ideas have *objective reality*.<sup>98</sup> This is to say that things' essences really (i.e., formally or actually) have the being that their ideas mentally represent them as having (i.e., objectively) as objects of thought (*ideatum*). The same holds for the dynamic description of essences: Spinoza explicitly refers to the intrinsic power of a thing as its "given, *or* actual", i.e., formal, essence (3p7d).<sup>99</sup>

Conceptual essentialism and dynamic essentialism, then, are legitimate ways of capturing and describing the natures and operations of things. Hence, it is unsurprising that conception and causation are *coextensive* according to Spinoza on the basis of 1a4: "The knowledge [*cognitio*] of an effect depends on, and involves [*involvit*], the knowledge of its cause" (1a4). As Michael Della Rocca (1996a, p. 11) has pointed out, Spinoza's appeals to 1a4 (e.g., at 1p6c and 1p25d) show that the axiom amounts to the claim that *x* is conceived through *y* just in case *x* is the cause of *y*.

Nonetheless, there are some important differences between the two glosses. Spinoza's conceptual essentialism is what we might call an "attribute-specific" gloss. This is because it refers to ideas in God's attribute of *thought* which represent essences objectively as they are formally in all of God's attributes (2p7c). Spinoza's dynamic essentialism, however, is *not* an attribute-specific gloss. To adapt a term from Jonathan Bennett (1984, pp. 143ff), it is rather a "trans-attribute" gloss by virtue that efficient causal intrinsic power accurately characterizes essences across attributes, including thought and extension.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> See, e.g., Suarez's *Disputations* (DM 5.1.1; 26.1.2,5-6; 30.1.9-12|BSM 33-37), Descartes' Third Meditation (CSM 2.28-29|AT 40-42), and Spinoza (TdIE 33ff; KV 1.1; DDP 1d3-4; 1p17s|G 2.63).

<sup>99</sup> A fairly prevalent line of interpretation in current Spinoza studies maintains that the "formal essence" (*essentia formalis*) of modes refers to their essence irrespective of existence, and that "actual essence" (*essentia actualis*) refers to the existence of modes whose essence is actualized. See, e.g., Donagan (1973), Martin (2008a; cf. 2010), Garrett (2009; cf. 2010), Viljanen (2011), Ward (2011), Schmaltz (2015), and even the glossary of Silverthorn's and Kisner's recent critical edition of Spinoza's *Ethics* (SK 256). I'm convinced by Lærke (2017, 24-33), however, that the formal essence and actual essence of things are one and the same for Spinoza, and that they are instead distinguished from the *objective essence* of things, as maintained by Descartes.

<sup>100</sup> So, essences as intrinsic powers are not to be understood as (say) the strictly *corporeal* correlate of conceptual essentialism in God's attribute of extension, as that would fail to capture the width and depth of Spinoza's dynamic



As this last point suggests, I believe that dynamic essentialism articulates the *ground floor* of Spinoza’s metaphysics, and is in some sense more basic than conceptual essentialism.<sup>101</sup> In slogan form, the idea is that *power is primary, or to be is to be powerful*.<sup>102</sup> This can be seen from some textual considerations that I’ve adapted from Francesca di Poppa (2013). First consider 1p34,d:

1p34: God’s power is his essence itself [*Dei potentia est ipsa ipsius essentia*].

Dem.: For from the necessity alone of God’s essence it follows that God is the cause of himself (by 1p11) and (by 1p16 and 1p16c) of all things. Therefore, God’s power, by which he and all things are and act, is his essence itself, q.e.d. (cf. TTP 6.9|G 3.83)

Like Descartes’ view of divine self-causation (§1.2.3), Spinoza maintains that God is his own cause (*causa sui*) in the positive sense that *power* characterizes his essence, i.e., God’s existence and actions are intrinsically caused (§1.3.1). Notice that in the above proposition, Spinoza does not qualify God’s essence as if power were no more than *one way* of conceiving or expressing the divine nature akin to an individual attribute. Rather, in unqualified terms, power expresses the divine nature, which consists in infinite attributes (1d6). I believe this is what Spinoza means when he says that “God’s power... is his essence itself”, just as he says that the power of each mode “is nothing but the given, *or actual*, essence of the thing itself” (3p7d). This also goes to show that power is *transitive* for Spinoza. The essence of modes is characterized as power because power characterizes God’s essence. God acts by virtue of his intrinsic power, conferring power to modes

---

essentialism. This seems to correspond nicely with Melamed’s (2013, pp. 139ff) compelling interpretation of Spinoza’s parallelistic dualism, which is not a narrow dualism of thought and *extension*, but more broadly that of thought and *being* (or perhaps better: *powerful being* or simply *power*).

<sup>101</sup> Commentators who hold a similar view include Viljanen (2011) and Di Poppa (2013). (Cf. Hübner, 2015; Melamed, 2012b; Nadler, 2012.) In terms of contemporary classification, Spinoza appears to be a dispositional essentialist of some stripe, wherein the features of anything are intrinsically powerful dispositional properties (see, e.g., Choi & Fara, 2018; Swoyer, 1982; Bird, 2005a, 2005b).

<sup>102</sup> The idea that being is fundamentally power traces back at least to Plato and especially Aristotle (see Viljanen, 2011, pp. 1-2, cf. 2-5). Unsurprisingly, similar views are suggested by Aristotelians and scholastics like Suarez, for example, who says: “For there is no being that does not participate in some *ratio* of cause. ... But there is no being that is not either an effect or a cause” (DM 12, prologue|SP 1.1).

just as any cause inflows being into its effect; and in turn, those modes act and are acted on by virtue of their own and others' intrinsic power, conferring power to other modes (see 1p36, 3p7d).

This conclusion is shored up by some texts surrounding Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism (2p7), which states that the series of modes of thought corresponds exactly with the series of modes of every other attribute:

*The formal being of ideas admits God as a cause only insofar as he is considered as a thinking thing, and not insofar as he is explained by any other attribute. I.e., ideas, both of God's attributes and of singular things, admit not the objects themselves, or the things perceived, as their efficient cause, but God himself [as their efficient cause], insofar as he is a thinking thing. (2p5; emphasis added)*

*The modes of each attribute have God for their cause only insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute. (2p6; emphasis added)*

The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things. (2p7)

From this [2p7] it follows that God's [NS: *actual*] *power of thinking* is equal to his *actual power of acting*. (2p7c; emphasis added)

The passage of 2p6 indicates that God's causation characterizes his relation to modes in every attribute; and 2p5 and 2p7c indicate one instance of this causation wherein God's formal activity in the specific attribute of *thought* is just *one way* in which God expresses his *power*. In other words, thought and its modes (ideas, concepts, etc.) are *ways of being efficacious powers*. On this reading, the same holds for any other attribute as well, and so God's formal activity in the specific attribute of *extension* is yet another way in which God expresses his power. This coheres well with the idea that Spinoza's dynamic essentialism is a trans-attribute gloss in which each of God's attributes is but one among infinitely other (fundamental) ways that God expresses his essence

(1d6,exp) understood as *power* (1p34).<sup>103</sup> If this is right, conceptual essentialism is a manifestation of dynamic essentialism within the attribute of thought.

While I've argued for the primacy of dynamic essentialism over conceptual essentialism, both glosses capture the essences and operations of things—be it in terms of efficient causation and power, or intelligibility and conception (or even both, as Spinoza is wont to do at 3d1 and 5a2, for example). The same sentiment appears to be reflected in Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason: "For each thing there must be assigned a cause, *or* reason [*causa seu ratio*], as much for its existence as for its nonexistence" (1p11d2).<sup>104</sup> Reminiscent of the phrasing of Descartes' Principle of Sufficient Reason (§1.2.3), Spinoza also requires a "cause, *or* reason".<sup>105</sup> A *cause* accounts for the existence (or nonexistence) of a thing in dynamic terms by reference to what follows as an effect from the power of one or more things' essences; and a *reason* accounts for the existence (or nonexistence) of a thing in conceptual terms by reference to what follows as an explanatory consequence of the idea of one or more things' essences. In either case, effects follow from things by virtue of essences, and so either essentialist gloss (dynamic or conceptual) is adequate for the mapping and description of reality.

This points to what I believe is a more comprehensive account of Spinoza's view of causation, in which efficient causation is not only fundamental (§1.3.1) but part and parcel with

---

<sup>103</sup> For additional textual evidence in Spinoza for the primacy of causal power, see DPP 1p7s|G 1.163.16-20; CM 1.3|G 1.241; Ep 60; 1d7, 1p11d3, 1app|G 2.83.23-26, 3p1,3-7, 4d8, 4app1-6, and 5a2. See also Viljanen (2011, esp. pp. 59-67); Di Poppa (2013), and Hübner (2014, p. 126; 2015). Cf. Melamed (2012b) and Nadler (2012).

<sup>104</sup> What it means to account for a thing's nonexistence is a topic I reserve for discussion in chapter 3, §3.2. There I explain Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason in some further detail.

<sup>105</sup> There nonetheless seem to be important differences between how Descartes and Spinoza understand their own Principles of Sufficient Reason. For example, Descartes seems to take the requirement of a "cause or reason" to be *disjunctive*, requiring that things at least have *either* a cause *or* a reason (if not both). In that case, if God's existence doesn't strictly have an efficient cause, Descartes can at least say that God's existence admits of a reason. For Spinoza, however, he is committed (via parallelism) to the *conjunctive* requirement that things have both a cause and a reason. In that case, where Descartes takes God to supply his own reason for existing and only a cause of himself merely on the analogy of an efficient cause, Spinoza seems to take God to be self-explanatory and a literal efficient cause of himself (that is, in the rather unique way that Spinoza understands efficient causation).

his dynamic essentialism. Similar to the “essentialist model of causation” proposed by Viljanen (2008; 2011, pp. 33-53) and the “formal causal model” proposed by Hübner (2015), I think Spinoza takes causation to be a relation in which certain features (*propria*, accidents, etc.) follow from one or more essences. And what it is for such features to follow from some essence is for those features to flow as efficiently caused effects of some essence, because an essence is at bottom efficient causal intrinsic power.<sup>106</sup>

If this is right, I want to propose that the “following-from” (*sequi*) relation that Spinoza frequently posits between objects is at bottom a relation of efficient causation. Understanding the following-from relation in this way may throw some fresh light on it in at least two respects.<sup>107</sup>

The first is that it is a *trans-attribute relation*. For, as a relation of efficient causation, the following-from relation is subsumed within dynamic essentialism—a *trans-attribute gloss* of essences in terms of power. And indeed, this seems to be exactly the way that Spinoza invokes the relation, both irrespective of any specific attribute (see, e.g., 1p29, 1p34-36) and with respect to specific attributes like thought or extension (see, e.g., 2p3, 2a1”|G 2.99). I believe that this is at least partly why, at 1p16c1, Spinoza feels entitled to infer that God is an *efficient cause* immediately after 1p16, where he demonstrated that infinitely many modes *follow from* God’s nature (not to mention that they also follow because they fall under God’s infinite intellect).

---

<sup>106</sup> Viljanen (2011, pp. 44-45) suggests that Spinozistic efficient causation either reduces to or is identical with formal causation but he doesn’t seem to commit to saying which. Hübner (2015, pp. 228-229n106) affirms the fundamentality of formal causation and maintains that efficient causation is an *extrinsic* formal causal relation. But if I’m right, Spinoza takes efficient causation to be fundamental as part and parcel of his dynamic essentialism. In my view, Hübner’s reading places too much weight on limited textual evidence in the *Ethics* (e.g., 1p33s1) and doesn’t grant enough weight to more extensive textual evidence outside of (and contemporaneous with) the *Ethics* (e.g., Ep 60). But even within the *Ethics*, Spinoza appears committed to the fundamentality of efficient causation as I suggested in §1.3.1 on the basis of 1p25s.

<sup>107</sup> For some important discussion of the following-from relation, see Garrett (1999a, pp. 105-106, 127-128n4-6) and Hübner (2015). See also Della Rocca (2003, p. 81) and Carriero (1991).

Similarly at 1p17s, Spinoza cites 1p16 and states that “*from God’s supreme power... all things, have necessarily flowed, or always follow*” (G|2.62.15ff; emphasis added).

The second respect concerns why the following-from relation is *not* the entailment relation of contemporary logics. For one thing, I just argued that the following-from relation is an efficient causal trans-attribute relation ultimately rooted in some essence. But entailment relations seem to be thought-specific conceptual relations. For another thing, Spinoza’s following-from relation is far more restrictive than logical entailment. For example, consider that:

(a)  $5 + 7 = 12$

and

(b) squares are four equal-sided rectilinear figures.

In this case, (a) indeed “follows from” (b) in the sense of logical entailment, but Spinoza would deny this in *his* sense of the relation. As Don Garrett (1999a) explains:

[I]n saying that “y follows from x,” [Spinoza] means considerably *more* than simply that “x entails y,”... In [most contemporary modal and entailment] logics, the meaning of “x entails y” is exhausted by the claim that there is no possible world in which x is true and y is false. For Spinoza, in contrast, to speak of x as following from y is to locate x specifically as a necessitating *cause and ground* of y within a causal order of the universe that is at once dynamic and logical. Thus, if the Spinozist “following-from” relation is to be identified with a kind of entailment at all, it must be identified with the entailment relation of a “relevance logic,” one whose relevance condition is satisfied only by priority in the causal order of nature. (p. 106)

So, in contrast, while Spinoza would deny that (a) follows from (b) in his sense of “following-from”, he would not deny of squares that

(c) the sum of the interior angles equals four right angles

follows from (b). According to Garrett, this would not merely be because (b) entails (c), but because (b) is the necessitating cause and ground of (c), satisfying the appropriate conditions of relevance.

The dynamic essentialist reading of Spinoza I outlined above helps to clarify how the following-from relation is one of necessitating cause and ground, but goes farther than Garrett's interpretation. It is the *essence* of things that is the necessitating cause and ground of whatever follows from it; and this is because essence is, at bottom, *efficient causal intrinsic power* in virtue of which effects necessarily flow and have being. Indeed, dynamic essentialism offers a natural and yet deeper explanation of just how Spinoza takes (b) to be the necessitating cause and ground of (c)—namely, because such essences *qua* efficient causal intrinsic powers emanate their proper features *qua* effects (cf. 3da22exp). Akin to conditions of logical relevance, dynamic essentialism also places strict conditions on what can and cannot follow from the essence of *x* (assuming for simplicity that *x* is a particular thing and not a collection of essences). Only those features or effects which are contained in the essence of *x* can and do follow from *x* necessarily, whereas it is impossible for features or effects to follow from *x* if they are not contained in the essence of *x*. That is, *y* can only follow from the essence of *x* to the extent that *x* actually has the power to efficiently cause *y*, otherwise *y* cannot follow from *x*. Below, I briefly explore an implication of Spinoza's essentialism thus described.

#### 1.4 Spinoza's Modal Reductionism

Modality is not primitive for Spinoza.<sup>108</sup> This makes him something of a *modal reductionist*, according to which a thing's modal status (necessary, possible) is not irreducible, but to be accounted for in terms of something deeper and amodal (cf. Sider, 2005; Newlands, 2013, §3). I believe this to be a consequence of Spinoza's essentialism, in which the deeper and amodal terms are those of some actual essential ground, by virtue of which a thing has its modal status. In other

---

<sup>108</sup> Others who share the view that Spinozistic modality is not primitive include Mason (1986), Carriero (1991) Dasgupta (2016), Newlands (2018), and perhaps Garrett (1999a, 2010). Cf. Sider (2005) and Vetter (2011).

words, a thing's modal status follows from some formal essence, or put simply, essence is prior to modality.<sup>109</sup> To some extent this is to be expected given the previous section, according to which Spinoza's dynamic essentialism is primary and characterizes essence in terms of efficient causal intrinsic power. For my purposes in this section, I want to look at two limited instances of Spinoza's modal reductionism. Because a full explanation would require spelling out Spinoza's modal metaphysics—the subject of chapter 3—it will suffice to look at how Spinoza treats *necessity* or *existing necessarily*.

#### 1.4.1 Necessary by Reason of Essence or Cause

As a necessitarian, Spinoza maintains that whatever is instantiated is necessarily instantiated in the absolute or metaphysical sense (1p29, 1p33, 2p44). He therefore denies that anything is contingently instantiated, which also makes him a *modal eliminativist* to this extent. But where Spinoza's modal reductionism comes in is his denial that the necessity in things is basic. It rather stems from a source that is either intrinsic or extrinsic:

A thing is called necessary either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause. For a thing's existence follows necessarily either from its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause. [*Res aliqua necessaria dicitur vel ratione suae essentiae vel ratione causae. Rei enim alicujus existentia vel ex ipsius essentia et definitione vel ex data causa efficiente necessario sequitur.*] (1p33s1)

To borrow some terminology from Michael Griffin (2008), this renders things either *intrinsically necessary* or *extrinsically necessary*, corresponding to the distinction between an intrinsic cause and an extrinsic cause from §1.3.1.

---

<sup>109</sup> See Carriero (1991) and Koslicki (2011). Outside of the history of philosophy, the idea that essence (and ontological dependence on essence) is prior to necessity (if not modality in general) has been defended by Fine (1994, 1995) and Gorman (2005).

God alone is intrinsically necessary: necessary *by virtue of* his essence or definition (1p11, 1p14). His instantiation follows necessarily from his nature, which is to say that God is intrinsically caused, or self-caused (1d1). For anything else—for every mode—it is likewise necessary in its existence, but *not* by virtue of its own essence. Rather, it is extrinsically necessary: necessary *by virtue of* a cause outside of and independent of themselves, from which its instantiation follows necessarily.<sup>110</sup> And this cause, in turn, obtains by virtue of some essence which not only is characterized by efficient causal power, but ultimately follows from God whose existence is intrinsically necessary, or necessary by virtue of his essence (thus ensuring the modal closure of necessity in Spinoza’s necessitarian metaphysics, as I explain in chapters 3 and 4). In either case, things are not primitively necessary, but necessary by virtue of the intrinsic power of some essence.<sup>111</sup>

#### 1.4.2 God’s Definition & Necessity

The above argument points to what I take to be the clearest case in which necessity derives from some essence. Consider how Spinoza treats necessity with respect to God’s definition:

By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence [*Per Deum intelligo ens absolute infinitum hoc est substantiam constantem infinitis attributis quorum unumquodque aeternam et infinitam essentiam exprimit.*]. (1d6)

---

<sup>110</sup> Indeed, not even the necessity of modes’ *essences* obtains by virtue of themselves. That necessity rather obtains by virtue of an eternal cause, namely, God. “For example... we may attend to the fact that the nature of the triangle is contained in the divine nature solely from the necessity of the divine nature, and not from the necessity of the essence and nature of the triangle—indeed, that the necessity of the essence and properties of the triangle, insofar as they too are conceived as eternal truths, depends only on the necessity of the divine nature and intellect, and not on the nature of the triangle.” (TTP 4.24|G 3.62-63) I touch on this theme in more detail in chapter 3.

<sup>111</sup> My reading thus approaches Mason (1986), in contrast to contemporary views which define essence in terms of necessary features, in that for Spinoza, “[t]o be necessary is to have a cause or sufficient explanation. In particular, essence may be seen as definable in terms of explanation of causality. The dependence of necessity on essence is reversed...” (p. 337) For some reason, however, Mason appears to backtrack on this, suggesting that being necessary for Spinoza is primitive and equivalent to having a cause or reason (pp. 339-341).



One feature that Spinoza ascribes to God but is strictly absent from God's defining characteristics is his necessity, or existing necessarily. This feature *follows from* God's definition. This is something that Spinoza shows only after a series of demonstrations that prove, firstly, that every substance exists necessarily (1p7), and then secondly, that God (the sole substance) exists necessarily (1p11, 1p14). As Spinoza explains, "since it pertains [*pertinet*] to the nature of a substance to exist... its definition must involve necessary existence, *and consequently its [necessary] existence must be inferred from its definition alone*" (1p8s2|G 2.51.14-17; emphasis added).<sup>112</sup> God's necessary existence, in other words, is a mode that derives from his essence as a consequence. Spinoza even says as much when he explicitly cites God's "necessity" as explaining "only his manner of existing [*modum existendi*]" (CM 2.11|G 1.275.3-4). To some extent this isn't surprising because Spinoza nowhere says that necessity is one of God's *attributes* that consist in his most fundamental, essential features (1d4).

I believe this shows that God's necessity is in fact one of his *propria* (a view that Descartes himself suggests but never affirms: see §1.2.3).<sup>113</sup> Spinoza seems to confirm this in a fairly detailed list of divine features cited in his appendix to part one of the *Ethics* (quoted here in part):

With these [demonstrations] I have explained God's *nature* and *properties* [*proprietas*]: *that he exists necessarily*; that he is unique; that he is and acts from

---

<sup>112</sup> Compare with Ep 34: "But since... necessary existence pertains to the Nature of God, it is necessary that his true definition should contain his necessary existence. And for that reason his necessary existence is to be inferred from his true definition." (G 4.180.22-25)

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Wolfson (1934, vol. 1, pp. 227-229). This conclusion is also supported by the requirements we saw from Spinoza's theory of definitions (§1.3.2). For like *propria*, necessity doesn't define God because it fails to explain God's inmost essence. Nonetheless, necessity is deducible from God's definition. But that necessity is a divine *proprium* is of course not to say that God somehow (incoherently) brought about his own existence from a prior state of *nonexistence*. There is no such prior state because Spinoza tells us that God's existence is identical to his essence (1p20). So, if essence is prior to modality, God's existence is prior to his necessity. This is similar once more to Descartes' view of divine self-causation (§1.2.3), in which God's essence supplies the power or explanation for his necessity—an outer layer of his being, as it were—a feature that is inextricable from God but nonetheless not one of God's deepest layers of being (his essence or attributes). Likewise, Spinoza writes: "For though *existing of itself, being the cause of all things, the greatest good, eternal, and immutable*, etc., are proper to God alone, nevertheless through those *propria* we can know neither what the being to which these *propria* belong is, nor what attributes it has" (KV 1.7.6).

the necessity alone of his nature; that (and how) he is the free cause of all things...  
(1app|G 2.77; emphasis added)

Arguably, God's *proprietas* in this passage are his *propria*, the first of which is God's necessity. For one thing, we know Spinoza uses *proprietas* synonymously with *propria* (see, e.g., TdIE 95; 1p16d, 3da6exp). For another thing, the *proprietas* are not fundamental enough to be God's attributes, but nor could they be accidents on account that there is no other substance but God to causally act on him (1p6, 1p11, 1p16-18).<sup>114</sup> So, the *proprietas* must be *propria*, which also explains why Spinoza distinguishes the *proprietas* from God's nature in the opening line of the above passage. For a final thing, Spinoza's list of divine *proprietas* bears striking resemblance to Spinoza's other lists compiled in his *Short Treatise* (KV 1.3-7), which are explicitly lists of God's *propria*.<sup>115</sup>

### 1.4.3 Amodal Essentialism

For Spinoza, I think this indicates that necessity is ultimately a consequence grounded in some essence and *not* a defining characteristic of it. Necessity is not something truly fundamental that figures appropriately in the power or formal essence of things, but rather stems from it (and ultimately from God's essence). To paraphrase Shamik Dasgupta (2016, p. 395), the idea here is that necessity (a modality) is a *way* for a thing to be, whereas essence is *what* a thing is; and it is only because of the prior fact of what a thing is, that there is then some way for that thing to be.<sup>116</sup>

To conclude this section, I've argued that the existence of things is necessary by virtue of the causal activity of some essence, either their own or that of another, which is to say that essence

---

<sup>114</sup> I discuss this line of thought further in chapter 4, §4.5.

<sup>115</sup> See also, e.g., CM 2.3|G 1.253-254.8, CM 2.11|G 1.275; 1p14-20, 1p34-36, 3p7d, and 2p10s|G 2.93.

<sup>116</sup> The idea here can be found in Carriero (1991, p. 73) and, in a more developed form, Dasgupta (2016, pp. 393-396). See also Garrett (2010, pp. 103-105).

is prior to necessity. It thus seems to me that Spinoza's conception of essence is, on this point, quite Aristotelian once again. As Kathrin Koslicki (2011) explains:

Aristotle does not subscribe to a modal conception of essence. For Aristotle, the essential truths are not even included among the necessary truths; and the essential features of an object are similarly not included among its necessary features. Rather, Aristotle conceives of the necessary truths as being distinct and derivative from the essential truths; and he conceives of the necessary features of objects, traditionally known as the 'propria' or 'necessary accidents', as being distinct and derivative from, the essential features of objects. (p. 187)

Later, I discuss Spinoza's modal reductionism in more general terms after having explained his modal metaphysics (ch. 3, §3.5).

## 1.5 Conclusion

Spinoza's essentialism, as we've seen, shares a good deal in common with that of his Cartesian and especially Aristotelian-scholastic predecessors (§§1.2, 1.4.3). He maintains the familiar distinction between essence, proprium, and accident (§1.3), a framework that can be characterized in either conceptual or dynamic terms (§§1.3.2-1.3.3). The latter characterization—what I later referred to as *dynamic essentialism*—is primary for Spinoza (§1.3.4), also reflecting Spinoza's commitment to the centrality of efficient causation (§1.3.1). In fact, his essentialism is even more fundamental than modality, or at least necessity, akin to Aristotle's own amodal conception of essence (§1.4). The resemblance of Spinoza's views with that of the Aristotelians, scholastics, and Cartesians is evidence that his essentialist framework was influenced to no small extent by such traditions. This is of course not to deny that there are novel ways in which Spinoza diverges from the traditions of his predecessors.<sup>117</sup> But as Hübner (2015) explains: "Concepts and doctrines

---

<sup>117</sup> For some of Spinoza's disagreements with Aristotelian and scholastic thought, for example, observe his treatment of definition (KV 1.7; cf. KV 2, preface|G 1.53); the reality of universal essences (2p40s1); substantial forms or "occult" qualities (CM 2.12|G 1.280.14-32; 5pref|G 2.279); and final causes (1app|G 2.78-81). And for some of Spinoza's disagreements with Descartes, see Ep 30 (Fragment 1), 81, 83, and 5pref.

inherited [by early moderns] from Aristotelianism were often redefined and revised, rather than simply rejected” (p. 207), and I suspect as much of Spinoza.<sup>118</sup> In subsequent chapters, I explain the role and implications of Spinoza’s essentialism, in order to ultimately explain his necessitarianism and the replies he has available to overcome its objectors.

---

<sup>118</sup> A case in point that old ideas were reinvented by early moderns is Spinoza’s treatment of the Cartesian, and ultimately Aristotelian, notion of substance. For some good discussion of this, see Jarrett (1977) and Carriero (1999). Another case in point is Leibniz’s treatment of the Aristotelian-scholastic doctrine of substantial forms (L 308|AG 42). Also see Wolfson (1934) on Spinoza’s debt to ancient and medieval philosophy.

## CHAPTER 2. SPINOZA ON LAWS OF NATURE

### 2.1 An Essentialist Interpretation of Laws

In the previous chapter I explained Spinoza's essentialism. In the present chapter, I turn to explain Spinoza's conception of laws. In an important way, this is continuous with chapter 1 because I believe that Spinoza's view of laws is a consequence of his essentialism. So more exactly, because of the central role that I assign to Spinoza's essentialism for his conception of laws of nature, I turn to outline what I call *the essentialist interpretation of laws*. As we'll see in due course, this interpretation will not only provide the grounds for a defense of the necessitarian reading of Spinoza, but also prove helpful for better understanding and contextualizing Spinoza's necessitarianism.

In support of the essentialist interpretation of laws, I begin by explaining what it is to be a law of nature according to Spinoza (§2.2). I then attempt to answer the question of how laws of nature figure into Spinoza's metaphysics writ large. My answer is that laws of nature are eternal truths contained in God's immediate infinite mode of thought (§2.3). The picture this paints of Spinoza's cosmos is a nested nomological order in which laws are "inscribed" in the very being of things (§2.4). Then finally, I finish this chapter with an argument that Spinoza is committed to necessitarianism based on his conception of laws (§2.5).

### 2.2 The Nature of Law

What is a law of nature? Spinoza's basic answer can be found in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, which arguably contains his most informative discussion of the topic:

The word *law*, taken without qualification, means that according to which each individual, or all or some members of the same species, act in one and the same fixed and determinate way [*Legis nomen absolute sumptum significat id, secundum quod unumquodque individuum, vel omnia vel aliquot ejusdem speciei una, eademque certa ac determinate ratione agunt*]. This depends... on a necessity of nature... A law which depends on a necessity of nature is one which follows necessarily from the very nature or definition of a thing [*Lex, quae a necessitate naturae dependet, illa est, quae ex ipsa rei natura sive definitione necessario sequitur*]. ...

For example, it is a universal law of all bodies, which follows from a necessity of nature, that a body which strikes against another lesser body loses as much of its motion as it communicates to the other body. Similarly, it is a law which necessarily follows from human nature that when a man recalls one thing, he immediately recalls another like it, or one he had perceived together with the first thing. (TTP 4.1-2|G 3.57-58)

The passage introduces the notion of a law (*lex*) as that which expresses a regularity for members belonging to a certain class or kind. It suggests that *laws of nature* (*naturae legibus*), in the most metaphysically significant sense of the term, truthfully express the necessary operations of natural things,<sup>119</sup> paradigmatic instances of which include the law of conservation in physics (cf. DDP 2p20)<sup>120</sup> and the law of association in psychology (cf. 2p18).<sup>121</sup> Likewise, to adapt a more recent example from Bas van Fraassen (1989, p. 27; cf. Carroll, 2016, §§1, 8), Spinoza would also presumably consider it a law of nature that *uranium spheres are less than one mile in diameter*, as

---

<sup>119</sup> By contrast, another kind of law that Spinoza discusses at length—and which I’ve omitted from the above passage—is that which *prescribes* conduct and ends for human beings based on our nature and circumstances. However, these are not laws of nature “in the most philosophically significant sense of the term” as I’ve put it above, because (among other things) they can be transgressed (TTP 4.5-7|G 3.58.30ff; TTP 7.24|G 3.102; cf. KV 2.24). The more “philosophically significant” laws naturally take priority over the prescriptive laws anyway. Since human beings are a class of natural things, prescriptive laws will turn out to be a special case of the more fundamental, metaphysical laws. On this, see Rutherford (2010, pp. 146-147). See also TTP 3.7-12|G 3.45-47, 4.3|G 3.58, 4.18|G 3.61; 3pref|G 2.138.

<sup>120</sup> As Curley (C 2.126n2) points out in the above passage, Spinoza’s statement of the law of conservation is roughly Descartes’ third law of motion in the *Principles of Philosophy*, 2.40 (CSM 1.242).

<sup>121</sup> In saying (as I just have) that laws “truthfully express...”, I do not mean to suggest that Spinoza takes the ultimate bearers of truth-values to be linguistic statements or abstract propositions. As will become clearer later, I’m inclined to agree with Garrett (2017) on the matter: “The fundamental bearers of truth and falsity for Spinoza are ideas themselves; the truth or falsity of statements or assertions, in contrast, derives from the truth or falsity of ideas” (p. 30).

this expresses what must be the case for members of the class of uranium spheres—namely, a necessary limitation of their size, by virtue of the critical mass intrinsic to uranium.

In the above passage from the *Theological-Political Treatise*, there are at least three things that are worth unpacking as parts of my essentialist interpretation of Spinoza on laws. These are: the notion of a *necessity of nature* (§2.2.1), the *dependence* of a law on a necessity of nature (§2.2.2), and the *universal scope* of a law of nature (§2.2.3). While I consider each in turn, it should be noted that this short list by no means exhaustively explains Spinoza’s conception of laws.

### 2.2.1 Necessity of Nature

A necessity of nature, put simply, is a necessary consequence of some essence. Following one of Spinoza’s common locutions, when he states that “*F* follows from the necessity of *x*’s nature”, this is to say that *F* is a derivative feature or effect that necessarily obtains of the very essence of *x*.<sup>122</sup> So, for some triangle *t*, it is a necessity of *t*’s nature that *the sum of its interior angles equals two right angles*, as this is a necessary feature of *t* by virtue of its essence alone (cf. TTP 4.24ff|G 3.62ff). But this isn’t quite the whole picture: while a necessity of nature may be one that follows from *x*’s essence *alone*—and therefore *adequately* from *x*’s essence—a necessity of nature may also include that which follows *partially* from the essence of *x* but *adequately* in conjunction with some *y* distinct from *x*. This is implied by Spinoza’s examples of laws of nature above,<sup>123</sup> and indicated rather explicitly in his *Ethics*:

---

<sup>122</sup> My disjunction of “feature or effect” follows Spinoza. In his definitions of the affects at the end of part 3 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza describes a nonessential feature that follows from the definition of love as “an effect, *or* property [*effectus sive proprietas*]” of its essence (see 3da22exp; cf. 3da6exp, 3da28exp).

<sup>123</sup> In the case of the laws of conservation and association, respectively, the body and the mind in question exhibit a necessity of nature by virtue of their essences together with outside factors. Consider each law in turn. By virtue of the nature of determinate modifications of extension, the law of conservation states in effect that if a body *x* collides (i.e., causally interacts) with a lesser body *y* distinct from *x*, then *x* is such that it loses a quantity of its motion inversely proportional to that acquired by *y*. Likewise, by virtue of the nature of the human mind, the law of association states that if the mind previously perceived (i.e., causally interacted with) two or more external things simultaneously (or what is the same given Spinoza’s parallelism of the attributes: if the body was previously affected by two or more

All our strivings, or Desires, follow from the necessity of our nature in such a way that they can be understood either through it alone, as through their proximate cause, or insofar as we are a part of nature, which cannot be conceived adequately through itself without other individuals. (4app1; emphasis added; see also 4app2,6 and 2a1”|G 2.99)

So, a necessity of  $x$ 's nature should also include that which follows necessarily from  $x$  together with some  $y$  external to and independent of  $x$ . In that case, it would also be a necessity of  $t$ 's nature if its interior space is purple, say, after being constructed on paper by my printer, as this would be a necessary feature of  $t$  that is partially a result of its essence (which determines its interior space) and partially a result of other things' essences extrinsic to  $t$  that determine its color (purple ink, my printer, etc.).

What I previously explained in chapter 1 (§1.3) presents a couple noteworthy implications of this. For one thing, the categories of Spinoza's essentialism indicate that necessities of nature must be the resultant *propria* and *accidents* of things, relative to their bearers and the essences that produce them. For another thing, Spinoza's conceptual and dynamic glosses of his essentialism indicate that necessities of nature designate a necessary and adequate *explanatory* or *causal* relation between things' essential and non-essential features. So, if  $F$  is a necessity of  $x$ 's nature, then  $x$  is non-essentially and necessarily  $F$  because  $x$ 's essence—either by itself or with the contribution of others—adequately explains or causes  $x$  to be  $F$ .

If that's right, laws concerned with necessities of nature are *explanatory* or *causal laws* which express the *propria* or *accidents* of things that follow from some essence in conceptual or dynamic terms. In fact, this maps squarely onto Spinoza's talk of laws of human nature, for example (cf. ch. 1, §§1.3.2-1.3.3; TTP 4.18):

By virtue and power I understand the same thing, i.e. (by 3p7), virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature, of man, *insofar as he has the power*

---

external bodies at once), then the mind is such that it will recollect the idea of the one immediately upon recollecting the idea of the other.



*of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone.* (4d8; emphasis added; see also 4p24d, 4p35c1-2)

We say that we are acted on when something arises in us of which we are only the partial cause (by 3d2), i.e. (by 3d1), *something that cannot be deduced from the laws of our nature alone.* Therefore, we are acted on insofar as we are a part of Nature, *which cannot be conceived through itself without the others*, q.e.d. (4p2d; emphasis added)

The laws referenced in the first text (4d8) effectively concern the *propria* that follow solely from the human essence, whereas the laws in the second text (4p2d) effectively concern the accidents of human beings (affective states like anger, for instance). What's more, in each text Spinoza glosses the human essence both dynamically (in terms of *powers* and *causes* etc.) and conceptually (in terms of *intelligibility* and *conception*, etc.).

### **2.2.2 Dependence on a Necessity of Nature**

Second, consider the *dependence* of a law of nature on a necessity of nature. Provided that laws of nature are truthful descriptions of the necessary operations of natural things, such laws are true ideas that express what must necessarily be the case by virtue of some thing's essence, be it some effect of an individual's nature, or a collection of such effects resulting from the interaction of many things' natures. And provided Spinoza's essentialism, the objects of the laws must be the *propria* or accidents that follow from things' essences.<sup>124</sup> So, not only do laws themselves seem to depend on natural necessities in the way that truths depend on the objects of which they are about

---

<sup>124</sup> If I'm not mistaken that laws of nature are among the eternal truths (as I suggested in §2.1), there is supporting reason to think that laws concern the *propria*, and perhaps also the accidents, of things. For among eternal truths Spinoza counts not only those that explain things such as the concept of a triangle (CM 2.1|G 1.250-251), but also their "affections", i.e., their nonessential features (Ep 9-10; DPP 1p5s; 1p17s|G 2.62.15-20).

(analogous to truthmakers),<sup>125</sup> but more importantly, the objects expressed by the laws depend on some essence in the way that necessary features of a thing obtain by virtue of some essence.<sup>126</sup>

This also suggests how it is that “[a] law which depends on a necessity of nature is one which follows necessarily from the very nature *or* definition of a thing” (TTP 4.1). In conceptual essentialist terms (see ch. 1, §§1.3.2, 1.3.4), a law necessarily follows from the nature of a thing akin to the way in which the concept of its propria are inferred from its definition by the intellect (cf. 1p16d,17d; see ch. 4).<sup>127</sup> In this way, it would presumably be a law of nature that *the sum of a triangle’s interior angles is equal to two right angles* because it expresses not only what is the case of triangles by virtue of their natures, but also a concept that follows from the definition of triangles.<sup>128</sup>

### 2.2.3 Universal Scope

Third and finally, consider the *universality* of a law of nature, “according to which each individual, or all or some members of the same species, act in one and the same fixed and determinate way” (TTP 4.1). As this and Spinoza’s own examples of laws indicate, laws of nature are universal: they not only generalize over all members of some class of things without exception, but (as we will

---

<sup>125</sup> While I presume that laws may depend on natural necessities in the way that truths depend on truthmakers, my thesis doesn’t ride on it. Nonetheless, it may be a real question whether Spinoza’s commitments would allow for this sort of dependence relation (e.g., the relation that holds between the idea of an extended apple and the extended apple itself) without violating the independence of the attributes (e.g., thought and extension). This is of course not to suggest that in such a relation, the one is caused by, or follows from, the other. Spinoza clearly denies that much (see 2p5-7, 3p2).

<sup>126</sup> In terms of contemporary philosophical classification, Spinoza appears to hold some sort of scientific essentialist or dispositional essentialist conception of laws. Cf. Martin (2018); Carroll (2016, §8); Swoyer (1982); and Bird (2005a, 2005b). Leibniz may hold a similar view of laws as Spinoza, too (see, e.g., L 306-307, 494-495).

<sup>127</sup> As a law, however, I take it that they should at least express a two-place relation. That is, the concept that follows from a definition cannot be of some effect in isolation from the cause, if it is a law; rather, if it is a law, it should relate the effect (what follows from  $x$ ) and the cause (where  $x$  follows from) in its description.

