

# Two

## The Metaphysics of Substance

How many things are there in the world? Spinoza's answer: one. What might seem to be other things are merely ways in which the one thing exists. In this chapter, I will explain Spinoza's conception of this one thing—which Spinoza calls a substance—and of the ways in which it exists. I will also unpack his powerful argument for this monism—this oneness—of substance. It cannot be overemphasized how the rest of Spinoza's philosophy—his philosophy of mind, his epistemology, his psychology, his moral philosophy, his political philosophy, and his philosophy of religion—flows more or less directly from the metaphysical underpinnings in Part I of the *Ethics*.

Spinoza's understanding of substance is, in many ways, a principled transformation and criticism of Descartes's conception. So it will be easier to understand Spinoza's conception if we first briefly sketch that of Descartes. The main theme here is this: Descartes's conception incorporates some guiding rationalist motivations but—Spinoza can be seen as implicitly saying—Descartes does not carry out these rationalist motivations consistently or far enough. Once you take the rationalist motivations in Descartes and follow through on them clear-headedly, you will arrive at something like Spinoza's more controversial account.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. DESCARTES ON SUBSTANCE

So let's begin with Descartes.

The leading lights of Descartes's metaphysics are substance, attribute (or principal attribute), and mode. Relying on a concep-

tion of substance that has its roots in Aristotle, Descartes sees a substance as a thing in which other things, such as properties or qualities or states, inhere and which does not inhere in anything else. Thus Descartes offers this definition of substance:

Each thing is called a substance which something is in [*inest*] immediately as in a subject or by means of which we perceive anything that exists, that is, by means of which we perceive any property, quality or attribute of which a real idea is in us.

[CSM II 114/AT VII 161, translation altered]

He also says, “we call the thing which they [attributes] are in [*insunt*] a substance” (CSM II 156/AT VII 222, translation altered). That a substance does not inhere in—is not in—anything else is apparent from Descartes’s frequent claim that substances exist through themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Another, related dimension of Descartes’s conception of substance is substance’s independence of anything else. Descartes offers this characterization:

By substance we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence.

[*Principles* I 51]

I will focus here on the characterization of substance in terms of independence and turn to the characterization of substance as that in which other things inhere in the next section.

What kinds of things can meet the requirement of independence? It quickly appears that, for Descartes, only God can meet this requirement: all other things depend for their existence on God and are literally inconceivable without God.

Nonetheless, Descartes does recognize a significant sense in which finite things, such as human minds, human bodies, tables,

trees, etc. are substances, for although such things do depend on God, they depend on no other created thing. Of course, a table or a tree may be caused to exist by some other finite thing (a carpenter, another tree), and thus the table or the tree may depend for its existence on something besides God. But for Descartes, this kind of dependence does not spoil the fact that finite things are substances. For while the tree may be caused to exist by another tree, Descartes regards it as conceivable that the tree exists without the other tree. Each finite substance is conceptually independent of any other finite substance. One can understand what it is for the tree to exist, Descartes would say, without presupposing the existence of any other finite thing. However, the finite substance could not, Descartes is saying, be conceived without conceiving of God who brings it into existence and, indeed, for Descartes, sustains it in existence.

By holding that finite things are substances, though they are so by meeting a different requirement from the requirement the substance God meets, Descartes explicitly regards the definition of substance as not univocal:

there is only one substance which can be understood to depend on no other thing whatsoever, namely God. In the case of all other substances, we perceive that they can exist only with the help of God's concurrence. Hence the term "substance" does not apply univocally, as they say in the Schools, to God and to other things; that is, there is no distinctly intelligible meaning of the term which is common to God and his creatures.

*(Principles I 51)*

There are two fundamentally different kinds of substance for Descartes (and this goes along with two fundamentally different kinds of dependence, as we shall see). Because there is this duality of dependent substances and an independent substance, because there is thus no single standard for being a substance, we have here a violation of naturalism, in the sense of naturalism that I discussed

in the previous chapter: Descartes here treats different things as playing by different rules.

But Descartes is quite happy to violate naturalism, and he has his motivations for doing so. This is because the alternative to seeing finite things as substances is to have them be mere modes of a substance. And that, as we will see, would be a truly horrifying prospect for Descartes and almost all other philosophers, but not, of course, for Spinoza. But this is to jump the gun a bit. Let's return to Descartes's notion of substance.

For Descartes, each substance has what he calls a *principal attribute*, i.e. "one principal property [*proprietas*] which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred" (*Principles* I 53). These other features of a substance that are explained by its essence Descartes often calls "modes" of the substance (*Principles* I 56). Thus each substance has a fundamental feature—fundamental in the sense that it is that feature which explains or enables us to understand all the other features of the substance and is, for this reason, the essence of the substance. There are only two attributes that can play this fundamental explanatory role for Descartes: thought and extension. Thought constitutes the essence of minds in the sense that for Descartes all the particular properties of minds presuppose thought or must be understood through thought. Thus, my feeling pain and my having the thought that today is Thursday are particular properties of a substance, and to say that the substance has these properties is to presuppose that it is thinking. All other properties of the substance also presuppose thought. In precisely the same way, extension is a principal attribute because any substance that has this property is such that all of its other properties presuppose extension. (Extension is literally the property of having extent, existing spatially. It is one of the most notable features of Descartes's account of the physical world that there is no more to being physical than taking up space.) Thus, for Descartes, extension is the principal attribute of an extended substance such as the table. The table is five feet

long, weighs 50 lbs., has a certain shape. All these properties presuppose, for Descartes, that the table is extended:

Everything else which can be attributed to body presupposes extension and is merely a mode of an extended thing.

(*Principles* I 53; for an account of weight, in particular, in terms of extension, see *Principles* IV 20–23)

But why must all the properties of a substance be subsumed under a fundamental feature? Why can't there be a feature of a substance that does not presuppose the principal attribute of the substance, but is nonetheless a feature of that substance? Thus, for example, why can't an extended substance also have some thinking features, features that cannot be understood through extension? Descartes does not, as far as I know, explicitly address this question, but it's clear what his answer would be: there would be no good account of what makes this free-floating thinking feature a feature of this extended substance. What would bind this thinking feature to this extended substance? For Descartes, the conceptual connection provided by an attribute furnishes the link needed to make a particular property a property of a given substance. Without the link afforded by an attribute, we cannot see a property as belonging to a substance. In other words, Descartes insists that there be this overarching feature because otherwise there would be no explanation of why a given feature is a feature of a particular substance.

Because the principal attribute helps us to understand all the properties of a substance, it tells us what kind of thing the substance is, what its essence is. And, for this reason, purely formal features of a substance do not count as attributes in this sense. Each substance has the features, let us say, of existence and of being powerful to some degree. But existence and power are not principal attributes for Descartes. This is because these features do not tell us what kind of thing a substance is and do not tell us what kinds of more particular properties it has.

In this way, we can see that on Descartes's ontology of substance and attribute, substances are explanatory engines. Each substance has a nature that can be articulated or explained in terms of its principal attribute, and this principal attribute in turn articulates or explains all the particular properties of the substance. Thus, for Descartes, each substance is fully conceivable. Everything about a substance must be capable of being understood and what it is understood in terms of is its principal attribute.

This is, of course, a rationalist dimension in Descartes's ontology, and we can appreciate this dimension by contrasting Descartes's view with a broadly Aristotelian account of substance. On the Aristotelian account (or at least on the Aristotelian account as it is developed by medieval philosophers such as Aquinas), a corporeal substance consists of prime matter and a substantial form. The substantial form is, in some ways, like a Cartesian principal attribute: it tells us the nature of a substance and the kind of properties it can have. But the form is not the only constituent of a substance. The substantial form must somehow inhere in a subject and this subject is prime matter, a featureless, bare subject for a substantial form. The prime matter is a thing in some sense, but, precisely because it is featureless, it cannot be articulated or explained.<sup>3</sup> Literally, prime matter is no *kind* of thing, and precisely for this reason Descartes rejects this notion as unintelligible (see CSM I 91, 92/AT XI 33, 35). Marleen Rozemond sums up the view here nicely:

Since Descartes eliminates prime matter from the hylomorphic conception of corporeal substance, the result in Aristotelian terms is that a substance just consists in a substantial form. In Descartes' own terms, the result is that the substance just consists in a principal attribute.

[Rozemond 1998: 11]

But a problem immediately arises: if the substance just is its principal attribute, then how can there be more than one substance that

has the same attribute? Let's say that substance A has the attribute of thought and substance B (distinct from A) also has the attribute of thought. Substance A might be my mind and substance B your mind. If each substance just is its principal attribute, then A is identical to the attribute of thought and B also is identical to the attribute of thought. Given the transitivity of identity, it would follow that, contrary to our supposition, A and B are identical or my mind and your mind are identical. This is a major problem, and to avoid it Descartes would have to say that there is something more to a particular substance than its attribute. This something more would then help individuate or distinguish one substance from another. Given that Descartes has eliminated prime matter, what can he appeal to to do this job? I think that Descartes would have to appeal to the modes or the particular properties of a substance. But as we will see, there are grave difficulties, pointed out by Spinoza, in allowing mere modes to perform the important task of individuation.

If, for Descartes, principal attributes are basic features in terms of which other features are conceived, then principal attributes must be conceptually independent of one another. Thus, for Descartes, to understand a thing as thinking does not require us to think of it as also extended, and similarly conceiving of a thing as extended does not require conceiving of it as thinking. By contrast, as we saw, conceiving of a thing as five feet long does require conceiving of it as extended. In this way, being five feet long is a mode (literally, a way) of being extended. If thought itself were conceived through extension, then thought would be a mode of extension and thus thought would not be an attribute after all. For this reason, given that thought and extension are each principal attributes, they must be conceptually independent of one another. Further, thinking features in general are conceptually independent of extended features. We can think of something as having a particular thinking feature without thereby thinking of it as having extension or any particular extended feature. Thus my mind's having the property of thinking

about a table does not presuppose that my mind has any extended feature, nor in fact does it presuppose that anything else is extended. Certainly this thought is *about* something extended—namely the table—but it does not presuppose that anything actually exists that is extended. The mere fact that I have the thought of a table is compatible with there being no tables or, indeed, no extended objects. That is, one can, it seems, conceive that I have the thought of a table without presupposing that there are tables or extended objects generally. Thoughts of extension are, for Descartes, conceptually independent of extension, or, as Descartes puts it, “the concept of the one is not contained in the concept of the other” (CSM I 298/AT VIII B 35). This is one of Descartes’s points in his famous skeptical arguments in the *Meditations*.

Despite insisting that attributes be conceptually independent, Descartes allows for causal interactions that cross the boundary between two attributes. Thus Descartes holds that certain mental changes, changes in thought, can cause certain changes in the extended world. And certain extended changes can cause changes in thought. Thus consider my mind which, for Descartes, is a substance separate from my body. My mind can cause changes in my body, and certain changes in my body can cause changes in my mind.<sup>4</sup> Thus, for Descartes, despite there being no *conceptual* connections between mental things and physical things, there can be *causal* connections between them.

There is a final aspect of Descartes’s ontology of substance that I want to emphasize, and this is his claim that each substance has only one principal attribute. For Descartes, there is only one fundamental feature in terms of which all the properties of a substance can be explained. Speaking of principal attributes, Descartes says (in a passage part of which I just quoted):

it cannot be said that those which are different, and such that the concept of the one is not contained in the concept of the other, are present together in one and the same subject; for that would



be equivalent to saying that one and the same subject has two different natures.

