

The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance, Attributes and Modes

Introduction¹

One of the major questions of metaphysics throughout its history has been: What *is*? Spinoza has an astonishingly brief answer to this question: *God*. All that is - is just God² (and his qualities). The rest of this essay will be dedicated to the elaboration of Spinoza's answer.

Spinoza's God has infinitely many qualities that constitute, or are conceived as constituting, his essence, while the other qualities of Spinoza's God, though not constituting God's essence, follow necessarily from God's essence. Spinoza calls the former 'Attributes [*attributa*]' and the latter 'Modes [*modi*].' Following a clarification of Spinoza's understanding of Substance [*substantia*] in the first part of this essay, we will study in the second and third parts Spinoza's conception of attributes

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all references to the *Ethics*, the early works of Spinoza, and Letters 1-29 are to Curley's translation *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Vol. 1. Edited and translated by Edwin Curley. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) – henceforth, **C**. In references to the other letters of Spinoza I have used Shirley's translation: Spinoza, *Complete Works*, translated by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002). I have relied on Gebhardt's critical edition (*Spinoza Opera*, 4 volumes (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Verlag, 1925)) for the Latin text of Spinoza. I am indebted to Mike Le Buffe, Colin Marshall and Tad Schmaltz for very helpful comments on early drafts of this paper. Michael Della Rocca was, as usual, a source of inspiration and many generous advices.

² For the acosmist reading of Spinoza – according to which Spinoza denies the reality of the world ("cosmos") and of anything but God – see *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, ed. Zwi Batscha (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1984), 217. Cf. my articles, "Salomon Maimon and the Rise of Spinozism in German Idealism" and "Acosmism or Weak Individuals?"

and modes, respectively. ‘Substance’, ‘Attributes’ and ‘Modes’ are terms that have a very long history before Spinoza. This, of course, does not mean that Spinoza restricts himself to traditional explications of these terms. On the contrary, Spinoza instead draws bold and radical conclusions from a traditional, or almost traditional, understanding of these concepts.

Though Spinoza’s immediate answer to question, “What is?” is brief and simple, the proper elaboration of this answer could fill several thick volumes. Therefore, this short essay only provides a cursory sketch of Spinoza’s main ontological terms, their interrelation, and the recent, major scholarly debates regarding their meaning and function in Spinoza’s system.

Part 1: Substance

In the opening of the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines substance in the following manner:

E1d3; By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed [*Per substantiam intelligo id quod in se est et per se concipitur hoc est id cuius conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei, a quo formari debeat*].³

The essential characterization of Spinoza’s substance is its *independence*. Substance is both ontologically and conceptually independent. It is a thing that does not depend on anything else in

³ In his early letters, Spinoza provides two slightly different definitions of substance, apparently quoting from early drafts of the *Ethics*. In Letter 4 Spinoza writes: “[B]y substance I understand what is conceived through itself and in itself, i.e., that whose concept does not involve the concept of another thing” (IV/13/34). The definition of substance in Letter 9 reads: “By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., whose concept does not involve the concept of another thing. I understand the same by attribute, except that it is called attribute in relation to the intellect, which attributes such and such a definite nature to substance” (IV/46/20).

order to be or be conceived. This understanding of substance follows traditional theories of substance, though, as we shall soon see, the slight (or apparently slight) changes Spinoza introduces into the concept of substance lead to radical and revolutionary conclusions. We begin with a concise overview of the historical background of Spinoza's discussion of substance, not only for the obvious reason that Spinoza was not working in a void, but also because the two competing theories of substance that were readily available to Spinoza - those of Aristotle and Descartes - suggest the two main ways of understanding Spinoza's own concept of substance. Due to the complexity of these matters, one can only provide a very general outline of these delicate issues.⁴

The two main *loci* for Aristotle's discussion of substance are the *Categories*, and the *Metaphysics*. In the *Categories*, Aristotle discusses substance [*ousia*] while explicating the ten categories of being, of which *substance* is the first and most important. Aristotle defines substance as follows:

A *substance* - that which is called a substance most strictly, and most of all - is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject, e.g., the individual man or the individual horse. The species in which the things primarily called substances are, are called *secondary* substances, as also the genera of these species.⁵

For Aristotle, the term 'substance,' in the fullest sense of the word, applies only to particular things, such as a particular horse or a particular man. Whatever is not a particular thing can either be *said of* a particular thing, or *be in* a particular thing. To the first group belong the genera and species under which particular things fall (such as 'man', 'animal', etc). The second group includes properties such as 'red' or 'hot' that do not constitute genera or species. In broad terms, we can say that the distinction between *being in* and *being said of* a thing is a distinction between accidental and essential

⁴ Parts of this section of the article are adopted from my article "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance: The Substance-Mode Relation as a Relation of Inherence and Predication."

⁵ *Categories*, 2a12-2a17.

predication.⁶ Aristotle allows for the existence of secondary substances; these are the genera and species that are said of (but are not in) the primary substances. Hence, whatever is not a primary substance depends on a primary substance, since it must either be *in* a primary substance, or *said of* a primary substance.⁷

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle claims that the substratum [*hypokeimenon*] “which underlies a thing primarily is thought to be in the truest sense its substance.” The substratum itself is defined as

[T]hat of which the other things are predicated, while it is not itself predicated of anything else.⁸

The element that is stressed in the discussions of substance in both the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics* is the *predicative independence* of the substance. That is, primary substances do not depend on anything else upon which they are said to be predicated. Let us mark this understanding of substance as the *predication definition of substance*: A is a primary substance if and only if it is a subject of predication⁹ and it is not predicated of anything else.¹⁰

⁶The further question of whether or not what is *in* a substance (such as whiteness) is repeatable is a subject of major controversy among scholars. For two opposite views see Ackrill (Aristotle, *Categories and De Interpretatione*), and Owen (“Inherence”).

⁷ For Aristotle, the relation *y is said of x* is transitive. Hence, the genus that is said of an individual’s species is also (transitively) said of the individual itself.

⁸ *Metaphysics VII (Z)*, 1028b36.

⁹ An interesting question, which I will not discuss here, is whether an Aristotelian substance must have properties. On the one hand, if the substance were to have no properties it would be unintelligible (in fact, it would be very much like Aristotelian prime matter). On the other hand, if a substance must have properties, the substance is then dependent (admittedly, in a weak sense) on its properties, which seems to conflict with the independence of substance. Spinoza would face a similar problem were he to explain why God must

What is Descartes' conception of substance? Clearly the Aristotelian definition of substance was not alien to Descartes' contemporaries.¹¹ Descartes himself, in the Second Set of Replies appended to the *Meditations*, defines substance in terms that are quite close to Aristotle's view:¹²

Substance. This term applies to every thing in which whatever we perceive immediately resides, as in a subject, or to every thing by means of which whatever we perceive exists. By 'what we perceive' is meant any property, quality or attribute of which we have a real idea (CSM 2 114).

Unlike Aristotle's characterization of primary substance, Descartes' does not stipulate that a substance should not be predicated of anything else.¹³ Yet it is clear that what makes something a

have modes. For medieval objections to the possibility of substance without accidents, see Normore, "Accidents and Modes", 675. For Leibniz's claims that the monad cannot subsist without some property, see *Monadology*, §21.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of the Aristotelian and Scholastic understanding of substance and its relation to Spinoza's views, see Carriero's excellent article, "On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza."

¹¹ See, for example, Arnauld and Nicole's characterization of substance: "I call whatever is conceived as subsisting by itself and as the subject of everything conceived about it, a thing. It is otherwise called a substance (*Logic or the Art of Thinking*, Part I, Chapter 2, p. 30). "Subsistence by itself" is traditionally explained as not being predicated of anything. According to Eustachius of St. Paul "to exist or subsist *per se* is nothing other than not to exist in something else as in a subject of inherence" (*Summa philosophica quadripartite*, I p. 97 IV. Translated in Rozemond, *Descartes's Dualism*, 7).

¹² Cf. Rozemond (*Descartes's Dualism*, 7) for a similar stress on the continuity between the Scholastic and Cartesian views of substance.

substance is the fact that it is a subject of which properties are predicated. Following his definition of substance, Descartes defines God as “the substance which we understand to be supremely perfect, and in which we conceive absolutely nothing that implies any defect or limitation in that perfection” (CSM 2 114). Although it renders God supremely perfect, this definition does not say that God is *more of a substance* than other, finite, substances. Such a distinction between God, the only substance in the strict sense of the word, and finite substances appears in Descartes’ most famous discussion of the topic, in section 51 of the first part of the *Principles*:

By *substance* we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence. And there is only one substance which can be understood to depend on no other thing whatsoever, namely God. In the case of all other substances, we perceive that they can exist only with the help of God's concurrence. Hence the term 'substance' does not apply univocally, as they say in the Schools, to God and to other things; that is, there is no distinctly intelligible meaning of the term which is common to God and his creatures. <In the case of created things, some are of such a nature that they cannot exist without other things, while some need only the ordinary concurrence of God in order to exist. We make this distinction by calling the latter 'substances' and the former 'qualities' or 'attributes' of those substances.¹⁴> (CSM 1 210)

Some scholars suggest that in this passage Descartes introduces a new definition of substance as an ‘independent being.’ This is somewhat imprecise, since Aristotle also stresses the independence of substance. Descartes diverges from Aristotle in the way he explicates this independence. While

¹³ In fact, in the Sixth Set of Replies, Descartes explicitly allows for one substance to be predicated of another substance, though only in a loose manner of speaking (CSM 2, 293).