<sup>128</sup> This much helps to explain the inference of laws of  $x$  from its definition insofar as those laws concern  $x$ ’s propria. But what about the case in which  $x$  is accidentally  $A$ , with respect to extrinsic causes  $y$  and  $z$ ? To infer that  $x$  is  $A$  would require invoking some additional laws in conjunction with the laws of  $x$ ’s nature, namely, the laws of  $y$ ’s and  $z$ ’s natures (if not also some broader, comprehensive law that covers  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  in the appropriate respects).

see later) hold irrespective of any particular time and place. Spinoza makes this clear in his *Theological-Political Treatise* and the *Ethics*:

[E]verything is determined by the universal laws of nature to exist and produce effects in a fixed and determinate way... (TTP 4.3|G 3.58; cf. 1p36)

Nothing, therefore, happens in nature which is contrary to its universal laws. Nor does anything happen which does not agree with those laws or does not follow from them. TTP 6.10|G 3.83)

No sound reason urges us to attribute a limited power and virtue to nature, or to maintain that its laws are suited only for certain things and not everything. (TTP 6.11|G 3.83)

[N]othing happens in nature which can be attributed to any defect in it, for nature is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere one and the same, i.e., the laws and rules of nature, according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are always and everywhere the same. So the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same, viz. through the universal laws and rules of nature. (3pref)

Spinoza also suggests that laws are universal for reasons connected to their intrinsic structure. Since laws concern things that are sufficiently similar in their natures to be considered members of the same species or kind (cf. TTP 4.18), they therefore operate in the same way under the same conditions. In other words, given that the scope of the laws includes the necessary operations of things alike in their essential features, then since like-causes produce like-effects (a corollary of the Principle of Sufficient Reason), laws of nature are universal. Laws may thus be construed as true generalizations of the form, “all *As* are *Bs*”, expressing necessities of nature for members of some class; and laws may be so construed *because* of those necessities of nature—the *Bs*—which obtain by virtue of the common natures of *A*-class members.<sup>129</sup> If it is a law that all *As* are *Bs*, the generalization holds *because Bs* follow necessarily from the natures of the *As*.

---

<sup>129</sup> Here, the idea of *common natures* is not meant to suggest that Spinoza is a realist about universals. I’m sympathetic with the reading recently advanced by Hübner (2016) that Spinoza is a realist with respect to particular essences, but a nominalist with respect to universal essences. Importantly, Hübner stresses that universal essences are ideas that have no reality outside finite intellects for Spinoza. That is, universal essences are *beings of reason (ens rationis)*: mind-dependent constructs grounded in real particular essences that assist the mind in forming adequate ideas (cf.

We can sum up all of this to say that a law of nature *L* is a true generalization over members of some class of things *C*, and that *L* holds by virtue of the necessities of nature of *C*, i.e., by virtue of things' propria and accidents that follow necessarily from things' essences in *C*. In this way, we can see that laws of nature—or perhaps better, *laws of essence*—are firmly grounded in Spinoza's essentialism.<sup>130</sup>

### 2.3 The Locus of Law

Thus far, the essentialist interpretation of laws furnishes an answer to the question of what laws of nature are. However, this says little about (a) what the status of laws is, and (b) where such laws are located (as it were) in Spinoza's overall metaphysics. I believe the answer to (a) is that laws of nature are eternal truths, and that the answer to (b) is that laws of nature *qua* eternal truths are ideas contained in the immediate infinite mode in the attribute of thought, or what is the same, God's infinite intellect. But before I can make the case for this (§§2.3.3-2.3.4), I lay some groundwork

---

Newlands, 2017). A noteworthy implication of Hübner's reading, when conjoined with my essentialist interpretation thus far, is that Spinoza's realism and nominalism about essences would seem to extend to laws of nature. If universal essences are beings of reason, then universal laws of nature—laws about distinct things of the same kind or nature—must also be beings of reason, perhaps even second order beings of reason. (For if laws are grounded in essences, then *universal laws* would presumably be grounded in *universal essences*.) And since Spinoza denies that universal essences (as beings of reason) have reality outside ideas within the intellect, universal laws about universal essences would then be beings of reason *about* other beings of reason. However, none of this would presumably apply concerning particular laws about particular things' natures, because Spinoza takes particular essences to be real beings, admitting of reality outside the intellect. To my knowledge, Jon Miller (2003, pp. 261-263) is the only commentator to recognize something approximating this implication regarding Spinoza's view of laws of nature. Cf. TdIE 101.

<sup>130</sup> So far as I can tell, the literature on Spinoza's conception of laws of nature is not very forthcoming on the finer details. But my interpretation seems to more or less align with that of Matson (1977, pp. 70, 76), Miller (2003), Viljanen (2008, p. 434n66), Rutherford (2010), and Garrett (2012, p. 251). Other commentators of Spinoza such as Mason (1997, p. 76) take Spinoza to identify laws of nature with essences. It isn't clear to me what Curley's interpretation of laws is despite all his excellent work on this very topic. He seems to suggest in some places that laws are identical to essences or attributes, and in other places that laws are descriptions of natural necessities akin to the reading I've advanced above (see, e.g., Curley, 1969, pp. 44-117, 158; 1985, p. 433n14; 1988, p. 42; 1990, pp. 115-126; C 2.125n1; 2019). Recently, Martin (2018) has argued for a reading of Spinoza that in effect *reverses* the order and priority of essence over laws that I proposed. In his view, it is not the case (as I maintain) that the laws of nature obtain by virtue of the effects that follow from things' essences, but rather that the effects that follow from things' essences obtain by virtue of the laws of nature contained in them (Martin, 2018, p. 178n65).

to explain Spinoza's view of duration and eternity (§2.3.1), and how it relates not only to the essences of modes (§2.3.2) but to truths or true ideas (§2.3.3).

### 2.3.1 Duration & Eternity

By way of introducing Spinoza's conception of eternity, it is helpful to begin with the concomitant notion of duration [*duratio*], which is tersely defined as “an indefinite continuation of existing” (2d5). So, if some *x* has duration, this is to say that *x* has temporally indeterminate existence: *temporal* because *x* persists (i.e., continues) in its existence for some interval of time (in the colloquial sense of “time”),<sup>131</sup> and *indeterminate* because *x*'s existence is not specified or limited (i.e., definite) by its own essence, or even by the proximate cause that instantiates its essence. As Spinoza explains: “I say indefinite because it cannot be determined at all through the very nature of the existing thing, nor even by the efficient cause, which necessarily posits the existence of the thing, and does not take it away” (2d5exp). In terms of Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine, the idea is that so long as there are no factors outside *x*'s essence that delimit its duration, *x* will continue to exist from the striving that characterizes its nature (3p4-8). However, since there *are* such limiting factors outside finite modes by virtue of their finitude—external causes by which they are conditioned, undergo change, and are eventually destroyed—their continuation of existing is definite in principle, even when the details of finite modes' delimitation are unknown to us (see 1d2, 2d7, 2p31, 3p8, 4p3).<sup>132</sup>

---

<sup>131</sup> Spinoza also has a notion of time as *tempus*, distinct from *duratio*. *Tempus* is a mind-dependent and constructed concept of time, lacking in reality outside the intellect and rooted in imagination or sensory experience (see CM 1.4; 2p40s2, 2p44c1s). For my purposes, I will not be concerned with *tempus*.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Ep 12|G 4.54: “From this it follows that when we attend only to the essence of modes, and not to the order of the whole of Nature [LC: matter], we cannot infer from the fact that they exist now that they will or will not exist later, or that they have or have not existed earlier.”

The definition of eternity states: “By eternity [*aeternitatem*] I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing” (1d8). In the subsequent explanation, Spinoza adds that “such existence, like the essence of a thing, is conceived as an eternal truth, and on that account cannot be explained by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end” (1d8exp). So, if the existence of  $x$  is eternal, it follows solely from some definition irrespectively of duration. As such, eternity is not analyzable in terms of duration, even if  $x$ ’s continuation of existing is *sempiternal*, i.e., everlasting or stretching forever into the past and the future, “without beginning or end”.

It is a noteworthy detail of 1d8 that Spinoza refers to existence conceived as following from the *definition* and not the *essence* of an eternal thing, because this permits the eternity of modes in addition to God (see Jaquet, 2018, pp. 372-373). As I explained in chapter 1 (§1.3.2), a definition of  $x$  explains the essence of  $x$  by including the concept of  $x$ ’s essence-instantiating efficient cause; and so, while definition and essence are interchangeable with respect to God because his essence is not distinct from the cause of his existence, definition and essence fail to be strictly interchangeable with respect to modes because their essence is distinct from the proximate (efficient) causes of their existence. For this reason, some modes in addition to God can be eternal: for if the proximate cause of a mode is eternal, then that mode also eternal. Hence, the *immediate* infinite modes are eternal because their existence is conceived to follow directly from the definition of an eternal cause, namely, God (1p19, 1p21,23). Likewise, the *mediate* infinite modes are eternal because they follow from God together with the immediate infinite modes, themselves being eternal (1p22-23).

This last point indicates that eternity, like power or necessity, is *transitive*. We might then distinguish God’s eternity from that of modes along lines of the causal distinction introduced in

chapter 1 (§1.3.1). To wit, God is *intrinsically eternal* since he is eternal by virtue of an intrinsic cause, and modes to which eternity applies are *extrinsically eternal* by virtue of an extrinsic cause that is eternal. By the same reasoning, eternal modes are derivatively immutable or changeless, since their eternal extrinsic cause—God, ultimately—is immutable or changeless (1p20c2).

Now, I believe that Jonathan Bennett is correct to observe that whatever is eternal is also sempiternal (Bennett, 1984, pp. 204-205, cf. 193-211; see also Melamed, 2012a, pp. 87-98; Melamed, 2013b: 112-126).<sup>133</sup> For one thing, this is compatible with 1d8exp above, which only says that eternity cannot be explained in terms of duration, time, or sempiternity. For another thing, the language Spinoza employs when discussing eternal entities arguably implies sempiternity. For example, in his proposition introducing the immediate infinite modes, Spinoza writes: “All the things which follow from the absolute nature of any of God’s attributes have always [*semper*] had to exist and be infinite, *or* [*sive*] are, through the same attribute, eternal and infinite” (1p21; see

---

<sup>133</sup> Nonetheless, we might go farther than Bennett and give some consideration to the suggestion that Spinozistic eternity amounts to *an infinite continuation of existing*, which applies *irrespective of duration* as I explained above. This appears consistent with 1d8 and 1d8exp, and it is also *not* to ascribe duration to God. For duration is defined by Spinoza as *indefinite* (i.e., unspecified) continuation of existing with respect to a thing’s essence alone. God does not have duration because—assuming a continuation of existing pertains to him—God’s continuation of existing with respect to his essence would not be *indefinite*, but *infinite*, as God is an absolutely infinite being. Duration may also imply limitations or qualifications on existence (see Bennett, 1984, pp. 193-211), in which case it would be distinct from *infinite* or *unlimited* continuation of existing on this count as well. Only modes can have duration, since only with respect to their own essences is their continuation of existing indeterminate. With respect to external causes, *finite* modes (by virtue of being finite) arguably have *definite* (or *limited*) continuation of existing with respect to their external causes (1d2). But *infinite* modes (by virtue of being infinite) arguably have *infinite* (or *unlimited*) continuation of existing with respect to their external cause, which is infinite. In fact, the infinite modes seem to exhibit the sort of eternity I am proposing. For Spinoza explicitly refers to them as “eternal” (1p21-23) without any indication of an equivocal meaning in terms, and even indicates (with a Latin *sive*) the equivalence of their eternity and “always” [*semper*] having to exist (1p21). A similar but more fundamental feature would presumably hold for God, since he is the source of the infinite modes’ eternity. We might explain this by appeal to the nature of infinitude as Spinoza explains it in his letter on the infinite. For whereas God is *intrinsically infinite* by virtue of an infinite intrinsic cause—“infinite as a consequence of [his] own nature, *or* by the force of [his] definition”—the infinite modes are *extrinsically infinite* by virtue of an infinite extrinsic cause—“what has no bounds, not indeed by the force of its essence, but by the force of its cause” (Ep 12|G 4.53, see also 4.54-55; cf. 5a2). Both God and the infinite modes would be eternal in that the “force” of their continuing in existence is *infinite*, though such force is from different sources with respect to their essences. While this reading suggests applying something that is *duration-like* to God and the infinite modes, it is not strictly duration. I take it that my suggestion here is also supported by 1p21d in which Spinoza denies duration to the immediate infinite modes only insofar as duration is conceived as “finite” and “determinate existence”. Cf. CM 2.1|G 1.252.15-18.

also 1p17s|G 2.62.15-20, 2p11d). Such infinite modes are characterized as “eternal” and yet “always” existing.

### 2.3.2 The Duration & Eternity of Modes

Duration pertains neither to God nor his infinite modes, neither in respect of their essence nor existence. Rather, God and his infinite modes are eternal (1p19-24). As I will argue later, since the object of an eternal truth is eternal, truths that take God and infinite modes as their objects are unproblematically eternal. What is not so unproblematic, however, is how the objects of eternal truths can concern finite modes. This has bearing on my claim that laws of nature are eternal truths, since finite things are certainly subject to nomological generalization. The problem is that it seems only duration and not eternity pertains to finite modes, in which case finite modes cannot be objects of eternal truths. However, the problem here confuses the temporal status of finite modes by conflating the essence-existence distinction I introduced in chapter 1 (§1.3.2). Insofar as eternal truths concern laws governing finite modes, I maintain that the objects of such truths are the eternal essences of finite modes. More exactly, in light of the above remarks on the nature of eternity and duration, I maintain that the *essence* of finite modes is eternal, and that their *existence* is durational (and whatever is eternally true of the essence of a thing is necessarily true of its durational instantiation). This not only is a consequence of what I take to be the relationship between the infinite modes and finite modes, but is supported by textual evidence. Briefly consider these points in turn.

In my view, Don Garrett’s influential interpretation of the infinite modes constitutes the most persuasive reading of Spinoza on the matter (or at least, I think this is so for certain aspects



of his reading, perhaps with some adjustments).<sup>134</sup> Two elements of Garrett’s reading are particularly pertinent here (1999a, pp. 110-111, 122-123; 2009, pp. 289-291). The first is that the *immediate* infinite modes contain the eternal, fixed, and unchanging totality of *essences* of finite modes (cf. KV 2.5.8-9|G 1.64.9-18). This totality of essences is described in correspondence as “absolutely infinite intellect [*intellectus absolutè infinitus*]” in the attribute of thought and “motion and rest [*motus & quies*]” in the attribute of extension (Ep 64|G 4.278). The second element of Garrett’s reading is that the *mediate* infinite modes contain the totality of finite modes’ *existence* insofar as they have duration and are subject to change. Alternatively, this totality of existing finite modes is described at 1p28 as an infinite causal series of singular, or finite, things,<sup>135</sup> at 2p13lem7s as an infinite individual containing singular things in a series of nested wholes, and at Ep 64 as “the face of the whole Universe [*facies totius Universi*]” (G 4.278).

In short, Garrett’s reading as I understand it proposes that the immediate infinite modes contain the *essence* of each and every finite mode, which is *eternal*, whereas the mediate infinite modes contain the *existence* of each and every finite mode, which is *durational*. The Garrettian reading is textually supported by a number of remarks across Spinoza’s corpus.<sup>136</sup> For example:

But note that by the series of causes and of real beings I do not here understand the series of singular, changeable things, but only the series of fixed and eternal things. For it would be impossible for human weakness to grasp the series of singular, changeable things... . . . The essences of singular, changeable things are not to be drawn from their series, or order of existing... all of which are far from the inmost

---

<sup>134</sup> As ingenious as I find Garrett’s interpretation of the infinite modes, I find it difficult to agree with on the whole. Garrett indicates, for example, (i) that Spinoza characterizes the essence-existence distinction as one between so-called “formal” and “actual” essences (2009, pp. 285-286), (ii) that the essences of finite modes are themselves infinite modes (2009, pp. 289-290), and (iii) that at least some finite modes share a universal or species essence (2009, p. 291n16). For some compelling, contrary readings, see Lærke (2017) with respect to (i), Nadler (2012) with respect to (ii), and Hübner (2016) with respect to (iii).

<sup>135</sup> Singular things are arguably one and the same as finite modes: see 1d2 and 2d7.

<sup>136</sup> If correct, this reading may also congenially explain why, just after demonstrating God’s infinite modes, Spinoza emphasizes that “God is the efficient cause, not only of the *existence* of things, but also of their *essence*” (1p25; emphasis added).

essence of things. *That essence is to be sought only from the fixed and eternal things...* (TdIE 101; emphasis added)

The essences of things are from all eternity and will remain immutable to all eternity. (KV 1.1.2)

[D]uration cannot in any way pertain to the essences of things. (CM 2.1|G 1.250)

[S]o long as we attend to their essence [i.e., the essence of modes], we shall find that it involves neither existence nor duration. (1p24c)<sup>137</sup>

It is perhaps for this reason that when a finite thing such as a human mind is inevitably destroyed and has its duration concluded, Spinoza maintains that “something of it remains which is eternal” (5p23).

### 2.3.3 Eternal Truth

For Spinoza, the notion of eternal truth seems to be one he adapted from Descartes, functioning in a similar manner as Cartesian “true and immutable natures”.<sup>138</sup> Given what eternity is (§2.3.1), we may state the *eternity condition* (as I’ll call it) for an eternal truth *T*:

*T* describes an object that follows from the definition of an eternal thing irrespective of duration.<sup>139</sup>

The condition helps to make sense of, for example, Spinoza’s conclusion “that God’s existence, like his essence, is an eternal truth” (1p19s; see also 1p8s2, 1p20c1) just after demonstrating that God is eternal (1p19). In the previous section, we also saw that the essence of finite modes is eternal, whereas their existence is durational. So, eternal truths, insofar as they concern finite

---

<sup>137</sup> See also, e.g., KV 1.1, note a|G 1.14-15; and 1p17s|G 2.63.

<sup>138</sup> See, e.g., Descartes’ Fifth Meditation (CSM 2.44-49) and *Principles*, 1.48-50 (CSM 1.208-209); see also Viljanen (2011, pp. 12-18). However, my saying that there is resemblance between Spinoza’s view and Descartes’ is not to suggest that there are no differences. For example, while both philosophers agree that essences are not independent of God as Platonists might have it, Spinoza rejects Descartes’ notorious voluntarism in which God indifferently creates eternal truths out of an arbitrary act of will or power; rather, eternal truths *qua* modes follow from God as a necessary consequence of his nature (1p33s2|G 2.76; see also Ep 75|G 4.311a-312a; CM 2.7|G 1.262.12-15, 2.10|G 1.270.9-16).

<sup>139</sup> The same is presumably the case for eternal truths themselves *qua* ideas or modes of thought in God’s infinite intellect: they follow from the definition of an eternal thing irrespective of duration.

modes, concern their eternal essences at the least. Thus Spinoza writes that “the existence of [a finite, durational] thing is not an eternal truth (as its essence is)...” (TdIE 67); that “a man is the cause of the existence of another man, but not of his essence, for the latter is an eternal truth” (1p17s|G 2.63.18-19); and that eternal existence, “like the essence of a thing [*sicut rei essentia*], is conceived as an eternal truth” (1d8exp; cf. TdIE 52-44ff).

However, in addition to the eternity condition, there is also the *truth condition* (as I’ll call it for lack of a better term) for an eternal truth *T*:

*T* is a true idea (*idea vera*) of some object *x* that represents and corresponds to the essence of *x* (or the essences involved in *x*) if not also *x*’s propria and accidents, i.e., *T* is an idea objectively containing *x*’s essence as it is formally, if not also objectively containing *x*’s effects as they are formally.<sup>140</sup>

The considerations I offer for this truth condition below, while concise, corroborate my essentialist interpretation that laws of nature not only express what follows from the essences of things, but are certain ideas located in the immediate infinite mode in the attribute of thought.

In his *Short Treatise*, Spinoza states that “[t]ruth... is an affirmation (or denial) which one makes concerning a thing and which agrees with the thing itself” (KV 1.15.1|G 1.78). And in the *Ethics*, he states that “[a] true idea must agree with its object [*ideato*]” (1a6), the object (*ideatum*) being what the idea is *of* or *about*.<sup>141</sup> As such, a true idea of *x* is one that not only contains positive proposition-like contents that accurately represent *x*, but corresponds to *x* as it actually is.<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> But by no means is my explanation exhaustive. For fuller treatment of Spinoza on the nature of truth, see Garrett (2018b) and especially Morrison (2015).

<sup>141</sup> Absent in 1a6 is the mention of “affirmation”, presumably because true ideas in the *Ethics* are inherently affirmative (see 2p43s, 3p4d).

<sup>142</sup> The considerations here are closely related to a distinction Spinoza makes between the *intrinsic denominations* and *extrinsic denominations* of a true idea (see, e.g., TdIE 69; Ep 60). The former are intimately connected to if not one and the same as an *adequate idea*: “an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations of a true idea” and which “exclude[s] what is extrinsic, viz. the agreement of the idea with its object” (2a4,exp). Intrinsic denominations concern all the representational contents that a true idea has—all its intrinsic phenomenological details—but not its correspondence with its object. Given 1a6, intrinsic denominations of an idea alone appear to render it insufficient for being a true idea. By contrast, extrinsic denominations *do*, since they concern the correspondence of an idea’s intrinsic representational contents with its object.

Moreover,  $x$  is distinct from the true idea of  $x$  if not also distinct from the intellect conceiving of  $x$  (see KV 1.1, note d, KV app1p4d; Ep 4|G 4.13, and Ep 9|G 4.42-43; CM 1.2|G 1.238).

However, concerning the truth condition, why think that the object represented by a true idea of  $x$  is at least  $x$ 's essence, if not also  $x$ 's existence? For one thing, ideas of nonexistent modes are true according to Spinoza. Their ideas at least agree with their essences contained in a substance whose own idea is true because it agrees not only with its substantial essence but its substantial existence (see 1p8s2, 2p8; KV 1.1, note d|G 1.17; see also ch. 3, §3.4.1). For another thing, "every perception [i.e., idea or concept] is either of a thing considered as existing, or of an essence alone" (TdIE 52; cf. 2d3,exp); and as we saw from the essence–existence distinction in chapter 1 (§1.3.2), the true conception of  $x$ 's existence presupposes the true conception of  $x$ 's essence.

Similarly, if the object of a true idea is a proprium or accident of  $x$ , the true idea will involve  $x$ 's essence. For, in the case of  $x$ 's propria, not only is the distinct conception of  $x$ 's essence sufficient for knowing  $x$ 's propria (ibid.), but the second kind of knowledge (reason) concerns "adequate ideas of the properties [*proprietatum*] of things" (2p40s2). And in the case of  $x$ 's accidents, their distinct conception requires conceiving them through both the essence of  $x$  and an extrinsic cause  $y$  (see 2a"|G 2.99, 4p2d; see also ch. 1, §1.3.3). So, the object of a true idea is at least some essence if not also its effects: "a true idea ... shows how and why something is, or has been done; and... its objective effects proceed in the soul [i.e., intellect] according to the formal nature of its object" (TdIE 85).

As this last passage indicates, the agreement between true idea and object closely relates to the distinction introduced in chapter 1 (§1.3.4) between the *objective* and *formal* essence (reality, being, etc.) of  $x$ , according to which an idea contains  $x$  objectively if it represents  $x$ 's essence (and  $x$ 's effects) as it is formally or actually. Thus Spinoza explains in his *Treatise on the Intellect*:

“Peter, for example, is something real; but a true idea of Peter is an objective essence of Peter, and something real in itself, and altogether different from Peter himself” (TdIE 34; see also 35-36); and “the idea is objectively in the same way as its object is really”, which is to say that “an idea must agree completely with its formal essence” (TdIE 41-42). Likewise in the *Ethics*: “A true idea must agree with its object (by 1a6), i.e. (as is known through itself), what is contained objectively in the intellect must necessarily be in nature” (1p30d).

Consonant with both Garrett’s interpretation and the supporting textual evidence in the previous section, this is certainly the way that true ideas function in God’s infinite intellect with respect to objects contained in the attributes: “the most immediate mode of the attribute we call thought [i.e., infinite intellect] has objectively in itself the formal essence of all things” (KV app2.3|G 1.117); and “[t]he truth and formal essence of things is what it is because it exists objectively in that way in God’s intellect” (1p17s|G 2.63). For “whatever follows formally from God’s infinite nature follows objectively in God from his idea” [i.e., the infinite intellect]” (2p7c), from which Spinoza infers that “all ideas which are in God agree entirely with their objects (by 2p7c), and so (by 1a6) they [ideas insofar as they are related to God] are all true” (2p32d).

Naturally, if God’s immediate infinite modes are eternal, then not only are the ideas contained in his infinite intellect eternal, but their corresponding objects in other attributes are eternal as well. At least for our purposes here, this captures what an eternal truth basically is, satisfying both the eternity and truth conditions above, viz., an eternal idea which contains an objective essence agreeing with the formal essence that is its object—itsself an eternal thing.

#### **2.3.4 Laws of Nature: Eternal Truths in the Immediate Infinite Mode of Thought**

The foregoing considerations put us in a position to make a case that Spinoza is committed to saying laws of nature are not only eternal truths, but are situated in God’s immediate infinite mode

of thought. In broad strokes, my argument is based on two overarching equivalences found throughout Spinoza's corpus. The first equivalence stems from his repeated indication that

(a) God's *immediate infinite mode* in the attribute of thought

is equivalent to

(b) God's *infinite intellect* (also referred to as God's *decree*, or *understanding*, or *will*).

Some support that Spinoza makes this equivalence was given when I explained both Garrett's interpretation of the infinite modes (§2.3.2) and how true ideas or objective essences are contained in God's intellect in the previous section. *A fortiori*, Spinoza indicates that (a) and (b) are equivalent by virtue of each being one and the same as *idea Dei*: God's true idea of his own eternal essence (the object of *idea Dei*) and of the infinitely many (i.e., all) eternal essences of modes that follow from God's essence (see 1p21d, 1p30d, 2p3-9cd,32d; CM 1.2|G 1.238.10-14; Ep 64|G 4.278.24-29).

Then there are Spinoza's repeated indications in his *Theological-Political Treatise* that (b) is equivalent to

(c) the *infinite laws of nature*

(see TTP 3.8-9|G 3.46; 4.23-36|G 3.62-65; 6.7-14|G 3.82-84; 6.25|G 3.86).<sup>143</sup> Below, I consider two sets of passages that, I believe, are altogether best explained by the equivalence of (b) and (c).

The first set of passages appears in the *Ethics*:

All things, I say, are in God, and all things that happen, happen only through the laws of God's infinite nature and follow (as I shall show [in 1p16-17]) from the necessity of his essence. (1p15s|G 2.6010ff)

[A]ll things follow from the necessity of the divine nature, and happen according to the eternal laws and rules of nature... (4p50s)

---

<sup>143</sup> Outside the TTP, see Ep 23|G 4.149.21-23, 64|G 4.278; 1p17,d,s, 1p33s2, 2p49c; CM 2.4|G 1.257 and 2.9|G 2.266.

From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways [*modis*] (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect.) (1p16)

We have just shown (1p16) that from the necessity of the divine nature alone, or (what is the same thing) from the laws of his nature alone, absolutely infinite things follow... (1p17d)

The first pair of texts allude to the second pair, and effectively state that everything follows from the necessity of God's essence by the laws of God's nature. This is in basic agreement with what laws of nature are as I explained them in §2.2, as descriptions of what follows necessarily from some essence. In the second pair of texts, the basic claim of 1p16—in terms of Spinoza's conceptual essentialism (see ch.1, §§1.3.2, 1.3.4)—is that the infinitely many (i.e., all) things that the infinite intellect conceives as following objectively from God's definition in fact do so formally (see also ch. 4). The subsequent gloss of this in 1p17d then indicates that this is tantamount to the claim that infinitely many things follow from the laws of God's nature. And from the laws of God's nature—the most fundamental laws, presumably—all other derivative laws presumably follow as well, just as from God's essence itself, all other essences follow (see 1p14-16, 1p25).

The second set of passages appears in the *Theological-Political Treatise*:

[T]he universal laws of nature, according to which all things happen and are determined... always involve eternal truth and necessity. (TTP 3.8|3.46; cf. 1p15s|G 2.60.10ff)

No sound reason urges us to attribute a limited power and virtue to nature, or to maintain that its laws are suited only for certain things and not everything. For... the power of nature is infinite, and... its laws are so broad that they extend to everything which is conceived by the divine intellect itself. (TTP 6.11|G 3.83; see also 16.2-5|G 3.189-190)

[T]he laws of nature extend to infinitely many things... (TTP 6.25|G 3.86)

At least three points here fall in favor of the equivalence of (b) and (c). Firstly, the top passage indicates that Spinoza takes laws of nature as eternal truths, since the *involves*-relation (see 2p49d) between the universal laws of nature and eternal truth implies that the laws of nature cannot be

conceived except as eternal truths. Secondly, the middle passage alludes to 1p16 and suggests the link between laws and the infinite intellect that we saw in the first set of passages. And finally, all three passages in this second set make it clear that Spinoza conceives of the laws of nature as infinite or unrestricted in their scope.

So, we have a quick argument not only that the laws of nature are eternal truths, but that the laws of nature are equivalent to the immediate infinite mode of thought. By transitivity, if (a) is equivalent to (b) and (b) is equivalent to (c), then (a) is equivalent to (c).<sup>144</sup> If this is right, Spinoza conceives of laws of nature as eternal truths expressing the necessary features or effects of things' essences.

While the laws of nature pertain to the attribute of thought, as I have said, this conclusion of course has bearing beyond the attribute of thought. Since God's essence expresses all attributes (1d6, 1p14), the infinite intellect or immediate infinite mode in thought will express and detail laws of nature for each of God's attributes. So, for example, the totality of laws of extension will be eternal truths expressing what follows from the essences of bodies when-ever and where-ever they are instanced (see 3pref), taking as its object the immediate infinite mode in extension (i.e., motion and rest).

## 2.4 The Nested Nomological Order

I've argued that laws of nature, for Spinoza, are not only eternal truths expressing propria and accidents that follow from some essence, but situated in the immediate infinite mode of thought. And prior to that, I also argued that the laws of nature—instanced in natural things and their operations—hold by virtue of the essences they describe, suggesting the idea that such laws are in

---

<sup>144</sup> The notion of transitivity is knotty in Spinoza studies when other attributes are brought into the discussion (see, e.g., Garrett, 2017). However, my argument is only assuming transitivity within a specific attribute, i.e., thought.



some way encoded and immanent in nature. I take it that something like all of this is what Spinoza has in mind when he writes:

[A singular and changeable thing's inmost] essence is to be sought only from the fixed and eternal things, *and at the same time from the laws inscribed in these things, as in their true codes, according to which all singular things come to be, and are ordered.* Indeed these singular, changeable things depend so intimately, and (so to speak) essentially, on the fixed things that they can neither be nor be conceived without them. So although these fixed and eternal things are singular, nevertheless, because of their presence everywhere, and most extensive power, they will be to us like universals, or genera of the definitions of singular, changeable things, and the proximate causes of all things. (TdIE 101; emphasis added).

This sentiment that laws of nature are “inscribed” in things’ essences apparently remained with Spinoza from his early composition of the *Treatise on the Intellect* to the end of his life, as we find him echoing the same idea in his late *Political Treatise*: “But he [man] can’t do anything against God’s eternal decree [i.e., the totality of laws of nature], *which has been inscribed in the whole of nature and concerns the order of the whole of nature*” (TP 2.22; emphasis added). And in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza suggests further that the laws contained in any individual things’ natures are themselves contained in increasingly encompassing laws that hold from the “top down” as it were:

In examining natural things we strive to investigate first the things most universal and common to the whole of nature: motion and rest, and their laws and rules, which nature always observes and through which it continuously acts. From these we proceed gradually to other, less universal things. (TTP 7.24|G 3.102)

These considerations paint a picture of a nested nomological order, both corresponding to and grounded in the derivative essentialist order I suggested in the previous section (see also ch. 1, §§1.3-1.4). Just as the essences of modes derive ultimately from the necessity of God’s comprehensive and infinite essence, so must the laws of nature “inscribed in” modes as their “true codes” derive ultimately from the comprehensive and infinite laws “inscribed in” God’s nature as his “true code”. The result is an intelligible holistic order which maps the structure of reality and

explicates its unfolding detail according to eternal, necessary, and universal laws—laws that are written into the very fabric of being.<sup>145</sup>

## 2.5 Laws of Nature & Necessitarianism

By way of concluding this chapter, I want to point out one way in which the essentialist interpretation of laws furnishes an argument for the necessitarian reading of Spinoza, and by extension, an argument against the semi-necessitarian reading.<sup>146</sup> I call it *the nomological argument for necessitarianism*. It anticipates some ideas that I will develop in more detail in chapter 4, where I defend Spinoza’s commitment to necessitarianism based on 1p16 and the character of essences. Nevertheless, my contention here differs from the one I offer in chapter 4 to

---

<sup>145</sup> My essentialist interpretation of laws may also hold promise for elucidating underlying ideas in Spinoza’s thought. Two examples include his epistemology and rejection of miracles. Regarding the former, Spinoza writes in 3pref that “the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be... through the universal laws and rules of nature”, suggesting that the laws of nature play an important role in acquiring adequate ideas. Due to the generality and nested order of the laws, they are presumably not only included in the purview of adequate knowledge of things, but closely related to Spinozistic *common notions*: universally accessible adequate ideas of “[t]hose things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole” (2p38). (See also Spinoza’s highest grade of knowledge at 2p40s2|G 2.122; Spinoza’s “proper order of philosophizing” that proceeds by conceptually mirroring the order of causes from God’s attributes to particulars at 2p10s; as well as TdIE 99; KV 2.5.11; and TTP 4.) This may be unsurprising given the essentialist interpretation of laws. For just as our “knowledge [*cognitio*] of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause” (1a4; see also TdIE 85, 73), the laws as eternal truths are universally available means by which human beings *qua* modes of thought can conceive what follows necessarily from things by virtue of essences and thereby understand natural phenomena (cf. TdIE 103). Regarding Spinoza’s denial of miracles, Spinoza rejects the metaphysical possibility of miracles insofar as they involve violations of laws of nature (TTP 6.7-15|G 3.82-84). The reasoning behind his rejection is rather convoluted, but ostensibly relies on the idea that miracles are inconsistent with God’s will or intellect, which Spinoza equates with the laws of nature (cf. §2.3.4). A result of this is that Spinoza’s argument is liable to appear remarkably unpersuasive. As Timothy McGrew (2019) puts it, “the argument is simply an elaborate exercise in begging the question” (§3.1.1). But I think this assessment is too quick. A deeper explanation of Spinoza’s background reasoning can be offered in light of the essentialist interpretation of laws. Because laws express necessities of nature, miracles *qua* violations of laws basically demand that some event obtain which does *not* follow from the natures of existing things (otherwise the event would fail to be miraculous). But that is at odds with Spinoza’s essentialism. In short, miracles are impossible because they run contrary to what follows from things by virtue of their essences, requiring in effect that things fail to be and operate in accordance with what they fundamentally are. But worse than this, miracles would seem to ultimately require that God fail to be and operate in accordance with what he fundamentally is, because the essences of all things apart from him follow from his divine nature in accordance with the laws of his nature. Thus understood, Spinoza’s rejection of miracles appears to go hand in hand not only with his essentialism, but with his commitment to necessitarianism: for any deviation at all from the actual ordering of things according to the universal laws of nature—any possible deviation from what must necessarily be the case by virtue of essences—would militate against the actual divine nature itself (cf. 1p33,s2). And as Spinoza explains: “Nothing would be more absurd than that” (TTP 6.9|G 3.83).

<sup>146</sup> See the Is Spinoza a Necessitarian? for details on the necessitarian and semi-necessitarian readings of Spinoza.

the extent that it is based on the character of laws. So, the fact that the nomological argument below *also* provides a basis for Spinoza's commitment to necessitarianism will serve to corroborate my contention in chapter 4.

The nomological argument for necessitarianism can be laid out in the following four steps:

1. If  $F$  follows from the laws of  $x$ 's nature alone, then  $F$  is a necessity of  $x$ 's nature.
2. Finite modes follow from the laws of God's nature alone.
3. If so (i.e., given premises 1 and 2), then finite modes are necessary.
4. So, finite modes are necessary. [1-3]

Premise (1) is a consequence of the essentialist interpretation of laws. Provided that some  $F$  follows solely from the laws of  $x$ 's nature, then there is a law of nature  $L$  that not only expresses a necessity of  $x$ 's very nature (according to which  $F$  is a feature or effect that follows necessarily from the very essence of  $x$ ), but  $L$  holds solely by virtue of the essence of  $x$ . As such,  $L$  in this case is *not* a law concerned with the accidents of  $x$ , otherwise  $F$  would not follow from the laws of  $x$ 's nature *alone*. So,  $L$  in this case is a law concerned with the *propria* of  $x$ .

My support for premise (2) relies on interpretive considerations of the following texts:

*All things, I say, are in God, and all things that happen, happen only through the laws of God's infinite nature and follow (as I shall show [in 1p16-17]) from the necessity of his essence [Omnia, inquam, in Deo sunt et omnia, quae fiunt, per solas leges infinitae Dei naturae fiunt et ex necessitate ejus essentiae (ut mox ostendam) sequuntur]. (1p15s|G 2.6010ff; emphasis added; see also 4p50s,73s)*

We have just shown (1p16) that from the necessity of the divine nature alone, or (what is the same thing) *from the laws of his nature alone, absolutely infinite things follow [ex solis ejusdem naturae legibus infinita absolute sequi]*, and in 1p15 we have demonstrated that nothing can be or be conceived without God, *but that all things are in God. So there can be nothing outside him by which he is determined or compelled to act.* Therefore, God acts from the laws of his nature alone, and is compelled by no one [*atque adeo Deus ex solis suae naturae legibus et a nemine coactus agit*], q.e.d. (1p17d; emphasis added)

But to those who ask "why God did not create all men so that they would be governed by the command of reason?" I answer... "*because the laws of his nature*

*have been so ample that they sufficed for producing all things which can be conceived by an infinite intellect*” (as I have demonstrated in 1p16) [*quia ipsius naturae leges adeo amplae fuerunt, ut sufficerent ad omnia, quae ab aliquo infinito intellectu concipi possunt, producenda, ut pro positione 16. demonstravi*]. (1app|G 2.83; emphasis added)

[T]he laws and rules of nature, *according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another*, are always and everywhere the same [*naturae leges et regulae, secundum quas omnia fiunt et ex unis formis in alias mutantur, sunt ubique et semper eadem*]. (3pref; emphasis added; cf. KV 2.24.4)

Spinoza makes it quite clear that nothing is exempt from operating in a lawlike manner: the comprehensive laws of God’s nature range over infinitely many (i.e., all) things. Because finite modes are indeed *things*, they too must operate in accord with such laws. This is confirmed by Spinoza’s inclusion of temporal objects or events—that which *happens* or *changes*—within the scope of *all things*. For only finite modes have duration, and therefore only they are capable of changing and happening at particular times and places. By contrast, God and the laws of nature are eternal. It is also confirmed in the third passage above, which indicates that the laws of God’s nature cover the operations of existing human beings—finite modes with duration (see 2p10). The above passages also make it clear that Spinoza takes the laws of God’s nature to be *adequate by themselves* for explaining the existence of finite modes. As Spinoza states, all things that are and happen do so “only through” the laws of God’s nature “alone”—laws that are “so ample” that they “sufficed” to explain the production of their existence.

Indeed, this last point about adequacy is arguably one reason why Spinoza feels the need in 1p15s and 1p17d to emphasize that all things are not only *in* God, but that God *acts* solely from the laws of his nature. In chapter 1 (§1.3.3), I explained that an *action*, or to *act*, according to Spinoza, is to adequately cause an effect in a thing, i.e., to produce a *proprium*, which can be clearly and distinctly understood through a thing’s essence alone. To be *acted on*, by contrast, is to partially cause an effect in a thing, i.e., to produce an *accident*, which cannot be adequately

understood through a thing's essence alone, but only in conjunction with other things' essences. That all things are *in* God basically rules out that there is anything outside of God to act on him, and thus that any of his states are accidents of him; and so, that God acts from his laws alone indicates that all of his operations—including the production of finite modes—stem from no other adequate source than himself, in accord with the laws of his nature alone.<sup>147</sup>

So, we have reason to grant premises (1) and (2) on behalf of Spinoza—that all finite modes follow from the laws of God's nature alone and are therefore necessities of God's nature alone. Premise (3) states in effect that if this is so, then all finite modes are necessary. And the basic idea underlying this claim is that of *modal closure*, according to which the modal status of any *F* that necessarily follows solely from *x*'s nature has the same modal status that *x* has (see ch. 1, §1.3.4, and ch. 4, §4.2.2). In that case, since finite modes are natural necessities of a metaphysically necessary being *alone*, finite modes are metaphysically necessary as well—as (4) concludes—despite finite modes' being dependent on an extrinsic cause.