[CSM I 298/AT VIII B 349–50]

Why does Descartes hold this view? He does not make his reason explicit, but he does allude here to the conceptual separation between the attributes. Precisely because thought and extension are conceptually independent, it follows that one can think of a substance as thinking without thereby thinking of it as extended (and vice versa). If a substance had both thought and extension as attributes, then, given this conceptual independence, why would they be together in the same substance instead of present in two separate substances? In the case of an attribute and a mode of that attribute, it is clear why they are in the same substance: being extended and being five feet long are features of the same substance precisely because there is a conceptual link between the essence of that substance (the attribute) and the mode. But in the absence of such a link between two attributes, what could account for their presence in the same substance? Earlier we saw that a property that is not explained in terms of an overarching attribute would be problematic for Descartes because there would be no explanation of the fact that it belongs to the substance it belongs to. In the same way, I believe, for Descartes, if a substance has two attributes, then, given their conceptual independence, there would be no explanation of the fact that they belong to the same substance. So, for Descartes, given the conceptual independence between the attributes and given his demand—which can be seen as a rationalist demand—that there be an explanation of why a substance has the features that it does have, we can see why he insists that a substance can have only one attribute. As we will see, Spinoza denies the Cartesian view that a substance can have only one attribute and, intriguingly, he will do this by strengthening not only the rationalist demand, but also the conceptual separation between the attributes.

**2. SPINOZA CONTRA DESCARTES ON SUBSTANCE**

In light of its rationalist character, one would expect Spinoza to be quite sympathetic to Descartes's ontology of substance and attribute, and indeed he is. He follows Descartes in developing an account of substance according to which it is independent of other things and an account of attribute according to which it is somehow a fundamental feature of the substance that all of its particular properties presuppose. Further, for Spinoza as for Descartes, one attribute is conceptually independent of another.

The latter two theses (at least) are, as I explained, rationalist theses in Descartes, and so Spinoza happily adopts them. However, he diverges significantly from Descartes in this area, and he does so precisely because of his more thoroughgoing commitment to the PSR.

Spinoza, like Descartes, sees a substance as something that has properties but that itself is not a property of anything else. This is why, I believe, part of Spinoza's definition (1def3) of substance is as that which is in itself. For Spinoza, as for Descartes, things inhere in substance and it, in turn, inheres in nothing else. Spinoza also defines substance in terms of independence. The kind of independence Spinoza, like Descartes, has in mind is conceptual independence, and thus the other part of Spinoza's definition of substance is that substance is conceived through itself.

So far the account is a lot like Descartes's. But the first departure is this: Spinoza does not countenance the kind of escape clause that allows finite substances into Descartes's scheme. Spinoza would agree with Descartes that only God meets the requirements for being a substance, but, unlike Descartes, he does not look for a way to have finite things count as substances as well. Any such exception would be too ad hoc, for Spinoza, or, more specifically it would be a violation of his naturalism and of his PSR. In virtue of what could some beings play by different rules? If the notion of a mode is of a being that is conceptually dependent on another, and if finite things such as the table and chairs are dependent in this way, then one should have the courage of one's convictions and

admit that such things are modes of the substance. This is precisely what Spinoza does, and it is what his rationalism demands. I will explore this point in the next section.

The second main departure from Descartes concerns Spinoza's notion of attribute. Spinoza defines attribute much as Descartes does:

By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence.

[1def4]

One obvious difference—though its significance is not immediately apparent—is that Spinoza qualifies his definition in terms of that which the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of substance. I will return to this difference in the next section. Like Descartes, Spinoza regards thought and extension as attributes. Unlike Descartes, Spinoza holds that there is an “infinity of attributes” including thought and extension. For Spinoza, the other attributes are unknown to human beings (Letter 64). I will not focus on this difference between Descartes and Spinoza in what follows. The difference I want to focus on instead emerges from some of the ways Spinoza applies the definition of attribute. Just as Descartes does, Spinoza rules out any kind of conceptual connection between attributes. He makes this claim most prominently in 1p10: “Each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself.” By this claim, Spinoza means, just as Descartes does, that nothing extended is conceptually connected to anything thinking (and vice versa). However, unlike Descartes, Spinoza also does not allow any causal relations between thought and extension. For Spinoza, it is precisely because thought and extension are conceptually separate (one can conceive of one without conceiving of the other) that thought and extension cannot causally interact. For Spinoza, in other words, causal dependence amounts to conceptual dependence (and thus when Spinoza says that a substance is conceptually independent of everything else, he means as well that it is causally independent).

We can see that Spinoza accepts that causation is just conceptual connection by turning to his claim that a substance cannot be caused by another thing. His reason is that in such a case the substance would (contrary to the definition of substance) be conceived through that other thing (1p6c). Thus, for Spinoza, there must be some conceptual connection between two things in order for them to be causally related. Indeed, it is clear from this passage, together with the way he uses 1ax4 in 1p25d, that, for Spinoza, causation is coextensive with conceptual connection. But Spinoza's point here is more than a claim of mere coextensiveness. For Spinoza, causal connections are grounded in and stem from conceptual connections. Consider the fact that Spinoza *defines* substance and mode in terms of conceptual connections and on this basis goes on to conclude (e.g. in 1p6c and 2p6) that there cannot be causal connections between substances or between modes of different attributes. Conceptual connections are clearly, for Spinoza, more fundamental than causal connections, and the latter can be derived completely from the former. And thus, for Spinoza, causation is nothing more than the relation whereby one thing explains another or makes it intelligible.

Why does Spinoza assimilate causal and conceptual dependence in this way? One can see him as guided by the drive for unification demanded by his rationalism and naturalism. It's as if Spinoza is saying to Descartes: "you have no good reason to separate these kinds of dependence, and if you do separate them, you are making causal relations unintelligible."

Here's one way to see this point as developing. Let's say that *a* is the total cause of *b*. I want to claim on Spinoza's behalf that in such a case the claim "if *a* occurs then *b* occurs" must be conceptually true. If this is so, then we cannot ask why this conceptual connection holds without betraying a misunderstanding of the concepts involved in that claim or at least a failure to grasp those concepts completely. By contrast, on the Cartesian view which allows for causal relations despite a conceptual gap between the mental and

the physical, these causal relations are, at bottom, unintelligible. Given the cause, there is no way to see the effect coming. But on Spinoza's view, according to which causes are conceptually connected to their effects, by understanding the concept of the cause, we can just see that the effect has to occur. There is no mystery about the causal relation, for Spinoza. His assimilation of causal and conceptual connections is thus a manifestation of his rationalism, and Descartes's acceptance of unintelligible mind-body causal relations is a sign of Descartes's failure to be truly a rationalist.

I think that one who appreciates the fact that, if there are to be genuine causal connections, they must amount to conceptual connections, is Hume. Hume, of course, denies that there are conceptual connections among distinct things and so he is unable to come up with genuine cases of causation. But, in a way, Hume does accept the rationalist demand that, if there is to be genuine causation, it must amount to conceptual connection. Spinoza accepts this rationalist demand too. But, unlike Hume, he sees there as being genuine conceptual connections, i.e. causal connections, in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Here we see what I called in the previous chapter Spinoza's twofold use of the PSR. In the first use, he asks what causation is. It cannot be a brute fact: we need an explanation or account of causation itself. In the second use, he accounts for causation by appealing to conceivability or explicability or intelligibility itself.

The final major difference between Spinoza's ontology and Descartes's ontology that I want to focus on is Spinoza's denial of Descartes's view that a substance can have only one attribute. For Spinoza, a substance can have more than one attribute; indeed, for him, the one substance, God, has infinitely many different attributes. How can this be so in light of the Cartesian reasons for limiting each substance to one attribute?

To see why, we need to explore the roots of Spinoza's claim that only one substance—with infinitely many attributes—exists. His argument for this claim—for his monism—is one of Spinoza's

most elegant and also intriguing and puzzling arguments. The argument does presuppose that a substance can have more than one attribute, but by seeing the ways in which the PSR undergirds this argument, we will be in a position to see how Spinoza would justify the view that a single substance can have more than one attribute.

### **3. THE ARGUMENT FOR SUBSTANCE MONISM**

So, without further ado, let's investigate Spinoza's argument for substance monism.

In addition to the definitions of substance and attribute, there is one further crucial definition at work in his argument, and that is his definition of mode as "that which is in another through which it is also conceived" (1def5). A mode is thus conceptually dependent on something other than the mode itself, and this is why a mode is a mode and not a substance.

Using these definitions and other claims, the argument travels through four key steps. It is, in outline, rather simple. Spinoza argues first that no two substances can share an attribute (1p5). Second Spinoza argues that "it pertains to the nature of a substance to exist" (1p7). On the basis of 1p7, Spinoza argues that God—defined as the substance with all the attributes—exists. Finally, since God exists and has all the attributes and since there can, by 1p5, be no sharing of attributes, no other substance besides God can exist. Any such substance would have to share attributes with God and such sharing is ruled out.

I want to explain each step briefly and, in some cases, raise potential objections, objections to which Spinoza has, I believe, good answers. Thus let's take 1p5 first: "In Nature there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute." To prove this proposition, Spinoza considers what is required in order to individuate two substances, i.e. what is required in order to explain their non-identity. For Spinoza, the distinctness between two distinct things must be explained by some difference between them, some difference in their properties. In the case of the individuation

of substances, this amounts to the claim that they must be individuated via a difference either in their attributes or in their modes. Thus Spinoza says in 1p4d:

Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another, either by a difference in the attributes of the substances or by a difference in their affections.<sup>6</sup>

In 1p5d, he makes clear that such a difference in properties is needed for two things to be “conceived to be”—i.e. explained to be—“distinguished from one another.”

In insisting on some difference in properties between two things, Spinoza endorses the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles. This is the principle—more often associated with Leibniz than with Spinoza—that if *a* and *b* are indiscernible, i.e. if *a* and *b* have all the same properties, then *a* is identical to *b*. One can see that this principle turns on the notion of explaining non-identity and, as such, one can see its roots in the PSR. Non-identities, by the PSR, require explanation, and the way to explain non-identity is to appeal to some difference in properties.

Thus two substances could be individuated either by a difference in their attributes or in their modes. Spinoza dismisses right away any differentiation of substances in terms of their attributes because he says we are considering whether two substances can share an attribute. Thus a case in which substances might have different attributes might seem to be irrelevant to the case at hand. However, as we will see in a moment, this dismissal might be too hasty. Spinoza then considers whether they can be distinguished by their modes. Spinoza eliminates this possibility as well, offering the following argument.

Since a substance is prior to its modes (by 1p1), we are entitled, and indeed obligated, to put the modes to the side when we take up the matter of individuating substances. Thus, with the modes to one side and with the attributes already eliminated as individuator,

it turns out that there are no legitimate grounds for individuating substances with the same attribute, for explaining why they are distinct. Thus, since substances with the same attribute cannot legitimately be individuated, there cannot be any sharing of attributes.

Obviously this argument turns crucially on the claim that we should put the modes to one side. But what justifies this claim? Spinoza appeals here to the notion of priority introduced in 1p1. What exactly what does this priority amount to? For Spinoza, as well as Descartes, it is conceptual priority. One can have the idea of a substance without having ideas of its modes.

Thus, we can see why Descartes would have a problem individuating, say, two extended substances. All Descartes could appeal to in order to individuate the substances is the modes, but given Descartes's own explanatory notion of substance, according to which all of a substance's modes are explained through its attributes, such an appeal is illegitimate.

Of course, Descartes might at this point simply give up the claim that the non-identity of substances is explicable. Fair enough. After all, Descartes does not explicitly assert the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles. But Descartes's rejection of prime matter is in the spirit of such a principle. For Descartes, there is no way to articulate what prime matter is precisely because it has no qualities. In the same way, there is no way to articulate what the non-identity of *a* and *b* consists in because no qualities are available to do the job of individuation. Thus, even on his own terms, Descartes should feel the force of this Spinozistic argument that rules out a multiplicity of substances sharing the same attribute.

