
Spinoza's Necessitarianism

IN A LETTER dated July 22, 1675, Henry Oldenburg advises Spinoza not to include in his “five-part Treatise [the *Ethics*] anything which may appear to undermine the practice of Religious virtue” (Letter 62). In response to Spinoza’s subsequent request to know the specific doctrines that he intends (Letter 73), Oldenburg reports on the reactions of readers of the earlier *Theologico-Political Treatise*:

I will tell you what it is that causes them most distress. You seem to assert the fatalistic necessity of all things and actions: and they say that if this is admitted and affirmed, then the nerves of all laws, of all virtue and religion, are cut through, and all rewards and punishments are empty. (Letter 74)

To this, Spinoza replies immediately and firmly:

At last I see what it was that you asked me not to publish. Since, however, *this very thing is the principal basis of all those which are contained in the Treatise [the *Ethics*] I had intended to publish*, I want to explain in what sense I maintain the fatalistic necessity of all things and of all actions.

For in no way do I subject God to fate, but I conceive that everything follows with inevitable necessity from the nature of God, just as all conceive that it follows from the nature of God Himself that He should understand Himself. (Letter 75; my emphasis)

Spinoza develops this “principal basis” throughout Part I of the *Ethics*, concluding that “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” (E1p29), and that “Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced” (E1p33).

How are these conclusions to be understood? It is widely agreed that Spinoza's position entails determinism: the doctrine that every event is causally determined from antecedent conditions by the laws of nature. But there has been little consensus concerning the further question of whether his position also entails what we may call "necessitarianism": the doctrine that every actual state of affairs is logically or metaphysically necessary, so that the world could not have been in any way different than it is—or, to adopt the Leibnizian mode of expression, that the actual world is the only possible world. Stuart Hampshire has asserted that Spinoza is indeed committed to necessitarianism; Curley has argued that he is best interpreted as committed to its denial; Matson, Jarrett, and Bennett have maintained that he inconsistently commits himself to both necessitarianism and its denial; while Delahunty appears to hold that Spinoza's formulations are sufficiently ambiguous that he commits himself neither to the doctrine *nor* to its denial.¹

With respect to the actual substance, its attributes and its infinite modes, Spinoza's position seems straightforward: they exist of necessity, and are the only ones there could have been.² If there is any contingency to be found in his universe, therefore, it evidently rests with the finite modes. But the possibility of different finite modes is a more difficult question. E1p28 asserts that every finite thing is caused to exist and to produce an effect by another finite cause that is caused to exist and to produce an effect by yet another finite cause, "and so on, to infinity." Since causes produce their effects necessarily for Spinoza (E1ax3), it follows that the existence and action of each finite mode is, given the antecedent existence of its cause, inevitable at the time it is produced. Moreover, because the chain of prior finite causes for each finite mode reaches to infinity, it also follows that there has been no point in the entire duration of the universe at which two different prospective sets of finite modes constituted genuinely alternative possible futures. Nevertheless, even this latter conclusion does not entail that the actual total series of finite modes as a *whole* is a necessary one; for it leaves open the question of whether there could not instead have been, from eternity, some other equally possible total series of finite modes, one equally compatible with all of the necessary constraints on such a series. If Spinoza allows that there could have been a different total series of finite modes, then for all its invocation of necessity and inevitability his metaphysics will not be necessitarian. For, to each such total series there will correspond a different "possible world"—that is, a different way the universe genuinely could have been. Thus, the question of Spinoza's necessitarianism is largely centered on the necessity or contingency of the total series of finite modes.

In this chapter I will argue for three theses: (1) Spinoza is *not* positively committed by anything he says to the denial of necessitarianism; (2) Spinoza *is* positively committed by what he says to the truth of necessitarianism; and (3) if we

do understand Spinoza as a necessitarian, then we can make better sense of two fundamental Spinozistic doctrines—his monism and his doctrine that every internally adequate idea corresponds to its object—as doctrines that are indeed founded on the “principal basis” of the “necessity of all things and actions.” Although each of the three theses for which I will argue is deductively independent of the others, in the sense that they could be true or false in any combination without contradiction, they are nonetheless mutually supporting. Taken together, these theses constitute a strong case for regarding Spinoza as a necessitarian. I will defend the theses in order.

I

There are three textual grounds on which Spinoza has been thought to be committed to a plurality of possible worlds and hence to the denial of necessitarianism: (1) the relation he describes between the finite modes and the “absolute nature” of the attributes; (2) his distinction between essences that involve necessary existence and those that do not; and (3) his distinction between essential and inessential characteristics of things.

1. *Finite modes and the “absolute nature” of attributes.* EI_p28d states that:

[W]hat is finite and has a determinate existence could not have been produced by the absolute nature of an attribute of God; for whatever follows from [*sequitur*] the absolute nature of an attribute of God is eternal and infinite. (by P₂₁)

There are two different ways in which this claim might be thought to commit Spinoza to a plurality of possible worlds.³

a. *“Following from.”* The first and more general of these ways does not demand that we assign any specific interpretation to the “absolute nature of an attribute” at all, so long as that “nature” is taken to be expressible in some propositional content. The argument, proposed by Bennett, is as follows: EI_p21 and EI_p28d both entail that finite modes do not “follow from” the absolute nature of any attribute; but it is a theorem in most systems of entailment logic that a necessary truth is entailed by—i.e., “follows from”—any proposition whatever; hence, we must conclude that the existence of any particular finite mode cannot be a necessary truth.⁴

Bennett himself sets this argument aside on the grounds that the relevant theorem of entailment logic has not always been well-known and remains controversial, so that there is no reason to think Spinoza was aware of it or held it. In fact, however, we can go further: Spinoza can and must reject the theorem, at least as a claim about the relation that *he* intends by “following from.”

He *must* reject it in view of its unacceptable consequences. To take one example, the existence of every infinite mode is necessary; but if every infinite mode therefore “followed from” every other infinite mode, Spinoza’s distinction between immediate and mediate infinite modes, which is drawn in terms of that relation (EIp23d; see also Letters 63–64), would collapse. Moreover, he clearly intends “ γ follows from x ” to entail “ x causes γ ,” as the cited passage from EIp28d indicates.⁵ Yet, surely he could not accept the consequence that every necessary state of affairs is a *cause* of every other. If it were, then every infinite mode of a given attribute would be both cause and effect of every infinite mode of every *other* attribute, contrary to EIIP6; and, even worse, every infinite mode would also be the cause of God’s existence, contrary to EIIP6c.

He *can* reject the theorem because, in saying that “ γ follows from x ,” he means considerably *more* than simply that “ x entails γ ,” as the latter proposition is understood in most contemporary modal and entailment logics. In these logics, the meaning of “ x entails γ ” is exhausted by the claim that there is no possible world in which x is true and γ is false. For Spinoza, in contrast, to speak of x as following from γ is to locate x specifically as a necessitating *cause and ground* of γ within a causal order of the universe that is at once dynamic and logical. Thus, if the Spinozist “following-from” relation is to be identified with a kind of entailment at all, it must be identified with the entailment relation of a “relevance logic,” one whose relevance condition is satisfied only by priority in the causal order of nature.⁶ Relevance logics, because of the additional requirements they impose on the entailment relation, generally do not satisfy the theorem Bennett cites.

b. “*Absolute nature.*” However, that theorem is by no means the only basis on which EIp21 and EIp28d may be thought to be incompatible with necessitarianism. For it may be argued that once we understand more specifically what is *meant* by “the absolute nature” of an attribute (alternatively: an “attribute . . . insofar as it is considered absolutely” [EIp23d]), we will see that the failure of finite modes to follow from *this* nature will require them to be contingent. If, for example, we interpret the “absolute nature of an attribute” to be its true or complete nature, then it will be difficult to see how finite modes could be rendered fully necessary *without* following from an attribute’s “absolute” nature—for the attributes constitute the essence of God, who is the only independently necessary being.

There is reason to doubt, however, that “absolute nature” should be interpreted as “true or complete nature” in this context. For Spinoza also asserts repeatedly that *all things*—clearly including finite modes—must “follow from the necessity of God’s [or “the divine”] nature” (EIp16, EIp17s, EIp26d, EIp33d, EIp33s1). At EIp29s, moreover, he equates “following from the necessity of God’s nature” with following “from any of God’s attributes.” Hence, the finite modes *do* evidently follow from the attributes, but *not* from the “absolute nature” of the attributes—which would be a contradiction if “absolute nature” meant simply “real or complete nature.”⁷

Can the notion of “absolute nature” be given a different interpretation, not subject to this difficulty? Its use in the *Ethics* gives us two clues. The first clue is in EI_p21d, where Spinoza offers two parallel *reductio ad absurdum* arguments. The first argument concludes that whatever follows from the absolute nature of an attribute of God must be infinite, while the second concludes that whatever follows from the absolute nature of an attribute must have always had to exist or be eternal. The first argument, which for the sake of definiteness uses “thought” as a representative attribute, may be outlined as follows:

- (1) “In some attribute of God [for example, “thought”] there follows from its absolute nature something that is finite” (Spinoza’s assumption).
- (2) Every attribute of God, including thought, is “necessarily . . . infinite by its nature” (by EI_p11).
- (3) A thing can be finite only if it is limited or “determined through” something of the same nature (by EI_de2).
- (4) There is thought that does not constitute the finite thing in question (from (1)–(3)).
- (5) “*On that account* [the finite thing] does not follow necessarily from the nature [of this thought] insofar as it is absolute thought” (from (4); my emphasis).
- (6) Whatever “follows from the necessity of the absolute nature of the attribute itself . . . must necessarily be infinite” (from the contradiction between (1) and (5), thus discharging Spinoza’s original assumption).

As the direct inference from (4) to (5) shows, Spinoza regards it as self-evident that whatever follows from the “absolute nature” of a thing must necessarily be manifested *pervasively* throughout that attribute. The second, parallel argument of the demonstration—concerning eternity and “determinate existence or duration”—similarly takes it as self-evident that whatever follows from the absolute nature of an attribute necessarily exists *permanently*, or without durational limits, throughout that attribute.

The second clue is in EI_p28d. There Spinoza argues that, since finite modes must be determined to exist and to produce their effects by God, yet cannot follow from the “absolute nature” of any attribute, they must follow instead from the attribute “insofar as it is considered to be affected by some mode.” “Following from the absolute nature of an attribute” is thus contrasted *not* with failing to follow from the attribute at all, but rather with following from the attribute as that attribute is considered in a different *way*.⁸

From these two uses of the notion of “absolute nature of an attribute,” we can form a reasonable hypothesis about its purpose. An attribute, if it is to have any internal diversity or change, must be qualified in different ways at different places and times. Now, some things about an attribute will follow from the very nature

of the attribute regardless of *how* it is qualified or “affected,” and thus will follow equally from it under all circumstances; accordingly, things of this kind must be infinite and eternal, in the sense of being necessarily pervasive and permanent throughout the whole range of the attribute. This is the argument of E1p21d concerning infinite modes. Other things, however—those local and temporary features that actually constitute the attribute’s diversification and change—cannot similarly follow from the nature of the attribute *without regard* to how it is qualified or “affected”; otherwise, they would be necessarily pervasive and permanent as well. Hence, these finite things must follow only from some non-pervasive or non-permanent qualifications or “affections” of the attribute. In order to be non-pervasive or non-permanent, these affections must themselves follow from non-pervasive or non-permanent affections, and so on to infinity. This is the argument of E1p28d concerning finite modes. The distinction at issue—between that which follows from the attribute “absolutely” or without regard to how it is affected, and that which follows from the attribute only where and when the attribute is qualified or affected in some particular way—is, thus, one that Spinoza would be committed to drawing simply by a commitment to the attributes’ manifesting internal diversity and change through their modes, regardless of his attitude toward the contingency or necessity of the series of those modes.

Still, it is one thing to say that Spinoza’s use of the distinction need not be *motivated* by a belief in the plurality of possible series of finite modes, and another to say that his use of the distinction does not *require* such a plurality. Could Spinoza allow the actual series of finite modes to be necessary while denying that those finite modes follow from the “absolute” nature of the attributes? In order to answer this, we must first ask how, if at all, he could suppose the actual series of finite modes to be necessary.

How could the series of finite modes be the only possible one? To put the question more precisely, how could there be only *one* possible solution to the problem of how an attribute is to be diversely modified by an infinite series of finite modes? Of course, such necessarily pervasive and permanent features of the attribute as its laws of nature—contained or “inscribed” in the attribute or its infinite modes (*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* 101)—will provide one kind of necessary constraint. Even so, however, the hypothesis that the actual total series of finite modes is the *only* one that is completely consistent with the laws of nature may seem too wildly optimistic for Spinoza to have accepted it.

To this it might be replied simply that: (i) these laws of nature may be highly complicated, and (ii) it also seems wildly optimistic to suppose that the actual set of laws of nature is the only completely consistent set, yet Spinoza evidently does accept *that* hypothesis. However, there is another, fuller response available; for, in addition to the general laws of nature, Spinoza can allow a further, crucial, necessary constraint on the series of finite modes. He holds that everything

whatever exists unless prevented from doing so (EIp1d), that a substance's power to exist varies with its reality and perfection (EIp1s) and that everything expresses some degree or other of reality and perfection (EIp16d; reality and perfection are identified in EIIdef 6). Furthermore, he evidently holds that "substance with less than the greatest possible number of attributes" is a contradiction, on the grounds that greater number of attributes" is correlated with greater reality (by EIp9), so that the existence of God is necessary, while the existence of substances of fewer attributes is impossible.⁹ It is therefore plausible that he would also regard "substance whose attributes express less than the greatest possible reality and perfection through their series of finite modes" as a contradiction, thus making the series of finite modes that expresses the highest degree of reality and perfection necessary, and all lesser series impossible. As Donagan has noted, this constraint is suggested by EIp33s1: "From the preceding it clearly follows that things have been produced by God with the highest perfection, since they have followed necessarily from a given most perfect nature."¹⁰ (See also EIp16d itself.)

