

Spinoza's Essentialist Model of Causation

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ABSTRACT *Spinoza is most often seen as a stern advocate of mechanistic efficient causation, but examining his philosophy in relation to the Aristotelian tradition reveals this view to be misleading: some key passages of the Ethics resemble so much what Suárez writes about emanation that it is most natural to situate Spinoza's theory of causation not in the context of the mechanical sciences but in that of a late scholastic doctrine of the emanative causality of the formal cause; as taking a look at the seventeenth-century philosophy of mathematics reveals, this is in consonance also with Spinoza's geometrical cast of mind. Against this background, I examine Spinoza's essentialist model of causation according to which each thing has a formal character determined by the thing's essence and what follows from that essence. In the case of real things this essential causal architecture results in efficacy, i.e. in bringing about real effects, the key idea being that without the essential, formally structured causal thrust there would be no efficacy in the first place. I also explain how this model accounts for efficient causation taking place between finite things.*

I. Introduction

It is a central characteristic of Spinoza's rationalism that everything can—at least in principle—be explained. Moreover, everything has its cause through which it can be explained. Indeed, according to Spinoza, not only the existence of everything that exists but also the non-existence of everything that does not exist requires explanation:

For each thing there must be assigned a cause, *or* reason, as much for its existence as for its nonexistence. For example, if a triangle exists, there must be a reason *or* cause why it exists; but if it does not exist,

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there must also be a reason *or* cause which prevents it from existing, or which takes its existence away. (E1p11d2)¹

The axioms concerning causation are located in the beginning of the *Ethics*:

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. (E1a3)

The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause. (E1a4)

So, causation involves necessity, nothing is outside of it, and effects are known through their causes. However, it is very difficult to obtain a full understanding of causality through these highly abstract ideas alone;² so we should ask, how could Spinoza's thinking be explicated so that we can get a firmer grasp of it?

As is well known, there is room in Spinoza's system for only one substance, the necessarily existing nature or God, without which nothing can exist or be understood (E1p11, p15). Finite things are modifications, i.e. states or affections, of the monistic substance, and they are produced by God whom they express in a certain and determinate way (E1p25, c). In Spinoza's substance monism God's manner of acting as cause is arguably the fundamental case of causation. The latter half of the first part of the *Ethics* concerns first and foremost God's causality, and it begins with one of the most important and intriguing propositions of Spinoza's philosophy:

From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect.) (E1p16)

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); and that it infers more properties 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 d6), each of which also expresses an essence infinite in its own kind, from its necessity there must follow infinitely many things in infinite modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect), q.e.d. (E1p16d)

This proposition has several corollaries, the first one stating that “[f]rom this it follows that God is the efficient cause of all things which can fall under an infinite intellect”. (E1p16c1)

How should the preceding passages be explicated? One useful way to study Spinoza’s thought is to analyse it in relation to the scholastic tradition. As is well known, that tradition relies on Aristotle’s distinction of four basic kinds of cause: the material, the formal, the efficient, and the final cause. I will argue that comparing Spinoza’s views on causation to those of some prominent scholastics reveals that the basic model of causation cannot be, for Spinoza, one adopted from the mechanical sciences; what emerges instead is a model heavily inspired by geometry and the idea of formal causation that pertains to it. I will endeavour to show that this approach can greatly enhance our understanding of the basics of Spinoza’s system.

II. The final, the material, and the efficient cause

Spinoza uncompromisingly rejects any doctrine that assigns final causes to God: “Nature has no end set before it, and... all final causes are nothing but human fictions” (E1app). There has been a lively discussion about teleology in Spinoza’s thought, but even the most enthusiastic proponents of the teleological interpretation do not maintain that Spinoza would have accepted divine teleology.³ Since I here concentrate mainly on Spinoza’s view on God’s, or the substance’s, causation, I will not pursue this issue further but simply hold Spinoza to be an anti-teleologist concerning God.

Turning to the material cause, the first thing to note is that Spinoza evidently nowhere even mentions it.⁴ However, Charlie Huenemann has recently suggested that the Spinozistic extended substance could be regarded as a kind of *prima materia*.⁵ This approach may, as Huenemann contends, help to fit Spinoza “into some of the history of thought about prime matter”.⁶ This is primarily so, I think, because the extended substance can be seen as a continuous field that is modified according to individual essences, resulting in actual physical things.⁷ Still, the idea of prime matter is deeply embedded in the hylomorphic doctrine, according to which natural things consist of matter and form, and this is quite foreign to the Spinozistic framework. Most importantly, no Spinozistic attribute can match prime matter as it was commonly understood, as devoid of all forms, for attributes such as thought and extension already specify certain fundamental manners of being. Moreover, if extension is interpreted as a kind of prime matter, on the basis of parallelism (E2p7) the same applies to all attributes, making also thought a kind of prime “matter”, which sounds odd. So, due to the lack of textual evidence and the difficulties this line of interpretation encounters, I would not be prepared to endorse the idea that the material cause would have found its way to Spinoza’s philosophy; it seems that the most we can

say is that concerning physical reality, the idea of a spatial field has in Spinoza's system a position somewhat reminiscent of the one held by the doctrine of prime matter in Aristotelianism.

What about efficient causation, then? According to the Peripatetic tradition, the efficient or moving cause is the agent that draws out the form from potency to act (see especially PN III.18). It is important to keep in mind that in medieval philosophy the efficient cause is also closely linked up with the final cause: for example in Aquinas's thought, different kinds of causes are intertwined so that the final cause is the cause of all causation and all other causes, and this implies that also the efficient cause, in getting the process of actualisation going, is always directed or inclined towards an end (PN III.18–19, IV.24). Now, the efficient cause, of course, appears in many important early modern texts, Spinoza's included, but by contrast to the Aristotelians, such anti-teleologically inclined thinkers as Hobbes and Spinoza see efficient causation as blind, in the sense that efficient causes are never end-guided.⁸ The upheavals that took place in the natural sciences during the seventeenth-century had an undeniably profound effect on that period's philosophy. No doubt, the impact of these scientific advances and Spinoza's tendency to separate efficiency from finality has led many to believe that he views all causation along the lines of *mechanistic* efficient causation. For instance, Bennett asserts, "Spinoza argues that nothing has a final cause because everything has an efficient cause".⁹ He justifies this by citing the appendix of the first part of the *Ethics* where Spinoza denies final causes by invoking, among other things, E1p16 and by reminding us that everything in nature happens by a certain eternal necessity. As the following quote evinces, Bennett has a rather mechanistic way of looking at Spinoza's conception of efficiency:

The phrase about "a certain eternal necessity of Nature" is a reference to Spinoza's efficient-cause determinism. He is implying that something which is caused mechanistically, i.e., by a "push" from behind, cannot properly be explained also in terms of goals or purposes or desires, i.e., in terms of a "pull" towards a resultant state of affairs.¹⁰

In general Bennett, like many others, seems to take for granted that the rejection of final causes directly entails that all causality is efficient causality, and since the paradigmatic case of efficiency is usually considered to be the one that reigns in mechanics, a rather mechanistic picture of Spinoza's philosophy is thereby given.