But even if substances that share an attribute are not individuated by their modes, perhaps such substances are individuated by attributes that they do not share. Spinoza does allow, after all, that a substance can have more than one attribute. So why can't we have the following scenario: substance 1 has attributes X and Y and substance 2 has attributes Y and Z. On this scenario, while the two



substances share an attribute (i.e. Y) they differ with regard to other attributes and can thus be individuated after all. So perhaps then, contrary to 1p5, there can be some sharing of attributes by different substances. This objection was first raised by Leibniz, one of the most acute readers of Spinoza.<sup>7</sup>

This objection is harder to answer than the charge that substances that share an attribute can be individuated by their modes, but Spinoza clearly has the resources to handle this objection too. To see why, let's assume that Leibniz's scenario is possible. If so, then attribute Y would not enable us to pick out or conceive of one substance in particular. The thought "the substance with attribute Y" would not be a thought of one substance in particular, and thus attribute Y would not by itself enable us to conceive of any particular substance. For Spinoza, such a result would contradict the clause in the definition of attribute according to which *each* attribute constitutes the essence of substance. As Spinoza says in 1p10s, a claim that he clearly sees as following from the definition of attribute, "each [attribute of a substance] expresses the reality or being of substance."<sup>8</sup> So for Spinoza, if a substance has more than one attribute, each attribute by itself must enable us to conceive of the substance, and this can be the case only if each attribute that a substance has is unique to that substance. Thus Leibniz's scenario is ruled out.

But this good result only raises again the question of whether a substance can have more than one attribute. Before we can answer this question, we must delve further into Spinoza's argument for substance monism.

The next crucial stage is 1p7: "It pertains to the nature of a substance to exist." Spinoza means by this claim that each substance is such that its existence somehow follows from its very concept or nature. Other things—i.e. limited things or modes—are not such that their existence follows from their very nature. For such things, their existence is at the mercy of other things, the things that limit them. But a substance is special: its existence

is beholden only to its own nature. And so the only way that the existence of a substance could be prevented would be if its essence or nature were somehow internally incoherent. Otherwise, i.e. if the nature of a substance is coherent, then that's what it is for the substance to exist. In this way, we can see that, for Spinoza, the existence of a substance is just the fact that it is coherent or, as I will say, conceivable. This reduction of existence to conceivability holds generally for Spinoza (not just for substance) and this fact will play a crucial role in helping us to understand Spinoza's account of the eternity of the human mind in Chapter 7.

How does Spinoza argue for 1p7? He first cites 1p6c, the claim that no substance can be caused by anything else. For Spinoza, as we have seen, if a substance were caused by something else, it would have to be conceived through that something else. But this would conflict with the self-conceived nature of substance. Since substance cannot be produced by anything else, he concludes (in 1p7d) that substance is produced by itself. Here the PSR plays a role: since substance is not produced by anything else, and, by the PSR, it must be produced by something, it follows that substance is self-caused. Given Spinoza's equation of causation and conceivability, it follows that a substance's existence is simply a function of its concept or definition. That is, as Spinoza says, "it pertains to the nature of a substance to exist."

One might, however, object to the notion of self-causation in the following way: causes must exist before their effects, so for a thing to cause itself it must exist prior to itself, which is absurd. Spinoza, however, simply rejects this restrictive notion of causation, and his assimilation of causation to explanation helps us to see how he can do this: to say that a thing is self-caused is nothing more than saying that it is self-explanatory, and this is indeed how Spinoza views a substance.

In 1p11 Spinoza applies 1p7 to the case of God. To see how Spinoza does this, we should have before us his definition of God:

By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.

(1def6)

By “an infinity of attributes” Spinoza means *all* attributes, as is clear from his explanation of this definition:

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

Spinoza thinks that God must be understood in terms of contentful, explanatorily basic features. This is in keeping with his rationalist commitment to the intelligibility of all things, including God.

Given that God is by definition a substance (and indeed a substance with all the attributes) and given that, as 1p7 states, existence follows from the nature of a substance, Spinoza concludes that God exists. Indeed, Spinoza states here that God exists *necessarily*, and it's easy to see why. Definitional or conceptual truths are necessary truths (for example, “squares have four equal sides” is a definitional truth and as such it is necessary.) Because existence is a part of the concept of God, we can say that the statement that God exists is a necessary truth.

Spinoza gives expression here to a version of what is known as the ontological argument for the existence of God. Such arguments, in one way or another, proceed from the claim that existence is part of the concept of God to the conclusion that God exists. Such arguments had already had in Spinoza's day a long history dating back at least to Anselm (1033–1109) and had recently been employed by Descartes in his Fifth Meditation. Spinoza's version is, perhaps, unique in the way in which it relies heavily on the PSR.

Spinoza, in effect, says in 1p11 that God must exist by his very nature for if he did not then there would be no explanation for his non-existence. But, this would be intolerable since, by the PSR, each fact must have an explanation. The PSR thus helps us to see that God must have a definition or nature that is so rich as to generate God's very existence.

But there's a loose end: I said earlier in connection with 1p7 that the claim that existence pertains to the nature of a substance would hold only for a substance whose nature is not somehow internally incoherent. In this light, Spinoza can be said to have proved that God exists by virtue of the fact that God is defined as a substance *only* if Spinoza can show that the notion of God is internally coherent. (This is a kind of difficulty with the ontological argument that Leibniz was at particular pains to address.)<sup>9</sup> But while Spinoza obviously regards the nature of God as coherent, and, in fact, Spinoza explicitly says that to see God's nature as involving a contradiction is "absurd" (1p11d2), he nonetheless offers no direct argument for the claim that God's nature is coherent. And, as it happens, one can well imagine a Cartesian challenging that Spinoza's definition of God is incoherent precisely because it involves the claim that a substance can have more than one attribute. So again we come up against the problem of a multiplicity of attributes. Is there anything that Spinoza says that can be seen as addressing this important difficulty? We'll see that there is indeed by examining a problem with Spinoza's last step, in 1p14, in his proof of substance monism,

Here Spinoza puts it all together. Precisely because God is defined as having all the attributes, it follows that if another substance were to exist in addition to God, it would have to share attributes with God. (Each substance, for Spinoza, must have at least one attribute—1p10s.) But 1p5 prohibits attribute-sharing. So, given that God exists necessarily (by 1p11), no other substance exists or, indeed, can exist. QED.

But an immediate problem arises here. This problem was originally raised by Don Garrett in his classic paper, "Spinoza's

‘Ontological’ Argument” (Garrett 1979). Spinoza’s proof of monism proceeds via the claim in 1p11 that God exists, and that claim is proved on the strength of the claim that God is a substance and also the general claim that it pertains to the nature of a substance to exist. But consider what would have happened if, instead of using 1p7 to prove in 1p11d that God exists, Spinoza had invoked 1p7 to prove that some different substance, a substance with fewer attributes, exists. For example, call the substance with only the attribute of extension, “ES1.” ES1 is, let us say, by nature a substance with only that attribute. Invoking 1p7, we can say that it pertains to the nature of ES1 to exist and thus ES1 does exist and necessarily so. (This would be, as it were, an ontological argument for the existence of ES1.) But now, given that ES1 exists and given 1p5—the thesis that substances cannot share attributes—and also given the fact that if God were to exist he would have all the attributes, it follows that God does not exist after all! God would have to share an attribute with ES1 which we have already proven to exist. So it seems that Spinoza was able to prove that God is the only substance only because he began 1p11 somewhat arbitrarily with the claim that God exists. What reason did he have for starting there instead of starting with the claim that, say, ES1 exists? The answer must be that somehow ES1 has an incoherent nature and God does not. But this just brings us back to the question we have already raised: Is God’s nature coherent?

How would Spinoza answer this question? He does not answer this question explicitly, but there is one claim that he espouses and that has an indirect bearing on this question. First, let’s assume that for each attribute there must be a substance that has that attribute—given that attributes are conceived through themselves (1p10), nothing could prevent the instantiation of a given attribute. Given that there is no sharing of attributes and given that extension is an attribute, it follows that there is only one extended substance. Now consider the question: does this one extended substance have other attributes as well? In particular, does it have

the attribute of thought? Well, let's say that it lacks thought. In virtue of what does it lack thought? This last question is a perfectly natural one, and in fact Spinoza's PSR demands that there be a reason here, that there be an answer to this question. What then could explain why the one extended substance lacks thought?

It's clear what Descartes would say: the fact that it is extended is the reason that the one extended substance lacks thought. Not only would Descartes say this, but it also seems the most natural and plausible way to answer the question. Notice, though, that this approach to the question is absolutely illegitimate from Spinoza's point of view. It is ruled out by his strong understanding of the conceptual barrier between the attributes. For Spinoza, as we have seen, no fact about thought depends on any fact about extension. This is just a manifestation of the self-conceived nature of each attribute. As Spinoza understands this separation, this means, for example, that the fact that a substance is extended cannot explain why it has the attribute of thought and also cannot explain why it lacks the attribute of thought. To explain the lack of thought by appealing to extension would be to explain a fact about thought in terms of a fact about extension. And this violates the conceptual barrier for Spinoza. He makes precisely the point in 1p10s. He says immediately after articulating the conceptual independence of the attributes that:

From these propositions it is evident that although two attributes may be conceived to be really distinct (i.e. one may be conceived without the aid of the other), we still cannot infer from that that they constitute two beings, or two different substances.

Spinoza says here that the conceptual barrier shows that one attribute cannot prevent a substance from having another attribute. No other potential explanation of the one extended substance's lack of thought seems to be available. So if this substance did lack thought, that would be a brute fact and as such ruled out by the PSR. In this

way, we can quickly see that every attribute not only must be instantiated but must also, on pain of violating the PSR, be instantiated by a single substance.

This understanding of the conceptual independence between the attributes is particularly strong. It uses the conceptual independence to preclude not only positive trans-attribute explanations (e.g. explanations that *a* is thinking because *a* is extended), but also negative trans-attribute explanations (e.g. explanations that *a* is not thinking because *a* is extended). Descartes obviously does not take the conceptual barrier this far: he is quite happy to say that an extended substance lacks thought *because* it is extended. However, Spinoza seems to be saying, if one has a conceptual barrier at all, there is no good reason not to extend it to preclude negative trans-attribute explanations as well as positive ones. And indeed I think that Spinoza is right here. He seems to be carrying to their logical extreme claims already accepted by Descartes. If Spinoza is right, then he has a good reason, on his own terms, for holding that one substance has all the attributes, and he has a good reason for ruling out ES1—the substance with only extension—because it has an incoherent nature. For Spinoza, there is good reason to hold that the only substance with a coherent nature is God, the substance of all attributes.

So now we have seen two respects in which Spinoza adopts a stronger version of the independence of the attributes than Descartes adopts. As we saw earlier, unlike Descartes, Spinoza rejects not only trans-attribute conceptual relations, but also trans-attribute causal relations. And, also unlike Descartes, Spinoza rejects negative trans-attribute explanations as well as positive ones. In taking the independence of the attributes to its logical extremes, Spinoza seems to be guided by the PSR: there is no reason not to take the independence of the attributes to these extremes.

In this light, we can see the argument for substance monism as generated by Spinoza's PSR as well as by his strong version of the conceptual independence of the attributes. And here at last we have

a justification of the general Spinozistic claim that it is possible for a substance to have more than one attribute. The explanation is that it's possible because otherwise there would be a violation not only of the PSR, but also of the conceptual independence of the attributes.<sup>10</sup>

This multiplicity of attributes in a single substance raises a problem about the essence of this substance. We have seen that for Spinoza an attribute constitutes the essence of substance, but could *each* of a multiplicity of attributes constitute this essence? Here we return to the significance of the way Spinoza qualifies the Cartesian definition of attribute. Recall that Spinoza defines attribute this way:

By attribute I understand what *the intellect perceives* of a substance, as constituting its essence.