This conclusion of course has bearing on the necessitarianism debate. Recall from the introduction of this dissertation that much of the interpretive dispute between the necessitarian and semi-necessitarian readings boils down to the question of whether the existence of finite modes is contingent, considered individually or as a whole series. But as we've just seen, the nomological argument for necessitarianism answers in the negative.

---

<sup>147</sup> This suggests the rather bold idea that finite modes are God's propria. For discussion of this (and the challenges it raises), see chapter 4, §4.7.

## CHAPTER 3. SPINOZA ON MODALITY

### 3.1 Modal Metaphysics

If Spinoza is a committed necessitarian, it may be tempting to think, from a contemporary point of view, that his framework for modality must be rather simplistic, and even uninteresting. For if nothing is contingent, then *actuality*, *possibility*, and *necessity* are all coextensive with each other, and there can be no modal distinctions between them. Is not Spinoza's modal theory, then, just “□” operators all the way down, as it were? However, Spinoza's modal views are much more nuanced than these brief considerations would suggest, and particularly in regard to possibility.<sup>148</sup> But the notion of possibility I have in mind here is *not* one of *epistemic possibility*, which Spinoza explicitly employs when he says, for example:

I call... singular [i.e., finite] things possible, insofar as, while we attend to the causes from which they must be produced, we do not know whether those causes are determined to produce them. (4d4)

Furthermore, we are completely ignorant of the order and connection of things itself, i.e., of how things are really ordered and connected. So for practical purposes it is better, indeed necessary, to consider things as possible. (TTP 4.4|G 3.58.24-27)

The sort of possibility Spinoza is concerned with above is clearly not one about objects' modal status, but about one's beliefs or perceptions of objects' modal status when facts about their causal history are unknown. The notion of possibility I have in mind, rather, is one that (at least in the *Ethics*) Spinoza not only implicitly employs in his proofs for God's existence (1p11) and substance monism (1p14), but never really bothered to explain, even in his initial remarks on the metaphysics of modality (1p33s1).

---

<sup>148</sup> For some instructive discussion of Spinoza's modal metaphysics, and his views on possibility in particular, see, e.g., Mason (1986; 1997, pp. 51-84), Miller (2001), Griffin (2008), and Newlands (2013; 2018, pp. 90-111).

I believe that in the background of Spinoza's thinking, he is operating with bifurcated metaphysical or absolute modalities, couched in his distinction between *essence* and *existence* (on that distinction, see ch. 1, §1.3.2). Among other things, this effectively provides Spinoza with a double notion of possibility: possibility *with respect to essence* on the one hand, and possibility *with respect to existence* (or *cause of existence*) on the other. It is unfortunate that this distinction is usually lost to exclusive treatments of the latter because the two notions of possibility can have significant bearing on how Spinoza's necessitarianism is interpreted. For, even if those things that are possible with respect to *both* essence and existence are also metaphysically necessary in each respect, it may turn out that *not* everything that is metaphysically possible with respect to essence is *also* metaphysically possible with respect to existence. In that case, the *existence* of those things would be metaphysically impossible, but *not* their *essence*. (Indeed, this is precisely what I argue later.)

This isn't mere speculation on my part. In a number of passages scattered across his corpus, Spinoza can be found not only speaking of modality along lines of essence and existence but making other points along the same lines. For example:

[I]t should be noted that *necessity* [*necessitas*], as it is in created things by the power of their cause [*vi causae*], is said *either in respect to their essence or in respect to their existence* [*vel respectu earum essentiae, vel respectu earum existentiae*]. For these two are distinguished in created things. ... But in God, whose essence is not distinguished from his existence, necessity of essence [*essentiae necessitas*] is also not distinguished from necessity of existence [*necessitate existentiae*]. (CM 1.3|G 1.241.23-29; emphasis added)

If you say that one can nevertheless see what belongs to the nature of a thing that does not exist, that is true *as regards existence* [*quo ad existentiam*], but not at all *as regards essence* [*quo ad essentiam*]. (KV 1.2.5, note c|G 1.20)<sup>149</sup>

---

<sup>149</sup> Other passages include TdIE 52-55, along with note s (in TdIE 54) and note x (in TdIE 57); CM 1.1|G 1.237.9-13 and CM 1.3|G 1.240-241; KV 1.1, note d|G 1.17, KV 1.6.3; TTP 4.24|G 3.62-63; and 5p36s. See also 1p25 in conjunction with 1p33s1: the former says that both the essence and existence of modes admit of a cause, and the latter indicates that whatever has a cause admits of modal status.

Be that as it may, I will not attempt to formulate an exhaustive account of Spinozistic modality here in terms of the essence-existence distinction. But I will attempt to explain what that distinction generally means for Spinoza's modal metaphysics and especially for his notion of non-epistemic possibility. This will allow me, in both the present and subsequent chapters, to get clearer on the nature, implications, and plausibility of his necessitarianism. To this end, I begin §3.2 with Spinoza's modal metaphysics of necessity and impossibility with respect to existence. This puts us in a position in §3.3 to see how possibility with respect to essence and existence falls out of it. Subsequently, in §3.4, I introduce and respond to what I refer to as *the scope problem*, which challenges the necessitarian pedigree of my interpretation of Spinoza's modal metaphysics on the grounds that it posits unactualized possibilities. Then finally, in §3.5, I wrap up the present chapter by completing the outline of Spinoza's modal reductionism previously introduced in chapter 1 (§1.4).

### 3.2 Necessity & Impossibility

Spinoza's modal metaphysics is primarily concerned with *de re* modality, not *de dicto* modality.<sup>150</sup> This is apparent not only from the fact that the objects of Spinoza's theorizing are natural *things* opposed to *statements*, but from the fact that he explains the modal status of things by appealing to their causes (see ch. 1, §§1.3.4-1.4.3). So, by way of introducing the modal metaphysics of necessity and impossibility, we must first turn to where Spinoza lays its causal groundwork in his second proof for God's existence:

---

<sup>150</sup> Among other things, Mason (1986; 1997, pp. 51-84) suggests that commentators misrepresent and misunderstand Spinoza's concern with the nature and causes of *things* when they attempt to reconstruct and assess his views in purely *de dicto* terms through the analytic lens of contemporary modal and entailment logics. I think Mason is correct about this to an extent. But *pace* Mason, while Spinozistic ideas or concepts are indeed *things*, they also function in a proposition-like way as the fundamental bearers of truth-values, and therefore not obviously uncongenial to a *de dicto* rendering of Spinoza's modal views.



For each thing there must be assigned a cause, *or* reason, as much for its existence as for its nonexistence [*Cujuscunq̄ue rei assignari debet causa seu ratio tam cur existit quam cur non existit*]. For example, if a triangle exists, there must be a reason *or* cause why it exists; but if it does not exist, there must also be a reason *or* cause which prevents it from existing, *or* which takes its existence away. But this reason, *or* cause, must either be contained in the nature of the thing, or be outside it. (1p11d2)

The opening claim of this demonstration is often cited as Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR).<sup>151</sup> The PSR here can be understood as the conjunction of two requirements. The first is that for any thing *x*, there must be a cause or reason for *x*'s existence if *x* exists, and a cause or reason for *x*'s nonexistence if *x* does not exist. In this way, Spinoza's PSR is concerned with the existential status of things as they stand to the essence-existence distinction. For there are essences of some things that are instantiated, and essences of other things that are not instantiated (at least at some time); and in either case, the PSR requires a cause or reason of this for each thing. The second requirement of the PSR is that the cause or reason for a thing's existence or nonexistence must be located either internal or external to the thing's essence (cf. 1p8s2).<sup>152</sup> This is basically the distinction I introduced in chapter 1 (§1.3.1)<sup>153</sup> between an *intrinsic cause* and *extrinsic cause*, except that here, it is extended not only to things' existence, but also to things' nonexistence:

*x*'s existence (or nonexistence) is *intrinsically caused* just in case *x* exists (or does not exist) by virtue of *x*'s essence, i.e., just in case *x*'s existence (or nonexistence) follows from the essence of *x*, and

---

<sup>151</sup> The Spinoza literature on the PSR has exploded in the last couple of decades. See, e.g., Della Rocca (2003, 2008) and Lin (2007, 2012, 2018).

<sup>152</sup> From the Spinoza literature it may be tempting to think that the PSR of 1p11d2 is Spinoza's most general and central form of the principle—one that is unrestricted, foundational, and motivating for his whole metaphysical project. But if the PSR of 1p11d2 is only concerned with the existence and nonexistence of things and not with their essences as well, then it is restricted in its scope. For it is not concerned with accounting for the formal reality (or lack thereof) of things' essences, which also admits of a cause (1p25). A better candidate for an unrestricted PSR can perhaps be found in, or constructed from, Spinoza's opening axioms of the *Ethics* (1a1-4).

<sup>153</sup> As I explain there, the "cause" of "cause *or* reason" corresponds to Spinoza's dynamic gloss of his metaphysics, and the "reason" of "cause *or* reason" corresponds to his conceptual gloss of his metaphysics. With a little caution, we may use the terms interchangeably, but I've opted to use the term "cause" below.

$x$ 's existence (or nonexistence) is *extrinsically caused* just in case  $x$  exists (or does not exist) by virtue of a cause  $y$  that is external to and independent of  $x$ , i.e., just in case  $x$ 's existence (or nonexistence) follows from  $y$  and  $x \neq y$ .

Now, with the two requirements of the PSR stated, we are in a position to see how Spinoza explains necessity and impossibility:

A thing is called necessary either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause [*Res aliqua necessaria dicitur vel ratione suae essentiae vel ratione causae*]. For a thing's existence follows necessarily either from its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause. And a thing is also called impossible [*impossibilis*] from these same causes—viz. [a thing's nonexistence follows] either because its essence, or definition, involves a contradiction, or because there is no external cause which has been determined to produce such a thing. (1p33s1)

In effect, the distinctions from the PSR between existence and nonexistence on the one hand, and an intrinsic cause and extrinsic cause on the other, explain the necessity and impossibility of things in the absolute or metaphysical modal sense.<sup>154</sup> The result is a corresponding pair of distinctions explaining a thing's modal status in causal terms. This can be tentatively stated as follows (in terms I've picked up from Griffin, 2008). For any  $x$  whose existence is *necessary*, either:

$x$ 's existence is *intrinsically necessary* just in case the existence of  $x$  is intrinsically caused, or

$x$ 's existence is *extrinsically necessary* just in case the existence of  $x$  is extrinsically caused.

And for any  $x$  whose existence is *impossible*, either:

$x$ 's existence is *intrinsically impossible* just in case the nonexistence of  $x$  is intrinsically caused, or

$x$ 's existence is *extrinsically impossible* just in case the nonexistence of  $x$  is extrinsically caused.

---

<sup>154</sup> In other words, the sense of necessity and impossibility that Spinoza is concerned with is the same sense that pertains to God's existence and nonexistence, respectively, as given in his proof for God's existence. It is disputed whether the same holds for modes. For some discussion of the univocity or equivocity of Spinozistic modalities, see chapter 4. I also outline the matter below in §3.4.3.

How are we to understand each of these, exactly? Right where we left off the PSR, Spinoza provides some instructive examples to clarify the above distinctions:

E.g., the very nature of a square circle indicates the reason why it does not exist, viz. because it involves a contradiction. On the other hand, the reason why a substance exists also follows from its nature alone, because it involves existence (see 1p7). But the reason why a circle or triangle exists, or why it does not exist, does not follow from the nature of these things, but from the order of the whole of corporeal Nature [*ex ordine universae naturae corporeae*]. For from this [order] it must follow either that the triangle necessarily exists now or that it is impossible for it to exist now. (1p11d2)

In the subsequent sections, I consider each example in the order that Spinoza presents them to explain each distinction above.

### 3.2.1 Intrinsic Impossibility

The first example from 1p11d2, together with 1p33s1, indicates that a *square circle* is a thing whose existence is intrinsically impossible because its nature “involves a contradiction”. This may initially seem puzzling since involvement relations or contradictions do not seem to concern essence or existence so much as logical relations between concepts. It isn’t so puzzling, however, if we understand that Spinoza is thinking here in terms of his *conceptual essentialism* as I explained it in chapter 1 (§§1.3.2, 1.3.4; see also Lin, 2007, pp. 276-277). The nature of  $x$  in such terms is the clear and distinct concept or adequate idea of  $x$  as at least having certain essential features ( $F$ ,  $G$ , etc.). And the concept of  $x$  is said to “involve” the concept of  $y$  if  $x$  cannot be conceived without  $y$  (2p49d). Along these lines, when the nature of  $x$  “involves a contradiction”, it is because the concept of  $x$  cannot but be conceived without relating features of  $x$  in contradictory ways such that  $x$  is both  $F$  and non- $F$ .

The nature of a square circle is like this. For a square is the figure described by four equal rectilinear lines whereas a circle is not. Hence the nature of a square circle involves a contradiction:

it cannot but be described by four equal rectilinear lines *and not* described by four equal rectilinear lines. Such contradictory things cannot be conceived, even in God's infinite intellect. This has existential import according to Spinoza—or rather, the negation of existential import. Since the existence of a thing is the instantiation of its essence, a square circle intrinsically causes its own nonexistence precisely because the instantiation of some of its essential features (being a square) negates the instantiation of some of its other essential features (being a circle). Thereby its existence is intrinsically impossible (cf. Lin, 2007, pp. 276-277).

The same basic idea may be put more pointedly in terms of Spinoza's *dynamic essentialism* (see ch. 1, §§1.3.3-1.3.4), according to which the essence of a thing is its intrinsic power to persevere in being and produce effects. This gloss of essences is especially ostensible from Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine (see 3p4-7; see also 2d2 and 1p11s), according to which the given essence of  $x$  posits the whole of  $x$ 's essential features ( $F$ ,  $G$ , etc.) that altogether strive not only to preserve  $x$ , but to “destroy”, “take away”, or “exclude” the presence of any opposing features in  $x$  that threaten  $x$ 's instantiation. In that case, the nature of a square circle intrinsically causes its own nonexistence precisely because the instantiation of its nature posits opposing essential features whose causal efficacy prevents the square circle from being instantiated. It defeats its own existence, as it were, by virtue of its mutually excluding and incoherent essential features. Hence, its existence is intrinsically impossible.

Presumably, however, there is no real object that corresponds to the nature of a square circle (although there presumably is for a square and a circle, taken as distinct, particular things). Like a chimaera, not only is a square circle a *pseudo*-nature with no formal reality outside the mind, but it cannot even be said to properly have objective reality *in* the mind. A square circle, like a chimaera, is at best a linguistic entity, as Spinoza explains in his *Metaphysical Thoughts*:

First, it should be noted that we may properly call a Chimaera a verbal being because it is neither in the intellect nor in the imagination. For it cannot be expressed except in words. E.g., we can, indeed, express a square Circle in words, but we cannot imagine it in any way, much less understand it. So a Chimaera is nothing but a word, *and impossibility cannot be numbered among the affections of being, for it is only a negation.* (CM 1.3|G 1.241.9-16; emphasis added)<sup>155</sup>

Thus we might also explain the existence of a square circle as intrinsically impossible because, at bottom, there simply is no such object which could be instantiated at all: its “nature” is a non-being, and just as surely as it involves a contradiction if something comes from nothing (because *ex nihilo nihil fit*), we may also say that it involves a contradiction if a square circle instantiates non-being.

### 3.2.2 Intrinsic Necessity

Together with 1p33s1, Spinoza’s second example from 1p11d2 indicates that *substance* is a thing whose existence is intrinsically necessary because its nature “involves existence”. Spinoza explains this by way of 1p7 (also see ch. 1, §§1.3.1-1.3.2).<sup>156</sup> The basic argument there is that since a substance is an ontologically and conceptually independent being (1d3), the existence of a substance cannot be extrinsically caused, as that would involve its existence in something outside its essence (1p6c). But since it is a corollary of the PSR that anything whose existence is not extrinsically caused must be intrinsically caused (i.e., self-caused), a substance must therefore be intrinsically caused to exist, which is to say that its essence involves its existence (1d1). Thereby the existence of substance is intrinsically necessary because its instantiation follows necessarily from its nature.

---

<sup>155</sup> See also TdIE 52ff and 2p49s|G 2.131-132. Cf. TdIE 96|G 2.36.25ff; 3p52s1|G 2.180.24ff, and 3doa20exp.

<sup>156</sup> The demonstration of 1p7 reads: “A substance cannot be produced by anything else (by 1p6c); therefore it will be the cause of itself, i.e. (by 1d1), its essence necessarily involves existence, *or* it pertains to its nature to exist, q.e.d.”

However, Spinoza glosses over an important, unstated assumption in the above argument from 1p7. For even granting Spinoza that a substance is intrinsically caused and not extrinsically caused, we should bear in mind that the intrinsic cause of *x* *either* posits the existence of *x* (intrinsic necessity) *or* prevents it (intrinsic impossibility). Spinoza’s reasoning assumes the former of substance, and by extension, that its given nature would not posit incoherent essential features if instantiated. So, in order for the existence of substance to be intrinsically necessary, its existence must not only have an intrinsic cause, but its nature should *not* involve a contradiction. That is, substance must have *both* a coherent essence *and* an intrinsic cause of its existence. Only then is the instantiation of its essence intrinsically necessary.<sup>157</sup>

### 3.2.3 Extrinsic Necessity

Spinoza’s third example from 1p11d2, together with 1p33s1, indicates that the existence of a *circle* or *triangle* is extrinsically necessary because it follows “from the order of the whole of corporeal Nature” and not “from the nature of these things”. Let’s unpack the latter remark, and then the former.

The fact that the necessary existence of a corporeal triangle is *not* a result of its nature is to say that the essence of a triangle would not involve a contradiction if instantiated. In this respect, the essence of a triangle is like that of substance from the previous example: both have essences

---

<sup>157</sup> Spinoza has resources available to him to argue that the nature or concept of substance is not contradictory or incoherent, and thus that it is no mere assumption on his part. He defines a substance as “what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed” (1d3). To conceive the nature of a substance is to conceive it under some attribute (1d4, 1p4-6, 1p10,d,s), that is, as expressing an essence consisting in an absolutely fundamental feature or positive way of being without negation, e.g., extension or thought. So understood, Spinoza would say the concept of a substance *x* with attribute *F* is internally protected from involvement in a contradiction. Since the concept of *x* as *F* is positive and without negation, no content contained in the concept of *x* as *F* can involve the concept of *x* as non-*F*. Moreover, the concept of *x* with *F* cannot be formed from any other concept—say, of substance *y* with attribute *G*—as that would involve conceiving *x* as *F* through *y* as *G*, and thus violate the conceptually independent nature of *x* or the fundamentality of attribute *F* (cf. Della Rocca, 2002; 2008, pp. 53-55). In this way, Spinoza would argue that there can be no contradictory features in the concept of a substance, and that its nature is coherent.

that are themselves internally coherent. Unlike substance, however, the essence of a triangle doesn't cause its own existence. As a finite mode of extension, the existence of a triangle (one drawn on a chalkboard, say) is determined by an extrinsic cause. And "[f]rom a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow" (1a3). In more global terms, the extrinsic cause of the triangle's existence is the preceding order of the whole of corporeal Nature, or as Spinoza simply refers to it elsewhere, "the order of Nature [*naturae ordo*]" (1p33d) or "the order of causes" (1p33s1; cf. 2p7s|G 2.90). The order of Nature is presumably the complete causal series of modes (*modulo* the triangle and its effects, presumably), both finite and infinite, of which the corporeal triangle's existence is a necessary product.<sup>158</sup> And in even more global terms, this order of Nature ultimately follows from God's essence (see 1p33d) conceived under the attribute of extension.<sup>159</sup>

Spinoza is keen to speak of the triangle's extrinsic cause in global terms because it would otherwise render the triangle's necessity unclear. By appealing to the *whole* order of Nature, Spinoza is of course not denying that the corporeal triangle admits of a *proximate* cause of its existence (say, the event in which a geometer drew it on the chalkboard). Rather, appeal to the whole order of Nature guarantees that the existence of the triangle is necessary in the way required by necessitarianism, i.e., *absolutely* or *metaphysically* necessary.<sup>160</sup> The triangle's existence would otherwise be *determined* as a mere inevitable consequence of its proximate cause, and such deterministic causation does not by itself render the existence of the triangle metaphysically necessary. For if the proximate cause itself—or any of its preceding causes—are not necessary,

---

<sup>158</sup> For some back and forth discussion of the scope and meaning of "order of Nature", see Garrett (1999a, pp. 122-123; 2018a, pp. 142-145) and Curley and Walski (1999, pp. 254-256).

<sup>159</sup> This is to say, in Spinoza's terminology at 1p29s, that the order of Nature is one and the same as *Natura naturans* and follows from *Natura naturata*.

<sup>160</sup> I take up further discussion of this matter in chapter 4.

then the triangle will be contingent despite being determined. Only if the entire causal series of existing modes is necessary, is the triangle—a member of that series—necessary in its existence. And this entire series, in turn, is guaranteed by God’s necessary activity, who is not only the cause of the entire series of existing modes, but necessary in his existence by virtue of his own essence (intrinsically necessary). In this way, we can see again that necessity for Spinoza is not only something *transitive* that gets distributed through causal relations, but one that is *closed* within the order of Nature. Metaphysical necessity is preserved in all modes outside God because the necessity of God’s essence is the ultimate and complete source of every mode’s existence.<sup>161</sup>

Unfortunately, Spinoza is not always keen to highlight that the necessity (or impossibility) of a mode is a result of its relation to the order of Nature which follows from God. This is liable to suggest by omission, like we just saw, that the necessary (or impossible) existence of a mode follows merely from the presence or absence of its proximate extrinsic cause (see 1p33s1).<sup>162</sup> Nonetheless, Spinoza quite clearly indicates throughout his corpus<sup>163</sup>—including 1p11d2<sup>164</sup>—that true knowledge of the modal status of a thing’s existence (or nonexistence) is knowing that it follows from causes embedded in the strata of a metaphysically necessary substance: “For if men understood clearly the whole order of Nature, they would find all things just as necessary as are all those treated in Mathematics... Accordingly, we must say... that the necessity we find in things has resulted from the decree of God alone.” (CM 2.9|G 1.265.25ff)

---

<sup>161</sup> Cf. CM 2.9: “Accordingly, we must say... since all things are really necessary... that [God] can do all things, and that the necessity we find in things has resulted from the decree of God alone.” (G 1.266.29-33)

<sup>162</sup> “For [an extrinsically necessary] thing’s existence follows necessarily... *from a given efficient cause*. And [an extrinsically impossible] thing is also called impossible from these same causes—viz. [a thing’s nonexistence follows]... *because there is no external cause* which has been determined to produce such a thing.” (1p33s1; emphasis added)

<sup>163</sup> See, e.g., 1p33s1 after the discussion of necessity and impossibility, the content under 2p44, as well as 2p31c and 5p6. See also CM 1.3, KV 1.6, and Ep 32.

<sup>164</sup> “But the reason why a circle or triangle exists, or why it does not exist, does not follow from the nature of these things, *but from the order of the whole of corporeal Nature*. For from this [order] it must follow either that *the triangle necessarily exists now or that it is impossible for it to exist now*.” (1p11d2; emphasis added)



Of course, none of this is to say that Spinoza thinks an extrinsically necessary triangle, because it exists necessarily, exists *at all times*. As he explains:

[W]hen we say that God has decided that the triangle shall exist, we are saying nothing but that God has so arranged the order of nature and of causes that the triangle shall necessarily exist at such a time. So if we understood the order of causes as it has been established by God, we should find that the triangle must really exist at such a time, with the same necessity as we now find, when we attend to its nature, that its three angles are equal to two right angles. (CM 1.3|G 1.243.16-24; cf. 3p8d, 4p4)

The necessity of the triangle's existence, in other words, holds for as long as it exists (and at all the places it exists), because that's precisely the duration of its instantiation that is compatible with extrinsic causes in the whole order of Nature. Spinoza even seems to allude to this in 1p11d2 when he says that a (presently) extrinsically caused triangle necessarily exists "now".<sup>165</sup>

In sum, for a mode  $x$  to have extrinsically necessary existence, not only must  $x$  have a coherent nature (i.e., the instantiation of its nature doesn't involve a contradiction), but  $x$  must also have an extrinsic cause of its existence, understood to ultimately stem from God's intrinsically necessary existence. In that case, if  $x$  could fail to exist despite being extrinsically caused, then the order of Nature *would* involve a contradiction: it would imply that  $x$  *does not* exist at the very times when (and in the very places that) it follows necessarily that  $x$  *does* exist.

### 3.2.4 Extrinsic Impossibility

Spinoza's final example from 1p11d2, together with 1p33s1, indicates that the existence of a *circle* or *triangle* is extrinsically impossible because their nonexistence follows "from the order of the whole of corporeal Nature" but not "from the nature of these things". In fact, the same basic

---

<sup>165</sup> Nor is any of this to say that an extrinsically necessary triangle, because it exists necessarily, is *impervious to destruction*. As a *finite* mode, the triangle's existence is dependent on and limited by other modes (1d2, 1p28), many of which are in flux, and whose collective power to exist far exceeds that of the triangle's, eventually leading to the triangle's exclusion from the whole order of Nature, i.e., its destruction (4a1, 4p2-4).

considerations we just saw regarding extrinsically necessary existence apply to extrinsically impossible existence, with the only difference being that the former is concerned with an instantiated nature whereas the latter is concerned with a non-instantiated nature.

What does this difference amount to? If a triangle exists, its existence is necessary because it is necessarily *posited* or *produced* by causes present in the order of Nature. But if a circle does not exist, its nonexistence is not extrinsically impossible merely because certain causes are *absent* in the order of Nature (causes that would otherwise posit its necessary existence). For reasons we have already seen, the absence of causes would not by itself imply that the nonexistence of the circle is impossible in the way (again) required by necessitarianism—*absolute* or *metaphysical* impossibility—although it would imply (again) that the nonexistence of the circle is an inevitable consequence of the absence of deterministic causes to instantiate it. Rather, if a circle does not exist, its nonexistence is impossible because there is a “cause which *prevents* it from existing, *or* which *takes* its existence *away*” (1p11d2; emphasis added). That is, it is impossible that the nature of the circle be instantiated on account of a cause whose presence in the order of Nature necessarily *excludes* the existence of the circle. (Similarly, God’s existence excludes other substances from existing, for example. See 1p14).

So, for a mode  $x$  to have extrinsically impossible existence,  $x$  must have both a coherent nature (i.e., the instantiation of its nature in and of itself doesn’t involve a contradiction) and an extrinsic cause of its nonexistence, which ultimately stems from God’s intrinsically necessary existence. Thus, if  $x$  could exist despite being extrinsically caused to *not* exist, the order of Nature would (again) involve a contradiction: for it would then follow necessarily from causes in the order of Nature that  $x$ ’s existence is *posited* precisely when (and where)  $x$ ’s existence is *excluded*.

### 3.3 Possibility

Earlier I said that Spinoza implicitly employs a distinction between possibility *with respect to essence* and possibility *with respect to existence*. In this section, I explain the distinction but focus primarily on the former and what it means for Spinoza's modal metaphysics.

#### 3.3.1 Intrinsic Possibility

That there is a notion of possibility with respect to essence in Spinoza's modal metaphysics should now be somewhat apparent from the way he relies on the fact of whether the nature of a thing by itself involves a contradiction. For if the concept of a thing's essence is *consistent*, or does *not* involve a contradiction, then it is in some way *possible*. To borrow a term from Alan Donagan (1973, pp. 249) and Michael Griffin (2008), I will refer to this Spinozistic notion of possibility with respect to essence as *intrinsic possibility*, and tentatively understand by this that:

*x* is *intrinsically possible* just in case no essential feature of *x* is incompatible with any other essential feature of *x*, i.e., just in case the essence of *x* is internally coherent.<sup>166</sup>

As such, we can see that intrinsic possibility holds for anything whose existence is *not* intrinsically impossible. But also consider more direct textual evidence that Spinoza held something like intrinsic possibility.

A rough formulation of intrinsic possibility, restricted to modes, appears in Spinoza's discussion of fictitious ideas in the early *Treatise on the Intellect*, in which he inquires into how one can suppose to exist what one knows does not. "E.g., I feign that Peter, whom I know, is going

---

<sup>166</sup> This assumes, on behalf of Spinoza, that the essences of many if not all things consist in more than one essential feature. Arguably, this is so even for God whose essential features are his attributes (1d6; cf. Brandau, 2015). If, however, some things do not have more than one essential feature (perhaps the "simplest bodies" of Spinoza's physical excursus at 2a"2|G 2.99), they would *a fortiori* be intrinsically possible: for the lone essential feature of such a thing would trivially be compatible with itself, not to mention that there would be no other essential feature of the thing with which it could be incompatible.

home, that he is coming to visit me, and the like. Here I ask, what does such an idea concern? I see that it concerns only possible, and not necessary or impossible things” (TdIE 52; cf. DPP 3pref).

He then goes on to explain:

I call a thing impossible whose nature implies that it would be contradictory for it to exist; necessary whose nature implies that it would be contradictory for it not to exist; and possible whose existence, by its very nature [*possibilem, cujus quidem existentia, ipsa sua natura*], does not imply a contradiction—either for it to exist or for it not to exist—but whose necessity or impossibility of existence depends on causes unknown to us, so long as we feign its existence. (TdIE 53; cf. 4d3)

Spinoza indicates (even if somewhat clumsily when referring to a thing’s “existence, by nature”; cf. C 1.24n39) that the notion of restricted possibility here is distinct from necessity and impossibility: for a mode *x* is either necessary or impossible with respect to its *existence* by virtue of extrinsic causes in the order of Nature, and yet, *x* is nonetheless possible with respect to its internally coherent *essence*.<sup>167</sup>

In the *Ethics*, however, Spinoza operates with a notion of unrestricted intrinsic possibility.

The second proof for God’s existence, for example, depends on a premise that a substance with all attributes (i.e., God) is intrinsically possible:

Since, then, there can be, outside the divine nature, no reason, *or*, cause which takes away the divine existence, the reason will necessarily have to be in his nature itself, if indeed he does not exist. *That is, his nature would involve a contradiction... But it is absurd to affirm this of a Being absolutely infinite and supremely perfect.* (1p11d2|G 2.53.20ff; emphasis added cf. 1p10s)

In effect, since God’s nature is conceived as neither extrinsically impossible nor intrinsically impossible (as a being to which absolutely no negation pertains: see 1d6exp), God must be

---

<sup>167</sup> The basic idea seems to be that *x* is possible just in case (i) there is no contradiction involved in *x*’s essence if *x* is instantiated and (ii) there is no contradiction involved in *x*’s essence if *x* is *not* instantiated. Two things are worth mentioning here. The first is that the possibility of *x* in this sense is not a notion of possibility with respect to existence. For Spinoza considers *x* to be possible even if *x* is not instantiated. Despite Spinoza’s rather awkward phrasing in TdIE 53, he indicates that the modal status of *x* is determined by whether or not *x*’s essence is coherent. In this way, we can see that possibility in the TdIE is restricted because it can only be satisfied by modes on account that their essence does not involve existence. By contrast, God is not possible in this sense on account that his essence *does* involve existence, which is to say that his nonexistence involves a contradiction, contrary to condition (ii).

intrinsically possible, from which Spinoza goes on to infer God's intrinsically necessary existence.<sup>168</sup> In this way, Spinozistic intrinsic possibility is reminiscent of the Cartesian notion that a thing is possible just in case its "true and immutable nature" is clearly and distinctly perceived,<sup>169</sup> and even seems to anticipate aspects of Leibniz's theory of *per se* possibility.<sup>170</sup>

### 3.3.2 Intrinsic Possibility & Modal Status

We can better understand intrinsic possibility by noting its role in the other categories of Spinoza's modal metaphysics that we've seen. An initial observation is that just as essence is at least a condition of existence (ch. 1, §1.3.2), the intrinsic possibility of  $x$  is at least a condition of  $x$ 's existence if  $x$  exist at all, as  $x$ 's existence would otherwise be intrinsically impossible.<sup>171</sup> We can lay this out in a fuller statement of the distinctions under necessity and impossibility tentatively laid out above (§3.2). For any  $x$  whose existence is *necessary*, either:

$x$ 's existence is *intrinsically necessary* just in case (i)  $x$  is intrinsically possible and (ii) the existence of  $x$  is intrinsically caused, or

$x$ 's existence is *extrinsically necessary* just in case (i)  $x$  is intrinsically possible and (ii) the existence of  $x$  is extrinsically caused (ultimately by something whose existence is intrinsically necessary).

And for any  $x$  whose existence is *impossible*, either:

$x$ 's existence is *intrinsically impossible* just in case (i)  $x$  is not intrinsically possible and (ii) the nonexistence of  $x$  is intrinsically caused, or

$x$ 's existence is *extrinsically impossible* just in case (i)  $x$  is intrinsically possible and (ii) the nonexistence of  $x$  is extrinsically caused (ultimately by something whose existence is intrinsically necessary).

---

<sup>168</sup> On this, also see footnote 157, above.

<sup>169</sup> Though, of course, this isn't to say that Spinoza's view is not significantly different from Descartes'. But see, e.g., Descartes' *Meditations* and his Replies (CSM 2.44-50, 54, 83, and 117; cf. Grey, 2017).

<sup>170</sup> Like footnote 169, this also is not to say that Spinoza's view is no different from Leibniz's. But see, e.g., Leibniz's *On Freedom and Possibility* (AG 21). For some excellent discussion of Leibniz and Spinoza on possibility, see Griffin (2008) and Lin (2012).

<sup>171</sup> From this, it would also seem that possibilities with respect to existence not only presuppose, but are posterior to, possibilities with respect to essence.

This last distinction helps to articulate how things are intrinsically possible (possible with respect to essence) even irrespective of their existence. Whereas the extrinsic necessities are intrinsic possibilities whose essences must be instantiated (at least at some time), the extrinsic impossibilities are intrinsic possibilities whose essences cannot be instantiated (at least at some time). The upshot is that things that exist, as well as those that do not, are intrinsically possible, so long as their respective essences are internally coherent.

Now, since Spinoza explains necessary and impossible existence with reference to intrinsic and extrinsic causes, we might also be tempted to do the same for possibility such that:

*x* is *extrinsically possible* just in case (i) *x* is intrinsically possible and (ii) the existence of *x* is extrinsically caused (ultimately by something whose existence is intrinsically necessary).

But as condition (i) suggests, the result is something quite different. In contrast to *intrinsic* possibility—possibility with respect to *essence*—*extrinsic* possibility is possibility with respect to *existence* by virtue of condition (ii). And so, extrinsic possibility does not stand to intrinsic possibility as extrinsic necessity stands to intrinsic necessity (etc.). In fact, extrinsic possibility, thus understood, is *equivalent* to extrinsic necessity. But this should not be very surprising provided Spinoza's necessitarianism, according to which whatever possibly exists also necessarily exists.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> Interestingly, Leibniz seems to have appreciated the necessitarian consequences of formulating a metaphysics of modality in terms of causes that posit or exclude a thing's existence, which in turn stem ultimately from God: "In a word, when one speaks of the *possibility* of a thing it is not a question of the causes that can bring about or prevent its actual existence: otherwise one would change the nature of the terms, and render useless the distinction between the possible and the actual. ... That is why, when one asks if a thing is possible or necessary, and brings in the consideration of what God wills or chooses, one alters the issue." (T 235)

### 3.3.3 The Scope of Intrinsic Possibility

Intrinsic possibility as I have tentatively stated it above is conceived *narrowly* with respect to the essence of a thing alone (or, if we prefer, with respect to the collection of essential features of a thing alone). But intrinsic possibility can also be conceived *broadly* with respect to a collection of two or more things' essences (essences which stand in certain relations to each other):

*x* and *y* (etc.) are *intrinsically possible* just in case (i) no essential feature of *x* is incompatible with any other essential feature of *x*, (ii) no essential feature of *y* is incompatible with any other essential feature of *y*, and (iii) no essential feature of *x* is incompatible with an essential feature of *y*.

Something like this is present in Spinoza's examples of extrinsic necessity and extrinsic impossibility.<sup>173</sup> In the former, a triangle that is extrinsically necessary in its existence is not just narrowly intrinsically possible, but broadly so, together with the essence of its extrinsic cause in "the order of the whole of corporeal Nature" (1p11d2). Each thing contained in the order of Nature is itself narrowly intrinsically possible and, taken together as a collection of essences, broadly intrinsically possible. And while this case concerns the intrinsic possibility of things whose essences are instantiated, the intrinsic possibility of things also holds (as we have seen) irrespective of their instantiations.<sup>174</sup>

Thus understood, Spinoza could go further with the notion of broad intrinsic possibility. In principle, such possibilities could range over an arbitrary collection of things' essences—combinations or permutations of more or less essences, instantiated or not. For the representational content given by a (clearly and distinctly) conceived essence contains objectively what it has

---

<sup>173</sup> Put simply, if *x* is a triangle, and if *y* is the order of Nature containing the extrinsic cause of *x*, we can see broad intrinsic possibility at work in the notions of extrinsic necessity and extrinsic impossibility by virtue that conditions (i)-(iii) are satisfied in the former and that (iii) is not in the latter.

<sup>174</sup> Broad intrinsic possibility also helps to clarify extrinsic impossibility. When Spinoza explains that the nonexistence of a triangle follows necessarily from the order of Nature, it is not because the triangle itself, or the order of Nature, has an incoherent essence. Rather, the triangle cannot exist because its existence together with the (prior) existence of the order of Nature would instantiate incompatible essential features in things.

formally; and if considered together with one or more other conceived essences of one's choosing, the conjunction of their concepts either will or will not be intrinsically possible.<sup>175</sup> In that case, intrinsic possibility ends up being a sort of *relative* possibility with respect to essence (see Dasgupta, 2016, pp. 393-394). The possibility that holds for an individual is not only relative to its own essence (narrow intrinsic possibility), but relative to any other essence or essences, depending only on the mutual compatibility of the essential features for all individuals concerned (broad intrinsic possibility).<sup>176</sup> If this is right, then it would seem that there very well are countless intrinsic possibilities which are, perhaps, never instantiated.

### 3.4 Necessitarianism & the Scope Problem

Charlie Huenemann has recently surveyed challenges involved in interpreting the character of Spinoza's necessitarianism. One such challenge especially pertinent to the present chapter is that the conceded existence of finite modes within the mediate infinite mode "may not be enough to establish Spinoza's necessitarianism... depending on *how many* logically possible finite particulars come to be actualized in the face of the [whole] universe" (Huenemann, 2018, pp. 119). I'll refer to this challenge as "the scope problem" because it raises the problem of how to reconcile the scope of intrinsically possible finite modes that come to be instantiated with their *bona fide* necessity. This matters a great deal for determining Spinoza's commitment to necessitarianism: for if the scope of finite modes that actually exist fails to completely exhaust all of the intrinsically

---

<sup>175</sup> In this way, broadly conceived intrinsic possibilities may be informative of the natures of things. See, e.g., Lin (2007, pp. 283-284). Cf. TdIE 55.

<sup>176</sup> My suggestion that relative possibility is available if not ascribable to Spinoza isn't mere speculation: in §3.4.1, I offer some textual support for it. And if it can be attributed to Spinoza, his notion of possibility with respect to essence will differ in important ways from Leibniz's *per se* account of possibility, one of which is that the *per se* possibility of some *x* is possibility relative only to *x* itself but not some *y* outside of *x* (Dasgupta, 2016, p. 417n37).



possible finite modes, it becomes a real question whether contingency has a home in Spinoza's universe after all, since within it only some but not all possibilities are apparently actualized.

To the question of how broad the range is for finite modes that acquire existence, Huenemann (2018, pp. 119-123) conveniently sorts the available answers into three options: **ALL**, **MANY**, and **SOME**. Regarding **ALL**, he explains, “[t]he cleanest possible route to necessitarianism would be to maintain that, according to Spinoza, *absolutely all* finite modes that are *intrinsically possible... become actual*” (ibid., p. 119). And regarding the (presumably less hygienic) route provided by **MANY**, there are constraints on the amount of intrinsically possible finite modes whose existence is actualized—constraints provided by the laws of nature, for example. Of course, while not *all* intrinsically possible finite modes are instantiated on this view, the world would nonetheless contain a “*whopping lot*” (ibid., p. 121) of existing finite modes. And finally, according to **SOME** (the least sanitary of the three options, presumably), there are even more restrictions on the number of intrinsically possible finite modes that exist—restrictions provided by the laws of nature *and* the causal series of finite modes in nature, for example. While the number of intrinsically possible finite modes that exist in the actual world may still be quite vast on this view, it would not amount to **ALL** or **MANY**. Whatever **MANY** or **SOME** have going for themselves, the only option that clearly excludes contingency in nature is **ALL**.

