

Oxford Handbooks Online

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

Martin Lin

The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza

Edited by Michael Della Rocca

Print Publication Date: Oct 2017

Subject: Philosophy, History of Western Philosophy (Post-Classical), Metaphysics

Online Publication Date: Dec 2013 DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195335828.013.011

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter investigates Spinoza's commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason (the PSR) and its role in his system. What sorts of things does Spinoza think require a cause or explanation? What counts, for him, as a cause or explanation? The PSR is often associated with doctrines such as necessitarianism, the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, the Principle of Plenitude, and the existence of God. Some commentators have alleged that Spinoza's commitment to the PSR leads him to accept all of these doctrines. This paper examines each of these doctrines as they pertain to Spinoza's commitment to the PSR and his metaphysics more generally.

Keywords: Sufficient Reason, necessitarianism, Identity of Indiscernibles, metaphysics, cause, explanation

Spinoza is a metaphysical rationalist. He believes that everything has an explanation.¹ No aspect of the world is fundamentally unintelligible or incomprehensible. There is nothing brute. These claims each express what is often called the Principle of Sufficient Reason (the PSR hereafter). This does not mean that Spinoza thinks that human beings do or even could possess an explanation of everything. He allows that our cognitive capacities are limited. Thus there are certain things that we can never know or understand. His conviction is, rather, that a perfect intellect could (indeed, does) possess such explanations. This conviction is central to Spinoza's philosophy and can be seen as one of the fixed points around which his system revolves.

The PSR has been formulated in different ways by different philosophers: everything has an explanation, everything has a cause or reason, there are no brute facts, and so forth. Each of these statements of the PSR harbors ambiguity. For example, the statement of anything that might be justly called a version of the PSR must be universally quantified—that is, it must be a claim about *everything*. After all, only a very committed anti-rationalist would deny that *something* has an explanation. But what is in the domain of the quantifier “everything?” Most—and some would say all—uses of the universal

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

quantifier are restricted, at least implicitly. Is Spinoza's understanding of the PSR restricted in some way, and if so, to what? Is it restricted to facts, events, substances, contingent truths, necessary truths—all of these and more?

There is also a question as to what counts as an explanation. Although it is widely agreed that explanation is one of the principal aims of inquiry, there is little agreement (p. 134) as to how to analyze explanation. Is something explained when we have an account that specifies its causes, unifies it with diverse phenomena, subsumes it under law, or something else? The words that Spinoza most frequently uses to express something like the concept of explanation are "*ratio*" and "*causa*." To fully understand Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism, we need to know how Spinoza understands those terms.

I would also like to investigate the role of the PSR in Spinoza's system. The PSR is often thought to entail a number of other significant doctrines. For example, it is often thought to entail necessitarianism, the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, the necessary existence of God, and the Principle of Plenitude. Spinoza commits himself to each of these doctrines but, in some cases, the arguments that he gives for them do not clearly cite the PSR. Does Spinoza himself see them as connected to metaphysical rationalism? If so, how?

1. The PSR and the Axioms of the Ethics

The only explicit statement of the PSR in Spinoza's *Ethics* occurs in his argument for the necessary existence of God, given in E1p11d2, where he announces that there must be a cause or reason for the existence or nonexistence of a thing. If the PSR is one of Spinoza's core philosophical commitments, why is it stated only so late in the *Ethics*? Why is it absent from the axioms, which presumably describe the fundamental metaphysical principles as Spinoza understands them? And why does Spinoza only explicitly state it in arguing for the necessary existence of God? Seen from this perspective, one might conclude that, although Spinoza believes the PSR and used it in his arguments for the necessary existence of God, he did not think that any other philosophically interesting propositions could be established by appealing to it. What is more, it might appear that the version of the PSR that Spinoza believes is a very restricted one. He says only that the existence or the nonexistence of a thing requires a cause or reason. Does this mean that he thinks that only existential claims require explanations? All in all, Spinoza may appear, at first glance, to subscribe to only a very moderate version of metaphysical rationalism.

The answer to why the PSR is absent from the axioms is that it is, in fact, not absent from them. Despite appearances, nearly all of the axioms of Part I of the *Ethics* either express or serve to clarify Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism. Thus nearly every aspect of his philosophy that depends upon the axioms ipso facto depends upon the PSR. This is an important point because some of Spinoza's axioms can seem poorly motivated and even arbitrary. Seen in that light, it is natural to ask, what possible interest could the systematic working out of the consequences of such a bizarre and counterintuitive set of axioms hold? But they are not ill-motivated. Rather they directly reflect his metaphysical

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

rationalism. If they appear ill motivated, it is only because they are couched in Spinoza's somewhat idiosyncratic technical vocabulary, which may obscure their true significance. This being so, we must first discuss some of the key concepts of Spinoza's (p. 135) philosophy: causation, conception, and inherence. These are some of the primitive notions in terms of which the definitions of Part I of the *Ethics* are stated and, consequently, they themselves are never explicitly defined. Nevertheless, we can perhaps recover something like implicit definitions of them from his uses of them.

Conception and inherence together define the relationship that a substance bears to its modes. Causation is another important undefined notion in Spinoza's ethics and, as we shall see, it is importantly related to both conception and inherence. Let us begin by considering inherence. According to Spinoza, substances are things that are "in themselves" whereas modes are "in substances."² What does Spinoza mean by "in itself" and "in a substance?" To begin with, the relation "x is in y" is not one of spatial containment. For example, modes of thought are in thinking substance but they do not have a location in space.³ Rather, when Spinoza says that one thing is in another, he means that one thing *inheres* in another. Inherence, according to an influential tradition that originates with Aristotle, is the relation that a predicate or property bears to its subject.⁴ It is thus reasonable to assume that Spinoza means that modes inhere in substance in something like the way that a predicate or property inheres in a subject. This is confirmed by the fact that he says that modes are affections of substance, which suggests that they are something like the ways that a substance is.⁵ Additionally, "*modus*" is Latin for *way*. Modes are the ways that substance is. This further suggests an adjectival relation between modes and substance.

Spinoza further claims that substances are *conceived* through themselves and that modes are *conceived* through substances.⁶ Spinoza's claim is controversial if modes are properties or qualities of substances. Some might find it more natural to think that substances are conceived through the properties or qualities that describe them than to think that properties are conceived through the objects that they describe. For example, some might find it natural to think that we conceive of Socrates through the attributes that characterize him: he is short, ugly, wise, and the teacher of Plato.

Spinoza's reasons for claiming that modes are conceived through the substances in which they inhere are perhaps easier to appreciate when we understand the way in which modes can differ from what we would typically call a property. The notion of a mode is ambiguous in Spinoza. He sometimes speaks of modes as particular or singular things and sometimes as affections of a substance. Things and affections belong, one might suppose, to distinct ontological categories. If this is so, then no *thing* is an *affection* and vice versa. The appearance of ambiguity is heightened by the fact that Spinoza often defines "mode" as God insofar as he is affected by some mode. Such definitions would be puzzling, to say the least, if "mode" were not ambiguous. Compare this definition to "a property is a substance insofar as it is affected by some property." It is hard to make

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

(p. 136) sense of such statements without construing the reoccurring word as expressing different meanings with each occurrence.