[1def4, my emphasis]

The significance of this qualification is to call attention to the fact that, for Spinoza, what counts as the essence of the substance depends on how the substance is being conceived by the intellect. Considered as extended, the substance's essence is extension (and not thought). Considered as thinking, the substance's essence is thought (and not extension). And so on for all the other attributes. Considered neutrally—i.e. simply as God—the essence of the substance is to have all the attributes. This is precisely what the definition of God specifies (1def6).<sup>11</sup> Thus the significance of the non-Cartesian qualification in Spinoza's definition of attribute is to call attention to Spinoza's non-Cartesian view that a single substance can have more than one attribute.

So by seeing the principled ways in which Spinoza's ontology departs from that of Descartes we can see how he generates his argument for substance monism and against Descartes's claim that one substance cannot have more than one attribute. Precisely because Descartes's ontology of attributes—for him, thought and extension, roughly the mental and the physical—continues to be



central to metaphysics and philosophy of mind even today, Spinoza's arguments represent a significant advance in our understanding of the traditional and still raging mind–body problem. Nonetheless, and obviously, there is at least one important question unanswered, and here no amount of drawing a contrast with Descartes will help because Descartes faces precisely the same problem.

The question I have in mind is: Why does Spinoza hold that thought and extension are separate attributes? Spinoza's argument that the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same thing (1p14, 2p7s) presupposes that thought and extension are separate attributes, but what justifies this presupposition? Unfortunately, Spinoza does not seem to have a good answer here. Spinoza does argue that thought is an attribute and that extension is an attribute (2pp1–2). His argument that thought is an attribute is just the claim that he can conceive of an infinite and conceptually independent thinking being, i.e. he can conceive that thought has the conceptual independence required to be an attribute. (He gives a similar proof for extension being an attribute.) But while this consideration may carry some intuitive weight, it is obviously unsatisfactory as a proof: even if we do have this conception of an independent thinking being, why does Spinoza think we are entitled to rely on this conception? Perhaps when we conceive—or think we conceive—of an infinite thinking being our thought really contains an unnoticed contradiction. Perhaps it is the case that there is some hidden conceptual dependence of thought on extension (or, alternatively, of extension on thought). Perhaps, in particular, to conceive adequately what it is for there to be a being with the mental life that you have, one must presuppose that there is some kind of physical world with which you are in contact, i.e. perhaps part of the very notion of what it is to be mental is that one bears some kind of relation to physical objects. This kind of conceptual connection seems not obviously absurd or illegitimate, and many philosophers have accepted something like it (e.g. Kant, Wittgenstein, and Davidson). If this is legitimate, then thought is,

after all, not self-conceived and so not an attribute. If Spinoza is to say that such a conceptual connection is illegitimate, then he needs to do more than simply assert, as he does in 2p1s, that it is.

Spinoza also asserts that extension does not depend on thought. But here too it is not enough simply to assert that one can conceive that extension is self-sufficient; one must argue for this claim and address the arguments and intuitions that tend in the opposite direction, arguments to the effect that extension conceptually depends on thought, as any number of idealists have held.

None of this is to say that Spinoza is worse off than his physicalist or idealist opponents. Typically they too offer merely intuitive grounds for their assertions of conceptual dependence and their positions require argument just as much as Spinoza's does. Thus the problem of explaining how the mental and the physical are related—the traditional mind-body problem—continues to be at an impasse. Unsurprisingly, then, Spinoza has not solved the mind-body problem. But he has advanced our understanding of it. He has shown how, if one skillfully and consistently wields the PSR and the conceptual barrier between thought and extension, one can construct an argument for the view that there is one substance and one can undermine the Cartesian intuitions that material things and physical things cannot be identical. In later chapters, we will return to further ways in which Spinoza's PSR and his conceptual separation between thought and extension shape his understanding of the mind-body problem.

#### **4. MODES**

If God is the only substance, then where does that leave such familiar objects as the table, your body, and your mind? What metaphysical status do such objects have? Spinoza's answer is, of course, that these things are modes of the one substance. But what exactly is it to be a mode? This is a matter we have touched on in passing but now need to address more directly. By seeing how Descartes understands modes, we will begin to see why Spinoza's

views on you and the table and ordinary objects generally have often been regarded as among his most exotic views and why some have been reluctant to attribute such views even to so bold a thinker as Spinoza.

Recall that, for Descartes, the attribute (or, as he sometimes puts it, the principal attribute) of a substance is the fundamental feature of the substance that all of its other features presuppose. These other, non-fundamental features are the modes of the substance. On this account, each mode presupposes a particular attribute. Modes of extension would be things such as the shape of the table, its size, and its weight. Such a mode is simply a way in which an extended substance is extended. Modes of thought would be, for example, particular thoughts that a given mind has. Thus my belief that, my thought that, Spinoza was a philosopher is a mode of my mind. Such a belief is simply a mode of thought, a way in which a thinking substance thinks.

Two aspects of the way Descartes conceives the relation between a mode and a substance are important. First, for Descartes, a mode is in the substance of which it is a mode (see, e.g., *Principles* I 53). This does not mean that the mode is a part of the substance, but rather that the mode is a *state* of the substance. The traditional, technical term for such a relation is inherence: modes inhere in substance. Thus roundness inheres in the table just in the sense that this is a state in which the table exists. Inherence is a kind of dependence relation: states of a substance depend for their existence on the substance. There cannot be a state of being round without some *thing* (a substance, for Descartes) that is round.<sup>12</sup>

Besides being in substance, modes are, for Descartes, conceived through the substance of which they are modes. This is what Descartes is getting at when he says that modes presuppose the attribute of the substance of which they are modes. For Descartes, modes literally cannot be *understood* except as in a substance (*Principles* I 53). Descartes makes clear that this is a kind of conceptual connection between modes and substance: “the nature of a mode is

such that it cannot be understood at all unless the concept of the thing of which it is a mode is implied in its own concept” (CSM I 301/AT VIII B 355).<sup>13</sup>

One debate about the status of modes is whether they are to be seen as universals or as particulars. An example will help bring out this distinction. When we say that a table is round, we are calling attention to a mode of the table. But is this mode something that not only this particular table has, but also any number of other things may also have? If so, then the mode would be roundness, a universal capable of being instantiated by a number of things. Or, alternatively, is the mode of the table not the general feature of roundness, but instead *this instance* of roundness, i.e. the table’s being round, not roundness in general? On this conception of modes they would be particulars and not universals. They would not be capable of being located in more than one substance. This instance of roundness and that instance of roundness would be numerically distinct even if they are intrinsically exactly alike. It is not clear how Cartesian modes are to be understood, although, for what it is worth, on the traditional understanding of accidents they were seen as particulars.<sup>14</sup> The issue of whether modes are particulars or universals will play a role in the debate about Spinozistic modes, as we will see presently.

For Descartes, objects such as your mind, your body, and the table are not modes of any substance, rather they are substances in their own right. And although such finite substances do, as we saw, depend completely on God, they do not depend on God in the way that states of a substance depend on and inhere in that substance. Thus we can see that Descartes recognizes (at least) two different kinds of relations of dependence: inherence and conceptual dependence generally. For Descartes, finite substances depend on God only in the latter way, but modes depend on substance in both of these ways.

Spinoza was, of course, deeply influenced by the Cartesian account of modes, and the main controversy in this area of Spinoza’s

thought is the extent to which he transformed this account. On the interpretation I will be offering, Spinoza does agree with Descartes that modal dependence involves both inherence and conceptual dependence, but he differs from Descartes because Spinoza sees inherence as nothing but conceptual dependence. For Spinoza, there is only one relation of dependence here, and not two as in Descartes.

To begin to see the outlines of this account, the most important point is that, for Spinoza, there is only one substance, God. Because all that exists, for Spinoza, is either a substance or a mode (1p4d), it follows that ordinary objects such as finite minds and bodies are modes of God. If Spinoza is adopting the Cartesian account of modes with all of its deep roots in medieval and ancient philosophy, then it would seem that the table, for example, is a *state* of God, that the relation between God and the table is much like the way that Descartes conceives the relation between the table and its roundness.

But how is this possible? How can a thing such as a table or your mind be a state or a feature of another thing such as God? Such objects are not, it would seem, ways in which God or anything else exists, rather they have an existence of their own. Curley often puts this worry by saying that modes, as Descartes conceives them, are properties or universals, while tables and minds are particulars, and no particular can be a universal. As Curley says,

Spinoza's modes are, *prima facie*, of the wrong logical type to be related to substance in the same way Descartes' modes are related to substance, for they are particular things (1p25c), not qualities.

[Curley 1969: 18]

However, as we have seen, modes as Descartes and the tradition conceive them are not necessarily universals; rather, they may be, as it were, particularized properties, such as the table's roundness

or this roundness instead of mere roundness in general. On this understanding, modes would be particulars and thus, perhaps, of the right logical type.

But to make this important point (as Carriero does so well) is not to eradicate the intuitive unease that Curley rightly feels at the thought that ordinary objects are modes in the Cartesian sense. This is because it may seem extremely implausible to regard the table, your mind, and your body as simply particularized states of something else. It seems almost as (if not equally) absurd to regard my body as a universal, as a property that God has, as it is to regard my body as a particular, namely God's having that property. Such a view would seem scarcely intelligible; it does not do justice to our sense of the robustness that we and other ordinary objects seem to enjoy. This, I think, is the root objection that Curley and others have to treating Spinozistic modes as modes in the Cartesian sense.

I believe that this concern is a powerful one, and it leads Curley to develop a radically different interpretation of Spinozistic modes according to which Spinoza's understanding of modes is radically different from that of Descartes. For Curley, Spinozistic modes do not inhere in substance at all; they are not states of substance. Rather, they are simply causally dependent on substance. Curley, of course, recognizes that Spinoza does say that modes are in substance (1def5), but by 'in' Curley takes Spinoza to mean not that modes inhere in the substance, but only that they are caused by it. And Curley has good evidence to bolster his case that the in-relation is a causal relation. Not only does Spinoza seem to equate the two in TdIE §92, but also, as Curley emphasizes, Spinoza frequently says that God causes, determines or produces modes (e.g. 1p15d, 1p24, 1p26).

Curley's reading is elegant and, as we will see, there is more than a grain of truth in it. Nonetheless, there is strong evidence that Spinoza does indeed see modes as states of substance. To demonstrate this, I will focus first on the evidence for thinking that Spinoza sees bodies in particular as states of substance, and then I will

turn to what I take to be compelling considerations in favor of seeing Spinozistic modes of thought as also states of substance. Finally, I will show how this reading of modes as states emerges from and is required by Spinoza's naturalism.

First, bodies as states. For Spinoza, extension is an attribute of God. This is, of course, a highly controversial theological claim. Traditionally, extension was thought to be unworthy of the divine nature because extension seemed to involve divisibility. And divisibility is bad because, for one thing, if a substance is divisible, then it can be divided into parts and, if the parts are divided and no longer together, then it would seem that the whole, the substance, would go out of existence (1p12). But, of course, God cannot be vulnerable to such untoward changes as division and destruction. So, the argument concludes, God cannot be extended. In response, Spinoza says: don't worry, God is extended but not in such a way as to show that God is divisible or vulnerable to destruction. This is because, for Spinoza, individual bodies are not parts into which God could be divided, rather they are literally ways in which the extended substance is affected. Spinoza says:

matter is everywhere the same, and ... parts are distinguished in it only insofar as we conceive matter to be affected in different ways, so that its parts are distinguished only modally, but not really. For example, we conceive that water is divided and its parts separated from one another—insofar as it is water, but not insofar as it is corporeal substance. For insofar as it is substance, it is neither separated nor divided. Again, water, insofar as it is water, is generated and corrupted, but insofar as it is substance, it is neither generated nor corrupted.

