

# Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance: The Substance-Mode Relation as a Relation of Inherence and Predication

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In his groundbreaking work of 1969, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation*, Edwin Curley attacked the traditional understanding of the substance-mode relation in Spinoza, according to which modes inhere in substance. Curley argued that such an interpretation generates insurmountable problems, as had already been claimed by Pierre Bayle in his famous Dictionary entry on Spinoza.<sup>1</sup> Instead of having modes

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<sup>1</sup> In quoting texts from Bayle's Dictionary, I rely on the fifth French edition (*Dictionnaire historique et critique par Mr. Pierre Bayle*, Amsterdam: Compagnie des Librairies, 1734), and (mostly) on Popkin's English translation (1991). I will refer to Bayle's entry by the page number in Popkin's translation followed by the page number in the above French edition (the Spinoza entry appears in the fifth volume of the French edition). Whenever I diverge from Popkin's translation I will mention this fact. Unless otherwise marked, all references to the *Ethics*, the early works of Spinoza, and Letters 1-29 are to Curley's translation (henceforth **C**). In references to the other letters of Spinoza I have used Shirley's translation (henceforward **S**). I use the following standard abbreviations for Spinoza's works: **TdIE**—*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* [*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*], **KV** – *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being* [*Korte Verhandeling van God de Mesch en deszelfs Welstand*], **Ep.** – *Letters*, **GLH** – *Hebrew Grammar* [*Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae*]. Passages in the *Ethics* will be referred to by means of the following abbreviations: a(-xiom), c(-orollary), p(-roposition), s(-cholium) and app(-endix); 'd' stands for either 'definition' (when it appears immediately to the right of the part of the book), or 'demonstration' (in all other cases). Hence, E1d3 is the third definition of part 1 and E1p16d is the demonstration of proposition 16 of part 1. I am indebted to Robert Adams, Ed Curley, Don Garrett, John Heil, Ilya Kliger, Mike LeBuff, Lukas Muhlethaler, Ohad Nachtomy Oded Schechter, Neta Stahl, Peter Thielke, Andrew Yale, Nasser Zakaria and an anonymous referee for *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. I am particularly indebted to Michael Della Rocca, whose inquisitiveness, intellectual generosity, and kindness contributed enormously to this work. Parts and early drafts

inhere in substance, Curley suggested that the modes' dependence upon substance should be interpreted in terms of (efficient)<sup>2</sup> causation, i.e., as committing Spinoza to nothing over and above the claim that substance is the (efficient) cause of the modes. These bold and fascinating claims generated one of the most important scholarly controversies in Spinoza scholarship of the past thirty-five years.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper I argue against Curley's interpretation and attempt to reestablish the traditional understanding of Spinozistic modes as inhering in God and as predicated of God. I also criticize Curley's philosophical motivation for suggesting this interpretation. In order to show that, for Spinoza, modes are predicated of—and inhere in—substance, I will proceed in the following manner. First, I will summarize Curley's arguments against substance-mode inherence and

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of the paper were presented at the New England Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy (Dartmouth College, 2002) and the Eastern APA (2004). I am indebted to the participants in these sessions for their helpful criticisms and remarks.

<sup>2</sup> Curley rarely qualifies substance-mode causality as *efficient* causation. Yet the terminology he uses in this context is clearly one of efficient causation. For example, in *Behind the Geometrical Method* (1988), Curley claims that God “*produces* and acts on things other than God” (38), and that the substance-mode relation “turns out to be a form of the doctrine of determinism” (50). (Cf. John Carriero, “Mode and Substance in Spinoza,” 1995, p. 254, for a similar point.) In recent correspondence Curley writes, “I don’t recall ever using the term *efficient* to modify the causality which God (insofar as he is infinite) has with respect to his modes. I realize that Spinoza himself uses it in IP16C1, but I think that’s potentially misleading. The relation I see in Spinoza is in important respects unlike efficient causality. On my reading of Spinoza, finite modes are temporal instantiations of timeless patterns described by the laws of nature” [Correspondence with author, January 2005]. I do in fact think that Curley was *right* (in the past) in using terminology which is typical of efficient causation (e.g., ‘production’ and ‘determinism’). Apart from E1p161, there are many other texts that support the conclusion that Spinozist causality is (at least primarily) efficient causality. The very notion of an immanent cause [*causa immanens*] is nothing but a sub-species of efficient causality, as one can see from the reliance of E1p18d on E1p16c1, and from Spinoza’s explicit statement in the *Short Treatise* (KV, I, iii| I/35/13-21). (Cf. Spinoza’s claim in Ep. 60 that “an efficient cause can be internal as well as external.”) Following Hume we tend to think of efficient causality as being essentially in time (i.e., the effect is supposed to follow the cause). I do not think Spinoza accepts this view. As I will later argue (see §6 below), for Spinoza the essence of a thing is the efficient cause of its *propria* (though these two, essence and *propria*, are simultaneous).

<sup>3</sup> In this paper I will discuss several arguments of Curley’s critics (primarily, those of Bennett, Carriero, Della Rocca, and Jarrett). Among the notable scholars who are sympathetic to Curley’s interpretation, one should mention Woolhouse (*The Concept of Substance in Seventeenth Century Metaphysics*, 1993, p. 51) and Mason (*The God of Spinoza*, 1997, pp. 30-32). Schmaltz (“Spinoza on the Vacuum,” 1999) tends to accept Curley’s critique of the traditional reading, yet he suggests an interesting alternative to both Curley’s and the traditional approach to the substance-mode relation. According to Schmaltz, the substance is the eternal and indivisible essence that “grounds” the modes (177). The latter view is consistent with my claim below (see §6) that for Spinoza modes are God’s *propria*.

present his alternative interpretation of the substance-mode relation. I will then present what I consider to be the most compelling arguments against Curley's interpretation. Some of these arguments have already been suggested in the literature of the past thirty years (and by Bayle); however, as far as I know, most of the arguments I will be making are new. In the subsequent section I will respond to objections that Curley and Bayle advance against Spinoza's view of God as the substratum in which all things inhere. Finally, I will address whether Spinozistic modes are *predicated of* (and not only *inhere in*) substance, and whether Spinoza considered modes to be particular properties (or "tropes," in the jargon of contemporary metaphysics).

Since Bayle's claims will be used both in support of and against Curley's interpretation, it would be appropriate to say a few introductory words on Bayle's stance. In his Spinoza entry, Bayle criticizes Spinoza's claim that all things are modes of God, claiming that it "is the most monstrous hypothesis that could be imagined, the most absurd, and the most diametrically opposed to the most evident notions of our mind."<sup>4</sup> Bayle, however, has no doubt that when Spinoza claims that all things are modes of God, Spinoza means that all things *inhere in* God. Curley embraces Bayle's arguments against Spinoza, but uses them in order to claim that we should not ascribe to Spinoza a view which is allegedly shown by Bayle to be absurd. What we should do, Curley argues, is reinterpret the substance-mode relation as a relation of causal dependence, which would set Spinoza free from Bayle's hook. Interestingly, as we shall soon see, Bayle himself discusses and rejects a very similar revisionary interpretation of the substance-mode relation.

### 1. Curley's Interpretation of the Substance-Mode Relation in Spinoza

At the opening of the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines substance and mode 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*].

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*].

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<sup>4</sup> Bayle, *Dictionary* 296-97 | *Dictionnaire* V 210.

A few lines further down, Spinoza presents his first axiom:

E1a1: Whatever is, is either in itself or in another [*Omnia, quae sunt, vel in se, vel in alio sunt*]

From these two definitions and axiom it follows that all things (“whatever is”) are either substances or modes of substances.<sup>5</sup> In the middle of the first part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza proves that God is the only substance (“Except God, no substance can be or be conceived” (E1p14)). He thus concludes that all other things apart from God are God’s modes:

Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God (E1p15).

This means that the Atlantic Ocean, Napoleon Bonaparte and every rhinoceros are all *in* God, and are *modes* of God. The traditional understanding of this doctrine is that, for Spinoza, Napoleon, rhinoceroses and all other modes *inhere* in God and are *states* of God. This interpretation takes for granted that Spinoza’s contemporaries (primarily Descartes and his followers) share this understanding of mode.

In *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, Curley forcefully and interestingly challenged the interpretation of the substance-mode relation in Spinoza as a relation of inherence. First, he argued, it was difficult to make sense of the claim that particular *things*, like Napoleon, are merely modes 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 *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.<sup>6</sup>

Already at this early stage it is important to note Curley’s interpretative strategy, particularly how he links the relations of *inherence* and *predication*. In the third sentence of the passage Curley claims that

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<sup>5</sup> Note, however, that on the mode side of this dichotomy there might also be modes of modes, as I will further point out later in this paper.

<sup>6</sup> *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 18 (italics mine). Cf. Curley’s *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 31.

inherence “may be viewed” as a relation of predication. This clearly allows for the possibility of other understandings (or other kinds) of inherence. In the first sentence of the passage, Curley hints that to consider particular things as predicated of God is to make a category mistake. Of course, one can avoid making the alleged category mistake by rejecting the assimilation of inherence and predication (i.e., by holding that modes *inhere in*, but are not *predicated of* God). Curley rightly points out that both Bayle and the British Idealist philosopher and Spinoza scholar Harold Joachim make the same identification and understand modes to both inhere in and be predicated of God.<sup>7</sup> The approach that divorces inherence from predication has been nicely developed in a number of recent studies.<sup>8</sup> However, in this paper I will defend the stronger claim that Spinozistic modes both inhere in and are predicated of the substance.

Curley advances three further arguments, originally presented by Pierre Bayle, that aim to show the absurdity of Spinoza’s metaphysics.<sup>9</sup> I will present here the outline of these arguments. Further elucidation will follow when we discuss their validity in § 4.

- (i) If all things were modes, or properties, of God, then God, the subject of all things, *would have contradictory properties*. When we attribute properties to things or persons, what we

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<sup>7</sup> See *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 12–22. Cf. Curley’s “On Bennett’s Interpretation,” 1991, p. 36. Indeed, Joachim is quite explicit in claiming that modes are states of the substance and are predicated thereof: “We begin therefore with the anti-thesis of Substance and its states or modifications—a more precise formulation of the popular antithesis of thing and properties, the metaphysical (though not coextensive) correlate of the logical antithesis of subject and predicates (*A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*, 1901, p. 15). Bayle’s claims will be discussed below.