It now remains for us to consider whether a series of finite modes that is necessary in such a way would be compatible with Spinoza's claim that finite modes do not follow from the absolute nature of the attributes. For, after all, it might be objected, if there is only *one* possible solution to the problem of how to realize a series of finite modes for an attribute, then that series *must*, after all, follow (either immediately or mediately) from the absolute or unqualified nature of the attribute itself.

To this objection there are two alternative replies. First, if Spinoza accepts the requirement that the series of finite modes must express the highest degree of reality and perfection, then he could well maintain that the series of finite modes does *not* follow from the absolute nature of the attribute, but only from that nature *together with* this additional necessary constraint. This constraint, it might be argued, pertains to the nature of the attributes, but not to their *absolute nature*, as evidenced by the fact that the constraint requires *different* modifications at different places and times.

Second, however (and this reply is available whether he accepts the additional constraint or not), Spinoza nowhere denies that the whole *series* of finite modes follows from the absolute nature of the attributes. His claim is only that no *individual* finite mode follows from it. Indeed, if the total series of finite modes as a whole were *itself* an infinite mode—not an implausible suggestion, given its pervasive and permanent extent—then it would *necessarily* "follow from" the absolute nature of the attributes, by EIp23. In that case, the total infinite series of finite modes would be an infinite mode having finite modes as parts; but that is not unprecedented, since the human mind is a finite mode that is nevertheless a part of the infinite intellect of God, by EIIp11c. In fact, the total infinite series of finite modes might well turn out to be identical with the "whole of nature [as] one Individual, whose parts . . . vary in infinite ways, without any change [in

the whole Individual" that Spinoza describes in lemma7s preceding EIIp14, and which he seems, in Letter 64, to identify as a mediate infinite mode. The crucial point, however, is that no finite mode would follow, *considered independently of its membership in this series*, from the nature of an attribute. For, if the mode followed *independently*, it would have to be necessarily pervasive and permanent throughout the attribute, i.e., it would have to be an infinite mode. Instead, each finite mode would follow from the nature of an attribute, but *only in virtue of its membership as part of the one consistently constructible or maximally perfect series of finite modes*. As a result, it would follow from an attribute *only insofar as the attribute is considered to be affected by particular modes*—just as EIp28d asserts.¹¹ Hence, the failure of individual finite modes to follow from the nature of an attribute "considered absolutely," is, on the proposed interpretation, compatible with there being only one possible total series of such modes.

2. *Essence and necessary existence*. EIIax1 reads: "The essence of man does not involve necessary existence."¹² At first glance, this axiom may suggest that the existence of particular men is not necessary, and hence must be contingent. Yet EIp29 asserts that "In nature there is nothing contingent," and EIp33s1 asserts that "A thing is called contingent only because of a defect of our knowledge." Is this not a contradiction?

We may begin by noting that the axiom does not claim that the *existence* of particular men is not necessary; it claims, rather, that necessary existence is not "involved" in the *essence* of men. It is thus simply a particular instance of the distinction drawn at EIp33s1:

A thing is called necessary either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause. For a thing's existence follows necessarily either from its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause. And a thing is also called impossible from these same causes—viz. either because its essence, or definition, involves a contradiction, or because there is no external cause which has been determined to produce such a thing.

But a thing is called contingent only because of a defect of our knowledge. For if we do not know that the thing's essence involves a contradiction, or if we do know very well that its essence does not involve a contradiction, and nevertheless can affirm nothing certainly about its existence, because the order of causes is hidden from us, it can never seem to us either necessary or impossible. So we call it contingent or possible.¹³

This distinction is often interpreted as one between two degrees of necessity: real logical or metaphysical necessity, on the one hand, and mere causal inevitability in virtue of antecedent conditions, on the other. The "contingency"

that Spinoza contrasts with both would amount, on this interpretation, simply to chance, or an absence of inevitability; and his denials of such contingency would therefore be simply assertions of determinism rather than of necessitarianism.

It must be emphasized, however, that Spinoza does not present the distinction as one between two *degrees* of necessity, but rather as one between two *sources* of necessity: a thing's own essence, and a cause other than the thing itself. And, once again, this is a distinction that Spinoza would have to draw, given his commitment to the internal diversification of the attributes through a series of finite modes, whether he were a necessitarian or not. For the essence of an actually existing finite mode cannot contain a contradiction; if it did, it would be like a square circle, incapable of existing at all. On the other hand, the finite mode's own essence cannot "involve," or be the sufficient source of, its existence; for then it would require no external cause for its existence and could not be prevented, through the absence of such a cause, from existing pervasively and permanently (see E1p11d). Hence, the individual members of a series of finite modes must have essences that, taken by themselves, do not necessitate the thing's existence *without regard* to external circumstances; rather, their essences must be capable of being instantiated under appropriate conditions (i.e., affections of the attribute), as part of a series of finite modes. (One might say that it pertains to their essence not to exist *simpliciter*, but rather to exist given the presence of a particular efficient cause.)

If the cause of such a finite mode is itself inevitable but only contingent, then the resulting finite mode will be inevitable but contingent. If, on the other hand, the series of causes that determines the finite thing to exist and to act at a particular time and place is itself the only possible series, then the existence of the finite mode at that time and place will itself be completely necessary, even though the necessity of its limited durational existence is derived from its place in the only possible series, rather than from its own essence considered in isolation. It might of course be argued that if the series of finite modes is completely necessary, then the limited durational existence of a finite mode must after all "follow from," and hence be "involved in" the thing's own essence; but this conclusion is warranted only if we accept the theorem that whatever is necessary "follows from" everything whatever; and this is a theorem that, as we have already seen, Spinoza can and must reject.

3. *Essential properties.* Throughout the *Ethics*, Spinoza appears to employ a distinction between the characteristics of a thing that are essential and those that are not essential. It may be argued, however, that if every actual state of affairs is necessary, then every characteristic of a thing must be essential to it, so that Spinoza's use of the distinction is incompatible with necessitarianism. As Bennett expresses it:

The strongest pressure on Spinoza to allow that at least some propositions are contingent comes simply from its being hard to do good philosophy while staying faithful to the thesis that this is the only possible world . . . for example, his uses of the concept of a thing's *essence*, meaning those of its properties which it could not possibly lack, are flattened into either falsehood or vacuous truth if there are no contingent truths; because then every property of every thing is essential to it.¹⁴

Bennett offers EI_p5d and EIII_p6d as examples of arguments that are said to rely crucially on an essential/inessential distinction, and hence on the existence of contingent truths.

a. *Essence, property and accident.* In assessing this line of argument, we must distinguish between two senses of "essence." In the first sense—due ultimately to Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, and common particularly in scholastic philosophy—the essence of a thing consists of the characteristics in virtue of which it is the thing that it is, and which, therefore, the thing must always have. This essence is distinguished both from the thing's properties and from its accidents. The properties are characteristics that do not belong to the essence but follow from and are deducible from it; for this reason, a thing must always have all of its properties. The converse, however, does not hold: the essence is not properly deducible from the properties.¹⁵ Accidents, in contrast, are characteristics that do not follow from the essence of the thing at all, and which the thing may therefore either acquire or lose without affecting its identity; their source is thus at least partly outside the essence of the thing. In the *second* sense of "essence"—historically derivative from the first, and common particularly in contemporary modal logic—a characteristic is said to be essential, or to be part of a thing's essence, if it is a characteristic that the thing has in every possible world in which the thing exists at all. For lack of better terms, I will speak of essences of the first kind as "scholastic" essences, and essences of the second kind as "logical" essences.

It is clear that Spinoza uses "essence" and related locutions to denote scholastic essences. At TIE 95, for example, he insists that a perfect definition "will have to explain the inmost essence of the thing, and to take care not to use certain properties [*propria*] in its place"; and at TIE 96, in discussing the conditions for a good definition of a created thing, he stipulates that we require "a concept, or definition, of the thing such that when it is considered alone, without any others conjoined, all the thing's properties can be deduced from it." The same distinction between essence and properties is clearly evident in the *Ethics* at EI_p40s2, where Spinoza contrasts knowledge of the second kind, which depends on "adequate ideas of the properties of things," with knowledge of the third kind, which "proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the . . . essence of things." Other particularly explicit

invocations of the essence/property distinction occur at EIp6d, and at EIIIdef.aff. VIexp and EIIIdef.aff. XXIIexp.¹⁶

The essence/property distinction, as Spinoza draws it, does not require that a property belong to its bearer only contingently; on the contrary, it *must* belong to it necessarily, since all properties are deducible from the essence alone. Consider Spinoza's own example:

If a circle, for example, is defined as a figure in which the lines drawn from the center to the circumference are equal, no one fails to see that such a definition does not at all explain the essence of the circle, but only a property of it. (TIE 95)

Spinoza is certainly well aware that this property, though not the essence of the circle, is a necessary rather than a contingent feature of it.

Spinoza also clearly allows that things have characteristics that are neither part of the thing's essence nor properties of it, characteristics that do not follow from the essence of the thing alone, and in that sense correspond to the "accidents" of the traditional distinction. Among the most important examples of such characteristics, for Spinoza's purposes, are human passions. But the fact that such characteristics do not follow solely from the essence of their bearer requires only that their source be at least partly outside the bearer; it does *not* require that there be a possible world in which the bearer would *not* have been caused to have them. Hence, neither Spinoza's own distinction between essence and properties, nor the distinction between these and characteristics that are imposed from outside, commits him to a denial of necessitarianism.

b. *Essence in EIp5d.* Spinoza's own uses of the term "essence" are most naturally understood in the scholastic sense, a sense in which the existence of "inessential" characteristics is compatible with necessitarianism. Still, it may be objected, Spinoza might nonetheless *rely* on the supposition that some things have some of their characteristics only contingently, without using the *term* "essence" in connection with it. And, in fact, in neither of the two arguments Bennett cites as examples—EIp5d and EIIIp6d—does the term "essence" occur. Thus, we must still investigate whether these arguments commit Spinoza to the existence of *logically* inessential properties, under whatever name, and hence to a denial of necessitarianism.

EIp5 and its demonstration read as follows:

P5: In nature there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute.

Dem.: If there were two or more distinct substances, they would have to be distinguished from one another either by a difference in their attributes,

or by a difference in their affections (by P4). If only by a difference in their attributes, then it will be conceded that there is only one of the same attribute. But if by a difference of their affections, then since a substance is prior in nature to its affections (by P1), if the affections are put to one side and [the substance] is considered in itself, i.e. (by D3 and A6), considered truly, one cannot be conceived to be distinguished from another, i.e. (by P4), there cannot be many, but only one [of the same nature *or* attribute], q.e.d.

One of the main problems in understanding this demonstration is to understand why EI_{p1} (“A substance is prior in nature to its affections”) entitles us to put “the affections . . . to one side.” Bennett’s suggestion is that:

If we take this [IP1] to entail that any state of a substance is accidental to it, i.e., that a substance could have lacked any of its actual [affections], then we get the following argument. Distinct substances must be unlike in respect of some properties which they cannot lose; for if they were unlike only in respect of their accidental properties they could become perfectly alike, and so, by the identity of indiscernibles, become identical. It is obviously intolerable to suppose that two substances could have been—or could become—one. So between any two substances there must be an unlikeness in respect of nonaccidental features, i.e., of attributes.¹⁷

Ingenious as this proposed interpretation is, it is nevertheless subject to a number of serious objections. First, as Bennett emphasizes, it would be a logical fallacy for Spinoza to argue from “*x* and *y* are unlike only in respect of their accidental properties” to “*x* and *y* could become exactly alike.” Second, it would be a further logical fallacy for Spinoza to move from “*x* and *y* could have been exactly alike” to “*x* and *y* could become exactly alike.” Third, although Spinoza would indeed reject the claim that two substances could have been or could become one, he is not yet in a position to reject such a claim at EI_{p5}. Indeed, the clearest grounds on which Spinoza could reject it would be EI_{p14} and EI_{p14cl}, which assert that God is necessarily the only substance; but EI_{p14} is derived in part from EI_{p5}, and so could hardly serve as a justification for it. Fourth, the kind of priority at issue in EI_{p1} must be a kind of priority derivable from the premises of EI_{p1}. These premises are simply EI_{def3} and EI_{def5}, the definitions of “substance” and “mode,” which mention only the priority of “being in” and “being conceived through.” These kinds of priorities may well be related to the *scholastic* inessentiality to substance of its modes, but the definitions do not imply that modes must be *logically* inessential, as the proposed interpretation requires. Finally, and perhaps most decisively, the proposed interpretation requires that Spinoza identify the distinction between a substance’s attributes and its affections or modes—as employed at

EIdefi—with the distinction between its logically essential and logically inessential characteristics; but this Spinoza could not and would not do, regardless of his attitude toward necessitarianism, since the infinite modes are, by EIp21, logically (although not scholastically) essential to God.¹⁸

For these reasons, it is unlikely that the proposed interpretation of EIp5d is correct. The interpretation could be rejected with greater certainty, of course, if we had a more satisfactory interpretation to offer in its place. I will outline such an interpretation—one that depends on a necessitarian reading of Spinoza—in the final section of this chapter. But the objections just considered are sufficient for us to conclude that he need not be construed as a necessitarian on the basis of EIp5d.

c. *Essence in EIIIp6d*. EIIIp6 states that, “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being.” The demonstration appeals, in part, to the claim that “no thing has anything in itself by which it can be destroyed, or which takes its existence away (by P4)”; or, as Bennett expresses it, that “nothing can, unaided, cause its own destruction.” Bennett then asserts that “if all a thing’s properties are essential to it, then this argument ought to conclude that nothing can, unaided, cause any change in itself.” His line of thought, presumably, is this: a logically essential characteristic of a thing is one that it has in all possible worlds in which the thing exists at all; necessitarianism requires that all characteristics of things be logically essential to them; hence, necessitarianism requires that if a thing lost one of its characteristics, it would cease to be that thing, so that all change would be destruction.