(1p15s)

Why, in his discussion of God's indivisibility, does Spinoza focus on finite things, such as individual quantities of water? This emphasis would be out of place if Curley were right. For if he were right,

God's being extended is no threat at all to God's indivisibility. Even if, *per impossibile*, individual bodies were capable of existence independently of God and of each other, this would not show that, for Curley, God, the extended substance, is divisible. This is so because, for Curley, God as extended is simply the attribute of extension, and the divisibility of the modes of extension which are, for Curley, somewhat ontologically removed from God would have no bearing on God's indivisibility. But in 1p15s, Spinoza obviously does see individual bodies as having a bearing on God's indivisibility, and this goes against Curley's interpretation.

Attention to modes of thought can bring home this point even more forcefully. Just as particular bodies, for Spinoza, are modes of extension, particular minds are modes of thought. But just what is my mind, for example? Spinoza is quite clear on this point: my mind is the idea of my body and this idea is a complex idea consisting of ideas of the various states or parts of my body. There is nothing more to my mind than a certain collection of ideas in God's mind. And the same holds true for your mind and for all other finite minds: each mind is just God's idea of a particular body. Obviously, there are many complexities in this account, some of which we will explore in the next chapter, but from this sketch we can already see that, for Spinoza, modes of thought (at least finite modes of thought) are ideas in God's mind. Individual ideas are naturally regarded as states of the mind that has these ideas. So it is quite natural to see Spinoza as holding that modes of thought are somehow states of God *qua* thinking thing. Spinoza regards these modes as caused by God, just as Curley stresses, but the modes of thought are also for Spinoza *features* of the substance. Given the strict parallelism between thought and extension (and other attributes) which Spinoza emphasizes and which I will emphasize too in the next chapter, we can see strong reason to think that, for Spinoza, all modes—of thought, of extension, and of each other attribute—are modes in something like the Cartesian sense: they are features or states of God.



Finally, I would like to point out that there is a deeper point here that transcends anything Spinoza might say about extension or thought in particular. This deeper point is a reflection of Spinoza's naturalism and shows that, in the end, Curley is importantly right in one respect. Return to Curley's interpretation. For him, modes are merely causally dependent on God, they do not inhere in God, they are not states of God. And, while Spinoza does say that modes are in God, by this, for Curley, Spinoza means only that they are caused by God. So, for Curley, there are two different kinds of dependence: inherence and what might be called mere causation or dependence that is not inherence. These are both kinds of conceptual dependence. The states of a thing would be conceived through the thing on which they depend, and Curley-esque modes as mere effects would be conceived through substance.

The question I want to press here is this: in virtue of what are inherence and mere causation different kinds of conceptual dependence? What makes them distinct? This is a pertinent question because, after all, they do have something in common: they are both kinds of conceptual dependence. Wherein do they differ? It's hard to see the difference here as anything other than a brute fact. There seems to be no way to elucidate the difference or to explain what it consists in except to say that mere causal dependence is the kind of conceptual dependence that, for example, bodies bear to God and, perhaps, some bodies bear to other bodies, and inherence is that kind of conceptual dependence that, for example, states of bodies bear to those bodies. Such an answer merely states that there is a difference between inherence and mere causation without explaining what the difference consists in. If the account were to end here, I think Spinoza would regard this account as unacceptably trading in primitive or brute facts.

One can see such a distinction as a violation of Spinoza's naturalism which is, as we saw, the thesis that everything in nature plays by the same rules. There is nothing that operates according to principles that are not at work everywhere. If inherence is found

only in some dependence relations but not in others, then that is to see a special kind of principle at work in some cases and not in others. One can put this point by paraphrasing Spinoza: dependence relations are everywhere the same.<sup>15</sup>

The worry here is really just the flip side of the worry that leads Spinoza to reject any kind of Cartesian view which allows for two distinct senses of substance. Descartes holds, as we saw, that we, for example, depend on God, but are nonetheless substances in our own right, albeit in a different sense from the sense in which God, who is absolutely independent of everything else, is a substance. This, as I explained, would be an unacceptable violation of naturalism for Spinoza. The Cartesian account allows different things to play by different rules, to be subject to different sets of requirements when it comes to being a substance. And such exceptions to the rules will seem objectionably ad hoc to Spinoza.

To allow for things that depend on God but are nonetheless substances is already implicitly at least to allow for two kinds of dependence relations. The finite Cartesian substances do not inhere in God or depend on him in that way, yet these finite substances have states that depend on or inhere in those finite substances. Thus, precisely because there are two different kinds of substances in Descartes, there are also two kinds of dependence relations. This duality of kinds of dependence relations seems every bit as objectionable from a Spinozistic point of view as the duality in kinds of substance. There is mere causal dependence and, what might be called, dependence of the inherence variety. But what makes them distinct kinds of dependence? If they are each a kind of dependence and if there is nothing that makes them distinct, then they are the same after all, Spinoza would argue. If there is something that makes them distinct kinds of dependence, then what is it? For Spinoza, the Cartesian has to say that there are these different kinds of dependence relations, but that, just as with the different kinds of substance, such a difference is a brute fact and a violation of the naturalist ideal of a single uniform set of requirements. Thus in

arguing for the non-Cartesian interpretation of Spinozistic modes as not states, Curley is making what is in the end a very Cartesian move: he is allowing for an unexplained duality in kinds of dependence.

By contrast, the interpretation of Spinoza according to which bodies and minds are modes of God in the sense that they are caused by God and inhere in God preserves the PSR and Spinoza's naturalism. Yes, both inherence and mere causation are kinds of dependence, but, for Spinoza, by virtue of his rationalism, they are ultimately the same kind of dependence, and that is conceptual dependence tout court.

Here we can see that in an important way Curley is right after all. He denies that Spinoza's in-relation (the relation of being in itself or in another) is an inherence relation. In doing so, Curley affirms that the in-relation just is the relation of causation. While I disagree with Curley about inherence, he is, I believe, absolutely right that the in-relation just is causation or, more generally, conception. And here I depart from Carriero's interpretation in a significant way. Although Carriero holds that Spinozistic modes do inhere in substance—and I agree—he also holds that the in-relation is a completely separate relation from the relation of causation. I find such a distinction inimical to Spinoza's rationalism for reasons I have already given. When Carriero says that the relations are different his claim is based partly on the further claim that Spinoza keeps his talk of causation and his talk of inherence on largely separate tracks. But this is not true. Carriero regards 1p16 as a key place in which Spinoza affirms the causal dependence of things on God. (1p16 says in part, "From the necessity of the divine nature, there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways.") But Spinoza argues for 1p16 by invoking the ways in which the properties of a thing depend on that thing. As Spinoza says in 1p16d:

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 (that is, from the very essence of the thing).

So in 1p16, the supposed bastion of causal talk as opposed to talk of inherence, Spinoza seems to mix the two kinds of locution effortlessly. This is evidence against Carriero's claim that the relations are separate and it is further positive evidence for taking causal dependence and inherence to be the same for Spinoza.

In effect, we can see Spinoza as offering an account of the nature of inherence that embodies another twofold use of the PSR. Spinoza would insist on the legitimacy of the demand that inherence be explained. "What is inherence?" is a natural question for Spinoza. Some account must be given beyond the unacceptable treatment of inherence as a relation of conceptual dependence that differs brutally from the relation of mere causal dependence. To make this demand that inherence be intelligible is the first use of the PSR in this case.

Spinoza meets this demand by arguing that inherence just is causal and, ultimately, conceptual dependence. Thus, to say that one thing inheres in another is to say simply that it is understood or conceived through or intelligible in terms of this other. This conclusion is the second use of the PSR or of the notion of intelligibility in this case. For Spinoza, inherence must be intelligible and it is intelligible in terms of intelligibility itself. Here again Spinoza is making the characteristic rationalist move, the kind of move he has already made in treating causation as conception.<sup>16</sup>

To tie the interpretation of modes as states of God to Spinoza's naturalism and his rationalism in this way is not by itself to display all the significant features of this interpretation. I will omit most of these other aspects which have been well discussed elsewhere. But there is one implication that is worth bringing out here because it will help us later in understanding Spinoza's account of the eternity of the human mind. If, as I have just argued, for Spinoza causation and inherence are the same, then when A causes B, B must

inhere in or be a state of A. While this may be the right account of the relation between God and the modes of God, it hardly seems to be an intelligible account of the relation between one mode and another. Spinoza does allow, and indeed require, that modes stand in causal relations to one another. Spinoza would allow, for example, that the carpenter causes the chair to come into existence. Given that causation and inherence are the same, it would seem to follow that the chair inheres in or is a state of the carpenter. But how can this be? To paraphrase a related claim of Curley's which we saw earlier: the table seems to be of the wrong logical type to inhere in or be a state of the carpenter. How can the relation between the chair and the carpenter be anything like the relation between the carpenter and what may seem more genuinely to be one of his states, for example the carpenter's height? This is a consequence of Spinoza's view and it is one he embraces, as in this passage from TTP: "knowledge of an effect through its cause is nothing but knowing some property of the cause."<sup>17</sup> He seems here to be equating an effect of a cause with a property of the cause. However, it is important to note that, for Spinoza, inherence comes in degrees, and precisely because the carpenter is only a partial cause of the chair, Spinoza would say that the chair only partly inheres in the carpenter and partly inheres in all the other finite causes of the chair. We will investigate the significance of this notion of degrees of inherence more fully when we turn to Spinoza's account of the eternity of the human mind in Chapter 7.

## 5. NECESSITARIANISM

What is, perhaps, most shocking about Spinoza's claim that finite particulars are merely states of God is that this thesis seems to make these finite things depend too intimately on God. But that's only part of the story, for the dependence on God is even more extreme than the thesis of modes as states would indicate. For Spinoza, not only do modes depend on God by being mere states of God, their dependence is so complete that it is absolutely

impossible for any mode—and thus for the entire series of modes—to be different in any respect from the way it actually is. For Spinoza, there is no contingency and all things are absolutely necessary. This is Spinoza's thesis of necessitarianism, the thesis I will explain and motivate in this section.

For Spinoza, everything must be determined either by itself or by another thing (see 1ax2). As we have seen, this is simply a manifestation of the PSR. And, as we also saw in the previous section, this is equivalent to the claim that everything is either a substance or a mode of a substance. Because God is the only substance, it follows that all things depend on or are determined by God.

This much is uncontroversial. Much less clear, at least initially, is whether the things that depend on God depend on God completely, whether *every* truth about those things can be accounted for simply by appealing to God's nature. This is the question at stake in considering whether Spinoza accepts necessitarianism.<sup>18</sup>

To resolve this matter, we must turn briefly to Spinoza's doctrine of infinite modes. Spinoza says that some things follow from the absolute nature of God's attributes (1p21). He also says elsewhere that such things follow from an attribute of God considered absolutely (1p23d). What is it to follow from an attribute considered absolutely? Spinoza's discussion in 1p21d—while notoriously obscure—does seem to indicate at least this much: Something follows from God's nature considered absolutely just in case it does not follow from God only in virtue of other things' following from God as well. Spinoza discusses in 1p21d whether a finite mode can follow from God's nature considered absolutely, and he rejects this possibility precisely because a finite mode can follow from God's nature only insofar as another finite mode of the same kind also follows from God's nature.