¹⁴ The passage in brackets appears only in the French version of the *Principles*.

Aristotle defines the independence of primary substance solely in terms of *predication*, Descartes stipulates that substance in the full sense of the word must also be *causally* independent. Hence, in addition to being self-subsisting, a full-fledged Cartesian substance must also comply with the *causal stipulation of substance*: ‘x is a full-fledged substance only if it is not caused to exist by anything else.’ Created substances, according to the passage above, are self-subsisting, yet externally caused by God (they need “God’s ordinary concurrence”). As a result, they are *not* fully-fledged substances for Descartes.

This brings us to an interesting asymmetry between causation and predication in Descartes’ view of substance. While Descartes grants the title ‘substance’ to things that *causally* depend only on God, he does not make the same compromise in regards to *predication*. Things which depend only on God in terms of predication (i.e., God’s attributes) are not recognized in this passage (or, as far as I know, in any other text of Descartes) as substances, even in the weaker sense of the word.¹⁵ This seems to indicate that even for Descartes, the *sine qua non* condition for substantiality is still independence in terms of *predication*. Only when this necessary condition is satisfied can the test of *causal* self-sufficiency distinguish between God, the substance in the full sense of the word, and finite, created substances (which depend on God in terms of causation, but not in terms of predication).

To return to Spinoza, he seems to have little patience for the Cartesian in-between category of “created substance.” If the title ‘substance,’ in its strict sense, applies only to God (since God is the only entity that is not dependent on anything else in terms of both predication and causation), Descartes’ willingness to grant the status of ‘created substance’ to things which “need only the

¹⁵ Of course, for Descartes, the distinction between substance and principal attributes is only a distinction of reason. Still, this does not make God’s attributes into substances (at least no more than the attributes of any *finite* substance).

ordinary concurrence of God in order to exist” may rightly seem a mere concession to popular religion and its demand to secure the substantiality (and hence everlastingness) of human minds.¹⁶

Spinoza does not *define* substance as causally independent, yet it takes him no more than five propositions to prove that, “One substance cannot be produced by another substance” (E1p6), and derive from this proposition the corollary that “substance cannot be produced by anything else” (E1p6c). Thus, substance must be causally independent from anything else. However, for Spinoza, the causal independence of substance does not only mean that it is not caused by anything else, but also that substance is positively self-caused.¹⁷ Relying on E1p6, and on the implicit and crucial assumption that everything must have a cause,¹⁸ Spinoza proves in E1p7d that substance is “the cause of itself.” But what does it mean for a thing to be “cause of itself”?

¹⁶ Spinoza would allow for non-substantial things (such as human minds) to become more and more independent, and thus more and more approximate the substantiality of God. In fact, this process plays a central role in Spinoza’s attempt to lead man from bondage to blessedness in parts four and five of the *Ethics* (See Daniel Garber, “Dr. Fischelson’s Dilemma”). Yet, he refuses to mark a stable category of “second best” substance which would aim primarily to secure or appease orthodox religion (“Why stop with ‘second best’ substances and not continue with ‘third best’ substances, etc.?” one might ask).

¹⁷ In Letter 60 (1675) Spinoza argues that a proper definition of a thing must express its efficient cause. In this letter he applies this stipulation to the case of God, indicating that God must have an efficient cause as well. Since God cannot be caused by anything other than itself, it must be the efficient cause of itself.

¹⁸ The claim that everything must have a cause is a variant or corollary of the Principle of Sufficient Reason; one can read E1a3 as stating this principle. On the pivotal role of the Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza’s philosophy, see Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, Ch. 1.

Though the notion of *causa sui* seemed paradoxical to many of Spinoza's predecessors,¹⁹ Spinoza did not shy away from using, and even ascribing a central role, to it. In fact, *the Ethics* opens with the definition of this very notion:

E1d1: By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, *or* that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing [*Per causam sui intelligo id, cujus essentia involvit existentiam, sive id, cujus natura non potest concipi, nisi existens*].

A *cause of itself* is a thing whose essence alone necessitates its existence, and which cannot be conceived as non-existing.²⁰ The causal independence of substance leads Spinoza to the conclusion that substance must exist by virtue of its own essence -- otherwise, the existence of substance could not be explained. Glossing this argument, Spinoza notes that we might be surprised by this conclusion since we use the term 'substance' far too liberally without paying attention to the precise meaning of the term (E1p8s2). Were we to better grasp this concept, Spinoza adds, we would consider that the essence of substance involves existence as an obvious and indisputable "common notion" (II/50/4).²¹

¹⁹ Although, in the First Set of Replies, Descartes notably claims that God is the efficient cause of itself. Descartes characterizes the cause of itself in terms of independent existence, which differs little from his conception of substance (AT VII 108-9). For a nuanced study of *causa sui* in Descartes, see Tad Schmaltz, "God as *Causa Sui* and Created Truth in Descartes." Cf. Carraud, *Causa sive ratio*, 266-87, 295-302.

²⁰ Notice the dualistic nature of this definition that -- like the definitions of substance and mode -- defines the term in both ontological and conceptual terminology. On the nature of the 'x involves y' relation, see Melamed, "Spinoza's Deification of Existence," §3.1.

²¹ Indeed, in Letter 2 -- in which being "conceived through itself and in itself" is used to define attribute (not substance!) -- Spinoza still claims that one of the main characterizations of substance is that, "it cannot be produced, but it is of its essence to exist" (IV/8/9). See Part II below. Interestingly, the concept of substance

Spinoza's substance has several other crucial characterizations, but presenting and discussing these requires an acquaintance with two other closely related concepts, attributes and modes. We turn now to the issue of attributes.

Part II: Attributes

Spinoza's famed definition of attribute (E1d4) reads:

By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence [*Per attributum intelligo id, quod intellectus de substantia percipit, tanquam ejusdem essentiam constituens*].²²

Following this definition, and the definition of substance previously discussed, Spinoza defines God:

E1d6: By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence [*Per Deum intelligo ens absolute infinitum, hoc est, substantiam constantem infinitis attributis, quorum unumquodque aeternam, et infinitam essentiam exprimit*].

Both definitions raise a number of important interpretative questions.

(i) Does an attribute really constitute the essence of substance, or is it merely how *the intellect perceives* substance?

(ii) If the former, why does Spinoza refer to the intellect at all in his definition of attribute?

does not appear in one of Spinoza's major works, the *Theological Political Treatise*. The closest notion to substance in this work is the identity of essence and existence in God. See Melamed, "The Metaphysics of the *Theological Political Treatise*", 137-40.

²² Notice that Latin does not have definite and indefinite articles. Hence E1d4 could refer equally to "an attribute" or "the attribute," or to "an intellect" or "the intellect."

(iii) If the latter, does this mean that in reality the attribute does *not* constitute the essence of substance and is merely an illusion generated by the intellect?

(iv) In what sense does God “consist of an infinity of attributes”? Are these attributes *parts* of God?

(v) What does Spinoza mean when he ascribes to God “an infinity of attributes”?

Taking these questions more or less in order, let me first note a few important points regarding the background of Spinoza’s discussion. In one of the early drafts of the *Ethics*, Spinoza presents a definition of substance (almost identical to the one in the published text of the *Ethics*) accompanied by the following comment:

I understand the same by attribute, except that it is called attribute in relation to the intellect, which attributes such and such a definite nature to substance.²³

No independent definition of attribute appears at this stage of the work (March 1663). Yet, oddly enough, an even earlier draft, quoted in Ep. 2 (September 1661), provides a definition of *attribute* that is very similar to the definition of *substance* (!) in the final version of the *Ethics*.

By attribute I understand whatever is conceived through itself and in itself [*omne id, quod concipitur per se & in se*], so that its concept does not involve the concept of another thing.²⁴

Let me stress three key points regarding the concepts of substance and attribute in Ep. 2. First, being “in itself” and “conceived through itself” are the essential characteristics of substance (E1d3) in the final version of the *Ethics*, yet here these two crucial characterizations are used to define attribute rather than substance. Second, notice that in this early draft *there is no mention of the intellect in the definition of attribute*. Finally, notice that in this letter Spinoza does not at all define substance, but

²³ Ep. 9 (IV/46/20).