We must distinguish, however, characteristics whose permanent possession is logically essential from characteristics whose temporary possession is logically essential. Spinoza certainly recognizes some characteristics of the first kind, such as each individual’s “fixed proportion of motion and rest.” Necessitarianism, however, by no means requires that every characteristic be of this first kind; it requires only that, whenever a thing has some characteristic for a temporary part of its duration in one possible world, it must have that characteristic for that *same* temporary part of its duration in every possible world. To put the point in another way, necessitarianism does not require that nothing undergo change, but only that the series of a thing’s actual changes constitute its only possible biography. For Spinoza, this would indeed be the case if the actual infinite series of finite modes was the only possible series. Necessitarianism is therefore compatible with EIIIp6d.

Thus far, I have argued that Spinoza is not committed to the denial of necessitarianism by (1) his claim that finite modes do not follow from the absolute nature of the attributes, by (2) his distinction between things whose essences include necessary existence and those whose essences do not or by (3) his explicit or implicit use of an essential/inessential distinction. I have not yet argued that he is committed to necessitarianism. It is to this thesis that I now turn.

II

There are three chief textual grounds for the conclusion that Spinoza is committed to necessitarianism in *Ethics* I: EIp16, which claims that “infinitely many things in infinitely many modes” follow from the necessity of the divine nature; EIp29, which denies any contingency in nature; and EIp33, which claims that “Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order” than that in which they have been produced. I will consider these three grounds in order. In the course of considering EIp16, I will argue that, independently of these three propositions, Spinoza is also committed to the denial of other possible series of finite modes by the doctrines of *Ethics* II.

1. *EIp16: The divine nature and the infinite intellect.* EIp16 and its demonstration read as follows:

P16: From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect).

Dem.: This Proposition must be plain to anyone, provided he attends to the fact that the intellect infers from the given definition of any thing a number of properties that really do follow necessarily from it (i.e., from the very essence of the thing); and that it infers more properties the more the definition of the thing expresses reality, i.e., the more reality the essence of the defined thing involves. But since the divine nature has absolutely infinite attributes (by D6), each of which also expresses an essence infinite in its own kind, from its necessity there must follow infinitely many things in infinite modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect), q.e.d.

Bennett outlines two different ways in which this proposition appears to commit Spinoza to necessitarianism: the first concerns the relation between the actual and the necessary, while the second concerns the relation between the possible and actual. I will argue that Spinoza is committed to necessitarianism in both ways.¹⁹

a. *Necessity and actuality.* Spinoza is committed to each of the following claims:

- (1) Everything that falls under an infinite intellect follows from the necessity of the divine nature.
- (2) “The necessity of the divine nature” is something necessary.
- (3) Whatever follows from something that is necessary, is itself necessary.
- (4) Everything that is actual falls under an infinite intellect.

(1) is simply a paraphrase of EIp16 itself. Spinoza's commitment to (2) is evidenced not only in his reference to the "necessity" of the divine nature, but in the demonstration of EIp16 itself. For the demonstration argues as follows: (i) from the definition or essence of a thing, properties necessarily follow; (ii) the greater the reality contained in the essence, the more properties will follow in this way; (iii) God's essence is utterly infinite (by EIdéf6); and, hence, (iv) from God's essence, infinitely many things must follow. The demonstration thus takes the "divine nature" to be equivalent to God's essence, which, by EIp20c1, is an eternal and, hence, necessary, truth.

(3) is an evident consequence of the character of the "following from" relation as a necessitating logical and causal relation, as is apparent from its use in EIp21–28. It might be suggested, however, that we could reject the application of (3) in this context on the following basis: Even if the series of finite modes were contingent, each finite mode could still be said to follow at least *partially* from the nature of the attribute. For finite modes follow from other finite modes *by means* of the laws of nature governing them. And these laws, at least—laws contained in the attribute or its infinite modes—do follow from the absolute nature of the attribute, whether there could have been a different total series of finite modes or not. Hence (1)—the claim that everything falling under an infinite intellect follows from the divine nature—can be construed as claiming only that such things follow *at least partially* from the divine nature. But it is not true that whatever follows *partially* from something necessary must be itself necessary; hence (3) ought not be interpreted as applicable to (1). (A similar line of argument has been suggested to reconcile EIp16 with EIp21 and EIp28d; see note 7.)

This argument, however, is subject to two serious objections. First, it requires Spinoza to trade tacitly (and equivocally, given EIp21 and EIp28d) on the very distinction between an adequate cause and a partial cause that he draws quite clearly at the outset of *Ethics* III, one that he could easily have drawn in *Ethics* I had he thought it would be useful. Second, the demonstration of EIp16 makes it clear that the relation between the divine nature and the infinitely many things said to follow from it is to be understood as the relation between a scholastic essence and its properties (in effect, the demonstration claims that infinitely many things are "properties" of God); yet, as we have already seen from TIE 96, the properties of a thing are all deducible from the essence of the thing *alone*.

Finally, Spinoza's commitment to (4) is evident from the definition of "infinite" at EIdéf2. For EIp16 equates "what falls under an infinite intellect" with "infinitely many things"; and, by definition, a collection of things cannot be infinite if it leaves any thing of the same kind outside itself. Moreover, numerous later passages (EIp17s, EIp26d, EIp33d, EIp33s) confirm that the "infinitely many things" that follow from the divine nature comprise "all" things, or everything. (4) is also independently required by Spinoza's commitment to the parallelism of

the attributes—i.e., that “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things” (EIIp7; EIIp7c in effect draws (4) as a consequence). But from (1)–(4) we can infer:

(5) Everything that is actual is necessary.

(5) is equivalent to necessitarianism.

b. *Actuality and possibility.* As Bennett observes,²⁰ Spinoza also appears to be committed to the following two claims:

(6) Everything that falls under the infinite intellect is actual.

(7) Everything that is possible falls under the infinite intellect.

(6) is directly entailed by EIp16 itself, since EIp16 states that whatever falls under an infinite intellect actually follows from the divine nature. It is also confirmed in EIp30, which states that, “an actual intellect, whether finite or infinite, must comprehend God’s attributes and God’s affections, and nothing else”; and it is confirmed again in EIp33s2. Moreover, it is required by the parallelism of the attributes (EIIp7): for if the infinite intellect contained an idea of a non-actual thing, it would be an idea without a corresponding object.²¹

Regarding (7), Bennett says only that “Spinoza sometimes uses the notion of an ‘infinite’ or unlimited intellect to express the notion of what is possible.”²² I have been unable to confirm this by a definitive passage, but it might be regarded as evident simply from the definition of “infinite” (EIdf2), on the grounds that the failure to conceive something that is genuinely possible constitutes a limitation. This interpretation of the definition would be strengthened by Spinoza’s apparent willingness to construe “infinite attributes” in the definition of “God” (EIdf6) as meaning “all possible attributes.” But, from (6) and (7) we can infer:

(8) Everything that is possible is actual.

(8) is also equivalent to necessitarianism.

c. *Parallelism and causal independence.* Even if we set aside EIp16 and EIdf2, however, Spinoza is still ultimately committed to (6) and (7) by doctrines he advances in *Ethics* II. We have already noted that he is committed to (6) by the parallelism of the attributes (EIIp7); I will now argue that *Ethics* II commits him to (7) as well.

Since there is in God an idea of every actual thing (EIIp7c), and since there could have been no substances, attributes or infinite modes other than the actual ones, the question of how the infinite intellect could lack the idea of something genuinely possible may be reduced to that of how God could fail to have an idea of a possible but non-existent finite mode—i.e., of a finite mode that exists in some

possible world, but not in the actual one. As we have already seen from EIp28, if there are to be genuinely possible but non-existent modes, they must belong to a total causal series of finite modes that is itself possible but not actual. But if there are such possible series of modes, what could prevent the occurrence of a corresponding series of *ideas* of those modes in the infinite intellect? There are only three alternatives: (i) the cause is to be found in the attribute of Thought itself; (ii) the cause is to be found in the non-existence of the objects of the ideas; or (iii) there is no cause, but the non-existence of the series of ideas is a brute contingent fact.

None of these alternatives, however, can be acceptable to Spinoza. If the non-existent series of finite modes is indeed a genuinely possible series, then the series of ideas of those finite modes must be a genuinely possible series of finite modes of thought; and hence we cannot say that the idea is prevented from existing by the attribute of Thought itself. Yet, to say that the series of ideas is prevented from existing by the non-existence of their objects would be to contradict EIIP5:

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

The remaining alternative is to say that, just as the series of finite modes itself could have existed but as a brute contingent fact did not, so the series of finite ideas of those objects could have existed but as a matter of brute contingent fact did not. But this too is unacceptable. For, if the existence or non-existence of a particular series of finite modes is an independent matter of chance within each attribute, then it will be only a matter of chance whether the series of finite modes from different attributes happen to correspond with one another. Moreover, we will never be in a position to know whether or not they *do* correspond. For example, from the existence of one's own mind, which is part of a series of finite modes in the attribute of Thought, one would not be able to determine whether the series of finite modes that includes one's own body has or has not been realized in Extension. EIIP7 (which asserts the parallelism of the attributes) and EIIax4 (from which EIIP7 is derived) would then be, if not false, at least contingent, uncertain and unknowable. Hence, the infinite intellect must contain an idea of every possible thing, since the idea of any possible thing could be excluded from it only by violating either the causal independence or the necessary parallelism of the attributes. But the claim that the infinite intellect contains an idea of every possible thing is (7); and together with (6)'s requirement that every idea in the infinite intellect have an actual object, it entails (8), the doctrine that everything possible is actual—i.e., necessitarianism.

We may also put this same line of argument in somewhat more popular theological terms. If God is to know everything that is the case without error, his set of ideas about what series of finite modes is actual in each attribute must correspond precisely to the actual series of finite modes in that attribute, without positing any *other*, non-existent, finite modes as actual. But this perfect correspondence between things and ideas can be assured—and hence a source of knowledge—in only two ways: either (i) God's ideas are *caused or explained* by the actuality of the series of things itself, or (ii) there is for each attribute only one *possible* total series of finite modes, and one corresponding *possible* series of ideas of finite modes. Since Spinoza rejects the former alternative, he must accept the latter.

2. *Elp29: Necessity and contingency.* Elp29 states:

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.

Elp29 differs from Elp16 in only three respects: (1) its explicit use of the term “contingency,” (2) its reference to “all things” as opposed to “infinitely many things” and (3) its explicit application both to the existence of things and to their actions. The demonstration justifies this greater explicitness on the basis of the more specific developments of Elp21–28. The heart of the demonstration, however, is the claim (Elp16) that infinitely many things follow in infinitely many ways “from the necessity of the divine nature.” If, as I have argued, the necessity of Elp16 must be construed as logical or metaphysical necessity, and not as mere “inevitability in light of antecedent conditions,” then the denial of contingency in Elp29, which is derived from and paraphrased in terms of that proposition, must be understood in the same sense.

3. *Elp33: The order of nature.* Elp33 and its demonstration read as follows:

P33: Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced.

Dem.: For all things have necessarily followed from God's given nature (by P16), and have been determined from the necessity of God's nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way (by P29). Therefore, if things could have been of another nature, or could have been determined to produce an effect in another way, so that the order of Nature was different, then God's nature could also have been other than it is now, and therefore (by P11) that [other nature] would also have had to exist, and consequently, there could have been two or more Gods, which is absurd (by P14C1). So things could have been produced in no other way and no other order, etc., q.e.d.

The crucial question in the interpretation of this proposition is this: how are we to understand “in no other way, and in no other order?” If this expression refers only to the attributes, the infinite modes, and their laws—which in a sense determine the “way” and “order” in which finite modes follow from one another—then the proposition is compatible with a plurality of different possible series of finite modes. If, on the other hand, this “way” or this “order” includes the finite modes as well, then the proposition will deny the possibility of even finite modes other than the actual ones.

As the demonstration makes clear, the “order” in question is the “order of Nature” (*naturae ordo*). Of Spinoza’s many uses of this term, in the *Ethics* and elsewhere, nearly all at least suggest that the order of nature includes particular finite modes as parts, and several imply it more directly. For example, in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, he proposes that we should “attend to the order of Nature” (TIE 65), as the chief remedy against the formation of imaginative “fictions” concerning the existence of particular durational things—advice that would presumably be useless if such particular things were not to be found as parts of that order. EI_{pud} asserts that:

[T]he reason why a circle or triangle exists, or why it does not exist, does not follow from the nature of these things, but from the order of the whole of corporeal Nature. For from this [order] it must follow either that the triangle necessarily exists now or that it is impossible for it to exist now.