In a sense the mechanistically oriented interpretation of Spinoza's view on causation is thoroughly understandable, for not only was the science of mechanics prominent in the seventeenth century, but the importance of the efficient cause emerges also from Spinoza's texts; he states, for instance, "God is the efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but also of

their essence” (E1p25), and this efficiency takes place through an infinite chain of finite causes (E1p28). Further, “nothing belongs to the nature of anything except what follows from the necessity of the nature of the efficient cause” (E4pr). Thus, no interpretation of Spinoza’s conception of causation can afford to ignore efficient causation. I will later return to the issues concerning the efficient cause, but before moving on I would like to point out that Spinoza shared with the scholastics the contention that efficient causes are *things* that cause changes in other things (for example, when a doctor induces a healing process in the patient), whereas in the post-Humean philosophy efficient causes are usually held to be *events* that are considered to bring about some other events as effects due to the regular succession of the two event types (for example, when the heating of iron bars is regularly followed by the expansion of those same bars).¹¹

III. Suárez on the formal cause and emanation

All in all, the efficient cause is undoubtedly important for Spinoza. But already a quick look at the aforementioned E1p16 reveals that it is hard to fit it into the mechanistic picture of efficient causation. In other words, judging from that proposition, the basic case of causation does not have, for Spinoza, to do simply with impacts through which motion is transferred from one body to another. Moreover, Spinoza’s order of presentation—the fact that E1p16c1 says that God is the efficient cause *because* of E1p16—speaks for this. So I suggest that we put the dominant, mechanism-associated way of thinking about efficient causation aside for a while and see how things look if we approach Spinoza’s views by keeping in mind the scholastic conception of the formal cause and the related notion of emanation; as we will see, a different, and to my mind rather clarifying, picture emerges.¹² Thus, to obtain a better grasp of E1p16 and to see Spinoza’s ideas concerning causation in their proper context, my next aim is to offer a brief explication of a relevant scholastic understanding of the formal cause and emanation.¹³

Of the scholastic philosophers, Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) and his view on emanation offers us a useful starting-point. Suárez was, of course, the most prominent of the Renaissance Jesuit philosophers whose writings had a profound influence on post-Renaissance thought; indeed, medieval philosophy was passed, to an important degree, on to the modern world through his works. Descartes, who was trained in the scholastic tradition, had most probably made firsthand acquaintance with Suárez’s *Disputationes*; and Suárez has been singled out as the most important scholastic for Spinoza.¹⁴ So when striving to find the context of Spinoza’s thought, it is instructive to take a look at the Suárezian position, especially because Suárez’s views on causation are in some important respects close—and considerably closer than those of Aquinas—to the claims contained in

the *Ethics*. Recognizing this background helps us to see certain characteristics of Spinoza's thought that would otherwise easily go unnoticed.

The first thing to be kept in mind is that Suárez's conception of *natural* or *efficient emanation* seems to be very much unlike mechanistic efficient causation. Suárez's thought starts from the central scholastic distinction between necessary accidents (that is, necessary accidental properties, i.e. proper accidents or *propria*) and non-necessary accidents; of these, non-necessary accidents can be taken away from a certain kind of substance (for instance, whiteness from man), while necessary accidents cannot (for instance, risibility from man) (see e.g. PN II.9). According to Suárez, substances produce their proper accidents through what he calls "natural emanation":

[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 a final cause but also as an efficient cause through a natural resulting... [I]t is probable that *the substantial form has a certain power for having its proper accidents emanate from it*. Likewise, in this way one discerns more clearly *the natural connection between a [substantial] form and its properties*... (DM 18.3.4, emphases added)

To illustrate this, Suárez claims that water, even after having been heated, reduces itself to its "pristine coldness" by "the [substantial] form through a natural resulting" (DM 18.3.4), and this kind of principle of efficient causality is "the inward substance itself" (DM 18.3.8). So, emanation is used to explain how things obtain their properties and why, in different situations, they act and react in certain characteristic ways: a thing's form and the properties resulting from it make the thing what it is.¹⁵

If emanation has to do with formal causality, why, then, does Suárez speak about *efficiency* in connection with it? The Thomists seem to be, as Dennis Des Chene explains, rather undecided about whether or not any kind of genuine activity pertains to emanation (probably not); but Suárez is decidedly of the opinion that emanation is efficient action.¹⁶ According to him, properties of natural things are distinct entities whose coming to being and persistence require a real action (DM 18.3.6–7); and this makes emanative causation a real action, even though it is not always, as Suárez acknowledges, counted as such (DM 18.3.6). In other words, for changes in the accidents of a substance (one, e.g. hotness, disappears, and another, e.g. coldness, appears) a cause, and hence real activity, is needed; and because, to use a traditional example,¹⁷ coldness emanates from the form of water even when water has been heated—bringing about a real change from hotness to coldness—the emanative production of properties must be, for Suárez, a true action.¹⁸

All this suggests that emanation is efficient because it refers to a true causal consequence or action in contrast to what Suárez calls a mere “natural appropriateness” that is found, for example, between the matter and form of celestial bodies—in them, matter and form are necessarily connected in a certain fashion, but there is no causality involved between form and matter (DM 18.3.6).¹⁹ After all, Suárez’s notion of the efficient cause seems to be rather broad, for he writes that the efficient cause operates “by means of a proper action that flows from it” (DM 17.1.6) and that “to be an actual efficient cause is the same as being something that acts” (DM 18.10.5). All this certainly applies to the natural emanation of forms too, always operative as those forms, by themselves, are. So a substantial form can be regarded not only as a formal but also as an efficient cause,²⁰ and Suárez certainly seems to think this to hold with regard to natural agents. This intertwinement does not, however, mean that the pre-eminence of the substantial form would be threatened: “*The substantial form is the principal principle by which the efficient cause acts*” (DM 18.2.3). These were not contested claims in scholasticism, on the contrary: by claiming that forms are efficient principles Suárez is expressing what has been called “a mainstream position” in late scholastic thought.²¹

Helen Hattab remarks that for Suárez, when substance A (the agent) produces an effect in substance B (the patient), A’s intrinsic powers to produce certain effects must be set to action by coming into contact with a suitable patient, and therefore (in intersubstantial or transeunt causation) the causality of the efficient cause is, according to Suárez, due to the patient.²² Hence, the potentiality to be acted on and the potentiality to act can be said to dovetail with each other so that the “potentiality to be acted on, once actualized, consists in a potentiality to act, which can in turn be actualized only in an object which has the corresponding potentiality to be acted on”.²³ However, when certain *intrinsic*, necessary properties emanate from the essence or the substantial form of a substance, the substance in question is, as it were, both the agent and the patient. So, in a sense, the suitable patient is always present,²⁴ and consequently those properties become necessarily produced. Because any production of properties requires true causal action, the above mentioned does not mean that this kind of production of intrinsic properties were not just as causal as the intersubstantial production of properties. So although, for Suárez, transeunt causality of the efficient cause consists in passive power or the mode of the patient, in emanation no extrinsic patient is involved, and thus the agent needs nothing external to itself in order to be drawn to act; an important reason to consider the thing itself as emanative cause to also be the efficient cause. Thus, understood in this way emanative causation is immanent in character and no external influence is required to trigger it into action.