²⁴ Ep. 2 (IV/7/24-28).

instead suggests three characterizations of *substance*, one of which reads: “[Substance] must be infinite, or supremely perfect *of its kind*.”²⁵ Strikingly, “being infinite in its kind” is the characterization of *attribute* in the final version of the *Ethics*.²⁶ Thus, it seems that between Ep. 2 and the final version of the *Ethics*, Spinoza virtually switched his concepts of substance and attribute. While the precise story of the development of Spinoza’s key concepts in the early drafts of the *Ethics* deserves a careful and detailed study that cannot be carried out here, I believe it is safe to conclude that (a) for Spinoza there was a very close connection between substance and attribute, and more importantly, (b) he experimented with various manners of conceptualizing these two notions and their interrelations. It is possible that at some stages in the developments of the *Ethics* Spinoza considered either the concept of substance or that of an attribute less central to his system.²⁷

Spinoza was also forced to experiment with various definitions of attribute, since the definition he found in Descartes’ text was extremely unstable. For Descartes, an attribute is the quality through which we know substance. Nothingness has no attributes. “Thus, if we perceive the presence of some attribute, we can infer that there must also be present an existing thing or substance to which it may be attributed.”²⁸ Descartes famously stresses that:

To each substance there belongs one principal attribute...Each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all other properties are referred. Thus, extension constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought

²⁵ IV/10/1. Italics added.

²⁶ See E1d6expl. God, or the substance, is said to be *absolutely* infinite (in the final version of the *Ethics*).

²⁷ In Ep. 36 Spinoza does not use the terminology of attributes. Instead, he refers to Thought and Extension as things which are “indeterminate and perfect in their own kinds,” while God is said to be “absolutely indeterminate.”

²⁸ *Principles of Philosophy*, I 52.

constitutes the nature of thinking substance. Everything else which can be attributed to body presupposes extension, and is merely a mode of an extended thing...By contrast it is possible to understand extension without shape or movement.²⁹

In this passage Descartes does not allow for the possibility of one substance having more than one *attribute*. All the properties of a substance other than its principal attribute are taken here as mere *modes*, depending asymmetrically on their principal attribute. But in the subsequent discussion of the three traditional sorts of distinction - *real distinction*, *modal distinction*, and *distinction of reason* [*distinctio rationis*] (which is here translated as “*conceptual distinction*”) - Descartes characterizes the third in the following manner:

A *conceptual distinction* [*distinctio rationis*] is a distinction between a substance and some attribute of that substance without which the substance is unintelligible; *alternatively, it is a distinction between two such attributes of a single substance*. Such a distinction is recognized by our inability to form a clear and distinct idea of the substance if we exclude from it the attribute in question, *or alternatively, by our inability to perceive clearly the idea of one of the two attributes if we separate it from the other*.³⁰

Descartes does not state explicitly in this passage whether the attributes he refers to here are *principal* attributes, but in order to avoid a flat contradiction with his claim in *Principles* I 53 that substance has only *one* principal attribute, we may charitably interpret *Principles* I 62 as referring to a plurality of non-principal attributes.³¹ Yet, our problems do not end here, since it is not at all clear how to reconcile the claims that (i) each substance has one *principal* attribute upon which all other properties

²⁹ *Principles of Philosophy*, I 53. Italics added.

³⁰ *Principles of Philosophy*, I 62. Italics added.

³¹ Cf. Descartes' claims that God – the infinite substance – has *many* immutable attributes (AT VIII B 348 | CSM 1 297), and that God has *countless* attributes beyond the ones we know (AT III 394 | CSMK 185).

of the substance *asymmetrically* depend (*Principles*, I 53), and (ii) that a substance may have several attributes, *each* of which is necessary (“without which the substance is unintelligible”) in order to render the substance intelligible (*Principles*, I 62). According to *Principles* I 53 the non-principal attributes must be understood through the principal attribute, but *not the other way around*. Yet, according to *Principles* I 62, the principal attribute may depend on another attribute in order to be clearly perceived.³²

Another problematic element of Descartes’ account of the attributes is the rather unclear distinction he draws between modes and attributes. We have seen that Descartes sometimes refers to the non-essential qualities of a substance as modes (*Principles* I 53), and other times as attributes (*Principles* I 62). We have also seen that in *Principles* I 53, modes are taken to be asymmetrically dependent on the principal attribute. Yet, when Descartes provides his official explanation of the distinction between mode and attribute, he does not appeal to considerations of dependence, but rather to degree of generality and changeability. Worse, in between attribute and mode, he adds a third category: quality.³³

³² Assuming *Principles* I 62 refers to *non-principal* attributes, it should allow for a state of affairs in which a substance S has two attributes, A1 and A2, such that A1 is principal and A2 is not. According to *Principles* I 53, A2 should be referred to (i.e., conceived through) A1. Yet, according to *Principles* I 62, A1 does not suffice to render S intelligible. As a result, A1 and A2 seem to be mutually dependent, rather than A2 being subordinate to A1, as *Principles* I 53 suggests. On the symmetric dependence of attributes in *Principles* I 62, see Nolan, “Reductionism and Nominalism,” 135, and Hoffman, *Essays on Descartes*, 53.

³³ In *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet*, Descartes suggests a similar distinction, though in this text there are only two categories: attributes and modes. “We must take care here not to understand the word ‘attribute’ to mean simply ‘mode’, for we term an ‘attribute’ whatever we recognize as being naturally ascribable to something, whether it be a mode which is susceptible of change, or the absolutely immutable essence of the thing in

56. *What modes, qualities and attributes are.*

By *mode*, as used above, we understand exactly the same as what is elsewhere meant by an *attribute* or *quality*. But we employ the term *mode* when we are thinking of a substance as being affected or modified; when the modification enables the substance to be designated as a substance of such and such a kind, we use the term *quality*; and finally, when we are simply thinking *in a more general way* of what is in a substance, we use the term *attribute*. Hence we do not, strictly speaking, say that there are modes or qualities in God, but simply attributes, since *in the case of God, any variation is unintelligible*. And even in the case of created things, that which always remains unmodified - for example existence or duration in a thing which exists and endures - should be called not a quality or a mode but an attribute.³⁴

According to this passage, attributes are more general than qualities, and qualities, presumably, are more general than modes.³⁵ Similarly, modes or qualities, but not attributes, are changeable, and therefore, God, being strictly unchangeable, has only attributes. This passage leaves several crucial questions unanswered: (1) At precisely what level of generality do modes turn into qualities, and qualities into attributes? (2) Why should one assume that the continuous distinction drawn in *Principles* I 56 among the degrees of *generality* of attributes, qualities, and modes, maps well onto the binary distinction spelled out in terms of *dependence* in *Principles* I 53?

Given these perplexities in Descartes' account of the attributes, it is easier to understand Spinoza's experiments, in the early drafts of the *Ethics*, with various conceptions of attributes and

question."(AT VIII B348 | CSM 1 297). Descartes' frequent warnings in his late work against confusing attributes and modes may reflect awareness of his own failure to do so in the *Principles*.

³⁴ *Principles of Philosophy*, I 56. Italics mine.

³⁵ According the passage, qualities, but not modes, designate the kind to which a substance belongs.

their relation to God or substance.³⁶ Spinoza did not inherit a ready-made, stable concept of attribute, and therefore had to design one almost from scratch. The notion of attribute is quite marginal in Spinoza's 1663 book on Descartes' *Principle of Philosophy*. It appears about four or five times, two of which raise sharp criticisms of Descartes' claims regarding this notion.³⁷ In one of these texts Spinoza confesses that he simply cannot make sense of Descartes' understanding of attribute, since Descartes' claim that one needs more power to create a substance than the attributes do not allow the attributes to be either qualities which constitute the essence of substance, or the properties which follow from the essence of substance.³⁸

We now return to the definition of attribute in the published version of Spinoza's *Ethics*. The central role the intellect plays in this definition – an attribute is “what the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence” (E1d4) – and the absence of any such role in Descartes' (and Spinoza's early) definitions, led some commentators to argue that for Spinoza, the attributes do not in fact constitute the essence of substance, but are only misleadingly perceived as such by the intellect. This reading of the definition of attribute can be traced back at least to Hegel, who also complained that Spinoza could not make the attribute depend on the intellect, since an intellect (whether finite or infinite) is a mere mode,³⁹ and (as seen shortly) a mode depends on its attribute

³⁶ It seems that in Ep. 2 the attributes are conceived primarily as the attributes of God, rather than the attributes of substance.

³⁷ See I/161/3-4 and I/163/4-35.

³⁸ See I/163/4-35.

³⁹ “By intellect (as is known through itself) we understand not absolute thought but only a certain mode of thinking.” (E1p31d). Cf. Let. 9 (IV/45/32) where Spinoza stresses that even an infinite intellect belongs to *natura naturata* and not to *natura naturans*.

and substance, and not the other way around.⁴⁰ Yet the most detailed presentation of the view, which denies that the attributes really constitute the essence of substance, appears in Harry A. Wolfson 1934 monumental study:

If the expression “which the intellect perceives” is laid stress upon, it would seem that the attributes are only *in intellectu*. Attributes would thus be only a subjective mode of thinking, expressing a relation to a perceiving subject and having no real existence in the essence... According to [this] interpretation, to be perceived by the mind means to be *invented* by the mind.⁴¹

Wolfson’s view of Spinoza as a follower of the medieval tradition of negative theology, which makes God’s essence ineffable, motivates his interpretation of the definition of attribute.⁴² One important source provides *some* support for such a reading: in one of his letters, Spinoza replaces his common characterization of God as an “absolutely infinite” being with the similar, yet significantly different notion of “absolutely *indeterminate*.”⁴³ If God is truly indeterminate, then attributes, being determinations of God, should not really belong to him. Yet there is overwhelming textual evidence

⁴⁰ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. III 260, 269-70; *Science of Logic*, 537. Cf. Melamed, “Acosmism or Weak Individuals? – Hegel, Spinoza, and the Reality of the Finite.”