Perhaps most directly of all, EI_{p24d} speaks of the relation between a part of the human body and “a singular thing [i.e., a finite mode or a concerted association of them, by EI_{Idef7}] which is prior, in the order of nature, to the part itself.” Spinoza also consistently uses such related terms as “common order of nature” (*communis ordo naturae*) and “order of causes” (*ordo causarum*) to include the finite modes.²³ Moreover, as Bennett points out,²⁴ Spinoza characterizes his position in EI_{p33d} and EI_{p33s2} as a denial that “things could have been of another nature,” that God could “decree anything different,” that God could have “willed and decreed something different concerning nature” and that “things could have been produced otherwise than they are now.” Taken together with the demonstration’s reliance on EI_{p16} and EI_{p29}, these facts strongly suggest that EI_{p33} is intended to rule out not merely any alternative possible attributes and infinite modes, but any alternative possible series of finite modes as well.

In this section, I have argued that Spinoza is committed to necessitarianism by three propositions in *Ethics* I: EI_{p16}, EI_{p29}, and EI_{p33}. I have also argued that he is independently committed to that claim by the conjunction of two doctrines expressed in *Ethics* II: the causal and explanatory independence of the attributes (EI_{p5}), and the necessary parallelism of the attributes (EI_{p7}).

III

Thus far, I have argued that Spinoza is not committed to the denial of necessitarianism, and that he is committed to its truth. But, does the question of necessitarianism have any bearing on our interpretation of the rest of his philosophy? I believe that it does, with respect to at least two topics: his monism, and his view of the relation between the internal adequacy of an idea and its external correspondence to its object. We are now in a position to explore briefly the bearing of necessitarianism on these topics.

1. *Monism and the sharing of attributes.* Spinoza's monism is stated in EIp14: "Except God, no substance can be or be conceived." The formal demonstration is straightforward: (i) God is by definition a being "of whom no attribute which expresses an essence of substance can be denied" (by EId6f6), and (ii) "he [God] necessarily exists" (by EIp11); but (iii) two substances cannot share an attribute (by EIp5); hence (iv) God is the only substance.

The demonstration of EIp14 relies, however, on EIp5; and the demonstration of the latter proposition has puzzled commentators. As we have seen, EIp5d begins by asserting (i) that two or more distinct substances would have to be distinguished either by a difference of *attributes* or a difference of *modes* ("affections"). Spinoza then argues (ii) that a difference of attributes would entail that there was only one substance of *the same* attribute; and he infers from EIp1—that is, "A substance is prior in nature to its affections"—(iii) that we may set the modes "to one side." He then concludes (iv) that there cannot be two substances with the same attribute. Perhaps the most puzzling feature of the argument is its claim that we are entitled by EIp1 to put the affections or modes of substance "to one side" in the attempt to distinguish two substances of the same attribute. Few commentators have agreed that Spinoza is entitled to do so. The fullest attempt to explain his grounds for so doing is that of Bennett, discussed above, according to which Spinoza's argument commits him to a plurality of possible worlds. Bennett himself rightly characterizes as "fallacious" the argument he is forced to ascribe to Spinoza; and I have argued that it is subject to a number of additional difficulties as well.

If, however, we interpret Spinoza as a necessitarian, then we find that he does have grounds for putting the modes "to one side" that are both comprehensible and sound. If all modes follow from attributes in such a way that no attribute could possibly have given rise to a *different* set of modes, then we will indeed be *entitled* to set the modes to one side in our attempt to distinguish two different substances with the same attribute; for any difference in modes will necessarily be *due* to some difference of attributes, and hence the second alternative for distinguishing two substances (difference of modes) will reduce to the first (difference of attributes).

Spinoza's necessitarianism is of course not yet articulated at this point in the *Ethics*. But it does not need to be for the purposes of EI_p5. He needs only the claim of EI_{def}3 and EI_{def}5, that modes must be conceived through substance, together with the equation of "substance" with "attributes" that EI_p4d makes for this context. From a strong reading of this claim of priority, expressed in EI_p1, he can infer that any *difference* of modes must be conceived through a *difference* of attributes. He need not appeal to the more explicit claim that modes are conceived through their attributes *because* they are causally necessitated by them—although this more explicit claim is arguably already available from the claim (in EI_{ax}4) that effects should be conceived through their causes, together with the description (in EI_{ax}3) of the causal relation as necessitating.

The question of how Spinoza reduces differences of mode to difference of attribute is by no means the only question that can be raised about the argument for EI_p5.²⁵ But, if we construe the dependence of modes on attributes in the strict way dictated by a necessitarian interpretation of Spinoza, then we have a much more natural and persuasive basis for one crucial step of the demonstration of EI_p5, and hence for one crucial step in his argument for monism.

2. *Internal adequacy and correspondence.* EI_{def}4 states that:

By adequate idea I understand an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations of a true idea.

In the *Meditations*, Descartes devotes a great deal of effort to arguing that a certain internal characteristic of an idea—namely, its clarity and distinctness—is and should be treated as a reliable criterion of the idea's agreement with or correspondence to that which it represents. In striking contrast, Spinoza seems at EI_{def}4 simply to take it for granted that there is a certain internal characteristic belonging to all and only ideas that are true—i.e., ideas that, by EI_{ax}6, agree with their objects. Similarly, in the TIE he asserts without argument that truth involves both an "internal" and an "external" denomination (TIE 69). How could Spinoza simply *presuppose* a correlation between an internal characteristic of ideas and their external correspondence to their objects, particularly when Descartes had tried so carefully and elaborately to establish such a correlation?

If there are genuinely possible but non-actual series of finite modes, then it is difficult to see how any *intrinsic* characteristic could reliably distinguish a "true" idea affirming the existence of a really existing finite mode from a "false" idea affirming the existence of a non-existent but equally possible mode. Furthermore, as we saw in our earlier discussion of the infinite intellect, there could be no guarantee that such false ideas would not exist, given the requirement of the

explanatory independence of the attributes in EIIp5. Hence, if Spinoza regards the series of finite modes as contingent, his assumption that there is an internal characteristic of ideas possessed only by those that correspond truly to their objects would be unwarranted.

If, however, we interpret Spinoza as holding that the attributes necessitate a unique series of modes, so that no other series is possible, then he will have a comprehensible and sound justification for his assumption. Necessitarianism entails that nothing is logically or metaphysically possible except what is actual. Hence, if an idea possesses enough internal consistency or "adequacy" to show that what it represents is a genuine *possibility*, it will thereby also show it to be *actual*. Of course, in Spinoza's view no idea affirming the existence of a finite mode actually possesses this degree of adequacy, *as the idea exists in any human mind*, since this adequacy requires a knowledge of all of the finite mode's causes (EIIp24–27). However, he also requires that ideas affirming the existence of particular finite modes *must* be "adequate" *in God* (EIIp9, EIIp32); and this internal adequacy could not guarantee the idea's correspondence with actually existing modes unless those modes were the only ones genuinely possible.

Conclusion

I have argued that Spinoza is not committed to the denial of necessitarianism by any of the three textual grounds on which he has been taken to be so committed. I have argued that he is committed to necessitarianism by three propositions of *Ethics* I, and, on independent grounds, by the doctrine of attributes contained in *Ethics* II. Finally, I have argued that if he is interpreted as a necessitarian, then both his monism and his view that internal "adequacy" is correlated with external correspondence can be given a sounder basis in his philosophy than they can be given otherwise. Taken together, these results make a strong case for the claim that Spinoza is a necessitarian. They also suggest that his doctrine of necessity is, indeed, a "principal basis" of at least some of the central doctrines of the *Ethics*.

Notes

Y. Yovel, ed., *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 191–218. © 1991, E.J. Brill, Leiden-New York-København-Köln

1. Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza* (New York: Penguin, 1951), p. 54; Edwin Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), especially pp. 106–109; Wallace Matson, "Steps Towards Spinozism," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 31 (1979): 76–83; Charles Jarrett, "The Logical Structure of Spinoza's *Ethics*, Part I," *Synthese* 37 (1978): 55–56; Jonathan

Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), 111–124; R.J. Delahunty, *Spinoza* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 155–165. Although I am in general agreement with Hampshire's characterization of Spinoza's position, I find his one-line justification of it, in terms of the co-extensivity of *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*, to be too brief and general to be helpful. I am inclined to classify J.I. Friedman with Curley, as one who interprets Spinoza as a non-necessitarian, on the basis of his "Spinoza's Denial of Free Will in Man and God," in *Spinoza's Philosophy of Man*, ed. Jon Wetlesen (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1978), pp. 58–63; I do not do so because I am not sufficiently confident that I know what he means by the locution "causally but not logically necessary" in the context of the paper. It should be noted that only Delahunty actually uses the term "necessitarianism," and that he uses it in a somewhat broader sense than I have given it here.

2. In the course of *Ethics* I, he asserts that God necessarily exists (EIp11), and that there could exist no other substance but God (EIp14). He defines God as the substance of infinite (unlimited or all possible) attributes (EId5f), which, given God's existence, entails that there could have been no attributes other than those actually possessed by God; and he asserts that all of God's attributes are eternal (EIp19), which, by the definition of "eternity" (EId5f), entails their necessary existence. He affirms that whatever things follow from the absolute nature of any of God's attributes have always had to exist and be infinite, and are eternal through that attribute (EIp21), and that every infinite mode must so follow, either immediately or mediately, from the absolute nature of some attribute of God (EIp23d). Assuming that no attribute could have had a different "absolute nature" from the one it actually has, and that nothing could have followed from such an absolute nature except what actually does follow from it, we may conclude not only that every infinite mode exists necessarily, but also that there could not have been any infinite modes other than the actual ones. Furthermore, Spinoza holds that nothing exists except substance and modes (EIp6c, EIp15d, and EIp28d), and does so on cited grounds (EId3, EId5, and EId1) that presumably render this restriction a necessary truth for him as well.
3. Of these two ways, only Bennett describes the first. The second is to be found in Curley, Matson, Jarrett, and Bennett (cited in n. 1).
4. Entailment is, of course, primarily a relation between states of affairs or propositions, whereas for Spinoza the "following from" relation is primarily between things. I shall not insist on the distinction here, however, and will instead speak indifferently of a mode, its existence and the proposition that it exists. For present purposes, nothing turns on the distinction.
5. This is clear from the fact that a claim about "production" is inferred directly from a claim about "following from." It is also especially evident in the derivations of EIp16c1–3, each of which infers a claim about the character of

- God's causality directly from E1p16's claim that infinitely many things "follow from" the necessity of the divine nature.
6. This is presumably a condition that could not be formalized. For a discussion of formalizable relevance logics, see Alan Ross Anderson and Nuel Belnap, *Entailment: The Logic of Relevance and Necessity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). As we shall soon see, Spinoza also holds that, in some cases, a y can "follow from" some x "insofar as" x is "considered in" one way, but not "insofar as" x is "considered in" another way. This is a related respect in which his "follows from" relation differs from, and is less formalizable than, other entailment relations.
 7. One might seek, as Jarrett suggests, to reconcile this contradiction by interpreting Spinoza as employing his own later distinction between adequate and partial causation at this point, so that E1p21 and E1p28d refer to following *adequately*, while the other passages refer to following *partially* (p. 55). I discuss this interpretation and my reasons for rejecting it below, in section II.
 8. Note that these two ways of following from the attribute need not be mutually exclusive; the demonstration implies that mediate infinite modes follow in *both* ways, although immediate infinite modes follow only in the former, and finite modes follow in only the latter.
 9. For an examination of the role of this principle in explaining why God is the only possible substance, see my "Spinoza's 'Ontological' Argument," *The Philosophical Review* 88 (1979): 198–223.
 10. Alan Donagan, "Spinoza's Proof of Immortality," in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Marjorie Grene (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. 249. This constraint would also explain why the attributes must express themselves through finite modes at all. To the question of why there are any finite modes, Spinoza could reply as he does to the question of why God has created men who are not governed by reason: "because the laws of his nature have been so ample that they sufficed for producing all things which can be conceived by an infinite intellect" (E1app; Curley, p. 446).
 11. Of course, the absolute nature of the attribute would "entail" the existence of each individual finite mode, in the sense that there would be no possible world in which the attribute had that absolute nature and yet the finite mode did not exist: but, as we have already seen, Spinoza requires more than this of the "following from" relation. In his view, a finite mode can be said to "follow from" an attribute "considered" in one way, but fail to "follow from" it when it is considered in another, more restricted, way—a distinction that makes good sense when taken as expressing a finite mode's dependence for existence on its membership in the only constructible or maximally perfect infinite series of such modes, but a distinction for which the modern entailment relation simply makes no allowance.

12. Spinoza's own gloss of this axiom continues: "i.e., from the order of nature it can happen equally that this or that man does exist, or that he does not exist." I discuss the interpretation of this gloss below, in n. 21. If what I argue in this section is correct, then it will be evident that both of the plausible interpretations of the gloss are compatible with necessitarianism.
13. For similar distinctions, see also TIE 53 and *Metaphysical Thoughts* 1:3. Reference to EIax2, EIp3s1, or both figure in Curley, Bennett, and Friedman.
14. Only Bennett offers this argument (p. 114). As the quoted passage suggests, however, it constitutes his chief grounds for regarding Spinoza as committed to a denial of necessitarianism.
15. If a thing's having its essence is a necessary truth, of course, then its doing so is *entailed* by anything whatever, in one sense of "entailment" discussed above. This only shows, however, that the sense of "deducible from" in question here is not identical with that sense of "entailed by."
16. The scholastic essence/property distinction is also in accordance with the definition of the "essential" offered at EIIdef2:

D2: I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing.