In what follows, I address the scope problem insofar as it has bearing on my reading of Spinoza's modal metaphysics. I first argue that **ALL** is mistaken: on the basis of some textual considerations, I maintain that the complete range of finite modes' essence is not coextensive with the complete range of finite modes' existence (§3.4.1). This conclusion of not-**ALL** will be enough for my purposes; and so, I will not be concerned with siding particularly with either **MANY** or **SOME**. I then explain what Spinozistic contingency is and argue that although not all intrinsically

possible finite modes are instantiated, finite modes are not *metaphysically* contingent (whether existent or not), though I concede that they may be *epistemically* contingent (§3.4.2). I subsequently explain the scope of the metaphysical modalities as they pertain to my reading of Spinoza's modal metaphysics, which shows how he can remain a committed necessitarian despite ALL being mistaken (§3.4.3). The result is significant if not for showing how Spinoza's necessitarian framework accommodates theorizing in both metaphysics and natural philosophy by allowing (as we will see in chapter 5) for coherent thought about the natures and operations of things that may never come to existential fruition (cf. DPP 3pref).

### 3.4.1 Ideas of Nonexistent Modes

It is uncontroversial that Spinoza concedes the nonexistence of some finite modes. At 2p8, for example (as we will see later), he gives an account of ideas of modes that do not exist. But what is controversial is whether such finite modes include any that *never* exist and have duration (thereby implying MANY and SOME), or whether they are simply finite modes that fail to exist *now* in the present because they either *did* exist in the past or *will* exist in the future (thereby implying ALL). But there are textual grounds to think that not every essence of a finite mode is instantiated at some time, and therefore, that not every finite mode finds its way into existence, as it were. In two early texts, for example, Spinoza writes:

For if some architect conceives of a building in an orderly fashion, then although such a building never existed, and even never will exist, still the thought is true, and the thought is the same, whether the building exists or not [*Nam si quis faber ordine concepit fabricam aliquam, quamvis talis fabrica nunquam exstiterit, nec etiam unquam exstitura sit, ejus nihilominus cogitatio vera est, et cogitatio eadem est, sive fabrica existat, sive minus*]. (TdIE 69)

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

even if it does not exist, and never did [*het welk waarlyk eeuwig en onveranderlyk is, en altyd moet zyn in 't concept van een berg, schoon hy nooyt was of is*]. (KV 1.1, note a|G 1.14-15)

In chapter 2 (§2.3.3), I argued that the true idea or concept of  $x$  at least corresponds to and represents  $x$ 's eternal essence as its object (*ideatum*) outside the intellect (see also TdIE 36, 41; KV app2.7; 1p17s|G 2.63, 2p32). This holds all the more of Spinoza's appeal to eternal truths in the second passage (not to mention its uncanny similarity to the Cartesian doctrine of true and immutable natures). In that case, true concepts of never-existing finite modes like buildings or mountains imply that their formal essences are instantiated at no time.<sup>177</sup>

This is consistent with what we find in the *Ethics*, though the textual evidence there is less straightforward. In a scholium to part one, for example, Spinoza explains in general terms that we can form true ideas of modes that do not exist outside the intellect because the *ideata* agreeing with the objective essences in ideas are formal essences contained in and conceived through a substance:

This is how we can have true ideas of modifications which do not exist; for though they do not actually exist outside the intellect, nevertheless their essences are comprehended in another [i.e., in a substance] in such a way that they can be conceived through it [*quocirca modificationum non existentium veras ideas possumus habere quandoquidem quamvis non existant actu extra intellectum, earum tamen essentia ita in alio comprehenditur ut per idem concipi possint*]. (1p8s2|G 2.50; see also 1p15)

In part two of the *Ethics*, Spinoza goes on to express the same idea in more precise terms:

---

<sup>177</sup> Perhaps one could argue, contrary to this, that the object of the true idea is an affection of the body. After all, the human mind is the idea of the body, and its mental states are ideas of the states of the body (see 2p13ff). While there may be something to this objection insofar as TdIE 69 is concerned (cf. TdIE 72), it is insufficient for explaining the other text. For one thing, the KV passage rather clearly concerns eternal truths, and the existing human body—no less than the existing human mind—is not an eternal truth. Nonetheless, the above objection is helpful as it suggests an important nuance in Spinoza's metaphysics between (what we may call) a *first order object* (of a first order idea) and a *higher order object* (of a higher order idea). A first order object corresponds to an existent object of an existent idea, like existent bodily states of existent mental states. But a higher order object corresponds to some further object of an idea of a first order object (of a first order idea), i.e., some further object of an idea, of which the existent object of an existent idea is about—like an idea of a bodily state that tells us about something external to our body and mind (an object that may or may not have existence but must at least have essence). The objects of adequate knowledge seem to function along these lines (2p40s2) which is consistent with my proposal above (cf. Garrett, 2009).

The ideas of singular things, *or* of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended in God's infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of the singular things, *or* modes, are contained in God's attributes [*Ideae rerum singularium sive modorum non existentium ita debent comprehendi in Dei infinita idea ac rerum singularium sive modorum essentiae formales in Dei attributis continentur*]. (2p8)

In this passage, as with 1p8s2, Spinoza appears to be anticipating some of his readers' concerns in order to respond to them. He grants that the intellect is capable of (clearly and distinctly) conceiving of nonexistent singular (i.e., finite) things and forming true thoughts about them. But this raises worries, for example, with how ideas of nonexistent modes fit into Spinoza's substance monist ontology, or the parallelism of thought and all other attributes (demonstrated just before 2p8). His answer is that ideas of nonexistent singular things—no less than existent singular things that acquire duration—are modes of God's attributes no less than their *ideata* (cf. KV app2.11|G 1.119). Consistent with the Garrettian interpretation introduced in chapter 2 (§2.3.2), what it is for ideas of nonexistent singular things to be “comprehended in God's infinite idea” is for the objective essences of nonexistent singular things to be contained in God's immediate infinite mode of thought.<sup>178</sup> And given the isomorphism of the attributes upon which Spinoza explicitly bases 2p8 (see 2p8d and 2p7,s), these objective essences imply formal essences of nonexistent singular things contained in the immediate infinite mode of every other attribute of which God also has an idea.<sup>179</sup>

---

<sup>178</sup> The notion of one thing “comprehending” another suggests something like the intellectual comprehension of ideas, or the inherence of mental states in a mind (see, e.g., 1p30,d), specific to the attribute of thought. But this is not always the case for Spinoza. It sometimes refers to the general (i.e., not attribute-specific) way that one thing inheres in, is contained in, or is internally caused by, another thing. For example, 1p35d states: “For whatever is in God's power must (by 1p34) be so comprehended [*comprehendi*] by his essence that it necessarily follows from it, and therefore necessarily exists, q.e.d.” (see also DPP 1a11, 2a11).

<sup>179</sup> Interestingly, the same idea behind 2p8 receives Cartesian expression in CM 1.2: “*being of Essence* is nothing but that manner in which created things are comprehended in the attributes of God. *Being of Idea* is spoken of insofar as all things are contained objectively in God's idea. ... Finally, *being of Existence* is the essence itself of things outside God, considered in itself. It is attributed to things after they have been created by God”; and a little later: “although the essences of nonexistent modes are comprehended in their substances, and their *being of essence* is in their substances, nevertheless we wished to recur to God in order to explain generally the essence of modes and of substances, and also because the essence of modes has only been in their substances after the creation of the substances and we were seeking the eternal *being of essences*.” (G 1.238-239)

Notably, neither 1p8s2 nor 2p8 indicate that nonexistent singular things *inevitably* acquire duration or existence at some point in time.<sup>180</sup>

Thus far, then, we have some moderate textual support for thinking that there are some finite modes that never exist or have duration. If correct, this conclusion has a number of implications in connection with my reading of Spinoza's modal metaphysics. One implication is that, since there are true ideas of finite modes that never exist, they are intrinsically possible insofar as their essences are concerned. Another is that the existence of such finite modes is extrinsically impossible since they never exist but have internally coherent essences. And a further implication is that **ALL** is false with respect to the question of how many intrinsic possibilities are instantiated in the world. For my argument above implies that the scope of essences of finite modes is wider than the scope of those finite modes that also "put on their particular existence", as Spinoza says (KV app2.11|G 1.119.26), leaving us with **MANY** and **SOME**.

Be that as it may, I want to consider a final passage that constitutes pretty strong textual support for thinking that essences of finite modes are *never* instantiated because they *absolutely cannot* be instantiated. As Spinoza explains in a rather remarkable passage of his *Metaphysical Thoughts*:

---

<sup>180</sup> But one might suppose that the corollary to 2p8 suggests otherwise: "And when singular things are said to exist, not only insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, but insofar also as they are said to have duration, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration" (2p8c; cf. KV app1p4d|G 1.116; TP 2.2). At first glance, the temporal language of in this passage ("when", "duration") may appear to commit Spinoza to the instantiation of every singular thing's essence at some time. However, a rereading of the passage reveals that no such thing is implied by 2p8c. It says nothing to indicate that *each* singular thing is said to exist at some time, or that each thing *must* have duration. Rather, the text seems to say little more than two things on this point. First, it states what is true of a singular thing *whether or not it exists or acquires duration*: that the objective essence in its idea is comprehended in God's immediate infinite mode of thought no less than the formal essence of the idea's object is comprehended in the immediate infinite mode of its respective attribute. And second, it states what is true *of those singular things that exist and acquire duration*: the objective essence in the ideas of the things with duration must "also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration", that is, they must also have existence in the *mediate* infinite mode of its attribute (cf. 1p25,d,s,c). Neither of these points preclude the option that some singular things never exist and acquire duration. Spinoza's geometrical example provided in the scholium to 2p8 seems to be likewise consistent with all of this.

[I]f we were to conceive the whole order of nature, we should discover that many things whose nature we perceive clearly and distinctly, that is, whose essence is necessarily such, can not in any way exist. For we should find the existence of such things in nature to be just as impossible as we now know the passage of a large elephant through the eye of a needle to be, although we perceive the nature of each of them clearly. So the existence of those things would be only a chimaera, which we could neither imagine nor understand [*si totum ordinem naturae conciperemus, inveniremus, quòd multa, quorum naturam clarè, & distinctè percipimus, hoc est, quorum essentia necessariò talis est, nullo modo possent existere; nam tales res in naturâ existere aequè impossibile reperiremus, ac jam cognoscimus impossibile esse, ut magnus elephantus in acûs foramine recipi possit: quamvis utriusque naturam clarè percipiamus. Unde existentia illarum rerum non esset, nisi chimaera, quam neque imaginari, neque intelligere possemus*]. (CM 1.3|G 1.241-242)<sup>181</sup>

In this text, Spinoza affirms the clear and distinct natures of “many things” that “can not in any way exist”. In effect, the *essence* of such things is narrowly intrinsically possible despite the complete and utter extrinsic impossibility of their *existence*. Needless to say, then, not only do such modes never acquire duration, but we have reason *a fortiori* to reject ALL.

More than this, it is noteworthy that the passage also provides support for what may have seemed like a speculative reading of intrinsic possibility on behalf of Spinoza in §3.3. For in the above text, Spinoza not only implicitly affirms the broad intrinsic possibility of existent things with the whole order of Nature (extrinsic necessities), but he explicitly denies the broad intrinsic possibility of nonexistent things with that order of Nature in absolute terms, likening the impossibility of their existence to that of *chimaera*. What’s more, Spinoza’s example of the latter

---

<sup>181</sup> Spinoza in my view expresses a lot more of his own philosophical opinions in the CM (and even the DPP) than some commentators are willing to say (see, e.g., Lærke, 2017). CM 1.3 seems to me to be a remarkable case in point, in which Spinoza argues for his own necessitarianism under the guise that he is merely explaining Cartesianism. It is not obvious to me that Descartes ever maintained necessitarianism, and Spinoza offers no direct citations to think he did (though, it’s another matter whether Descartes is committed to the view). Of course, some elements of Cartesian thought might be taken to imply necessitarianism. Leibniz, for example, points to Descartes’ claim at CSM 1.258 that extension takes on all possible forms (L 273). Spinoza also repeats the Cartesian line at DPP 3pref. But under inspection it isn’t clear that such a claim commits Descartes to more than a sort of determinism in which extension takes on all possible forms, say, *allowed by the laws of nature that obtain*. (If the laws of nature could be otherwise—per Descartes’ theological voluntarism, perhaps—there could be unactualized possible forms of extension. Furthermore, as far as I can tell, it is open to Descartes to say, e.g., that God’s creation of extension itself is contingent, or even that the powers of thinking substances—who affect the forms of extended substances—are contingent.) At any rate, it would be something of a stretch, in my view, to say that the necessitarianism explained in the CM is more Descartes’ than Spinoza’s.

suggests the notion of relative possibility I proposed in §3.3.3. He denies the broad intrinsic possibility of a case in which a large elephant (a narrow intrinsic possibility), *relative* to the eye of a needle (another narrow intrinsic possibility), passes through the eye. But because he only denies the possibility of this case on the grounds that the essences involved in it are *not* jointly compatible (i.e., *not* clearly and distinctly conceivable *together* in the way specified by the case), he is arguably committed to cases in which the essences involved *are* jointly compatible. Such cases include relative possibilities in which, for example, a suitably fine thread or a speck of sawdust, relative to the eye of the needle, passes through the eye, even if such a thing “can not in any way exist”.<sup>182</sup>

### 3.4.2 Contingency

I have argued that ALL is false. Necessarily, there is no 1-1 correspondence between the *essence* and *existence* of all finite modes. For those finite modes to which there is 1-1 correspondence, their existence is extrinsically necessary for the extent of their duration (outside of which existence is extrinsically impossible); and for those to which there is no 1-1 correspondence, their existence is extrinsically impossible, *tout court*. In either case, such finite modes are intrinsically possible. However, I suspect that these results are liable to give the impression to both necessitarian and semi-necessitarian interpreters that I want to have my cake and eat it, too—that I want to claim that Spinoza is a *bona fide* necessitarian while denying that never-existent intrinsically possible finite modes are really contingent. To address this concern, it is worth considering intrinsic

---

<sup>182</sup> The availability of broad intrinsic possibilities to Spinoza would in effect allow him the conceptual resources to construct myriad “possible worlds” of a sort, though of course Spinoza himself never held such a notion. Griffin (2008, p. 89), for example, argues on Spinoza’s behalf for possible worlds that resemble Leibniz’s, in that they exclude God but include various complete internally consistent collections of modes.

possibility in regard to what Spinoza has to say about contingency, as well as in what sense he is willing to affirm or deny contingency in nature.

Spinoza writes in part four of the *Ethics*: “I call singular things contingent [*contingentes*] insofar as we find [*invenimus*] nothing, while we attend only to their essence, which necessarily posits their existence or which necessarily excludes it” (4d3). The idea here can be rephrased to say that:

a singular thing  $x$  is *contingent* just in case  $x$ 's existence is found to be neither intrinsically necessary nor intrinsically impossible from the consideration of  $x$ 's essence alone.

Contingency, so defined, invokes the intrinsic possibility of singular (i.e., finite) things simply by virtue that  $x$  is *not* intrinsically impossible. More than this, however, contingency in this 4d3 sense may initially appear to be a metaphysical modal notion, supporting the idea—contrary to the necessitarian modal metaphysics that I've ascribed to Spinoza—that he *does* believe a real contingency applies to finite modes.

But a little inspection reveals that contingency in the sense of 4d3 is not only a partially epistemic notion, but perfectly consistent with necessitarianism. While it is true that every contingent singular thing is intrinsically possible, 4d3 is conspicuously silent about further details that pertain to such contingent things given Spinoza's metaphysical commitments. Granting that  $x$  is contingent, if all that is conceived about  $x$  is that it is *not* intrinsically caused to either exist or not exist, then  $x$  is contingent insofar as  $x$ 's existence or nonexistence cannot be discerned from  $x$ 's essence alone. And this is consistent with  $x$  being either necessary or impossible with respect to its existence. For as we've seen (§§3.2.3-3.2.4), *every* existent singular thing is *extrinsically necessary* and every nonexistent singular thing is *extrinsically impossible* with respect to the series of causes in the order of Nature.



So, it is consideration of  $x$  in isolation from the series of causes in the order of Nature that makes  $x$  contingent, although the fact of the matter is that  $x$ 's existence (not to mention  $x$ 's essence) is either necessary or impossible. Arguably, this is what Spinoza precisely tells us:

But a thing is called contingent only because of a defect of our knowledge. For if we do not know that the thing's essence involves a contradiction, or if we do know very well that its essence does not involve a contradiction, and nevertheless can affirm nothing certainly about its existence, because the order of causes is hidden from us, it can never seem to us either necessary or impossible [with respect to existence]. (1p33s1)<sup>183</sup>

If, however, we attend to the essence of the thing alone, and not to its cause [of existence], we shall call it *contingent*. That is, we shall consider it as midway between God and a chimaera, so to speak, because we find in it, on the part of its essence, neither any necessity of existing (as we do in the divine essence) nor any impossibility [of existing] *or* inconsistency (as we do in a chimaera). (CM 1.3|G 1.242.14-20)

More exactly, then, what makes  $x$  contingent is that one has an inadequate conception of  $x$ 's existential status in relation to its cause in the order of Nature. But if  $x$  is understood in relation to its cause in the order of Nature, one then has an adequate conception of  $x$ 's existential status, which reveals its true modal status. This highlights how 4d3 is an epistemic definition of contingency for all intents and purposes: for while it has a metaphysical basis to the extent contingency presumes that a singular thing is possible *with respect to essence*, it is epistemic to the extent it requires inadequately conceiving a singular thing as possible *with respect to existence*.<sup>184</sup> In this way, it is consistent with Spinoza's necessitarianism that singular things are contingent.

---

<sup>183</sup> See also Ep 12: "when we attend only to the essence of modes, and not to the order of the whole of Nature [LC: matter], we cannot infer from the fact that they exist now that they will or will not exist later, or that they have or have not existed earlier" (G 4.54).

<sup>184</sup> Spinoza also hints at this in part two of the *Ethics* when he glosses the notion of contingency as a feature attributable to things insofar as one has inadequate knowledge of whether or not, or for how long if at all, the essence of a finite thing is instantiated in time: "[A]ll particular things are contingent and corruptible. For we can have no adequate knowledge of their duration (by 2p31), and that is what we must understand by the contingency of things and the possibility of their corruption (see 1p33s1). For (by 1p29) beyond that there is no contingency." (2p31c)

On the one hand, then, there is 4d3’s epistemic sense of contingency that Spinoza is willing to ascribe to things insofar as they are inadequately conceived. But on the other hand, there seems to be a *non-epistemic* sense of contingency that Spinoza is *not* willing to ascribe to anything when he writes, for example: “In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way” (1p29). Assuming that Spinoza is not blatantly contradicting himself, what notion of contingency is he denying to things in nature? Unfortunately, an explicit answer is nowhere to be found in the *Ethics*.<sup>185</sup> But fortunately an explicit answer can be found elsewhere. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza answers “no” to the question of “whether there are any contingent things in Nature, *viz.* *whether there are any things that can happen and also can not happen*” (KV 1.6.2|G 1.41; emphasis added; see also KV 2.9.2). And in *Metaphysical Thoughts*, he explains: “if he attends to nature and how it depends on God, he will find that there is nothing *contingent* in things, that is, nothing which, on the part of the thing, *can either exist or not exist*, or as is commonly said, be a *real contingent*” (CM 1.3|G 1.242.25-30; emphasis added; see also G 1.243.7-11). To put it simply, the notion of metaphysical or “real” contingency here—and the notion that I propose is rejected by Spinoza at 1p29 and in the *Ethics* generally—is the following:

a singular thing *x* is *contingent* just in case (i) *x* is possible with respect to existence and (ii) not-*x* is possible with respect to existence, i.e., just in case *x*’s existence is neither (i) extrinsically necessary nor (ii) extrinsically impossible.<sup>186</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> For this reason, in his “On the Ethics of Benedict de Spinoza”, Leibniz complains (rightfully, I think) that “[t]he matter [of 1p29] depends on the definition of ‘contingent’, which he [Spinoza] has given nowhere” (L 203).

<sup>186</sup> With respect to Spinoza’s gloss of real contingency in KV, I am presuming that “happenings” or events are finite things (i.e., modes) in Spinoza’s ontology.

There can be no contingency in *this* sense for Spinoza. There is simply no room for it given the categories of his modal metaphysics as I explained it above, indicating that my reading does not compromise Spinoza’s commitment to necessitarianism.<sup>187</sup>

### 3.4.3 The Scope of the Metaphysical Modalities

My reading of Spinoza paints a picture like the one in the provided figure, which serves to not only summarize my interpretation of Spinoza’s modal metaphysics but highlight the scope of the metaphysical modalities as they univocally apply to essence and existence.

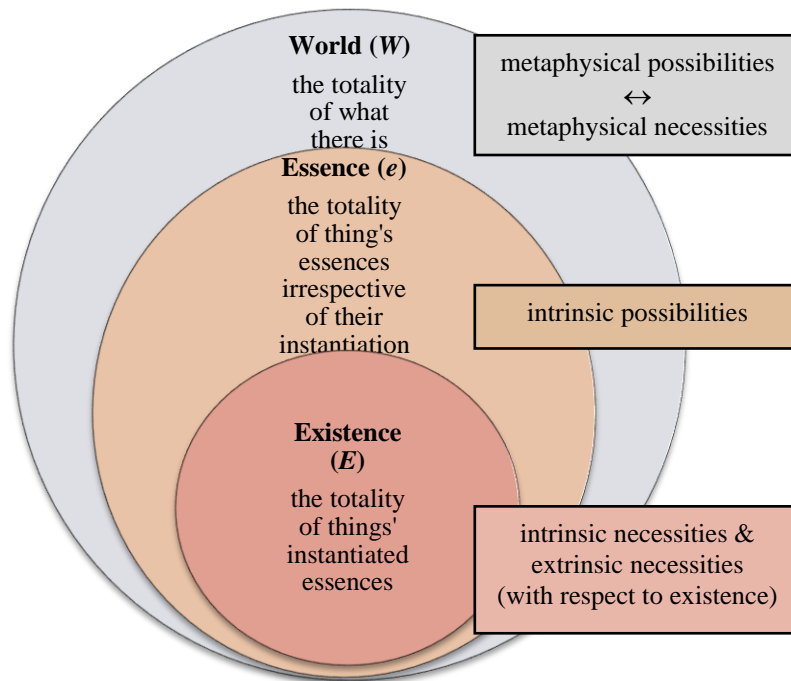


Figure 1. The scope of the metaphysical modalities.

In figure 1, we may think of the world, *W*, as the totality of what there is, or as the whole of things that admit of actual or formal being: the totality of things’ essences, *e*, and the totality of

<sup>187</sup> For a finer grained discussion of Spinoza’s rejection of metaphysical contingency, or at least as it is laid out in KV, see Koistinen (2003, pp. 289-291). Cf. Jarrett (2009, pp. 127-133).

instantiations of things' essences, *E*. (*W* thereby consists of God, to which the essence-existence distinction does not apply, and his modes, to which the distinction does apply.) The complete scope of metaphysical modalities extends to everything in *W*. And given necessitarianism, the metaphysical modalities are coextensive: whatever is metaphysically possible is also metaphysically necessary in its actual being. So, if *x* is in *W*, *x* is metaphysically possible. (While *x* is also metaphysically necessary, I will refer to only one or the other modality to avoid redundancy for present purposes.) And if *x* is *not* in *W*, *x* is metaphysically impossible—in effect, a non-being falling outside of possibility-space.

A finer-grained characterization of *W*, however, details the respects in which *x* is metaphysically possible or not. If *x* is in *e*, *x* is intrinsically possible (God, modes), i.e., metaphysically possible with respect to essence; and if *x* is *not* in *e*, *x* is intrinsically impossible (chimaeras), i.e., metaphysically impossible with respect to essence. And if *x* is in *E*, *x* is either intrinsically necessary (God) or extrinsically necessary (modes), i.e., metaphysically necessary with respect to existence. But the scope of *e* is wider than the scope of *E*, i.e.,  $e > E$ . So, while every *x* in *E* is also in *e*, *not* every *x* in *e* is also in *E*. And when this is the case—if *x* is in *e* but *not* in *E*—*x* is extrinsically impossible, i.e., not metaphysically possible with respect to existence although metaphysically possible with respect to essence.<sup>188</sup>

This last point answers the scope problem for Spinoza's necessitarianism that was introduced at the beginning of §3.4. Recall that the challenge was that finite modes will have to be considered metaphysically contingent unless every intrinsically possible finite mode is instantiated (at least at some time). But my reading shows how Spinoza can deny it while remaining a

---

<sup>188</sup> The distinction often made in contemporary philosophy between the logical or conceptual modalities and the metaphysical modalities is in some ways analogous to the distinction I have made on Spinoza's behalf between the modalities with respect to essence and metaphysical modalities with respect to existence (cf. Dasgupta, 2016, pp. 393-394).

necessitarian. To wit, the bifurcation of the metaphysical modalities along lines of the essence-existence distinction shows that intrinsically possible finite modes whose essences are never instantiated are only metaphysically possible with respect to essence, but not with respect to existence. At first blush, this may appear to concede metaphysical contingency, as if to say that the existence of finite modes is possible but not necessary. But this is only so *in different respects*: never-existent finite modes are possible *with respect to essence* and not necessary *with respect to existence* (namely, because they are impossible). Finite modes can only be considered metaphysically contingent by mistakenly conflating the distinction. For that reason, Spinoza is nonetheless a *bona fide* necessitarian.

### 3.5 Modal Reductionism Redux

In chapter 1 (§1.4), I introduced the idea that Spinoza is something of a modal reductionist, according to which modality is not primitive, but rather explained in terms of something more basic and ultimately amodal. I gave some limited arguments for this thesis based on the way that Spinoza treats the necessity of instantiated things as grounded in the causal activity of some essence, as part and parcel with his dynamic essentialism that fundamentally characterizes the formal or actual essence of a thing in terms of efficient causal power (ch. 1, §§1.3.3-1.3.4). And in the present chapter, the way that Spinoza characterizes his modal metaphysics indicates *a fortiori* that he is not merely concerned with stating that things have a certain modal status: for it is *because* of certain amodal facts that things have the modal status they do. But in view of my interpretation and the additional modal considerations it introduced, it is likely unclear how Spinoza's modal reductionism tracks, or even how he can be considered a reductionist at all. So, by way of wrapping up this chapter, I want to explain more exactly how it is, for Spinoza, that essence is prior to modality. Doing so will also prove worthwhile because, as we will see in chapter

4, the replies available to Spinoza in response to his anti-necessitarian critics depends squarely on the priority of essence over modality.

As we have seen, if the *existence* of  $x$  is *necessary*, it is by virtue of  $x$  being intrinsically or extrinsically necessary. And this is so by virtue of  $x$  being intrinsically or extrinsically *caused*. If the existence of  $x$  is intrinsically caused, this is so by virtue of both the intrinsic possibility of  $x$  and the power of  $x$ 's own essence to instantiate itself. But if the existence of  $x$  is extrinsically caused, this is so by virtue of both the intrinsic possibility of  $x$  and the power of some  $y$  outside  $x$  which instantiates  $x$ 's essence. And unless  $y$  is itself intrinsically caused,  $y$  has the power to instantiate  $x$ 's essence by virtue of some  $z$  which, ultimately, is intrinsically possible and instantiated by virtue of the power of its own essence.

At this point in the (as yet incomplete) reduction of necessity to essence, what it is for  $x$ 's existence to have the modal status it does is the conjunction of (a)  $x$ 's intrinsic possibility and (b) some power of a thing's essence to instantiate  $x$ . To complete the reduction, there must be something by virtue of which this conjunction holds in amodal, dynamic essentialist terms. While conjunct (b) already consists in such terms, conjunct (a) does not. So, by virtue of what is  $x$  *intrinsically possible*? We cannot say that  $x$  is intrinsically possible by virtue that  $x$ 's essence is internally coherent, or involves no contradiction, or that no essential feature of  $x$  is incompatible with any other essential feature of  $x$ . These seem to fail to explain reductively since “coherent”, “involves”, “contradiction”, and “incompatible” are all apparently modally laden terms.

I propose the following: that by virtue of which  $x$  is intrinsically possible is simply that  $x$ 's essence is *given*, i.e., that there really is an essence of  $x$ , with actual or formal reality. I suspect that Spinoza at least has something like this in mind when he speaks of a definition or essence as “given” (see, e.g., TdIE 75, 97; 1p16d, 2d2, 3p7d; cf. 3p4d). In that case, the collection of  $x$ 's essential

features is internally coherent *because* of the content provided by *x*'s essence. In a related context, Shamik Dasgupta (2016) helpfully explains the same idea in this way:

For a possibility is a way for things to be. But essentialist facts (as I understand them) detail what those things are in the first place. In this sense then the essentialist facts are *prior to the possibilities*: the essentialist facts about the things give us the raw materials, as it were, and only then do the possibilities detail different ways for that raw material to be. (p. 395)

For Spinoza, then, the idea would be that the given essence of *x* grounds *x*'s intrinsic possibility, or that the intrinsic possibility of *x* follows from *x*'s given essence. Since *x*'s intrinsic possibility expresses a *way* for *x* to be, and the given essence of *x* expresses *what x* is, it is only by virtue of what *x* is that there is some way for *x* to be. And ultimately, every given essence apart from God's has actual reality because it is, in turn, comprehended in the divine attributes, i.e., grounded in the God's amodal, actual essence.<sup>189</sup>

*Mutatis mutandis*, the basic reasoning above holds for the reduction of extrinsic impossibility. However, this is not so for intrinsic impossibility: it is not reducible to essence because it is simply a "negation" and not "among the affections of being" (CM 1.3|G 1.241.9-16) as we have seen (§3.2.1). For if the existence of *x* is intrinsically impossible, *x* is intrinsically caused to *not* exist by virtue of failing to be intrinsically possible. And this is just to say—provided the grounding of intrinsic possibility above—that the essence of *x* is *not* given, i.e., that there is no

---

<sup>189</sup> Spinoza also suggests that everything possible or necessary (either with respect to essence or existence) is *actual* in nature if we generalize his remarks that there is no potential in either God, his infinite, or his finite modes, insofar as the attribute of thought is concerned: "all the Philosophers... concede that in God there is no potential intellect, but only an actual one" (1p33s2|G 2.75.30-31); and "[t]he reason why I speak here of actual [infinite or finite] intellect [i.e., mode] is *not because I concede that there is any potential intellect...*" (1p31s; emphasis added). Then of course there is Spinoza well-known passage detailing two ways in which things may be considered actual: "We conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature. But the things we conceive in this second way as true, *or* real, we conceive under a species of eternity, and to that extent they involve the eternal and infinite essence of God." (5p29s) (Cf. Curley & Walski, 1999, pp. 250-252. See also Newlands, 2013, §3; 2015.)

formal or actual reality of  $x$ , and thus that  $x$  is impossible by virtue of being literally nothing at all.

So, it turns out that  $x$  is intrinsically impossible because  $x$  fails to be grounded in essence.



## CHAPTER 4. SPINOZA'S NECESSITARIANISM & THE ESSENTIALIST FOUNDATION OF ETHICS 1P16

### 4.1 Spinoza's Necessitarianism?

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I explained that there is hardly if any interpretive disagreement between commentators over Spinoza's commitment to the absolute or metaphysical necessity of God and the infinite modes. There is even no disagreement between commentators about the determinism by which each finite mode is an inevitable consequence of prior members in the causal series of finite modes together with the laws of nature (i.e., some infinite mode). Where there is disagreement, however, is over the modal status of finite modes, generally dividing commentators into two camps. Those of the *semi-necessitarian interpretation* affirm Spinoza's commitment to the contingency of the whole series of finite modes, and by extension, each individual finite mode. But those of the *necessitarian interpretation* reject this, maintaining that Spinoza is committed to the absolute or metaphysical necessity of finite modes, both as a whole series and as individual members.

In the literature, disagreement on this matter has largely centered around a keystone text of the *Ethics* that commentators believe can answer the question of the modal status of finite modes. That text is 1p16, a proposition about God's ultimate production of things, which reads in part: "From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways [*modis*]"<sup>190</sup> One important reason why the interpretive dispute over the modal status of finite modes has centered around 1p16 is because the proposition seems to lend itself to an argument that Spinoza *is* committed to necessitarianism. But of course, determining whether 1p16 really does commit Spinoza depends crucially on how to properly understand it—a task that is

---

<sup>190</sup> Here and below, I've slightly modified Curley's original translation of *modis* ("modes") as "ways".

complicated in no small part by its enigmatic formulation. What's more, there are at least three general interpretive challenges that have gotten in the way of the argument from 1p16 for necessitarianism.

In this chapter, I defend the argument that 1p16 commits Spinoza to necessitarianism. I lay out the basic argument in §4.2. This is followed by the three interpretive problems for the argument, stated in §4.3. In §4.4, I recapitulate the relevant features of Spinoza's essentialism from chapter 1 in order to then offer, in §4.5, an essentialist interpretation of 1p16. This puts me in a position to effectively respond to the three interpretive challenges raised to the argument from 1p16 in §4.6 and show that Spinoza is firmly committed to necessitarianism by 1p16. In §4.7, I address some difficulties associated with my essentialist interpretation of 1p16. Then finally, in §4.8, I wrap up the chapter by going on the offensive against semi-necessitarianism and argue that it cannot sustain the weight of at least one of Spinoza's psychotherapeutic doctrines.

## 4.2 *Ethics* 1p16 & Spinoza's Commitment to Necessitarianism

1p16 marks a crucial point in the progression of the *Ethics*. In the propositions leading up to it, Spinoza is largely concerned with the nature and existence of God. But at 1p16, he turns to the nature and existence of modes. The proposition and part of its demonstration read as follows:

1p16: From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways, (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect.) [*Ex necessitate divinae naturae infinita infinitis modis (hoc est omnia quae sub intellectum infinitum cadere possunt) sequi debent.*]

Dem.: This Proposition must be plain to anyone, provided he attends to the fact that the intellect infers from the given definition of any thing a number of properties that really do follow necessarily from it (i.e., from the very essence of the thing)...

While highly cryptic on the surface, Spinoza's basic idea seems to be that there are infinitely many effects (modes) by virtue of the infinitely abundant nature of their cause (God).

### 4.2.1 The Significance of 1p16

More than just a turning point, 1p16 is regarded by commentators as one of the most significant steps in Spinoza's *Ethics* despite its rather enigmatic, initial appearance. Margaret Wilson (1999), for example, calls 1p16 "a key proposition concerning the causality of God" (pp. 166-167).<sup>191</sup> In Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus' observation, 1p16 is "nearly the most important proposition" in the first part of the *Ethics* (Ep 82|G 4.334). Likewise, Yitzhak Melamed (2012b) pronounces 1p16 as "one of the most central propositions of the *Ethics*" (p. 207). I believe these evaluations are correct. A great deal weighs on 1p16 not only because the *Ethics* is a largely cumulative text whose later propositions ultimately rely on 1p16 (or propositions that function like it), but also because the proposition outlines the ultimate origin of non-substantial things from the divine nature, constituting the fundamental bridge between God and his modes. Naturally, then, 1p16 has bearing on the modal status of finite modes. This is why, as Chris Martin (2010) observes, the proposition has served as "[t]he anchor for nearly every argument espousing Spinoza's commitment to strict necessitarianism" (p. 26).

We can see the importance of 1p16 by observing its role in Spinoza's official demonstrations for necessitarianism: 1p29 and 1p33. Both make crucial appeals to 1p16 to prove the necessity of God's modes—whatever that necessity amounts to. Consider 1p29 first: "In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way [*In rerum natura nullum datur contingens sed omnia ex necessitate divinae naturae determinata sunt ad certo modo existendum et*

---

<sup>191</sup> Valtteri Viljanen (2011) holds a similar sentiment and reckons that "[it] would be difficult to overestimate the importance of that proposition [1p16], for in it and its corollaries Spinoza designates what his basic ontological tenets amount to when put in causal terms" (p. 34).

*operandum*].” The steps of Spinoza’s demonstration<sup>192</sup> for this proposition may be briefly sketched as follows:

- 1'. Whatever exists is either God or a mode of God. [1p15]
- 2'. God exists necessarily, not contingently. [1p11]
- 3'. Modes—whether infinite [1p21] or finite [1p28]—follow from God’s nature necessarily, not contingently. [1p16]
- 4'. It is necessary, not contingent, that modes exist and produce effects (i.e., produce further modes) if they follow from God’s nature. [1p24c, 1p27]
- 5'. It is impossible, not contingent, that modes exist and produce effects if they do not follow from God’s nature. [1p24c, 1p26]
- 6'. If (1')-(5'), then nothing that exists is contingent.
- 7'. So, nothing that exists is contingent. [1'-6']

This demonstration of necessitarianism arguably hinges on 1p16. Not only does Spinoza cite 1p16 in premise (3') to posit the existence of modes and infer their modal status, but all other references to propositions on existent (or nonexistent) modes presuppose 1p16, too. To this extent, 1p29 pushes the question of Spinoza’s necessitarianism back to 1p16 itself.

What about 1p33? It states: “Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced [*Res nullo alio modo neque alio ordine a Deo*]

---

<sup>192</sup> 1p29d: “Whatever is, is in God (by 1p15); but God cannot be called a contingent thing. For (by 1p11) he exists necessarily, not contingently. Next, the modes of the divine nature have also followed from it necessarily and not contingently (by 1p16)—either insofar as the divine nature is considered absolutely (by 1p21) or insofar as it is considered to be determined to act in a certain way (by 1p28). Further, God is the cause of these modes not only insofar as they simply exist (by 1p24c), but also (by 1p26) insofar as they are considered to be determined to produce an effect. For if they have not been determined by God, then (by 1p26) it is impossible, not contingent, that they should determine themselves. Conversely (by 1p27) if they have been determined by God, it is not contingent, but impossible, that they should render themselves undetermined. So all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature, not only to exist, but to exist in a certain way, and to produce effects in a certain way. There is nothing contingent, q.e.d.”

*produci potuerunt quam productae sunt*].” The steps of Spinoza’s demonstration<sup>193</sup> for this proposition may be briefly sketched in this way:

- 1". Suppose it’s possible for another order of modes, different from the order that is determined to exist and produce effects, follows from God’s nature. [1p16, 1p29]
- 2". If (1"), then it’s possible for God’s nature to be different from what it is.
- 3". If it’s possible for God’s nature to be different from what it is, then there are two or more Gods (because every possible God really exists). [1p11]
- 4". But it’s impossible that there are two or more Gods. [1p14c1]
- 5". So, it’s impossible that that another order of modes, different from the order that is determined to exist and produce effects, follows from God’s nature. [1"-4"]

This demonstration, like the previous one, arguably hinges on 1p16. For Spinoza cites both 1p16 and 1p29 in premise (1") to posit the existence of modes and infer their modal status; and 1p29, as we just saw, appeals to 1p16. So like 1p29, it appears 1p33 pushes of the question Spinoza’s necessitarianism back to 1p16 as well.

It seems, then, that both of Spinoza’s purportedly official demonstrations of necessitarianism depend on 1p16 to infer the necessity of God’s modes. This complicates things: for it’s not entirely clear what that necessity amounts to because neither 1p29d nor 1p33d offers much by way of elucidating 1p16. So, an answer to the question of Spinoza’s necessitarianism appears to reside with 1p16 itself, if it does at all.

---

<sup>193</sup> 1p33d: “For all things have necessarily followed from God’s given nature (by 1p16), and have been determined from the necessity of God’s nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way (by 1p29). Therefore, if things could have been of another nature, or could have been determined to produce an effect in another way, so that the order of Nature was different, then God’s nature could also have been other than it is now, and therefore (by 1p11) that [other nature] would also have had to exist, and consequently, there could have been two or more Gods, which is absurd (by 1p14c1). So things could have been produced in no other way and no other order, etc., q.e.d.”