⁴¹ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, I 146. Cf. Caird, *Spinoza*, 53-4.

⁴² “Substance is thus to Spinoza, like God to the medievals, absolutely simple, free from accidental as well as from essential attributes.” Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, I 116.

⁴³ “[I]f we suppose that something which is *indeterminate* and perfect *in its own kind* exists by its own sufficiency, then we must also grant the existence of a being which is *absolutely indeterminate* and perfect. This being I shall call God. For example, if we are willing to maintain that Extension and Thought exist by their own sufficiency, we shall have to admit the existence of God who is *absolutely* perfect, that is, the existence of a being who is *absolutely indeterminate*” (Let. 36. Italics added).

that Spinoza espoused a position diametrically opposed to negative theology. Consider, for example, Spinoza's bold claim in E2p47: "The human mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence," and the even bolder statement in the scholium of this proposition: "God's infinite essence and his eternity are known to all."⁴⁴ If negative theology asserts that God's essence is ineffable and unknowable, E2p47 seems to claim that it is impossible *not* to know God's essence.⁴⁵

Many other crucial texts contradict Wolfson's reading. First, consider E2p7d, in which Spinoza rephrases his definition of attribute, referring to an attribute as "whatever can be perceived *by an infinite intellect* as constituting the essence of substance" (Italics added).⁴⁶ Clearly, an infinite intellect (i.e., God's intellect) does not have misperceptions or illusions. In fact, for Spinoza, the intellect, either finite or infinite, perceives things adequately and it is only the imagination that is the sole source of error.⁴⁷ Thus, the intellect's perception of attributes cannot be an error that fails to reflect the true nature of substance, or as Spinoza puts it: "What is contained objectively in the intellect must necessarily be in nature" (E1p31d).

⁴⁴ Furthermore, the force of Letter 36 is undermined by the fact that the extant text is a mere translation of the lost original. In translation, "infinite" could be easily replaced by "indeterminate."

⁴⁵ Insofar as the essence of God is self-caused, it does not presuppose or require the knowledge of anything else, and hence it is the easiest thing to know. For further discussion of E2p47 and Spinoza's surprising views on the "order of philosophizing," see my review of Michael Ayers (ed.), *Rationalism, Platonism and God*.

⁴⁶ Cf. E2p4d: "An *infinite* intellect comprehends nothing except God's *attributes* and his affections" (Italics added), and Della Rocca, *Representation*, 157.

⁴⁷ "Knowledge of the first kind is the only cause of falsity, whereas knowledge of the second and third kind is necessarily true" (E2p41). Knowledge of the first kind is "opinion or imagination" (E2p40s2).

Second, the definition of God in the final version of the *Ethics* asserts that God is a “substance consisting [*constantem*] of an infinity of attributes” (E1d6). This definition is not qualified by any disclaimer such as ‘God is *perceived as* consisting of infinite attributes.’ We can and should ask how precisely God consists of the attributes, but I believe it is clear that if the attributes were *only* in the human mind, God would not, in reality, consist of an infinity of attributes.⁴⁸

Finally, E1p4d proves one of the most crucial propositions of the *Ethics*:

There is nothing *outside the intellect* [*extra intellectum*] through which a number of things can be distinguished from one another except *substances, or what is the same* (by E1d4), *their attributes, and their affections*” (Italics added).

There are at least two relevant and important implications drawn from E1p4d: (i) The attributes of substance are also outside the intellect,⁴⁹ and (ii) the attributes are in some sense “the same” as the substance.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Cf. Spinoza’s use of ‘*constare*’ in E2p13c.

⁴⁹ See Haserot, 509. Another related consideration against the view of the attributes as illusory is that in Letter 6, Spinoza stresses that motion and rest, an infinite mode of Extension, “explicates nature as it is in itself”, and not as it is related to human perception (IV/28/11-15). It would be very odd if motion and rest, the immediate infinite mode of Extension, which follows immediately from the “absolute nature” of Extension (E1p21), were real, while Extension itself were an illusion. For further criticism of Wolfson’s reading, see Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, 441-47.

⁵⁰ Another closely related question is why the definition of attribute refers to the intellect’s *perception*, rather than *conception*. In E2d3 Spinoza draws a distinction between *conception* and *perception*. The latter “seems to indicate that the mind is acted on by the object,” the former an action of the mind. Since in Spinoza’s theory of the mental, the activity of the mind is associated with adequate ideas, and passivity with inadequate ideas, one might be tempted to conclude that perceptions should be inadequate. This is clearly not the case, given numerous passages where Spinoza speaks of *true* perceptions. Consider, for example, E2p44d: “It is of the

At this point, two of the questions posed at the beginning of our discussion of the attributes have been answered. The attributes truly constitute the essence of substance (question (i)) and are not illusory (question (iii)). We still have to explain Spinoza's reason for introducing the intellect into the definition of attribute, question (ii). I approach this question after addressing two others posed at the beginning of this section.

(iv) *In what sense does God "consist of an infinity of attributes"? Are these attributes parts of God?* – Spinoza's God is strictly indivisible (E1p13). One of Spinoza's main mereological assumptions is that parts are prior to their whole.⁵¹ Since nothing is prior to God, God cannot have parts. Hence, the attributes cannot be parts of God. Instead, as I will shortly elaborate, Spinoza suggests that the attributes are distinct and adequate conceptions of one and the same entity, or as Spinoza puts it, "one and the same thing which is explained through different attributes" (E2p7s).

Here might be the place to stress that, insofar as the attributes are said to constitute the essence of substance, each attribute, like the substance, must be "conceived through itself" (E1p10s) – that is, each attribute and its features must be explained independently, without any appeal to another attribute. Thus, for example, the notions of *intellect* and *will* could not qualify as attributes for Spinoza because they are conceived through the attribute of Thought. Similarly, *motion* could not qualify as a Spinozistic attribute because it is conceived through the attribute of Extension. Since

nature of reason to perceive things truly [*res verè percipere*], i.e., as they are in themselves." Cf. E2p43s (II/125/1). In E2p49s (II/133/26) Spinoza seems to identify "perceptions" and "the faculty of conceiving." Della Rocca suggests that in E1d4 Spinoza uses the '*percipere*' terminology in order to draw attention to the referential opacity of "contexts involving the notion of constitute" (*Representation*, 166). While I find this suggestion helpful and essentially agree with it, I suspect Spinoza also uses '*percipere*' to indicate that the intellect serves as *reasoned reason*, and not as *reasoning reason*, i.e., that it does not create distinctions that have no foundation in reality. I will explain this point shortly.

⁵¹ CM (I/258/16-19); KV (I/30/10); Let. 35 (S 203); E1p12d (55/12-3).

Spinoza thinks there is a tight connection between cognition and causation (E1a4), he concludes that the attributes (and their modes) must also be causally independent from each other (E2p6d). Thus, Spinoza erects a conceptual, as well as causal, barrier among the attributes.

(v) *What does Spinoza mean when he ascribes to God “an infinity of attributes”?* – Explaining his definition of God (E1d5), Spinoza distinguishes between the infinity of each attribute (“infinity in its own kind”), and the infinity of God (“absolute infinity”). God is said to have infinitely many attributes, each of which is infinite in its kind. Yet, in parts two to five of the *Ethics*, Spinoza discusses only two attributes, Extension and Thought, and in E2a5 he stresses that the human mind can know modes of only these two attributes. This led some commentators to argue that Spinoza did not really mean to claim that there are more than two attributes, and that by saying that God has *infinite* attributes he merely means that God has *all* attributes.⁵² In support of such a reading, Jonathan Bennett argued that: (1) if Spinoza really meant that there are infinitely many attributes, he would have had to explain *why* we do not know the other attributes, but his attempt to explain the issue in Letters 64 and 66 is completely unclear; (2) there was no philosophical or theological tradition which ascribes to God infinitely many attributes, and hence no traditional pressure on Spinoza to endorse it; and (3) Spinoza has no theoretical pressure to motivate this view.⁵³

A detailed clarification of this issue requires a separate study and cannot be carried out here. Yet, there is no doubt in my mind that Spinoza is strongly committed to the view that God has

⁵² In his discussion of Spinoza in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel seems to doubt that Spinoza really meant that God has infinitely many attributes. For more recent presentation of this view, see Kline, “On the Infinity of Spinoza’s Attributes.” Here I concentrate on Bennett’s discussion since it has been the more influential.

⁵³ Bennett, *Study*, 75-78.

infinitely many attributes, and in the following I will respond very briefly to each of Bennett's arguments.