For a thing can be conceived (simply by conceiving its essence) *without* conceiving its properties. This does not mean that we can conceive that the essence might fail to give rise to the properties, but only that conceiving the essence does not require us to conceive the properties. (This situation is somewhat analogous to that of the attributes: we conceive each attribute without the aid of any other (EIp10s), but we cannot conceive that one should exist and that another should not, since that would involve conceiving that an attribute failed to exist.) Similarly, the thing does not causally *depend* on the properties, and in that sense "can be" without (reliance on) them, even though it cannot fail to give rise to them through its essence. Indeed, EIIIdef.aff. XXIexp speaks of "an effect or [*sive*] property."
17. Bennett, pp. 67–68.
18. The infinite modes do not, of course, constitute respects in which substances of the same attribute might *differ*. The objection is rather to the reading of EIp1 that Bennett's interpretation requires.
19. These two ways, which I outline below, are based specifically on Bennett, p. 122; the argumentation that Spinoza is committed to their individual elements is my own.
20. Bennett, p. 122.
21. It is worth taking note of a weaker sense in which there *are* ideas of non-existent finite modes—for example, of unicorns, conceived as a species of one-horned equine animals. This is the sense of EIIp8; and if having an idea of a

non-existent thing in *this* sense were sufficient to make something “fall under the infinite intellect,” (7) would follow immediately. But as EIIp8 explains, such an idea is *not* an idea having no object, which would violate EIIp7; rather it is an idea having a truly existent thing as its object. This truly existent thing is not an existent unicorn, however, but rather the formal *essence* of a unicorn. This essence is “comprehended” in the attribute of Extension. As I understand it, this means that the essence is itself a real, existent, feature of Extension: specifically, the pervasive and permanent feature that Extension’s *general* laws are such as to permit the unicorn-mechanism to exist whenever and wherever the series of finite modes and causes should dictate. The idea of a “non-existent thing” in EIIp8 is simply the idea of this essence (which I construe to be an infinite mode); indeed, the idea is the very *same* mode as this essence, but manifested under the attribute of Thought (EIIp7s).

In the case of actually existing finite modes, however, there is in God not only an idea of their permanent *essence*, but also an idea of their *actual existence* (EIIp8c). This idea of the actual existence of a finite mode is itself a finite mode, and is indeed the very same finite mode manifested under the attribute of Thought, as part of a causal order paralleling the causal order containing its object (EIIp7s; EIIp9.d). The human mind is an example of such an idea of an actually existing finite mode (EIIp11), and all such ideas of the actual existence of finite modes are in the infinite intellect of God (by EIIp11c, whose demonstration is completely general). (To put the matter in more popular terms, God not only knows what essences there are, he knows which particular finite modes actually exist.) It is such finite ideas of the actual existence of finite modes that I am discussing in the text.

22. Bennett, p. 122.
23. In fact, there is only one passage that even appears to contradict this interpretation. Spinoza continues in EIIax1 (“The essence of man does not involve necessary existence”) as follows: “i.e., from the order of nature it can happen equally that this or that man does exist, or that he does not exist [hoc est, ex naturae ordine, tam fieri potest, ut hic, & ille homo existat, quàm ut non existat].” There are two possible interpretations of this gloss that are compatible with Spinoza’s determinism: (a) that the existence of a particular man in itself neither contradicts nor is required by the general and pervasive *laws* (“order”) of nature, or (b) that the man’s *essence* does not determine whether he exists or not, but that his existence is instead determined as part of the actual *series* (“order”) of natural causes and effects. The first interpretation requires that the “order of nature” not include finite modes, but the second interpretation requires that it *should* include finite modes. The first interpretation is particularly suggested by the Curley and Shirley translations; the second is particularly suggested by the Elwes and White-Sterling translations.

24. Bennett, pp. 119–120.
25. For an excellent presentation of some of these issues, see Bennett, pp. 66–70. I have discussed these issues in “Ethics IP5: Shared Attributes and the Basis of Spinoza’s Monism,” contained in a collection of essays written in honor of Jonathan Bennett, ed. Mark Kulstad and Jan Cover (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1990).

Postscript

Necessitarianism Revisited

“SPINOZA’S NECESSITARIANISM” [HENCEFORTH “SN”] argues that Spinoza is committed by at least three propositions of *Ethics* Part 1—1p16, 1p29, and 1p33—to the doctrine that every actual state of affairs holds with strict metaphysical necessity [henceforth simply “metaphysical necessity”].¹ In addition, it argues that he is committed to that doctrine by his commitment to the necessary parallelism between extended things and the ideas of them (as entailed by 2p7) in conjunction with the causal and explanatory independence of divine attributes (2p5). In their widely cited and densely argued article “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism Reconsidered” [henceforth “SNR”],² Edwin Curley and Gregory Walski raise objections to this interpretation of Spinoza. They agree that, for Spinoza, God exists as a matter of strict metaphysical necessity and that every finite mode follows with strict metaphysical necessity from God’s nature when taken together with previous finite modes. They deny, however, that Spinoza regards finite modes themselves as existing with strict metaphysical necessity. Instead, they hold, Spinoza believes that there could have been (from all eternity) any one of many different possible complete systems (“series” in the terminology of SN and SNR) and that each of these systems would have been equally compatible with the divine nature.³ The doctrine attributed to Spinoza in SN they call “strict necessitarianism”; the doctrine that they attribute to Spinoza in SNR they call “moderate necessitarianism.” I am grateful for their in-depth challenge, and I hope that my detailed reply to it here will help to clarify—much better than I was able to do in SN itself—the nature and basis of Spinoza’s strict necessitarianism.

Moderate necessitarianism is a coherent view. Nevertheless, it sits uncomfortably with Spinoza’s apparent commitment to a strong principle of sufficient reason, because it requires that a crucial fact about the universe—namely, that there is *this* complete infinite system of finite modes rather than others that were equally possible—has no explanation at all.⁴ In order to alleviate this difficulty, SNR seeks to downplay the strength of Spinoza’s principle of sufficient reason. Although Curley and Walski do not attempt to rebut the argument of SN that

Spinoza is effectively committed to strict necessitarianism by the conjunction of (2p7) and (2p5), they offer extensive objections to SN's interpretations of 1p16, 1p29, and 1p33. It is clear, however, that their primary motivation for interpreting Spinoza as a merely "moderate" necessitarian is their belief that strict necessitarianism is *not* a fully coherent doctrine. Accordingly, I will address first the question of the coherence of strict necessitarianism for Spinoza and then SNR's specific objections to my interpretations of 1p16, 1p29, and 1p33.

I. The Coherence of Strict Necessitarianism

Perhaps the simplest way to express a natural concern about the coherence of strict necessitarianism is this: How can every state of affairs hold of strict metaphysical necessity if (as we observe) different things exist and have different qualities at different times and places? In relation to Spinoza's metaphysics, this general concern may be expressed more specifically thus: How can a spatiotemporally varying world of spatiotemporally limited finite modes follow with strict necessity from a necessary and eternally unchanging divine nature? For if some mode follows from the divine nature with strict necessity at one time and place, mustn't it also follow with equally strict necessity at *every* time and place, precluding any possibility of variation?⁵

The simplest way to express an answer to the general concern is this: Different things *can* exist and have different qualities at different times and places even if every state of affairs holds with strict metaphysical necessity *if* it is a matter of strict metaphysical necessity that there should be a variegated world so ordered that just those different things exist and have just those different qualities at just those different times and places. In relation to Spinoza's metaphysics, this answer can be expressed more specifically thus: A spatiotemporally⁶ varying world of spatiotemporally limited finite modes can follow with strict necessity from a necessary and eternally unchanging divine nature *if* it follows precisely from that divine nature that there should be a spatiotemporally variegated world so ordered as to have just those finite modes at just those times and places. That the world is spatiotemporally variegated in precisely this way will, of course, then itself be an eternal truth, always following from the divine nature. To be sure, allowing this to be an eternal truth may, in turn, require a view of time according to which *past*, *present*, and *future* are not fundamental determinations of things but are instead relative to a particular location within an ordered system, a system that can also be fully understood in a way that does not depend on occupying any particular location within it. But such a view of time or duration is itself fully coherent, or so Spinoza clearly assumes (see, for example, 2p44c2,d). Let us therefore examine more closely the resources offered by his metaphysics for implementing this answer to the general concern.

For Spinoza, the divine nature or essence is constituted by the attributes (1d4 and 1d6). In 1pp16–29, he describes *all* modes as “following from the necessity of the divine nature” (see 1p16, 1p17d, 1p29, and also 1p32c2) and (equivalently) “following necessarily from the divine nature” (see 1p16d, 1p29d, and also 2pp3–5). However, he carefully distinguishes two different *ways* in which modes do so. The *first* of these ways, discussed primarily in 1pp21–23, he calls “following from the absolute nature of the attribute” and (equivalently) “following from the nature of the attribute considered absolutely” (1p29d). Let us call this “following absolutely.” When a mode follows absolutely from the divine nature, it will be an *infinite* mode—that is, one that, as SN puts it, “is pervasive and permanent through the entire attribute” of which it is a mode. *Following absolutely* can, in turn, be either *immediate* or *mediate*. The common term in the secondary literature for an infinite mode that follows “immediately” from the absolute nature of the attribute (1p21) is “immediate infinite mode.” Other infinite modes, however, follow only from “some mediating modification, which follows from [an attribute’s] absolute nature” (1p23d)—or, as Spinoza also puts it, “insofar as [the attribute] is affected by some mode . . . which is eternal and infinite” (1p28d). The common term for an infinite mode of this latter kind, which follow from one or more other infinite modes, is “mediate infinite mode.” In 1p23d, Spinoza explains what he means by the phrase “the absolute nature of the attribute” in these descriptions: it is the attribute “insofar as that attribute is conceived to express infinity and necessary existence, or (what is the same, by D8), eternity, i.e., (by D6 and P19), *insofar as it is considered absolutely*” (emphasis added)—that is, insofar as it is considered unconditionally or without respect to determinations of it.

In contrast, the *second* way in which a mode can follow from the divine nature, discussed primarily in 1p28, is the way in which finite modes—that is, modes that are not infinite but rather local and temporary, or as Spinoza puts it, have a “determinate existence and duration”—follow from the divine nature. The following of one thing from another is, as SN argues, a causal relation for Spinoza;⁷ and 1a4—“the knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause”—requires that things be understood through their causes (see Chapters 7 and 14), whether those causes precede them in time or not. Thus, much as a *mediate infinite* mode cannot be understood to follow from an attribute as a *pervasive and permanent* modification of that attribute without first understanding how that mediate infinite mode follows from an immediate infinite mode, so too a *finite* mode cannot be understood to follow from the attribute as a *determinate and finite* modification of it without first understanding how that finite mode is produced (at least in part) by another finite mode as an element in the system of finite modes that all “follow necessarily from the divine nature.” Because this second kind of following requires that the mode be caused in part by a previous finite mode, Spinoza describes it as “following [from the attribute] insofar as it is modified by

a modification which is finite and has a determinate existence" or (equivalently) "insofar as [the divine nature] is considered to be determined to act in a certain way" (1p29d). Let us call this "following as determined."

It is evident that Spinoza draws his distinction between *following absolutely* and *following as determined* in order to explain why some modes are pervasive and permanent throughout the attribute while other modes are local and temporary: the former follow immediately from the attribute or depend only on other pervasive and permanent expressions of the attribute, while the latter depend on prior modifications of the attribute that themselves constitute local and temporary variations within it. Curley and Walski seem simply to presuppose that no attribute—which is of course something infinite—could itself be causally sufficient for the existence of a local and temporary mode, and hence they assume that such a mode could follow from an attribute only with supplemental causal input from something else for which the attribute itself was *also* not sufficient.

Spinoza, however, seems not to share this presupposition. On the contrary, he specifies that, even for finite modes—that is, those that follow as determined from the divine nature—there is "no cause, either extrinsically or intrinsically, which prompts God to action, *except perfection of his nature* (1p17c, emphasis added). Indeed, if the attributes constituting God's essence were *not* causally sufficient for the actual finite modes, then God could be only an "inadequate" cause of them (by 1a4 and 3d1), and God would thereby properly be said to be "acted on" (extrapolating from 3d2)—a claim that Spinoza would surely disallow.⁸

Of course, if Spinoza is to regard an attribute as sufficient for the existence of a given finite mode while at the same time regarding that finite mode as depending for existence on other finite modes, then he must treat the attribute as also being sufficient for the existence of those other finite modes. To see how he can do so, consider that all finite modes are local and temporary parts or elements of the mediate infinite mode that Spinoza calls "the infinite individual" (lemma 7s following 2p13s) which, insofar as it is extended, may also be the mediate infinite mode that Spinoza calls in Letter 64 "the face of the whole universe" (SN 198). Like any infinite mode, it is itself pervasive and permanent, following necessarily in its complete character from the attribute—which is thereby also sufficient for it—in a way that does not itself depend on any prior local or temporary expressions of the attribute and is therefore "absolute." Equally, however, the generation, interaction, and subsequent destruction of the local and temporary finite modes that compose it constitute the only possible infinite internal history of this infinite individual and hence the only possible infinite system of finite modes.⁹ Furthermore, because this is a history of the *causal* generation, interaction, and destruction of finite modes with specific locations and durations—and because things must be understood through their

causes—the complete understanding of the existence of any particular finite mode must depend on an understanding of its distinctive causal place *in* that history, and hence on understanding prior modifications or expressions of the attribute that are themselves local and temporary. In this way, each finite mode follows from the attribute not absolutely but as determined, even though the attribute is sufficient for the entire infinite system of finite modes—and is sufficient for each finite mode *within* it, precisely *through* also being sufficient for each mode's necessary finite causes.