The preceding paragraphs can be summed up by saying that emanation is formal causation by which a thing produces its properties.²⁵ The hotness

that emanates from fire is a classic example of this, and its kind of causation has traditionally been seen to involve two different characteristics. First, it is *immediate*, because an emanative cause produces its effect without mediating factors, and this, of course, is what happens when a thing effects something in itself, in virtue of its form alone. Second, it can be said to be *necessary* in the sense that when an emanative cause is given, it would be contradictory were the effect not to exist; for example, fire could not be fire without being hot, so abolition of the hotness equals extinguishing the fire.²⁶ Moreover, during the Middle Ages this kind of emanative causality was often referred to when talking about “properties that follow from the thing’s essential principles”; here the key distinction is made between “essential principles” or essential properties (e.g. rationality of human beings) and the non-essential properties that necessarily follow from these essential principles (e.g. risibility of human beings).²⁷ In a nutshell, emanation means that from any thing’s essence certain properties follow immediately and necessarily.

IV. Spinoza, formal causality, and geometry

With regard to Spinoza, what does the preceding discussion imply? If we return to the already cited E1p16, we find it stating that “[f]rom the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes”, and this to be so first and foremost because “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*)” (E1p16d, emphases added); and, consequently, from God’s infinite essence infinitely many properties—i.e. all being—follow. Now, there quite clearly seems to be a connection between this proposition and the above-outlined formal-emanative causality,²⁸ and it is only strengthened by the proposition stating that “[n]othing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow” (E1p36); in other words, things are essential causers. I will later on take a closer look into Spinoza’s reasons for this claim, but here the important point concerns the nature of this essential causation. The following passage from the *Theological-Political Treatise* talks about causation in terms of properties being produced:

[S]ince the knowledge of the effect through its cause is *nothing other than the knowledge of a property of that cause*, the greater our knowledge of natural phenomena, the more perfect is our knowledge of God’s essence, which is the cause of all things. (TTP IV.7, emphasis added)²⁹

This way of putting things gestures towards the traditional view, such as the one endorsed by Suárez, according to which properties are caused by the

substantial form from which they emanate. However, still more interesting is what Spinoza says when he discusses his method of having clear and distinct ideas in the *Treatise of the Emendation of the Intellect*:

And then, so that all ideas may be led back to one, we shall strive to connect and order them so that our mind, as far as possible, *reproduces objectively the formal character of nature* [*formalitatem naturæ*], both as to the whole and as to the parts. (TdIE, § 91, emphasis added)

Both the whole of nature, i.e. God, and its parts, i.e. finite things, have “formal character”. Now, traditionally a thing was said to exist “objectively” insofar as it is an object of thought, and “formally”—or as Descartes also says, “actually” (CSM II, 28)—insofar as it is a real thing. Spinoza’s understanding of these terms is, however, an issue that calls for a fair amount of interpretative work: he claims, for instance, that each thing has its “formal essence”, thereby evidently referring to the eternal essences of things which are contrasted with the *actual* essences of things. I propose that we keep an open mind here; also the claim located in E5p31d, “the mind, insofar as it is eternal, is the adequate, *or* formal, cause of the third kind of knowledge (by 3d1)”, suggests that Spinoza may well have reasons of his own, reasons that stem from the similarity his conception of causality has with the traditional idea of the formal cause, to speak about the formality, being, and essence of things.³⁰

At this point Spinoza’s conspicuous eagerness to use geometrical objects in illustrating his ideas proves to be highly relevant. After having claimed that “God acts from the laws of his nature alone” (E1p17) he remarks:

I think I have shown clearly enough (see p16) that from God’s supreme power, *or* infinite nature, infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, i.e., all things, have necessarily flowed [*effluxisse*], 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. (E1p17s, emphasis added)

Spinoza’s geometrical illustrations are, of course, traditionally acknowledged as focal for his thought; but as Margaret Wilson remarks, their precise meaning is far from clear: “Spinoza himself offers no direct clarification of the notion of essential consequence involved in the triangle analogy—or the ‘necessity’ that it exemplifies”.³¹ Quite often, this has been seen as grounds for claiming that Spinoza conflates the relation of causality with the relation of logical implication.³² However, in light of the preceding discussion, it is evident that the talk about “flowing” exemplifies classic emanative terminology. I would hence suggest that we take a look at what

kind of picture emerges when Spinoza's position is considered from the emanativist point of view.

Spinoza's denial of final causes has most often been considered to entail reducing all causation to efficient causation, and the way the triangle illustration has been interpreted evinces this particularly plainly. For instance, John Carriero maintains the point of the triangle analogy merely to be that final causes have nothing to do with divine causation because the flowing from essence is "not a consequence of some choice on God's part, directed at the good".³³ Of course, in Spinoza's system there is no place for a transcendent chooser-God, but this negative stand is hardly all that Spinoza wants his triangle illustration to convey. Quite the contrary: a brief overview of seventeenth-century geometry leaves little doubt that precisely geometry, not mechanics, is the discipline lurking behind Spinoza's views on causality.

As Paolo Mancosu explains, at the heart of the most important controversy of the seventeenth-century philosophy of mathematics lay the scientific status of geometry: according to the prevailing Aristotelian conception, in order to be scientific an explanation needs to reveal the cause of the phenomenon under examination—be the relevant kind of cause formal, material, efficient, or final. Now, the question whether geometrical demonstrations were truly causal was raised already during the Renaissance period: in many cases those demonstrations did not proceed through the causes of geometrical objects and their properties. A very important example of this was the way in which the sum of the internal angles of a triangle was proven to be equal to two right angles by appealing to certain auxiliary segments, which, of course, cannot be the cause of the aforementioned equality. Accordingly, this kind of demonstration was not causal in character, and so, granted the Aristotelian conception, it could not be scientific, either. Keeping the geometry's paradigmatic position in mind, this shortcoming was bordering on a scientific scandal.³⁴

However, the crucial thing for us is to note on what the different sides of the debate agreed, namely what kind of causal explanations would surely accord with geometry's nature and could thus guarantee its scientificity:

The scholastic tradition would have assumed this [the proof concerning a triangle's angles] to be a causal proof by maintaining *the triangle must have an essence (given by a definition) that determines, as in a formal cause, the rest of its properties*, in particular, the sum of the internal angles is equal to two right angles.³⁵

In other words, the questioning of the *discipline* of geometry did not mean that the intrinsic causality of geometrical *objects* would have been under suspicion—the crux of the problem was precisely the fact that although the essence of a geometrical object was thought to determine the properties pertaining to the object, some important geometrical demonstrations did

not refer to these essential causes. For instance, Isaac Barrow (1630–77), who delivered his lectures during the 1660s and is one of the noteworthy mathematicians Mancosu discusses, emphasized geometry’s causality and did not hesitate to use emanative terminology: according to him, mathematical propositions must “flow from the intimate *Essences* and *Causes* of the Things”.³⁶ Moreover, Barrow held that necessary consequence can only be based on formal causality found in the nature of mathematical objects.³⁷