I propose that we disambiguate the notion of a mode as follows. Modes understood as particular things are substance insofar as it is affected in some way. Modes understood as properties are the ways in which substance is affected. That is, “mode” has two senses: (1) God insofar as he is affected in some way and (2) a way in which God is affected.⁷ It is clear that these two are distinct. Consider a red rose. There is the rose itself insofar as it is red and then there is the redness of the rose. The rose insofar as it is red clearly cannot be identified with redness. The redness is exemplified by a particular but the rose insofar as it is red is not. The rose insofar as it is red is colored, but the redness is not. Singular things are God insofar as he is affected in some way. Thus Peter is God insofar as God Peter-izes, and Paul is God insofar as he Paul-izes. This notion of a mode is familiar. A dent is, for example, a tin can insofar as its surface is dented. A wrinkle is the carpet insofar as it is warped. A fist is a hand insofar as it is closed. Modes of God, on this understanding of the term, stand to God as dents, wrinkles, and fists stand to cans, carpets, and hands respectively. Thus there is nothing exotic about Spinoza’s conception of modes. What is innovative is Spinoza’s claim that all ordinary objects are modes of a single substance.

On this conception of a mode as a substance insofar as it is affected in some way, it is easier to understand why Spinoza thinks that modes must be conceived through the substance. Just as a smile, for example, must be conceived through the cat in which it inheres or a fist must be conceived through the hand in which it inheres, so too must all modes be conceived through the substance in which they inhere.

With respect to causation, Spinoza claims that substances are self-caused and that modes are caused by substances. This has several implications for the relationship between causation, conception, and inherence. First of all, Spinoza believes that causation and conception are coextensive.⁸ That is, for all x and all y , x is caused by y just in case x is conceived through y . What is it for one thing to be conceived through another? Spinoza is not as forthcoming on this topic as we might wish, but it is clear that he believes that for all x and all y , x is conceived through y just in case the concept of x involves the concept of y .⁹ Of course this raises the question of what it is for one concept to “involve” another. Spinoza never spells out an answer to this question either, but it appears that if one concept involves another then it is impossible to possess the first (p. 137) concept without also possessing the second. Spinoza also thinks that if the concept of x involves the concept of y then x is understood through y .¹⁰ Since, by E1a4, the concept of an effect involves the concept of its cause, effects are understood through their causes.

Second, Spinoza believes that inherence entails causation so that, for all x and all y , if x inheres in y , then y causes x .¹¹ That is, a substance is the cause of all of its affections or modes. By the equivalence of causation and conception, the modes of a substance must be understood through the substance in which they inhere and which is their cause.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

Now that we have some understanding of Spinoza's basic vocabulary, let us turn to the axioms of Part I. E1a1 states, "Whatever is, is in itself or in another." Because inherence entails causation, this entails that whatever is, is either self-caused or caused by another. This also means that whatever is, is understood through itself or understood through another. What this rules out is that there is something that is not understood or understandable. This clearly expresses a deep commitment to metaphysical rationalism and the intelligibility of everything. E1a1 thus states the PSR.

E1a2 states, "Whatever cannot be conceived through another, must be conceived through itself." This means that nothing is inconceivable, or, given Spinoza's understanding of conception, there is nothing that cannot be understood. By the equivalence of causation and conception, this also entails that everything has a cause. Nothing is unintelligible or uncaused. Once again, Spinoza lays his metaphysical rationalist cards on the table.

E1a3 says, "From a determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow." That causes necessitate their effects guarantees that causes provide sufficient reasons or explanations of their effects. That nothing happens or exists without a cause entails that everything has a *sufficient* reason or explanation.

E1a4 and E1a5, which read "The cognition of an effect involves and depends on cognition of its cause" and "Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, or the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other" respectively, do not themselves express Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism. However, they play an important role in establishing the relationship between causation, conception, and understanding, which in turn establishes the entailments from E1a1 and E1a3 to clear statements of metaphysical rationalism. It is on account of E1a4, which Spinoza interprets as meaning that the concept of the effect involves the concept of its cause, that causation is a necessary condition on conception. It is E1a5 that establishes that conception and understanding are coextensive—that is, x is conceived through y just in case x is understood through y . E1a4 and E1a5 together entail that causation and understanding are coextensive, that x causes y just in case y is understood through x .

(p. 138) E1a6 and E1a7, alone among the axioms of Part I, have no discernible relation to Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism. E1a6 says, "A true idea must agree with its object." It expresses his commitment to a correspondence theory of truth. E1a7 says, "If a thing can be conceived as not existing, its essence does not involve existence." This axiom is an instance of a more general principle that Spinoza clearly believes: if something can be accurately conceived as not- F , then F -ness does not belong to its essence. This connects essence to conception, causation, and understanding in ways that have interesting consequences for Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism, but it is possible to consistently believe this principle and deny the PSR. For example, many philosophers today believe that conceivability entails possibility, but few of them endorse the PSR.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

So we see, far from arriving late on the scene in E1p11d2, Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism is built into the very axiomatic structure of his *Ethics*. As Spinoza draws out the logical consequences of these axioms throughout the rest of Part I, he is articulating the doctrines to which his metaphysical rationalism commits him.¹²

We are also now in a position to start to answer some of the questions posed in the beginning of this paper. For example, we asked what is in the domain of the quantifier in the claim that everything has an explanation? All substances and modes have explanations. And apart from substances and modes, nothing else exists.¹³ So the domain includes substances and modes and nothing else. Does this mean that Spinoza denies the existence of the other entities often thought to be in the domain of the PSR, such as truths or events? It is not entirely clear. We can, however, say this much with confidence: if there are truths or events then they are either modes or substances. At first glance, it might seem natural to assume that modes and substances must belong to different ontological categories from truths and events. But, in fact, modes have many characteristics that facilitate an assimilation of truths and events to them. Consider truths first. Take some true statement p . It would not be implausible for Spinoza to claim that p is made true by God insofar as he is such that p . God insofar as he is such that p might strike some as a bizarre mode, but so long as we allow that being such that p is a way that God could be, there is no reason to suppose that no such mode exists. If this is so, then some modes are truthmakers.¹⁴ This suggestion is not to be confused with Curley's famous claim that, in Spinoza, modes are facts even though, on both of our interpretations, modes are truthmakers.¹⁵ As I have interpreted modes, they are not abstract and they can exist at specific times and places and so are dissimilar to facts in these respects.