In SNR, Curley and Walski offer four objections to this proposal as it was less explicitly sketched in SN. The *first* is that if, as proposed, the infinite individual with its complete infinite history were to follow “from the absolute nature of the attribute,” then as a matter of logic so too would each of its finite parts, contrary to 1p28 (247). In Spinoza's view, however, this is not a matter of logic but rather a simple fallacy of division.¹⁰ The precise character of the entire infinite system of finite modes that constitutes the only possible internal history of the infinite individual follows completely from the pervasive and permanent nature of the attribute, and in understanding it God does not require the logically antecedent understanding of any local or temporary variations in the attribute that would be prior to the infinite individual (nor could there be any); the infinite individual therefore *follows absolutely* from the attribute. However, the local and temporary parts of the infinite individual do not follow *atomically* or *each in an independent way* from the pervasive and permanent nature of the attribute, but rather *only in virtue of their having a place as elements in the one possible complete system of causally interrelated finite modes* that follows strictly absolutely from the nature of the attribute as an expression of the attribute's absolute reality and perfection. God's adequate understanding of any single element in the system therefore *also* requires and is inseparable from the understanding of other local and temporary elements in the same system. Thus, by definition, these finite modes each follow from the attribute *not* absolutely but *as determined*. The nature of the attribute is fully causally sufficient both for the infinite modes and for the finite modes, but in different ways. The second of these ways, unlike the first, necessarily involves being *produced as an element of a varying system of parts* within an infinite individual mode that is itself pervasive (present everywhere) and permanent (without beginning or end of existence).

The *second* objection of Curley and Walski concerns causation more specifically. They write:

If the attributes are not, by themselves, a sufficient condition for particular finite modes (as Garrett generally seems willing to concede)—that is, if finite modes require for their explanation an infinite series of prior finite modes as their causes, in addition to the attributes and infinite

modes—then why should we expect them to share the absolute necessity of their *partial* cause? (252)

On the view I propose, the attributes *are* completely sufficient for the existence of each and every finite mode. They are so, however, in a particular way: by being sufficient for an infinite system of finite modes that the attributes produce through their own causal power partly as that power is *expressed* through other finite modes of the attribute in the same system. It is important to emphasize that because Spinoza is a substance monist, the causal power of each mode is a *share of*, rather than *distinct from*, the causal power of the attributes themselves (see Chapter 13); accordingly, an attribute produces a finite mode *through* some of its other modes, including some of its finite modes. Thus, although finite modes do, as Curley and Walski say, “require for their explanation an infinite series of prior finite modes as their causes,” this is emphatically *not* “in addition to the attributes and infinite modes” but rather in expression of those very attributes.

As a *third* objection, Curley and Walski write,

The ultimate cause is supposed to produce (be a sufficient condition for) the series as a whole without causing any individual members of the series. We have yet to see how that is possible. (253)

But again, the ultimate cause—that is, the attributes or divine nature—does not produce the system as a whole (as a “causally sufficient condition for” it) *without* causing any individual members of the system. Rather, it causes each individual member at least in part¹¹ by causing other individual members of the system, which are themselves produced at least in part by other individual members of the system, and so on.

The *fourth* objection of Curley and Walski to the proposal is this: attributes and infinite modes are or correspond to “general facts” while finite modes are or correspond to “particular facts,” and “you cannot deduce any particular facts from general facts alone” (258). However, Spinoza does not distinguish some facts as “general” and others as “particular.” On the contrary, he regards all beings or facts as particular (see *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* §101); his distinction is rather between those that are “infinite” (that is, pervasive and permanent) and those that are “finite” (that is, local and temporary). And in his metaphysics, the infinite individual, as a pervasive and permanent being composed of local and temporary parts, is perfectly suited to provide a bridge between the two kinds of facts or beings. In effect, the attributes act uniformly and eternally to express their metaphysical reality and perfection through infinite internal variegation.

II. *Whatever Is Actual Is Necessary (1p16)*

I turn now to SNR's objections to SN's interpretation of specific key propositions of *Ethics* Part 1. *Ethics* 1p16 and its demonstration state:

1p16: From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes [or ways], (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect.)¹²

Dem.: This Proposition must be plain to anyone, provided he attends to the fact that the intellect infers from the given definition of any thing a number of properties that really do follow necessarily from it (i.e., from the very essence of the thing); and that it infers more properties the more the definition of the thing expresses reality, i.e., the more reality the essence of the defined thing involves. But since the divine nature has absolutely infinite attributes (by D6), each of which also expresses an essence infinite in its own kind, from its necessity there must follow infinitely many things in infinite modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect), q.e.d.

This proposition and its demonstration imply two principles, each bearing directly on necessitarianism: that *whatever is actual is necessary* and that *whatever is possible is actual*.

Precisely *how* these two principles bear on necessitarianism, however, depends on their intended scope. If they are taken as ranging over all possible *states of affairs*, including those that are positive and those that are negative, then they are logically equivalent to each other and to necessitarianism itself.¹³ If, on the other hand, they are taken as ranging only over possible *beings* rather than possible states of affairs, then they are not equivalent to each other but rather complementary: only together would they entail that all facts about what beings do or do not exist are necessary.¹⁴ As a matter of textual interpretation, it is plausible that 1p16 explicitly concerns only the strict metaphysical necessity of all facts about what beings do or do not exist, while 1p29 explicitly extends this same necessity also to the actions of those beings, and 1p33 (with its scholia) explicitly extends it to all possible states of affairs. It may well be that, for Spinoza, the facts about *what modes of God do and do not exist* are sufficient to entail all of the facts about *what states of affairs are and are not actual*, so that the progression from 1p16 to 1p33 only renders more explicit what was implicit in 1p16. I will not press this fine point of scope interpretation, however, as the objections offered by Curley and Walski do not depend on their resolution.

According to SN, 1p16 implies, via the following reasoning, that whatever is actual is metaphysically necessary:

- (1) Whatever falls under the infinite intellect follows from the necessity of the divine nature. [from 1p16]
- (2) The necessity of the divine nature is itself necessary.
- (3) Whatever follows from something necessary is itself necessary.
- (4) Everything that is actual falls under the infinite intellect.
- (5) Everything that is actual is necessary. [from (1)–(4)]

Curley and Walski object to this argument by proposing that “follows” and “necessary” each have a stronger and a weaker sense for Spinoza, rendering (1) and (3) ambiguous in such a way that the conclusion (5) follows only in a weak sense that is compatible with moderate necessitarianism. Let us first consider in some detail their proposal to distinguish two senses of “follows.”

On the basis of Spinoza's distinction in 1pp21–29 between *following absolutely* and *following as determined*, Curley and Walski propose two senses of “following,” which are intended to correspond to them:

Following unconditionally: “following [from features intrinsic to God's nature] without the aid of any other propositions”

Following conditionally: “following with the aid of [true] propositions which do not describe features intrinsic to God's nature”

Even on the assumption that Spinoza's claims about how modes follow from the divine nature can be glossed in terms of “propositions,” however, these definitions are problematic as attempts to capture his distinction. For as we have seen, Spinoza holds that mediate infinite modes “follow from the absolute nature of the attribute,” but they nevertheless require the “aid” of (“insofar as [the attribute] is affected by”) at least one immediate infinite mode in doing so. Curley and Walski thus face a dilemma: Are immediate infinite modes “intrinsic to God's nature” or not? If what is “intrinsic to God's nature” is just God's essence—that is, the attributes themselves (1d4 and 1d6)—then (contrary to their intentions) all of the mediate infinite modes will follow only “conditionally” (in their sense) from the necessity of the divine nature, because they follow only with the “aid” of an immediate infinite mode that is not itself intrinsic to that essence. If, on the other hand, what is “intrinsic to God's nature” includes both God's essence *and* everything for which that essence is sufficient, then (again contrary to their intentions) *all* modes, including the finite modes, will evidently follow “unconditionally” (again, in their sense) from the divine nature. This is because 1p16d requires that *all* modes are God's “*propria*”—which Curley translates as “properties”—and “*propria*” is the technical Latin term for all of the things that, in contrast to mere “accidents,” necessarily follow entirely from the essence of a

thing, which is therefore sufficient for them.¹⁵ For this reason, Curley and Walski are obliged to claim that Spinoza uses the term *propria* “carelessly,” applying it in 1p16d to finite modes that are not really *propria* at all (249). Yet even if this charge of Spinoza’s carelessness is granted, and “God’s nature” is *initially* restricted to all attributes plus all infinite modes that follow (“absolutely”) from it, the infinite mode that is the infinite individual will still follow “unconditionally” on this definition, and this infinite individual has all of the actual finite modes as its constituent parts.

These difficulties of formulation aside, Curley and Walski state explicitly that the distinction they intend to attribute to Spinoza in this context mirrors a distinction that he introduces much later in the *Ethics*, in 3d1 and 3d2, between “adequate causes” and “inadequate causes”—that is, between complete and sufficient causes, on the one hand, and merely partial and contributing causes on the other. Yet textual evidence that Spinoza already anticipates and employs such a distinction in 1pp21–29 is lacking. Certainly, the simple fact that Spinoza describes finite modes as following from an attribute “insofar as the attribute is modified by some mode” does not show that he regards the divine nature as merely their partial or inadequate cause, for—as we have seen—he applies that description to mediate infinite modes as well (1p28d).

Nor can we infer that Spinoza regards the divine nature as only a partial or inadequate cause of finite modes simply from the fact that he describes them as *not* following necessarily from an attribute insofar as that attribute is “considered absolutely” and “conceived to express infinity,” but as following necessarily instead from the attribute only insofar as it is considered and conceived in a different manner—namely, insofar as it is “considered to be determined to act in a certain way.” For Spinoza readily allows that, in general, something Y can follow *completely and adequately* from something else X despite the fact that Y does *not* follow from X insofar as X is considered or conceived in one manner but *only* insofar as X is considered or conceived in a different manner. For example, he holds that the infinite modes of thought follow *completely and adequately* from the divine nature despite the fact that they do *not* follow from the divine nature insofar as that nature is considered or conceived to be extended but *only* insofar as it is considered or conceived to be thinking (2p6). Nor can we infer that Spinoza regards the divine nature as only a partial or inadequate cause of finite modes simply from the fact that he describes them, in a verbal variation, as not following “from the absolute nature” of an attribute. For as we have already seen, he means by this only that they do not follow from the attribute insofar as the attribute is *conceived in a certain way*—namely, “considered absolutely” or as “expressing infinity” (1p23d), rather than as self-conditioned and self-variegated.

In addition, it is worth emphasizing that nowhere *outside* of 2pp21–29 does Spinoza use “follows from” in a way that suggests merely partial or contributory causation. If he were nevertheless using the term in that way *within* 2pp21–29, then we might expect him to say not merely that finite modes *follow from the divine nature*—as he does—but also that some finite modes *follow from certain other finite modes*.¹⁶ Yet he conspicuously avoids this latter claim. Furthermore, 1p15d requires that modes “can be in the divine nature alone, and can be *conceived through it alone*” (1p15d; emphasis added), and 1a4 requires (as previously observed) that each thing be conceived entirely through its cause. It seems to follow from these requirements on conception that finite modes could not qualify even as partial and contributory causes of other finite modes unless the divine nature were a complete and sufficient cause for them all.

Let us now turn, somewhat more briefly, to the two senses of “necessary” that Curley and Walski propose as a second ambiguity in 1p16. As SN notes (see also the Postscript to Chapter 2, “Arguments for God’s Existence Revisited”), Spinoza in 1p33s1 distinguishes between two sources of necessity:

1p33s1: A thing is called necessary either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause. For a thing’s existence follows necessarily either from its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause.

On the basis of this passage, they seek to distinguish two senses of “necessary” in Spinoza corresponding to different degrees of necessity:

Absolutely (or unconditionally) necessary: “necessary, not by reason of any external cause, but because of [the thing’s] intrinsic nature”

Relatively (or conditionally) necessary: “necessary only given [the thing’s external] cause” (245)

They then assert that the divine nature and everything that “follows unconditionally” from it is “absolutely necessary” for Spinoza, and that whatever follows only “conditionally” from the divine nature is only “relatively necessary.” The attributes and the infinite modes they place in the former category, and the finite modes they place in the latter category.

As Curley and Walski later concede, however, *only God* satisfies Spinoza’s definition of “necessary by reason of its essence,” while *every* infinite mode and every finite mode instead satisfies his definition of “necessary by reason of its cause” (248–9). Thus, Spinoza does not draw *any* distinction between kinds of necessity, or between senses of “necessity,” that places infinite modes and finite modes on opposite sides of the divide, as their interpretation requires; and the distinction

that Spinoza does draw between *sources*—not degrees—of necessity is quite separate from the distinction that he draws between following absolutely (as infinite modes do) and following as determined (as finite modes do).

Finally, let us examine the use that Curley and Walski make of their two proposed distinctions. They assert that in the line of reasoning outlined in SN as requiring that *everything actual is necessary*, (1) and (3) of should be interpreted only as:

(1′) Everything that falls under the infinite intellect follows *in some way (either conditionally or unconditionally)* from the necessity of the divine nature.

and

(3′) Whatever follows unconditionally from something which is absolutely necessary (i.e., necessary by reason of its essence) is itself absolutely necessary; but if something follows only conditionally from something which is absolutely necessary, then it is not itself absolutely necessary but only conditionally necessary (i.e., necessary by reason of its cause).

Accordingly, they conclude that Spinoza is committed only to the thesis that

(5′) Everything which is actual is either absolutely necessary or relatively [that is, conditionally] necessary.

Because they hold that only “absolute” necessity strictly excludes other metaphysical possibilities, they interpret Spinoza’s view as compatible with moderate necessitarianism (245–6).