<sup>8</sup> This strategy is developed in two important articles by Jarrett (“The Concepts of Substance and Mode in Spinoza,” 1977, where he states on page 85, “The difficulty...can be solved by distinguishing inherence from predication, which is not without precedent”) and Carriero (“On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza,” 259). Note that both scholars suggest that modes *are* properties of the substance but deny that the modes are predicated of the substance. Carriero argues against the view that “the notion of a... particular property [is] absurd on its face” (258) and considers Curley’s disregard for particular properties as one of the main reasons for Curley’s going off track. For Carriero, Spinozistic modes are particular *properties*. Jarrett concludes that “‘Being in’, as found in Spinoza, expresses a relation of ontological dependence that is modeled after the dependence of an ‘individual *property*’ on its bearer” (103, my emphasis). Both Jarrett and Carriero view modes as tropes, yet presumably both take predication to be a relation which holds only between a *universal* (rather than a *particular*) property and the subjects which have this property. Hence they deny that modes (qua *particular* properties) are predicated of God. Cf. §6 below.

<sup>9</sup> For Curley’s presentation and concise discussion of these arguments, see *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 12–13.

are really doing, according to Bayle's understanding of Spinoza, is attributing properties to God, insofar as the said things or persons are in God:

[According to Spinoza] one would speak falsely when one said, "Peter denies this, he wants that, he affirms such and such a thing"; for in actuality, according to [Spinoza], it is God who denies, wants, affirms.<sup>10</sup>

In nature, there are things whose properties are opposed to each other. According to Bayle, these opposite properties should be attributed to the one Spinozistic substance underlying all things, i.e., God. If, for instance, Napoleon loves honey, while Josephine hates it, and if both Napoleon and Josephine are modes of God, it will follow that "God hates and loves, denies and affirms, the same things, at the same time." Thus, Bayle argues, Spinoza's metaphysics violates the law of non-contradiction.<sup>11</sup>

(ii) If particular things were modes of God, then God would not be immutable.

The world we encounter is filled with particular things that are constantly changing, and Spinoza does not seem to deny the reality of change and motion.<sup>12</sup> These things come into and out of being, and change their properties. If these particulars were modes of God, God would gain and lose modes, and thus be in motion.<sup>13</sup> But if God changes, claims Bayle, he is "not at all the supremely perfect being, 'with whom is no variability, neither shadow of turning' (James 1:17)."<sup>14</sup> Following Bayle, Curley adds that God's immutability is not just a traditional theological view, but also a view openly endorsed by

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<sup>10</sup> Bayle, *Dictionary* 309-10 (Remark N) | *Dictionnaire*, V 212. It is likely that Bayle's argument draws upon a similar argument of Malebranche, in which the latter claims that concurrentism ascribes to God cooperation with contrary actions. See, *The Search after Truth*, Elucidation Fifteen, p. 664.

<sup>11</sup> Bayle, *Dictionary* 310 (Remark N) | *Dictionnaire*, V 212. "Two contradictory terms are then true of [God], which is the overthrow of the first principles of metaphysics." (Ibid). Note that this argument is potent only against those who take Spinozistic modes to be predicated of God. The other two arguments of Bayle, discussed below, can also target the view that Spinozistic modes inhere in, but are not predicated of, God.

<sup>12</sup> The reality of motion in Spinoza is supported by the fact that 'Motion and rest' is the immediate infinite mode of Extension (Letter 64).

<sup>13</sup> "[T]he God of the Spinozist is a nature actually changing, and which continually passes through different states that differ from one another internally and actually." Bayle, *Dictionary*, 308 | *Dictionnaire* V 211.

<sup>14</sup> Bayle, *Dictionary*, 308 | *Dictionnaire* V 211.

Spinoza in E1p20c2.<sup>15</sup> Hence, Curley argues, the inherence of modes generates an internal inconsistency in Spinoza's system.

- (iii) If all things were modes of God, then God would be directly responsible for all the evil in the world.

Traditional theology strives to explain how God can be the omnipotent and omniscient cause of all things, and yet not be responsible for the evil in the created world. According to Bayle, Spinoza's view that all things are modes of God connects God far more intimately to evil, and makes him the real agent of all crimes.

Several great philosophers, not being able to comprehend how is it consistent with the nature of the supremely perfect being to allow men to be so wicked and miserable, have supposed two principles, one good, and the other bad; and here is a Philosopher, who finds it good that God be both the agent and the victim [*le patient*], of all the crimes and miseries of man.<sup>16</sup>

In order to avoid these absurdities, so skillfully pointed out by Bayle, Curley suggests that we should do away with the traditional interpretation of the substance-mode relation in Spinoza as a relation of inherence. Curley proposes that in using the 'substance-mode' terminology Spinoza primarily meant to point out a certain asymmetric dependence of modes on the substance. While modes are entities that depend on the substance and its attributes, the substance is a completely independent entity. Preserving this asymmetric dependence by no means requires that we conceive modes as inhering in the substance.<sup>17</sup> The very fact that modes are *caused* by the substance suffices to establish this asymmetric dependence. Thus, the claim that Napoleon is a mode of God should, according to Curley, amount to nothing over and above the claim that God is the (efficient) cause of Napoleon.<sup>18</sup> Under this interpretation, the claim that all things are modes of God appears to be completely innocent (in fact, too innocent), insofar as it ascribes to Spinoza a common theistic view, namely that God is just the cause of all things.

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<sup>15</sup> Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Bayle, *Dictionary*, 311| *Dictionnaire*, V 213.

<sup>17</sup> Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 37.

<sup>18</sup> "[T]he relation of mode to substance is one of causal dependence, not one of inherence in a subject" (Curley, "On Bennett's Interpretation," 37). Cf. *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 40: "[T]he relation of mode to substance is a relation of causal dependence, which is unlike the relation of predicate and subject," and *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 31.

Interestingly, Bayle explicitly addresses such an attempt to take Spinoza off the hook. In a remark added to the Spinoza article in the second edition of the *Dictionnaire*, Bayle responds to those who claim that he “has not understood Spinoza’s theory at all.”<sup>19</sup> In particular, Bayle addresses the claim of those who insist that

Spinoza only rejected the designation of “substance,” given to beings dependent on another cause with respect to their production, their conservation, and their operation.<sup>20</sup> They could say that, while retaining the entire reality of the thing, [Spinoza] avoids using the word, because he thought that a being so dependent on its cause could not be called ...” a being subsisting by itself” which is the definition of substance.<sup>21</sup>

Bayle criticizes and rejects the view according to which Spinozistic modes are equivalent to Cartesian “created substances” (that are causally dependent on God), rather than the Cartesian modes.<sup>22</sup> In an ironic concluding comment, Bayle announces his willingness to “admit” his mistake, if Spinoza indeed meant his modes to be the equivalent of Cartesian “created substances.” If this is the case, says Bayle, then Spinoza is indeed “an orthodox philosopher who did not deserve to have the objections made against him ... and who only deserves to have been reproached for having gone through so much trouble to embrace a view that everyone knows.”<sup>23</sup> We will return to this important point later. Let us first complete our presentation of Curley’s view by briefly pointing out another component of his interpretation.

If, as Curley suggests, God is not the subject of inherence of all things, then the common attribution of pantheism to Spinoza turns out to be just another myth. Curley’s God is simply not identical with the totality of nature. What then is God?

[Spinoza] rejected the notion of God as a personal creator and identified God with (the attributes in which are inscribed) the fundamental laws of nature, which provide the ultimate explanation for everything that happens in nature. That is, *he identifies God with Nature, not*

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<sup>19</sup> Bayle, *Dictionary*, 329 (Remark DD)| *Dictionnaire*, V 222.

<sup>20</sup> Descartes’ definition of substance, which is in the background of these claims, will be discussed in the next section.

<sup>21</sup> Bayle, *Dictionary*, 333 (Remark DD)| *Dictionnaire*, V 224. Cf. “If [Spinoza] did not want to ascribe the status of substance either to extension or to our souls, because he believed that a substance is a being that does not depend on any cause, I admit that I have attacked him without grounds, have attributed to him a view that he does not hold” (*Dictionary* 332) *Dictionnaire*, V 223.

<sup>22</sup> *Dictionary*, 335 (Remark DD)| *Dictionnaire*, V 224.

<sup>23</sup> Bayle, *Dictionary*, 334 (Remark DD)| *Dictionnaire*, V 224.



*conceived as the totality of things, but conceived as the most general principles of order exemplified by things.* [Italics in original].<sup>24</sup>

Curley's claim that God is just "the most general principle of order" is quite astonishing, since it seems to make God into a principle or *lex* rather than an *ens* or *res*. Given the novelty of this daring claim, one expects Curley to provide textual support (and a detailed explanation of Spinoza's understanding of the laws of nature). Curley admits that such an understanding of God is hard to find in the first part of the *Ethics* (where Spinoza lays out the foundations of his metaphysics), yet Curley suggests that a later passage does support his interpretation.

If you do not find this as explicit as you might like it to be in Part I of the *Ethics*, consider what Spinoza writes in the Preface of Part III:

"[N]ature is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere one and the same i.e., the laws and rules of nature, according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are always and everywhere the same. So the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same, viz. through the universal laws and rules of nature."<sup>25</sup>

If I understand him correctly,<sup>26</sup> Curley is taking the equivalence of '*natura*' and '*naturae leges et regulae*' (in the first sentence of the passage) as implying the identification of the two.<sup>27</sup> But this is only one possible way to explain the conjunction of terms. Alternative readings can take the equivalence to suggest that the *uniformity* of nature is

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<sup>24</sup> *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 42–3.

<sup>25</sup> *Behind the Geometric Method*, 42–3. The Latin text reads: "[Nihil in natura fit, quod ipsius vitio possit tribui;] est namque natura semper eadem et ubique una eademque eius virtus et agendi potentia, hoc est, naturae leges et regulae, secundum quas omnia fiunt et ex unis formis in alias mutantur, sunt ubique et semper eadem, atque adeo una eademque etiam debet esse ratio rerum quaecumque naturam intelligendi, nempe per leges et regulas naturae universals."

<sup>26</sup> One may cite Spinoza's claim that the laws of nature are "inscribed in [the fixed and eternal things]" (TdIE, § 101) in support of an identification of such laws with the attributes (assuming—wrongly, I believe—that the "fixed and eternal things" are attributes and not infinite modes). The inscription metaphor, though indicating an intimate relation between a thing and what is inscribed in it, does not support the ascription of *identity* between the two things (the relation 'x is inscribed in y' seems to be asymmetric, unlike the identity relation).

<sup>27</sup> In recent correspondence Curley notes that "actually what I take the passage to identify are *the laws of nature* and *nature's virtue and power of acting*." Even if we grant Curley's point that the passage identifies the laws of nature with nature's virtue and power of acting, this still falls far short of showing that Spinoza identifies God (or nature) with the laws of nature.

identical to, or exemplified by, the *uniformity* of the laws and rules of nature, or even that the uniformity of “nature’s virtue and power of acting” is identical to, or exemplified by, the uniformity of the laws and rules of nature.<sup>28</sup> The textual source appears too equivocal to support the bold suggestion that God is the most general law (or principle) of nature.