(1) Spinoza has a perfect explanation for the fact that one does not know *the nature* of any attribute other than Thought and Extension (though, as I will later show, we know that God must have infinitely many attributes other than Thought and Extension). According to Spinoza, the human mind is a complex idea (i.e., mode of Thought) whose object is nothing but a human body (a mode of Extension). One of the central and most famous doctrines of the *Ethics* asserts that there is a parallelism, or isomorphism, between the order of things and the order of ideas (E2p7). Things [res] for Spinoza are everything that is real, including bodies and ideas. We have just seen that Spinoza erects a causal and conceptual barrier among the attributes (E1p10). In Ep. 66, Spinoza relies on these two doctrines – Ideas-Things Parallelism and the barrier among the attributes – to prove not only that items belonging to different attributes cannot interact causally with each other, but also that mental representations of items belonging to different attributes cannot causally interact with each other. In other words, in addition to the barrier among the attributes introduced in E1p10, there is a *parallel barrier* in the attribute of Thought among representations (i.e., ideas) whose objects are items from different attributes. Thus, it is not only that my body cannot causally interact with a mode of the third attribute, but also that my mind (which is simply the idea of my body) cannot causally interact with any mind, or idea, which represents items of the third attribute. The *parallel barrier*, which is internal to Thought, does not allow any communication between ideas representing different attributes. Our minds (i.e., the ideas of our bodies) cannot communicate with the minds of items of the third attribute, and as a result these two classes of minds cannot know anything about each other, nor about the items each mind represents.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ For a detailed presentation of this issue, see Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, Chapter Four.

(2) There are clear philosophical and theological traditions that ascribe infinitely many attributes to God. In fact, once one rejects negative theology (and its rejection of the ascription of *any* attributes to God), the view of God as having infinitely many attributes becomes the most plausible option, since it is much more fitting for God to have infinitely many attributes than to have any limited number. One philosopher who ascribes to God infinitely many attributes is the late fourteenth century Jewish philosopher, Hasdai Crescas (1340-1410), who developed this view as part of his defense of actual infinity and his critique of Aristotle’s concept of infinity.⁵⁵ Spinoza clearly knew Crescas’ views quite well, since he cites him approvingly in the course of his discussion of infinity in Ep. 12. Another philosopher who seems to ascribe to God infinitely many attributes (and with whom Spinoza was somewhat familiar) is none other than Descartes, who claims that God has “countless” attributes that are unknown to us.⁵⁶

(3) Spinoza has strong theoretical pressure to claim that God has infinitely many attributes. In E1p9 Spinoza argues: “The more reality or being [*esse*] each thing has, the more attributes belong to it.” The demonstration of this important proposition is shockingly brief: “This is evident from E1d4” i.e., the definition of attribute. Yet, in the scholium of the following proposition (E1p10s), Spinoza provides a detailed explanation of his reasons for defining God as having infinite attributes:

So it is far from absurd to attribute many attributes to one substance. Indeed, nothing in nature is clearer than that each being must be conceived under some attribute, and *the more reality, or being [realitas aut esse] it has, the more it has attributes* which express necessity, *or* eternity, and infinity. And consequently there is also nothing clearer than

⁵⁵ Crescas, *Or Ha-Shem [Light of the Lord]*, Book I, iii 3 (page 106 in Fisher’s edition). For a discussion of this text and the Kabbalistic tradition, which ascribes infinitely attributes to God, see Harvey, *Rabbi Hasdai Crescas*, 94.

⁵⁶ AT III 394 | CSMK 185.

that *a being absolutely infinite must be defined (as we taught in D6) as a being that consists of infinite attributes*, each of which expresses a certain eternal and infinite essence. (Italics added)

This passage is in fact a reformulation of a very similar statement Spinoza makes in Letter 9:

But you say that I have not demonstrated that a substance (or being [*sive ens*]) can have more attributes than one. Perhaps you have neglected to pay attention to my demonstrations. For I have used two: first, that nothing is more evident to us than that we conceive each being under some attribute, and that *the more reality or being [plus realitatis aut esse] a being has the more attributes must be attributed to it; so a being absolutely infinite must be defined*, etc.; second, and the one I judge best, is that the more attributes I attribute to a being the more I am compelled to attribute existence to it;⁵⁷ that is, the more I conceive it as true. It would be quite the contrary if I had feigned a Chimera, or something like that (IV/44/34-45/25).

In both passages Spinoza is responding to the Cartesians, who wonder how can a substance have more than one principal attribute, and in both texts Spinoza stresses that not only does God have more than one attribute, but in fact he has *infinitely* many attributes. The underlying logic of both passages is that the quantity of attributes a thing has corresponds to the thing's degree of reality or being [*esse*]. Nothingness, or a Chimera, has no attributes. Finite things, having a finite degree of being, have a finite quantity of attributes. An infinite being must have infinite attributes. These passages make no sense under Bennett's reading, since if God were to have only two attributes, he would have the same quantity of attributes (i.e., two) and hence *the same degree of reality or being* as a

⁵⁷ Notice that for Spinoza it is only *reality*, and not *existence*, which is said to come in degrees. Existence is binary: either a thing exists or it does not. According to Ep. 9, we are "more compelled to attribute" existence to a thing the more attributes we attribute to it, but we do not attribute more existence.

finite thing, like a human being. Yet, Spinoza stresses time and again that God's and man's being [esse] and manner of existence are utterly different.⁵⁸ Thus, given the huge gap between the reality or being of God and the reality or being of modes, there must be a similar gap between the quantity of attributes each has.

Apart from the theoretical considerations pointed out above, there are numerous texts, both in the *Ethics* and outside it, in which Spinoza explains and proves various points regarding the unknown attributes. Consider, for example, Spinoza's claim in Ep. 56 that we do not know "the greater part of God's attributes" (IV/261/13). In light of these theoretical and textual considerations, the view that Spinoza's God has only the two attributes of Extension and Thought is hardly defensible.⁵⁹

We turn now to the final question in this part.

(ii) *If an attribute really constitutes the essence of substance, why does Spinoza refer to the intellect at all in his definition of attribute?* - We have seen that the attributes cannot be parts of God or of God's essence, but we have not yet explained precisely how the attributes relate to God, the infinite substance. To address this key issue, we should return to a notion we have already encountered – a *distinction of reason*. In one of his earliest works, the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Spinoza argues:

That God's Attributes are distinguished only by reason

And from this we can now clearly conclude that all the distinctions we make between the attributes of God are only distinctions of reason—the attributes are not really distinguished from one another. Understand such distinctions of reason as I have just

⁵⁸ See, for example, E2a1, E2p10 and Ep. 12 (IV/54/33).

⁵⁹ For further discussion of the Two Attributes interpretation, see Ariew, "The Infinite in Spinoza's Philosophy."

mentioned, which are recognized from the fact that *such* a substance cannot exist without *that* attribute. So we conclude that God is a most simple being. (I/259/3-8)

These claims of Spinoza's seem consistent with Descartes' view of a distinction of reason as obtaining either between a substance and its attributes or between two attributes of the same substance (*Principles* 1 62). Yet, in the *Ethics*, Spinoza's view on the nature of the distinction between substance and attribute appears more complicated. The relevant passage appears in a scholium to one of most important propositions of the *Ethics*.

E1p10: Each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself.

Dem.: For an attribute is what the intellect perceives concerning a substance, as constituting its essence (by E1d4); so (by E1d3) it must be conceived through itself, q.e.d.

The main point of the proposition is to establish that each attribute, like the substance, must be conceived through itself, because an attribute is what the intellect perceives as constituting a substance's essence. Now comes the scholium:

From these propositions it is evident that although two attributes *may be conceived to be really distinct* [*realiter distincta concipiantur*] (i.e., one may be conceived without the aid of the other), we still cannot infer from that that they constitute two beings, or two different substances [*duo entia, sive duas diversas substantias constituere*]. For it is of the nature of a substance that each of its attributes is conceived through itself, since all the attributes it has have always been in it together, and one could not be produced by another, but each expresses the reality, or being of substance. (Italics added)

Some commentators read this passage as stating that there is a *real distinction* between the attributes.⁶⁰ A *real distinction* [*distinctio realis*], in medieval and early modern philosophy, is a distinction between two things, usually substances,⁶¹ which can mutually exist without each other.⁶² In the *Principles*, Descartes suggests a *sign* that can tell us when two substances are really distinct:

We can perceive that two substances are really distinct simply from the fact that we can clearly and distinctly understand one apart from the other.⁶³

Oddly enough, in E1p10s, Spinoza seems to say that while the Cartesian sign for the presence of a real distinction between the attributes obtains (i.e., the attributes may be conceived without each other), we still cannot infer from that sign that the attributes really constitute two different substances. In fact, the phrase in the first sentence of the passage, “may be conceived as really distinct,” is quite ambiguous, meaning either a distinction of reason (a distinction related to our conception) or a real distinction. It is clear, however, that the passage *cannot* state that the distinction at stake is a real distinction, because if this were the case, the whole point of the demonstration of E1p10 would be completely undermined. Were a substance really distinct from its attribute, we could not infer the self-conceivability of the attributes from the self-conceivability of substance,

⁶⁰ See Shein, “Spinoza’s Theory of the Attributes”, § 1.3. Eventually, Shein endorses a more nuanced view of the distinction between the substance and its attributes.

⁶¹ Sometimes, detachable accidents are also considered really distinct from each other and from their substratum.

⁶² See, for example, Spinoza’s definition of real distinction in his *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy*: “Two substances are said to be really distinct when each of them can exist without the other” (DPP1d10).