It is important to note that to say that a mode follows non-absolutely from God is not to say that it follows only partly from God.<sup>19</sup> For Spinoza, to say that a mode follows non-absolutely from God is to say that it follows from God only as part of a package. To

say that it follows non-absolutely carries no implications whatsoever as to whether God is not the complete account of the modes. It is, of course, perfectly compatible with God's causing a mode as part of a package that God completely causes that mode. Consider a complete dance with 16 steps. It may be that I can perform step 12 only in the context of performing all the other steps. Nonetheless, I can be the complete cause of the performance of step 12, as well as of all the other steps. Similarly, God may be the complete cause of the infinitely many modes he causes only as part of a package. And we will see that Spinoza holds precisely this view.

Why, for Spinoza, is it the case that a finite mode cannot follow absolutely from God, that a finite mode must follow from God's nature as part of a package of infinitely many other finite modes? Spinoza's reasoning here can be seen as invoking the PSR. Let's say that an attribute gives rise to a finite mode and nothing else, and thus the finite mode would follow absolutely from God's nature. With regard to this situation, the question arises: what prevents the attribute in question from giving rise to other finite modes as well? Certainly not the finite mode in question: for Spinoza, a finite mode is by nature such that it is always conceivable that it be limited by another finite thing of the same kind (1def2). Certainly not the attribute itself: if the attribute gives rise to one finite mode, its nature would seem to be compatible with other finite modes as well. Certainly not another attribute: there can, of course, be no such causal relation between different attributes. And certainly, for Spinoza, it cannot be a brute fact that the attribute produces only this one mode. It seems that we have exhausted possible answers to the question of why the attribute produces only one mode. And so we must conclude that, on Spinozistic terms, the attribute cannot produce only one finite mode. A similar line of argument would tend to the conclusion that the attribute cannot produce only a finite number of finite modes. So the inevitable conclusion is that a finite mode cannot be produced by God's nature except as part of a package of infinitely many other finite modes (1p28). And, for this

reason, for Spinoza, a finite mode cannot follow from the absolute nature of one of God's attributes. Anything that follows absolutely from God must itself be infinite.<sup>20</sup>

To say that a mode of a given attribute is infinite is to say, at least, that it is pervasive in that attribute, that the mode is somehow to be found throughout that attribute. How this could be the case is something we shall explore.

For Spinoza, there are two kinds of infinite modes. First there are those that follow directly from God's nature. These are the immediate infinite modes. Second, there are infinite modes that follow from God, not by following absolutely from God, but by following from the infinite modes that do follow absolutely from God. Such infinite modes, Spinoza says, follow mediately from God's nature. These are the mediate infinite and eternal modes.<sup>21</sup>

Some examples of infinite modes may help to clarify the notion. Let's focus on infinite modes of extension. The attribute of extension is infinite because it pervades the entire realm of extension—all modes of extension are understood through the attribute of extension. But obviously the attribute of extension is not an infinite mode of extension. Spinoza was pressed by Tschirnhaus to give examples of infinite modes, and the example of an immediate infinite mode of extension that he offers is motion-and-rest (Letter 64, see also KV II Preface §7). Here Spinoza's debt to Cartesian mechanism is apparent. Descartes believes not only that all modes of extension presuppose extension, but also that all variety in the extended world could be accounted for simply by differences in the degree of motion and rest of parts of matter (*Principles* II 23). Spinoza makes a similar point here: every extended thing can be understood not only in terms of extension, but, in particular, in terms of motion-and-rest. If motion-and-rest is explanatorily central in this way, one can see how it pervades the realm of extension and can be called an infinite mode.

Obviously, for Spinoza, the notion of motion and rest will figure into the laws extended nature. He sees such laws as pervasive



throughout the realm of extension and in general the laws of nature considered under any particular attribute are pervasive in that attribute. As Spinoza says in 3preface:

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.

As this passage makes clear, the pervasiveness of these laws involves the fact that they govern all the changes that occur in a given realm. Thus, change in finite modes would be explained in part by the appropriate laws of nature or infinite modes. Although Spinoza gives a few examples of such laws, such as a principle of inertia for extension (see 2le3c) and a principle of the association of ideas in thought (see TTP, chap. 4, p. 58, G III 57–58), he does not offer any full-blown list of the laws of nature, nor could he. Because these laws are the rules according to which *all* things happen, these laws will obviously be quite detailed and perhaps beyond the capacity of human minds to cognize fully. Further, because of their pervasiveness, it is natural to see the laws of nature as infinite modes.<sup>22</sup>

On this conception of infinite modes as laws, they are pervasive features found throughout a given realm. Everything in extension has, for example, the property of obeying the law of inertia. But there is an apparently different strand in Spinoza's thinking about infinite modes according to which infinite modes are not features of the extended realm or of the thinking realm, but are instead individuals in their own right. This way of thinking is suggested by Spinoza himself. His own example of an immediate infinite mode of thought is "absolutely infinite intellect." The infinite intellect, for Spinoza, seems to be a thinking individual, the individual constituted by all individual ideas. This collection forms a vast thinking individual made up of all of these infinitely many ideas. (Spinoza says that the human mind—a finite thinking individual—is a part

of the infinite intellect of God (2p11c.) Thus this infinite mode of thought seems to be not a feature of thought, a property of the realm of thought, but instead a thinking individual.

This suggestion that at least some infinite modes are individuals and not mere features is strengthened by Spinoza's example of a mediate infinite mode (whether of thought or of extension is not clear): the face (*facies*) of the whole universe. It's not clear what *facies* means, but Spinoza attempts to elucidate this claim by citing 2le7s where he claims that the infinite collection of finite bodies forms one vast extended individual:

the whole nature is of one individual, whose parts, that is, all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole individual.

I will not attempt to adjudicate these apparently conflicting conceptions of infinite modes, for there may not be, in the end, much difference here. Just as, as we saw in the previous section, finite individuals may just be finite features of substance, a similar point may hold for infinite individuals and infinite (i.e. pervasive) features.

One more point about the infinite modes is needed before we can directly address the issue of necessitarianism. The constituents of the infinitely large group of finite modes are causally related, not only to God, but also to other members of the package. God does not cause a package of otherwise causally unrelated modes. Rather, God causes a collection of modes that are causally related to one another. Precisely because no finite modes can follow from God absolutely, in order for a finite mode to follow from God, there must be another finite mode that follows from God, and in order for that finite mode to follow from God, there must be yet another finite mode, etc. This indicates a dependence of each finite mode on God and on other finite modes: the finite mode exists only because God exists and because God causes other finite modes. (Spinoza argues in just this way in 1p28d.)

This account of causation between modes commits Spinoza to determinism. This is the thesis, as Garrett puts it, that “every event is causally determined from antecedent conditions by the laws of nature” (Garrett 1991: 191). According to determinism, the relevant laws of nature are in some sense necessary. The antecedent conditions are other finite modes, and the laws, as we have seen, are among the infinite modes that follow from an attribute of God. According to determinism, given the past, the future is closed, the future is already, as it were, locked in. This is, of course, quite a controversial thesis, not least because many have thought that it would undermine all freedom and responsibility. We will return to this point in Chapter 5. Although the thesis of determinism is controversial, it is not at all controversial that Spinoza accepts it. Indeed, it is easy to see the PSR as determining that Spinoza accepts determinism: if, given the past, more than one future is nonetheless open and there is more than one possible course for events to take, then whatever course of events actually comes to be would seem to be a brute fact; there would be no way, as it were, to see this particular future coming, there would be no reason in the past that suffices for this particular future.

We are now in a position to argue—controversially—that Spinoza accepts a thesis much stronger in many respects than determinism, namely necessitarianism. To see how necessitarianism is stronger, consider a possibility that determinism does not rule out. According to determinism, given the laws of nature (which are necessary), the antecedent conditions determine the later conditions. But determinism does not require that the antecedent conditions are themselves necessary. Determinism requires that if one of the antecedent conditions were changed, then its causes would have had to have been different, and the causes of these causes would have had to have been different etc., all the way back. But, as far as determinism is concerned, there is nothing in principle impossible about the chain of causes having been different all the way back. The laws of nature are necessary, according to determinism,

but the particular series of events governed by these laws is not necessary: there could have been a different series of events. The view that there is more than one possible series of events (or, in Spinozistic terms, one possible series of finite modes) is precisely what determinism allows and necessitarianism denies. According to necessitarianism, there is no sense in which it is possible that I wore a purple polka dot shirt today, whereas determinism can allow that it is possible.

This is an extremely implausible thesis. Even if we grant that determinism is true, what would compel us to accept that it is in no way possible for me to have worn a purple polka dot shirt today? Perhaps my friends would welcome this news, but is this a philosophical conclusion that one can endorse? Almost all philosophers would say not. In addition to its intrinsic implausibility, necessitarianism is even more of a threat to freedom than is determinism. If my stealing money from you is absolutely necessary, then how can I be free in acting that way? Leibniz, for example, is happy to say that freedom is compatible with determinism, but wants to draw the line at saying that freedom is compatible with necessitarianism.

Yes, necessitarianism is extremely implausible, but that would not deter Spinoza—bold philosopher that he is—from accepting it if he sees good reasons for doing so. And Spinoza does see such reasons.

Spinoza claims in 1p16:

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).

(trans. altered)

For Spinoza, everything can be grasped by the infinite intellect—anything that could not be so grasped could not be conceived, but, according to 1ax2, everything can be conceived. Thus, it follows

from 1p16 that God's nature determines *everything*, and there seems to be every reason to think that, for Spinoza, "everything" includes the total state of the world. God seems to determine every last detail of everything that exists. Spinoza develops this point further in 1p29 and 1p33 which explicitly depend on 1p16:

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)

These sound like the claims of a necessitarian. A determinist can allow, as we have seen, that some things are contingent (e.g. the entire state of the world) and that things could have been produced in a different way (though not according to different laws). So, Spinoza's claims seem to be distinctively necessitarian claims.

Fundamental here, obviously, is Spinoza's argument for 1p16 which proceeds this way: the more reality a thing has, the more properties follow from its nature. Since God—as the substance of infinite attributes—has the most reality, the most properties possible follow from his nature, i.e. he has *all* possible properties. Spinoza concludes from this that God determines all things. (Notice here, by the way, the implicit equation of particular things and properties of God. This lends further credence to the interpretation of Spinozistic modes as states of God.) The crucial point in the demonstration is the claim that God has the most reality. For Spinoza, reality is equivalent to power,<sup>23</sup> and, in this light, we can see what he means by saying that God has the most reality: as a self-sufficient and unique substance, God has the most power possible. If such a substance lacked some power, what could prevent it from

having that power? There is no other substance to prevent God from having that power, and certainly no mode could prevent God from having as much power as possible, so any such lack would have no explanation and is thus disallowed by Spinoza. Thus God has the most power and reality possible, and, as such, determines everything else. And thus we can see that Spinoza's necessitarianism ultimately derives from his PSR.<sup>24</sup>

If Spinoza is a necessitarian for these reasons, how would he answer the following, and perhaps strongest, challenge to necessitarianism? If, so the objection goes, necessitarianism is true, then why does it seem to us (falsely) that things could have been otherwise than they actually are? What explanation can be given of this massive error on our part? Spinoza would have a ready answer: If one fully understood the implications of the very nature of God, then one would see that no particular state of affairs could have been otherwise. But, for Spinoza, although we do have a grasp of God's nature, the finitude of our minds prevents us from drawing out completely and clearly the implications of that essence. We will explore these cognitive limitations of the human mind further in the next chapter.