#### 4.2.2 The Argument for Necessitarianism from 1p16

At least initially, matters may look particularly congenial for the necessitarian reading: 1p16 appears sufficient to show that Spinoza is committed to necessitarianism independent of his allegedly official demonstrations of the doctrine.<sup>194</sup> This would prove considerable since it would sidestep any contentious details exclusive to the demonstrations of 1p29 and 1p33.<sup>195</sup> Here's a sketch of how that contention might go, one that I will refer to as "the argument for necessitarianism from 1p16", or simply "the argument from 1p16" for short:

1. The existence of modes follows from the necessity of the divine nature.
2. If the existence of modes follows from the necessity of the divine nature, then everything that exists is necessary.
3. So, everything that exists is necessary.

Premise (1) is a paraphrase of 1p16, according to which the existence of modes is a necessary consequence of the divine nature.<sup>196</sup>

Premise (2) can be seen as a consequence of three Spinozistic commitments, some of which we've already seen: (i) the modal closure principle, as I'll call it, (ii) God's existence, and (iii) substance monism. According to (i), necessity is closed under Spinoza's causal *following-from* relation (see ch. 1, §1.3.4). This means that if *y* follows from *x*, where *x* is necessary, then *y* is

---

<sup>194</sup> See Bennett (1984, p. 122) and Garrett (1999a), especially. Some commentators have nonetheless attempted to argue that Spinoza is a strict necessitarianism without explicitly resting their case on 1p16, e.g., Huenemann (1999), Griffin (2008), Koistinen (2003), and Perler (2011). At present, I'm unconvinced that one can make a case for Spinoza's commitment to necessitarianism without implicitly presupposing 1p16,d or something that is virtually like it.

<sup>195</sup> For example, one might argue that 1p29 is really a claim that amounts to no more than determinism for finite modes, or that 1p33 only concerns the order of infinite modes and not finite modes. See Curley and Walski (1999, pp. 252-256) and Martin (2010, pp. 64-70).

<sup>196</sup> While I will treat premise (1) as a paraphrase of 1p16 for simplicity's sake, premise (1) is arguably closer to a corollary of 1p16 because it only makes a claim about modes' *existence*. As Spinoza indicates at 1p25s (on the basis of 1p16), the *essence* as well as the *existence* of modes follows from the necessity of the divine nature.

necessary, too. Or put simply, whatever follows from something necessary is itself necessary.<sup>197</sup>

Spinoza operates with assumptions that commit him to nothing less than the modal closure principle when he demonstrates 1p21-23, for example (see also Bennett, 1984, p. 111). Consider 1p23 and its demonstration (in part):

1p23: Every mode which *exists necessarily* and is infinite *has necessarily had to follow* either from the absolute nature of some attribute of God, or from some attribute, modified by a modification *which exists necessarily* and is infinite.

Dem.: ... So if a mode is conceived to *exist necessarily* and be infinite, [*its necessary existence* and infinitude] *must necessarily be inferred, or perceived* through some attribute of God, insofar as that attribute is conceived to express infinity and *necessity of existence*... (emphasis added)

According to (ii), the existence of God or the divine nature itself is necessary (1p11). Together with the modal closure principle, we may infer that the modes that follow from the divine nature are necessary, too, wherein the necessity of God's existence is transferred to the existence of his modes. This is operating in 1p35d, for instance, immediately after Spinoza identified God's essence with power: "For whatever is in God's power must (by 1p34) be so comprehended by his essence that it necessarily follows from it, and therefore necessarily exists, q.e.d." But this doesn't quite get us the consequent of premise (2), the universal claim that *everything* that exists is necessary. That requires (iii), substance monism, which in effect tells us that nothing exists save for the divine nature and the modes that follow from it (1p14-1p15).

Premises (1) and (2) jointly entail (3). Thus it seems that 1p16 commits Spinoza to necessitarianism. But matters are not as straightforward as the above considerations might suggest.

---

<sup>197</sup> Also see Garrett (1999a, p. 118), Martin (2010, p. 28), and Lin (2012, pp. 419-420, 422-433). Because I maintain that the following-from relation is causal, Spinoza's modal closure principle is richer than the mere modal claim that  $((\Box p \ \& \ (p \rightarrow q)) \rightarrow \Box q)$  or, for that matter, the distribution axiom K that  $(\Box(p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow (\Box p \rightarrow \Box q))$ .

### 4.3 Three Problems for the Argument from 1p16

Upon closer inspection, the argument from 1p16 is subject to at least three general interpretive challenges. If unaddressed, they may serve to block the inference that Spinoza is committed to rejecting contingency wholesale. I call these *the quantification problem*, *the adequacy problem*, and *the equivocation problem*, respectively. What's more, each problem is exacerbated in conjunction with other things Spinoza says in his corpus.

#### 4.3.1 The Quantification Problem

Recall 1p16, which states: "From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways..." The first premise of the argument for necessitarianism from 1p16 rephrases the proposition as follows:

1. The existence of modes follows from the necessity of the divine nature.

But this terse necessitarian reading leaves much to be desired because 1p16 itself is ambiguous. And recognition of that ambiguity opens up 1p16 to being consistent with contingency.

Consider first that the success of the argument from 1p16 depends on taking premise (1) as a tacit universal claim about modes. It assumes that "the infinitely many things in infinitely many ways" cited in 1p16 entails (or is equivalent to) "all modes", and thus that the existence of *every* mode follows from God. But nothing in 1p16 itself seems to commit Spinoza to this. Perhaps some modes do not follow from God. Hence the quantification problem for the argument from 1p16: whether the scope of what follows from God binds *all* modes or only *some*. The argument assumes the former disjunct holds for premise (1) without ruling out the latter disjunct. This consideration undercuts the necessitarian reading of 1p16.

So stated, the quantification problem may not seem particularly pressing. While the problem might duly call our attention to a notable ambiguity of 1p16, it might also strike us as



predicated on something rather un-Spinozistic in spirit. But this latter suggestion can be challenged; for the quantification problem is supported by some formidable textual considerations. One proposition we have already seen raises the question of whether Spinoza is committed (perhaps inconsistently or not) to the denial that some modes follow from God:

Every singular thing, *or* any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity. (1p28)

This proposition appears to imply that *only something finite can follow from something finite*. And so the question 1p28 raises, together with 1p16, is how finite modes can follow from God, who is infinite.

Conversely, consider a couple of Spinoza's propositions on the infinite modes:

All the things which follow from the absolute nature of any of God's attributes have always had to exist and be infinite, *or* are, through the same attribute, eternal and infinite. (1p21)

Whatever follows from some attribute of God insofar as it is modified by a modification which, through the same attribute, exists necessarily and is infinite, must also exist necessarily and be infinite. (1p22; see also 1p23, quoted above in §4.2.2)

These propositions seem to imply that *only something infinite can follow from something infinite*. And so, because the infinite modes are infinite, they can follow from God, who is infinite. This poses a similar problem to 1p28 above by raising the question, together with 1p16, of how non-infinite or finite modes can follow from God, who is infinite.

One answer in logical space to the above questions is provided by a semi-necessitarian reading of Spinoza which embraces the above textual considerations: finite modes simply *cannot* follow from God (at least not entirely—more on this later), and so 1p16 must only concern the

infinite modes which *can* follow from God in virtue of their infinitude.<sup>198</sup> According to this semi-necessitarian line of thought, then, the scope of what follows from God fails to bind all modes.

The quantification problem is problematic for the necessitarian interpretation because it challenges the assumed scope of premise (1) based on an ambiguity in 1p16. If the alternative semi-necessitarian interpretation is right, then some but not all modes follow from the divine nature. As a result, the inference to the wholesale denial of contingency in the argument from 1p16 could be blocked. For, then the modal closure principle invoked in the second premise—

2. If the existence of modes follows from the necessity of the divine nature, then everything that exists is necessary.

—would be unsatisfied for all modes, and the necessity of the divine nature would fail to transfer to finite modes, as the necessitarian view must maintain.

### 4.3.2 The Adequacy Problem

A related but logically distinct issue concerns the nature of the relation between God and modes. The necessitarian reading of 1p16, paraphrased in premise (1), assumes the causal *follows from* relation that God stands in to his modes is adequate for the existence of his modes. But 1p16 itself seems to be ambiguous on this point, opening it up once again to being consistent with contingency.

Consider first that (1) is assuming that the “follows from” relation at 1p16 entails (or is equivalent to) “*adequately* follows from”, opposed to (say) “*partially* follows from”. In broader terms, the suggestion is that God provides the necessary but not sufficient conditions for the existence of modes to follow from him (that is, at least regarding the existence of *some* modes). This of course isn’t to deny that modes follow necessarily from their adequate causes, whatever

---

<sup>198</sup> If I understand him correctly, this reading is suggested by Martin (2008a; 2010), or at least, it seems to me to be an implication of his arguments. (Cf. Curley, 1969, pp. 44-81; Curley & Walski, 1999, pp. 243-244, 246-247, 252.)

those causes may be (1a3). Rather, it is to suggest that the *following-from* relation may permit the existence of (at least some) modes which follow from God *only together* with something else (something which, ultimately, may or may not be contingent). In that case, the existence of (at least some) modes would follow from God partially, but not adequately or entirely from God's nature. Thus the adequacy problem for the argument from 1p16: whether God's modes follow from him *adequately* or *partially*. Once again, the argument from 1p16 assumes the former disjunct holds for premise (1) without ruling out the latter disjunct, undercutting the necessitarian reading of 1p16.

At this point, one might initially be skeptical of the suggestion that the Spinozistic *following-from* relation can be partial. Perhaps *partial following* isn't *following* at all: for either *x* follows from *y* or else it does not. But Spinoza indicates that things can and do partially follow from the natures of things. This is sufficiently clear in the physical excursus of the second part of the *Ethics* in which Spinoza explains: "All modes by which a body is affected by another body *follow both from the nature of the body affected and at the same time from the nature of the affecting body*" (2a1"<sup>r</sup>|G 2.99; emphasis added; see also 3d1-3, 3p1,3, 4app1-2).

What's more, the adequacy problem can be motivated on the same textual grounds as the quantification problem above. If the question is how the existence of finite modes could follow from an infinite God, another answer in logical space provided by the semi-necessitarian interpretation (one that may seem closer in spirit to Spinoza than the answer to the previous problem) is to say that finite modes *do* follow from God, but only *partially*. Specifically, the existence of a finite mode follows adequately only from the nature of both (a) the infinite modes,

which follow adequately from God's attributes (1p21-23), and (b) preceding items in the infinite causal series of finite modes, none of which by themselves follow entirely from God (1p28).<sup>199</sup>

According to this semi-necessitarian line of thought, then, at least some modes follow partially from the divine nature and not entirely, contrary to premise (1). If this is right, the inference to the wholesale denial of contingency in the argument from 1p16 could be blocked; for again, the modal closure principle invoked by premise (2) would not be *entirely* satisfied for each mode, contrary to the necessitarian reading.

### 4.3.3 The Equivocation Problem

Another related but logically distinct issue for the argument from 1p16 takes aim at the modal closure principle invoked by premise (2). It assumes that if  $x$  follows from  $y$ , and  $y$  is necessary *in some sense*, then  $x$  is necessary *in the same sense* as  $y$ . It's then inferred that the necessity with which modes exist is unequivocally that with which God exists. But 1p16 itself is ambiguous on this point, too, opening it up once more to being consistent with contingency.

Consider first that there seems to be a difference between the necessity of a dependent mode like my cat Storm, and the necessity of an independent substance like God. After all, it seems to be one thing to exist necessarily in respect of some distinct cause as Storm does, and another thing to exist necessarily irrespective of any distinct cause as God does. Thus, the equivocation problem for the argument from 1p16: whether the necessity of (at least some) modes is the same necessity of the divine nature. In other words, this is the problem of whether Spinoza's notion of necessity extends from substance to everything else in his ontology in a manner that is *univocal* or

---

<sup>199</sup> A similar reading is advanced by Curley (1969, pp. 44-81), and further developed in Curley and Walski (1999, pp. 243-244, 246-247, 252). See also Martin (2010).

*equivocal*. The argument from 1p16 assumes the former disjunct holds for premise (2) without ruling out the latter disjunct, once more undercutting the necessitarian reading of 1p16.

If there's anything to the equivocation problem, the difference between God and his modes would lend itself naturally to a distinction of two senses, kinds, or degrees of necessity—one that is in fact offered by the semi-necessitarian interpretation of Spinoza. On the one hand:

*x* is *extrinsically necessary* just in case *x*'s existence follows necessarily from an extrinsic cause *y* (and  $x \neq y$ ).

A finite mode (or the whole infinite series of finite modes, for that matter) would be necessary in this extrinsic sense because it is necessary only relative to, or conditional upon, whether certain outside factors obtain. But on the other hand:

*x* is *intrinsically necessary* just in case *x*'s existence follows necessarily from *x*'s essence as an intrinsic cause.

A substance like God would be necessary in this intrinsic sense because God is self-caused (1d1, 1p7, 1p11) or necessary in virtue of his nature, and thus necessary absolutely, conditional upon no factors outside his nature whatsoever.<sup>200</sup>

The necessity with which God exists would then be very different in kind from the necessity with which finite modes exist—and this appears to allow for contingency. Because God is intrinsically necessary, he cannot be otherwise in virtue of his essence. But finite modes (or even the causal series of finite modes as whole) *can* be otherwise because they're merely extrinsically necessary. Their own natures do not necessitate their existence; they rather depend on certain external causes to exist. Therefore, without such causes they would not exist; and given different

---

<sup>200</sup> I'm following Griffin (2008) here in referring to the above necessities as "extrinsic" and "intrinsic". There's a dizzying amount of alternative terms used to express similar ideas in the literature. For example, what I call extrinsic necessity may also be referred to as "hypothetical", "relative", "conditional", or "causal" necessity; and "intrinsic" necessity may also be referred to as "absolute", "unconditional", or "essential" necessity. In my view, these alternative terms are unhelpful.

causes, they would be different.<sup>201</sup> In Curley's (1988) words: "Considered in themselves, apart from the causes which determine them to be what they are, these particular features of the universe are contingent, could be otherwise", and thus, "their totality is also contingent" (p. 49). So, the extrinsic necessity of finite modes, it seems, commits Spinoza to no more than their mere deterministic inevitability and not their absolute or metaphysical necessity, for otherwise they would be intrinsically necessary.

This proposed issue for premise (2) of the argument from 1p16 isn't merely speculative: a defender of the semi-necessitarian reading can also offer some textual evidence. At 1p33s1, for example, Spinoza seems to propose the very equivocal notion of necessity we've been considering: "A thing is called necessary either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause. For a thing's existence follows necessarily either from its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause."

The equivocation problem is problematic for the necessitarian interpretation because it challenges the univocal notion of necessity assumed in premise (2). If the semi-necessitarian interpretation is right, then there's an equivocal notion of necessity that applies to God and modes. In that case, once again, the inference to the wholesale denial of contingency in the argument from 1p16 could be blocked.<sup>202</sup>

We've just seen three interpretive issues for the argument from 1p16, each of which serves to challenge the idea that Spinoza is committed to the wholesale denial of contingency. I believe that an answer to the three problems depends in crucial respects on a certain understanding of 1p16,

---

<sup>201</sup> The above is a line of thought defended by Curley (1969, pp. 82-117, esp. 86-93) and Curley and Walski (1999, pp. 244-249). See also Martin (2010, pp. 68-69).

<sup>202</sup> For instance, Spinoza's first demonstration of 1p11 derives God's necessity from 1p7, the claim that the divine essence involves existence. This seems to indicate intrinsic necessity. Spinoza suggests later that no finite mode—a man, for example—can be necessary in the intrinsic sense because his essence doesn't involve existence (2a1; see also 1p24). But this doesn't exempt finite modes from being necessary given their causes (1a3, 1p28); so, they must be necessary in some other sense, namely, the extrinsic sense (or so the argument might go).

which requires some understanding of the role of Spinoza's essentialism in 1p16. Once this is clarified, I reply to the three problems.

#### 4.4 Recap of Spinoza's Essentialism

Despite Spinoza's departures from the accepted philosophical views of his day, his essentialism shares a good deal in common with that of the Aristotelian-scholastic tradition. Consonant with that tradition, Spinoza's essentialism consists in a tripartite distinction between *essence*, *property* (*proprium*), and *accident*. This was explained in some detail in chapter 1. In the present section, I will briefly recapitulate each distinction insofar as they are necessary for understanding the background of 1p16 in the subsequent section.

The *essence* or *nature* of a thing is its intrinsic structure, consisting in fundamental features that make the thing what it is. Concomitantly, to explain *what* something is, is to provide the *definition* of the thing. This sort of definition is neither stipulative nor an explication of the mere meaning of a term; it is rather a formula or conceptual account that accurately captures and explains a thing's essence as it really is. So, for example, the definition of Hillary Clinton *qua* human being—at least according to Aristotelians and scholastics—would be *a rational animal*. (Spinoza would dispute the finer details of this example, but it need not concern us at present.) Rational animality captures the core characteristics of Clinton's humanity by specifying what it is in virtue of which Clinton is what she is, which distinguishes her from other things that aren't characteristically animal or rational.

Things also have convertible features that nonetheless fail to constitute their essence, because such features derive as a necessary consequence of the essence alone. This sort of feature is a *property* in a technical sense, or a *proprium* (plural: *propria*) as it has come to be called. So, it would be a *proprium* of Clinton, for example, that she is *risible* (capable of laughter at humor).

Risibility doesn't constitute what it is for Clinton to be human: the feature isn't fundamental enough to qualify as essential because it presupposes and is entirely explained by deeper features of Clinton, namely, by her human essence, and in particular, by her *animal* capacity for vocalizing laughter together with her *rational* capacity for understanding the punch line of a joke.

Notably, Spinoza indicates that even geometrical objects have propria that follow from their essence. A classic example is that it's a proprium of triangles that *the sum of their interior angles equal two right angles*. This is because the feature is not only uniquely necessary to triangles, but derivative of the more fundamental intrinsic features that constitute the essence of triangles, captured by their definition (e.g., *a closed, rectilinear, three-sided figure*).

Spinoza frequently glosses his essentialism in *dynamic* or *conceptual* terms, which I refer to as *dynamic essentialism* and *conceptual essentialism*, respectively. In terms of Spinoza's dynamic essentialism, propria stand to essences as effects that emanate or follow from the causal activity intrinsic to things. As such, essences are *powers* that *efficient cause* their propria which, for Spinoza, means that essences are by themselves the immediate and principle sources from which the entire being of their effects (i.e., propria) flow forth. In terms of Spinoza's conceptual essentialism, propria stand to essences as consequences are deducible or inferable from the definition of things alone. As such, essences are *concepts* or *ideas* that, when adequately conceived by some intellect, *conceptually contain* and *explanatorily imply* their propria. On either gloss—dynamic or conceptual—Spinoza tends to refer to the propria of a thing as its *actions* or *power of acting*, to the extent that the thing adequately causes effects (affects inhering in itself) which can be conceived solely through its essence.

The final feature that a thing may have is an *accident*. This is a non-essential feature that inheres in a thing in virtue of both its essence and something in addition to and outside of its



essence. For example, suppose Clinton is seated. The feature of *being seated* is an accident of Clinton, because it is explained by both Clinton's essence itself and an occasion to sit—say, a vacant chair and a desire to sit, both of which lay outside of Clinton's essence. Like propria, Spinoza also glosses accidents in dynamic and conceptual terms. He refers to a thing's accidents as its *passions* or its *being acted on*, to the extent that a thing's accidents are effects (affects inhering in itself) that depend on external causes, and so cannot be understood or conceived through the thing's essence alone. Unlike propria, a thing's accidents are partially caused by its essence, and so accidents are only inadequately understood through the thing alone. The adequate cause of an accident requires in addition an external source, outside the essence of its bearer, which jointly allows the complete conception of the thing's accidents.

Now that attention has been called to Spinoza's essentialism, we are now in a position to see its underlying significance in 1p16 itself.

#### 4.5 Spinoza's Essentialism & the Demonstration of *Ethics* 1p16

In light of foregoing section, I now turn to offer an essentialist interpretation of 1p16. Arguably, Spinoza essentialism is remarkable salient in the demonstration of 1p16 (quoted here in full along with its proposition):

1p16: From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways, (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect.) [*Ex necessitate divinae naturae infinita infinitis modis (hoc est omnia quae sub intellectum infinitum cadere possunt) sequi debent.*]

Dem.: This Proposition must be plain to anyone, provided he attends to the fact that the intellect infers from the given definition of any thing a number of properties [*proprietates*] that really do follow necessarily from it (i.e., from the very essence of the thing); and that it infers more properties [*proprietates*] the more the definition of the thing expresses reality, i.e., the more reality the essence of the defined thing involves. But since the divine nature has absolutely infinite attributes (by 1d6), each of which also expresses an essence infinite in its own kind, from its necessity there

must follow infinitely many things in infinite ways (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect), q.e.d.

But before explaining Spinoza's demonstration in light of his essentialism, it is important to first observe the way in which he casts his reasoning: in terms of his *conceptual essentialism* in which an *intellect* infers *properties* (*proprietas*) from a definition that captures the essence of a thing.<sup>203</sup>

#### 4.5.1 “Infinite Intellect” & “Properties”

Consider the nature of the intellect in 1p16d, and in turn, the properties. In principle and in general, the given definition of a thing is sufficient for the inference of a number of properties when that definition is adequately conceived by an intellect, be it finite or infinite. However, Spinoza is quite clear about the cognitive limitations of the human intellect (1p30-31, 2p30-31, 1p40s2), and no finite intellect can actually infer infinitely many properties from any definition, including God's, even granted that we can adequately conceive of the divine nature (2p47). The only intellect that can actually infer infinitely many properties must be God's infinite intellect. Subsequent to 1p16, Spinoza indicates that the infinite intellect is the immediate infinite mode in the attribute of thought, or simply “God's idea” (*idea Dei*): “For God (by 2p1) can think infinitely many things in infinitely many ways, or (what is the same, by 1p16) can form the idea of his essence and of all the things which necessarily follow from it” (2p3d; see also 1p21d, 1p30d, 2p3-9cd, 2p32d).<sup>204</sup>

The nature of the *proprietas* that Spinoza refers to are not *properties* in the broad, contemporary sense of the term, but rather in the narrow sense of Aristotelian-scholastic *propria*,

---

<sup>203</sup> This is also indicated by Spinoza's corollary that God is a *per se* cause (1p16c2). For some discussion of *per se* causation in connection with this corollary, see Wolfson (1934, vol. 1, p. 307). For some extended scholastic discussion of *per se* causation, see Suarez (DM 17.2.2-5|AJF: 11-16). Spinoza's conceptual gloss of 1p16d is reminiscent of various themes in Descartes as well. For example, the distinction of objective and formal reality and God's containment of all perfections in himself (Third Meditation), and the possibility (in principle) to deduce God's perfections from his concept or essence (Fifth Meditation).

<sup>204</sup> A corresponding mode of God's idea is *motion and rest* (*motus et quies*), that is, the immediate infinite mode that follows from God's attribute of extension (Ep 64|G 4.278).

which follow necessarily “from the very essence of the thing”.<sup>205</sup> This conclusion is also a consequence of Spinoza’s essentialism: for such properties are either *propria* or accidents of the bearer in question (God) since they are obviously not essential features or attributes. But God is an infinite and independent being that cannot have accidents. Only things that are subject to extrinsic causes—i.e., modes—can be the bearers of accidents; and there is nothing external to and independent of God that could causally act upon him (1p14-15s). So, the properties in question at 1p16d must be *propria*.<sup>206</sup>

But perhaps all of this strikes us as a bit too quick. It’s one thing to ascribe *propria* to human beings or geometrical objects, and another thing to ascribe *propria* to the divine nature. Traditionally, at least, all of God’s features have been considered essential to him (to say nothing of divine simplicity). Does Spinoza really ascribe *propria* to God? He does, and in saying so it is quite clear that *propria* do not belong exclusively to the essences of modes (see also ch. 1, §1.4.1):

*Propria... are nothing but Adjectives which cannot be understood without their Substantives. I.e., without them God would indeed not be God; but still, he is not God through them, for they do not make known anything substantial, and it is only through what is substantial that God exists. (KV 1.3.1, note a|G 1.34-35; see also KV 1.1, note e|G 1.18 and KV 1.2.29|G 1.27.19-24)*

One of Spinoza’s perspicuous examples of a divine proprium is *omnipresence*, the feature of being present everywhere (KV 1.7.1, note a|G 1.44). Naturally enough, God’s omnipresence follows necessarily from one of his fundamental, essential features alone, namely, his attribute of *extension*. Hence, Spinoza concludes that omnipresence is one of God’s *propria*. There are of course other divine *propria* as well, as Spinoza makes clear later on in his *Short Treatise*:

---

<sup>205</sup> See Garrett (2002, pp. 138, 156-157n26) and Melamed (2013, pp. 49-60, 92n14). Also see TTP 4.11-12: “since knowledge of an effect through its cause is nothing but knowing some property [*proprietatem*] of the cause, the more we know natural things, the more perfectly we know God’s essence, which is the cause of all things” (cf. 1a4).

<sup>206</sup> This conclusion is further confirmed by Spinoza’s denial that God has passions. As I argued in chapter 1 (§1.3.3), passions are features that at least correspond to accidents (5p17; KV 2.24.2|esp. G 1.104.10-13). So, again, the properties in question at 1p16 must be *propria*.

*Propria*, which indeed belong [*behooren*] to a thing... never explain what it is. For though *existing of itself, being the cause of all things, the greatest good, eternal, and immutable*, etc., are proper to God alone, nevertheless through those *propria* we can know neither what the being to which these *propria* belong is, nor what attributes it has. (KV 1.7.6|G 1.45.14-20)<sup>207</sup>

I turn now to unpack the demonstration of 1p16.

#### 4.5.2 The Demonstration of 1p16

Spinoza's reasoning in the demonstration of 1p16 can be broken down into the following steps:

- 1\*. From the given definition of *x*, a number of *x*'s *propria* must be inferred by the intellect.
- 2\*. The more reality expressed by the given definition of *x*, the more *propria* of *x* are inferred by the intellect.
- 3\*. The given definition of God is of a substance whose essence expresses infinite reality, i.e., infinitely many attributes, each of which is infinite in its kind. [1d6]
- 4\*. So, from the given definition of God, infinitely many things (i.e., *propria*, modes)<sup>208</sup> in infinitely many ways (i.e., attributes) are inferred by the intellect. [1\*-3\*]

Premise (1\*) is part and parcel with Spinoza's essentialism, stating in effect that a number of *propria* follow necessarily from the concept of a thing's given essence. Premise (1\*) is not, however, concerned with definitions of things that have no reality outside the intellect (akin to a chimaera, say) but rather with those that are "given". And as Spinoza indicates, a definition of *x* is given just in case it captures the essence of *x* as it is in itself outside the intellect—that is, just in

---

<sup>207</sup> Among God's *propria*, Spinoza includes a rather startling list of traditional "attributes": *necessary existence, providence, immensity, uniqueness, infinity, omniscience, omnipotence, being the free cause of all things, and being a predeterminer* (KV 1.5.1, KV 1.7.1-2, note a|G 1.44; CM 2.3|G 1.253.33ff; Ep 34|G 4.180.22-25; 1app|G 2.77; and 2p10s).

<sup>208</sup> As both this parenthetical and 1p16d suggest, Spinoza refers to the *propria* that follow from the necessity of God's nature as "things" and well as "properties". For some good discussion of this, see Melamed (2013, pp. 49-59).

case the definition represents the essence of  $x$  as it is really, formally, or actually (see 2d2, 3p4d-7d; and Ep 9|G 4.42-43). Only then is it the case that a thing's propria "really do follow necessarily from it", as Spinoza says (cf. 1p36).

Premise (2\*) appeals to the degree of reality expressed by a definition. At 1p9, Spinoza demonstrates in effect that a substance  $x$  has more reality than  $y$  just in case  $x$  has more attributes than  $y$ .<sup>209</sup> So, the degree of reality of a substance is a function of the number of its attributes conceived by an infinite intellect (see 1d4, 2p7). This may seem initially uninformative: how do the attributes themselves, let alone the number of such attributes, have any bearing on a thing's production of propria? An answer resides in Spinoza's dynamic essentialism: it implies that all the attributes, which constitute and express the essence of substance, are different fundamental ways of expressing God's power (1p34), all of which necessarily produce a number of propria (i.e., effects from themselves alone) in proportion to their power (see 1p36, 3p6-7, 4pref|G 2.209.1-3). Moreover, Spinoza understands the degree of reality of a thing to be equivalent to its degree of power (not to mention its degree of perfection,<sup>210</sup> essence,<sup>211</sup> and virtue) (see 2d6, 3gdaexp|G 2.204, 4d8). This indicates why Spinoza believes that the number of propria an intellect infers from the definition of a substance has bearing on the degree of reality or number of attributes expressed in

---

<sup>209</sup> "The more reality or being each thing has, the more attributes belong to it" (1p9). John Brandau (2015, pp. 310ff) argues convincingly that 1p9 is a biconditional such that  $x$  has more reality than  $y$  just in case  $x$  has more attributes than  $y$ .

<sup>210</sup> It is revealed later that Spinoza's notion of perfection is equivocal (see 4pref). Two of the most metaphysically significant senses of perfection that pervade the *Ethics* seem to be (a) perfection as a thing's fixed essential features (G 2.209), and (b) perfection as a thing's changing, non-essential features that promote both its perseverance in being and production of effects (G 2.208.24-30). I take it that the former and not the latter sense of perfection is what Spinoza has in mind when it comes to God's perfection in 1p16.

<sup>211</sup> This remark indicates Spinoza's view that essences come in degrees or quantities. While this is liable to strike us as particularly odd from a contemporary point of view, it may not be so strange in the end. I believe that Brandau (2015) argues persuasively that, for Spinoza, things have varying degrees of essence (reality, perfection, etc.) in virtue of the fact that things have more or less essential features. This is why God has the most essence (reality, perfection, etc.): he has more essential features than anything else, that is, all conceivable attributes (1d4,6).

its definition, namely, because that is a function of its degree of power, which determines the number of propria the substance produces in proportion.

Premise (3\*) is a paraphrase of the definition of God. Before unpacking that definition, Spinoza's passing claim that God's definition is "given" is worth noting. Since prior to 1p16 he demonstrated not only that God's essence involves existence (1p11) but that God is the only substance (1p14,c1), Spinoza is entitled to say that God's definition captures the divine essence as it really is outside the intellect, and thereby given.

Next, consider Spinoza's official definition of God along with its explanation:

1d6: By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence [*Per Deum intelligo ens absolute infinitum hoc est substantiam constantem infinitis attributis quorum unumquodque aeternam et infinitam essentiam exprimit*].

1d6exp: I say absolutely infinite, not infinite in its own kind; for if something is only infinite in its own kind, we can deny infinite attributes of it [NS: (i.e., we can conceive infinite attributes which do not pertain to its nature)]; but if something is absolutely infinite, whatever expresses essence and involves no negation pertains to its essence.

Arguably, this definition is doing most of the work in the demonstration of 1p16, and particularly God's infinitude. To see the connection that this infinitude bears to other steps of 1p16d, we may parse 1d6 as the conjunction of two interrelated claims. For lack of better terms, the first is a *quantitative* claim about the number of attributes that constitute the divine essence (namely, infinitely many); and the second is a *qualitative* claim about the characteristics of each attribute in its own kind (namely, their respective infinitude).

The quantitative claim is that God's definition expresses infinitely many attributes. I believe that Bennett (1984, pp. 75-79) is correct to observe that when Spinoza speaks of "infinitely many *x*", this basically entails "all possible *x*". So, the quantitative claim amounts to saying that God's essence consists in *all possible* attributes, i.e., all fundamental ways of being that are

possible for a substance to instantiate.<sup>212</sup> By “possible” here, I mean possible in the more fine-grained sense that I explained in chapter 3 (§3.3) as possible *with respect to essence*, or as *intrinsically possible*. For  $x$  to be possible in this way, insofar as some  $x$  is considered alone, is for no essential feature of  $x$  to be inconsistent with another essential feature of  $x$ . But since this concerns the internal coherence of  $x$ 's essence alone, and not the coherence of some  $y$  (or  $z$ , etc.) independent of  $x$ , this case is one of *narrowly* conceived intrinsic possibility. In the more inclusive case, concerning some  $x$  and  $y$  (etc.), intrinsic possibility is *broadly* conceived. And for  $x$  and  $y$  to be possible in this way is for  $x$  and  $y$  to be narrowly intrinsically possible, respectively, and for there to be no essential feature of either  $x$  or  $y$  that is incompatible with any other essential feature of  $x$  or  $y$ .

In light of this we may say that the divine nature consists in *all possible attributes* just in case each attribute of God is narrowly intrinsically possible, and altogether broadly intrinsically possible (cf. 1p8-11s). This is also one of the main thrusts of Spinoza's proof for substance monism (1p14): substances must have at least one attribute; no attributes can be shared by substances; and in virtue of the infinitely robust and ontologically exhaustive divine essence, there is no possible attribute left over in metaphysical space to be had by another substance save for God. In this spirit, God as an absolutely infinite being cannot be lacking in any respect; so, if God did not have some attribute that is possible for him to have, then God would not be absolutely infinite.<sup>213</sup>

The qualitative claim is that each attribute expressed in God's definition is infinite in its kind. An attribute is infinite in its kind just in case there is nothing external to it of the same nature

---

<sup>212</sup> I offer textual evidence for this claim below when I respond directly to the quantification problem. But here, it may be worth mentioning the similarity of 1d6 and KV 1.2.1, with one difference being Spinoza's gloss of “infinite”: “He [God] is, we say, a being of which *all, or infinite*, attributes are predicated, each of which is infinitely perfect in its own kind” (emphasis added).

<sup>213</sup> Equivalently, God's absolute infinitude is the expression of all possible perfection or essence. See, e.g., KV 1.2|G 1.23,28, KV 2.5.10|G 1.64.27; CM 2.3|G 1.253-254; Ep 12, Ep 23|G 4.147.18-19, Ep 35-36, Ep 50|G 4.240b; 1p33s2|G 2.74, 1app|G 2.80; TTP 6.58|G 3.93.8-12.

that could limit it in any respect or qualify its positive being. That is, an attribute is infinite in its kind just in case there is nothing external to the attribute of the same nature that could condition or restrain its fundamental and derivative ways of being. This is suggested by at least two texts. The first is 1d6exp: “if something is absolutely infinite, whatever expresses essence and involves no negation pertains to its essence”. This states in effect that God has attribute *F* provided that *F* expresses essence and cannot be conceived except as unconditioned. The second is 1d2: “That thing is said to be finite in its own kind that can be limited by another of the same nature. For example, a body is called finite because we always conceive another that is greater. Thus a thought is limited by another thought.”<sup>214</sup> The converse of this is that if *x* is not limited by some *y* of the same nature outside of *x*—if no *y* distinct from *x* can be conceived that is greater than *x*—then *x* is infinite in its kind.

In terms of Spinoza’s conceptual essentialism, nothing can possibly restrict the scope of inferable effects (the *inferendum*, as it were) from the idea of the causal power expressed by each unlimited attribute in God’s given definition. And neither could the scope or power of an infinite intellect itself (the *inferens*, as it were) be restricted in what it can infer from anything it conceives, in virtue of its *own* infinitude (1p21d; Ep 12). There is thus nothing to prevent *all possible* propria from being actually derived from the definition of God, which is to say that all narrowly intrinsically possible derivative ways of being which are broadly intrinsically possible with inhering in the divine substance. So, “everything which can fall under an infinite intellect”

---

<sup>214</sup> Taking 1d2 conversely and not restricted to finite modes, I assume that the infinite intellect (an immediate infinite mode of thought) can be infinite in its own kind analogous in a way to the attributes. This also appears to be suggested by Spinoza’s distinction between what could be called (a) *intrinsic infinitude* and (b) *extrinsic infinitude*: “Everyone has always found the problem of the Infinite very difficult, indeed insoluble. This is because they have not distinguished between [a] what is infinite as a consequence of its own nature, or by the force of its definition, and [b] what has no bounds, not indeed by the force of its essence, but by the force of its cause.” (Ep 12|G 4.53)



(1p16)—that is, anything that an infinite intellect can conceive as possibly following from an attribute of the divine nature—really does follow from God.

Equivalently, in terms of Spinoza’s dynamic essentialism, the efficacious essential activity that constitutes each of God’s attributes is unlimited, and thus unrestrained in the exercise of its intrinsic power to produce all possible effects. In this manner, all possible propria follow from the power of all possible attributes expressed by the essence of God, because there is nothing that could prevent them from doing so (cf. 1p11d2-3,s).<sup>215</sup>

This essentialist reading of 1p16 just provided explains the apparently redundant, but important, double-infinite in 1p16: “*infinitely* many things in *infinitely* many ways” (see Melamed, 2013b, pp. 150-151).<sup>216</sup> Far from being redundant, the double-infinite corresponds to the quantitative and qualitative claims in the definition of God that I just outlined. The “infinitely many things” that follow from God are all his possible propria, and the “infinitely many ways” are all of God’s possible attributes through which an infinite intellect conceives of their propria.

The connection that premise (3\*) bears to Spinoza’s other steps in his demonstration of 1p16 should now be more apparent. Because the definition of God expresses infinite attributes, it expresses all possible attributes; and because each attribute is infinite in its kind, all possible propria follow from the definition of God. This in effect is Spinoza’s conclusion, (4\*).

It should be said, however, that the “infinitely many things” that follow from God are not just God’s propria. In Spinoza’s ontology, these propria that follow from God are one and the same as God’s *modes*, because modes—like propria—are conceived through the nature of the thing from which they follow (cf. 1d5). This is indicated later in Spinoza’s chain of theorems: “the *modes* of

---

<sup>215</sup> Alternatively, and to put matters simply, the power of an effect is defined by the power of its cause (5a2); and since God’s effects are defined by God’s essence as their cause—that essence being an unlimited power—God’s effects must be unlimited, too.

<sup>216</sup> My conclusion below follows Melamed, but my argument for the conclusion differs from his (cf. Melamed, 2018).

the divine nature have... followed from it necessarily and not contingently (*by 1p16*)” (1p29d; emphasis added). Accordingly, 1p16 amounts to the claim that the infinite intellect infers *all possible modes* in all possible attributes from the given definition of God.

#### 4.6 Reply to the Three Interpretive Problems

Now that I’ve thrown some light on the role of Spinoza’s essentialism in 1p16, I’m in a position to finally answer the three problems posed to the argument for necessitarianism from 1p16 (§4.3).

Recall that the argument was outlined as follows (§4.2.2):

1. The existence of modes follows from the necessity of the divine nature.
2. If the existence of modes follows from the necessity of the divine nature, then everything that exists is necessary.
3. So, everything that exists is necessary.

Also recall the three problems raised to the argument based on various ambiguities surrounding 1p16. The first problem posed to this argument was *the quantification problem*, aimed at premise (1): whether the scope of what follows from God binds *all* modes or only *some*. The second was *the adequacy problem*, also aimed at premise (1): whether God’s modes follow from him *adequately* or *partially*. The third problem was *the equivocation problem* aimed at premise (2): whether the necessity with which both God and modes exist is *univocal* or *equivocal*. We saw that if any of the latter three disjuncts hold, Spinoza’s commitment to necessitarianism cannot be inferred from 1p16. But if all three former disjuncts hold, then premises (1) and (2) would be secured, in effect committing Spinoza to necessitarianism.

In what follows, I argue that all three former disjuncts *do* hold. I believe that there is powerful textual evidence corroborating the essentialist reading of 1p16 just sketched, showing

Spinoza's commitment to saying that *all* modes follow *adequately* from God *with the same necessity* by which God exists.

#### 4.6.1 Reply to the Quantification Problem

For Spinoza, I believe the answer to the quantification problem is clear: the scope of what follows from God covers nothing less than *all* modes. This is entailed by the essentialist reading of 1p16 that I gave in the previous section. But it is also clear from Spinoza's texts.