This cannot be correct, however. Concerning (1′), although Spinoza distinguishes between *following absolutely* and *following as determined*, we have seen that there is no need to weaken (1) to (1′) if “conditionally” means “partially,” as Curley and Walski require; for *both* of his kinds of following are evidently complete and adequate. Concerning (3′), Spinoza does not and cannot accept either of its clauses as Curley and Walski intend them. For as we have also seen, Spinoza *denies* that whatever follows from something that is necessary by reason of its essence is *itself* necessary by reason of its essence; on the contrary, it is necessary by reason of the cause from which it follows. And if something follows only partially and together with other propositions (that is, “conditionally”) from something that is “absolutely necessary,” then that by itself would not entail that it is *necessary* by reason of its cause (“relatively necessary”) since it does not by itself guarantee that the *other* part of its cause would

not be contingent. Finally, concerning (5'), although Spinoza certainly grants that everything actual is either necessary by reason of its essence (as God is) or by reason of its cause (as all modes are), neither source of necessity allows for metaphysically possible alternatives in Spinoza's metaphysics. Hence, (5') properly interpreted requires strict necessitarianism.

III. Whatever Is Possible Is Actual (1p16)

The second proposition that bears on necessitarianism and is implied by 1p16 and 1p16d is that *whatever is possible is actual*. SN reconstructs the line of argument as follows:

- (6) Everything which falls under the infinite intellect is actual. [1p16; see also 1p30 and 1p33s2]
- (7) Everything which is possible falls under the infinite intellect. [1d2; see also 1d6 and 2p7]
- (8) Everything which is possible is actual. [from (6)–(7)]

In SNR, Curley and Walski grant that Spinoza does and must accept (7). However, they argue that he need not and does not accept (8) on its most natural reading, proposing instead that (6) involves yet another ambiguity, this one involving two senses of "actual" (251). They base this proposal on a passage from near the end of the *Ethics*:

5p29s: We conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature. But the things we conceive in this second way as true, or real, we conceive under a species of eternity, and to that extent they involve the eternal and infinite essence of God (as we have shown in IIP45 and P45S).

They interpret this passage as alluding, in turn, to 2p8 and its corollary:

2p8: The ideas of singular things, or of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended in God's infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of the singular things, or modes, are contained in God's attributes.

2p8c: From this it follows that so long as singular things do not exist, except insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, their objective being, or ideas, do not exist except insofar as God's infinite idea exists. And when singular things are said to exist, not only insofar as they are

comprehended in God's attributes, but insofar also as they are said to have duration, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration.

To say that something is actual in 5p29s's *first* sense, Curley and Walski propose, is to say that it "has spatio-temporal existence." However, to say that something is actual in 5p29s's *second* sense, they continue, is to say only that there is a "formal essence contained in God's attribute" of the thing as an "abstract type," and this is compatible with the thing's not existing. Thus, they write, when we conceive of something as actual in this second sense, we are "having an idea of a *nonexistent* singular thing, a thing which is nevertheless *actual* insofar as its formal essence is contained in God's attributes" (250; emphasis in original). For convenience, let us call the first of these proposed senses "existence actuality" and the second "formal essence actuality." Curley and Walski conclude that (8) is true for Spinoza only in the sense that whatever is possible has *formal essence actuality*, even though it may lack *existence actuality*. In the more natural ("existence") sense of "actuality," therefore, they interpret Spinoza as denying that *whatever is possible is actual*, and thus they deny that he is a strict necessitarian.

There are at least five serious problems for this interpretation. First, 2p8 and 2p8c do not distinguish two senses of "actual." Indeed, they do not contain that term at all. Instead, 2p8 and 2p8c concern the question of how there can be true thoughts about the "formal essences" or natures—what Descartes called "true and immutable natures"—of "singular things" that do not exist, even though (because they do not exist) there cannot be a true idea of those singular things *as existing*. As Chapter 9 argues in greater detail, singular things and their formal essences are different but closely related beings for Spinoza. While a singular thing is a finite mode, the formal essence of a singular thing is an infinite mode of (and hence equally a mode that is contained "in") an attribute.¹⁷ More specifically, Chapter 9 argues, the formal essence of a singular thing is the pervasive and permanent feature of the attribute consisting precisely in the fact that a particular kind of singular thing with a tendency for self-preservation is consistent with the laws of nature for that attribute. (Those laws of nature are themselves pervasive and permanent features of the attribute, and hence they are infinite modes as well—just as Curley was the first to propose that they are.¹⁸) The existence of a formal essence of a singular thing is a precondition for the actual existence of a singular thing instantiating that formal essence, but it is not sufficient for it, since other actual finite causes are required as well, as parts of the one possible complete system of finite modes. Although 2p8c does refer, as Curley and Walski emphasize, to singular things that "do not exist except insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes," both 2p8 and 2p8c make it clear that the "non-existent" singular things in question—as opposed to their formal essences—do *not* thereby

themselves genuinely exist, let alone as “actual.” Rather, what exist are formal essences that are preconditions for the existence of corresponding singular things and which provide objects for true thoughts about their natures.

Second, Spinoza himself does not connect 2p8 and 2p8c with 5p29s. Neither 2p8 nor 2p8c refer forward to 5p29s or employ its key technical term, “actual”; and the latter does not cite or invoke either 2p8 or 2p8c, nor does it employ their key technical term “formal essence.” Whereas 2p8 and 2p8c concern the question of how there can be thought about things that (actually) do *not* exist, 5p29s concerns the quite different question of how we can conceive the existence of things that actually do exist.

Third, and more importantly, even 5p29s itself does not employ or distinguish two senses of the term “actual.” Rather, it distinguishes two ways of *conceiving* something to be actual in the only sense of “actual” that Spinoza ever employs—namely, that of *genuinely existing*. (This sense of “actual” corresponds roughly to SNR’s “spatiotemporal existence,” although only extended things are literally spatial and God’s existence is not literally temporal.) For example, when 2p11 declares that “the first thing that constitutes the actual being of a human Mind is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which actually exists,” the term “actual” indicates that the mind and its corresponding object have genuine existence. Furthermore, in the particular proposition to which 5p29s is a scholium Spinoza states:

5p29: Whatever the Mind understands under a species of eternity, it understands not from the fact that it conceives the Body’s *present* actual existence, but from the fact that it conceives the Body’s essence under a species of eternity. (emphasis added).¹⁹

As the demonstration of this proposition goes on to remark, “it is the nature of reason,” as contrasted with imagination or sensation, “to conceive things under a species of eternity.” The immediately following scholium then merely explains more explicitly that this distinction in kinds of conceiving includes within its scope *knowledge of things as having actuality*: we can conceive of them “as actual” either by *imagining or sensing* them *from* a particular time and place that we occupy bodily, or we can conceive them as “as actual” through *reason* by *understanding* them as “following from the necessity of the divine nature”—as all and only actually existing modes (infinite and finite) in fact do. Of course, human minds cannot conceive in full detail *how* any one singular thing follows from the necessity of the divine nature, but 1p16 itself shows us how to conceive through reason *that* they all follow in precisely this way. In whichever way we conceive it, however, it is the same actuality that is being conceived.

Fourth, and equally importantly, the proposed interpretation would render 1p16 far too weak for the role it must play in the *Ethics*. Again, that proposition states:

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

In granting (7), Curley and Walski grant “that everything which can fall under an infinite intellect” includes everything that is possible, and on their interpretation this must include infinitely many things that *lack existence actuality* but have *only formal essence actuality*. Hence, when Spinoza states in 1p16 that all of these things “must follow from the necessity of the divine nature” (in a phrase repeated in 5p29), Curley and Walski must take him to be making a claim about these things that is silent about whether they have existence actuality—that is, a claim without any actual-existential import. Accordingly, 1p16 will amount on their interpretation only to the mild claim that whatever is possible (as falling under an infinite intellect) is indeed possible (as having a formal essence that follows from the divine nature) even though the thing itself may not have existence actuality.

Yet, crucially, this weakened version of 1p16 would not be sufficient to provide a basis for any of the propositions with obvious actual-existential import that Spinoza uses 1p16 to establish, including 1p16c3, 1p29, 1p33, and 1p35:

1p16c3: It follows, thirdly, that God is absolutely the first cause.

1p29: 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.

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

1p35: Whatever we conceive to be in God’s power, necessarily exists.

An “absolute first cause” must be a cause of the actual existence of everything that *has* existence actuality, while a thing can neither “produce an effect” nor “be produced” without having existence actuality. And since whatever is possible must be within the infinite power of God, 1p35 requires that any possible alternative to the actually existing system of finite modes must also be not merely “actual” in an attenuated sense compatible with nonexistence, but must itself “necessarily exist.”

Finally, the proposed interpretation of 1p16’s principle that *whatever is possible is actual* cannot be reasonably combined with SNR’s own treatment of 1p16’s principle that *whatever is actual is necessary*. The reason is simple: The proposed interpretation

renders entirely pointless SNR's previous insistence that the term "follows" in 1p16 should be interpreted as meaning only "follows unconditionally or conditionally" (emphasis added), where following conditionally requires additional true propositions about actually existing finite modes. For the modest question of what *formal essences* there are, as mere types of possibly nonexistent singular things, does not depend on any condition at all concerning which finite modes, if any, have *existence actuality*. Furthermore, if the *existence actuality* of a finite mode were really to follow even *conditionally* from the divine nature, the finite mode would thereby *have* existence actuality. But since SNR concedes that 1p16 includes *all possible modes* within its scope, even their following conditionally from the divine nature would thereby require that *whatever is possible is (existentially) actual*, contrary to the claim of SNR.

IV. In Nature There Is Nothing Contingent (1p29)

SN argues that if the necessity ascribed to all things by 1p16 is strict metaphysical necessity, then the necessity of each thing's existence and production of effects in 1p29, which is derived from 1p16, must also be strict metaphysical necessity. Curley and Walski do not dispute this claim but reply that if, on the other hand, 1p16 is consistent with the merely conditional—that is, relative—necessity of finite modes, then so too is 1p29. However, I have argued in Section II that 1p16 does *not* attribute merely relative or conditional necessity to finite modes. Curley and Walski also raise in connection with 1p29 objections to the intelligibility of strict necessitarianism for Spinoza that I have already answered in Section I. In addition, however, they raise a further objection that merits discussion:

We do not see why we should suppose that there is exactly one consistently constructible series of finite modes, and we consider it question begging to assume that there will be. (251)

That there is only one metaphysically possible complete infinite system of finite modes for Spinoza is not a mere supposition of SN, but rather a consequence of its positive text-based arguments that he is a strict necessitarian. Nevertheless, it may still be asked *how* Spinoza can think that there is only one possible complete infinite system of finite modes.²⁰ To this question, SN offers two alternatives: he may suppose either (1) that the constraints on that system provided by the laws of nature and other infinite modes (aside from the infinite individual itself) are so stringent when taken in combination that only one complete infinite system of finite modes can meet them all; or (2) an *additional* necessary constraint is provided by the necessary fact that the divine nature—as the nature of a maximally perfect

and real being (in the metaphysical senses of these terms)—entails that things must “be produced by God with the highest perfection” (1p33s2), a constraint that is uniquely satisfied by the actual complete infinite system of modes. Each alternative, I think, is compatible with Spinoza’s texts.

Curley and Walski do not directly respond to the first alternative. No doubt it strikes them as too implausible for Spinoza to accept, although it is not obvious that they can rule it out (especially for someone who, like Spinoza, does not provide a list of the laws of nature or other infinite modes). By way of analogy, a set of constraints on numerical sequences might each *individually* be satisfied by many or even infinitely many sequences and yet be such that, necessarily, they can only be *jointly* satisfied by one unique sequence.

To the second alternative, however, Curley and Walski object:

Garrett seems to think that, just as the *ens realissimum* must have all possible attributes (E1P9), so it must express itself in the series of finite modes which has the highest degree of reality and perfection (p. 197). But how are we to understand the idea that the actual series of finite modes has the highest degree of reality and perfection without comparing its degree of reality and perfection with those of other possible series? And doesn’t that bring in precisely the idea of a plurality of possible series, which Garrett’s interpretation was supposed to avoid? If there’s only one possible series, the claim that it has more reality and perfection than any other doesn’t seem to say much. (253)

But it is one thing to say that a finite mode, or a system of finite modes, is compatible with the necessary laws of nature (and with other infinite modes aside from the infinite individual), and potentially quite another to say that it is compatible with the entirety of the divine nature as that nature requires expression with maximal reality and perfection. Let us call the former kind of compatibility “law compatibility” and the latter kind of compatibility “comprehensive compatibility.” This is an essential distinction for Spinoza, even in application to an individual finite mode; for example, any singular thing that has a formal essence is law compatible (as argued in Chapter 9), even if it does not actually exist because it lacks comprehensive possibility.²¹ Furthermore, Curley and Walski should agree about the importance of this distinction; for presumably the null complete system consisting of *no* actually existing finite modes would have law compatibility, but it seems highly implausible that Spinoza should regard even this null complete system as comprehensively compatible with the perfection of the divine nature. Spinoza’s strict necessitarianism requires that only one complete system of finite modes should have comprehensive compatibility; it does not by itself require that only one complete system should have law compatibility.

Curley and Walski sometimes characterize Spinoza as holding that there is a plurality of possible worlds. This characterization is compatible with a strict necessitarianism that adopts the second alternative, so long as "possible world" (which is not Spinoza's word, as they note) is interpreted to mean "law-compatible complete system of modes" and *not* "comprehensively compatible complete system of modes." Indeed, Michael Griffin argues persuasively that even Leibniz, the first to formulate explicitly a doctrine of the multiplicity of possible worlds, must grant, despite his many distinctions, that only one of his infinitely many (internally) possible worlds is fully compatible with the necessary constraints provided by God's necessarily instantiated nature as a supremely perfect thinking and willing being. On Griffin's reading, the difference between the necessitarianism of Spinoza and the necessitarianism of Leibniz lies not in their degree of ultimate strictness, but in the *way* in which they take things to be necessitated: for Leibniz through the necessary operations of a perfect intellect and will, for Spinoza through purposeless necessity on the model of the way in which the essence of the circle necessitates its many properties.²² Because Leibniz's God transcends every world, He can fully conceive each world prior to necessarily choosing the best to actualize. Because Spinoza's God is immanent, however, and things can only be fully conceived through their causes for Spinoza, only the actual complete modal system can be fully conceived as actualizable.