The similarity, sometimes finding its way even into the choice of words, of the foregoing geometrical discussion and Spinoza’s views on causality is, I think, evident. It is simply improbable that Spinoza was not aware of the most significant mathematical debate of his time or the prevalent ways of thinking about formal causality when he decided to include the triangle analogy in E1p17s. And as the following passage witnesses, if there is a model of causality he is led to by denying the final causes, it is much more akin to formal-essential than mechanistic causation: “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 of figures, had not shown men another standard of truth*” (E1app, emphasis added). All this, together with the above-presented talk about formality in connection with essences and the being of things, strongly suggests that Spinoza regards the mathematical standard as the true one because through it the true formal character of the world can be pinned down. I take it that this idea lurks behind Spinoza’s tendency to think about *all* things through the model provided by geometrical objects,³⁸ and so it is quite understandable that his doctrine of causality has much in common with the idea of formal causes, or to “what follows from the essence”. Consistently enough, this applies most clearly to the only substance: according to the passages concerning God’s freedom and power, God-nature has precisely as little choice over the fact that he produces everything there is in virtue of his essence alone as fire can choose its hotness, a rational creature its ability to laugh, or a triangle the sum of its internal angles.

Spinoza’s enthusiasm for geometry goes well together with the contention that the world is thoroughly intelligible, in its totality as well as its parts. Consider how Descartes of the *Fifth Meditation*, being far from the sole representative of this line of thought, thinks that each geometrical object has its essence, i.e. form, and properties that so clearly belong to the object that we cannot but recognize them to do so:

I think the most important consideration at this point is that I find within me countless ideas of things which even though they may not exist anywhere outside me still cannot be called nothing; for although in a sense they can be thought of at will, they are not my invention but have their own true and immutable natures. When, for example, I

imagine a triangle, even if perhaps no such figure exists, or has ever existed, anywhere outside my thought, *there is still a determinate nature, or essence, or form of the triangle which is immutable and eternal* ... This is clear from the fact that various properties can be demonstrated of the triangle, for example that its three angles equal two right angles, that its greatest side subtends its greatest angle, and the like; and since *these properties are ones which I now clearly recognize whether I want to or not*, even if I never thought of them at all when I previously imagined the triangle, it follows that they cannot have been invented by me. (CSM II, 44–5, emphases added)

John Cottingham claims that here is set up the “standard notion of essence”.³⁹ Now, I would like to claim that thinking along these lines convinced Spinoza that each thing has its logical structure similar to the one found in geometrical entities, and so it is no wonder that he thought that a perfectly solid and intelligible ontology can and should be constructed on the ideas of essence, property, and (formal-emanative) “following”.⁴⁰ Spinoza’s point is that this kind of following, traditionally spoken of as formal causation, has an autonomous standing and is not reducible to or to be confused with efficient causation: it holds in geometry even though no efficient causes (nor matter) are involved.⁴¹ Most importantly, for Spinoza this primary type of causality determines, with geometrical necessity, the basic structure of reality and things in it.⁴² In the case of *real things* it is correct to say (and as the above discussion of Suárez witnessed, in harmony with a notable position in late medieval thought) that the formal character of things equals or results in efficient causality: to the extent things are real, the essential causal architecture equals efficacy, i.e. bringing about *real* effects, states, or properties.⁴³ In light of this, it is understandable that once Spinoza has established that all things follow from God’s nature (E1p16), God of course being a real thing, the “flowing” from his nature has the *corollary* that “God is the efficient cause of all things” (E1p16c1).⁴⁴

V. Spinoza and the essentialist model of causation

The observations made thus far suggest that Spinoza puts forward a particular essentialist model of causation in many respects similar to one traditional understanding of emanation. According to Spinoza’s model, causation has fundamentally to do with the fact that as things are what they are—that is, as they have the kind of essences they do—certain properties follow or flow from those essences. And since there is only one substance, God or nature that is also a real thing, indeed *ens realissimum*, it is only understandable that everything turns out to be what it is and the way it is because God’s essential causal activity results in real effects, or “infinitely many things in infinite modes”.⁴⁵

At least the following points can be said in support of the view that the best way to make sense of Spinoza's conception of causation is by reading certain key passages against the background in which the idea of formal-emanative causation holds a prominent place. First and foremost, E1p16 seems to be talking about the sort of production of necessary properties characteristic to the formal cause. It was traditionally held that "a thing is intelligible only through its definition and essence" (EE I.3), and as e.g. E1p16d shows, Spinoza obviously adopts this contention without hesitance: each thing has its definable essence. The triangle analogy of E1p17s is there to drive home the idea that certain properties belonging to a thing follow from its definable essence with the precisely same kind of necessity as in geometry. And on these grounds we are in the position to know that if such an entity really exists, it has efficacy, in virtue of its essence, to produce those properties.⁴⁶ This observation reveals all things, be they mere beings of reason or real things, to share the same formal architecture of "following", which explains, at least in part, Spinoza's apparent disregard of the distinction between logico-geometrical following and efficient causation: at least in God's case, the latter occurs as determined by the former, thereby necessarily realizing everything as it follows from God's essence. This bears, I think, a striking resemblance to the emanativist way of speaking about both geometrical following and the immanent causal activity of physical and mental things in terms of emanative production of properties.

Second, although the term "emanation" itself is not, to my knowledge, to be found in the *Ethics*,⁴⁷ Spinoza uses it in his correspondence (Ep43, Ep75), for instance in the following fashion:

[W]hether the good that follows from virtue and the divine love is bestowed on us by God as judge, or whether it emanates from the necessity of the divine nature, it will not on that account be more or less desirable[.] (Ep75)

Of course, Spinoza himself endorses the latter of these two views.

Third, as Gueroult explains, the passages of the *Ethics* that deal with causation place into the Spinozistic framework nearly all the different ways of classifying causes included in the catalogue of Franco Bürgesdijck and Adrian Heereboord, two seventeenth-century philosophers from Leiden; and in this context E1p16 refers precisely to the emanative (vs. active) cause.⁴⁸ Understood in this way, emanation is the aspect of causality from which other aspects (such as efficiency) follow.