One cluster of problems that this identification faces is that it seems not to fit the characteristics Spinoza assigns to God. Take, for example, indivisibility (E1pp12&13): what does it mean that a law is indivisible? Surprisingly, most of Curley’s critics have not targeted this aspect of his interpretation.<sup>29</sup> One can easily see why a twentieth (or twenty-first) century scholar would be tempted by such an interpretation. It bestows upon Spinoza a certain aura of modernity and philosophical respectability, yet as far as I can see (and I might well be wrong), it is hard to find it in the *Ethics*.<sup>30</sup> In the following, I will concentrate my discussion on Curley’s explanation of the substance-mode relation as a causal relation, and leave aside the problematic identification of God with the most general law of nature, insofar as the former seems to me not to depend on the validity of the latter.

Curley admits that although his interpretation “makes sense of a great many passages in [Spinoza’s] work, it will not deal equally well with all of them.”<sup>31</sup> The fact that his interpretation solves the problems we have just discussed leads Curley to believe that the allegedly minor

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<sup>28</sup> Note that the context of this discussion is Spinoza’s claim that human beings and their affects are not a “dominion within dominion” in nature, but that the same constancy and necessity which governs the rest of nature applies equally to the human psyche.

<sup>29</sup> Curley, however, is aware of the threat posed by God’s indivisibility (E1pp12-13) to his interpretation. See *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 78.

<sup>30</sup> In recent correspondence, Curley writes: “Assuming it’s permissible to cite passages from the *Theological-Political Treatise*, I would cite from that work the passages identifying the power of God with the power of Nature, and the latter power with the laws of nature, such as TTP iii, 7-11, iv, 1-4, and vi, 1-12.” The texts Curley cites seem to me important and relevant. They cannot be discussed here in detail, but as far as I can see they are consistent with the TTP’s well-known claim that the true laws of God are not religious commandments, but rather laws of nature. Identifying divine with natural law is still not an identification of God (or nature) with either kind of law.

To what extent Spinoza’s view of natural laws (even the physical ones) is modern is a truly difficult issue. Spinoza’s view of the nature of mathematical entities is both surprising and difficult. Spinoza arguably did not share Galileo’s (and Descartes’) view that “the book of nature is written in mathematical script,” and it is at least questionable whether he understood the laws of nature as quantitative (see Guérout, “Spinoza’s Letter on the Infinite,” 1973, Gilead, “The Order and Connection of Things,” 1985, and Melamed, “On the Exact Science of Non-Beings: Spinoza’s view of Mathematics,” 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 78.

discord between his interpretation and statements by Spinoza in other texts is a price worth paying.

## 2. The Aristotelian and Cartesian Background of Spinoza's Discussion of Substance and Mode

Before we examine the validity of Curley's interpretation it is important to have a concise overview of the historical background of Spinoza's discussion of substance. This is so 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. Obviously, what we can do here is only to provide a very general outline of these delicate issues.

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. Here is how Aristotle defines substance:

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.<sup>32</sup>

For Aristotle, the term 'substance', in the full 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 descriptions 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 predication.<sup>33</sup> Now, Aristotle allows for the existence of secondary substances; these are the genera and species which are said of (but are not in) the primary substances. Hence, whatever is not a primary substance depends

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<sup>32</sup> *Categories*, 2a12-2a17.

<sup>33</sup> The further question of whether what is *in* a substance (such as whiteness) is repeatable or not is a subject of major controversy among scholars. For two opposite views see Ackrill (Aristotle, *Categories and De Interpretatione*, 1963), and Owen ("Inherence," 1965).

on a primary substance, since it has to either be in a primary substance, or be said of a primary substance.<sup>34</sup>

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle claims that the substratum [*hypokeime-non*] “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.<sup>35</sup>

Clearly the element which is stressed in the discussions of substance in both the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics* is the *independence* of the substance, and in both texts this independence is cashed out in terms of *predication*, i.e. (primary) substances do not depend on anything else of 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 *iff* it is a subject of predication<sup>36</sup> and it is not predicated of anything else.<sup>37</sup>

What is Descartes’ conception of substance? First, it is clear that the Aristotelian definition of substance was not alien to Descartes’ contemporaries.<sup>38</sup> Descartes himself, in the Second Set of Replies appended to the *Meditations*, defines substance in terms that are quite close to Aristotle’s view:<sup>39</sup>

*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

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<sup>34</sup> 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.

<sup>35</sup> *Metaphysics VII (Z)*, 1028b36.

<sup>36</sup> 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 an Aristotelian prime matter). On the other hand, if a substance must have properties, it would make the substance dependent (admittedly, in a weak sense) on the properties, which seems to conflict with the independence of substance. Spinoza would face a similar problem were he to explain why God must have modes.

<sup>37</sup> 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.”

<sup>38</sup> 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 in Buroker’s translation).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Rozemond (*Descartes’s Dualism*, 1998, p. 7) for a similar stress on the continuity between the Scholastic and Cartesian views of substance.

any property, quality or attribute of which we have a real idea (CSM II, 114)

Unlike Aristotle's characterization of primary substance, Descartes' does not stipulate that a substance should not be predicated of anything else.<sup>40</sup> Yet it is clear that what makes something a 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 II, 114). What is interesting in this definition is that in spite of the fact that it makes God supremely perfect, it 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 does appear 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.) (CSM I, 210)

Several prominent scholars suggest that in this passage Descartes introduced a new definition of substance as an 'independent being.' This, I believe, is somewhat imprecise, since the independence of substance is also stressed by Aristotle. Where Descartes diverges from Aristotle is in the way he cashes out this independence. While for Aristotle the independence of (primary) substance is defined 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 fit the *causation*

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<sup>40</sup> In fact, in the Sixth Set of Replies, Descartes seems to allow for one substance to be predicated of another substance, though only in a loose manner of speaking (CSM II, 293). We will return to this text when we discuss the question of whether the traditional interpretation of the substance-mode relation in Spinoza ascribes to Spinoza a category mistake.

*stipulation of substance*: ‘x is a (full-fledged) substance only if it is not caused by anything else.’ Created substances are self-subsisting, yet externally caused by God. As a result, they are not substances in the full sense of the word.

This brings us to an interesting asymmetry between causation and predication in Descartes’ view of substance. While Descartes is willing to grant the title ‘substance’ to things which are *causally* dependent only on God, he does not seem to be willing to make the same compromise with regard 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 (i.e., as being dependent only on God).<sup>41</sup> This seems to indicate that even for Descartes, the *sine qua non* condition for substantiality is still independence in terms of *predication* (i.e., self-subsistence), and only once this necessary condition is satisfied, *causal* self-sufficiency distinguishes between God, the substance in the full sense of the word, and finite, created substances.<sup>42</sup>

What are Cartesian modes? Shortly after presenting his definition of substance in *Principles* I, 51, Descartes defines *mode* as “what is elsewhere meant by an *attribute* or *quality*.” Yet attributes, as opposed to modes, are general and unchanging characteristics of substances (*Principles* I, 56).<sup>43</sup> Modes are also asymmetrically dependent on their substance, both for their existence and for their conceivability.<sup>44</sup>

Later in this paper we will discuss further issues in Descartes’ view of substance (such as the question of whether for Descartes there is

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<sup>41</sup> Of course, for Descartes the distinction between a substance and its principal attribute (i.e., the attribute which constitutes its essence) 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).

<sup>42</sup> In the Third Set of Replies Descartes suggests that reality (or thinghood) admits of degrees: “A substance is more of a thing than a mode; if there are real qualities or incomplete substances, they are things to a greater extent than modes, but to a lesser extent than complete substances; and, finally, if there is an infinite and independent substance, it is more of a thing than a finite and dependent substance” (CSM II 130). The “finite substances” of the third set of replies are presumably the “created substances” of *Principles* I, 51. This text also accepts self-subsistence as the *sine qua non* criterion of being a substance.

<sup>43</sup> On the distinction between attributes and modes, see *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* (CSM I 297| AT VIII B 348). Cf. Garber (*Descartes’ Metaphysical Physics*, 1992, p. 65) for an illuminating discussion of the development of the distinction between attribute and mode in Descartes’ later work.

<sup>44</sup> For the conceptual dependence of modes on their substances, see Descartes’ *Principles* I, 61 (CSM I 214| AT VIII A 29) and *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* (CSM I 298| AT VIII B 35). For the ontological dependence of modes or accidents on their substances, see Descartes’ Fifth Set of Replies (CSM II 251| AT VII 364). Cf. Sixth Set of Replies (CSM II 293| AT VII 435).

only one or many extended substances). But before we return to our main issue—the substance-mode relation in Spinoza—let’s see how Curley would relate to this Aristotelian and Cartesian background. From the point of view of Curley’s interpretation,<sup>45</sup> Descartes represents the crucial middle link in the transition from substance as a self-subsisting being (the Aristotelian notion of substance) to substance as causally independent being (the Spinozistic view of substance according to Curley). According to this historical scheme, Descartes begins a move (the introduction of the causal notion of substance) which is completed by Spinoza (in the elimination of self-subsistence from the definition of substance).

### 3. Arguments Against Curley’s Interpretation.

Curley’s bold thesis has drawn substantial and interesting criticism over the years. In what follows I will point out and further develop three arguments of Curley’s critics that I find powerful. Later I will add some further arguments, which I believe are presented here for the first time.

#### 3.1 Pantheism

One crucial implication of Curley’s interpretation is that Spinoza’s famous pantheism is a myth.<sup>46</sup> According to Curley, Spinoza identifies God not with nature *simpliciter*, but with *Natura naturans*, the active aspect of nature which includes substance and its attributes. *Natura naturata*, the passive aspect of nature and the domain of modes, is, according to Curley, caused by God, but is *not* God.<sup>47</sup> This view does not easily make sense of Spinoza’s reference to *Deus sive Natura* (E4pref and E4p4d), by which he seems to identify God with nature

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<sup>45</sup> Curley concentrates on the Cartesian background of Spinoza’s understanding of substance, suggesting that the Cartesian distinction between substance and mode “involved two elements: a distinction between independent and dependent being and a distinction between subject and predicate” (*Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 37). Spinoza, according to Curley, adopts only the first Cartesian distinction. As I mentioned earlier, I believe that the independence/dependence dichotomy underlies both distinctions, which differ in terms of their explication of the independence of substance and dependence of modes. Curley hardly deals with the Aristotelian discussion of substance. Hence, the present paragraph presents what I believe Curley *should have said* had he examined Spinoza’s view against the background of both Aristotle and Descartes. In fact, a very similar historical scheme appears in Guéronault, though Guéronault does not deny that Spinozistic modes are also qualities of substance (*Spinoza I*, 1968, p. 63).