## **6. THE PURPOSE OF IT ALL**

Spinoza's necessitarianism and the law-governedness of nature are at work in his denial of divine teleology, of the view that God brings about certain things with a purpose, for the sake of some particular end. Spinoza is especially concerned to refute that version of the doctrine of divine teleology according to which God orders the rest of nature to serve the interests of human beings and, in general, has a special concern for human beings that guides his actions. The sources of Spinoza's critique are multifarious and, in this section, I will try to disentangle them and reveal a single fundamental line of thought that is centered on the PSR.

We can begin by asking the question Spinoza asks: Does God act for the sake of an end? The traditional answer—and indeed the

prevalent answer still today among people generally and among a considerable number of philosophers—is a resounding “yes!” God acts out of a special concern for human beings, either to aid them, or to punish them, etc. This was and is a prevailing religious view. Even Descartes—whose rejection of appeals to divine purposiveness in explaining changes in the physical world was a deep influence on Spinoza—appeals to divine purposiveness when it comes to explaining our knowledge and also the interaction between mind and body. Roughly, Descartes’s view is that, since God is a benevolent non-deceiver, he would not allow our beliefs in general to be false and he also arranges for the kinds of connection between mind and body that are most conducive to the successful maintenance of what he calls the union of mind and body, i.e. of the human being.

This kind of special purposive concern that God is seen as having for human beings is, in some ways, of a piece with other influential views which somehow see human beings as central to the workings of the world. The Ptolemaic conception of the universe according to which the earth is at the center is, in part, a manifestation of the conviction that our position in nature is special. The anti-Darwinian view that the human species did not evolve via a natural process from other species is also a manifestation of this conviction. Both the Ptolemaic and anti-Darwinian views were difficult to dislodge, and, in many quarters, the anti-Darwinian views still haven’t been dislodged. The view that God acts out of a special concern for human beings is, if anything, more deeply entrenched, as we can see by considering that many, if not most, of those who happily accept the Copernican, heliocentric view and Darwin’s theory still believe in a special divine providence, a special divine concern. In denying that God acts in such a way, Spinoza knew that he faced a difficult fight and, perhaps, that is why his attack is, even more than usual for Spinoza, savage and unrelenting.

For Spinoza, it is clear why we tend to believe that God acts for the sake of human beings. First, because human beings see that they act for the sake of an end—namely for their own advantage (more on

this in Chapter 4)—they come to believe that all things have a purpose or, as Spinoza says using the traditional terminology, all things have *final causes* (1app, G II 78). And because we find that many things in nature are advantageous to us, we come to conclude that all natural things are produced for the sake of our advantage. Spinoza's reasoning here is elegant, compelling, and worth quoting at length:

men act always on account of an end, namely, on account of their own advantage, which they want. Hence they seek to know only the final causes of what has been done. ... Furthermore, they find—both in themselves and outside themselves—many means that are very helpful in seeking their own advantage, for example, eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, plants and animals for food, the sun for light, the sea for supporting fish. Hence, they consider all natural things as means to their own advantage. And knowing that they had found these means, not provided them for themselves, they had reason to believe that there was someone else who had prepared those means for their use. For after they considered things as means, they could not believe that the things had made themselves; but from the means they were accustomed to prepare for themselves, they had to infer that there was a ruler, or a number of rulers, of Nature, endowed with human freedom who had taken care of all things for them, and made all things for their use.

(G II 78–79)

It is interesting to note that at work in what Spinoza sees as this deeply mistaken way of thinking is, by Spinoza's lights, a genuine insight, namely that all natural events must be explained in the same way. This is really the core of naturalism—everything plays by the same rules. Spinoza's only problem is that the rules invoked here—which turn on human advantage—are not at all legitimate. But to the extent that there is a naturalistic line of thought here, Spinoza would applaud. Here we can see support for Spinoza's implicit contention that a naturalist approach to the world has



significant power and is pervasive, even if it is not always followed through consistently.

Spinoza denies not only that God acts for the sake of human advantage, but also that God acts for any particular end whatsoever. Why does he make this general claim? His reasons seem to turn on the fact that, for Spinoza, God acts from the necessity of his nature. Spinoza says that he has shown that nature has no end set before it partly on the basis of “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 II 80). Spinoza thus sees acting for an end as incompatible with acting solely out of the necessity of one’s nature. In this light, we can see why, for Spinoza, we act for the sake of an end and that’s precisely because our actions are, in keeping with our status as modes, determined not wholly by our own nature. They are instead determined wholly by God’s nature which determines our nature as well as the nature of other finite things (1p25). Spinoza obviously sees an end as something set, at least in part, by something external to the nature of the thing that acts for the sake of that end, and this is why Spinoza says that ends involve negation (4pref, G II 207–8). In this sense of “end,” God obviously cannot act for the sake of an end since there is nothing external to him to help determine his ends.

Fair enough, but this construal of “end” only raises the question; why we should conceive of ends this way? Can’t a thing (i.e. God) by the necessity of its nature privilege some things above others so that the latter (the others) are for the sake of the former? Such a determined, necessary process can be seen to be no less goal-directed and teleological than a process that does not follow from the necessity of the nature of a thing. Spinoza needs a further reason—beyond the fact that God acts out of the necessity of his nature—in order to deny that God acts for the sake of an end.

What could this further reason be? At this point, Spinoza would call attention to something he sees as very disconcerting about using divine ends to explain things. Let’s say that *a* is for the sake of *b*

(e.g. the existence of plants is for the sake of human nourishment). If this is so, it certainly seems that *b* explains *a*, human nourishment is the reason that there are plants. But, equally, it seems that *a* explains *b*, the reason that human beings are nourished is that there are plants. Certainly human nourishment is caused by plants; how then can plants be explained by human nourishment? Or, given the equivalence of explanation and causation in Spinoza, how can plants (which cause nourishment) be themselves caused by nourishment? Isn't this just a case of a thing causing its causes and wouldn't that be, in Spinoza's memorable phrase, "to turn nature completely upside down" (*naturam omnino evertere*)?

Again, fair enough. But there is a ready answer to Spinoza's charge at this point. Intentional action—though it is directed at a future state of affairs—does not require turning nature upside down. In acting because of an intention, one is acting for the sake of the object of the intention—one is acting with a purpose. But the object that the intention concerns—something that may lie far off in the future—does not mysteriously cause any actions that lead to the desired object. Instead, the intention which occurs before *x* non-mysteriously causes *x*.<sup>25</sup> This is a very natural way to make sense of teleological causation. Spinoza himself is quite willing to account for teleology in our case in precisely this way. Here's his mundane example:

when we say that habitation was the final cause of this or that house, surely we understand nothing but that a man, because he imagined the conveniences of domestic life, had an appetite to build a house. So habitation, insofar as it is considered as a final cause, is nothing more than this singular appetite. It is really an efficient cause.

[4pref, G II 207]

If final causes can be legitimate causes in this way—and there is every reason to think that they can and that Spinoza recognizes that they can—then why can't we see God as acting in a similar way with prior divine intentions causing certain actions which are performed

with the purpose, say, of aiding human beings? Isn't this a way of legitimating divine teleology? What's wrong with such divine intentions or goals, especially if they flow from the necessity of God's nature?

This question really gets to the heart of the issue, and Spinoza has a twofold answer to it.

First, Spinoza says that even those who appeal to divine intentions in this way cannot genuinely explain very much of the detail of God's activity. Such partisans of teleology are quickly forced to appeal to our ignorance of God's will. Here's Spinoza's rather acerbic way of making this point:

the followers of this doctrine [of divine purposiveness], who have wanted to show off their cleverness in assigning the ends of things, have introduced—to prove this doctrine of theirs—a new way of arguing: by reducing things, not to the impossible, but to ignorance. This shows that no other way of defending their doctrine was open to them. For example, if a stone has fallen from a roof onto someone's head and killed him, they will show, in the following way, that the stone fell in order to kill the man. For if it did not fall to that end, God willing it, how could so many circumstances have concurred by chance [for often many circumstances do concur at once]? Perhaps you will answer that it happened because the wind was blowing hard and the man was walking that way. But they will persist: why was the wind blowing hard at that time? why was the man walking that way at that same time? If you answer again that the wind arose then because on the preceding day, while the weather was still calm, the sea began to toss, and that the man had been invited by a friend, they will press on—for there is no end to the questions which can be asked: but why was the sea tossing? why was the man invited at just that time? And so they will not stop asking for the causes of causes until you take refuge in the will of God, that is, the sanctuary of ignorance.

(G II 80–81)

This is a good point, but at most it shows that we do not know God's purposes. It does not make the stronger claim that there are no such purposes. Yet in his denial that God acts for the sake of an end, Spinoza clearly aims to make the stronger claim.

How then can he do that? One way to reach the stronger claim would be to deny that God has a will and, a fortiori, to deny that God has purposes focused specifically on finite beings. Spinoza is sometimes taken to do precisely this in 1p17s when he says that "the intellect and will which would constitute God's essence would have to differ entirely from our intellect and will, and could not agree with them in anything except the name" (1p17s, G II 62–63). But I do not think that this is accurate because I do not think that Spinoza denies that God has a will. Merely to say that if will constitutes God's essence, it would be completely different from ours is not to say that God does not have a will. After all, Spinoza is quite clear that will does not constitute God's essence (1p31). We will touch on God's will again in Chapter 4. Right now, I want to mount a Spinozistic attack on the claim that God has specific purposes in mind, purposes that favor certain finite beings more than others. This attack does not presuppose that God has no will at all. The following argument is not explicit in Spinoza, but, as I will show near the end of this section, there is evidence that Spinoza was thinking along these lines.

Let's say that a thing *x* is a finite thing for the sake of which God acts. I will speak of *x* as a particular finite thing, but the argument would go through if we were to take *x* as a kind of finite thing, such as human beings. Further, let's say that God wills to bring about other finite things in order to bring about, or to aid, *x*. Those other finite things are thus, in some way, subordinated to *x*. Finally, let's add a further point—one that Spinoza clearly accepts: each finite thing is part of an infinite series of finite things with infinitely many causes and effects (see 1p28 and 1p36).

This last claim is, of course, derived from the PSR. By the PSR, each finite thing must have a cause. But finite things cannot, as we

have seen, come directly from God (1p23), so each finite thing must have a finite cause. Also, each finite thing must have a finite effect (and that effect must have an effect, etc.). This conclusion—which Spinoza draws in 1p36—also can be seen as derived from the PSR: if causal dependence just is conceptual dependence, and if from the concept of a given thing certain states of affairs must follow, then the thing in question must have some causal power. Because the equation of causation and conceptual dependence stems, as we have seen, from the PSR, Spinoza's claim that each thing has causal power also stems from the PSR. I will explore further—in the chapter on Spinoza's psychology—the causal power that each thing has.

Thus  $x$ , the finite mode in question, is necessarily in the midst of a series of finite causes and effects. But, we are supposing,  $x$  nonetheless outstrips other modes in importance to God. Why does God privilege  $x$  in this way instead of privileging some other finite mode, say, certain of  $x$ 's causes or  $x$ 's effects?  $x$  is neither the culmination of the series of finite modes, nor is it the starting point. So those natural reasons for privileging are not present. Nor can it be said that God privileges  $x$  because  $x$  is more like God than other finite modes. (This would be Leibniz's way of explaining why God favors so-called rational souls.) For each divine-like quality that  $x$  has (such as power, knowledge, etc.), there will be other, perhaps infinitely many other, finite modes that have those divine-like qualities to a higher degree. Spinoza makes this point with regard to power in 4ax1:

There is no singular thing in nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given, there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed.