Now, if Spinoza's conception of causation really is so close to the formal-emanative one as I claim it is, we should be as clear as possible about its relation to other types of causes. As I mentioned already earlier, the final and the material cause pose no problem here: at least with regard to God, Spinoza denies that there is any kind of teleology, and the material cause

seems to be altogether expunged from his thought. This leaves us with the efficient cause; Spinoza undoubtedly wants to include it in his system, and now the question is: How is efficient causation accounted for within the essential model? This is a thorny question to say the least, but I believe we have already gathered enough material to answer it. Now, textual evidence both for the emanative-essentialist and the efficient-mechanist readings of Spinoza's thought can be found; obviously, he regarded the two aspects as quite compatible. Nowhere, to my mind at least, is this witnessed more clearly than in the following already cited passage: "[N]othing belongs to the nature of anything except what follows from the necessity of the nature of the efficient cause." (E4pr) This can be taken as a piece of evidence for the efficient reading, as saying that the natures of things result from efficient causation;⁴⁹ but it can be read the other way round, too, as saying that real things act as efficient causes, and do so because effects necessarily follow from their natures or essences. Actually, this way of reading it concords much better with Spinoza's order of exposition in E1p16 and its corollary, where efficiency is a consequence of essential causation, and E3p7d, where he states, "[f]rom 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)". Real things' essence-originating causing can be called efficient because it results in real changes in the agent and other things—indeed, by what other term than efficacy could this aspect of causality be characterized? However, the key idea is that without the essence-originating, formally structured causal thrust there would be no efficacy in the first place.⁵⁰

To restate the view I defend, the following from God's nature results in real effects, the production of which nothing can intervene in or affect already for the simple reason that, in the Spinozistic framework, God is the only substance there is. Because finite things are among the real effects of God's productive activity, God can be called their efficient cause. However, the causality of finite things, or of modifications of God, is another issue, for, unlike God, they are not causally isolated, exclusively self-determining agents. As a consequence, only God's causality amounts to full-blown emanation, and the essentialist model must be qualified to account for the causation taking place between finite things.⁵¹

With regard to finite things, the efficiency pertaining to causality has an especially important role, for since each finite thing is always under the influence of external causes—whose fundamental manner of operation is determined by their essences—those causes in fact always do determine, for their part, the way the finite thing behaves. In other words, two cases must be distinguished: one in which a thing effects something in virtue of its essence alone, and one in which the thing's essence is only a partial cause of the resulting effect, which means that something happens that is a joint product of two or more disparate things' essences.⁵² In this respect the

difference between God and his modifications lies in the fact that God's causal activity is determined by his essence alone, whereas finite things' causal activity is determined by other finite things, i.e. by external causes, too.

I think that Spinoza attempts to give an uncomplicated formulation to issues pertaining to the necessity of causation by saying that “[f]rom a given *determinate* cause the effect follows necessarily” (E1a3, emphasis added): regardless whether an agent is determined to cause effects internally (i.e. actively) by its own nature alone, or externally (i.e. passively) so that the resulting effects are joint products of its nature and the natures of external causes, once the cause is determined, the effect results with the necessity pertaining to the emanative cause. Moreover, I would like to emphasize that also in the case of passivity we are still dealing with what follows from the essences of things (the agent and the patient), or what is the same, also joint causing of effects is, for Spinoza, essence-based causing. So although Spinoza infers from the famous example of a stone that “receives from the impulsion of an external cause a fixed quantity of motion whereby it will necessarily continue to move when the impulsion of the external cause has ceased” that “every single thing is necessarily determined by an external cause to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate way” (Ep58), this should not be taken to mean that the resulting motion would be what it is were the essence of the stone different from what it is; the same impulsion would not, of course, effect the same kind of motion if directed to, say, a feather. This idea is clearly stated by the following axiom:

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, so that one and the same body may be moved differently according to differences in the nature of the bodies moving it. And conversely, different bodies may be moved differently by one and the same body. (E2le13a1)⁵³

It should be noted, though, that although any finite thing is capable of operating in virtue of its essence, it can itself neither determine the kind of essence it has nor come into existence because of that essence, for all finite things come to exist from external causes (E1p11s). This means that from the Spinozistically adequate monistic standpoint finite things are God's states and that God produces those things via his other states,⁵⁴ so although finite things can be said to be essentialist causers, they are brought about by other finite things, which, operating according to their essences, act as efficient causes on other finite things; and as E1p28 states, this chain of finite causes continues *ad infinitum*. But we should not take Spinoza's idea to be that all finite things are always *completely* externally determined; as the axiom above and Spinoza's view of passivity imply, and as Spinoza

elsewhere (see e.g. E2p29s, 3defaff1; TTP III.4) makes clear, things are also active and self-determined in different degrees.

At this point I should address a possible objection to my interpretation that is based on a popular understanding of the Spinozistic God's causality. It has been claimed,⁵⁵ to a great extent based on the hugely influential reading Edwin Curley presents in his *Spinoza's Metaphysics* of 1969, that only the general features of the universe that are explicable by laws of nature emanate from God's nature, whereas serial, sequential, or horizontal efficient causality pertains to singular things, each one of them a part of, and determined by, an infinite causal chain that consists of finite things. In a way very similar to the covering law model of Carl Hempel and Paul Oppenheim,⁵⁶ Curley contends that neither infinite modes (the general nomological facts) nor finite modes (the singular facts)

are by themselves adequate causes of finite modes... [T]he existence and actions of a particular finite mode cannot be understood either by reference to other finite modes alone or by reference to infinite modes alone, but only by reference to both infinite and finite modes.⁵⁷

So, "the infinite and finite modes are separately necessary and only jointly sufficient conditions of finite modes".⁵⁸ According to the line of thought inspired by this, since only infinite things can follow from God's absolute nature, there are, for Spinoza, two kinds of causality: the *emanative* one pertaining only to (immediate and mediate) infinite modes, and the *sequential* one (resulting from the infinite modes, i.e. general nomological facts, together with the chain of finite modes) pertaining to finite modes.

However, although this way of interpreting Spinoza has its merits,⁵⁹ it cannot, I think, give the correct view of Spinoza's thought. The main problem is that if only general facts are claimed to follow from God's nature, there is and cannot be any explanation why precisely the actual sequence of finite modes exists—or why are there *any* finite things in the first place.⁶⁰ When confronted with this dilemma,⁶¹ Curley argues (with Walski) that "such phenomena as the existence of the totality of finite things and... the existence of the most general laws governing finite things" are simply of such a nature that no explanation for them is "even conceivable".⁶² However, Spinoza obviously holds that there *is* an ultimate explanation for everything, namely God's nature, from which all things follow (E1p16, p18).⁶³ But if we reject Curley's view, what should we say about the fact that Spinoza claims nothing finite follows from God's absolutely infinite nature? The best solution to this problem is offered, I believe, by Olli Koistinen's argument that the *formal essences* of finite things are *objects of truths* about finite modes, as such not spatio-temporally limited, and thus infinite modes,⁶⁴ on this interpretation, there is no problem with formal essences following from God's nature,⁶⁵ as his properties, which fixes everything *sub*

specie aeternitatis. Thus, and this is the most important thing for our purposes, it can be said that everything concerning finite things follows from the divine nature, just as E1p16 claims.⁶⁶

Spinoza's rather strong branch of geometrical essentialism lurks behind his general ethical project, moral psychology, and political philosophy too, and has direct implications on how human affects are conceived. Indeed, before embarking upon constructing his theory of the affects, Spinoza proclaims to "consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies" (E3pr), thus leaving little doubt that he understands his approach to be geometrical, not mechanistic in character. And such propositions as "[e]ach affect of each individual differs from the affect of another as much as the essence of the one from the essence of the other" (E3p57) exemplify his essentialist psychology.⁶⁷ Also the doctrine of our actual essence as *conatus*, central for Spinoza's psychology, witnesses the fact that proper grasp of his essentialism is necessary for the correct understanding of his naturalistic ethics.⁶⁸