V. Things Could Have Been No Other Way (1p33)

Ethics 1p33 and its demonstration state:

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

1p33d: For all things have necessarily followed from God's given nature (by P16), and have been determined from the necessity of God's nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way (by P29). Therefore, if things could have been of another nature, or could have been determined to produce an effect in another way, so that the order of Nature was different, then God's nature could also have been other than it is now, and therefore (by P11) that [other nature] would also have had to exist, and consequently, there could have been two or more Gods, which is absurd (by P14C1). So things could have been produced in no other way and no other order, etc., q.e.d.

SN argues that a complete infinite system of finite modes different in any way from the actual one would constitute a different "order of nature" (or, equivalently,

a different “way” and “order” of God’s producing things), and hence that 1p33 commits Spinoza to strict necessitarianism.

Curley and Walski concede that “*frequently* Spinoza uses that expression in such a way that finite modes are clearly included in the order of nature” (255, emphasis in original). However, they claim that in 1p33 Spinoza means by “order of nature” only the laws of nature, and that he is asserting only that those laws, as infinite modes, are strictly necessary. In support of this reading, they offer two passages (one from the *Ethics*) as “clear cases” of Spinoza using “order of nature” to refer only to the laws of nature, and three other cases (all from the *Ethics*) as “probable” cases.

The only passage from the *Ethics* that Curley and Walski cite as a “clear” case is 2a1:

[2a1] The essence of man does not involve necessary existence, i.e., from the order of nature it can happen equally that this or that man does exist, or that he does not exist.²³

They write:

This must mean that it is consistent with the laws of nature that any particular man should not exist, that the existence of any particular man requires (in addition to the laws of nature) the antecedent conditions which those laws specify; it cannot mean that it is consistent with the laws of nature and the past history of the world that a particular man who does exist should not exist. Otherwise, Spinoza would give up (what everyone agrees he held) determinism. (255)

Certainly Spinoza is a determinist, but Curley and Walski misconstrue the force of his phrase “from the order of nature” (“*ex naturæ ordine*”). They interpret it as equivalent to “so far as the laws of nature are concerned,” so that 2a1 states that the laws of nature alone are insufficient to determine whether this man or that man exists or not. Yet Spinoza’s use of “i.e.” (“*hoc est*”) implies that what follows it should be a reasonable gloss on the clause that precedes it—namely, “the essence of man does not involve necessary existence.” This condition is not satisfied by their proposed interpretation. On that interpretation, Spinoza would be explaining the claim that the *essence* of man is insufficient to determine man’s existence as meaning that some other *infinite modes* (the laws of nature) are insufficient either to determine or to prevent it. But such an explanation of the claim would be *prima facie* mistaken, on Spinoza’s view—for much the same reason that it would be a mistake to explain the contrasting doctrine that God’s essence *does* involve necessary existence as meaning that the infinite modes constituting the

laws of nature *are* sufficient to determine it. Instead, Spinoza means that man's *essence* leaves it equally open whether this or that man exists, so that whether this or that man does exist or not is determined instead *from the order of nature*—which of course must include the prior order of finite modes as at least part of what does the determining. Spinoza makes a similar point in more general terms in 1p33s1, where he writes of things whose essence does not involve existence and which we erroneously call “contingent” through the defect of knowledge that we “can affirm nothing certainly about its existence, because *the order of causes* is hidden from us” (emphasis added). In many cases, at least, this ignorance must surely be ignorance of the prior order of finite modes rather than of the relevant laws of nature.

The only other “clear case” cited by Curley and Walski is from *Cogitata Metaphysica*, the appendix to *Descartes's “Principles of Philosophy”*:

Then there is the ordinary power of God, and his extraordinary power. The ordinary is that by which he preserves the world in a certain order; the extraordinary is exercised when he does something beyond the order of nature, e.g., all miracles, such as the speaking of an ass, the appearance of angels, and the like. (DPP 1.9).

Of course, as they note, Spinoza himself does not regard miracles as possible; here he is writing only as an expositor of Descartes. And they are certainly right that an historical event actually occurring “beyond the order of nature” would require a violation of the laws of nature. But it does not follow that by “the order of nature” he means *just* those laws, as opposed to the entire system of actual events that are determined in accordance with those laws—for a miracle would be something occurring not as part of *that* system but beyond it. This latter more comprehensive reading is strongly suggested by the further statement that God preserves the world not merely *with* but *in* a certain order. Furthermore, Descartes's only use of the phrase “order of nature” (*Sixth Meditation*, CSM II.55/ AT VII.83) clearly includes particular sensory perceptions as elements in “the order of nature.”

The three “probable” cases cited (though without explanation) by Curley and Walski are 1p33s2, 2p7s, and the Preface to *Ethics* Part 5. None of these passages, however, treats the order of nature as equivalent to the laws of nature in contrast with the system of finite modes that are in accordance with them; quite the contrary, they seem in at least two cases positively to include the elements of that system as elements of that order. *Ethics* 1p33s2 treats the claim that “things could have been created by God in no other way or order” as equivalent to the claim that God “can never decree *anything* different, *and never could have*” (emphasis added). *Ethics* 2p7s identifies “the order of the whole of nature” with “the connection of causes” and in turn identifies “the same connection of causes” with “the same *things* follow[ing] one another” (emphasis added). Furthermore, the topic of 2p7 as

a whole is not the parallelism between *laws of nature governing things* and the ideas of those laws but rather the parallelism between *things* and ideas themselves. The Preface to Part 5 criticizes philosophers who “believe that man disturbs, rather than follows, the order of nature, that he has absolute power over his actions, and that he is determined only by himself.” As with the passage from *Cogitata Metaphysica*, however, this need only mean that they suppose man to disturb and upset, rather than to participate fully in, the system of actual events that are determined in accordance with those laws.

Thus, many of Spinoza’s uses of the phrase “the order of nature” can only be interpreted as referring to the system of things operating in accordance with the laws of nature, and all of them readily accommodate that interpretation; in contrast, none require interpretation as referring only to the laws of nature themselves. Equally important, however, Spinoza in the course of the demonstration and scholia of 1p33 also characterizes the strictly alternative-excluding necessitarianism of that proposition as applying not only to “the order of nature” but also to everything “concerning nature and its order,” to everything that “God decrees,” and, most strikingly, to “all things [that] depend on God’s power.” Accordingly, the strength of the interpretation of 1p33 as committed to strict necessitarianism by no means depends exclusively on the interpretation of the phrase “order of nature.”

VI. Conclusion

I have argued in Section I that the strict necessitarianism that SN attributes to Spinoza is a coherent doctrine, just as moderate necessitarianism is. I have further argued in Sections II–V that 1p16, 1p29, and 1p33, when properly interpreted, require a strict necessitarian interpretation of Spinoza and cannot sustain a moderate necessitarian one. Given these conclusions, plus SN’s further undisputed conclusion that only a strict necessitarian reading can explain Spinoza’s commitment to the necessary parallelism between extended things and the ideas of them in light of the causal barrier between attributes, I conclude that the interpretation of Spinoza as a strict necessitarian is secure.²⁴

Notes

1. For further discussion of logical-metaphysical necessity, see the Postscript to Chapter 2, “Spinoza’s ‘Ontological’ Argument.”
2. Edwin Curley and Gregory Walski, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism Reconsidered,” in *New Essays on the Rationalists*, edited by Rocco J. Gennaro and Charles Huenemann (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 241–262. The article seeks to defend an interpretation of the modal status of the finite modes that was originally stated in Edwin Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics: An Essay in*

- Interpretation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969). Because I take SNR to pose the strongest challenge in the literature to the interpretation of Spinoza as a strict necessitarian, I will not directly address such other challenges as Christopher Martin, "A New Challenge to the Necessitarian Reading of Spinoza," in *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, Volume 5, edited by Daniel Garber and Steven Nadler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 25–70.
3. Following common practice, both SN and SNR used the term "infinite series of finite modes." However, because this term might suggest, contrary to Spinoza's intention, that there is only one finite mode at any given time, I shall henceforth follow Olli Koistinen ("On the Consistency of Spinoza's Modal Theory," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 36 [1998]: 61–88) in using the preferable term "infinite system of finite modes."
 4. For a development of this theme, see Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).
 5. Samuel Clarke raised this objection against Spinoza in Section X of his 1705 work, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God, more particularly against Hobbes, Spinoza, and their Followers*, originally presented as Boyle Lectures. See Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*, ed. E. Vailati, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
 6. *Spatial* variation presumably applies literally only to the attribute of extension, but there will be parallel kinds of variation in other attributes.
 7. Spinoza also writes frequently of "propositions" as following from other propositions; it is not necessary to determine here whether this usage is also causal or not, although ideas certainly stand in causal relations to one another for Spinoza.
 8. 3d1 reads: "I call that cause adequate whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it. But I call it partial, or inadequate, if its effect cannot be understood through it alone." 3d2 reads in part: "I say that we are acted on when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause."
 9. For some elaboration of this theme in response to Curley and Walski, see Michael V. Griffin, *Leibniz, God and Necessity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 68–79.
 10. This is the fallacy of illicitly inferring that a property of a whole must also be a property of each part. A comparison may be useful. It might equally seem to be a matter of logic that if each item in a system has a sufficient causal explanation, then the entire system as a whole must have a sufficient causal explanation. However, Curley and Walski themselves must agree that this would be a fallacy of *composition* (illicitly inferring that a property of parts must also be a property of the whole). This is because they treat every finite mode as having (what is for them) a sufficient causal explanation in the divine nature plus previous finite modes, yet they deny that there is any causal explanation at all of why the entire system, rather than some other, exists.

11. I say “at least in part” because I agree with Curley and Walski that for Spinoza some infinite modes are also contributing causes to the existence of finite modes.
12. Spinoza’s original Latin reads: “Ex necessitate divinæ naturæ, infinita infinitis modis (hoc est, omnia, quæ sub intellectum infinitum cadere possunt) sequi debent.” Curley mentions that “modis” might be intended nontechnically as “ways.”
13. In this case, the proposition that *whatever is actual is necessary* would entail that *whatever is possible is actual*, because for every *nonactual* state of affairs *that p*, the necessity of the contrasting *actual* state of affairs *that not-p* would entail the *impossibility* of the *nonactual* state of affairs *that p*; hence, only actual states of affairs would be even possible. And conversely, that *whatever is possible is actual* would also entail that *whatever is actual is necessary*. For by simple contraposition, if *whatever is possible is actual*, then *whatever is nonactual is impossible*; hence, for every *actual* state of affairs *that q*, the impossibility of the contrasting *nonactual* state of affairs *that not-q* would entail the *necessity* of the state of affairs *that q*.
14. On this weaker interpretation, it could be that all of the actual beings were necessary even if some merely possible beings were neither actual nor necessary (for example, if a necessary God failed to create anything else, even though it could have created them); or, alternatively, it could be that all of the possible beings were actual even if some of those actual beings were not necessary (for example, if all possible things were capable of existing together and a necessary God brought about every thing that was possible, even though God could have refrained from bringing them about). Neither of these alternatives is plausibly attributable to Spinoza, however. Although some commentators interpret him as holding that every *formal essence* is realized at some time or other (see Section III), they typically do so because they regard it as a necessary consequence of God’s infinite power. Curley and Walski do not propose this interpretation.
15. Martin, *op. cit.*, proposes that only infinite modes are treated as *propria* in 1p16, but I do not see the textual basis for this distinction among the “infinitely many things” that follow from the necessity of the divine nature. Spinoza does not draw the distinction between infinite modes and finite modes until later in Part 1 of the *Ethics*.
16. This would be especially to be expected if, as Curley and Walski hold, and I agree, the causes of any finite mode include some finite modes and some infinite modes for Spinoza.
17. Koistinen, *op. cit.*, proposes that the formal essences of singular things are infinite modes consisting in the unchanging “object-of-truth” *that* such a singular thing exists at a particular time and place, *t*. It is by no means obvious, however, that Spinoza would recognize an “object-of-truth” of this kind (as opposed to the singular thing itself) as an additional mode in his ontology. The proposal also does not easily square with the more general distinction Spinoza draws between the existences and essences of things (for example, at 1p25).

18. Curley, *op. cit.*
19. Spinoza holds that the human intellect operates by conceiving the formal essence of the body (see Chapter 14); hence the claim of 5p29 that conceiving “under a species of eternity” requires conceiving “the Body’s essence.”
20. Spinoza’s critic Samuel Clarke, *op. cit.*, also found this claim incredible, although he was sure that Spinoza held it.
21. As remarked in footnote 14, some commentators have held that every formal essence is instantiated by an existing singular thing at least once, even if it is not instantiated at all times. While this is not implausible, I take no interpretative stand on the question, as nothing at issue in this postscript depends on it, and I am not confident that Spinoza’s texts provide a definitive answer.
22. Griffin, *op. cit.*
23. Spinoza’s Latin: “*Hominis essentia non involvit necessariam existentiam hoc est ex naturæ ordine tam fieri potest ut hic et ille homo existat quam ut non existat.*”
24. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Angela Coventry for discussions of “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism Reconsidered.”