Immediately after demonstrating 1p16, for example, Spinoza concludes as a corollary that "God is the efficient cause of *all things* which can fall under an infinite intellect" (1p16c1; emphasis added). This indicates that the infinitely many things conceived by God's infinite intellect at 1p16 contain *all modes* within its scope, and accordingly follow from God (also see 1p17s|G 2.63.6-7). For, as Spinoza confirms a couple propositions later in a reference to 1p16c1: "Everything that is, is in God, and must be conceived through God (by 1p15), and so (*by 1p16c1*) *God is the cause of [NS: all] things, which are in him*" (1p18d; emphasis added; see also 1p15s|G 2.60).

Spinoza's later paraphrases of 1p16 itself are even more telling: "I think I have shown clearly enough (*see 1p16*) that from God's supreme power, or infinite nature, infinitely many things in infinitely many ways, *that is, all things*, have necessarily flowed, or always follow..." (1p17s); "For *all things* have necessarily followed from God's given nature (*by 1p16*)..." (1p33d); "For from the necessity alone of God's essence it follows that God is the cause of himself (by 1p11) and (*by 1p16 and 1p16c*) of *all things*" (1p34d); and finally, "the laws of [God's] nature have been

so ample that they sufficed for producing *all things... (as I have demonstrated in 1p16)*” (1app|G 2.83.27-34) (emphases added).<sup>217</sup>

But perhaps one could object here in the following way to block any pending necessitarian conclusions from this: the textual evidence thus far only shows that 1p16 entails that *all actually existing* modes follow from God, which is not obviously equivalent to the claim that *all possible* modes follow from God (that is, unless one is begging the question). And yet, the equivalence would seem needed in order to justify both the essentialist reading of 1p16 above (§4.5) and the argument for necessitarianism based on 1p16.

Apart from the fact that premises (1) and (2) already entail such a conclusion—namely, because possible modes are themselves modes (see ch. 3, §§3.3-3.4), there are some textual grounds to think the equivalence does hold. In a clear reference to 1p16 in letter 60, Spinoza explains to Tschirnhaus that only if God is defined as an absolutely infinite being can all of God’s *propria* be deduced from the definition or idea of him.<sup>218</sup> At the end of Spinoza’s letter, he adds:

I maintain absolutely that from certain properties [*proprietatibus*] of a thing (whatever idea [*or* definition] is given) some things can be discovered more easily, others with greater difficulty... But I think it necessary to pay attention to just this one thing: *we should seek an idea from which all things can be elicited, as I said above.*<sup>219</sup> *For if I want to deduce from [a definition of] a thing everything possible, it follows that the last things will be more difficult than the first, etc. [Omnia enim ex aliquâ re possibilia deducturus, necessariò sequitur ultima prioribus difficiliora fore &c.]* (Ep 60|G 4.271; emphasis added; cf. 1app|G 2.83.27-34 and 2p10s)

---

<sup>217</sup> Two other texts may be worth noting as well. First, Spinoza invokes 1p16 in 1p29d to infer the necessity of modes (as I briefly explained in §4.2.1), with which he eventually concludes: “So *all things* have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature, not only to exist, but to exist in a certain way, and to produce effects in a certain way. There is nothing contingent, q.e.d.” (emphasis added) Then there is 1app, which appeals not only to 1p16 but to 1p32c1-2, the ancestry of which traces to 1p16 and prior propositions: “For I believe I have already sufficiently established it... *by 1p16, 1p32c1 and 1p32c2*, and all those [propositions] by which I have shown that *all things proceed by a certain eternal necessity of nature*, and with the greatest perfection.” (G 2.80.5-9; emphasis added)

<sup>218</sup> “Similarly, when I define God as a supremely perfect Being, since that definition doesn’t express the efficient cause (for I understand the efficient cause to be both internal and external), I won’t be able to derive all God’s properties [*proprietates*] from it. But when I define God to be a *Being [absolutely infinite]*, etc. (see 1d6), [I can derive all God’s properties from it].” (Ep 60|G 4.271)

<sup>219</sup> “To know which of the many ideas of a thing is sufficient for deducing all its properties [*proprietates*], I pay attention to one thing only: that the idea *or* definition of the thing expresses the efficient cause.” (Ep 60|G 4.270)

Arguably, not only do *all* existing modes (things, propria, etc.) follow necessarily from God, but *all possible* modes (things, propria, etc.) follow necessarily from God.

#### 4.6.2 Reply to the Adequacy Problem

For Spinoza, the answer to the adequacy problem is clear as well: modes follow *adequately* and *not partially* from God. According to the reading I gave of 1p16, the things produced from the necessity of the divine nature are God's propria, or equivalently, his modes. Since the propria of a thing follow from its essence *alone*, and every effect whatever follows from some adequate cause, God's modes must follow from him adequately because they follow from the divine essence alone. Moreover, there is simply nowhere else such modes could follow from given Spinoza's substance monism. All this is supported by textual evidence.

First, consider that, at 1p16c3, Spinoza derives the corollary "that God is absolutely the first cause" in virtue of God's priority established by 1p16. This is unsurprising since modes are propria that emanate from the divine nature, and so cannot flow from any other source, not least because there is no other source.<sup>220</sup> So, no mode may owe its existence *even partially* to something apart from the divine nature.

Second, consider the reference to 1p16 cited in the demonstration of 1p17:

1p17: God *acts* [*agit*] from the laws of his nature *alone*, and is compelled by no one.

Dem.: We have just shown (*1p16*) that from the necessity of the divine nature *alone*, or (what is the same thing) from the laws of his nature *alone*, absolutely infinite things follow... (emphasis added; see also 1p17c1-2)

---

<sup>220</sup> See 2p10s,cs, 2p18s, 2p38, 2p45-47; and KV 1.3. But two other passages seem especially significant. First: "If we use our intellect well in the knowledge of things, we must know them in their causes. Now since God is a first cause of all other things, the knowledge of God is prior, according to the nature of things, to the knowledge of all other things, because the knowledge of all other things must follow from knowledge of the first cause." (KV 2.5.11; cf. Melamed, 2010, pp. 131-133; 2013, pp. xv-xvii). And second: "since knowledge of an effect through its cause is nothing but knowing some property [*proprietatem*] of the cause, the more we know natural things, the more perfectly we know God's essence, which is the cause of all things." (TTP 4.11-12; cf. 1a4, 5p24,d, and 5p36s)

Spinoza is unequivocal that 1p16 entails that God produces everything *solely* from his essence. But that God is said to *act* is even more telling. As I explained above (§4.4), for something to act is for it to adequately cause effects (i.e., *propria*) from its essence alone. And since it is through God's actions that everything is produced (by 1p17,d), everything must follow adequately from God.<sup>221</sup>

Third, recall above that Spinoza inferred from 1p16 that God is the *efficient cause* of all modes (1p16c1). In the preface to part four of the *Ethics*, Spinoza indicates that (as I explained in ch. 1, §1.3.1), efficient causes are adequate for bestowing on their effects whatever being they express: "For nothing belongs to the nature of anything except what follows from the necessity of the nature of the efficient cause" (4pref|G 2.208.4-6).<sup>222</sup> This, too, is unsurprising regarding the relation that modes stand in to God, considering that modes are *propria* that *derive* their entire being from the divine essence. Together with 1p16c1, then, God must be the adequate cause of all modes.

Finally, consider some remarks made by Spinoza at the end of his first appendix to the *Ethics*:

But to those who ask "why God did not create all men so that they would be governed by the command of reason?" I answer only "because he did not lack material to create all things, from the highest degree of perfection to the lowest;" or, to speak more properly, "*because the laws of his nature have been so ample that they sufficed for producing all things which can be conceived by an infinite intellect*" (as I have demonstrated in 1p16) (G 2.83.27-34; emphasis added; cf. 1p17,s).

---

<sup>221</sup> In chapter 1 (§1.3.3, we also saw that actions are defined as *affects* of things that increase or decrease their power to exist (3d3). Strictly speaking, however, God's power to exist isn't affected by his modes (5p17,d). But since Spinoza clearly takes God to *act*, it would perhaps be more accurate if Spinoza qualified part of 3d3 to say that a thing's decrease or increase in power to exist only applies to things dependent on or subject to external causes; and so, since God is not dependent on or subject to external causes, God's actions will be different in certain respects than those of modes.

<sup>222</sup> See also 4pref|G 207.19ff; 1p11s|G 2.54.21-27, 1p17s|G 2.63, 1p25; Ep 4|G 4.14, and Ep 60.

This passage suggests two things about 1p16. One is that the God's nature is understood as the adequate cause of all modes, which is indicated by Spinoza's description of God's nature as "so ample" that it "sufficed" for the creation of all things for which it is possible to conceive by his infinite intellect. The other is that Spinoza takes *finite modes*—the existence of irrational men—to not only be included among *all conceivable modes* that God produces, but that they adequately and not partially follow from him (see also ch. 2, §2.5).<sup>223</sup>

### 4.6.3 Reply to the Equivocation Problem

Like the answers to the above problems, I believe the answer to the equivocation problem challenging the argument for necessitarianism from 1p16 is clear as well: according to Spinoza, there is a *univocal* notion of necessity that applies to both God and his modes. In contemporary parlance, there is no possible world in which God exists but not the modes whose existence follows from him in the actual world.<sup>224</sup> That is just what one would also expect if, as I have argued, modes are God's *propria*, because modes that follow from God would inherit their modal status from the necessity of the divine nature, as the modal closure principle requires. A number of texts bear this out.

First, consider Spinoza's proposition at 2p44: "It is of the nature of Reason to regard things as necessary, not as contingent." Its demonstration reads: "It is of the nature of reason to perceive

---

<sup>223</sup> This last point is especially noteworthy since it may have seemed thus far that I've been merely assuming that finite modes are among "all things" that both follow adequately from God and are conceived by his infinite intellect (*pace* Martin, 2010). Alternatively, consider human virtue. In Ep 43, Spinoza indicates that human virtue, among other finite things, "emanates from the necessity of the divine nature" (G 4.222b.31-34). This is so in the *Ethics*, too, where Spinoza defines human virtue as the actual essence of human beings, or as a power to exist and produce effects (4d8, 3p7,d). The power of human beings, or any instantiated finite mode for that matter, is actual only because it follows from God's infinite power (1p36), which Spinoza ultimately takes to be derived from 1p16. So again, actual finite modes follow adequately from God. For other textual evidence, see, e.g., 1p25,d,s,c and 2p45s, both of which cite 1p16. Cf. Wilson (1999, pp. 168-169).

<sup>224</sup> As this suggests, if my univocal reading of Spinoza on necessity is right, Spinoza held a view that, in many respects, overlaps to a remarkable extent with contemporary modal logics. See, e.g., Jarrett (1976; 1978; 2009); cf. Garrett (1999a, pp. 105-106) and Hübner (2015, esp. pp. 198-205).

things truly (by 1p41), viz. (by 1a6) as they are in themselves, i.e. (by 1p29), not as contingent but as necessary, q.e.d.” (2p44d) The latter appeals to Spinoza’s first explicit demonstration for necessitarianism at 1p29, where he concludes that nothing is contingent because God is necessary and everything else follows necessarily from him.<sup>225</sup> This necessity enjoyed by both God and his modes cannot apply equivocally here; it must be univocal. This is because, according to Spinoza, *reason* is a way of adequately knowing the *common* features of things and the consequences of that knowledge (2p40s2).<sup>226</sup> And reason could only adequately know the necessity of all things from 1p29 if both God and his modes share the same kind of necessity *in common*. Indeed, this is exactly what Spinoza goes on to affirm in a subsequent corollary: “But (*by 1p16*) this necessity of things *is the very necessity of God’s eternal nature*” (2p44c2d; emphasis added).

Second, consider two rather remarkable passages from Spinoza’s early *Metaphysical Thoughts* describing the modal status of things in the causal order of nature (see Jarrett, 2009).

But we also say that the necessity of really existing is not distinct from the necessity of essence (CM 2.9). That is, when we say that God has decided that the triangle shall exist, we are saying nothing but that God has so arranged the order of nature and of causes that the triangle shall necessarily exist at such a time. So if we understood the order of causes as it has been established by God, we should find that the triangle must really exist at such a time, *with the same necessity as we now find, when we attend to its nature, that its three angles are equal to two right angles.* (CM 1.3|G 1.243.16-24; emphasis added)<sup>227</sup>

For if men understood clearly the whole order of Nature, they would find all things just as necessary as are all those treated in Mathematics. (CM 2.9|G 1.266.25-27)<sup>228</sup>

---

<sup>225</sup> “Whatever is, is in God (by 1p15); but God cannot be called a contingent thing. For (by 1p11) he exists necessarily, not contingently. Next, the modes of the divine nature have also followed from it necessarily and not contingently (by 1p16)... So all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature, not only to exist, but to exist in a certain way, and to produce effects in a certain way. There is nothing contingent, q.e.d.” (1p29d)

<sup>226</sup> “From what has been said above, it is clear that we perceive many things and form universal notions... from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things (see 2p38c, 2p39, 2p39c, and 2p40). This I shall call reason and the second kind of knowledge.” (2p40s2|G 2.122)

<sup>227</sup> Spinoza’s example in this passage is reminiscent of the one he gives at 1p11d2.

<sup>228</sup> Does the CM, as I’ve quoted it in the above two passages, reflect Spinoza’s views in the *Ethics*? I go on to answer affirmatively. But here I’ll add the following. While Meyer explicitly says in the preface to Spinoza’s DPP that both DPP itself and its appended CM express Descartes’ philosophy and not the views of Spinoza (G 1.132-133; see also CM 1|G 1.233), this cannot be wholly accurate for at least three reasons. First, Spinoza explicitly endorses DPP 1p19,



The modal status of things produced by God is unequivocally the necessity enjoyed by mathematics. Spinoza illustrates this with the fitting example of the necessary relation that essences of triangles bear to their own propria.<sup>229</sup> Since geometrical necessity presumably falls under the most philosophically significant kind of necessity—namely, absolute or metaphysical necessity—it follows that the existence of things produced by God—his modes or propria—must be likewise.<sup>230</sup> This modal sentiment is not exclusive to the early *Metaphysical Thoughts*, however.<sup>231</sup> The same view is also present in Spinoza’s mature *Ethics*:

But I think I have shown clearly enough (*see 1p16*) that from God’s supreme power, or infinite nature, infinitely many things in infinitely many ways, i.e., all things, have necessarily flowed, or always follow, *by the same necessity and in the same way as from the nature of a triangle it follows, from eternity and to eternity, that its three angles are equal to two right angles.* (1p17s|G 2.62.15-19; emphasis added; see also G 2.61.26-62.1)

For all things follow from God’s eternal decree *with the same necessity* as from the essence of a triangle it follows that its three angles are equal to two right angles. (2p49s|G 2.136.10-13; emphasis added)<sup>232</sup>

The first passage explicitly refers to 1p16, and the second alludes to it,<sup>233</sup> indicating that the nature of necessity ascribed to modes at 1p16 is the very necessity enjoyed by geometry.<sup>234</sup>

---

coincidentally at *Ethics* 1p19s, thereby committing himself to the antecedents on which DPP 1p19 is based (perhaps with the proviso that those prior propositions, axioms, and definitions be consistent with the *Ethics* or interpreted in terms of the *Ethics*). Second, there are simply too many differences between what Descartes says and doesn’t say in his own work and what Spinoza purports to merely explain on behalf of Descartes in CM (e.g., the explicit necessitarianism of CM 1.3 is nowhere to be found in Descartes, it seems). And third, there are simply too many similarities between Spinoza’s own views in his *Ethics* and what he purports to merely explain on behalf of Descartes in CM (compare, e.g., CM 1.2 with 1p25 and 2p8).

<sup>229</sup> Cf. DDP|G 1.127-149; and Aristotle on demonstration in *APo*.

<sup>230</sup> Cf. Leibniz (T 168, 173, 371; p. 417). Despite his use of mathematical analogies, Spinoza nevertheless seems to think of abstract mathematical entities as beings of reason opposed to real beings. See, e.g., Ep 12; TdIE 93; and CM 1.1. Cf. Hübner (2016).

<sup>231</sup> See also TdIE 79; KV 1.2.6|G 1.32.10-17; and CM 2.1|G 1.250.21ff. Cf. Descartes’ Fifth Meditation.

<sup>232</sup> The examples in these passages are reminiscent not only of Aristotle’s own (ch. 1, §1.2.1), but also Descartes’ (CSM 2.45, 262-263; and CSM 1.213).

<sup>233</sup> Apart from the similarity the second passage shares with the first passage and 1p16 itself, Spinoza also identifies God’s eternal decree with God’s infinite intellect and the laws of nature. See, e.g., CM 2.4|G 1.257, CM 2.9|G 2.266; TTP 3.8; 1p17,d,s and 1p33s2. See also chapter 2.

<sup>234</sup> One might even take the argument further. Spinoza’s comparisons of geometry with God’s existence suggest that the necessity exhibited by geometry is exhibited by God’s own existence (see, e.g., DDP 1p5s; Ep 21|G 4.130, and Ep 56|G 4.261.7-10; cf. Descartes’ Fifth Meditation). In that case, we would have the equivalence of (a) the necessity of

Third, consider two passages about the modal status of God's actions in relation to 1p16 (see Jarrett, 2009):

*[W]e have shown in 1p16 that God acts with the same necessity by which he understands himself, i.e., just as it follows from the necessity of the divine nature (as everyone maintains unanimously) that God understands himself, with the same necessity it also follows that God does infinitely many things in infinitely many ways. And then we have shown in 1p34 [by 1p11 and 1p16,c] that God's power is nothing except God's active essence. And so it is as impossible for us to conceive that God does not act as it is to conceive that he does not exist. (2p3s; emphasis added)*

That eternal and infinite being we call God, or Nature, acts from the same necessity from which he exists. For we have shown (1p16) that the necessity of nature from which he acts is the same as that from which he exists. (4pref|G 2.206.23-26)

In both passages, Spinoza cites 1p16 to prove that the necessity that holds for God's existence is the same kind of necessity that holds for God's *acts* or *actions*. In the first passage, what it is for God to act is cashed out conceptually, in the attribute of thought, as God's active understanding of himself, by which he forms an idea of his essence comprehending all his attributes, and conceives all modes that can derive therefrom (see also 1p30-31, 1p35, 2p1-7c).<sup>235</sup> (In effect, this is Spinoza's conceptual gloss of his demonstration of 1p16.) For any attribute however, both passages indicates that what it is for God to act is for God to produce every mode that can follow from his essence (see also 1p17,d,c2, 1p34d). So, given what it is for God to act on the one hand, and that the necessity of God's actions is equivalent to the necessity of God's existence on the other, we may conclude the univocal necessity of God's existence and the existence of modes that follow from him.

---

mathematics and (b) the necessity of God's existence. But as I just argued above, we also have the equivalence of (a) and (c): the necessity of modes that follow from God at 1p16. By extension, we have the equivalence of the necessities of (b) and (c) as well. I maintain this same conclusion by another argument below.

<sup>235</sup> Spinoza's line here was apparently a favorite (i.e., the line equating the necessity by which all things follow from God with the necessity of God's understanding of himself); he repeats it often across his corpus. See, e.g., Ep 43|G 4.221b.33-222b.2, Ep 75|G 4.311a-312a; TTP 6.8|G 3.82.32-34; E1p33s2|G 2.76.4-8, and 2p6c.

All of this informs how we are to understand the distinction that was made between two different senses or kinds of necessity, which seemed to pose a problem for the reading that Spinoza is committed to necessitarianism. Recall the considerations I gave against the necessitarian reading on behalf of the semi-necessitarian reading. On the one hand, *x* is *extrinsically necessary* just in case *x*'s existence follows necessarily from an outside cause; and on the other hand, *x* is *intrinsically necessary* just in case *x*'s existence follows necessarily from its own nature. It was argued that the existence of individual finite modes, and even the series of finite modes as a whole, is extrinsically necessary. Because their essence doesn't guarantee their existence, they could be otherwise given causes that are otherwise. By contrast, God's existence cannot be otherwise because he is intrinsically necessary: he is his own cause in virtue of his essence which guarantees his existence. As textual support of all this, I cited 1p33s1: "A thing is called necessary either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause. For a thing's existence follows necessarily either from its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause."

While it may be tempting to take this as a distinction of two kinds or senses of necessity—one for modes and one for God, each being modally distinct—I think it is a mistake to do so. For one thing, I've already argued at some length that the textual evidence is clear: the necessity of the divine nature and the necessity of modes are unequivocally one and the same kind.<sup>236</sup> For another thing, the distinction would commit Spinoza to a corresponding difference between the senses in which God is the cause (a) of himself and (b) of everything else. But that is precisely what Spinoza denies, and notably on the basis of 1p16:

This Proposition [1p25: God is the efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence] follows more clearly from 1p16. For from that it

---

<sup>236</sup> What's more, on the "two kinds of necessity" reading, one must deal with the awkward worry that the infinite modes are contingent because extrinsically necessary (Curley & Walski, 1999, pp. 248-249). The view that intrinsic necessity is distinct in sense or kind from extrinsic necessity also seems to collapse into a single kind of necessity (see Jarrett, 2009, p. 128).

follows that from the given divine nature both the essence of things and their existence must necessarily be inferred; *and in a word, God must be called the cause of all things in the same sense [eo sensu] in which he is called the cause of himself.* (1p25s; emphasis added)

For we have shown (1p16) that the necessity of nature from which he acts is the same as that from which he exists. *The reason, therefore, or cause, why God, or Nature, acts [i.e., adequately causes effects], and the reason [or cause] why he exists, are one and the same.* (4pref|G 2.206.25-28; emphasis added)

However convincing all of this is, there is still the question of how the above univocal notion of necessity is to be reconciled with the intrinsic-extrinsic necessity distinction Spinoza seems to explicitly draw at 1p33s1. I believe the reconciliation lies in ultimately understanding that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic necessity is not of two *senses* or *kinds* of necessity, but rather of two *causes* or *reasons* for one and the same sense or kind of necessity (see ch. 3, §§3.2.2-3.2.3, 3.4.3).<sup>237</sup> Spinoza is explicit about this in 1p33s1: “A thing is called necessary either *by reason* of its essence or *by reason* of its cause” (emphasis added). Necessity is *transitive*, and the distinction designates the *source* of a thing’s modal status—where a thing’s necessity comes from—and specifies whether it holds by virtue of itself (intrinsic necessity) or by virtue of another (extrinsic necessity). In either case, a thing’s existence is necessary in virtue of its cause, contained in some essence or other, and ultimately in God’s essence.<sup>238</sup>

If my essentialist reading of Spinoza is correct, there is both compelling reason and a wealth of textual evidence to believe—contrary to the quantification, adequacy, and equivocation problems supporting the semi-necessitarian reading—that Spinoza understood 1p16 to say that *all* modes

---

<sup>237</sup> Commentators who hold a similar reading include Bennett (1984, p. 124), Garrett (1999, pp. 111-112), Koistinen (1998, pp. 65-66), Griffin (2008, pp. 80-84), Jarrett (2009, pp. 127-133), and perhaps Mason (1986, p. 328).

<sup>238</sup> In his *Short Treatise*, Spinoza also indicates that the infinite series of finite modes finds its necessary source in God: “if the contingent thing is contingent because its cause is contingent, then that cause must also be contingent because the cause that produced it is also contingent *and so on, to infinity.* *And because we have already proven that everything depends on one single cause, then that cause would also have to be contingent. And this is plainly false.*” (KV 1.6.3|G 1.41; emphasis added; Curley’s inserted brackets omitted)

follow *adequately* from God *with the same necessity* by which God exists. We may thus conclude that the argument from 1p16 holds, and that Spinoza is indeed committed to necessitarianism.

#### **4.7 Some Difficulties for the Essentialist Interpretation of *Ethics* 1p16**

In this section I attempt to answer two difficulties for my essentialist interpretation of 1p16. The first difficulty is a residual concern about the sufficiency of my replies to the quantification and adequacy problems (§§4.6.1-4.6.2). The second difficulty regards the claim from §4.5 that modes are God's propria.

##### **4.7.1 How Does the Finite Follow from the Infinite?**

There is a lingering issue following the quantification and adequacy problems. My replies to those problems do not constitute a direct rebuttal to the textual grounds that were cited to motivate them. Recall that 1p28 provided reason to believe that no finite mode can follow (at least adequately) from something infinite; and that if anything can follow from something infinite, it must also be infinite (1p21-23). Assuming Spinoza isn't inconsistent, the textual evidence I've cited in my replies to the problems may only show that Spinoza takes the finite to *somehow* follow from the infinite; but it does not explain *how* that is supposed to go. At least *some* explanation is in order, it seems.

How the finite follow from the infinite is an admittedly tall order, one that would take us too far afield to attempt explaining in detail here. However, I think it suffices to say that 1p28 only implies that no *individual* finite mode follows by itself from something infinite. Indeed, as Garrett (1999a, pp. 110-111) has pointed out, that does not preclude the interpreter of Spinoza from identifying the *whole infinite causal series of finite modes* with one of God's *infinite modes*, namely, the mediate infinite mode. While no *individual* finite mode taken in isolation could follow

adequately from something infinite, all individual finite modes *taken together* could follow adequately from something infinite. If their totality constitutes an infinite mode, it could ultimately and adequately follow from God, consistent with 1p21-23. Spinoza suggests as much when he explains, for example, that “the world [*mundum*] is a necessary effect of the divine nature” (Ep 54|G 4.252.3-4),<sup>239</sup> and that the whole of nature is a nested series of individuals containing all finite modes as its parts, which altogether form an infinite individual, i.e., God’s mediate infinite mode (see, e.g., Ep 32, 64; and 2lem7d|G 2.102).

#### 4.7.2 How Can Finite Modes be Propria of God?

In the present section, I want to ameliorate a concern from §4.5, in which I interpreted Spinoza as holding the view that modes in general are God’s propria in the Aristotelian sense. Other advocates of this reading include Carriero (1991, pp. 71-72), Garrett (1999a, pp. 113-114, 119; 2002, p. 138), and Melamed (2013b, pp. 52, 60; cf. 2018), but surprisingly none of them say much about how *finite* modes can be considered as such. Even conceding that finite modes follow adequately from God, the matter of their status as *convertible* proper features certainly merits *some* explanation since finite modes go in and out of existence whereas God does not. Finite modes *prima facie* fail to be convertible with God in the way that even the proprium of risibility is convertible with the essence of a human being. Of logical necessity, *x* is risible iff *x* is human; so, it cannot be the case that *x* is *not* risible for the *duration* that *x*’s humanity is instantiated. Likewise, if finite modes are propria of God, then it should be all the truer that no finite mode can fail to exist if God exists. Indeed, since God is eternal, the existence of finite modes should be sempiternal if not eternal as well (see ch. 2, §§2.3.1-2.3.2). How is it, then, that a finite mode may fail to exist at some time

---

<sup>239</sup> Interestingly, Leibniz (AG 277) seems to take this quoted passage from Ep 54 as closely connected to 1p16.

and yet be a proprium of God? Isn't the instantiation of propria guaranteed so long as the essence from which they follow is also instantiated? For similar (and other) reasons as these, Martin (2010, pp. 34-53) explicitly argues that God's propria do *not* include finite modes, but only infinite modes.

The problem, in other words, is that if a finite mode  $F$  is a proprium of God, then  $F$  cannot fail to be instantiated if God is instantiated. However, I am not convinced the problem is insuperable.<sup>240</sup> Consider two responses to the challenge on Spinoza's behalf.

#### ***4.7.2.1 A Deflationary Account of Propria***

The present response might concede that finite modes are not quite propria in the strict Aristotelian sense, but nonetheless rejects the semi-necessitarian alternative that finite modes do not follow adequately from God. If finite modes are not propria in the technical Aristotelian sense that require strict convertibility, the necessitarian interpreter might argue that Spinoza accepts a looser, deflated notion of propria as features which follow adequately from the essence of  $x$  but need not be strictly convertible with  $x$  at all times,<sup>241</sup> at least in the case in which  $x$  is God.

To see this, consider that on the Garrett reading above, the totality of finite modes is contained in the mediate infinite mode. Since the mediate infinite mode follows adequately from God (even if indirectly with the mediation of the immediate infinite mode), the totality of finite modes—and thus any individual finite mode  $F$ —follows adequately from God, too. But because  $F$ 's following from God involves infinitely other finite modes,  $F$  is necessarily acted upon by

---

<sup>240</sup> The problem is reminiscent in many ways of the old Hegelian threat that Spinoza is in fact committed to denying the reality of finitude in the world (see, e.g., Melamed, 2012b; see also Nadler, 2012).

<sup>241</sup> There's reason to think Spinoza is committed to such an account, for example, given the way he conceives of the virtuous person's adequately caused affects or actions (i.e., propria—see ch. 1, §1.3.3). Those actions seem to be features that can come and go, depending on external causes (see, e.g., 3p59s).

external forces and eventually destroyed. In this way, finite modes can be proprium of God in the deflated sense, but nevertheless go in and out of existence.<sup>242</sup>

#### **4.7.2.2 Eternalism**

Finite modes can be included among God's propria by appeal to a congenial view in the philosophy of time. Literature on the Spinozistic nature of time is both legion and diverse. However, there seems to be widespread agreement that Spinoza does not subscribe to *presentism* (a variant of *A-theory*): the idea that only objects that exist presently are real (in the colloquial sense of "real"). One contrasting view to presentism, congenial to Spinoza even if a little revisionist, is *eternalism* (a variant of *B-theory*): the idea that objects which exist in the past, present, and future are all equally real (see Rea, 2005; see also Huenemann 2018, p. 119; Garrett, 2018b, p. 126; cf. Bennett, 1984, pp. 193-211). "Past", "present", and "future" are relativistic and perspectival notions, depending on "where" one is in time. No particular time enjoys a privileged ontological status, and thus time on eternalism is simply irrelevant to ontology. So, an object existing in some earlier stretch of time (the Library of Alexandria, say) is not more or less real than an object existing in some later stretch of time (say, the Eiffel Tower); each object would merely be located in and across different places within a vast temporal landscape.<sup>243</sup> As a whole, the complete temporal landscape would in some sense constitute a changeless series of ordered events; but within the whole, there would be change from one event to another.

---

<sup>242</sup> At any rate, if the infinite modes are propria in the strictly convertible Aristotelian sense, then on the Garrett interpretation, existing finite modes would at least be parts of God's propria, since the mediate infinite mode contains the totality of finite modes as parts. This would seem to place an interesting status on finite modes that stands midway between strict Aristotelian propria and accidents: for like propria, finite modes would follow adequately from the essence of God, and yet, like accidents, they go in and out of existence by virtue of extrinsic causes, despite it being impossible for there to be any change in God's existence.

<sup>243</sup> As this last remark might suggest, eternalism is a variety of *four-dimensionalism*, which likens time to a dimension of space and describes objects existing across time as temporally "extended".



It does not seem too anachronistic or revisionist to say that Spinoza's remarks on time suggests something like eternalism. For example, he tells us that the person led by reason sees things as they truly are, and thus does not ontologically privilege presently existing objects over those in the past or future: "Insofar as the Mind conceives things from the dictate of reason, it is affected equally, whether the idea is of a future or past thing, or of a present one" (4p62). And this is because conceiving the existence of finite modes from the guidance of reason is to conceive them in a comprehensive and global way, namely, *sub specie aeternitates* or under a species of eternity, in relation to God and as participating in his essence irrespective of a particular time and place (4p62d).<sup>244</sup> By contrast, to conceive the existence of finite modes *sub specie durationis* or under a species of duration is to conceive them narrowly in relation to a particular time and place, in isolation from the whole order of nature.

Eternalism also coheres well with the Garrett reading that the totality of finite modes follows from God, contained in the immutable mediate infinite mode. For the totality of finite modes *taken together* follows from God as an eternal effect of his nature; and as such, the whole order of finite modes must include those we consider "past", "present", and "future". This consideration is further complemented by Spinoza's independent suggestions that the existence of finite modes is temporally indexed or determined in the infinite causal series. For while the duration of a finite mode is *indefinite* in relation to its own essence (2d5,exp), its continuation of existing is *definite* in relation to the whole order of nature (see CM 1.3|G 1.243.16-24; 1p11d2, 3p8d, 4p62s).

If an eternalist reading of Spinoza is tenable, it would allow one to challenge the idea that if a finite mode *F* is a proprium of God, then *F* cannot fail to be instantiated if God is instantiated.

---

<sup>244</sup> See, e.g., 1p21,d, 2p44c2-45s, 5p22,d, 5p29s, and 5p30d. See also KV 2.5.9|G 1.641.9-18 and KV 2.26.7-8|G 1.110-111.

So long as *F* is instantiated at any time, *F* can be a proprium of God. Because time is irrelevant to ontology on eternalism, what matters is not the convertibility of God's existence with *F* at all times, but the convertibility of God's reality with *F*'s somewhere in the complete temporal landscape. Any finite mode that exists at all, for any duration, would be convertible with God conceived in relation to the whole changeless order of nature. In this way, *F* could be a proprium of God. Perhaps something like this is even what Spinoza has in mind in conceiving finite modes *sub specie aeternitatis*.

#### 4.8 Semi-Necessitarianism & Ethics 5p6

Before I close the present chapter, I want to leave off with not a *defensive* argument for the necessitarian reading, as I have been doing up to this point, but with an *offensive* one against the semi-necessitarian reading. Curley (1988) maintains that the semi-necessitarianism or “determinism” he attributes to Spinoza “is strong enough to be philosophically interesting and to bear the weight of the moral conclusions Spinoza wants to draw from it” (p. 50). While it is indeed philosophically interesting, there is reason to doubt that semi-necessitarianism can withstand the weight of at least one conclusion of Spinoza's moral project, namely, his psychotherapeutic doctrine of 5p6: “Insofar as the Mind understands all things as necessary, it has a greater power over the affects, or is less acted on by them [*Quatenus mens res omnes ut necessarias intelligit eatenus majorem in affectus potentiam habet seu minus ab iisdem patitur*].”<sup>245</sup> The psychotherapy of 5p6 tells us how to incrementally free ourselves from the power of harmful affect and more readily attain virtue and our highest blessedness.

---

<sup>245</sup> The demonstration reads: “The Mind understands all things to be necessary (by 1p29), and to be determined by an infinite connection of causes to exist and produce effects (by 1p28). And so (by 5p5) to that extent [the mind] brings it about that it is less acted on by the affects springing from these things, and (by 3p48) is less affected toward them, q.e.d.” (5p6d)

The reasoning behind 5p6 seems to be something like this (cf. Curley, 1988, pp. 132-135). Suppose Gordon is burdened by debilitating guilt following the loss of his wife to some unfortunate illness (cf. 3da17,32). This guilt has power over Gordon's mind, compounded by agonizing questions for which he has no answer, such as what he could have done differently to prevent his wife's death; or whether he could have spent more time with her; or (more generally) why things turned out as they did at all rather than some other way. According to 5p6, Gordon's guilt can be diminished by acquiring knowledge that all things are necessary.<sup>246</sup> This requires that Gordon learn to see himself and his wife in the series of events leading up to his loss as embedded in, and following from, an infinitely vast nexus of causes that could not possibly be different from what it is, because all things follows from the necessity of the divine nature. If Gordon understands that every past link in the causal chain of events was absolutely unavoidable, then in the process his guilt will be diluted to the extent it is "spread out" over the totality of prior causes.<sup>247</sup> Put another way, Gordon would in principle have an ultimate and intelligible answer to the questions antagonizing him over the loss of his wife. For the Spinozist who recognizes that nothing in the nexus of causes is contingent, it is understood in at least a general way why it is absolutely impossible for the series of events to be different than they are.<sup>248</sup> "For we see that Sadness over

---

<sup>246</sup> As this indicates, Spinoza considers the recognition of certain features of reality as crucial for flourishing (at least to the extent one's power and circumstances allow). In correspondence with Blijenbergh, for example, he says: "Ethics... as everyone knows, must be founded on metaphysics and physics" (Ep 27|G 4.160-161). See also Spinoza's physical digression (G 2.98-103) in his later ethical doctrines (e.g., 2lem2 in 5p4d) and Descartes's preface to his *Principles of Philosophy* (CSM 1.186).

<sup>247</sup> Spinoza assumes that affects such as guilt admit of a certain quantity. This doesn't seem implausible given that affects have a degree of power in the mind, not to mention that the essence of affects, like anything else, is power (see ch. 1, §§1.3.3-1.3.4).

<sup>248</sup> Spinoza would put it by saying that such guilt is unworthy for the person "who rightly knows that all things follow from the necessity of the divine nature, and happen according to the eternal laws and rules of nature" (4p50s). A little later, Spinoza adds: "a man strong in character considers this most of all, that all things follow from the necessity of the divine nature, and hence, that whatever he thinks is troublesome and evil... arises from the fact that he conceives the things themselves in a way that is disordered, mutilated, and confused. For this reason, he strives most of all to conceive things as they are in themselves, and to remove the obstacles to true knowledge" (4p73s|G 2.247.21ff).

some good which has perished is lessened as soon as the man who has lost it realizes that this good could not, in any way, have been kept” (5p6s).<sup>249</sup>

This appears to be at odds with semi-necessitarianism. Since the reading is committed to there being some contingency in Spinoza’s metaphysics, it is also committed to certain “brute facts” within it—facts that literally lack a reason for their being the case, and thus facts that are *impossible to understand*. As Curley (1988) explains:

Considered in themselves, apart from the causes which determine them to be what they are, these particular features [i.e., finite modes] of the universe are contingent, could be otherwise. ... If each particular feature of the universe, considered in itself, is contingent, then their totality is also contingent, and there is at least one thing which does not have an explanation: the totality of particular features of the universe. (p. 49)

The problem for the semi-necessitarian is that—contrary to the therapy of 5p6—Gordon cannot *understand (intelligit)* things as necessary in a way that would allow him to effectively cope with the loss of his wife and overcome the power of his guilt over the mind.

To see this, observe that the above questions antagonizing Gordon presuppose that the actual world is *not* the only possible world. With respect to the present example, I take it that Spinoza’s psychotherapy of 5p6 can only work by virtue of there being, in principle, ultimate and intelligible answers to Gordon’s questions—answers informing him that no world apart from the actual is metaphysically possible. But semi-necessitarianism cannot provide an ultimate and intelligible answer to Gordon’s antagonizing questions, even *in principle*, because there is ultimately nothing intelligible to be had, as Curley himself concedes. On semi-necessitarianism, there are presumably possible worlds in which Gordon does things differently and prevents his

---

<sup>249</sup> Shoring up this conclusion is Spinoza’s subsequent example in which he indicates that the necessity he is concerned with is the very necessity of things’ natures: “Similarly, we see that no one pities infants because of their inability to speak, to walk, or to reason, or because they live so many years, as it were, unconscious of themselves. But if most people were born grown up, and only one or two were born infants, then everyone would pity the infants, because they would regard infancy itself, *not as a natural and necessary thing*, but as a vice of nature, or a sin.” (5p6s)

wife's death and spends more time with her—worlds in which things turn out some other way and no one dies of such unfortunate illnesses. Nonetheless, there is no explanation for why those possible worlds fail to be actual instead of the one in which Gordon finds himself. Those other possible worlds could be actual, but they simply are not, and for no reason.<sup>250</sup> This result would very well exacerbate Gordon's sorry situation, impeding his virtue and blessedness in the process.

So *pace* Curley, it seems to me that semi-necessitarianism cannot bear the weight of Spinoza's moral conclusions. By contrast, necessitarianism can.<sup>251</sup>

---

<sup>250</sup> What's more, not only does this violate the Principle of Sufficient Reason (1p11d2), but since the whole causal series of finite modes is arguably a mode itself (see §4.7.1), Curley's semi-necessitarianism would appear inconsistent with Spinoza *a fortiori* because every mode must be adequately conceived through the substance it is in (1d5), and therefore adequately caused by God to exist necessarily.