(p. 139) We can further appreciate the difference between my interpretation and Curley's by noting that, on my interpretation, some modes might be events. Events and Spinozistic modes have much in common. Both are particulars, both are concrete, and both correspond to changes in a substance. So for example, a touchdown could be identified with God insofar as he is affected by a football player who scores a touchdown. A touchdown is clearly not a fact, so it is not the case, on my interpretation, that modes are facts.

I do not wish to suggest that Spinoza is committed to any of this, and I certainly do not mean to suggest that Spinoza carefully considered any of these issues. I merely wish to claim that if such questions were pressed on Spinoza, he could offer such answers without contradicting any of the metaphysical commitments that he does explicitly make.

2. The Identity of Indiscernibles

Moving forward from the axioms, we soon encounter a proposition that many have interpreted as expressing one of the alleged signature consequences of the PSR, the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles (the PII hereafter). In E1p5 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza seeks to establish that "[i]n nature there cannot be two or more substances of

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

the same nature or attribute.” This clearly bears at least some resemblance to the doctrine that Leibniz will later name “The Identity of Indiscernibles,” which says that x and y are numerically distinct just in case they are discernible—that is, different with respect to some pure intrinsic property. But it is far from clear that E1p5 and the PII say the same thing. First of all, as Leibniz understands the PII, no two things can be indiscernible in *any* qualitative intrinsic respect, not just in respect of attribute or essence. Second, Leibniz applies the PII to bodies and minds. Spinoza thinks that bodies and minds are modes, not substances. E1p5 is about substances. So E1p5 does not apply to bodies and minds. Third, Spinoza thinks that a substance can have more than one attribute but that no two substances can have the same attribute. This goes well beyond the Leibnizian doctrine. That doctrine merely states that any two things must differ in *some* respect, whereas Spinoza appears to say that any two substances must differ in *every* attribute. But these further doctrines that serve to distinguish Leibniz’s PII and E1p5 are introduced only after E1p5. Indeed, Spinoza argues for some of these later doctrines by way of E1p5, so the proper interpretation of E1p5 should not presuppose those doctrines. In any event, in this section, I shall simultaneously attempt to clarify E1p5’s relationship to the PSR and explore its relationship to the Leibnizian doctrine.

Let us begin by explicating Leibniz’s version of the PII since its connection to the PSR is explicit. Seeing how the PII is connected to the PSR in Leibniz’s thinking may help us to see if Spinoza is committed to the PII by virtue of his metaphysical rationalism. As I have said, Leibniz holds that any two objects differ with respect to their pure intrinsic properties. Intrinsic properties are properties that are not extrinsic. An extrinsic property is a property that is possessed only if some non-reflexive relation holds. For (p. 140) example, being a brother is an extrinsic property because possessing it entails that one is appropriately related to some other person.

A pure property can be understood in contrast to an impure property. An impure property is a property the instantiation of which entails the existence of a specific particular. For example, being fifty miles from Paris is impure since nothing has that property unless Paris itself exists. That Leibniz does not intend impure properties to be relevant to the individuation of substances is also clear from his rejection of cases where intrinsically alike substances differ with respect to their relations and relational properties on the grounds of the PII. If impure properties were allowed to individuate substances, then such cases would not violate the PII because the substances in question would differ with respect to their impure properties.

Not all pure properties are intrinsic, and not all extrinsic properties are impure. For example, being fifty miles from the capitol of the oldest nation state is both pure and extrinsic. Being identical to Socrates is both impure and intrinsic.

The restriction to pure intrinsic properties make sense given Leibniz’s main argument for the PII.¹⁶ He says that nothing happens without a sufficient reason (the PSR) and so God does not create the world without a sufficient reason. If the world contained two individuals that were identical with respect to all of their pure intrinsic properties (but

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

perhaps differing with respect to their extrinsic or impure properties), then God would have no reason to create the actual world rather than a world in which these two indiscernible individuals were switched with respect to their extrinsic relations. Therefore, there are no such indiscernible individuals. That extrinsic properties are irrelevant to individuation is clear from the fact that relations that one individual bears to its environment cannot provide the reason why it bears those relations and not the relations borne by its indiscernible counterpart. For example, if the world contained two indiscernible twins, Mary-Kate and Ashley, such that Mary-Kate was born first and Ashley was born second, God must have determined their birth order arbitrarily and so such a world violates the PSR. That impure properties are irrelevant comes from the fact that God's sufficient reason for creating the world is moral: this is the best possible world. Leibniz's thought is that impure properties are irrelevant to moral value. For example, if Mary-Kate and Ashley are alike with respect to all of their pure qualities, it would be absurd to think that Mary-Kate is virtuous and Ashley is vicious. What could account for this moral difference? The mere fact that Mary-Kate is Mary-Kate and Ashley is Ashley? Impure properties, Leibniz quite plausibly claims, are irrelevant to moral evaluation.

Before turning to Spinoza's argument for E1p5, it is worth noting that if his metaphysical rationalism leads him, like Leibniz, to the PII, it will be either a very different version of the principle or for very different reasons. This is because Leibniz's version of the PII is distinctive in its restriction to pure intrinsic properties, and the reason for these restrictions are found in the moral judgments guiding God's choice. Spinoza's God does (p. 141) not make moral judgments and does not choose. Nothing is good or evil from God's perspective, and God produces the world out of natural necessity, not choice.¹⁷ So either Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism does not motivate a restriction to pure intrinsic properties or it motivates them very differently than for Leibniz.

The first step in Spinoza's argument is to establish that things are distinguished from each other only by a difference in their attributes or in their affections or modes. If two things are distinguished from each other, Spinoza reasons, they must be distinguished by some difference. There are only substances and their modes. So only substances and modes can serve to distinguish anything. Spinoza quickly moves from only *substances* and modes can serve to distinguish to only *attributes* and modes can serve to distinguish. In making this move, he cites the definition of attribute as what the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of a substance. So substances can be distinguished only by essence or by accident.¹⁸ He continues by noting that if two substances are distinguished by attribute then we have no counterexample to the claim that there can be only one substance of the same nature or attribute. Furthermore, it is not possible that two substances are distinguished by their modes because substances are conceived through themselves whereas modes are conceived through the substances in which they inhere. Spinoza appears to assume that if one substance is distinguished from another by a kind of feature then that substance must be conceived through that kind of feature. Presumably, he thinks this because he thinks that one cannot conceive of something if one cannot distinguish it from other things. So if what distinguishes one thing from another are features of a certain kind, then it must be at least partially conceived through such

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

features. For example, if two things are indistinguishable in all respects other than their spatial location, then they must be conceived, at least partially, through their spatial locations. Otherwise, nothing would make a thought determinately about one rather than the other. Spinoza concludes that, since neither attribute nor mode can distinguish substances of the same attribute, there cannot be two substances of the same nature or attribute.