⁶³ *Principles of Philosophy* I 60. On real distinction in Descartes and the scholastics, see Gilson, *Index Scholastico-Cartesian*, 88-9.

since things that are really distinct and independent from each other may well have different qualities.

Thus, we are left with the position already stated in Spinoza's early work, the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, according to which there is only a distinction of reason between the substance and its attributes. But does this position commit Spinoza to the view that the distinction between the attributes is generated *merely* by reason (or the intellect), and has no corresponding element in reality? Not necessarily. Consider the following passage from a letter by Descartes to an anonymous addressee. Descartes explains his understanding of distinction of reason:

In article 60 of Part One of my *Principles of Philosophy* where I discuss it explicitly, I call it a distinction of reason – that is, distinction made by *reasoned reason* (*ratiocinatae*). I do not recognize any distinction made by *reasoning reason* (*rationicantis*), that is, one which has no foundation in reality – because we cannot have any thought without a foundation; and consequently in that article, I did not add the term *ratiocinatae*.⁶⁴

Descartes' use of the scholastic sub-division of the distinction of reason into *reasoning reason* and *reasoned reason* makes clear that, for him, a distinction of reason is not reason's invention, but rather the reflection of an element that obtains in reality as well. I believe that the same is true for Spinoza: the distinction between the substance and its attributes is a distinction made by *reasoned reason*, or the intellect,⁶⁵ and it has a foundation in reality. Spinoza never mentions the subdivision of the distinction of reason, yet it is highly likely that he was familiar with this division, which not only appears in Descartes and Suarez, but is also elaborated in great detail in the most popular and influential seventeenth century Dutch textbook of logic, Franco Burgerdijk's *Institutionum logicarum*

⁶⁴ CSMK 280 | AT IV 349-50. I altered the translation slightly, replacing 'conceptual distinction' with 'distinction of reason.' Both are translations of *distinctio rationis*.

⁶⁵ Spinoza frequently equates intellect and reason. See, for example, E4app4 (267/2).

libri duo (1626), which appeared in numerous editions during the century following its first publication.⁶⁶ A *distinction of reasoning reason* is a distinction that “has no foundation in reality and arises exclusively from the reflection and activity of the intellect.”⁶⁷ The *sign* of a distinction of reasoning reason is simple identity statement, such as “Peter is Peter.”⁶⁸ In this case, the intellect generates a diversity that has no foundation in reality. On the other hand, a *distinction of reasoned reason* “arises not entirely from the sheer operation of the intellect, but from the occasion offered by the thing itself on which the mind is reflecting.”⁶⁹ This is a distinction in which “one and the same thing is represented by different concepts [*una eademque res obijcitur conceptibus dissimilibus*].”⁷⁰

I believe it is clear that the distinction between Spinoza’s substance and its attributes cannot be a distinction of reasoning reason, since, first, the attributes are radically different concepts (and thus “the thinking substance is the extended substance” is not a trivial identity statement), and second, as we have seen, the attributes cannot be a complete invention of the intellect. But if it is a distinction of reasoned reason,⁷¹ what is the foundation in the substance itself that is merely

⁶⁶ On Burgersdijk’s *Institutiones* and its wide circulation, see J.B.M. van Rijen, “Burgersdijk: Logician or Textbook Writer?” For Suarez’s discussion of reasoning and reasoned reason, see *Metaphysical Disputations VII: On the Various Kinds of Distinctions*, 18-9.

⁶⁷ Suarez, *Metaphysical Disputations VII: On the Various Kinds of Distinctions*, 18. Cf. Burgersdijk, *Institutiones*, 91.

⁶⁸ Burgersdijk, *Institutiones*, 91.

⁶⁹ Suarez, *Metaphysical Disputations VII: On the Various Kinds of Distinctions*, 18

⁷⁰ Burgersdijk, *Institutiones*, 91.

⁷¹ The suggestion that the intellect in E1d4 functions as reasoned reason can also explain why Spinoza uses ‘*percipere*’ (rather than ‘*concipere*’), indicating a certain passivity on the side of the intellect. The intellect in E1d4 is not active in the sense that it does not generate a distinction that has no foundation in reality. In other words, it is constrained by the nature of its object. See note 50 above.

discerned by the intellect? According to Suarez, reasoned reason conceives the various *aspects* of one and the same thing.⁷² This suggestion could provide a good explanation for Spinoza's understanding of substance and attributes. Substance, in reality, has infinitely many aspects that are each infinite and independent of each other. These are aspects of one and the same indivisible and infinite entity. God is substance consisting [*constantem*] of infinite aspects (E1d6), but these aspects are not parts of God.⁷³ The intellect merely conceives these infinitely many aspects, or attributes, of the same entity: God.⁷⁴

There are many elements in Spinoza's account of the attributes that need further elaboration.⁷⁵ We have discussed neither the nature of the two attributes known by the human mind, Thought and Extension, nor Spinoza's rather problematic proof that Extension and Thought are attributes (E2p1 & E2p2). Nor did we discuss the important question of what God's essence is,

⁷² Suarez, *Metaphysical Disputations VII: On the Various Kinds of Distinctions*, 19.

⁷³ Similarly, Spinoza's claim in E2p13c that "man consists of mind and body [*hominem Mente, et Corpore constare*]" should be read as saying that mind and body are two aspects of one and the same thing, or one and the same thing conceived under different attributes (E2p7s). That "*constantem*" need not indicate a relation of proper part to its whole we can learn from E1p12d, where Spinoza discusses (and rejects) the possibility of a substance "consisting [*constare*]" of only *one* attribute.

⁷⁴ For further discussion of the attributes as aspects of one and the same thing, see Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance and Thought*, Ch. 5. Pollock also suggests that the attributes are aspects of the substance. See his *Spinoza*, 153.

⁷⁵ There is an intriguing element in Burgersdijk's account of distinctions of reason which I believe is closely related to Spinoza's understanding of substance and attribute, though I am still not sure precisely how. Burgersdijk notes that, for the scholastics, the term reason [*ratio*] or Logos refers to the commonality of intellect and the essence perceived by the intellect. The scholastics called the former 'reasoning reason' and the latter 'reasoned reason' (*Institutiones*, 91).

an essence having the infinite aspects of Extension and Thought.⁷⁶ Finally, we have not discussed the nature of the ‘expression [*exprimere*]’ relation that obtains between God’s essence and the attributes.⁷⁷ We will have to leave these questions for another occasion, but have made some significant progress in explaining Spinoza’s understanding of attribute. We now move to the third and final part on Spinoza’s concept of mode.

Part III: Modes

In the opening of the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines a mode:

E1d5: By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived [*Per modum intelligo substantiae affectiones, sive id, quod in alio est, per quod etiam concipitur*].

A mode is an affection (i.e., quality), which depends on its substance both for its existence (it is “in another”), and for its conceivability (it is “conceived through another”). The first proposition of part one of the *Ethics* states this dependence in terms of priority:

E1p1: A substance is prior in nature to its affections [*Substantia prior est natura suis affectionibus*].

Spinoza’s concept of mode, like his understanding of substance and attribute, went through a few transformations. We have seen that, for Descartes, a mode is a changeable, specific (i.e., less general

⁷⁶ A common view takes the essence of Spinoza’s God to be power [*potentia*]. This view is particularly popular in contemporary French Spinoza scholarship under the influence of Deleuze’s book, *Expressionism in Philosophy*. For an alternative view according to which God’s essence is pure existence or eternity [*aeternitas*], see Melamed, “Spinoza’s Deification of Existence.”

⁷⁷ An account of Spinoza’s understanding of expression is still a desideratum. While the term is widely used, I am not aware of any good account of this central notion.

than attribute), property.⁷⁸ In the early drafts of the *Ethics*, Spinoza uses the terms ‘mode’ and ‘accident [*accidens*]’ interchangeably:

By Modification, or Accident, [I understand] what is in another and is conceived through what it is in. From this it is clear that:

Substance is by nature prior to its Accidents, for without it, they can neither be nor be conceived.⁷⁹

This passage appears in a 1661 letter. Shortly afterwards, Spinoza stops using the terminology of accident, since a mode necessarily depends on the substance in which it inheres while an accident does not.⁸⁰ The strict dependence of modes on their substances is a crucial feature for Spinoza. Indeed, just a few years later, Spinoza hesitates as to whether ‘mode’ deserves a separate definition of its own, or whether to include it in the definition of substance.⁸¹

In the final version of the *Ethics*, Spinoza distinguishes between two realms: *natura naturans* (roughly, naturing nature) and *natura naturata* (“natured nature”). The former is the realm of substance and attributes; the latter is that of modes. Spinoza characterizes each as follows:

Before I proceed further, I wish to explain here—or rather to advise [the reader] what we must understand by *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. For from the preceding I think it is already established that by *Natura naturans* we must understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, *or* such attributes of substance as express an

⁷⁸ See the beginning of Part II above.

⁷⁹ Letter 4 (IV/13/34-14/2).

⁸⁰ See I/237/2-5. On the rise and fall of “real accidents” (accident that are not dependent on their substance), see Normore, “Accidents and Modes.” For Spinoza’s critique of real accidents, see CM II, I (I/249/33).