<sup>251</sup> Charlie Huenemann has reached a similar conclusion with respect to Spinoza's doctrine of the intellectual love of God (*amor Dei intellectualis*): "Mere causal determinism would not be enough [to remedy the harmful affects]. For if we trace through all the causes leading to a finite particular, and understand the causes of those causes, and their causes, and so on, we will never be able through all this tracing to reach God's attributes, and see in the necessity of the finite particular. For this we need some sort of necessitarianism; for only then can we possibly intuit immediately just how what we have experienced is metaphysically demanded by the nature of the one substance." (Huenemann 2018, p. 126)

## CHAPTER 5. WHO'S AFRAID OF MODAL COLLAPSE?: A DEFENSE OF SPINOZA'S NECESSITARIANISM

### 5.1 Introduction

#### 5.1.1 Recap of Spinoza's Necessitarianism

Few views are more offensive to commonsense than necessitarianism. After all, it implies that no one has the ability to say and do otherwise than they actually say and do, any more than a triangle has the ability for its geometrical properties to be otherwise than they actually are. But caring very little as he characteristically does for commonsense, Spinoza unabashedly affirms necessitarianism when he writes that, for example, "In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way" (1p29); "I have shown more clearly than the noon light that there is absolutely nothing in things on account of which they can be called contingent" (1p33s1); or that "if men understood clearly the whole order of Nature, they would find all things just as necessary as are all those treated in Mathematics" (CM 2.9|G 1.266.25-27).

The basic thrust of Spinoza's reasoning for necessitarianism can be briefly expressed with the following argument (see chapters 2-3).

1. Whatever exists is either God or a mode of God. [1p14,c1, 1p15]
2. God's existence is necessary, not contingent. [1p11]
3. The existence of modes follows necessarily and not contingently from God. [1p16]
4. Whatever follows from something necessary is itself necessary. [1p21-23, 1p35]
5. So, whatever exists is necessary, not contingent. [1p17s, 1p29, 1p33]

Spinoza's reasoning here can be understood as the conjunction of three ideas. First, premise (1) is a consequence of Spinoza's *substance monism*, according to which there is a single substance

consisting of infinite attributes, each of which gives rise to infinitely many modes (1d6, 1p14,c1). Provocatively, Spinoza identifies the one substance of infinite attributes with *Deus sive Natura*, “God, or Nature” (4pref[G 2.206]); and inhering in God are all the modes we know and love in the causal order of Nature—things like hummus, hedgehogs, and human beings. Nothing, else exists save for God and his modes.

Second, premises (2) and (3) may be viewed as a result of Spinoza’s *metaphysical rationalism*, according to which the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) is true: everything has a *causa sive ratio* from which its existence (or nonexistence) follows as a consequence (1p11d2). The *causa sive ratio* for God’s existence is the necessity of the divine nature itself (premises 2). Likewise, the ultimate *causa sive ratio* for the existence of modes is the divine nature as well (premise 3).

Third and finally, premise (4) is the *modal closure principle* that necessity is closed under the Spinozistic “following-from” relation, according to which  $y$  follows from  $x$  just in case  $x$  is the necessitating cause and ground of  $y$  (see ch. 1, §1.3.4). In that case, if  $x$  exists in all possible worlds and  $y$  follows from  $x$ , then  $y$  also exists in every possible world. Hence, because God exists in every possible world and the existence of modes follows from God in each possible world in which God exists, the modes exist in all possible worlds as well, which is just to say that there is but one possible world: the actual one. Taken together, premises (1)-(4) of Spinoza’s reasoning thus lead to necessitarianism: everything is necessary, nothing is contingent. There are other, more contemporary routes to Spinozistic necessitarianism, but this much suffices for present purposes.<sup>252</sup>

---

<sup>252</sup> A case for Spinozistic necessitarianism can also be made, in less idiosyncratic terms, on the basis of the PSR, understood as the principle that every true proposition  $p$  has an explanation  $q$ , whereby if  $q$  explains  $p$ , then  $q$  entails  $p$ . The most well-known cases for thinking that the PSR leads to Spinozistic necessitarianism has been made by Peter van Inwagen (1983, pp. 202-203) and Jonathan Bennett (1984, pp. 114-116), which can be briefly stated as follows.

### 5.1.2 The Consensus View of Spinozistic Necessitarianism

Unsurprisingly, the consensus among commentators is that Spinoza's wholesale denial of contingency is wildly untenable. Indeed, the reception of his necessitarianism today seems no different in the early modern period than it does today. Pierre Bayle, for example, calls it "a great embarrassment" (qtd. Curley, 2019, p. 19). Gottfried Leibniz considers Spinoza's view to be "an opinion so bad, and indeed so inexplicable" (T 173) that he wouldn't waste his time to refute it.<sup>253</sup> In the preface of Isaac Newton's (2004) *Principia*, Roger Cotes alludes to Spinoza's necessitarianism as "the lowest depths of degradation" (p. 57).<sup>254</sup> Likewise, Samuel Clarke (1998) declaims it as "palpably absurd and false" (p. 49). Insofar as religious piety is concerned, Christian Wolff (2020) even goes so far as to argue that "Spinozism is more harmful than atheism" (p. 194) precisely because atheists need not be committed to necessitarianism.

More recently, Jonathan Bennett, Edwin Curley, and Gregory Walski have called Spinoza's necessitarianism "tremendously implausible" (Bennett, 1996, p. 75; Curley & Walski 1999, p. 242). Chris Martin (2010) suggests that it is "the more pernicious strand of necessitarianism" (p. 25). It strikes Martin Lin (2012) as "hopeless" (p. 443). And Peter van Inwagen (1983) doubts "whether many present day philosophers could bring themselves even to

---

Suppose for *reductio* that there is a big contingent conjunction of all contingent true propositions,  $q$ . As such,  $q$  is a contingent true proposition. By the PSR,  $q$  has a sufficient reason,  $p$ . Now,  $p$  is either contingent or necessary. But  $p$  cannot be contingent: for if it were, then  $p$  would be a conjunct of  $q$ , and  $q$  would be its own sufficient reason. But that's absurd: no contingent true proposition is its own sufficient reason. So,  $p$  is necessary. But  $p$  cannot be necessary either: if it were, then it couldn't be the sufficient reason of  $q$ , a contingent true proposition. For sufficient reasons entail what they explain, and whatever is entailed by something necessary is itself necessary. Therefore,  $q$  is both contingent and necessary, which is absurd. So, our *reductio* is false: there is no big contingent conjunction of all contingent truths,  $q$ . In other words, there are no contingent truths, a conclusion equivalent to necessitarianism. A result of this contention is that the connection between Spinoza, the PSR, and necessitarianism has become especially well-trodden territory. See, e.g., Della Rocca (2003; 2008, pp. 69-78; 2010), Goldstein (2012), Lin (2012; 2018), and Pruss (2006, p. 97ff; 2009, pp. 50ff; 2011, pp. 230-231).

<sup>253</sup> Despite the dismissive remarks in his *Theodicy*, there is reason to think that Leibniz took Spinoza's necessitarianism (and even Spinoza's metaphysics generally) seriously enough to developed some of his views precisely with the aim of avoiding Spinozism (see, e.g., L 273, 663). See also Adams (1994, pp. 9-52), Griffin (2008), and Cover & O'Leary-Hawthorne (1999, pp. 253-290).

<sup>254</sup> See also (Newton, 2004, pp. 91-92).



consider [necessitarianism] seriously” (p. 204). Even among notably charitable commentators, there is skepticism about the mere defensibility of Spinoza’s unabashed denial of contingency. Timothy O’Connor (2008), for instance, finds necessitarianism “untenable” despite his best efforts to give Spinoza a fair hearing (p. 87). Similarly, Charlie Huenemann (2018) expresses some astonishment with the view regardless of his attempts to sympathetically answer the question, “*Why on earth would Spinoza (or anyone, for that matter) want to be considered as a necessitarian?*” (p. 115) To put it mildly, Spinoza’s necessitarianism is not a popular view.<sup>255</sup>

But apart from philosophers pointing out the highly counter-intuitive nature of the position, surprisingly little has been said to explain exactly why necessitarianism is so absurd. Moreover, what has been said tends to be perfunctory, with hardly any serious engagement with Spinoza on the matter.<sup>256</sup> This raises the question: *what justifies the consensus view of Spinoza’s necessitarianism?* Despite most commentators’ brief and undeveloped treatment of this question, their critical remarks appear to point to an intriguing answer, one which amounts to an argument that I call “the indispensability argument for contingency” (or simply, “the indispensability argument”). The basic idea is expressed by Bennett (1984) in his landmark study of Spinoza’s *Ethics* when he writes: “The strongest pressure on Spinoza to allow that at least some propositions are contingent comes simply from its being hard to do good philosophy while staying faithful to the thesis that this is the only possible world” (p. 114). Without the modal distinction between the necessary and the contingent, it seems that Spinoza cannot accommodate a host of crucial concepts

---

<sup>255</sup> See also Nadler (2006, p. 107n22) and Delahunty (1985, p. 164-165).

<sup>256</sup> An exception in the history of philosophy may be Clarke’s (1998) rather neglected *Demonstration*. Among other things, the work attempts to provide a sustained critique of Spinoza’s metaphysics. And while many of Clarke’s arguments strike me as elaborate exercises in uncharitable interpretation and question-begging, there are others that may pose serious challenges for Spinoza’s necessitarianism as well as his substance monism. On this, see Yenter (2014).

(distinctions, tools, presuppositions, commitments, etc.) that are indispensable for doing good philosophy. In passing, Huenemann (2018) has recently expressed Bennett's concern as follows:

For the doctrine [of necessitarianism], in addition to being intuitively wrong, brings along notorious difficulties in its wake. For example, denying that anything nonactual is possible makes it hard to do good philosophy. Counterfactuals all end up being vacuously true, essential characteristics become indistinguishable from nonessential ones, and it is impossible to distinguish laws of nature from any "accidental" regularities. Also, as with determinism, the doctrine makes it hard to see why people should be held morally accountable for what they do – for no one can ever do otherwise. ... Finally, if we are religious in the way most of Spinoza's contemporaries were, we will be bothered by necessitarianism's lamentable tendency to make God directly responsible for everything that happens in the world – since everything, from apple blossoms and summer days to traffic accidents and birth defects, flows necessarily from God's immutable nature. (pp. 115-116)

Huenemann goes on to say little more about these issues. However, his remark forcefully indicates that there are a flurry of difficulties awaiting the necessitarian who wishes to do good philosophy.

As devastating as the indispensability argument may seem for Spinoza, the details of the argument remain (to my knowledge) almost entirely undeveloped in the literature, with Lin (2012) being perhaps the only exception. Nevertheless, the indispensability argument looks like a highly promising and powerful answer to the question of what justifies the consensus view of Spinoza's necessitarianism as so absurd, namely, Spinoza's view entails the loss of indispensable philosophical concepts that only contingency can afford.

### **5.1.3 Aims**

In the present chapter, I want to develop the indispensability argument on behalf of Spinoza's critics in order to then examine, on Spinoza's behalf, whether it successfully shows the absurdity of necessitarianism. I maintain that the indispensability argument for contingency fails: Spinoza's rich view of essences at the ground floor of his metaphysics ultimately supplies him the resources he needs to defensibly answer the problems that the argument poses to him. In this chapter,

therefore, I will ultimately be arguing *against* the consensus view to show that Spinoza's necessitarianism is not at all absurd, or at least not as implausible as commentators have tended to assume.<sup>257</sup>

The present chapter unfolds as follows. In §5.2, I develop the indispensability argument for contingency and three supporting considerations in its favor. In §5.3, I explain how features of Spinoza's metaphysics—rooted ultimately in his views on essences—provides the resources he needs to reply to the indispensability argument and each of its three associated supports. I conclude that the consensus of Spinoza's necessitarianism is mistaken, at least insofar as the indispensability argument is concerned.

## **5.2 The Indispensability Argument for Contingency**

### **5.2.1 The Basic Argument**

In general, doing good philosophy requires the accommodation of certain concepts which are indispensable in some way for good theory and practice. They might be conceptual distinctions that compartmentalize knowledge (e.g., a priori vs. a posteriori) or carve reality at its joints (e.g., fundamental vs. derivative properties). They might be fruitful conceptual tools and theories (e.g., set theory) that in turn require ontological commitments (e.g., to abstracta). They might also be pre-philosophical notions underlying perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (e.g., that there is an external world populated with minds other than our own).

Relevant to necessitarianism is a class of concepts that seems to crucially require contingency. But a philosophical view like Spinoza's is incapable of accommodating any concepts

---

<sup>257</sup> Confirming my point here, Steven Nadler indicates that the worries expressed in the indispensability argument are a key motivation for the semi-necessitarian reading: "The fear is that with necessitarianism comes the loss of a number of crucial distinctions – between necessary and contingent truths, between essential and accidental properties of things – and an inability to account for such important conceptual tools as counterfactuals" (Nadler, 2006, p. 107n22).

requiring contingency. The result is the loss of those concepts, and with it, the hope of doing good philosophy. This consequence is unacceptable. But it also explains—perhaps more than anything else—why Spinoza’s necessitarianism is considered so absurd.<sup>258</sup> This general line of thought provides us the bare outlines of the indispensability argument for contingency, which may be sketched as follows:

1. Spinoza’s necessitarianism entails the loss of indispensable philosophical concepts that only contingency can afford.
2. If so, then Spinoza’s necessitarianism is absurd.
3. Therefore, Spinoza’s necessitarianism is absurd.

Premise (2) is plausible enough for my purposes, so we may assume it is true. However, premise (1) requires support, as it does all the heavy lifting for the argument. By way of support, one might consider a set of interrelated *ethical difficulties* (broadly understood) which contain some of the most commonly cited issues facing Spinoza’s necessitarianism, similar to those frequently raised against determinism (many of them being briefly touched on by Huenemann above). For if nothing could be different in virtue of God’s absolute necessitation of all things, it quickly becomes a question how one tackles the following, for example:

- i. *The free will problem*: the problem of how to account for agents’ freedom to choose among alternate possible actions.
- ii. *The moral responsibility problem*: the problem of how to account for agents’ moral responsibility (blameworthiness or praiseworthiness) for their actions that could have been otherwise.

---

<sup>258</sup> Alternatively, we might say that some concepts are indispensable for constructing a plausible philosophical worldview. A philosophical view’s compatibility with concepts of this sort is a necessary condition on the plausibility of that view. The objection might then say that necessitarianism utterly fails the test, and so it isn’t a plausible view.

- iii. *The deliberation problem*: the problem of how to account for agents' intelligent deliberation among alternate possibilities as objects of thoughtful consideration prior to decision-making, which connects agents' freedom to their responsibility.<sup>259</sup>
- iv. *The normativity problem*: the problem of how to account for normative claims prescribing what one morally "ought" to do (and therefore "can" do) in a given situation.
- v. *The problem of divine responsibility*:<sup>260</sup> the problem of how to account for evil in the world without making God directly responsible for them or undermining religion.<sup>261</sup>

Without the concept of contingency or nonactual possibilities, it's difficult to see how one could begin to answer difficulties like these.

Then one might also consider a more pointed, troubling set of *metaphysical difficulties* in support of (1) against Spinoza's necessitarianism (again, many of them being briefly touched on by Huenemann above). For example:

- vi. *The essence problem*: the problem of how to account for the distinction between a thing's essential and accidental features.
- vii. *The generalization problem*: the problem of how to account for the distinction between lawlike and accidental generalizations.

---

<sup>259</sup> As Lin briefly explains it, the basic idea is that a free agent is morally responsible for their actions on account that their actions are deliberately chosen among nonactual alternatives (Lin, 2012, p. 443). Aristotle also suggests something like the deliberation problem, apparently with fatalism in mind (*EN* 6.2|1139b5-11 and 6.5|1140a26-1140b4).

<sup>260</sup> I have foregone naming the problem of divine responsibility "the problem of evil" because I understand the latter, while related, to be primarily concerned with the *existence* of God in relation to worldly evils, not God's responsibility.

<sup>261</sup> Some commentators see a link between the issue of divine responsibility for worldly evils and Spinoza's necessitarianism (see subsequent footnotes for references). For that reason I've included it in the above list of difficulties. Nonetheless, the issue strikes me not so much as a difficulty for Spinoza's necessitarianism as it is a complaint about his conception of God from the perspective of a traditional religious audience. For if one supposed that worldly evils flow contingently rather than necessarily from God, we will probably not thereby avert the religious person's concern that God is directly responsible for it all. Necessitarianism doesn't therefore seem very relevant to the divine responsibility problem. What's more, if contingency is required for moral responsibility across the board, then it may not make sense to think of God (perhaps even as traditionally understood) as being responsible for worldly evils given that there is only one possible world that God could create. In any case, an answer here very well depends on further questions about the attributes of God, the conditions of responsibility, and the nature of moral value.

- viii. *The counterfactual problem*: the problem of how to account for the distinction between counterpossible and counterfactual conditionals.
- ix. *The problem of diversity*: the problem of how to account for the reality of finitude, change, differentiation, and diversity in the world (opposed to the world being, say, an infinitely uniform and changeless Parmenidean unity).<sup>262</sup>

Each of these problems appears insuperable if there is no contingency. And of course, there may be many other problems than those just mentioned.

Variations of the above difficulties just listed have been expressed by a range of commentators.<sup>263</sup> But few have explicitly recognized the connection between the individual difficulties just cited and the more general, subsuming line of thought that I have called the indispensability argument.<sup>264</sup> And insofar as the metaphysical difficulties go—with the exception of the problem of diversity—fewer still have attempted to develop them or seriously engage with Spinoza on the matter.<sup>265</sup>

By way of developing support of premise (1) of the indispensability argument for contingency, I will not discuss the ethical difficulties for Spinoza's necessitarianism. Instead, I will content myself with three metaphysical difficulties, namely, the essence, generalization, and

---

<sup>262</sup> There are various ways the problem of diversity is stated in the literature, but one general way to state it is as follows. If everything is necessity by virtue of the necessary activity of a single, ultimate, and infinite source (God or Nature, for Spinoza), then the conditions that generate the world and everything in it cannot admit of any differentiation, variety, or change, as those conditions must hold always and everywhere the same. To get differentiation, variety, and change, some things must be contingent (say, the free choice of a creator God to bring the world's diversity into being). If that's right, then Spinoza's necessitarianism prevents him from ultimately explaining the world's diversity.

<sup>263</sup> See, e.g., Bayle (1991, pp. 311-314); Bennett (1984, p. 114); Clarke (1998, pp. 36-38, 43-49, 51-53, 63-66, 105); Curley (1969, pp. 11-14ff, 50-55; 1973, pp. 372; 1985, p. 429); Huenemann (2018, pp. 115-116); Hume (1998, pp. 56-57); Leibniz (AG 44-46, 94-95; L 273; T 42, 168, 173, 371); Lin (2012, esp. pp. 443-445); Nadler (2006, pp. 107n22, 237-238); Newton (2004, pp. 57, 91-92); Oldenburg (Ep 74, 75, 77-79); and van Inwagen (1983, pp. 29-31, 153-161, 204).

<sup>264</sup> Nadler (2006, p. 107n22) and especially Huenemann (2018, pp. 115-116) are exceptions, as they explicitly refer to Bennett's terse version of the indispensability argument. While Lin (2012, pp. 443-445) doesn't refer to Bennett, he suggests a similar argument.

<sup>265</sup> Lin (2012, esp. pp. 443-445), so far as I know, may be the only exception.

the counterfactual problems.<sup>266</sup> Independent of the ethical difficulties' connection to the more general indispensability argument, most have received a good deal of attention from commentators in connection to determinism,<sup>267</sup> whereas the metaphysical difficulties by comparison have not (perhaps with the fairly recent exception of the problem of diversity).<sup>268</sup> What's more, I find the metaphysical difficulties to be the most pressing insofar as the tenability of Spinoza's necessitarianism is concerned. I also suspect that Spinoza's answers to the ethical difficulties cannot be thoroughly stated or appreciated without first clarifying his answers to the metaphysical difficulties.<sup>269</sup> Needless to say, addressing the ethical difficulties would constitute an undertaking far too large to conduct here, not to mention that I will have enough on my plate with three of the metaphysical difficulties.

So, by way of support for premise (1) of the indispensability argument, we have the essence problem, the generalization problem, and the counterfactual problem. I develop each by drawing on the work of Lin (2012) and others before replying to them on Spinoza's behalf.

---

<sup>266</sup> Later, I indirectly touch on and respond to the deliberation problem. This is because my answer on Spinoza's behalf to the issue of counterfactuals will, by extension, at least partially answer the deliberation problem. See also Kisner (2011, pp. 179-196) and Pereboom (2006, pp. 127-157).

<sup>267</sup> For some discussion of issues connected to the free will, moral responsibility, deliberation, and normativity problems, see Barry (2016), Carriero (2014), Curley (1973), Garrett (1996, esp. pp. 298-301), Nadler (2006, pp. 213-247, esp. 237-238; 2014), Kisner (2011, esp. pp. 57-71, 179-196), and the volume *Doing without Free Will* edited by Goldenbaum and Kluz (2015). See also Pereboom (2006, pp. 127-186) for some discussion of similar problems independent of Spinoza studies. (Of course, Spinoza notoriously and explicitly denies free will and moral responsibility to human beings so far as those concepts are ordinarily understood—see 1p17s, 1p32, 1app|G 2.81-83, and 2p48. In his view, those concepts are debilitating obstacles to living a moral life which nonetheless brings with it a kind of freedom and responsibility—see 2p49s, 3p48-49, and 5p6,9.) For some discussion of issues connected to the divine responsibility problem, see Carriero (1999), Nadler (2008), and Melamed (2013b, pp. 36-37).

<sup>268</sup> For some discussion of the essence problem, see Carriero (1991, pp. 65-74) and Garrett (1999a, pp. 112-114). For some discussion of the problem of diversity, see Nadler (2012), Melamed (2012), and Yenter (2014).

<sup>269</sup> This much is unsurprising given the geometrical order of Spinoza's *Ethics*, whose parts on ethics are explicitly founded upon his metaphysics. In correspondence with Blijenbergh as well, Spinoza writes: "Ethics... as everyone knows, must be founded on metaphysics and physics" (Ep 27|G 4.160-161). This is quite clear from the role of Spinoza's so-called physical digression (G 2.98-103) in his later ethical doctrines (see, e.g., 2lem2 in 5p4d). Cf. Descartes's preface to his *Principles of Philosophy* (CSM 1.186).

### 5.2.2 The Essence Problem

The concept of a thing's essence—of *what* a thing is—is considered indispensable for doing good philosophy.<sup>270</sup> Spinoza, however, must face the essence problem: the problem of how he could account for the distinction between essences and accidents if necessitarianism is true. Bennett and Lin respectively explain the issue as follows:

Many of Spinoza's philosophical moves are invalid if there is no contingency: for example, his uses of the concept of a thing's *essence*, meaning those of its properties which it could not possibly lack, are flattened into either falsehoods or vacuous truth if there are no contingent truths; because then every property of everything is essential to it. (Bennett, 1984, p. 114)

[One important job for which contingency is called upon to perform] is to allow for a distinction between essence and accident. If all truths are necessary, then every object has all of its properties necessarily. If things couldn't have been otherwise, then Socrates had to have a snub nose, teach Plato, and marry Xanthippe just as he had to have been a human being. (Lin, 2012, pp. 443-444)<sup>271</sup>

As both Bennett and Lin indicate, there's an important distinction to be made between a thing's essence and nonessential accidents. Namely,

$x$  is essentially  $E$  just in case  $x$  is necessarily  $E$ ;

and

$x$  is accidentally  $A$  just in case  $x$  is contingently  $A$ .

For example, while Barak Obama had *black* hair in his first term as POTUS, black hair is an accidental and not essential feature of him since he can possibly exist without it; this is evident from his *gray* hair in his second and final term. By contrast, Obama's being human is an essential and not accidental feature of him, since he couldn't possibly exist without it. But if necessitarianism is true as Spinoza claims, then the distinction between Obama's essential and accidental features collapses: all features become essential to him, and none accidental. This, in

---

<sup>270</sup> The concept of essence is thought to play a crucial role in scientific, metaphysical, ethical, and pre-philosophical thinking. See, e.g., Kripke (1980), Oderberg (2007), Plantinga (1979), and Robertson and Atkins (2016).

<sup>271</sup> Cf. Lin (2012, pp. 419-421, 433-441, 443-445).



other words, commits Spinoza to *maximal essentialism*, the disconcerting view that all the features of a thing—including those it comes to acquire or lose over time—constitute its essence.<sup>272</sup> This means that Obama’s black and gray hair in his first and second terms, respectively, are as essential to him as his being human, which is surely absurd.

### 5.2.3 The Generalization Problem

A law of nature assumes the form of a generalization (“all *F*s are *G*s”) describing regular phenomena in nature, for example, Newton’s (2004, p. 71) second law that all force equals mass times acceleration. The concept of a law of nature is considered indispensable for doing good philosophy, let alone good science.<sup>273</sup> And related to the essence problem we just saw, there is the generalization problem for Spinoza: the issue of how a necessitarian could account for the distinction between lawlike generalizations and accidental generalizations. Lin (2012) states the problem in this way:

Another important job [for contingency] is to allow for a distinction between lawlike generalizations and accidental generalizations. It is a law that electrons repel each other. It is not a law, although true, that all electrons stand in some spatio-temporal relation to Donald Trump. This distinction is often characterized in modal terms. Electrons *have to* repel each other. They *do not have to* stand in some spatio-temporal relation to Donald Trump. Trump exists only contingently. Had he not existed, then no electron would have stood in any spatio-temporal relation to him (p. 444).

Curley (1969) also seems to gesture at the problem in his renown *Spinoza’s Metaphysics* (just after proffering his semi-necessitarian interpretation of Spinoza—see chapter 4):

---

<sup>272</sup> This wouldn’t appear to be the first time Spinoza is charged with maximal essentialism. For example, in correspondence over the consequences of Spinoza’s necessitarianism expressed in DPP, Blijenbergh objects on the grounds that “nothing else pertains to an essence than what it has at that moment when it is perceived. I.e., if I have an appetite for sensual pleasure, that appetite pertains to my essence at that time, and if I have no appetite for sensual pleasure, then that lack of appetite pertains to my essence at the time when I lack that appetite.” (Ep 22|G 4.137). See also Ep 21 (G 4.128-129). For some discussion of maximal essentialism, see Robertson and Atkins (2016, §3).

<sup>273</sup> Laws of nature are frequently said to play a vital role in scientific explanations. See, e.g., Ruben (1993) and Carroll (2016).

The defining characteristic of nomological [i.e., lawlike] propositions is their strict universality. But there is another characteristic which follows from this: that they are necessarily true, that they could not have been otherwise. Only necessary propositions are true without spatial or temporal limitations. Necessity and strict universality are indissolubly linked. So nomological generalizations are, and accidental generalizations are not, necessary truths. (p. 51)

As both Lin and Curley indicate, there's an important distinction to be made between generalizations that genuinely hold as *bona fide* laws of nature and generalizations that hold accidentally. Namely:

*L* is lawlike generalization over some class of members *C* just in case *L* holds for *C* necessarily;

whereas

*A* is an accidental generalization over some class of members *C* just in case *A* holds for *C* contingently.

But like we saw before: without contingency the distinction evaporates. To reiterate Lin's example, the generalization that electrons repel each other is lawlike because it holds necessarily for all members of the class of electrons. But that electrons stand in some spatio-temporal relation to Trump is not a lawlike generalization; it's an accidental one because it holds contingently among all electrons in relation to Trump, who could have failed to exist. However, if Spinoza's necessitarianism is true, this distinction collapses: all true generalizations are lawlike, and none are accidental. This means that the generalization that electrons stand in some spatio-temporal relation to Trump is no less lawlike than that electrons repel each other, which is, again, absurd.

#### 5.2.4 The Counterfactual Problem

Reasoning about what *would* be the case if some contrary-to-fact situation *were* the case is considered to be indispensable for doing good philosophy.<sup>274</sup> But this raises the counterfactual

---

<sup>274</sup> See, e.g., Starr (2019, esp. §1). In a discussion not far removed from necessitarianism, Curley also writes that "any [satisfactory theory] must assign to counterfactuals truth conditions according to which a counterfactual will be true

problem: the problem of how a necessitarian like Spinoza could account for the distinction between counterpossible conditionals on the one hand, and counterfactual conditionals that feature so pervasively in reasoning on the other. Lin (2012) expresses the problem in this way:

Another important job [for contingency] is to allow for counterfactual reasoning. If the actual world were the only possible world, then all propositions that were counterfactual would also be counterpossible. But surely it makes sense to reason about what would be the case if I had taken a certain dose of cyanide. If all contrary to fact situations were impossible, to ask what would be the case if I had taken a certain dose of cyanide, the objection goes, would make as little sense as asking what would be the case if I were a prime number. (p. 445)

As Lin's examples nicely illustrate, counterpossible conditionals state what *would* be the case if some contrary-to-fact situation (which strictly *could not* be the case) *were* the case. By contrast, counterfactual conditionals state what *would* be the case if some contrary-to-fact situation (which *could* be the case) *were* the case.<sup>275</sup> In this way, counterpossible reasoning and not counterfactual reasoning fails to track nonactual possibilities, and as such the former and not the latter fails to be a coherent form of reasoning. This explains why it makes sense to reason about what would be the case if I (a human being) took a certain (presumably lethal) dose of cyanide: it successfully tracks possible worlds apart from the actual in which I die due to a lethal dose of cyanide. This also explains why it makes no sense to reason about what would be the case if I were a prime number (or an acorn, or a lava lamp, or whatever): it fails to track what is possible at all.<sup>276</sup>

---

only if it holds in some possible but non-actual worlds" (Curley, 1985, p. 429). I suspect that Curley would be sympathetic to the counterfactual problem just as he would of the generalization problem.

<sup>275</sup> According to the popular Lewis-Stalnaker analysis, when such a counterfactual is issued in the actual world, it is true when the most similar possible world in which its consequent is true is also one in which its antecedent is true (see, e.g., Lewis, 1979). In other words, a counterfactual conditional is true (on this view) when its consequent holds in the nearest unactual possible world in which the antecedent holds. By contrast, a counterpossible conditional is one whose antecedent fails to be true in any possible world, and is thus impossible.

<sup>276</sup> Contrary to Lin's intimation, however, it doesn't seem obvious that counterpossible reasoning is without sense (that is, without semantic content, presumably), or involves conditionals that are trivially true or uninformative (see, e.g., Berto & Jago, 2018; Tan, 2019). For example, in asking what would be the case if one were a prime number, it may make some sense to infer that one would be neither human, nor a concrete object, nor an even integer, etc.

As Lin indicates, there's an important distinction to be made between conditionals that are counterpossible and those that are counterfactual. Namely:

a conditional *C* is counterpossible just in case *C* is necessarily false (i.e., just in case *C* holds in no possible world),

whereas

a conditional *C* is counterfactual just in case *C* is contingently false (i.e., just in case *C* holds in at least some possible but non-actual world).

But if Spinoza's necessitarianism is true, no distinction between counterpossibles and counterfactuals can be made. There are neither nonactual possible worlds nor contingent falsehoods, and so the above distinction collapses: every counterfactual is counterpossible since every falsehood is necessarily false, and none are contingently false.<sup>277</sup> Consequently, counterfactual reasoning is incoherent within a necessitarian framework.<sup>278</sup> For similar reasons, Oberto Marrama (2016) has concluded: "There is no place for such things as non-contradictory ideas of counterfactuals within Spinoza's system: counterfactuals have neither any ontological reality, nor any logical coherency. In short, counterfactuals are out-and-out contradictory ideas." (p. 367)

---

<sup>277</sup> A tempting thought here might be that if the laws of nature tell us what happens whenever certain circumstances obtain, couldn't laws assist Spinoza in accounting for counterfactual reasoning? Alas, it is difficult to see how this is much help in a necessitarian framework given what we've seen from the generalization problem. If so, this route is unavailable to Spinoza on account of his necessitarianism. For similar reasons, as we've seen, Curley (1969) observes that "nomological [lawlike] generalizations do, though accidental generalizations do not, support counterfactual inference" (p. 51).

<sup>278</sup> Related to the above ontological concerns with counterfactuals, Richard Mason suggests that the related semantic concern (also echoed above by Lin) is an inadvertent consequence of Spinoza's necessitarianism. He speculates that Spinoza's approach to modality would not have included an attempt to deny counterfactuals semantic content or truth conditions, but rather that, "[i]n so far as he could be said to have any contact with this sort of approach then it could only be to deny that that the conditions suggested by counterfactuals could ever obtain" (Mason, 1986, p. 322).

### 5.2.5 The Absurdity of Necessitarianism?

Recall the indispensability argument for contingency (§5.2.1). The basic contention is that Spinoza's necessitarianism entails the loss of indispensable philosophical concepts that only contingency can afford (premise 1), and that if this is so, then Spinoza's necessitarianism is absurd (premise 2). Considering the three problems we've just seen, the first premise appears well supported. The essence, generalization, and counterfactual problems each call attention to a different indispensable philosophical distinction that is lost if Spinoza's necessitarianism is true because only contingency can afford those distinctions. Thus, granted the second premise, it follows that Spinoza's necessitarianism is indeed absurd, as the consensus view holds.

But matters appear even worse for Spinoza: he is arguably committed to at least some of the very indispensable distinctions that pose the foregoing problems. Bennett (1984, pp. 67-68, 114), for example, has pointed out that Spinoza presupposes a distinction between essential and nonessential features of things in some of the most important doctrines of the *Ethics*, such as substance monism (see 1p5d and 1p14d) and the *conatus* (see 3p4-8).<sup>279</sup> Spinoza likewise presupposes counterfactuals, for instance, when he makes his case for the Hobbesian thesis that justice and injustice are only intelligible in the context of a civil state: "If men *lived* [*viverent*] according to the guidance of reason [in the state of nature], everyone *would possess* [*potiretur*] this right of his [to strive uninhibited] (by 4p35c1) without any injury to anyone else" (4p37s2|G 2.237; emphasis added).<sup>280</sup> Thus, addressing the issues raised by the indispensability argument

---

<sup>279</sup> Additionally, one distinction in Spinoza's epistemology between *intuition* and *reason* is that the former is adequate cognition of things' essences, whereas the latter is adequate cognition of things' nonessential features (2p40s2). Spinoza also occasionally speaks of the error of philosophers who, when attempting to construct a good definition of a thing, mistake its non-essential features for its essential ones (TdIE 95-96, Ep 60, 3da4exp).

<sup>280</sup> Also consider a passage from Spinoza's "letter on the infinite", in which he explains that there are crucial distinctions regarding the concept of the infinite that philosophers have failed to observe, leading them into confusion: "If they *had* attended to these distinctions, I maintain that they *would* never have been overwhelmed by such a great crowd of difficulties. For then they *would* have understood clearly..." (Ep 12|G 4.53.10ff; emphasis added)

appears especially urgent for Spinoza, since they threaten his philosophical system with widespread incoherence.<sup>281</sup>

### 5.3 Reply to the Indispensability Argument for Contingency

However hopeless Spinoza's necessitarianism might appear at this point, I'm not quite convinced. Each of the three problems posed to him assume that the relevant distinctions are to be drawn on orthodox modal grounds via necessity and contingency. But that isn't the only way to do it. I maintain that Spinoza's essentialism supplies him the resources to reply to the foregoing problems and preserve their respective distinctions without contingency. In that case, Spinoza can reject premise (1) of the indispensability argument as things stands.

#### 5.3.1 Reply to the Essence Problem

In order to answer the essence problem, we need to recap Spinoza's views on essences. As I argued in chapter 1, Spinoza accepts a form of *essentialism* that is rooted in a tradition tracing back to scholastics and Aristotle, consisting of a tripartite distinction between essence, proprium ("property"), and accident. The *essence* (or equivalently, *nature*) of a thing, *x*, is what makes *x* the thing it is. What this amounts to is clarified in light of the notion of a definition of *x*. In the most philosophically significant sense of the term, a definition of *x* captures and explains the essence of *x alone*, and therefore excludes any of *x*'s *derivative* features that follow from *x* as a consequence of *x*'s ontologically prior essence. This reveals that the essence of *x* consists in *x*'s *fundamental*

---

<sup>281</sup> Because the preoccupation with the distinction between lawlike and accidental generalizations seems to be a fairly recent one in the history of philosophy, it is unsurprising that there isn't much to go on textually by way of Spinoza's commitment to the distinction. Nonetheless, I suspect he would be so committed. For Spinoza, it is a law of nature that "a body which strikes against another lesser body loses as much of its motion as it communicates to the other body" (TTP 4.2). But he would presumably deny that it is a law of nature, although true (say), that all the objects in Amsterdam are less than two miles in diameter. Cf. Curley (1969, pp. 45-81).

features: the core characteristics of  $x$  that do *not* follow from any other (ontologically prior) features of  $x$ . By contrast, the propria of  $x$  are derivative features that  $x$  has solely by virtue of  $x$ 's fundamental features. So,  $x$ 's propria are nonessential features of  $x$  that follow adequately from  $x$ 's essence alone. Then there are accidents. These are non-essential features of  $x$  that do *not* follow adequately from the essence of  $x$  alone, but only partially so. This is because the accidents of  $x$  follow from the essence of  $x$  only together with the contribution of other things outside of  $x$ . Thereby accidents are also derivative features of  $x$ , but possessed by virtue of both  $x$ 's own fundamental features and the features of things external to and independent of  $x$ 's essence.

Spinoza also glosses his essentialism in a couple ways that I referred to in chapter 1 as *conceptual essentialism* and *dynamic essentialism*. Conceptual essentialism highlights the *explanatory* aspect of essences and the way in which the concepts of things' essences adequately explain phenomena in nature. By contrast, dynamic essentialism highlights the *causal* aspect of essences *qua* intrinsic powers, or strivings, and the way in which they adequately produce phenomena in nature. Solely from the intrinsic power that characterizes  $x$ 's essence, propria follow from  $x$  just as effects flow or emanate from their adequate efficient causes.

Now, recall the essence problem: the problem of how a necessitarian like Spinoza could possibly distinguish between essences and accidents. However, following his essentialism, and *despite* his necessitarianism, Spinoza can distinguish between essences and accidents, or more generally, between essential and non-essential features of things. To wit:

$x$  is essentially  $E$  just in case  $E$  is that by virtue of which  $x$  is (fundamentally) the thing that it is,

$x$  is properly  $P$  (or has a proprium  $P$ ) just in case  $x$  is (derivatively)  $P$  by virtue of the essence of  $x$  alone, and

$x$  is accidentally  $A$  just in case  $x$  is (derivatively)  $A$  by virtue of both the essence of  $x$  and some  $y$  external to and independent of the essence of  $x$ .<sup>282</sup>

Spinoza distinguishes the essential and non-essential features of a thing *not* based on the distinction between its necessary and contingent features but based on the distinction between the fundamental and derivative features of a thing in conceptual or dynamic terms. He then distinguishes the non-essential features of a thing—its *propria* and accidents—based on the locus of their proximate explanation or cause—that is, on whether the total source of a thing’s derivative features is or is not the thing’s own essence.

To illustrate all of this and to see how it avoids the essence problem, we may fill in Spinoza’s tripartite essentialist distinction in terms of the example from §5.2.2 regarding Obama’s essential and non-essential features. In dynamic essentialist terms, the essence of Obama *qua* human being consists in a certain power or striving.<sup>283</sup> For illustration purposes, we might put a familiar Aristotelian-scholastic spin on Obama’s essence and say it consists in something approximating *rational animality* when his striving is related to the body and mind together (3p9s, 3da1):<sup>284</sup> *animality* insofar as Obama’s human essence in the attribute of extension is an organic body striving to preserve its ratio of motion and rest (see the excursus on physics after 2p13s, G 2.97-103); and *rationality* insofar as Obama’s human essence in the attribute of thought is the idea

---

<sup>282</sup> In other words:  $x$  is essentially  $E$  just in case (i)  $E$  is a feature of  $x$  and (ii)  $E$  does not follow from any feature  $F$  of  $x$  such that  $F$  is explanatorily or causally prior to  $E$ ;  $x$  is properly  $P$  just in case (i)  $P$  is a feature of  $x$  and (ii)  $P$  follows from some (explanatorily or causally prior) essential feature  $E$  of  $x$  alone; and  $x$  is accidentally  $A$  just in case (i)  $A$  is a feature of  $x$ , (ii)  $A$  follows both from some (explanatorily or causally prior) feature  $F$  of  $x$  and from some  $y$  that is external to and independent of  $x$ .

<sup>283</sup> Be that as it may, Spinoza offers his readers a rather dizzying array of rough equivalences to explain or refer to the human essence—either *simpliciter*, or in relation to actual being, or to the mind alone, or to the body alone, or to both the mind and body together: e.g., as a ratio of motion and rest (G 2.97-103 after 2p13), as will or intellect (3p9s, 2p49c), as striving or power or preservation in being (3p6-7), as appetite or desire (3p9s, 3da1), as virtue (4d8), as understanding (4p26d), or as reason (4p35c1, 4p36s). This is to name but a few.