<sup>46</sup> See Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 42 and Curley, “On Bennett’s Interpretation,” 45.

<sup>47</sup> Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 19.

(and not just with *Natura naturans*). Similarly, it would make little sense for Curley's Spinoza to say that there is nothing outside God, a claim which Spinoza repeats more than once.<sup>48</sup>

Yet Curley interestingly argues that in the key passage in the *Ethics*, in which Spinoza officially introduces the distinction between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*, he identifies God only with the former.<sup>49</sup>

[B]y *Natura naturans* we must understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, or such attributes of substance as express an eternal and infinite essence, i.e. [*hoc est*] (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).

At first sight, the definition of *Natura naturans* as "God insofar as he is considered as a free cause" seems to provide a clear endorsement of Curley's position. Yet when we read it more closely, it turns out, I believe, to make quite the opposite point. According to the passage, *Natura naturans* is not God *simpliciter*, but rather "God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause" [*Deus, quatenus, ut causa libera, consideratur*].<sup>50</sup> Why would Curley's Spinoza qualify the identity of God and *Natura naturans*? If *Natura naturans* is identical with God only "insofar as he is considered as a free cause," it is at least possible that in another respect, God is not identical with *Natura naturans*.

At several places in the *Ethics*, Spinoza speaks of God "not insofar as he is infinite" (see, for example, E4p4d).<sup>51</sup> He apparently uses this roundabout language because he feels uncomfortable describing God as finite or compelled. Yet Spinoza leaves no doubt that he takes finite

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<sup>48</sup> See, for example, KV I, ii (I/26/17); KV I, iii (I/35/19), and the NS version of E1p18d ("God is not a cause of anything outside him" [C 428, n. 52]). Similarly, in Letter 75, when Spinoza answers Oldenburg's persistent queries about his true view of Christ, he replies with words that could hardly be interpreted in a non-pantheistic manner: "I will add only this.... that God is not in any one place but is everywhere in accordance with his essence, that matter is everywhere the same, that God does not manifest himself in some imaginary space beyond the world." (Ep. 75| Shirley 338).

<sup>49</sup> Curley, "On Bennett's Interpretation," 47. Cf. *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 37, 42-3.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Della Rocca makes this point in his unpublished manuscript, "Predication and Pantheism in Spinoza".

<sup>51</sup> In "Predication and Pantheism in Spinoza," Della Rocca discusses E2p9 in this context and cites E2p9c, E2p12d, E2p19d and E2p20d, as further examples. My argument, though aiming at the same conclusion, relies on E1p28.



modes to be God in some sense or respect.<sup>52</sup> One such text is E1p29d, the demonstration that comes just before E1p29s (where Spinoza introduces the distinction between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*):

[T]he modes of the divine nature have also followed from [the divine nature] necessarily and not contingently (by P16)—either [*vel*] insofar as the divine nature is considered absolutely (by P21) or insofar as the divine nature is considered to be determined to act in a certain way (by P28).

In E1p21, Spinoza discusses the immediate infinite modes which “follow the absolute nature of any of God’s attributes.” These are the modes which follow from the divine nature “insofar as he is considered absolutely” (E1p29d). But what is the divine nature insofar as it “is considered to be determined to act in a certain way”? Let’s look at E1p28, the proposition Spinoza cites in support of this claim.

E1p28 attempts to explain how God can be considered the cause of finite modes. In E1p21, Spinoza states and proves that the modes which follow directly from God, or the attributes, are infinite.<sup>53</sup> In E1p22, he proves that only infinite modes can follow from infinite modes.<sup>54</sup> This leaves us wondering in what sense God is said to be the cause of the finite modes (as E1p16&c1 and E1p25 claim). Spinoza answers:

Whatever has been determined to exist and produce an effect has been so determined by God (by P26 and P24C). But what is finite and has a determinate existence could not have been produced by the absolute nature of an attribute of God; for whatever follows from the absolute nature of an attribute of God is eternal and infinite (by P21).<sup>55</sup> It had, therefore, to follow either from God or from an attribute of God insofar as it is considered to be affected by some mode. For there is nothing except substance and its modes (by A1, D3, and D5) and

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<sup>52</sup> In a somewhat surprising response, Curley writes recently (in correspondence): “I’m willing to accept that formula, so long as its vagueness is not repaired by interpreting it as implying that finite modes are parts of God (an interpretation I take to be ruled out by IP13S).” I definitely do *not* think that finite modes are parts of God (see the discussion of substance-mode pantheism as opposed to whole-part pantheism at the end of §5 below). Hence it seems that the gap between our positions is considerably reduced.

<sup>53</sup> “E1p21: All the things which follow from the absolute nature of any of God’s attributes have always had to exist and be infinite, or are, through the same attribute, eternal and infinite.”

<sup>54</sup> “E1p22: Whatever follows from some attribute of God insofar as it is modified by a modification which, through the same attribute, exists necessarily and is infinite, must also exist necessarily and be infinite.”

<sup>55</sup> The “absolute nature of an attribute” is the attribute when it is not modified at all. What “follows from the absolute nature” of God is an immediate infinite mode of the same attribute.

modes (byP25c) are nothing but affections of God's attributes. But it also could not follow from God, or from an attribute of God, insofar as it is affected by a modification which is eternal and infinite (by P22). It had, therefore, to follow from, or to be determined to exist and produce an effect by *God or an attribute of God insofar as it is modified by a modification which is finite and has a determinate existence*. (E1p28d, emphasis mine).

God, "insofar as it is modified by modification which is finite and has a determinate existence," is clearly not *Natura naturans*, since the latter is neither finite nor has a determinate existence. This passage leaves little doubt that to follow from a finite mode of God is to follow from God. This is, in fact, the whole point of the demonstration of E1p28. Since finite modes can follow *only* from finite modes, God *has* to be the finite modes ("God insofar as it is modified by modification which is finite") if he is to be the cause of all things, including finite modes.<sup>56</sup> Hence, we must conclude that insofar as God "is considered as a free cause" he is *Natura naturans*, but insofar as he "is modified by a modification which is finite and has a determinate existence," God is *Natura naturata*. Thus, if pantheism is the view that identifies God with nature (i.e., with all aspects of nature), Spinoza *is* a pantheist.<sup>57</sup>

### 3.2 The Definition of 'Mode'

Curley's interpretation makes some of Spinoza's formulations highly misleading. Particularly disturbing is the fact that Curley's Spinoza must have been careless not only in his casual writing about the substance-mode relation, but even the very *definition* of mode seems to be poorly formulated. The definition (E1d5) reads

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*].<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Curley believes that finite modes follow both from God and from other finite modes, and he might respond by suggesting that God is the cause of finite modes only insofar as he is the cause of certain infinite modes which include the finite mode. The argument of E1p28d shows clearly that Spinoza's view is much stronger and that he takes God to be the cause of every finite mode in its particularity. This is fulfilled by taking finite mode *x* which causes finite mode *y* as God "modified by a modification which is finite."

<sup>57</sup> In the Fourth Chapter of the TTP Spinoza writes: "So the whole of our knowledge, that is our supreme good, not merely depends on the knowledge of God but consists entirely therein [*sed in eadem omnino consistit*]" (G III/60/11-13) S 50). This seems to indicate that Spinoza embraced pantheism at least as early as the 1660s, while he was writing the TTP.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Ep. 12 (IV/54/9) Shirley 102): "The affections of Substance I call Modes."

According to Curley this definition amounts to nothing over and above the claim that modes are causally dependent on something else. Interestingly, this definition (as well as the definition of substance) does not at all mention the term ‘cause’ [*causa*]. For the time being, let’s just note that it appears somewhat odd that a philosopher who makes an extremely powerful and extensive use of the notion of causality fails to mention it in the place where it, presumably, most belongs. How does Curley infer causal dependence from the definition of mode? Presumably, it is the “*in alio est*” phrase in E1d5 which Curley understands as designating the causal dependence of modes.<sup>59</sup> However, another question emerges: why define modes as affections? Bennett rightly points out that the Latin ‘*affectio*’ means “quality, or property or state.”<sup>60</sup> Even if Spinoza used *affectio* in an idiosyncratic sense,<sup>61</sup> it would still seem to be redundant, since

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<sup>59</sup> It would be unreasonable for Curley to interpret the ‘conceived through another’ clause of the definition of mode as designating the causal dependence of modes, since in such a case he would have to address two problems. Firstly, he would have to explain the ‘*in alio est*’ clause. Secondly, he would have to point out a textual source for the conceptual dependence of modes.

<sup>60</sup> Bennett, *Study*, 1984, p. 93. Cf. Bennett, *Six Philosophers*, Vol. I, 2001, p. 142. Cf. Garrett, “Spinoza’s *conatus* argument,” 2002, p. 135. That Spinoza understands ‘affections’ to be *properties* one can see in the following passage from the *Cogitata Metaphysica* where Spinoza defines affections as the *attributes* of a thing.

“*The definition of affections*: Let us, therefore, attend to our own business. We say that affections of being are certain attributes, under which we understand the essence or existence of each thing, [the attributes,] nevertheless, being distinguished from [being] only by reason. I shall try here to explain certain things concerning these attributes (for I do not undertake to treat them all), and also to distinguish them from denominations, which are affections of no being.” (I/240/15-20| C 306). It is not clear to me whether in this early text ‘attribute’ designates *every* property of a real thing, or only the properties which constitute the essence of a thing. The claim that the attributes “are distinguished from being only by reason” seems to support the latter. In any case, it is clear, I think, that attributes—and hence also affections—are taken here as properties.

<sup>61</sup> Here I agree with Bennett’s view that according to Curley’s interpretation, “Spinoza has defined ‘mode’ just about as misleadingly as he could possibly have done” (*Study*, 93). Curley would have to explain many passages in Spinoza’s works where ‘*affectus*’ seems to indicate inherence (and predication). Here are three examples. 1) One group of texts where ‘affection’ clearly involves inherence is in Spinoza’s discussion of the affection of the body in part three of the *Ethics*. See, for example, E3p32s: “the images of things are the very affections of the human Body, or modes by which the human Body is affected by external causes, and disposes to do this or that.” Would Curley deny that images of things are in the human body? 2) In Letter 12 Spinoza claims that “from the fact that we *separate* the affections of Substance from Substance itself, and arrange them in classes so that we can easily imagine them, there arises Number” (IV/57/3-4| S 104. Italics mine). For Spinoza, numbers are merely “aids of the imagination” and our knowledge of numbers belongs to the distorting first kind of knowledge (see Guérault, “Spinoza’s Letter on the Infinite,” and Ramond, *Qualité et quantité dans la philosophie de Spinoza*, 1995). If our (distorted) conception of number results from the separation of

the idea of the modes' dependence is clearly stated in the rest of the definition (i.e., that the mode is "in another"). Why then add the misleading claim (according to Curley's account of Spinoza) that modes are *substantiae affectiones*?