⁸¹ See Letter 12, IV/54/9-10.

eternal and infinite essence, i.e. (by P14C1 and P17C2), God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause.

But by *Natura naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, *or* from any of God's attributes, i.e., all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God (E1p29s).

The attributes and the substance belong to *natura naturans* since they are in themselves and conceived through themselves. Substance and attributes are also causally self-determined, and for that reason they are free, or they are “God insofar [*quatenus*] as he is considered as a free cause.”⁸² But why does Spinoza qualify this last claim with a *quatenus*? Can God be considered a non-free cause? In a sense, yes. God’s modes are not self-determined, since they follow from God’s nature (i.e., God’s essence) or from the attributes (see E1p16 and E1p21). Spinoza also stresses that things which belong to *natura naturata* (i.e, modes), are dependent upon *natura naturans* – they cannot be or be conceived without *natura naturans*.

Spinoza draws another crucial distinction between the substance and modes in one of his most important letters, Ep. 12, sometimes called “The Letter on the Infinite.” In this letter, Spinoza argues that the existence of modes is entirely different from the existence of substance:

[W]e conceive the existence of Substance to be entirely different from the existence of Modes.

The difference between Eternity and Duration arises from this. For it is only of Modes that

⁸² See Spinoza’s definition of freedom: “That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone” (E1d7), and E1p17c2: “God alone is a free cause.”

we can explicate⁸³ existence [*existentiam explicare possumus*] by Duration. But [we can explicate the existence] of Substance by Eternity, i.e., the infinite enjoyment of existing, *or* (in bad Latin) of being (G IV/54/33-55/3).

Strictly speaking, eternity is the existence of substance or of the thing whose essence and existence are one and the same (E1p20), while duration is the existence of modes or things whose existence is different from their essence.⁸⁴ There are, however, two distinct senses in which Spinoza allows even modes to be eternal, but we cannot address this delicate issue here.⁸⁵

After proving in E1p14 that God is the only substance, Spinoza argues in E1p15 that all things are *in* God:

Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be conceived without God [*Quicquid est, in Deo est, et nihil sine Deo esse, neque concipi potest*].

This claim earned Spinoza the title of a pantheist, for indeed he holds that all things, including ourselves and the objects of our daily experience, are in God. Notice, however, that Spinoza never claims that anything is *part of* God. Spinoza's substance and attributes are strictly indivisible (E1p12 & E1p13), and for him the part-whole relation obtains only between modes.⁸⁶ Spinoza takes parts

⁸³ Here, I changed Curley's translation from "explain" to "explicate". Both are possible translations of "*explicare*", but I do not think that in this case existence is explained by the modes. Rather, Duration and Eternity are two ways to explicate, or spell out, existence.

⁸⁴ A similar formulation appears in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* in a paragraph whose title is "What eternity is; What duration is": "From our earlier division of being into being whose essence involves existence and being whose essence involves only possible existence, there arises the distinction between eternity and duration" (CM I iv | I/244/13-15).

⁸⁵ See Melamed, "Spinoza's Deification of Existence," §3.3.

⁸⁶ KV I/26/8-16.

to be prior to their whole,⁸⁷ and as a result he cannot allow for anything to be part of the substance or attributes – in such a case, the thing would be prior to the substance, which is impossible (per E1d3). Instead of saying that we are parts of God (and thus making us prior to God), he argues that we are modes of God (and thus posterior to and dependent upon God).⁸⁸ Thus, we should note that Spinoza’s pantheism is a substance-mode pantheism and not a whole-part pantheism.⁸⁹

The claim that human beings, mountains, giraffes and tables are all simply modes of God is clearly a bold and non-trivial claim. Indeed, many of Spinoza’s cotemporaries found the claim utterly outrageous. Pierre Bayle writes in his famous entry on Spinoza:

It is the most absurd and momentous hypothesis that can be imagined, and the most contrary to the most evident notions our mind.⁹⁰

Bayle’s complaints found an ear in an important work of contemporary Spinoza scholarship. In his 1969 book, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, Edwin Curley argues that considerations of interpretive charity should make us avoid ascribing to Spinoza this strongly counterintuitive view according to which Spinoza understands ‘mode’ in the traditional sense of the word, and thus holds that all things are qualities of God:

Spinoza’s modes are, prima facie, of the wrong logical type to be related to substance in the same way Descartes’ modes are related to the substance, for they are particular

⁸⁷ CM (I/258/16-19); KV (I/30/10); Let. 35 (S 203); E1p12d (55/12-3)

⁸⁸ Notice that for Aristotle, too, an accident is considered that which is in a substance but not as its part. See Aristotle, *Categories* 3a32.

⁸⁹ For further discussion of the distinction between these two kinds of pantheism, see Melamed, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics of Substance”, 63-5.

⁹⁰ Bayle, *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, “Spinoza”, vol. 5, 208.

things (E1p25c), *not qualities*. And it is difficult to know what it would mean to say that particular things inhere in substance. When qualities are said to inhere in substance, this may be viewed as a way of saying that they are predicated of it. What it would mean to say that one thing is predicated of another is a mystery that needs solving.⁹¹

In order to avoid ascribing to Spinoza the category mistake of considering things as qualities, Curley argues that we should understand the substance-mode relation in Spinoza as nothing but a causal relation.⁹² According to Curley, Spinoza does not consider finite things as qualities of God, but rather as effects of God (a view which agrees with most traditional theologies). One implication of Curley's view is that Spinoza is not really a pantheist, since finite things do not inhere in God, but rather are effects caused by God.⁹³

Curley's reading is an exciting and powerful challenge to the standard interpretation of the substance-mode relation. Yet, over the past four decades, it has been subjected to close scrutiny that pointed out deep and significant problems in his interpretation. In the following I will summarize very briefly some of the most important problems noted by Curley's critics.⁹⁴ (i) Spinoza defines modes as "the affections of substance" (E1d5). The Latin '*affectio*' denotes a state or quality. Had Spinoza thought that modes were merely caused by the substance, the wording of his definition of mode would be highly misleading. (ii) In several places in the *Ethics*, Spinoza refers to modes as

⁹¹ *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 18 (Italics added). Cf. Curley's *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 31

⁹² "[T]he relation of mode to substance is a relation of causal dependence, which is unlike the relation of predicate and subject," Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 40. Cf. Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 31.

⁹³ In fact, Bayle had already suggested the outline of Curley's revisionary reading of Spinoza in a remark he added to the second edition of his *Dictionary*. See Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Spinoza", Remark DD, vol. 5, 220-1.

⁹⁴ For detailed critiques of Curley's reading, see Carriero, "On the Relationship between Substance and Mode," and Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance".

God insofar [*quatenus*] as he is modified by a finite mode.⁹⁵ Thus, there is a sense in which modes are God, but according to Curley's reading, God is merely the cause of modes, and thus there is no reason to call modes God in any sense. (iii) According to Curley's reading, substance is *defined* as self-caused (since, for Curley, being '*in se*' is nothing but being self-caused). Yet, in E1p7 Spinoza *proves* that substance is self-caused. It would be very odd for a careful writer like Spinoza to attempt to prove his definitions. (iv) For Spinoza, we have knowledge by having ideas, and ideas are modes (E2a3). According to Curley, God merely causes ideas, but ideas are not states inhering in God. Thus, according to this reading, God himself has no ideas, i.e., he lacks any knowledge. Yet, Spinoza clearly ascribes knowledge, and in fact omniscience, to God (E2p3). (v) In November 1676, Leibniz met Spinoza for a long conversation. According to Leibniz' notes, Spinoza entertained a "strange metaphysics" according to which creatures are only "modes or accidents of God."⁹⁶ Had Spinoza thought that modes were merely effects of God, why would he mislead Leibniz to believe that he had a "strange metaphysics"? (vi) It is not at all clear that Curley's interpretation is as charitable as it claims to be. If Spinoza merely holds that God is the *cause* of modes, then much of the excitement about, and interest in, Spinoza's philosophy would seem to be unjustified. Holding that God is the cause of all things is a very standard theological view, and ascribing this view to Spinoza makes his philosophy much *less* interesting and challenging. (vii) Curley's claim that things and qualities belong to distinct logical types that cannot, and should not, be mixed was not widely

⁹⁵ See, for example, E1p28d, E2p9 and E4p4d.

⁹⁶ *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, I, p. 118. For a detailed presentation of arguments (ii)-(v), see Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance", 31-43.

accepted in medieval and early modern philosophy, nor is there a consensus on this issue in contemporary metaphysics.⁹⁷

In addition to the arguments summarized above, there is important textual evidence showing that, for Spinoza, modes are not only qualities or properties, but in fact a very specific kind of property. For Spinoza, modes are God's *propria*, i.e., properties, which follow necessarily from the essence of a thing. In order to establish this point we need to examine E1p16 closely.

E1p16: 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.) [*Ex necessitate divinae naturae infinita infinitis modis (hoc est, omnia, quae sub intellectum infinitum cadere possunt) sequi debent*].