On the face of it, Spinoza's reasoning is not cogent. As Leibniz—always a perceptive reader of Spinoza—points out, two substances could share some but not all of their attributes. Thus they could be distinguished by a difference in attribute although their attributes overlap. But, as Della Rocca has convincingly argued, Spinoza believes that each attribute must be, in itself, sufficient for conceiving of a substance. That is to say, suppose a substance has attributes F and G. Both F and G must be individually sufficient for conceiving of the substance. But if there were a second substance that was F but not G, conceiving of a substance as F would not be sufficient for conceiving of either of them. Thus there can be no two substances that share an attribute.¹⁹

(p. 142) We are now in a position to summarize the core of Spinoza's argument. His begins by assuming that: (1) if two things are different then they are conceived of differently, and (2) things are conceived through their essences. From (2) follows (3) conceiving an attribute that expresses the essence of a substance is sufficient for conceiving of that substance. So if there were two substances that shared an attribute, it would follow from (3) that each substance could be conceived through that attribute. But this would violate (1). So neither substance could be conceived through that attribute. This contradicts (3). From this it follows that no two substances share an attribute. None of Spinoza's assumptions appear to be closely related to the PSR. They relate instead to his theory of conception and essence. No doubt this theory has important consequences for the PSR, especially given Spinoza's belief that one thing is conceived through another just in case the one is understood through the other. But those consequences for the PSR are downstream from the assumptions of E1p5d. They do not feed forward from the PSR to E1p5d. Thus Spinoza's version of the PII, unlike Leibniz's does not derive from the PSR, at least in the demonstration of E1p5.

Della Rocca has argued that, although the demonstration of E1p5 does not explicitly depend upon the PSR, it is possible, nonetheless, to discern a connection. He says:

One can see that [Spinoza's version of the PII] turns on the notion of explaining non-identity and, as such, one can see its roots in the PSR. Non-identities, by the PSR, require explanation, and the way to explain non-identity is to appeal to some difference in properties.

(Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 47)

Might the PSR lurk behind E1p5 as an unarticulated motivation? It is not entirely implausible since Spinoza clearly believes that everything has an explanation, and so we might infer that identities have an explanation. But there is, nonetheless, reason for

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

skepticism. As noted earlier, universal quantifiers are rarely (if ever) unrestricted and not all metaphysical rationalists think that identities require explanation. We have already seen that, in Leibniz, the PII follows, in part, from the PSR but not because identities require explanation.²⁰ It is because God's choice of a world must be motivated and nothing could motivate God to choose between worlds that were indiscernible with respect to their qualitative features but discernible with respect to their non-qualitative features. Indeed, for Leibniz, the sufficient reason for a necessary truth is always an identity. He never suggests that the identities themselves require an explanation.

(p. 143) What about Spinoza? Might his metaphysical rationalism have drawn him toward the PII? Let us pause to look more closely at how identities can be explained. The rationalist proponent of the PII plausibly holds that identities are explained by quality distributions. How are identities explained by quality distributions? Say that $a = b$. Why does $a = b$? Because (If (for all F s, a is F just in case b is F) then $a = b$) and (for all F s, a is F just in case b is F). We have explained an identity fact (that $a = b$) by a quality distribution fact (that for all F s, a is F just in case b is F). But what explains the quality distribution? Why is it the case that for all F s, a is F just in case b is F ? If $a = b$, then the only possible explanation of this coincidence of properties seems to be the identity of a and b . (Think of how scientists arrive at theoretical identifications. In the laboratory, it is determined that, for every property tested for, water, for example, is the same as H₂O. What could explain this coincidence? That water = H₂O!) To put the point slightly differently, why am I identical to myself? Because I have every property that I have. To deny this would be a contradiction. But it would be a contradiction only if I am self-identical. If I were not, then it would not be contradictory for me to have properties that I lack. But it cannot be the case that identities are explained by quality distributions and quality distributions are explained by identities. If both were the case, we would have a vicious explanatory circle. We must choose between explaining the identities by the quality distributions and explaining the quality distributions by the identities. The PSR offers us no guidance here.

One consideration that could decide the difference is the ontological priority that one assigns to objects and qualities.²¹ If you think that objects are somehow ontologically prior to qualities then you should prefer the explanations of quality distributions by identities. On the other hand, if you think that qualities are somehow more basic than objects (for example, if you are a bundle theorist) then you should prefer explanations of identities in terms of quality distributions. It would appear, however, that Spinoza thinks that substance and its attributes are ontologically on par. Substance cannot exist without its attributes and vice versa. Thus it appears that Spinoza's commitment to the PSR gives Spinoza no reason to think that identities must be grounded in quality distributions. But, in the end, the question is moot because we have already seen that Spinoza has altogether different reasons for holding his version of the PII that are not derived from his metaphysical rationalism.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

Before turning to our next topic, I would like to consider briefly the question of the applicability of the PII to attributes, properties, and relations. Della Rocca has argued that Spinoza's commitment to the PII requires him to identify indiscernible properties and relations.²² What kinds of features could distinguish between two properties or relations? Perhaps they are distinguished by the second-order properties such as their extensions. Thus if two properties or relations were coextensive they would be identical. For example, this would mean that, since Spinoza believes that x causes y just in case x is (p. 144) conceived through y , he is committed to believing and indeed does believe that causation just is conception. That is, x causes y and x is conceived through y indicate the same relation. He thinks that if they were two different relations, there would have to be an explanation of their nonidentity. The only candidate explanation is a difference in their extensions. They have the same extensions. So if they were not identical, their nonidentity would be brute. Nothing is brute. Therefore, they are identical.

It is far from obvious to me that Spinoza would accept this line of reasoning. Spinoza's statement of the PII in E1p5 is explicitly in terms of substances, not properties or relations. But does Spinoza's reasoning generalize? Intuitively, triangularity and three-sidedness are different properties even though they are coextensive. There are, of course, philosophers who deny this. Might Spinoza be among them? It is unclear, but if he is, it is not because his metaphysical rationalism obliges him so. As I argued earlier, it is consistent with the PSR that identities are more basic than quality distributions and indeed explain those distributions. The same could be true of the identity of properties and the distribution of second-order properties. Just as basic identity properties are not obviously repellent to metaphysical rationalism, neither are quiddities, the intrinsic natures of a properties. Thus Spinoza might believe, consistent with his metaphysical rationalism, that attributes, properties, and relations are individuated by their quiddities.

3. The Necessary Existence of God

That God exists necessarily is another doctrine that is often thought to be entailed by the PSR. In this case, Spinoza clearly agrees. In E1p11d2, he both gives the first explicit statement of the PSR in the *Ethics* and attempts to deduce the necessary existence of God from it. Spinoza's argument is noteworthy because, among other reasons, it is not a variant of any of the traditional cosmological arguments usually associated with the PSR. Instead, he attempts to show that the nonexistence of God would be inexplicable and hence impossible.