### 3.3 E1p15 and E1p16

We have seen that according to Curley the substance-mode relation amounts to nothing over and above the asymmetric dependence of an effect on its cause. Now, in E1p15, Spinoza states and proves that all things are modes of God:

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

In the following proposition, Spinoza states and proves that

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

And from E1p16, Spinoza derives E1p16c1:

From this it follows that God is the efficient cause of all things which can fall under an infinite intellect [*Hinc sequitur, Deum omnium rerum, quae sub intellectum infinitum cadere possunt, esse causam efficientem*].

Both Jarrett and Carriero make the cogent point that if, the substance-mode relation amounts to nothing over and above causation, it would

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affections from substance, it would seem that otherwise these affections *are not* separate from substance. 3) Further on in the same letter Spinoza argues that if one thinks that there is a definite number for all the motions of matter that have ever been (i.e., if one thinks that matter could exist prior to the beginning of movement), "he would surely be attempting to *deprive* [*privare*] *corporeal Substance*, which we cannot conceive other than existing, *of its affections*, and to bring it about that Substance should not possess the nature that it does possess" (IV/60/12-15| Shirley 106. Emphasis mine). If the affections at stake are non-essential properties of the substance, we can, I think, make sense of these claims. The argument seems to be roughly this: if the number of motions till now were finite, it would seem that before the earliest movement, substance existed without having a multiplicity of modes (assuming that the multiplicity of modes can only result from change and motion). Spinoza rejects this possibility by insisting that the substance cannot exist without its modes. This explanation follows the traditional understanding of modes and affections as inhering in the substance. But, if we accept Curley's view, it is not clear what kind of removal ("deprive corporeal Substance...of its affections") is at stake and why such a removal of (what Curley considers to be merely) an effect of the substance should make the substance "not possess the nature that it does possess."

seem odd for Spinoza to state this relation in E1p15 and repeat it (redundantly) in E1p16c1, without making the slightest claim that E1p16c1 (or E1p16) is derived from, or is a restatement of, E1p15. Moreover, in his later references to the two propositions Spinoza does *not* seem to treat the two propositions as equivalent.<sup>62</sup>

I find the aforementioned arguments quite convincing. I wish to add the following points.

### 3.4 Can Curley's God Know Anything?

One underlying concern for Curley is to secure Spinoza's "impersonal conception of God, according to which God will have nothing in common with man, but will have enough in common with the God of the Philosophers to justifiably be called God."<sup>63</sup> Though one may doubt whether the phrase "the God of the Philosophers" has any univocal meaning, I think Curley's main point is definitely right. Spinoza consciously attempts to preserve *some* continuity between the philosophical terminology with which he was acquainted and his own philosophical terminology.<sup>64</sup> One attribute which is traditionally ascribed to God is omniscience, and in E2p3 and E2p4 Spinoza seems to ascribe omniscience to God. Yet when we carefully examine Curley's understanding of the substance-mode relation, it leads, I believe, to the conclusion that not only is Curley's God not omniscient, but that this God is completely ignorant.

Spinoza arguably accepts the following two theses:

- (1) A has knowledge of x, iff she has an idea of x.<sup>65</sup>
- (2) All ideas are modes of Thought.<sup>66</sup>

From which we can infer that,

- (3) If God has knowledge of x, God must have a mode of Thought.

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<sup>62</sup> See Jarrett ("The Concept of Substance and Mode in Spinoza," 92) and Carriero ("On the Relation Between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics," 255-6).

<sup>63</sup> Curley, "On Bennett's Interpretation," 40.

<sup>64</sup> In an important note in the third part of the *Ethics* (Definitions of Affects, 20), Spinoza lets his readers know that although his use of philosophical terms does not necessarily follow the common use, his terminology still "is not entirely opposed" to the common usage.

<sup>65</sup> In E2p7d Spinoza rephrases E1a4 by replacing 'knowledge' [*cognitio*] with 'idea'. In several other places he treats the "idea or [*sive*] knowledge" (of an item) as equivalent terms. See, for example, E2p19d: "God has the idea of the human body, or knows the human body". Cf. E2p20d, E2p23d, Ep. 72 (Shirley 290).

<sup>66</sup> See the end of E2a3: "[T]here can be an idea, even though there is no *other* mode of thinking" (Emphasis mine).

Now, what does ‘having a mode of Thought’ mean? According to the traditional understanding of the substance-mode relation it means that ideas (modes of Thought) inhere in God. According to Curley it means that God is merely the cause of certain ideas. Since Curley agrees with Bayle’s claim that having modes (in the traditional sense) entails mutability, he would have to deny that any idea inheres in God. Hence, Curley’s God has no ideas—and no knowledge—*within* himself. All that Curley’s God does is to cause or produce ideas. But to say that when someone produces an idea of *x*, she has knowledge of *x*, seems to be an extremely odd criterion for knowledge. *Prima facie*, it seems that Curley makes God know things without endowing him with any internal mentality or representational capacities.

Can Spinoza accept a God that is ignorant? In numerous places Spinoza assigns to God thinking [*cogitans*], knowledge [*cognitio*], and understanding [*intelligere*].<sup>67</sup> It is hard to make sense of claims that God thinks, knows and understands while denying that God has any ideas within him.

### 3.5 Inherence in Letter 12

Though Spinoza does not frequently use the term ‘inherence’ [*inhaereo*], he does use it at a very crucial moment. At the end of his discussion of kinds of infinities in Letter 12, Spinoza writes:

From all that I have said one can clearly see that certain things are infinite by their own nature and cannot in any way be conceived as finite, while other things are infinite by virtue of the cause in which they inhere [*causae cui inhaerent*]; and when they are conceived in abstraction, they can be divided into parts and be regarded as finite. [IV/60/17-61/3] Shirley 106]

I cannot dwell here on Spinoza’s complicated and intriguing taxonomy of infinities. Yet it is not difficult to see that what is at stake in this passage is the distinction between attributes and infinite modes. In Spinoza’s ontology, the *only* infinite things that can “have a cause in which they inhere” are the infinite modes. Attributes do not have causes (apart from themselves), and they are far too closely related to their substance to inhere in it.<sup>68</sup> Attributes are also indivisible (E1p12).

Spinoza’s main point in this passage is that while both attributes and infinite modes are infinite, their infinities are of different kinds and have opposite characteristics. The infinity of attributes is due to their

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<sup>67</sup> See, for example, E2p3s and E2p5d.

<sup>68</sup> For Spinoza, like Descartes, the distinction between a substance and its attributes is only a distinction of reason.

nature, or definition (see E1d4), and is absolutely indivisible. The infinity of infinite modes has nothing to do with the nature, or definition, of a mode, but rather results from the fact that it *inheres* in (and is caused by) the infinite substance (or, as Spinoza puts it in E1p22-23, it “follows” from an attribute).

It is important to stress that this passage cannot be explained away as a marginal text, since we know that even in his late period Spinoza kept circulating copies of this important letter among his friends.<sup>69</sup>

### 3.6 “*In Deo Moveri*”

In Letter 71, Henry Oldenburg, the secretary of the Royal Society in London, asks Spinoza “to elucidate and moderate those passages in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, which have proved a stumbling-block to readers.” Oldenburg was particularly concerned about the passages which “appear to treat in an ambiguous way of God and Nature, which many people consider you have confused with each other.”<sup>70</sup> To this charge Spinoza replies in Letter 73:

I entertain an opinion on God and Nature far different from that which modern Christians are wont to uphold. I maintain that God is the immanent cause, as the phrase is, of all things, and not the transitive cause. All things, I say, are in God and *move in God* [*in Deo esse & in Deo moveri*], and this I affirm together with Paul and perhaps together with all the ancient philosophers, though expressed in a different way, and I would even venture to say together with all the ancient Hebrews, as far as may be conjectured from certain traditions, though these have suffered much corruption. However, as to the view of certain people that the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* rests on the identification of God with Nature (by the latter of which they understand a kind of mass or corporeal matter) they are quite mistaken [S 332. My emphases.]

The last sentence of the passage may appear at first as a rejection of pantheism. But a deeper look proves the opposite. The sentence does not reject *any* identification of God with Nature, but only the identification of God with Nature considered as “mass or corporeal matter.” The latter identification is faulty for Spinoza on two counts. First, it ascribes to God only one attribute, Extension, while, for Spinoza, Thought and all the other attributes are by no means less real than Extension. Second, even the identification of *Extension* with “mass or corporeal matter” is imprecise. In Letter 81, Spinoza criticizes

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<sup>69</sup> See Ep. 81 (Shirley 352).

<sup>70</sup> Ep. 71 (IV/304/9-11|Shirley 329).

Descartes precisely because the latter conceives Extension as “an inert mass.”<sup>71</sup>

When we turn our attention to the rest of the passage, it seems to present two significant challenges to Curley’s interpretation. First, Spinoza’s claim that “all things *move* in God” seems to be unintelligible on Curley’s reading. Second, on Curley’s reading it is hard to figure out why Spinoza invokes the “ancient philosophers” as supporters of the view that all things are in God, since this doctrine—which, according to Curley, means only that all things are caused by God—was accepted by virtually all of Spinoza’s contemporaries. I have already pointed out that Curley’s interpretation of the substance-mode relation in causal terms brings Spinoza much closer to the good old theist position. Why then invoke the distant shadows of the Eleatics, the Stoics, and the mysterious traditions of “the Ancient Hebrews”?<sup>72</sup>

This passage cannot easily be explained away either, since it appears in one of Spinoza’s last letters, reflecting his mature thought.

### 3.7 Immanent Cause

Both in the *Ethics* and in his other writings Spinoza suggests an important distinction between *immanent* [*causa immanens*| *inblijvende oorzaak*] and *transient* cause [*causa transiens*| *overgaande oorzaak*], and stresses that “God is the immanent and not the transitive cause of all things” (E1p18d). Spinoza’s main discussion of this distinction appears in the *Short Treatise*, and it seems to me undeniable that in this text the claim that God is the immanent cause of all things means that all things are *within* God.

In the *Short Treatise* Spinoza characterizes an immanent cause as one in which the agent and the one acted on are not different,<sup>73</sup> in which the agent “acts on himself,”<sup>74</sup> whose effect “is not outside

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<sup>71</sup> Ep. 81 (Shirley 352). Of course, Spinoza *intentionally* phrases these lines (in Letter 71) so that a naive reader would take it as a rejection of pantheism. Given the political context of his writing this seems to be a reasonable practice.