(4ax1)

And since, for Spinoza, perfection and power are coextensive,<sup>26</sup> we can conclude that there are infinitely many other finite modes that

have more perfection than  $x$  does and are, as such, more similar to God. For this reason, any privileging of  $x$  in particular (or even of any finite collection of finite modes) would seem to be arbitrary, a brute fact. And, as such, Spinoza would reject it.

In this light, I think we should understand Spinoza's rejection of any special status for the Jewish people (TTP, chap. 3), his claim that God is equally gracious and merciful to all (TTP, p. 40), and Spinoza's claim that God does not have sympathy for some things and antipathy for others (Letter 19, G IV 90). Each of these views is a manifestation of Spinoza's naturalistic denial of any special concern on God's part for some things rather than others.

I think that this is a powerful argument on Spinozistic terms for the rejection of divine ends. But does Spinoza actually argue in this way? I admit that he does not explicitly do so, but given his systematic aversion to arbitrariness, such an argument seems to be a plausible reconstruction of his thought. Moreover and more importantly, it is hard to see how, in light of the challenges that I raised earlier to his denial of divine ends, he could offer a different defense on his own terms of that denial. For without this kind of argument, the door seems wide open for Spinoza to allow the legitimacy of privileging one finite mode over others.

We reach the perhaps unsettling conclusion that God is not, as it were, looking out for our interests or, indeed, for the interests of any other finite modes. We might seem to be, for Spinoza, on our own, hapless victims of the inexorable grinding away of Spinoza's one substance. Spinoza calls this substance "God or Nature." And while we can readily see why he would call this substance nature—after all it is the totality of what exists, a totality that is governed by fully natural laws and not supernatural principles—it is far from clear that this substance merits the appellation "God." In previous sections, we have already seen that Spinoza's God has some, to say the least, unusual qualities for a divine being: God is extended, God is the only substance that exists, God determines absolutely everything with absolute necessity, God does not transcend the world

for, in some sense, God is the world. All of these characteristics are difficult to take from a traditional theistic perspective, but when one adds to this litany the fact that, for Spinoza, we human beings—both collectively and individually—hold no special place in God’s plans or God’s purposes, we may seriously doubt the propriety of his use of the term “God.” Why should the one substance be called “God”? To begin to see how to answer this question, we need to see how, despite these questionable divine qualities, Spinoza’s God is also supremely good, perfect and virtuous, and is capable of love and is the source of the kind of eternity that you and I can enjoy. In this light, the term “God” may seem more appropriate. But how Spinoza can say these things consistently with his naturalism is a story that will unfold in succeeding chapters.

#### SUMMARY

Spinoza’s metaphysics is, in many ways, an effort to tap into the underlying rationalist motivations of Descartes’s metaphysics and to follow through on these motivations more consistently than Descartes ever did. Employing the Cartesian notions of substance, attribute, and mode, and wielding strongly rationalist principles only hinted at in Descartes—such as the PSR and the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles—Spinoza is able to mount a powerful argument for substance monism, for the view that there is, fundamentally, only one thing in the world. On the same basis he argues for the concomitant view that you and I and the table are merely modes of merely states or properties of this one substance and not, as Descartes would have it, substances in their own right. Spinoza’s PSR dictates that he holds not only determinism—the thesis that each event is determined by previous states of the world—but also necessitarianism, the much stronger thesis that all truths are absolutely necessary and that there is only one possible total sequence of events. Spinoza’s PSR also generates his rejection of divine teleology, the view that God produces the world for the benefit of certain beings, such as, for example, human beings. On the contrary,

Spinoza says, God acts simply out of the necessity of his nature without singling out for special attention any particular finite beings.

### **FURTHER READING**

- Jonathan Bennett (1984) *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, chap. 3. (Helpful chapter on Spinoza's theory of substance.)
- John Carriero (1995) "On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics." (Powerful argument that modes are merely properties of substance.)
- . (2005) "Spinoza on Final Causality." (Good account of Spinoza's attitude toward teleology in relation to Aristotelian and Scholastic Philosophy.)
- Edwin Curley (1988) *Behind the Geometrical Method*. (Contains an accessible account of Spinoza's metaphysics as a development of Cartesian metaphysics.)
- . (1991) "On Bennett's Interpretation of Spinoza's Monism." (Sharp criticism of the view that modes are merely properties of substance.)
- Gilles Deleuze (1992) *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. (Difficult but useful treatment of Spinoza's metaphysics.)
- Michael Della Rocca (2002) "Spinoza's Substance Monism." (Defends Spinoza's argument for monism from prominent objections.)
- . (2003a) "A Rationalist Manifesto: Spinoza and the Principle of Sufficient Reason." (Contains a direct argument for a necessitarian reading of Spinoza.)
- . (2006) "Explaining explanation and the Multiplicity of Attributes." (Defends Spinoza's view that there is more than one attribute.)
- Don Garrett (1991) "Spinoza's Necessitarianism." (Fine defense of a necessitarian interpretation.)
- . (1998) "Teleology in Spinoza and Early Modern Rationalism." (Sees Spinoza as more friendly to purposiveness than do most interpreters.)
- Martial Guérout (1968, 1974) *Spinoza*. (Volume 1 is a monumental treatment of Part I of the *Ethics*.)
- Yitzhak Melamed (forthcoming) "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance: The Substance-Mode Relation as a Relation of Inherence and Predication." (Powerful objections to Curley's reading of modes as not mere properties of substance.)
- Marleen Rozemond (1998) *Descartes's Dualism*. (Useful account of Descartes's metaphysics of substance, attribute, and mode.)
- Peter van Inwagen (2002) *Metaphysics*, second edition, chapter 7. (Argues for the claim that the PSR entails necessitarianism.)



# Notes

## **ONE** SPINOZA'S UNDERSTANDING AND UNDERSTANDING SPINOZA

- 1 Wittgenstein 1958: §217.
- 2 See, in particular, how Spinoza moves naturally from claims about the way in which substance is conceived to claims about the way substance is explained (1p10s, 1p14d, 2p5). See also the way in which conceiving a thing is identical to understanding it or finding it intelligible (1ax5). For further discussion, see Della Rocca 1996a: 3–4.
- 3 For more on Spinoza's method, see Aaron Garrett 2003.
- 4 Bergson 1975: 113.
- 5 And he outlines this strategy in the TdIE.
- 6 Goldstein 2006.
- 7 Thus Lucas relates: "He had such a great propensity not to do anything for the sake of being regarded and admired by the people, that when dying he requested that his name should not be put on his *Ethics*, saying that such affectations were unworthy of a philosopher" (in Wolf 1970: 62).
- 8 See Nadler 1999. Lucas's biography (in Wolf 1970) was written in 1677 or 1678 and first published in 1719. Colerus' biography was first published in 1705.
- 9 On this aspect of Spinoza's thought, Yovel 1989, vol. 1, is very good.
- 10 Colerus 1880: 416; see also Bayle 1991: 292.
- 11 Hereafter "TTP."

## **TWO** THE METAPHYSICS OF SUBSTANCE

- 1 Curley also, especially in Curley 1988, argues that Spinoza's position on substance is simply the Cartesian position taken to its logical extreme. Curley's development of this theme is very illuminating, but quite different from mine.
- 2 See CSM III 207/AT III 502, CSM II 157, 159/AT VII 222, 226, CSM I 297/AT VIII-2 348, and for discussion see Rozemond 1998: 7.

- 3 This account applies only to corporeal substances. Spiritual substances do not have prime matter as a constituent.
- 4 There's a controversy over whether Descartes does indeed allow for genuine causal interaction between minds and bodies. I think it is clear that he does allow both minds to act on bodies and bodies to act on minds. For some discussion, see Della Rocca 2008a.
- 5 See Della Rocca 2008a.
- 6 For Spinoza, affections are modes, as 1def5 makes clear.
- 7 See Leibniz, "On the Ethics of Benedict de Spinoza," in Leibniz 1969: 198–99.
- 8 Spinoza makes clear in 2p5d and elsewhere that for one thing to express another is for the first to be sufficient for conceiving of the second. See Della Rocca 2002: 20–21.
- 9 See "Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas" in Leibniz 1989: 25–26, and *Discourse on Metaphysics* §23 in Leibniz 1989.
- 10 For more on these issues, see Della Rocca 2006.
- 11 For Spinoza, the definition of a thing states its essence, as Spinoza says in a number of places; see, e.g., 3p4 and Letter 9 (G IV 43).
- 12 This notion of modal dependence has its origin in the Aristotelian-scholastic notion of the way in which accidents (such as whiteness and being eight feet tall) depend on substances. For a good discussion of these traditional notions as they figure in Descartes and Spinoza, see Carriero 1995. For an account of the transition from the talk of accidents to the talk of modes, see Garber 1992: chap. 3.
- 13 This kind of conceptual dependence of modes on substance goes back to the Aristotelian *definitional* dependence of accidents on substance. See Carriero 1995: 248.
- 14 Carriero 1995: §2.
- 15 Compare 3pref: "nature is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere one and the same."
- 16 For this reason, we can see that, when Spinoza says that substance is in itself, this simply amounts to the claim that substance is dependent only on itself or is conceived only through itself.
- 17 TTP, p. 50 (G III 60); see also KV II, chap. 26, G I 111; I am grateful to Yitzhak Melamed for calling the relevance of these passages to my attention.
- 18 Spinoza's interpreters have given conflicting answers to this question. See, e.g., Garrett 1991; and Curley and Walski 1998.
- 19 Curley and Walski, however, do make this claim.
- 20 Spinoza argues similarly that any such mode must also be eternal.

- 21 There is some unclarity as to whether the mediate infinite modes can be said to follow from God's nature absolutely. The account I gave above of the nature of following absolutely from God suggests that they do not, for the mediate infinite modes follow from God only because something else (namely an immediate infinite mode) also follows from God. And 1p23 does indicate that the mediate infinite modes do not follow from the absolute nature of God. However, in 1p23d, Spinoza seems to allow mediate infinite modes to follow absolutely from God as well (see Giancotti 1991). I believe, in light of what I take to be the natural interpretation of Spinoza's line of reasoning in 1p21d, that the locution in 1p23 is to be favored over the locution in 1p23d.
- 22 See especially TdIE §101. For a classic statement of the relation between infinite modes and laws of nature, see Curley 1969: 58–62. As Curley explains, it would be more accurate to say that the infinite modes are not themselves the laws of nature, but are rather the facts within extension or thought that correspond to the laws. The laws are, as it were, statements of these facts. As Spinoza puts it in TdIE §101, the laws are inscribed in the “fixed and eternal things.”
- 23 See 2def6 for the equivalence of reality and perfection, and 4pref (G II 208) for the equivalence of perfection and power. Spinoza also links power and reality in 2p49s (G II 133).
- 24 For such a connection between the PSR and necessitarianism, see van Inwagen 2002: chap. 7, and Bennett 1984: 115. Curley and Walski object to using PSR to justify a necessitarian reading of Spinoza. They base this objection on the claim that the totality of particular facts cannot be explained because “if the totality really does contain all the particular facts ... the only facts available for explaining that totality are those wholly general facts described by the laws of nature, and you cannot deduce any particular facts from general facts alone” (Curley and Walski 1998: 258). Curley and Walski seem to assume that the laws of nature and thus the attributes are wholly general facts. To assume this is really to beg the question because the necessitarian reading involves the claim that attributes are sufficient explanations for particulars and thus attributes may be seen as not mere general facts.
- 25 There are some worries here about whether a mental intention can give rise to a physical action, but we will bracket these worries for now and return to this matter in the next chapter when we discuss Spinoza's parallelism.
- 26 See note 23.

### **THREE** THE HUMAN MIND

- 1 See Descartes's definition of thought in the *Replies to the Second Objections* (CSM II 113, AT VII 160).