In what follows, I propose to look at the details of Spinoza's argument with an eye toward specifying the role played by the PSR. I shall argue that the details of Spinoza's purported proof illuminate in interesting ways Spinoza's conception of both causation and explanation. I shall also spend some time evaluating the cogency of Spinoza's argument. By accurately appreciating what does and does not follow from the PSR, we shall acquire a better understanding of its strength and content.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

Spinoza begins by saying that substances are the kinds of things that are self-caused, by which he means they have essences that involve existence.²³ They are self-caused in that given their natures, their existence does not call for further (p. 145) explanation. If you grasp the essence of substance, you cannot reasonably ask why it exists if it exists. So if a substance did not exist, there would, by the PSR, have to be an explanation of its nonexistence. But the cause of the nonexistence of God is either internal to God or external to God. If it is external, then it either shares a nature with God or it does not. If it shares a nature, then it is God, and so God exists. If it does not share a nature with God, then it has nothing in common with God so it can neither bring him into existence or prevent him from existing. So the cause of the nonexistence of God cannot be external. If it is internal, then God's nature is contradictory, but it is absurd to say that the nature of a perfect being is contradictory. So God necessarily exists.

There is much here that deserves comment. Let us start by examining Spinoza's understanding of a self-caused being. A self-caused being is one that satisfies the PSR without having an external cause for its existence. One way that a being might cause itself is by means of backwards causation or time travel. For example, a man could travel back in time and bring it about that his parents meet. So he is the cause of his own existence. This is not what Spinoza has in mind. A self-caused substance does not bring itself into existence by means of efficient causation. Rather a self-caused substance explains its own existence because its essence involves existence. This immediately calls to mind debates about whether existence is a property and so could partially constitute the essence of something. But Spinoza never claims that existence is a property, and it is not clear that when he says a self-caused substance has an essence that involves existence that "involves" means includes or is partially constituted by. Is there another way of understanding self-causation? Take the example of the empty set. It is not part of the definition of the empty set that it exists, but anyone who grasps the essence of the empty set and does not believe that sets are impossible will believe that the empty set exists. The existence of the empty set will not strike anyone as calling out for explanation. Its existence is not brute or in any way mysterious. Indeed, if someone asked why the empty set exists, it would be reasonable to doubt that she had fully grasped the concept of the empty set. So we see that existence might be metaphysically entailed by something's nature even though existence is not a property and is not a constituent of its essence or real definition. I do not know if Spinoza would view the existence of a substance as analogous to the existence of the empty set in this way. The letter of the text is compatible with both accounts.

Consider next, Spinoza's claim that the nonexistence of something requires a cause or explanation. This is, of course, just Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism. The nonexistence of something cannot be brute. There must be a reason why. Spinoza thinks that there are just two kinds of explanation for nonexistence. Either the nonexistence is explained by the thing's nature or by the action of some external cause. Spinoza gives the example of the nonexistence of a square circle to illustrate how a thing's nature could explain its nonexistence. The nature of a square circle (Spinoza appears to believe that there are natures of impossible beings) involves a contradiction, and this explains the nonexistence

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

of them. The nonexistence of a tiger in my study, on the other hand, is not explained by the nature of tigers alone but rather by the prior state of the universe (“the (p. 146) order of nature,” in Spinoza’s vocabulary). That prior state entails the current state, and the current state includes the nonexistence of a tiger in my study.

Could the nonexistence of God be explained by an external cause? Spinoza believes that if x causes the nonexistence of F s, then x has something in common with F s. He believes this because he thinks that causes must have something in common with their effects. He has two reasons to believe that. First, there is the common (although by no means universal) assumption in the seventeenth century that causation is something like a kind of property transference.²⁴ In order for the cause to transfer a property to its effect, the effect must be the kind of thing that can possess such a property. In other words, the essence of a thing must be compatible with the property. So the cause and the effect must both have the kind of essence compatible with the possession of the property the transfer of which is the causation. Spinoza assumes that if both the cause and the effect have the kind of essence compatible with possession of the transferred property, then they have the same essence or are modes of the same essence. This assumption is motivated by further assumptions about the structure of property space. Attributes are determinables and all modes are determinates of some attribute or are derived from such determinants. If you want to prevent something from existing, you have to block its causes. Since its causes share an attribute with it, and blocking is a causal relation, then anything capable of blocking its causes shares an attribute with it. But since substances are individuated by their attributes, the only thing that shares an attribute with a substance is itself.²⁵

This line of reasoning is somewhat puzzling. It seems most appropriate to things with external efficient causes. But the topic under discussion is God’s necessary existence. God is self-caused—that is, his essence involves existence. As we have noted earlier, it is not entirely clear how Spinoza understands self-causation, but what is clear is that it is not a kind of efficient causation by external causes. The story told above appears to be about external efficient causation. So it is unclear if it is relevant to our issue.

(p. 147) I think the best way to make sense of Spinoza’s remarks is to construe him as saying that the only way that an external cause could bring about the nonexistence of a thing is by blocking the causes that produce that thing. But a self-caused being has no such external causes, so the causes cannot be blocked. Thus no external cause can prevent something self-caused from existing. But since a self-caused being is such that its existence is explained by something other than efficient causes, could its nonexistence also be explained by something external other than efficient causes? Could there be an explanation of the nonexistence of a self-caused being that cited factors external to the nature of the thing? Take the case of the empty set. The notion of the empty set is not incoherent, so if it did not exist, its nonexistence would be explained, presumably, by something external. What could that be? Surely not an external efficient cause. Still someone might reasonably believe both that the empty set does not exist and that this nonexistence has an explanation. For example, it might be explained by the fact that everything that exists must be concrete. Since the empty set is abstract, it does not exist.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

The fact that only concrete things exist does not need to share an attribute with the empty set in order to explain its nonexistence since it is not achieving that via blocking the empty set's external efficient causes.

It is difficult even to formulate these questions in terms of Spinoza's metaphysics. Of what attribute is God insofar as he is such that the empty set does not exist a mode? Of what attribute is God insofar as he is such that everything that exists is concrete? Thought? Extension? Neither of these seem correct. Is this evidence that we have made a wrong turn? Would Spinoza then see our questions as somehow ill formed? On what grounds? It is far from clear what justification Spinoza has for his conviction that thought and extension are the only known attributes. And he himself holds true many statements that cannot be easily construed as being made true by a mode of either thought or extension. For example, Spinoza believes that whatever is must be in itself or in another. Is that made true by a mode of extension? A mode of thought? The problem is not that Spinoza does not recognize any ontological categories apart from substance and mode. Rather such difficulties arise from his insistence that all modes are modes of either extension or thought. In any event, the anti-platonist's claim that the empty set does not exist would not need to be explained by something blocking the external causes of the empty set's existence. So it is unclear why the factors that explain the nonexistence of the empty set need to share a nature with the empty set.