<sup>72</sup> It is quite likely that these “ancient Hebrew” traditions [*traditionibus*] are nothing but the pantheistic teachings of the *Kabbalah*. In pre-modern Hebrew, the word ‘*Kabbalah*’ means *tradition*. It was a common practice of the medieval Kabbalists to attribute their works to ancient sources. (These claims have conventionally been approached with skepticism, though recent studies of the Kabbalistic literature suggest that some sources of the main Kabbalistic works might indeed go back to pre-medieval times). Spinoza’s reference to the corruption of these traditions is in line with the views of some early modern Jewish philosophers such as Salomon Maimon and Moses Mendelssohn, who saw the Kabbalah as founded upon a rationalist (one may say, Neo-Platonic) core, which was enveloped in, and corrupted by, its mythical presentation.

<sup>73</sup> KV I, ii [I/26/19| C 72].

<sup>74</sup> KV I, ii [I/26/25| C 72].



itself,”<sup>75</sup> and in which the effect is part of the cause.<sup>76</sup> A transitive (or transient) cause has precisely the opposite characteristics. Spinoza’s paradigmatic example of an immanent cause is the relation of an intellect to the concepts which constitute it.<sup>77</sup> These claims make clear that the effects of an immanent cause are *within* the cause.

The two other places where Spinoza discusses immanent cause are Letter 73 and the *Ethics*. Does Spinoza’s understanding of immanent cause in these two later texts involve the thesis that its effect is not within the cause? We have no indication which supports this possibility. On the contrary, when we look carefully at the relevant passage of Letter 73 (see the quotation above) we find that Spinoza interrupts himself with a short remark indicating that he is not using the notion in any new manner: “I maintain that God is the immanent cause, *as the phrase is*, of all things, and not the transitive cause” (emphasis mine).

The *Ethics* passage simply states that all things are in God,<sup>78</sup> and at first sight may appear to provide no proof either for or against Curley’s interpretation. But why should we ascribe to Spinoza a change in the use of his terminology when there is no indication that such a change took place (and, when a very late text, Letter 73 (1675), seems to indicate a continuity in Spinoza’s use of this terminology)? Let’s look closely at E1p18 where Spinoza proves that God is the immanent cause of all things. The demonstration of E1p18 proceeds in two stages. First, Spinoza points out that according to E1p15 all things are in God, and then relies on E1p16c to show that God is the (efficient) cause of all things. Thus, an immanent cause is just an efficient cause whose effect is *in* the cause. A transitive cause is an (efficient) cause whose effect is not in the cause (or is outside the cause). But can Curley allow for such a notion? Recall that it was Curley’s reading of E1d3&5 that ‘to be in x’ is just to be caused by x? If so, then the notion of transitive cause turns out to be a blunt contradiction in terms: it is a cause whose effect is ... not caused by it.

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<sup>75</sup> KV I, ii [I/30/23-25] C 76] and KV I, iii [I/35/25] C 80].

<sup>76</sup> KV I, ii [I/30/29-31] C 76]. The tension between God’s indivisibility and the existence of particular things in God seems to have occupied Spinoza throughout his life. As I will later argue, the mature Spinoza solved this problem by relating particular things to God not as *parts* of a whole, but rather as *modes* of an indivisible substance.

<sup>77</sup> KV I, ii [I/26/26] C 72] and [I/30/25] C 76].

<sup>78</sup> “E1p18: God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things. Dem.: Everything that is, is in God, and must be conceived through God (by P15), and so (by P16C1) God is the cause of [NS: all] things, which are in him. That is the first [thing to be proven]. And then outside God there can be no substance (by P14), i.e. (by D3), thing which is in itself outside God. That was the second. God, therefore, is the immanent, not the transitive cause of all things, q.e.d.”

### 3.8 Modes of Modes

Do Spinozistic modes, such as particular bodies and minds, themselves have modes? In E3d3 Spinoza affirms precisely the existence of such entities:

By affect [*affectum*] I understand the affections of the body [*corporis affectiones*] by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained.

Recall that Spinoza defines a mode as “the affections of substance [*substantiae affectiones*].” Since the body itself is a mode of God, affects must be modes of a mode. The notion of a mode of a mode appears in several other places in the *Ethics*.<sup>79</sup> I doubt anyone would deny that affects such as joy, lust and anger are states that inhere in the body (or in the mind). Hence, Curley has, I think, to concede that in some places Spinoza is using ‘modes’ and ‘affections’ in the traditional sense of these terms. It is indeed possible that a writer uses a certain term in more than one sense. We would like the writer to indicate when he or she is using a term in an uncommon way, but writers are obviously not perfect beings. Yet it is, I believe, fair to say that Spinoza is a relatively careful writer. When he uses a term like ‘love’ in a sense different from his customary use he explicitly warns the reader.<sup>80</sup> This, of course, does not mean that Spinoza could not fail to warn the reader in other cases of the equivocal use of a term. Yet we always approach a text assuming that its terminology is not constantly changing (otherwise, any attempt to understand a text would be hopeless), and it is, I think, a clear deficiency of an interpretation when it forces the text to be read as containing an equivocal use of crucial terminology.

### 3.9 Leibniz's Report on His Conversations with Spinoza

Between the 18th and the 21st of November 1676, Leibniz visited Spinoza at the Hague. Before visiting Holland, Leibniz lived for a while in Paris, where he met Baron Ehrenfried Walter von Tschirnhaus, one of Spinoza's most acute correspondents. We know that Tschirnhaus and Leibniz discussed Spinoza's views in detail.<sup>81</sup> Leibniz was therefore

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<sup>79</sup> See, for example, E3p32s: “The images of things are the very affections of the human body, or modes by which the human body is affected by external causes, and disposed to do this or that.”

<sup>80</sup> When in E5p17c Spinoza claims that “*strictly speaking*, God loves no one,” he arguably prepares his readers for a different use of the term ‘love’ that would allow God to love.

<sup>81</sup> See Nadler, *Spinoza—A Life*, 1999, pp. 300-2, 341.

probably well prepared for his meeting with Spinoza. Leibniz summarizes his discussions with Spinoza as follows:

I saw [Spinoza] while passing through Holland, and I spoke with him several times and at great length. He has a strange metaphysics, full of paradoxes. Among other things, he believes that the world and God are but a single substantial thing, that God is the substance of all things, and that creatures are only modes or accidents [Il a une étrange Metaphysique, pleine de paradoxes. Entre autres il croit, que le monde et Dieu n'est qu'une même chose en substance, que Dieu est la substance de toutes choses, et que les creatures ne sont que des Modes ou accidens.]. But I noticed that some of his purported demonstrations, that he showed me, are not exactly right. It is not as easy as one thinks to provide true demonstrations in metaphysics. [Emphasis mine.]<sup>82</sup>

As one can easily see, Leibniz understood Spinoza to be a pantheist (“*the world and God are but a single substantial thing*”) and as taking finite things to be God’s *accidents*. Furthermore, he considers this view as “strange” and paradoxical. There is nothing strange or paradoxical in the view that God is the cause of all things (as Curley interprets the substance-mode relation). Could Leibniz have misunderstood Spinoza? This is very unlikely given the fact that the two spoke “several times” and “at great length,” and that Leibniz was intrigued by Spinoza’s view of God as the substance of all creatures. Curley’s interpretation of the substance-mode relation is not particularly difficult to grasp and it should not take Spinoza much time to explain the issue. Could Spinoza intentionally conceal his true understanding of the substance-mode relation? No. Why should he? Why should (Curley’s) Spinoza conceal his rather innocent and orthodox view of God’s relation to creatures by making Leibniz believe that he embraces the strange and unorthodox view that all creatures are just accidents in God?

### 3.10 Modifications or Accidents

Letter 4, addressed to Henry Oldenburg, provides us with precious information about the very early (1661) drafts of the *Ethics*.

[P]lease attend to my definitions of substance and accident ... :

- (1) For by substance I understand that which is conceived through itself and in itself, that is, that whose conception does not involve the conception of another thing;

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<sup>82</sup> Translation by Nadler (*Spinoza—A Life*, 341). The original French can be found in *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, I, p. 118.

- (2) and by modification or accident I understand that which is in something else and is conceived through that in which it is [*per modificationem autem, sive per Accidens id, quod in alio est, & per id, in quo est, concipitur*].

Hence, it is clearly established that,

- (3) first, that substance is prior in nature to its accidents; for without it these can neither exist nor be conceived.
- (4) Secondly, beside substance and accidents nothing exists in reality, or externally to the intellect.<sup>83</sup>

There is little doubt that (1)-(4) are the early formulations of E1a3, E1a5, E1p1 and E1p4d, respectively, in the published version of the *Ethics*. The main difference between the two texts is that in one place in Letter 4 Spinoza identifies modifications with accidents (see claim 2 above), and elsewhere uses ‘accidents’ instead of ‘modes’.<sup>84</sup> Accidents are commonly considered to both inhere in, and be predicated of, their subject.<sup>85</sup> Hence, Letter 4 seems to provide strong support for the claim that Spinoza’s modes *sive* accidents are properties of the substance.<sup>86</sup> Curley could of course respond by saying that the very fact that Spinoza abandoned the identification of modes and accidents shows that at least in the *Ethics* modes are not conceived as properties. Fortunately, Spinoza does provide us with an explanation of why he stopped using the terminology of ‘accidents’ (which appears quite rarely in his late writings). The passage below is taken from the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, the appendix to Spinoza’s 1663 book, *Descartes’ Principle of Philosophy*.

I only wish it to be noted, concerning [the division of being], that we say expressly that being is divided into Substance and Mode, and not into Substance and Accident. For an Accident is nothing but a mode of thinking [*nam Accidens nihil est praeter modum cogitandi*], inasmuch as it denotes what is only a respect, E.g., when I say that the triangle is moved, *the motion is not a mode of the triangle, but of the body which is moved*. Hence the motion is called an accident with respect to the triangle. But with respect to the body, it is called a real being. For the motion

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<sup>83</sup> Shirley 68 (IV/13/30-14/6). The numeration of the claims is mine.

<sup>84</sup> Similarly, one of Spinoza’s correspondents, Hugo Boxel, relates ‘accident’ and ‘mode’ as synonymous. See Ep. 55 (Shirley 274).

<sup>85</sup> See Van Cleve, “Essence/Accident” in *A Companion to Metaphysics*, 1995, p. 136.

<sup>86</sup> Note that Leibniz also ascribes to Spinoza the view that creatures are “modes or accidents” of God (see Leibniz’s report on his conversations with Spinoza, quoted above).

cannot be conceived without the body, though it can without the triangle (I/236/31-237/5 | C 303). [Emphasis mine.]<sup>87</sup>

The passage is not easy to decipher, but it seems that Spinoza's distinction between accident and mode is related to the dependence (or lack thereof) of each upon its subject. While a mode cannot be conceived independently of its substance, an accident *can* be so conceived.<sup>88</sup> Since movement can be conceived independently of the triangle, but not independently of the body, movement is a mode of the body but only an accident of the triangle.<sup>89</sup> Whether we are satisfied by this explanation or not, it is clear that in this passage Spinoza takes *modes* to be *states* of the substance ("the motion is a mode ... of the triangle which is moved"). The rejection of the terminology of "accident" seems to have nothing to do with predication, since even *after* the rejection of the synonymity of 'mode' and 'accident,' Spinoza understands mode as a state of a thing and clearly not as an effect.