<sup>284</sup> This is of course not to say that the Aristotelian-scholastic notion of the human essence, and all the metaphysical baggage that comes with it, can be mapped squarely onto Spinoza’s metaphysics. My choice of example is primarily for illustrating Spinoza’s view with a familiar Aristotelian-scholastic example. Nothing important hangs on whether Spinoza’s notion of the human essence approximates the traditional Aristotelian-scholastic one (cf. 2p40s1).



of his body, a mental striving to preserve its intellectual ability for forming adequate ideas (see 2p15, 4p35c1, 4p36s).<sup>285</sup> It is a proprium of Obama that he is *risible*, that is, capable of laughter at humor. As such, risibility is a feature of Obama by virtue of his essence alone, but it doesn't determine what Obama is. Risibility isn't fundamental enough to qualify as essential because it derives from deeper features of Obama's human essence, namely, his animal capacity for vocalizing laughter accompanied by his rational capacity for understanding the punch line of a joke.

In a similar way, the derivative status of Obama's hair color reveals that it is accidental to him. Since Obama's rational animality, and not his hair color, is fundamentally that by virtue of which Obama is what he is, hair color cannot be among his fundamental features that constitute his essence. So, Obama's black and gray hair of his first and second terms, respectively, are non-essential features of him. Like Obama's proprium of risibility, his hair color depends on his essence. But unlike risibility, his hair color doesn't depend entirely on his essence alone. This is why Obama's hair color is an accident of him: it is a feature he has *partially* as a result of his essence and *partially* as a result of factors external to and independent of his essence. The partial contribution to Obama's gray hair from his essence may be from, say, his genetic code or the fact that humans are mammals; and the partial contribution to his gray hair from outside factors may be from, say, Obama's diet, age, and the draining psycho-physical stresses that accompany being a U.S. President.<sup>286</sup>

---

<sup>285</sup> Hübner (2014, pp. 131-132, 140) makes a convincing case for thinking the essence of human beings, related to the mind, is *reason*, or more precisely, a power to produce adequate ideas by reasoning, culminating in intuition. I would also add in support of this that Spinoza identifies the essence of the human mind with *will* (3p9s), which he takes to be the same as *intellect*, *reason*, and *rational understanding* (see 2p49c, 4app4, 4p26d, cf. 1p17s, 1p31; TTP 4.23-28|G 3.62.27-63.33).

<sup>286</sup> What's more, since finite things exist in a complex network of interactive causes wherein some things begin to exist and others cease to exist, accidents are liable to change when certain causes are present or absent. So, while Spinoza's necessitarianism implies that Obama's hair color is necessary, it does not imply that such accidents are invariable or incompatible with diachronic change. Rather, Obama's black and gray hair across his first and second

So, the fact that Obama (or anything else for that matter) has all his features necessarily doesn't subtract from whether there's a distinction between his essential and non-essential features. In this way, we can see that the essence problem posed above assumes that the only viable account on offer is *modal essentialism* (as I'll call it), in which  $x$ 's essential and non-essential features are distinguished according to whether  $x$  has those features necessarily or contingently, respectively. Provided this assumption, it's no wonder that Spinoza looked guilty of the maximal essentialist charge that all the features of things must be essential to them. But modal essentialism isn't the only essentialist game in town.<sup>287</sup> In fact, to presume so seems to straightforwardly beg the question against Spinoza (not to mention Aristotelians and scholastics!), who distinguishes things' essential and non-essential features by virtue of their intrinsic and/or extrinsic source, not modal status. The essence problem, therefore, does not seem to be a problem for Spinoza after all.

### 5.3.2 Reply to the Generalization Problem

In order to answer the generalization problem (§5.2.3), recall Spinoza's views on laws of nature. As I argued in chapter 2, Spinoza takes laws of nature to be eternal and necessary truths expressing natural necessities that are grounded in things' natures. That is, laws report what must always be the case by virtue of things' essences, whether the essence in question unique to either some particular individual, an entire class of individuals, or a subclass of individuals. I also argued that the objects of the laws are features or effects that follow from one or more things' essences. In that case—given the categories of Spinoza's essentialism—such objects can only be *propria*, accidents, or combinations/permutations thereof, which follow in things from either one essence alone

---

terms, respectively, are necessary for the duration that Obama stands in relation to the relevant causes. In such a case, then, it is necessary that  $x$  is accidentally  $A$  and not- $B$  for an interval of time  $t^1$  to  $t^2$ , and necessary that  $x$  is not- $A$  and  $B$  from  $t^2$  to  $t^3$ , etc. On this, see chapter 2 (§§2.2.1-2.2.2) and chapter 3 (§3.2.3).

<sup>287</sup> In fact, some would say that modal essentialism is not even *a way* to genuinely distinguish essences and accidents. The most well-known case for this seems to be Fine (1994). See also Fine (1995); Koslicki (2011); and Vetter (2011).

(propria) or together with the operations of multiple essences (accidents). What's more, since everything admits of an essence, the laws not only include generalizations expressing regularities in nature but cover everything without exception—applying every-where and every-when things' natures and operations are instantiated. In the language of the *Treatise on the Intellect*, the laws are “inscribed in” things' essences, “as in their true codes” (TdIE 85, 101).

Now recall the generalization problem: the problem of how a necessitarian like Spinoza can account for the distinction between lawlike generalizations and accidental generalizations without appeal to modal notions of necessity and contingency, respectively. However, regardless of the fact that all true generalizations are necessary, Spinoza's conception of laws allows him to address the generalization problem. Since laws of nature are grounded in things' essences, which in turn explain or cause the phenomena described by the laws. This supplies a basis for determining which true generalizations are lawlike and which are accidental. Lawlike generalizations differ from accidental generalizations along the same lines by which a *proprium* differs from an *accident*, or by which an *adequate* cause differs from a *partial* cause.<sup>288</sup> To wit, Spinoza may say:

*L* is a lawlike generalization over some class of members *C* just in case *L* holds by virtue of essences of *C*,

whereas

*A* is an accidental generalization over some class of members *C* just in case *A* does *not* hold by virtue of essences of *C*.<sup>289</sup>

---

<sup>288</sup> In terms of distinctions introduced earlier, lawlike generalizations differ from accidental generalization along the same lines by which *acting* differs from *being acted on* (see ch. 1, §1.3.3) or that *being deduced from the laws of a thing's nature alone* differs from *not being deduced from the laws of a thing's nature alone*, namely, because doing so requires additional laws of some other thing's nature (see ch. 2, §2.3).

<sup>289</sup> In other words, *L* is a lawlike generalization just in case *L* is a generalization of the form “all *F*s are *G*s” and *L* holds by virtue that the *G*s follow from the essences of the *F*s, whereas *A* is an accidental generalization just in case *A* is a generalization of the form “all *F*s are *G*s” and *A* does *not* hold by virtue that the *G*s follow from the essences of the *F*s.

Because the members of *C* reported by *L* include those essences by virtue of which the generalization holds, the essences of *C* adequately explain the phenomena described by *L*. By contrast, the members of *C* reported by *A* do *not* adequately explain the phenomena described by *A*. This is because *A* fails to include those essences in *C* by virtue of which the generalization holds. In this case the essences from which the phenomena adequately follow, as described by *A*, reside outside *C*.

To illustrate this, recall Lin's examples of electrons and Trump. To be sure, the generalization that electrons repel each other is lawlike. On Spinoza's account, this is not because it is a necessary truth. Rather, it's because the repulsion follows from, or is adequately explained by the essences of electrons; the repulsion obtains by virtue of electrons' internal structural features, such as their negative charge. And to be sure, it's also an accidental generalization that electrons stand in some spatiotemporal relation to Trump. On Spinoza's account, this is not because it is a contingent truth, but because neither the essences of electrons nor the essence of Trump adequately explains the spatiotemporal relation that electrons stand in to Trump. To adequately explain the spatiotemporal relation that electrons stand in to Trump, one would have to look outside of both the essences of electrons and Trump. And to do that, one would have to invoke a generalization whose scope or cited class of members is wide enough to capture just those additional essences from which that very spatiotemporal relation adequately follows, thus making such a generalization lawlike.<sup>290</sup>

---

<sup>290</sup> There may also be some reason to doubt the sufficiency of the modal account that distinguishes laws of nature from accidental generalizations by their necessity and contingency, respectively. If *L* is a lawlike generalization over some class of members *C* just in case *L* holds necessarily, then suppose *L* is "if blue is a color, then 2 is a number", which is necessarily the case given the truth conditions for conditionals. This seems insufficient because, while the generalization holds necessarily, the antecedent and consequent of *L* are irrelevant: they have nothing to do with each other on any sort of explanatory or causal level. *L* does not therefore seem to be a genuine law of nature in this case, but rather seems more on a par with an accidental generalization. And this is so *despite* *L*'s being necessarily true. (This is not to mention that *L* fails to be a genuine law of nature according to Spinoza's account, due to *L* failing to capture the relevant explanatory or causal relata with respect to some essence.)

Despite both lawlike and accidental generalizations being necessary as a result of Spinoza's necessitarianism, it seems he can nonetheless distinguish between such generalizations. In that case, the generalization problem is no problem for Spinoza after all.

### 5.3.3 Reply to the Counterfactual Problem

Like the replies I offered on Spinoza's behalf to the essence and generalization problems, I believe that Spinoza's essentialism also grounds modality, and that this allows him to explain counterfactuals without appeal to contingency. But first, we need to recap some features of Spinoza's modal metaphysics. As I explained in chapter 3, Spinoza bifurcates the metaphysical modalities along lines of his distinction between *essence* and *existence* (see also ch. 1, §1.3.2). The most significant result of this is that it effectively provides Spinoza a notion of possibility *with respect to essence*, in contrast to the notion of possibility *with respect to existence* (or *cause of existence*). Of course, since Spinoza is a necessitarian, whatever is possible is also necessary and otherwise impossible. But because of the two respects in which things may be possible, some things may be possible with respect to essence even if they are impossible with respect to existence. In fact, I argued for this modal asymmetry in chapter 3 (§§3.3-3.4), on the basis that the scope of finite modes' essence is wider than the scope of their existence (i.e., there is no 1-1 correspondence between the essence and existence of every finite mode). And it is with these resources at his disposal, I believe Spinoza can effectively respond to the counterfactual problem.

To see this, we need to spell out the relevant modal nuances as I previously explained them. First there is what I referred to as *intrinsic possibility*, either *narrowly* conceived with respect to the essence of a thing alone, or *broadly* conceived with respect to a collection of two or more essences of things in a certain relation. In the narrow case, a thing *x* is intrinsically possible just in case no essential feature of *x* is incompatible with any other essential feature of *x*, i.e., just in case

the essence of  $x$  is internally coherent. And in the broad case, the collection consisting of the essences of  $x$  and  $y$  (etc.) is intrinsically possible just in case no essential feature of either  $x$  or  $y$  is incompatible with any other essential feature of  $x$  or  $y$ , i.e., just in case the collection consisting of the essences of  $x$  and  $y$  is internally coherent.

Consequently, if something fails to be intrinsically possible—conceived either narrowly or broadly—then it is *intrinsically impossible*—and not just impossible with respect to essence because of its internally incoherent features, but also impossible with respect to existence because, as I previously explained, intrinsic possibility is a condition of existence (ch. 3, §3.3.2; see also ch. 1, §1.3.2). However, some cannot exist despite being intrinsically possible. When this is the case, there is an extrinsic cause that prevents the thing's existence—a cause that ultimately stems from the necessity of the divine nature. This is to say that  $x$ 's existence is *extrinsically impossible* just in case  $x$  is intrinsically possible but extrinsically caused to not exist (and ultimately by God).

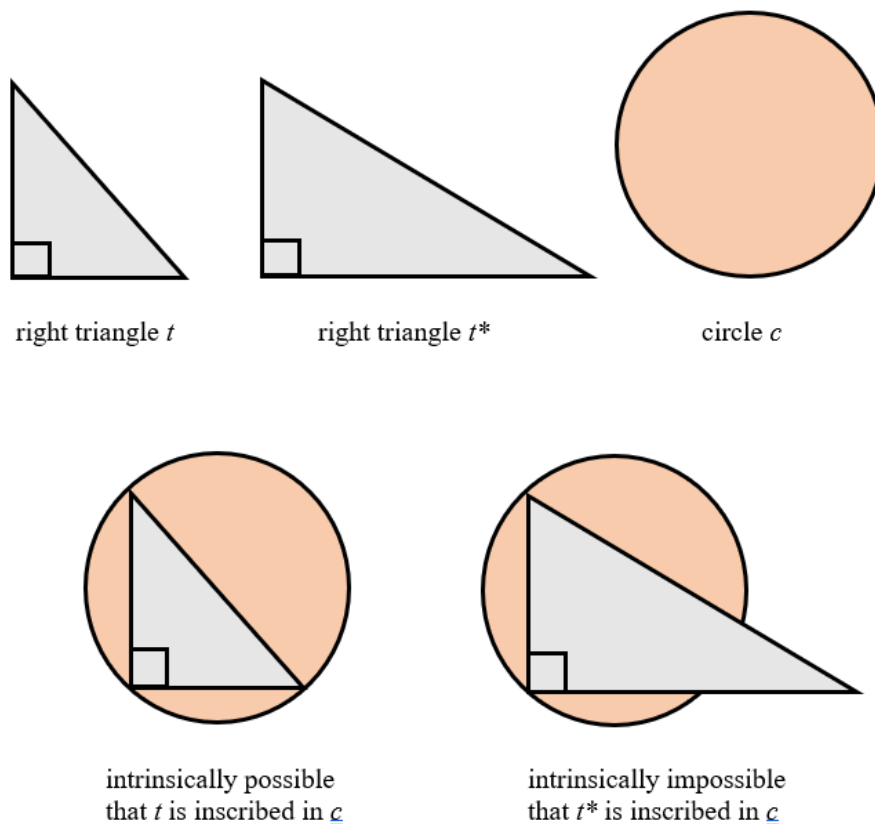


Figure 2. An illustration of intrinsic possibility and intrinsic impossibility.

Figure 2 is a Spinozistic illustration of all this. Consider two intrinsically possible geometrical figures: a circle  $c$  and a right triangle  $t$ . Further suppose that the hypotenuse of  $t$  is equal to the diameter of  $c$ . It is then intrinsically possible that  $t$  is inscribed in  $c$  because the essential features of  $t$  and  $c$  are not incompatible or mutually excluding of each other. Or more exactly,  $t$  and  $c$  are *narrowly* intrinsically possible as individuals, and *broadly* intrinsically possible as a collection in which  $t$  is inscribed in  $c$ . This result holds even if the essences of  $t$  and  $c$  fail to be instantiated in the way I described, which is significant: for unless the inscription of  $t$  in  $c$  is instantiated, then the instantiation of the scenario I just described is *extrinsically impossible* and

cannot be otherwise of metaphysical necessity. Yet, despite its impossible existence, it remains intrinsically possible that  $t$  is inscribed in  $c$ .

Now consider another right triangle  $t^*$  whose hypotenuse exceeds the diameter of  $c$ . Then it fails to be intrinsically possible that  $t^*$  is inscribed in  $c$ , because the essential features of  $t^*$  and  $c$  are jointly incompatible or mutually excluding of each other. The scenario is *intrinsically impossible* and cannot be otherwise of metaphysical necessity.

The notions of intrinsic possibility and intrinsic impossibility respectively indicate the way in which a thing's possibility and impossibility depends only on the internal structure of its essence, even apart from whether the thing exists, or even whether the thing can exist. Together, I believe that the notions provide Spinoza the resources he needs to answer the counterfactual problem despite his necessitarianism, and consistently so with his modal metaphysics. Namely, we may say:

a conditional  $C$  is counterpossible just in case  $C$  is false and intrinsically impossible, i.e.,  $C$  is false and the essences reported by  $C$  involve a contradiction,

whereas

a conditional  $C$  is counterfactual just in case  $C$  is false and intrinsically compossible, i.e.,  $C$  is false and the essences reported by  $C$  involve no contradiction.

Continuing the above geometrical example, take the following conditional:

(B\*) If right triangle  $t^*$  were inscribed in circle  $c$ , then the hypotenuse of  $t^*$  would be equal to the diameter of  $c$ .

Conditional B\* is *counterpossible* because it is false—the scenario is not instantiated—and the essential features of the things it reports are internally inconsistent and mutually excluding of each other. But now suppose B, which is just like B\* except that  $t^*$  is replaced for  $t$  even though this is not the case. Then conditional B is *counterfactual* because it is false—the scenario is not instantiated (or so we should suppose)—and the essences it reports are internally consistent and mutually coherent.



Here, both conditionals are non-actual, as they must be on necessitarianism. But just because a conditional is necessarily false doesn't mean a distinction can't be drawn between counterpossibles and counterfactuals. That a conditional is intrinsically possible or not seems sufficient to draw the distinction, and by extension, to account for counterfactual reasoning so far as the counterfactual problem is concerned.<sup>291</sup>

#### 5.4 Conclusion

The indispensability argument for contingency seems to be one of the best justifications of the consensus view that Spinoza's necessitarianism is tremendously implausible. Three considerations have been offered in support of the argument's first premise (that necessitarianism entails the loss of indispensable philosophical distinctions that only contingency can afford), namely, the essence, generalization, and counterfactual problems. However, if I've been successful, Spinoza has adequate resources to respond to each of the three considered problems facing his necessitarianism, and thus to reject premise (1) of the indispensability argument as things stand. Spinoza's necessitarianism may thus not be as implausible as commentators have assumed. Indeed, Spinoza might wonder how it could possibly be any other way.

---

<sup>291</sup> The distinction may also explain why, granted contingency, many metaphysically *per impossibile* conditionals are still informative: they state something that is at least intrinsically possible.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, R. M. (1994). *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*. Oxford University Press.
- Alexander, D. (2008). The Recent Revival of Cosmological Arguments. *Philosophy Compass*, 3(3), 541–550.
- Barry, G. (2016). Spinoza and the Feeling of Freedom. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 1-15. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2015.1129632>
- Bayle, P. (1991). *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. (R. H. Popkin, Trans.) Hackett Publishing Company.
- Bennett, J. (1984). *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*. Hackett Publishing Company.
- Bennett, J. (1996). Spinoza's Metaphysics. In D. Garrett (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (pp. 61-88). Cambridge University Press.
- Berto, F., & Jago, M. (2018). Impossible Worlds. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 ed.). (E. N. Zalta, Ed.) Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/impossible-worlds/>
- Bird, A. (2005a). The Dispositionalist Conception of Laws. *Foundations of Science*, 10(4), 353-370.
- Bird, A. (2005b). Laws and Essences . *Ratio*, 18(4), 437–461.
- Brandau, J. (2015). Degrees of Essence and Perfection in Spinoza. In Y. Y. Melamed (Ed.), *The Young Spinoza: A Metaphysician in the Making* (pp. 300-318). Oxford University Press.
- Carriero, J. (1991). Spinoza's Views on Necessity in Historical Perspective. *Philosophical Topics*, 19(1), 47-96.
- Carriero, J. (1999). On the Relationship Between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics. In D. Pereboom (Ed.), *The Rationalists: Critical Essays on Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz* (pp. 131-163). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Carriero, J. (2014). The Ethics of Spinoza's Ethics. In M. J. Kisner, & A. Youpa (Eds.), *Essays on Spinoza's Ethical Theory* (pp. 20-40). Oxford University Press.
- Carroll, J. W. (2016). Laws of Nature. (E. N. Zalta, Ed.) The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved from The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/laws-of-nature/>

- Carroll, J. W. (2016). Laws of Nature. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*(Fall 2016 ed.). (E. N. Zalta, Ed.) Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/laws-of-nature/>
- Choi, S., & Fara, M. (2018). Dispositions. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*(Fall 2018 ed.). (E. N. Zalta, Ed.) Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/dispositions/>
- Clarke, S. (1998). *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*. (E. Vailati, Ed.) Cambridge University Press.
- Cohen, S. M. (2016). Aristotle's Metaphysics. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*(Winter 2016 ed.). (E. N. Zalta, Ed.) Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/>
- Cover, J. A., & O'Leary-Hawthorne, J. (1999). *Substance and Individuation in Leibniz*. Cambridge University Press.
- Curley, E. (1969). *Spinoza's Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation*. Harvard University Press.
- Curley, E. (1973). Spinoza's Moral Philosophy. In M. Grene (Ed.), *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays* (pp. 354-376). University of Notre Dame Press.
- Curley, E. (1985). Spinoza on Miracles. In E. Giancotti (Ed.), *Proceedings of the First Italian International Congress on Spinoza* (pp. 421-438). Bibliopolis.
- Curley, E. (1988). *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics*. Princeton University Press.
- Curley, E. (1990). Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece (II): The Theological-Political Treatise as a Prolegomenon to the Ethics." In J. A. Cover, & M. Kulstad (Eds.), *Central Themes in Early Modern Philosophy* (pp. 109-159). Hackett Publishing Company.
- Curley, E. (2019). Spinoza's Metaphysics Revisited. In J. Stetter, & C. Ramond (Eds.), *Spinoza in Twenty-First-Century American and French Philosophy: Metaphysics, Philosophy of Mind, Moral and Political Philosophy* (pp. 3-51). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Curley, E., & Walski, G. (1999). Spinoza's Necessitarianism Reconsidered. In R. J. Gennaro, & C. Huenemann (Eds.), *New Essays on the Rationalists* (pp. 241-262). Oxford University Press.
- Dasgupta, S. (2016). Metaphysical Rationalism. *Nous*, 50(2), 379–418.
- Delahunty, R. J. (1985). *Spinoza*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- Della Rocca, M. (1996a). *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*. Oxford University Press.
- Della Rocca, M. (1996b). Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology. In D. Garrett (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (pp. 192-266). Cambridge University Press.
- Della Rocca, M. (2002). Spinoza's Substance Monism. In O. Koistinen, & J. Biro (Eds.), *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes* (pp. 11-37). Oxford University Press.
- Della Rocca, M. (2003). A Rationalist Manifesto: Spinoza and the Principle of Sufficient Reason. *Philosophical Topics*, 31(1 & 2), 75-93.
- Della Rocca, M. (2008). *Spinoza*. Routledge.
- Della Rocca, M. (2010). PSR. *Philosopher's Imprint*, 10(7), 1-13.
- Della Rocca, M. (2012). Rationalism, Idealism, Monism, and Beyond. In E. Förster, & Y. Melamed (Eds.), *Spinoza and German Idealism* (pp. 7-26). Cambridge University Press.
- Des Chene, D. (1996). *Physiologia: Natural Philosophy in Late Aristotelian and Cartesian Thought*. Cornell University Press.
- di Poppa, F. (2013). Spinoza on Causation and Power. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 51(3), 297-319.
- Donagan, A. (1973). Spinoza's Proof of Immortality. In M. Grene (Ed.), *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays* (pp. 241-258). University of Notre Dame Press.
- Donagan, A. (1988). *Spinoza*. Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Doppelt, T. (2018). *Spinoza's Ethics 2.0*. Retrieved July 2, 2021, from <https://ethics.spinozism.org/>
- Fine, K. (1994). Essence and Modality. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 8, 1-16.
- Fine, K. (1995). XIV—Ontological Dependence. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 95(1), 269-290.
- Förster, E., & Melamed, Y. (Eds.). (2012). *Spinoza and German Idealism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gale, R. M., & Pruss, A. R. (1999). A New Cosmological Argument. *Religious Studies*, 35, 461–476.
- Garrett, D. (1979). Spinoza's "Ontological" Argument. *The Philosophical Review*, 88(2), 198-223.

- Garrett, D. (1990). Ethics IP5: Shared Attributes and the Basis of Spinoza's Monism. In J. Cover, & M. Kulstad (Eds.), *Central Themes in Early Modern Philosophy* (pp. 69-107). Hackett Publishing Company.
- Garrett, D. (1996). Spinoza's Ethical Theory. In D. Garrett (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (pp. 267-314). Cambridge University Press.
- Garrett, D. (1999a). Spinoza's Necessitarianism. In D. Pereboom (Ed.), *The Rationalists: Critical Essays on Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz* (pp. 103-130). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Garrett, D. (1999b). Teleology in Spinoza and Early Modern Rationalism. In R. J. Gennaro, & C. Huenemann (Eds.), *New Essays on the Rationalists* (pp. 310-335). Oxford University Press.
- Garrett, D. (2002). Spinoza's Conatus Argument. In O. Koistinen, & J. Biro (Eds.), *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes* (pp. 127-158). Oxford University Press.
- Garrett, D. (2009). Spinoza on the Essence of the Human Body and the Part of the Mind that is Eternal. In O. Koistinen (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics* (pp. 284-302). Cambridge University Press.
- Garrett, D. (2010). Spinoza's Theory of Scientia Intuitiva. In T. Sorell, G. A. Rogers, & J. Kraye (Eds.), *Scientia in Early Modern Philosophy* (pp. 99-115). Springer.
- Garrett, D. (2012). A Reply on Spinoza's Behalf. In E. Förster, & Y. Melamed (Eds.), *Spinoza and German Idealism* (pp. 248-264). Cambridge University Press.
- Garrett, D. (2017). The Indiscernibility of Identicals and the Transitivity of Identity in Spinoza's Logic of the Attributes. In Y. Y. Melamed (Ed.), *Spinoza's Ethics: A Critical Guide* (pp. 12-42). Cambridge University Press.
- Garrett, D. (2018a). Postscript: Necessitarianism Revisited. In D. Garrett, *Necessity and Nature in Spinoza's Philosophy* (pp. 125-148). Oxford University Press.
- Garrett, D. (2018b). Truth, Method, and Correspondence in Spinoza and Leibniz. In D. Garrett, *Necessity and Nature in Spinoza's Philosophy* (pp. 176-198). Oxford University Press.
- Goldenbaum, U., & Kluz, C. (Eds.). (2015). *Doing without Free Will: Spinoza and Contemporary Moral Problems*. Lexington Books.
- Goldstein, R. (2012). Explanatory Completeness and Spinoza's Monism. In P. Goff (Ed.), *Spinoza on Monism* (pp. 281-292). Pelgrave Macmillan.

- Gorman, M. (2005). The Essential and the Accidental. *Ratio*, 18, 276-89.
- Grey, J. (2017). The Modal Equivalence Rules of the Port-Royal Logic. *History and Philosophy of Logic*, 38(3), 210-221.
- Griffin, M. V. (2008). Necessitarianism in Spinoza and Leibniz. In C. Huenemann (Ed.), *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays* (pp. 71-93). Cambridge University Press.
- Guigon, G. (2012). Spinoza on Composition and Priority. In P. Goff (Ed.), *Spinoza on Monism* (pp. 183-205). Pelgrave Macmillan.
- Hillman, T. A. (2010). Leibniz on the Imago Dei. In D. Garber, & S. Nadler (Eds.), *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* (Vol. V, pp. 171-213). Oxford University Press.
- Hobbes, T. (1999). *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*. (J. C. Gaskin, Ed.) Oxford University Press.
- Hübner, K. (2014). Spinoza on Being Human and Human Perfection. In M. J. Kisner, & A. Youpa (Eds.), *Essays on Spinoza's Ethical Theory* (pp. 124-142). Oxford University Press.
- Hübner, K. (2015). On the Significance of Formal Causes in Spinoza's Metaphysics. *De Gruyter/AGPh*, 97(1), 196-233.
- Hübner, K. (2016). Spinoza on Essences, Universals, and Beings of Reason. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 97, 58-88.
- Huenemann, C. (1999). The Necessity of Finite Modes and Geometrical Containment in Spinoza's Metaphysics. In R. J. Gennaro, & C. Huenemann (Eds.), *New Essays on the Rationalists* (pp. 224-240). Oxford University Press.
- Huenemann, C. (2004). Spinoza and Prime Matter. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 42, 21-32.
- Huenemann, C. (2018). But Why Was Spinoza a Necessitarian? In M. D. Rocca (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza* (pp. 114-132). Oxford University Press.
- Hume, D. (1998). *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (2 ed.). (R. H. Popkin, Ed.) Hackett Publishing Company.
- Jaquet, C. (2018). Eternity. In M. D. Rocca (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza* (pp. 370-376). Oxford University Press.
- Jarrett, C. (1976). Spinoza's Ontological Argument. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 6(4), 685-692.

- Jarrett, C. (1977). The Concepts of Substance and Mode in Spinoza. *Philosophia*, 7, 83-105.
- Jarrett, C. (1978). The Logical Structure of Spinoza's Ethics, Part I. *Synthese*, 37, 15-65.
- Jarrett, C. (2001). Spinoza's Distinction between Essence and Existence. *The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, 50, 245-252.
- Jarrett, C. (2009). Spinoza on Necessity. In O. Koistinen (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics* (pp. 118-139). Cambridge University Press.
- Jonas, H. (1973). Spinoza and the Theory of Organism. In M. Grene (Ed.), *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays* (pp. 259-278). University of Notre Dame Press.
- Kisner, M. J. (2011). *Spinoza on Human Freedom: Reason, Autonomy and the Good Life*. Cambridge University Press.
- Koistinen, O. (1998). On the Consistency of Spinoza's Modal Theory. *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, XXXVI, 61-80.
- Koistinen, O. (2003). Spinoza's Proof of Necessitarianism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 67(2), 283-310.
- Koslicki, K. (2011). Essence, Necessity, and Explanation. In T. E. Tahko (Ed.), *Contemporary Aristotelian Metaphysics* (pp. 187-206). Cambridge University Press.
- Kripke, S. (1981). *Naming and Necessity*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Lærke, M. (2017). Aspects of Spinoza's Theory of Essence: Formal Essence, Non-Existence, and Two Types of Actuality. In M. Sinclair (Ed.), *The Actual and the Possible: Modality and Metaphysics in Modern Philosophy* (pp. 11-44). Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, D. (1979). Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow. *Nous*, 13(4), 455-76.
- Lin, M. (2004). Spinoza's Metaphysics of Desire: The Demonstration of IIP6. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 86, 21-55.
- Lin, M. (2006). Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza. *The Philosophical Review*, 115(3), 317-354.
- Lin, M. (2007). Spinoza's Arguments for the Existence of God. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 75(2), 269-297.
- Lin, M. (2012). Rationalism and Necessitarianism. *Nous*, 46(3), 418-448.
- Lin, M. (2018). The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza. In M. Della Rocca (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza* (pp. 133-154). Oxford University Press.

- Marrama, O. (2016). Spinoza on Fictitious Ideas and Possible Entities. *The European Legacy*, 21(4), 359-372.
- Martin, C. (2008a). The Framework of Essences. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 16(3), 489-509.
- Martin, C. (2008b). *Spinoza's Individuals*. (Publication No. 3287279) [Doctoral Dissertation, Purdue University]. ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
- Martin, C. (2010). A New Challenge to the Necessitarian Reading of Spinoza. In D. Garber, & S. Nadler (Eds.), *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* (Vol. V, pp. 25-70). Oxford University Press.
- Martin, C. (2018). Spinoza's Formal Mechanism. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 99(S1), 151-181.
- Mason, R. (1986). Spinoza on Modality. *Philosophical Quarterly*, 36(144), 313-342.
- Mason, R. (1997). *The God of Spinoza: A Philosophical Study*. Cambridge University Press.
- Matson, W. (1977). Steps Toward Spinozism. *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 31(119/120 (1/2)), 69-83.
- Maurer, A. A. (1982). *Medieval Philosophy* (Rev. ed.). Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies.
- McGrew, T. (2019). Miracles. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 ed.). (E. N. Zalta, Ed.) Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/miracles/>
- Melamed, Y. (2010). The Metaphysics of the Theological-Political Treatise. In Y. Melamed, & M. Rosenthal (Eds.), *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide* (pp. 128-142). Cambridge University Press.
- Melamed, Y. (2012a). Spinoza's Deification of Existence. In D. Garber, & D. Rutherford (Eds.), *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* (Vol. VI, pp. 75-103). Oxford University Press.
- Melamed, Y. (2012b). Why Spinoza is not an Eleatic Monist (Or Why Diversity Exists). In P. Goff (Ed.), *Spinoza on Monism* (pp. 206-222). Pelgrave Macmillan.
- Melamed, Y. (2013a). Charitable Interpretations and the Political Domestication of Spinoza, or, Benedict in the Land of the Secular Imagination. In E. Schliesser, M. Lærke, & J. Smith (Eds.), *Philosophy and Its History: Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy* (pp. 258-279). Oxford University Press.
- Melamed, Y. (2013b). *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought*. Oxford University Press.



- Melamed, Y. (2017). The Causes of Our Belief in Free Will: Spinoza on Necessary, ‘Innate’, yet False Cognition. In Y. Melamed (Ed.), *Spinoza’s Ethics: A Critical Guide* (pp. 121-141). Cambridge University Press.
- Melamed, Y. (2018). The Building Blocks of Spinoza’s Metaphysics: Substance Attribute, and Modes. In M. Della Rocca (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza* (pp. 84-113). Oxford University Press.
- Miller, J. (2001). Spinoza’s Possibilities. *The Review of Metaphysics*, 54(4), 779-814.
- Miller, J. (2003). Spinoza and the Concept of a Law of Nature. *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 20(3), 257-276.
- Morrison, J. (2015). Truth in the Emendation. In Y. Melamed (Ed.), *The Young Spinoza: A Metaphysician in the Making* (pp. 66-91). Oxford University Press.
- Nadler, S. (2006). *Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nadler, S. (2008). "Whatever is, is in God": substance and things in Spinoza’s metaphysics. In C. Huenemann (Ed.), *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays* (pp. 53-70). Cambridge University Press.
- Nadler, S. (2012). Spinoza’s Monism and the Reality of the Finite. In P. Goff (Ed.), *Spinoza on Monism* (pp. 223-243). Pelgrave Macmillan.
- Nadler, S. (2014). The Lives of Others: Spinoza on Benevolence as a Rational Virtue. In M. J. Kisner, & A. Youpa (Eds.), *Essays on Spinoza’s Ethical Theory* (pp. 41-56). Oxford University Press.
- Newlands, S. (2013). Spinoza's Modal Metaphysics. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*(Winter 2013 ed.). (E. N. Zalta, Ed.) Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/spinoza-modal/>
- Newlands, S. (2015). Backing into Spinozism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1-27. doi:10.1111/phpr.12219
- Newlands, S. (2017). Spinoza on Universals. In S. D. Bella, & T. M. Schmaltz (Eds.), *The Problem of Universals in Early Modern Philosophy* (pp. 62-86). Oxford University Press.
- Newlands, S. (2018). *Reconceiving Spinoza*. Oxford University Press.
- Newton, I. (2004). *Philosophical Writings*. (A. Janiak, Ed.) Cambridge University Press.

- O'Connor, T. (2014). Could There Be a Complete Explanation of Everything? In T. Goldschmidt (Ed.), *The Puzzle of Existence: Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?* (pp. 22-45). Taylor and Francis.
- O'Neill, E. (1993). Influxus Physicus. In S. Nadler (Ed.), *Causation in Early Modern Philosophy: Cartesianism, Occasionalism, and Pre-Established Harmony* (pp. 27-55). The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- O'Connor, T. (2008). *Theism and Ultimate Explanation: The Necessary Shape of Contingency*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Oderberg, D. S. (2007). *Real Essentialism*. Routledge.
- Parkinson, G. H. (1990). Definition, Essence, and Understanding in Spinoza. In J. A. Cover, & M. Kulstad (Eds.), *Central Themes in Early Modern Philosophy* (pp. 49-67). Hackett Publishing Company.
- Pasnau, R. (2011). *Metaphysical Themes 1274–1671*. Oxford University Press.
- Pereboom, D. (2006). *Living Without Free Will*. Cambridge University Press.
- Perler, D. (2011). The Problem of Necessitarianism (1p28–36). In M. Hampe, U. Renz, & R. Schnepf (Eds.), *Spinoza's Ethics: A Collective Commentary* (pp. 57-77). Brill.
- Plantinga, A. (1974). *The Nature of Necessity*. Oxford University Press.
- Pruss, A. (2006). *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: a Reassessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pruss, A. (2009). The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument. In W. L. Craig, & J. P. Moreland (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (pp. 24-100). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Pruss, A. (2011). *Actuality, Possibility, and Worlds*. The Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Pruss, A., & Gale, R. M. (2005). Cosmological and Design Arguments. In W. J. Wainwright (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook to Philosophy of Religion* (pp. 116-137). Oxford University Press.
- Rea, M. C. (2005). Four-Dimensionalism. In M. J. Loux, & D. W. Zimmerman (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* (pp. 246-280). Oxford University Press.

- Robertson, T., & Atkins, P. (2016). Essential vs. Accidental Properties. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 ed.). (E. N. Zalta, Ed.) Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/essential-accidental/>
- Rowe, W. L. (1998). *The Cosmological Argument*. Fordham University Press.
- Ruben, D.-H. (Ed.). (1993). *Explanation*. Oxford University Press.
- Rutherford, D. (2010). Spinoza's conception of law: metaphysics and ethics. In Y. Y. Melamed, & M. A. Rosenthal (Eds.), *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide* (pp. 143-167). Cambridge University Press.
- Schaffer, J. (2012). Monism: The Priority of the Whole. In P. Goff (Ed.), *Spinoza on Monism* (pp. 9-50). Pelgrave Macmillan.
- Schaffer, J. (n.d.). Monism. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 ed.). (E. N. Zalta, Ed.) Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/monism/>
- Schliesser, E. (2018). Spinoza and the Philosophy of Science: Mathematics, Motion, and Being. In M. Della Rocca (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza* (pp. 155-189). Oxford University Press.
- Schmaltz, T. M. (2008). *Descartes on Causation*. Oxford University Press.
- Schmaltz, T. M. (2015). Spinoza on Eternity and Duration: The 1663 Connection. In Y. Y. Melamed (Ed.), *The Young Spinoza: A Metaphysician in the Making* (pp. 205-220). Oxford University Press.
- Schmid, S. (2015). Efficient Causality: The Metaphysics of Production. In J. L. Fink (Ed.), *Suárez on Aristotelian Causality* (pp. 85–121). Brill.
- Schopenhauer, A. (1974). *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*. (E. F. Payne, Trans.) Open Court Publishing Company.
- Sider, T. (2005). Reductive Theories of Modality. In M. J. Loux, & D. W. Zimmerman (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* (pp. 180-208). Oxford University Press.
- Starr, W. (2019). Counterfactuals. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 ed.). (E. N. Zalta, Ed.) Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/counterfactuals/>
- Tan, P. (2019). Counterpossible Non-vacuity in Scientific Practice. *Journal of Philosophy*, 116(1), 32-60.
- van Fraassen, B. (1989). *Laws and Symmetry*. Clarendon Press.

- van Inwagen, P. (1983). *An Essay on Free Will*. Oxford University Press.
- Vetter, B. (2011). Recent Work: Modality without Possible Worlds. *Analysis Reviews*, 71(4), 742-754.
- Viljanen, V. (2008). Spinoza's Essentialist Model of Causation. *Inquiry*, 51(4), 412-437.
- Viljanen, V. (2009). Spinoza's Ontology. In O. Koistinen (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics* (pp. 56-78). Cambridge University Press.
- Viljanen, V. (2011). *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Viljanen, V. (2015). Spinoza's Essentialism in the Short Treatise. In Y. Y. Melamed (Ed.), *The Young Spinoza: A Metaphysician in the Making* (pp. 183-195). Oxford University Press.
- Ward, T. M. (2011). Spinoza on the Essence of Modes. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 19(1), 19–46.
- Wilson, M. D. (1999). Infinite Understanding, Scientia Intuitiva, and Ethics I.16. In M. D. Wilson, *Ideas and Mechanism: essays on early modern philosophy* (pp. 166-177). Princeton University Press.
- Wolff, C. (2020). Refutation of Spinoza's Ethics. In C. W. Dyck (Ed.), *In Early Modern German Philosophy (1690-1750)* (C. W. Dyck, Trans., pp. 159-194). Oxford University Press.
- Wolfson, H. A. (1934). *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (Vols. 1-2). The World Publishing Company.
- Yenter, T. (2014). Clarke Against Spinoza on the Manifest Diversity of the World. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 22:2(2), 260-280.