Before we turn our attention to Spinoza's argument for the claim that there can be no internal cause of God's nonexistence, we should pause to note that it is also not obvious that, even granting all of Spinoza's assumptions about efficient causation, in order to block God's existence, an external efficient cause would have to share God's essence *completely*. Partial overlap may suffice. God is by definition a substance with infinitely many attributes. So to have God's essence, a substance would have to have infinitely many attributes. But why could a merely extended substance, for example, not block God's existence? After all, there can only be one substance per attribute. So if a merely extended substance existed, that would, all by itself, preclude the existence of any other extended substance, including God. Some commentators have argued that Spinoza's (p. 148) response to this objection can be discerned in the third and fourth arguments contained in E1p11.²⁶ Important and interesting issues pertaining to power, infinity, and reality as Spinoza understands them are raised by these arguments, but consideration of them would divert us from our topic, the PSR, so I shall set them aside in this paper.

Let us next consider Spinoza's argument for the conclusion that the nature of God cannot account for God's nonexistence. Spinoza's argument has two main premises. The first is that God, by definition, is a substance and all substances have essences that involve existence. In other words, substances are self-caused. So, by definition, if God exists, then God is self-caused—that is, his existence would call out for no further explanation. The second is the claim that it is absurd to think that a perfect being has a contradictory essence. These two premises purport to rule out the two ways that God's nature could explain God's nonexistence. The first way is by lacking the power to explain God's existence. The second is by being the sort of nature that cannot be exemplified. But

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

defining God as a substance does not guarantee that he has a nature that does not explain his nonexistence. Something could be defined as self-caused and yet have a nature that explains its nonexistence without appealing to contradiction. Many things are impossible despite having coherent essences. Many philosophers doubt the existence of Platonic forms or Leibnizian monads without alleging incoherence. And if forms or monads do not exist, it is presumably not contingently so—that is, there is no external cause for their nonexistence. So Spinoza’s claim that the only internal source of nonexistence is incoherence is tendentious. If some natures are unexemplified for internal reasons other than incoherence, then Spinoza must show that God’s nature is not among them. Indeed, an orthodox Cartesian would regard Spinoza’s God as metaphysically impossible insofar as Spinoza defines God as a substance with infinitely many attributes and Descartes thinks that substances cannot have more than one attribute.²⁷ The nature of Spinoza’s God cannot be exemplified, according to the Cartesian, not on account of a contradiction contained in his essence. Rather, his nature cannot be exemplified on account of necessary truth about the category of substance.

What is more, Spinoza has not shown that the nature of God does not contain a contradiction. He merely asserts that it would be absurd to suppose that a being that is “absolutely infinite and supremely perfect” has a nature that involves a contradiction. Something like this is assumed by all ontological arguers prior to Leibniz (who correctly realized that it is necessary first to show that God is possible) but is far from obvious. For example, omnipotence is often thought to follow from supreme perfection, but it is not clear that omnipotence is a coherent concept.²⁸

So we see that the PSR does not entail the necessary existence of God without the aid of a whole host of highly controversial assumptions. Nevertheless, Spinoza’s use of the PSR in E1p11d2 allows us to shed some light on one of the questions posed at the outset (p. 149) of this paper: what is a reason or explanation? Unsurprisingly, we will not get a complete answer to this question, and Spinoza himself never tackles it directly. But we have seen in the course of considering Spinoza’s argument for the necessary existence of God from the PSR that Spinoza thinks that substances can explain their own existences and do so not by being their own efficient causes but by having natures that involve existence. There is much that is obscure in this claim, but we can infer that some explanations or reasons are not efficient causal explanations (of the sort favored by many philosophers today) but rather take the form of explicating a nature or essence.

4. The Principle of Plenitude

Another important doctrine often associated with the PSR is what Lovejoy calls the Principle of Plenitude (the PP hereafter). The PP says, in Lovejoy’s words, that “no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled, that the extent and abundance of the creation must be as great as the possibility of existence and commensurate with the productive capacity of a ‘perfect’ and inexhaustible Source.”²⁹ It is clear that Spinoza endorses the PP. He writes:

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

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)³⁰

The PP is often thought to be a consequence of the PSR, and some commentators have thought that Spinoza derives his commitment to the PP from his commitment to the PSR.³¹ It is far from clear that the demonstration of E1p16 supports this conclusion, although I shall argue that it is possible that the PSR plays some background role in Spinoza's thinking on the subject.

In the demonstration of this proposition, Spinoza reasons as follows: Properties follow from the definition or nature of a thing. The more reality the thing defined possesses, the more properties that follow from it. The divine nature is absolutely infinite. So infinitely many things follow from it.

The most noteworthy thing about this argument given our present purposes is that there is no explicit reference to the PSR in Spinoza's discussion. The only citation in the demonstration is to E1d6, the definition of God. But prior results are, unsurprisingly, assumed by the demonstration. For example, that God exists is obviously assumed. Since Spinoza argues for the existence of God by way of the PSR, to that extent at least, E1p16 assumes the PSR. But many have consistently believed that God exists without (p. 150) believing the PP. And it is equally coherent to subscribe to the PP while denying the existence of God. So the existence of God alone leaves us far short of the PP.

Is it possible to discern the influence of the PSR behind any other assumptions or inferences made in E1p16? It is difficult to say with any confidence. The argument given in E1p16d is very quick and, indeed, invalid as stated. (That infinitely many things follow from the divine nature does not entail that every possible thing follows from the divine nature.) It is tempting to imagine that Spinoza reasoned that if something is absolutely infinite then it has infinite power. So there is no possible thing that it cannot bring into existence. If there is a possible thing that does not exist, its nonexistence must have an explanation. Since God is omnipotent, the explanation cannot be God's nature. So there must be an external cause preventing it. But no external cause can limit God. So every possible thing exists. This assumes, of course, that there are no necessary connections between modes such that if, for example, mode *m* exists then mode *m*1 cannot exist.

I believe that Spinoza would have found the above line of reasoning congenial, but it is pure speculation to assert that he ever entertained it let alone endorsed it. It remains, therefore, entirely possible that the PP had no significant connection to the PSR in Spinoza's mind.