### 3.11 Modes and Participles

Spinoza's *Compendium of the Hebrew Grammar* was written at the end of his life. Regrettably, this work has largely been neglected by Spinoza scholars. I say regrettably, because between the lines of this text one

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<sup>87</sup> The example of the motion of the triangle follows Descartes' *Principles*, I, 61 [CSM I, 214]. However, unlike Descartes, Spinoza would deny that a figure is a mode of a body. For Spinoza, geometrical figures are merely abstractions, or *entia rationis*. See Letter 12 [IV/57/7], and Letter 83 ("... or in the case of mental constructs [*entia rationis*] in which I include *figures*, but not in the case of real things").

<sup>88</sup> See Guérout (*Spinoza I*, 65 n. 193) for a similar explanation of this distinction. Cf. Des Chene, *Physiologia*, 1996, p. 132. The accidents Spinoza has in mind here are presumably what were at the time otherwise called 'real accidents,' i.e., accidents which are capable of existing independently of their substance.

<sup>89</sup> According to Bayle the term 'mode' became widely used instead of 'accident' following the transubstantiation controversy. Official Catholic doctrine holds that after the consecration of the bread and wine in the Eucharist, the accidents of the bread and wine remain, while their original substances turn into the blood and body of Christ). Philosophers like "Descartes, Gassendi, and, in general, all those who have abandoned Scholastic philosophy, have denied that an accident is separable from its subject in such a way that it could subsist after its separation" and began employing the less common term 'mode' instead of 'accident' to make clear that the qualities at stake are inseparable from their substance (*Dictionary* 331-2 | *Dictionnaire* 224). For various Cartesian accounts of the transubstantiation, see Tad Schmaltz, *Radical Cartesianism*, 2002, pp. 27-74. Bayle's explanation is consistent with Spinoza's distinction between accident and mode in the *Cogitata Metaphysica*. The Port-Royal Logic's distinction between mode and accident is slightly different. Accidents are distinct ideas of modes which are joined with "the confused and indeterminate idea of a substance" (*Logic*, 44). However, it is clear that for Nicole and Arnauld both modes and accidents are predicated of and inhere in their substances.

can easily find some of Spinoza's most crucial metaphysical doctrines. One example is a certain analogy Spinoza draws between parts of speech—noun (or substantive noun), adjective, participles, and the metaphysical terms they denote—substance, attribute, modes.<sup>90</sup> A fragment of this analogy first appears in the fifth chapter of the work:

The noun Ish is a man [*vir*]; hacham [learned, *doctus*], gadol [big, *magnus*], etc. are attributes of a man; holech [walking, *ambulans*], yodea [knowing, *sciens*], are modes. (G I/303/20| GLE 28).<sup>91</sup>

That 'Ish' ['Man'] is a noun seems straightforward, but how does Spinoza distinguish between 'gadol' ['big'] on the one hand, and 'holech' ['walking'] on the other? What makes the first (signify) an *attribute*, and the second (signify) merely a *mode*? Spinoza answers these questions explicitly in the 33rd and last chapter of the work:

I call these participles since they signify a mode [*modum significant*] by which a thing is considered as in the present. But they [the participles] themselves are frequently changed into pure adjectives which signify the attributes of things; for example, 'sofer' is a participle, which means *a counting man* [*hominem numerantem*], that is *who is now occupied in counting* [*qui jam in numerando est occupans*], but most frequently **it is used as an attribute without any relationship to time**, and signifies a man *who has the job of counting* [*qui officium habet numerandi*], namely *a scribe* [*scribam*]...... So the passive participle 'nivhar' [chosen, *electus*], that is *a man or a thing which is now actually chosen* [*quae jam actu eligitur*] is frequently attributed to a thing *distinguished*, namely of things *chosen above all*; and **in this manner intensive participles and others change often in attributes, that is into adjectives which have no relationship to time whatever** (G I/396/20| B 150, bold letters mine).

As the two quoted examples show, the distinction between adjectives and participles is one of generality. While participles reflect temporally specified properties (such as being chosen *now*), adjectives signify essential properties which are not related to time (such as “being the chosen man,” or “the chosen people”).<sup>92</sup> The text leaves little room for doubt that Spinoza considers the distinction between modes and attributes (signified by participles and adjectives, respectively) to be of the same kind: modes are,

<sup>90</sup> I am indebted to Warren Zev Harvey for pointing out this crucial passage to me. Harvey discusses this passage—though not in the context of Curley's reading of Spinoza—in his recent article, “Spinoza's Metaphysical Hebraism,” 2002.

<sup>91</sup> I have underlined the transliterated Hebrew words and put their Latin translations in italics.

<sup>92</sup> The attribute/adjective analogy appears also in the *Short Treatise* I, i (I/18/32| C 64). For Spinoza's discussion of whether the election of the Hebrews was a temporal or eternal matter, see TTP, Chapter 3 (Shirley 44).

local, or temporally specified, properties, while attributes are essential properties that have no relation to time. This seems to be as explicit as a text can be in making the point that modes are local *properties*.

### 3.12 E1p4

In E1p4, Spinoza presents and proves his own formulation of the Identity of Indiscernibles.<sup>93</sup> The proposition reads:

P4: Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another, either by a difference in the attributes of the substances or by a difference in their affections.

The individuation principle suggested by this proposition stipulates that,

(1) If  $x \neq y$ , then there is some property (either essential or accidental) which belongs to the one but not to the other.

The proof of the proposition is relatively simple.

E1p4d: Whatever is, is either in itself or in another (by A1), i.e. (by D3 and D5), outside the intellect there is nothing except substances and their affections. Therefore, there is nothing outside the intellect through which a number of things can be distinguished from one another except substances, or what is the same (by D4), their attributes, and their affections, q.e.d.

This reading of E1p4 relies on an understanding of modes ('affections' and 'things which are in another' in this passage) as non-essential properties inhering in the substance. Obviously, Curley must read this proposition differently.<sup>94</sup> For Curley, modes ('affections') are *effects*, and not properties of the substance. What is 'in itself' is self-caused, and what is 'in another' is caused by another. Hence, according to Curley's view, the proposition should be read in the following manner:

E1p4 (according to Curley): Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another, either by a difference in the attributes of the substances or by a difference in their [effects].

Dem: Whatever is, is either [self-caused] or [caused by another] (by A1), i.e. (by D3 and D5), outside the intellect there is nothing except

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<sup>93</sup> See Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*, 1996, pp. 131-2.

<sup>94</sup> In *Behind the Geometrical Method*, Curley discusses E1p4 extensively (pp. 12-15). His discussion, however, concentrates on the relation between a substance and its attributes, and does not provide an explanation for the clauses in E1p4 which deal with modes. In the following, I consider an explanation of these clauses which I believe Curley could suggest, given his interpretation of the definition of mode.

substances and their [effects]. Therefore, there is nothing outside the intellect through which a number of things can be distinguished from one another except substances, or what is the same (by D4), their attributes, and their [effects] q.e.d.

Clearly, Curley's reading of the passage does not ascribe to it the statement of the Identity of Indiscernibles, insofar as it allows for two things to be distinguished by their effects (and not merely by their internal properties). Yet, in itself, this does not seem to be a problem. The problems arise when we look carefully at the principle which is stated in Curley's version. The principle states that

- (2) If  $x \neq y$ , then either there is an attribute which belongs to the one but not to the other, or there is an effect which results from the one and not from the other.

There seems to be something awkward in a principle which treats *attributes* as belonging to the same category as *effects* insofar as they can be individuated through either the one or the other. It would be far more natural to treat *attributes* and *modes* (in their traditional senses) as on par). Still, perhaps (2) is stating an innovative and surprising principle of individuation?<sup>95</sup> I do not think it does. One possibility which (2) neglects is that two things could be individuated by their *causes*. If, as (2) states, two things can be individuated by their *effects*, why can they not be individuated by their *causes*? This question gains more force once we pay attention to Spinoza's claim in E1a4 that the explanatory power of an effect depends on the explanatory power of its cause. But if things could be individuated only by their causes (i.e., if they could share precisely the same internal properties and effects), then clearly the proof of E1p4 is invalid.

### 3.13 Does Spinoza prove his **Definition** of Substance?

I mentioned earlier that Curley takes the '*in se*' clause in the definition of substance (E1d3) to mean causal self-sufficiency. According to Curley, "a substance is, *by definition*, something causally self-sufficient, and a mode is, by definition, something causally dependent on something else, ultimately on substance."<sup>96</sup> Now, if causal self-sufficiency were part of the definition of substance (as Curley thinks), it would have been an odd methodological practice on Spinoza's part to have tried to *prove* the causal self-sufficiency of substance. If causal self-sufficiency belongs to the definition of substance,

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. Leibniz's discussion in *De Summa Rerum* of the similar idea that the principle of individuation of a thing might be "outside the thing, in its cause" (A VI /3, 491).

<sup>96</sup> Curley, "On Bennett's Interpretation," 48 (Emphasis mine).



then proving that this property belongs to substance is both redundant and circular. Yet Spinoza leaves no doubt that he takes the causal self-sufficiency of substance to be a *demonstrable* property. In E1p15s, Spinoza states: “I have *demonstrated* clearly enough [*Ego saltem satis clarè. demonstravi*]*—*in my judgment, at least—that no substance can be produced or created by any other” (emphasis mine). Indeed, in E1p6, Spinoza states and proves that one substance cannot be produced [*non potest produci*] by another. Spinoza provides two detailed proofs for this proposition.

Dem.: In Nature there cannot be two substances of the same attribute (by P5), that is, (by P2), which have something in common with each other. Therefore (by P3) one cannot be the cause of the other, or cannot be produced by another, q.e.d. ...

Alternatively: This is demonstrated even more easily from the absurdity of its contradictory. For if a substance could be produced by something else, the knowledge of it would have to depend on the knowledge of its cause (by A4). And so (by D3) it would not be a substance.

These two proofs would be completely redundant were Curley right. What is the point in providing a proof for the characteristic by which substance is defined?<sup>97</sup>

Note further that the first proof in E1p6d makes no reference to the definition of substance (E1d3). The second proof does rely on the definition of substance, yet even this proof relies only on the ‘*per se concipitur*’ clause, and not on the ‘*in se*’ clause of E1d3. The ‘*per se concipitur*’ clause, together with E1a4, yield the absurdity of the contradictory of E1p6. Now, if the ‘*in se*’ clause in E1d3 meant (as Curley claims) causal self-sufficiency, Spinoza’s practice in E1p6 would be very odd. He proves what doesn’t need to be proven, and simply refuses to cite the clause which (according to Curley) could prove his point immediately.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> In the *Short Treatise* Spinoza provides another detailed *proof* for the claim that one substance cannot be produced by another. See KV I, ii (I/20/34).