VI. Conclusion

I have argued that Spinoza's conception of causation turns out to be considerably closer to a traditional idea of the emanative causality of the formal cause than to a mechanistically conceived notion of efficient causation. This, together with Spinoza's geometrical cast of mind, pushes him towards a particular essentialist model of causation in which each thing has a formal character determined by the thing's essence and what follows from that essence, and in the case of real things this essential following results in efficacy, i.e. in bringing about real effects—the key idea being that without the essential causal thrust there would be no efficacy in the first place. I think it can be said that Spinoza discards the Aristotelian doctrines of teleology and activity as the actualisation of potentiality, but does not jettison the geometry-inspired essentialism stemming from that same source: from this viewpoint, causality is not about regular succession of event types but about finite things with essences in virtue of which they produce effects and determine each others' manner of acting. Once a thing is determined to act in a certain way, whether that determination be brought about inwardly or externally, the effect necessarily results. However, when dealing with finite things' causation, we should not lose sight of Spinoza's original monistic vision—from the philosophically adequate standpoint there is, in the end, only one substantial causal agent, God-nature, who produces everything there is and determines the nature of reality to the finest detail: "[A]ll 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" (E1p29d).⁶⁹

Notes

1. The *Ethics* will be abbreviated E (for other abbreviations, see the reference list), and I have used the following method in referring to it: a = axiom, app = appendix, c = corollary, d = definition (when not after a proposition number), d = demonstration (when after a proposition number), le = lemma, p = proposition, po = postulate, pr = preface, s = scholium. For instance, E1p8s2 refers to the second scholium of the eighth proposition in the first part of the *Ethics*.
2. As Margaret Wilson (1991, p. 133) notes, "Spinoza says very little to elucidate directly the concept or concepts of causality he relies on".
3. See especially Garrett (1999); Lin (2006).
4. I have not been able to locate it in his works or in Giancotti Boscherini (1970).
5. Huenemann (2004). Based on Dennis Des Chene's (1996, p. 85) discussion of the central medieval texts, the meaning of prime matter on which basically all late scholastic notables agreed can be summed up to be the following: prime matter is the simple and unique substrate of all natural change, has no form, and can thus potentially receive any form. It is the material cause of things by being a component in complete substances.
6. Huenemann (2004, p. 32).
7. Here I have in mind Jonathan Bennett's (1984, pp. 81–110) "field metaphysical" interpretation of the extended substance.
8. John Carriero (2005, pp. 121–2) expresses this point very nicely in his instructive discussion on Spinoza and final causality. See also Carriero (1991, pp. 58–9).
9. Bennett (1984, p. 215).
10. Bennett (1984, p. 216).
11. See Lear (1988, pp. 30–3).
12. That the notion of emanation is relevant in interpreting Spinoza is, as such, by no means a novel observation: already Harry Wolfson (1961 [1934] I, pp. 372–4, 391) lists what he sees as analogies between Spinoza's thought and the emanative doctrines of Maimonides and certain Hebrew philosophers. However, Wolfson's main thesis, that Spinoza develops his theory of God's productive causality broadly along Neoplatonic lines, strikes me as misleading; most notably, it is not plausible to regard Spinoza as "interposing infinite modes between God and finite modes" just as the emanationists interpose "immaterial Intelligences between God and matter" (Wolfson 1961 [1934] I, p. 391), for this kind of hierarchism, characteristic to the Neoplatonic doctrine of hypostases, is quite alien to Spinoza's system. Martial Gueroult (1968, pp. 246–52) maps Spinoza's relation to this traditional notion, and according to Carriero (1991), Spinoza operates within an emanative framework stemming from Avicenna. However, although important connections can be found between Avicenna and Spinoza, the idea of causation as emanation is not exclusively an Avicennan one. Moreover, Carriero seems to have a rather mechanistic interpretation of Spinoza's view of efficient causation. According to him, Spinoza applies "the lessons of the new physics to human beings and the deity... new science affords Spinoza powerful reasons for divorcing final causality from efficient causality and confining the former to an epiphenomenal status" (Carriero 1991, p. 59); Spinoza supposedly "presents a theory according to which the sort of causality the new scientists find in the corporeal order is found throughout all of nature" (Carriero 2005, p. 121). However, precisely because Spinoza's conception of causation owes much to the idea of emanation its relation to mechanistic causation should be reconsidered.
13. There are, to my knowledge, two noteworthy readings that have regarded formal-emanative causality as focal for understanding Spinoza. According to Gueroult's classic study, Spinoza does not accept the traditional distinction between logico-mathematical emanation and active efficiency because he fuses the formal and the efficient cause

together (Gueroult 1968, pp. 294, 297–9). Although Gueroult’s work provides invaluable background information for interpreting Spinoza, and although he is in these matters probably closer to truth than anybody thus far, simply stating that the formal-emanative and the efficient-active are assimilated (or, as Gueroult at one point [1968, p. 293] implies, that the latter is even in some sense “reduced” to the former) is neither particularly enlightening nor accurate; a more explicative account of the relations between different kinds of causes in Spinoza’s thought remains to be given. A central ingredient in Gueroult’s interpretation, an ingredient lurking also behind the rather simplifying fusion thesis, seems to be the erroneous contention that the scholastics would not have seen emanation as true causal activity. That this does not apply to all the prominent schoolmen, and the implications of this observation for interpreting Spinoza, will be presented below. For a reading resembling Gueroult’s, see Macherey (1998), pp. 140–6; for a recent criticism of Gueroult that is based on the idea that unlike in the case of geometrical objects, God’s essence is power, see Rizk (2006), pp. 43–5. Also Vincent Carraud (2002, pp. 323–6) objects to interpreting Spinozistic causation as efficient causation; according to him, *ratio* in the key phrase “*ratio seu causa*” (E1p11d2) refers to the forms of things, and consequently the formal cause emerges as the basic model of all causality. This is a wise interpretative move, and one I will follow, albeit on different grounds, favour. However, Carraud’s reasoning leads him to analysing the formal conditions of the existence of things, which, as far as I can see, advances little our understanding of the nature of Spinoza’s doctrine of causation; I am also unsure how should his view on the relationship between formality and efficiency (“efficiency is just the external doublet of formality” [p. 324, translation mine]) be understood. Although Wolfson mentions geometrical necessity while discussing emanation, he does not clarify its nature but merely proclaims, “the term cause which Spinoza applies to God is... to be understood in the logical and geometrical sense” (Wolfson 1961 [1934] I, p. 373). Gilles Deleuze (1997 [1968], pp. 171–3) compares Spinoza’s position to Plotinus’s doctrine according to which the effects that emanate from the One do not remain in their cause; were this the only kind of theory of emanation, it would follow, as Deleuze claims it does, that Spinoza disagrees with the emanativists. The Neoplatonic doctrine is not, however, the only kind of emanativist doctrine there is, and as will become shortly clear, there are late scholastic views on emanation that are quite relevant to understanding Spinoza. So, although these scholars point to the right direction, ultimately their analyses prove to be incomplete.