Before moving on to our next topic, necessitarianism, a couple of remarks on the connection between the PP and necessitarianism are in order. One might think that the PP is equivalent to necessitarianism. If there are no unactualized possibilities, then is the actual world not the only possible world?³² Not necessarily, because, for all the PP says, there might have been unactualized possibilities. There are, then, possible worlds in which there are unactualized possibilities and the actual world is not the only possible

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

world. In other words, even if the actual world contains every possible thing, there may well be possible worlds that include fewer things (although not more things). Such worlds represent ways the world could have been otherwise. Necessitarianism is stronger than the PP. If necessitarianism is true, then there are no unrealized possibilities, i.e., the PP is true.³³

It might seem odd that Spinoza first tries to prove the weaker claim, the PP, and then tries to prove the stronger claim, necessitarianism. After all, the PP is not sufficient for necessitarianism but necessitarianism is sufficient for the PP. But Spinoza's focus in E1p16 is not the PP as such. He is much more interested in showing two different claims: first, that God acts out of natural necessity and second, that a diversity of effects is consistent with natural necessity. Both of these claims are controversial. A standard view among Spinoza's predecessors is that God is a voluntary agent as opposed to a natural agent. A natural agent is one who acts out of natural necessity—that is, the (p. 151) actions of a natural agent follow from the essence of the agent. A voluntary agent is one who deliberates and chooses her actions. So when Spinoza argues in E1p16 that infinitely many things follow from the nature of God, he is staking out the unorthodox position that God is a natural agent. It was also commonly assumed by Spinoza's predecessors that natural agents produce only one effect by nature. Spinoza argues on the contrary that an infinite natural agent will have infinitely many natural effects. Both of these claims are important for Spinoza's argument for necessitarianism, as we shall see in the next section.

5. Necessitarianism

Another alleged consequence of metaphysical rationalism is necessitarianism. Indeed, this alleged consequence is sometimes cited as a refutation of metaphysical rationalism. But, as always, one philosopher's *modus tollens* is another's *modus ponens*: Spinoza believes that rationalism entails necessitarianism and so accepts necessitarianism.

At first glance, it might appear that Spinoza's argument for necessitarianism doesn't rely upon the PSR. He writes:

E1p29: In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things, from the necessity of the divine nature, have been determined to exist and act [*operandum*] in a certain way.

Whatever is, is in God (by E1p15); but God cannot be called a contingent thing. For (by E1p11) he exists necessarily, not contingently. Next, the modes of the divine nature have also followed from it necessarily and not contingently (by E1p16); and they either follow from the divine nature insofar as it is considered absolutely (by E1p21) or insofar as it is considered to be determined to act in a certain way (by E1p28). Further, God is not just the cause of these modes insofar as they exist (by E1p24c), but also (by E1p26) insofar as they are considered to be determined to produce an effect. For if they have not been determined by God, then (by E1p26) it is impossible, not contingent, that they should determine themselves. Conversely (by E1p27) if they have been determined by God, it is

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

not contingent, but impossible, that they should render themselves undetermined. So all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature, not only to exist, but to exist in a certain way, and to produce effects in a certain way. There is nothing contingent, q.e.d.

The main idea here is that the nature of a necessary being necessitates or determines everything. (E1p16) What is necessitated by something necessary is itself necessary. So everything is necessary.

There is no explicit statement of the PSR in this text, and none of the axioms that express it are cited. Of course, E1p11, which states that God necessarily exists, depends upon the PSR, but no one thinks that the mere existence of God entails necessitarianism with no additional assumptions. But in fact, many of the premises of this argument presuppose the PSR. Let us start with E1p15, which says that whatever is, is in God. This is because of the conjunction of E1a1 and 1p14. Recall that E1a1 says that whatever is, is (p. 152) itself or in another, which I have argued is, given Spinoza's understanding of inherence, tantamount to the PSR.

E1p26, which says that effects of the modes follow from the divine nature, also depends upon the PSR. The idea is that modes produce effects in virtue of their essences. The essences of things must be conceived through God because, by E1p15, everything is conceived through God. And we have just seen that Spinoza thinks that E1p15 is partially a consequence of the PSR.

In short, everything is conceived through or understood through God. This entails that everything is understood, which is just metaphysical rationalism. But what is understood through something necessary is, Spinoza concludes, itself necessary. Why Spinoza thinks so can be seen in two ways. The first is to note that Spinoza appears to think that to understand something is to possess an explanation of it. A complete explanation of something specifies its sufficient reason. If something necessary is sufficient for something else, then this too is necessary. This can be perspicuously framed in terms of possible worlds. What is necessary exists in every possible world. If it is sufficient for some x , then it cannot exist without x existing too. So x exists in every possible world, that is, x is necessary. The second is to note that one thing is understood or conceived through another just in case it is caused by it. So everything is caused by God. Causes necessitate.³⁴ God is a necessary being. So everything is necessitated by something necessary. This entails that everything is necessary for similar reasons. So, appearances notwithstanding, the PSR plays an indispensable role in Spinoza's argument for necessitarianism.

6. Conclusion

More than ever before, recent Spinoza scholarship has emphasized the importance of the PSR in Spinoza's thinking. This has trend has been, I believe, salutary and has led to a deeper understanding of Spinoza on a wide range of topics. It is my hope that this paper

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

contributes to this effort in a number of ways. First, I have tried to elucidate the meaning of the PSR as Spinoza understands it by specifying the range of things to which the PSR applies and by partially explicating the notion of explanation at work in Spinoza's thought. I have also explored the place of the PSR in the axiomatic foundations (p. 153) of Spinoza's system as articulated in the *Ethics* as well as its role in Spinoza's arguments for some of his most important doctrines.

In some cases, I have nevertheless, argued for conclusions that go against the current trend, which tends to depict the PSR as *the* central idea driving Spinoza's thinking. For example, I have argued that Spinoza's version of the PII as articulated in E1p5 does not follow from the PSR but rather derives from other, unrelated assumptions. Moreover, I have argued against the idea that the PII can be straightforwardly applied to anything other than substances as some influential commentators have assumed. I have also argued that, in opposition to a well-established interpretative tradition, the importance of the PSR to Spinoza's Principle of Plenitude is far from clear.

In short, the picture of Spinoza that emerges from this essay is one of a deeply committed metaphysical rationalist whose philosophy nevertheless cannot be reduced to simply the systematic working out of the consequences of the PSR. Spinoza's thought is more variegated and multifaceted than that. I do not want to deny, however, that the PSR is a defining feature of Spinoza's system. I merely want to emphasize that is not the only one.

Finally, I must admit that the present effort only begins to scrape the surface of the topic of Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism. I have left unexplored the role of the PSR in Spinoza's philosophy of mind, his physics, his moral psychology, his ethics, and his political philosophy. Although the PSR is often thought of as a purely metaphysical doctrine, I believe that it is possible to discern its influence in these other areas of Spinoza's thought.³⁵ Consideration of such issues is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this paper. There is more work to be done.

Bibliography

Bennett, Jonathan. *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984.

Biro, John I., and Olli Koistinen, eds. *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Cover, J. A., and Mark Kulstad, eds. *Central Themes in Early Modern Philosophy: Essays Presented to Jonathan Bennett*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1990.

Curley, Edwin. *Spinoza's Metaphysics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Della Rocca, Michael. *Spinoza*. New York: Routledge Press, 2008.

Della Rocca, Michael. "Spinoza's Substance Monism." In Biro and Koistinen eds., *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, pp. 11–37.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

Garrett, Don. "Spinoza's 'Ontological' Argument." *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979): 198–223.