Dem.: This Proposition must be plain to anyone, provided he attends to the fact that the intellect infers from the given definition of any thing a number of *properties* [*plures proprietates*] 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.... (Emphasis added)

The key questions for our inquiry concern the character of the *properties*, which, according to the demonstration, the intellect infers from the *definition* of any thing, and how this inference relates to the flow of the infinite things in infinite ways from God's essence. Before we approach these questions, let me briefly clarify the proposition itself. On a first reading, this proposition may seem to claim that the *infinita infinitis modis*, which follow from the necessity of God's nature, are the infinite attributes. However, this cannot be the case. According to E1p29s, what "follows

⁹⁷ For a discussion of the relativity of the substance-accident division in medieval philosophy, see Normore, "Accidents and Modes", 677. For discussion of the distinction between things and qualities in early modern and contemporary metaphysics, see Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance," 71-4.

from the necessity of God's nature" is *Natura naturata* (i.e., the modes), while the substance and attributes are *Natura naturans* (i.e., God's essence). The attributes do not *follow* from God's nature or essence; they *are* God's nature. Hence, E1p16 must be read as dealing with the infinite infinity of *modes* that follow from God's essence (since only modes follow from God's essence or nature).

I turn now to the question of the 'properties' that follow from "the given definition of any thing" in E1p16d. In order to understand the demonstration we must first clarify Spinoza's criteria for the correctness of a definition. A detailed discussion of the issue appears in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, in which Spinoza stipulates:

To be called perfect, a definition will have to explain the inmost essence of the thing [*intimam essentiam rei*], and to take care not to use certain *propria* in its place (TdIE § 95 | II/34/29-31).

Indeed, Spinoza stresses in several places that a precise definition must specify only the essence of the thing defined.⁹⁸ But what are the *propria* that Spinoza warns us not to confuse with the essence of the thing? Here, Spinoza follows a common Scholastic (ultimately Aristotelian), threefold distinction among: qualities which make the thing what it is (the qualities which constitute the *essence* of the thing); qualities which necessarily *follow from* the essence of the thing, but do not constitute the essence itself (the *propria*); and qualities which are at least partly caused by a source external to the thing (termed 'accidents' or 'extraneous accidents').⁹⁹ Though a thing necessarily has both its essence and its *propria*, it is only the former that provides us with an explanation of the nature of the thing, and hence should be included in the definition. Spinoza explains that it is important for the definition to capture the essence of the thing rather than its *propria*, "because the properties of things [*proprietates rerum*] are not understood so long as their

⁹⁸ See Ep. 8 (IV/42/30) and Ep. 34.

⁹⁹ 'Extraneous accident' is the term Aquinas uses to designate these qualities (see Carriero, "Spinoza's view on Necessity", p. 69). Garrett simply uses 'accidents' instead (see Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism," 201).

essences are not known” (TdIE §95| II/35/6-7). Notice that in this passage the word ‘*proprietates*’ has the technical sense of *propria*, rather than properties in general. In fact, in his discussion of definition in sections 95-97 of the TdIE, Spinoza explicitly uses the term ‘*propria*’ only once (II/34/30). In all other cases (35/4, 35/6, 35/18, and 36/1), he uses ‘*proprietates*’ (properties), but in the narrow sense of *propria*, rather than properties in general.

Following the stipulation that a perfect definition should explain the essence and not the *propria* of the thing defined, Spinoza provides an example of the distinction between essence and *propria*.¹⁰⁰ He proceeds to distinguish the requirements for the perfect definition of a created thing from the requirements for the perfect definition of an uncreated thing. However, Spinoza stipulates that in *both* cases, “all the thing’s properties” [*omnes proprietates rei*] must be inferred [*concludantur*] from the definition, insofar as the definition states the essence.¹⁰¹

Let us return now to E1p16 and its demonstration. Since the definition of a thing states the essence or nature of a thing, it is clear that what follows from God’s *essence* in E1p16 is what the intellect infers [*concludit*] from the *definition* of God in E1p16d. The ‘properties’ in E1p16d cannot be God’s attributes, since the latter *constitute* God’s essence rather than follow from it. What follows from God’s essence, or what the intellect infers from the definition of God are only the entities belonging to *Natura naturata*, i.e. the modes, which in E1p16d Spinoza explicitly terms ‘properties’ [*proprietates*]. Properties that follow necessarily from the essence of a thing *must* be understood in the technical sense of *propria*. Indeed, modes stand in the same relation to God’s essence as the *propria* of a thing to the thing’s essence – they cannot be

¹⁰⁰ “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 [*proprietatem*] of it” (TdIE § 95| II/35/1-3).

¹⁰¹ TdIE § 96 (II/35/19), and § 97 (II/36/1).

understood without God's essence (E1d5), and according to E1p16, all modes follow (or can be deduced) from God's essence. In other words, Spinoza's modes *are* God's *propria*.¹⁰²

Before we conclude our discussion of modes, let me point out that Michael Della Rocca recently defended a view which has some crucial features in common with Curley's interpretation. Unlike Curley, Della Rocca believes that modes inhere in, and are states of, the substance.¹⁰³ Yet, Della Rocca argues that the inherence relation (i.e., the '*in alio*' relation between modes and the substance) and the causal relation are strictly identical.¹⁰⁴ The ensuing view is a bold and odd notion of inherence that allows for one mode to inhere in more than one subject (just as an effect can be caused by more than one cause), and also allows for modes to inhere in subjects that do not exist

¹⁰² Spinoza uses 'properties' in the technical sense of *propria* in at least three other places in the *Ethics* (E1app [II/77/22], E3defAff6e [II/192/24], and E3defAff22e), as well as in the fourth chapter of the TTP [III/60/9] and in Letter 60. It is also likely that E2d3 uses '*proprietates*' in the technical sense. Among modern translations of the *Ethics*, Jakob Klatzkin's extraordinary Hebrew translation (1923) stands out in its explicit and systematic detection of the technical use of '*proprietates*.' Klatzkin translates '*proprietates*' in E1p16d (and in the other texts mentioned above) with '*Segulot*,' which is the technical medieval Hebrew term for *propria* (I am indebted to Zeev Harvey for pointing this out to me). For reference to medieval Hebrew uses of this notion, see Klatzkin's *Thesaurus philosophicus linguae Hebraicae et veteris recentioris* (1928), 91-2. See also Curley's helpful discussion of *proprium* in the glossary to his translation (Spinoza, *Collected Works I*, 652), and Garrett, "Spinoza's *conatus* Argument, p. 156-7, n. 24). My account of E1p16d is indebted to Garrett's reading of this crucial text in his "Spinoza's Necessitarianism" and "Spinoza's *conatus* Argument".

¹⁰³ Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 62-4.

¹⁰⁴ Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 65-9.

simultaneously (just as an effect can be caused by a non-simultaneous cause).¹⁰⁵ Some of the major problems with this interpretation have been identified in recent literature.

Finally, let me point out that Spinoza introduces a new philosophical notion that could hardly be found among his predecessors: *an infinite mode*. The concept of infinite modes appears already in the very early works of Spinoza, yet it seems not to be ever fully worked out.¹⁰⁶ The main discussion of the infinite modes in the *Ethics* is in E1p21 to E1p23. The infinite modes, like the attributes, are infinite, though unlike the attributes, they are *divisible*. Finite modes are parts of the infinite modes. Thus, for example, the human mind (a finite mode) is part of God's infinite intellect (an infinite mode) (E2p11c). The infinite modes follow from the attributes (E1p21), and their existence is not limited in time.¹⁰⁷ Within each attribute, each infinite mode brings about another single infinite mode. Thus, within each attribute, infinite modes are distinguished by the degree of their distance (i.e., number of intermediaries) from the attribute. The more distant an infinite mode is from its attribute, the less perfect it is.¹⁰⁸ An infinite mode cannot be the cause of a finite mode (E1p22). Spinoza provides several examples of infinite modes in Ep. 64 ("God's absolutely infinite intellect" in the attribute of thought; "motion and rest" and "the face of the whole universe" in the

¹⁰⁵ In my recent article - "Inherence, Causation, and Conceivability in Spinoza" – I point out some of the major problems with this interpretation

¹⁰⁶ See KV KV I ii (I/33/12), II v (I/64/9-14).

¹⁰⁷ According to E1p21 the infinite modes are eternal. Whether this eternity is strictly atemporal or merely indicates an everlasting existence in all times is a subject of scholarly debate.

¹⁰⁸ See E11pp G II/80/15-19.

attribute of extension), yet the precise nature of these enigmatic entities, their role in Spinoza's system, and their relation to the finite modes are subject to scholarly debate.¹⁰⁹

4. Conclusion.

In this article we have studied three of the most basic concepts of Spinoza's metaphysics: substance, attributes, and modes. We traced some of the historical sources of Spinoza's understanding of these concepts and followed their development in Spinoza's works. We also discussed some of the major scholarly debates about Spinoza's understanding and use of these concepts and identified problems with some of the interpretations surveyed. Obviously, this was merely a cursory sketch of the landscape, but my hope is that by now, you, the reader, are sufficiently acquainted with these building blocks of Spinoza's philosophy to engage and experiment by yourself. Welcome to Benedict's Lego.

¹⁰⁹ For further discussion of the infinite modes, see Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, 309-324, Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 54-74, Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 70-74, and Schmaltz, "Spinoza's Mediate Infinite Mode."

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