14. Thomas Lennon (2005, p. 27) estimates that Suárez “might have been [Spinoza’s] most important medieval source”.
15. As Steven Nadler (1998, p. 515) holds, the Aristotelians thought the form to be “*causally* responsible for the substance’s being such as it is”.
16. Des Chene (1996, pp. 158–61).
17. On the history of this example, see Pasnau (2004, p. 38).
18. Since no thing can exist without its *propria*, it would probably be more accurate to speak here not about coldness but power to make colder; but discussing this would take us too far afield.
19. For another reason for regarding emanation as real action, see Des Chene (1996, p. 160).
20. See also Des Chene (1996, p. 332).
21. LoLordo (2005, p. 86). As Robert Pasnau (2004, p. 34) contends, “[f]or scholastic philosophers of all persuasions, the substantial form is the explanatory basis of the entire substance, serving as the internal cause of a thing’s accidental properties and supplying the identity conditions for the whole substance and its parts”.
22. Hattab (2004, pp. 3–6).
23. James (1997, p. 35). See *Met.* 1021a15–26; SCG II.30.

24. As Des Chene (1996, p. 43) observes in one Aristotelian view on immanent actions “agent and patient coincide, or are parts of the same whole”.
25. Cf. Franco Bürgesdijck, a seventeenth-century professor from Leiden with whose work Spinoza was acquainted: “[A]ll form is emanative cause of its properties.” (Cit. Gueroult 1968, p. 297)
26. See Gueroult (1968, pp. 246, 269). As Gueroult notes, in its immediacy and necessity the emanative cause differs from the “active” cause that produces its effect non-necessarily and mediately (e.g. when a fire heats up a nearby table). For the corresponding distinction in Aquinas, see SCG II.30.12; EE IV.5.
27. See EE IV.8; SCG II.30.1; Carriero (1991, p. 51); Garrett (1991, p. 201); Des Chene (1996, p. 71). As Carriero (1991, p. 73) observes, this kind of Aristotelian conception of essence differs from our contemporary way of construing a thing’s essence out of its necessary properties.
28. That Spinoza’s talk of finite things as properties following from God’s essence harks back to scholasticism has been observed by noteworthy Anglo-American and French Spinoza scholars alike; see e.g. Gueroult (1968, p. 251); Garrett (1991, p. 201); (2002, pp. 136–7, 157).
29. Cf.: “[E]ffect, or property[.]” (E3defaff22exp)
30. Read together, the just-cited passages could well be taken to say the following: any adequate cause can be said to be formal cause (E5p31d); and since the adequate cause *par excellence* is of course God (E1p16), the world can be said to have formal character (TdIE, § 91).
31. Wilson (1991, p. 134).
32. For an influential account of this, see Curley (1969, pp. 45–6).
33. Carriero (1991, p. 64).
34. Mancosu (1996, pp. 10–5).
35. Mancosu (1996, p. 14), emphasis added.
36. Cit. Mancosu (1996, p. 21).
37. Mancosu (1996, pp. 21–2). Mancosu (1997, p. 17–9) points out that according to some seventeenth-century mathematicians, geometry deals not only with formal but also with material causes. To my mind, however, such passages as *Met.* 1036a26–b6 make it rather clear that essences of mathematical objects do not include matter; see also EE II.2; CMA II.7.9.1468; Lear (1982, p. 169). This—if not the simple fact that Aristotle sometimes equates essence with form alone (see e.g. *Met.* 1032b1–2, 1035b32)—probably explains why Barrow mentions only formal causes when writing about geometrical causality. As Des Chene (1996, pp. 232–5) explains, it was a debated issue in medieval Aristotelianism whether or not matter should be included in the essence of things.
38. This is manifested also by the fact that the requirements he lays on any thing’s good definition (TdIE, § 96) match those sometimes required of geometrical objects’ definitions (Mancosu 1996, pp. 98–9). Of course, the geometrical style in which the *Ethics* is constructed reflects this, too.
39. Cottingham (1986, p. 59).
40. Cf.: “To your question as to whether I have as clear an idea of God as of a triangle, I reply in the affirmative.” (Ep56) “For I do not presume that I have found the best philosophy, but I know that what I understand is the true one. If you ask me how I know this, I reply that I know it in the same way that you know that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles.” (Ep76)
41. As André Scala (1994, p. 36, translation mine) notes, even “if any production of an effect corresponds to a property in the cause, the converse does not hold: for instance, a triangle has properties but does not produce effects”.
42. Pasnau (2004, p. 40) writes about the formal cause in Aristotle, “formal explanation seems to take place at a more abstract, metaphysical level. What is at issue here are...

more refined questions of unity and individuation, requiring judgments about, for instance, a thing's modal properties". Exactly the same could be said about the position of essential following in Spinoza's system.

43. In an exciting recent paper, Michael Della Rocca (2003, pp. 80–1) contends that “the notion of causation somehow depends on the notion of conceivability” and asks,

is Spinoza willing to say that any form of conceivability or conceptual connection is a kind of causality? Is there, e.g., a *causal* relation between the fact that a triangle is a right triangle and the fact that it satisfies the Pythagorean theorem? This certainly does not seem causal, but at most merely conceptual. Still, I think Spinoza would not balk at calling this relation causal.

I believe my interpretation can lend support to, and shed some light on, Della Rocca's contentions. For I have suggested that (efficient) causation depends on a (conceivable) formal structure of a thing; but still a certain kind of causality may be claimed to pertain to this sort of conceivability, namely formal causality.

44. Pasnau (2004) argues that the scholastics came to view the substantial form as an internal *efficient* cause. But even though I think this holds true with regard to natural things, the important point for our purposes is that, for Spinoza, the form of causality reigning in geometry that involves no efficiency is the primary and autonomous one, determining the basic nature of things. Only if a thing is a real one, its intrinsic formal character can be said to be converted into internal efficiency.
45. Here I am in agreement with some noteworthy recent discussions. In his elaborate article on Spinoza's *conatus* argument, Garrett claims Spinoza to have endorsed a view according to which all finite things inhere in God, and since any *y* that inheres in *x* is both conceived through and caused by the essence of *x* (Garrett 2002, pp. 136–42, 144–5), this amounts to what may be called the essentialist model of causation. In consonance with this, Garrett emphasizes the causal efficacy of essences: “In Spinoza's view, something is an individual thing only to the extent that it has some nature or essence through whose genuine activity effects can be understood to follow.” (Garrett 1999, p. 330) “[A]n individual... exists to the extent that there is instantiated a definite essence or nature that can serve as a locus of causal activity. Where there is such an essence, properties follow (both causally and logically) from that essence.” (Garrett 2002, p. 150; see also 1991, pp. 194, 201). In his article defending a teleological reading of Spinoza, Martin Lin (2006, p. 343) advocates a similar view on similar grounds and claims that, for Spinoza, “things are causally efficacious only in virtue of their essences”; but Lin links this kind of “causation through essence” up with a Neoplatonic view of efficient causation according to which “efficient causation is a kind of giving” in which the cause resembles the effect (see also Lin 2004, pp. 29–33). Although these scholars are right in emphasizing the importance of essences in Spinoza's theory of causation, I think that the formal-emanative framework allows us an even better grasp of the import and nature of Spinoza's essentialist commitments; for instance, Spinoza is pushed toward his essentialist view on causation not merely, as Lin (2006, p. 345) claims, by his “rationalistic cast of mind” that shuns brute contingencies, but by his *geometrical* branch of rationalism and the model of causation it carries within.
46. Given what Christia Mercer (2001, p. 227) writes about the two related senses of “essence” in the seventeenth century, Spinoza's thought here reflects a then widely accepted view: “First, an essence is what is given in the definition of the thing and what can be grasped by the intellect; second, it constitutes the nature of an individual and that from which its properties flow.”
47. Wolfson (1961 [1934] I, pp. 373, 391) claims that also Spinoza's talk of “following” (*sequi*) reflects “following by necessity” of certain medieval emanative doctrines.
48. Gueroult (1968, pp. 246–8, 251–2).