Garrett, Don. "Ethics Ip5: Shared Attributes and the Basis of Spinoza's Monism." In Cover and Kulstad, eds., *Central Themes in Early Modern Philosophy: Essays Presented to Jonathan Bennett*, pp. 69–108.

(p. 154) Garrett, Don. "Spinoza's Conatus Argument." In Biro and Koistinen, eds., *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, pp. 127–58.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. "Primary Truths." In *Philosophical Essays*, Trans. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989.

Lin, Martin. "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Desire." *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 86 (2004): 21–55.

Lin, Martin. "Spinoza's Arguments for the Existence of God." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 75 (2007): 269–97.

Lovejoy, Arthur. *The Great Chain of Being*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957.

Notes:

⁽¹⁾ I am very grateful for helpful comments on drafts of this paper to Michael Della Rocca, Don Garrett, John Morrison, Tobias Wilsh, and the participants in my graduate seminar at Rutgers University during the spring semester of 2010.

⁽²⁾ E1d3, E1d5. Most English translations are taken from C, with occasional modifications.

⁽³⁾ E2p1, E2p6.

⁽⁴⁾ *Categories*, 1a20–1b9.

⁽⁵⁾ E1d5.

⁽⁶⁾ E1d3, E1d5.

⁽⁷⁾ It must be noted that Spinoza is not consistent in what he says about modes. He says, for example, in E1p25c that particular things are affections. But he also says, in E1p28d, that modes are substance insofar as it is affected in a determinate way. I do not know how to reconcile these two texts, and I think we must conclude that Spinoza is not as precise in his use of "mode" as we would have hoped. What I present here is an effort to clean things up a bit on Spinoza's behalf.

⁽⁸⁾ E1a4, E1p25. Garrett argues that conception implies causation in his "Spinoza's Conatus Argument," p. 136. It is clear that Spinoza also believes that causation implies conception since he argues in E1p25 that God is the cause of the essences of things

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

because otherwise there would be things that are not conceived through God, which contradicts 1p15.

(⁹) E1d3.

(¹⁰) E1p3d.

(¹¹) This is because, as shown above, inherence implies conception and conception and causation are coextensive. See Garrett, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument," p. 137. See also, Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, pp. 15–16.

(¹²) For an alternative reading of the connection between Spinoza's axioms and the PSR, see Garrett, "Ethics Ip5," pp. 101–103.

(¹³) What about attributes? Although I shall not argue the point here, I do not think that Spinoza regards attributes as among the things that are. They are, if you like, of the wrong category to be in the domain of quantification.

(¹⁴) The existence of truthmakers does not, without further assumptions, entail the existence of truths or the reality of the truthmaking relation. (I owe this point to Don Garrett.) But if we suppose that truths supervene on truthmakers and that supervenient beings are nothing over and above their bases, then we can easily make the necessary inference without deforming Spinoza's basic metaphysics.

(¹⁵) Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, pp. 50–74.

(¹⁶) Leibniz presents several different arguments for the PII. The one discussed here, however, is the one characteristic of Leibniz's late or mature period as articulated, for example, in his correspondence with Clarke

(¹⁷) E1app.

(¹⁸) Assuming that since modes are nonessential ways of being a substance they can be accurately called "accidents."

(¹⁹) Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Substance Monism."

(²⁰) One might point to "Primary Truths" as a text in which Leibniz does indeed claim that identities require an explanation. He writes that "in nature, there cannot be two individual things that differ in number alone. For it certainly must be possible to explain why they are different, and that explanation must derive from some difference they contain" (pp. 31–32). This text says only that nonidentities must have explanations. Perhaps one might think that if qualitative diversity explains nonidentity then qualitative sameness explains identity. But this would conflict with the rest of the essay in which Leibniz maintains that identities are primitive truths—that is to say, truths that do not rest upon other truths. In any event, the argument is weak, and Leibniz abandons it in favor of the argument for the PII discussed above.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

(²¹) I am grateful to Ralf Bader for this suggestion.

(²²) Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 65.

(²³) E1d1.

(²⁴) Lin, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Desire," pp. 31–33.

(²⁵) Someone might object that I have needlessly saddled Spinoza with a doctrine that he never explicitly endorses and that his claim that causes and effects must share an attribute has an entirely different basis. Here is another line of reasoning that has some currency with readers of Spinoza. Effects are conceived through their causes—that is, to have the idea of the effect you must also possess the idea of its cause. Perhaps this is because the concept of the effect includes the concept of the cause. So you cannot have the idea of something caused by a mode of some attribute without an idea of that attribute. This does not, however, entail that causes and effects share an attribute. Suppose that the cause of some effect *e* falls under attribute *F*. So *e* is conceived through something that is *F*. Now, according to Spinoza, things are conceived through the attributes under which they fall. So if something falls under *F*, it must be conceived as such. So in order to conceive of *e*, we must also conceive of something that is *F* as *F*. This does not, however, entail that *e* is *F*. We must add the further assumption that, in order to conceive a mode of some attribute, it is unnecessary to possess the idea of any other attribute. Spinoza thinks that each attribute must be conceived through itself and that conceiving of a mode of an attribute in terms of some other attribute violates that constraint. I see this as compatible with and to some extent motivated by the theory of efficient causation discussed above. In any event, as we shall see, understanding Spinoza's remarks as resting on this other basis does not clarify much.

(²⁶) Garrett, "Spinoza's 'Ontological' Argument"; Lin, "Spinoza's Arguments."

(²⁷) Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Substance Monism."

(²⁸) I am thinking of well-known paradoxes indicated by questions such as, "Can God create a stone so heavy that even he cannot lift it?"

(²⁹) Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, p. 52.

(³⁰) E1p16.

(³¹) *The Great Chain of Being*, pp. 151–157.

(³²) Bennett draws this inference from E1p16 in *A Study*, p. 122.

(³³) Of course, the necessity of the PP would be equivalent to necessitarianism. If every possibility is necessarily actualized, then there are no possible worlds in which fewer than all the possibilities are realized. Arguably, Spinoza thinks that E1p16 is an entailment of a necessary truth (that is, that the more reality a definition expresses, the more things the

The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza

intellect infers from it). If this is so, he is committed to the necessity of the PP and thus to necessitarianism.

(³⁴) It is, of course, common to distinguish causal necessity from absolute necessity. Causal necessity might appear too weak to entail Spinoza's conclusion. But those who think that causal necessity is weaker than absolute necessity typically think that the causes could be in place but that the effects could fail to follow because some further condition fails to hold. For example, the laws of nature might be different, but such a scenario is implausible in the context of E1p29. Because Spinoza presumably thinks that the laws of nature follow from God's essence in the same way everything else does, the laws could not be different unless God had a different nature, which is absurd. The same would go for any other additional condition.

(³⁵) See Della Rocca's *Spinoza* for a bold foray into the connection between these issues and Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism.

Martin Lin

Martin Lin is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. His research concerns metaphysics and philosophy of mind from a historical perspective, with particular attention to the seventeenth century.