49. Carriero (2005, p. 130) writes: "By 'the necessity of the nature of the efficient cause' I take Spinoza to mean what I have referred to as a blind efficient cause."
50. Also Lin's (2006) position is, I believe, close to the one presented here. Moreover, it should be noted that Spinoza's views have also here some noteworthy affinities with the late scholastic ones: as Hattab observes, the competing late scholastic camps agreed that efficient cause-effect relation is grounded in some intrinsic mode either of the agent or the patient (Hattab 2004, pp. 7–8). And since the substantial form determines what the substance is and which properties or modes it necessarily has, efficient causation turns out to be based on formal-emanative causation. Spinoza, in turn, holds there to be things with essences, from which certain things follow and based on which things determine each other's actions, and this determining equals transeunt efficient causation (more on this below).
51. However, it should be kept firmly in mind that since there is, according to Spinoza, only one substance, considering the essentialist model from the viewpoint of finite things should not be done as if finite things were separate substances (this is what happens quite quickly due to our tendency to endorse a pluralistic ontology). After all, Spinoza thought the only metaphysically appropriate point of view to be the one in which all causation is immanent to the monistic substance (see E1p18); obviously, all talk about causal relations taking place between finite things can and should be translated, as it were, into more adequate talk about God's internal causation (indeed, this is why the Suárezian account of emanation, explicating the way in which a substance obtains its properties, sits so well with Spinoza's thought). As Koistinen (2002, p. 60) points out, Spinoza thought his monistic doctrine capable of unlocking the severe problems plaguing both Descartes's interactionism and Malebranche's occasionalism. Although Pascal Sévérac's treatment of these issues could be further elucidated, I find much that is good in his observation (in which he is following Pierre Macherey) that the relationship between the only substance and a mode is that of a cause and an effect, but "according to immanent, not mechanistic, causality" (Sévérac 2005, p. 56).
52. According to E3d2, the first case equals activity, the second passivity.
53. For another illustration of this idea, see TP IV.4.
54. As Koistinen (2002, p. 68) explains, "individuals enter into causal relations *via* their states", from which it follows that substance is the cause of some effect if and only if some state of the substance is the cause of that effect.
55. See especially Rice (1992), but also e.g. Watt (1972), Lennox (1976), Gilead (1990), and Malinowski-Charles (2004).
56. See Hempel (1965, pp. 245–90).
57. Curley (1969, p. 66).
58. Curley (1969, p. 70). See also Curley (1988, pp. 47–50).
59. Curley's interpretation not only fits fairly well with some things Spinoza says but also presents his system in a form that is very approachable for anybody familiar with the philosophy of the last century.
60. As Huenemann (1999, p. 225) observes, "it is not clear why should there be any finite modes at all, let alone why they should be said to be necessary".
61. The objection is by Huenemann and presented in Curley & Walski (1999, p. 258): "[Y]our Spinoza cannot explain why one possible universe is actual and another is not. That this universe, and no other is actual is, I take it, a brute fact, true independently of any fact about God." Huenemann articulates well what seems to be the greatest problem in Curley's interpretation:

Monism has been understood generally as the view that somehow all things... owe their existence and essence ultimately and exclusively to a single thing, and Spinoza has been understood generally as such a monist. But according to Curley, Spinoza does not claim that finite modes owe their existence *exclusively*

to God. God's nature plays a part in their existence, to be sure: it grounds the laws of nature, which are necessary for the generation of any finite mode. But the laws alone are not sufficient for a finite mode's generation. There must also be an independent causal chain of finite modes, a chain whose links are again governed by the laws of nature, but which (again) do not owe their existence exclusively to God... [T]he totality of finite modes cannot be understood as following from God's nature or God's attributes or God's infinite modes, according to Curley, since this would mean that each finite mode does so, and E IPP21–23, 28 rule this out. Thus there is no final explanation, in Curley's account, for the existence of the totality of finite modes other than the individual explanations for the existences of particular members of that totality. (Huenemann 1999, p. 227)

I am, however, unsure whether Huenemann's (1999, pp. 235–8) own solution, according to which only the immutable formal essences of things are necessitated by God's absolute nature, whereas the actual existence of finite things is "relatively necessitated" by other actually existing finite things (and thereby "follow necessarily from God's nonabsolute nature") escapes the problems plaguing Curley's interpretation: on what, if not the absolute nature of God, are the determinations pertaining to the actual existence of things based?

62. Curley & Walski (1999, p. 259).
63. Huenemann (1999, pp. 227–8) mentions, justifiably I think, also KV I.4, CM I.3, and E1p29 as additional reasons to see Spinoza to believe, as Huenemann puts it, "that some ultimate explanation... must be given for the existence and determinate nature of the totality of finite modes".
64. Koistinen (1998, p. 73) explains:

Let us suppose that Jones raised his hand in his bedroom 12.2.1995... [B]ecause this hand raising has spatiotemporal limits it is a finite mode. But consider now the truth expressed by the sentence "Jones raised his hand in his bedroom 12.2.1995." This sentence is *about* the finite mode... [b]ut... what makes it true is not just the existence of "Jones' raising his hand" but "Jones' raising his hand in his bedroom at 12.2.1995." ... This entity is beyond the temporal and spatial order and is for that reason an infinite mode. But because all truths about finite modes must involve place and time specifications it follows that all truths about finite modes have as their objects infinite modes and are made true by infinite modes.

65. Koistinen (1998, p. 71–5).
66. Evidently, much here hinges on how one understands Spinoza to think about laws. Curley's (1969, p. 47) suggests that by laws Spinoza means regularities in nature. But I do not think that this is accurate; rather, by "laws of nature" Spinoza primarily means laws *inscribed in things' essences*, i.e. the intelligible structure or the "true code" (TdIE, § 101) of those essences. Most importantly, everything is what it is and the way it is because God's nature is what it is, has the kind of inner code or formality it does.
67. For the impact of essentialism on Spinoza's political theory, see TP IV.4; TTP XVII.1.
68. Interestingly, views resembling Spinoza's kind of essentialism have also recently been defended. Most notably, Rom Harré (1970, p. 88) claims that we may see the behaviour of things "as flowing from their natures or constitutions as consequences of what they are. So they must behave the specified way, or not be the things that they are". This essentialist line of thinking is developed more extensively in Harré & Madden (1975). Also Brian Ellis's (2002) "new essentialism" has many notable similarities to Spinoza's position.
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