<sup>98</sup> One last remark in this context. If (as the traditional interpretation of substance-mode relation suggests) the definition of substance (E1d3) states that substance does not inhere in something else and is not conceived through something else, then Spinoza’s argumentative strategy in E1p6 makes good sense. Assuming that Spinoza’s primary audience is the Cartesians, it would make sense for Spinoza to begin with a definition of substance acceptable to his audience, and then show that certain surprising conclusions necessarily follow from it. As we saw earlier, the Cartesians have never deserted the predication definition of substance, and for Descartes, the *sine qua non* condition for substantiality was the stipulation that substance is the subject of predication. What Spinoza does in E1p6 is to show that given certain assumptions, which he expects the Cartesians to share with him, he can prove that substance must be causally self-sufficient. Had he already *stipulated* the causal self-sufficiency of substance in the definition, the Cartesians could most easily defend their view by rejecting the suggested definition.

I believe that the arguments I have discussed so far make a strong case against Curley's interpretation of the substance-mode relation. What remains to be done is to answer the interesting objections raised by Curley and Bayle. I turn to this task in the next section.

#### 4. Replies to Bayle's Arguments

##### 4.1 Does God have Contradictory Properties?

The traditional formulation of the law of non-contradiction states that two opposite terms cannot be affirmed of the same subject at the same time and *in the same respect*. Indeed, when Bayle argues that Spinoza's modes violate the law of non-contradiction, he includes the "same respect" clause in the formulation of the law.<sup>99</sup> Obviously, for Spinoza, God does *not* love and hate honey in the same respect. While God *qua* Napoleon loves it, God *qua* Josephine hates it. Spinoza developed this respects-analysis into a genuine art. In numerous places he asserts that a thing may have a certain property *quatenus* (insofar as) it is X, and a different (or even opposite) property *quatenus* it is Y. Thus, I can have a causal relationship with a certain body, say a flamingo, *insofar as I am an extended thing*, but, *insofar as I am a mind*, I have no causal relationship with any body (but only with ideas of bodies). It is simply not in the same respect that I am, and I am not, causally related to (the body of) the flamingo.

This response might suffice to discharge Bayle's argument, as I, following Curley, have presented it. But Bayle's actual argument is subtler. It relies heavily on Spinoza's crucial claim that God is indivisible. Since God has no parts—says Bayle—every property of God must belong to Him in His entirety, i.e., if Napoleon is a mode of God, the entire God, and not only a part of God, must be Napoleon.<sup>100</sup> Though one may, perhaps, elude this argument by again using Spinoza's different respects analysis (i.e., by saying that in one respect God is entirely Napoleon, and that in another respect, God is entirely not Napoleon), I think we should not adopt this answer, since Spinoza would never, I believe, agree to the claim that "God is entirely Napoleon."<sup>101</sup> In order to provide an adequate and

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<sup>99</sup> Bayle, *Dictionary*, 309 (remark N)| *Dictionnaire*, V 212.

<sup>100</sup> "This is the picture of the God of Spinoza; he has the power to change or modify himself into earth, moon, sea, tree, and so on, and he is absolutely one and not composed of any parts. It is then true that it can be asserted...that God entirely is the earth, that God entirely is the moon" (*Dictionary*, 336 (remark DD)| *Dictionnaire*, V 225).

<sup>101</sup> Because this would amount to making Napoleon into an infinite mode.

complete answer to Bayle's objection we will need to clarify the precise sense and scope of God's indivisibility. This cannot be done here,<sup>102</sup> but let me just provide a rough outline of such an explanation. Finite modes are just parts of certain infinite totalities which Spinoza calls "infinite modes." These infinite modes, as opposed to the substance and attributes, are divisible. Napoleon is neither a part of God, nor is he God entirely. Napoleon (and any other finite mode) is just a part of a property, an infinite mode, which belongs to God entirely. In the present case, Napoleon's body is part of the totality of bodies, which is an infinite mode of Extension.<sup>103</sup> It is this infinite mode of Extension which belongs to God entirely. Similarly, Napoleon's mind is part of the infinite intellect, the totality of ideas and the infinite mode of Thought; the infinite intellect is a property which belongs to God entirely. The bottom line is that even if we correct Curley's presentation of Bayle's argument, the argument still seems easily dealt with through the divisibility of infinite modes (of which Bayle was apparently unaware).

#### 4.2 Spinoza's Radical Theodicy

The claim that Spinoza's God is responsible for the most horrendous evils insofar as He is the direct agent of these evils seems to me an objection of much lesser weight. In fact, I would venture to say that Spinoza could not care less about ascribing evil to God. For Spinoza good and evil are merely mutilated human constructs.

Whatever seems immoral, dreadful, unjust, and dishonorable, arises from the fact that [one] conceives the things themselves in a way which is distorted, mutilated and confused (E4p73s).<sup>104</sup>

In the appendix to the first part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza includes 'good and evil [*Bonus et Malus* <sup>105</sup>]' in the list of notions which are "*entia, non*

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<sup>102</sup> For a discussion of the indivisibility of *natura naturans* and the divisibility of *natura naturata*, see my yet unpublished paper on Infinite Modes.

<sup>103</sup> See Letter 64.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. TTP Chapter 16 (S 180-1).

<sup>105</sup> In a valuable editorial note, Curley remarks: "*Malus* can be translated by either *bad* or *evil*. At one stage I preferred *bad* wherever possible, since *evil* has connotations which seem inappropriate to Spinoza's philosophy. I now think it is best to retain the term and to regard Spinoza's definition as deflationary. Like Nietzsche's, Spinoza's philosophy is, in some sense, beyond good and evil" (C 636).

*rationis, sed imaginationis.*"<sup>106</sup> If men were born free, they would form no concepts of good and evil (E4p68).<sup>107</sup> Spinoza provides a fascinating cognitive genealogy of evil that is based on his nominalism. We conceive things as evil by comparing them with things we consider similar and then judging how much better things could have been. When making this comparison we rely on universals. For example, when we think of Dostoevski's Raskolnikov murdering his landlady, we compare him with other men by using the universal 'human being.' We observe that most particulars which fall under this universal are capable of mercy and do not kill old ladies. Thus, we conclude that Raskolnikov's act is evil, insofar as it is less perfect (i.e., deprived of a perfection which naturally belongs to it) than our notion of 'human being' (the universal itself being merely an abstraction from the particulars we encounter). In a similar way we conclude that the earthquake in Lisbon was evil, since in other areas the Earth's crust does not cause such devastation. Now, for Spinoza all this is just illusionary thinking resulting from a self-centered anthropomorphism. When we attribute to God the belief that something is evil, we err even further in thinking that God, "*just like his creatures, [feels] sympathy with some things and antipathy to others*" (Letter 19| S 134. Emphasis mine). From the objective and true perspective of God, there is no evil.<sup>108</sup> God knows every entity in its particularity, not through universals. "God does not know things in abstraction, nor does he formulate general definitions of that sort" (Letter 19| IV/91-92| S 134). There was no evil in the occurrence of the

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<sup>106</sup> E1app [II/81/30, 82/17 and 83/15]. Similar claims appear in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* II, vii (I/262/2-21) ("Good and Evil are nothing in Things, but only in the human mind which compares things one with another"), Letter 32 (S 192), Letter 54 (S 269), and in the TTP Chapter 16 (S 180), Chapter 17 (Shirley 193). On the Maimonidean background of Spinoza's view, see Harvey, "A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean," 1981, pp. 158-60. Harvey rightly observes the influence of Maimonides' view, according to which "through the intellect one distinguishes between true and false [but] good and evil belong to the popularly accepted notions" (*Guide of the Perplexed*, I, 2).

<sup>107</sup> Cf. E4p64c: "if the human mind had only adequate knowledge, it would form no notion of evil."

<sup>108</sup> In contemporary scholarship there is a tendency to associate Spinoza's view of good and evil with Nietzsche's relativist perspectivism. This comparison is valid, but only to a certain point. Spinoza does treat good and evil as relative to the individual (see E3p51d and *Cogitata Metaphysica* I, iv (I/247/24)). As such, good and evil are synonymous to the useful and harmful (E1app (81/35), E3p39s, E4d1&2, E4p29d, and E4p30d). However, when things are considered from an *objective* perspective—and for Spinoza, unlike Nietzsche, there *is* an objective perspective (i.e., the perspective of God, and of men, had they been born free (E4p68) and had adequate knowledge (E4p64))—good or evil are just meaningless. In this context, it is worth mentioning Spinoza's claim in the TTP (Chapter 4. Shirley 55-6) that describing God as 'just' is anthropomorphic.

earthquake in Lisbon because this piece of land was not deprived of any perfection with which God, or nature, could have endowed it. It was as perfect as any other event on Earth. From the point of view of Spinoza's Christian contemporaries, Spinoza's "solution" to the problem of evil may seem quite astonishing, even devastating, but this is a direct result of one of the main lines of Spinoza's thought: his battle against anthropomorphism and the demand that the "proper order of philosophizing" is to contemplate first the divine nature, and only then try to understand particular things from that perspective (E2p10s|II/93).<sup>109</sup> From the divine and objective perspective, there is nothing imperfect or evil.<sup>110</sup>

### 4.3 Spinoza's Deflationary Account of God's Immutability

On the face of it, the issue of divine immutability poses an unsolvable dilemma for Spinoza: either God is a simple, immutable being, or he has modes, and is thus changing. In his early period, Spinoza seems to take this dilemma as a real one. Thus, he writes in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* (1663):

That there is also in God *no composition from different modes* is sufficiently demonstrated from the fact that *there are no modes in God*. For modes arise from the alteration of substance (*Principles I*, 56|. Italics mine. I/258/30| C 324).<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Cf. TTP, Chapter 2 (Shirley 22). Curley is in fact the most attentive contemporary commentator on the importance of this line in Spinoza's thought (see his "Man and Nature in Spinoza," 21, and "On Bennett's Interpretation," 40). Curley is also the scholar who analyzed most beautifully Spinoza's amorality in his "Kissinger, Spinoza, and Genghis Khan" and it is somewhat surprising that he assigns *any* value to Bayle's rather popular objection regarding "evil."

<sup>110</sup> It is important to note that Spinoza's "solution" to the problem of evil is far more radical than Leibniz's. One crucial issue where Spinoza's view strongly conflicts with Leibniz's theodicy is in the question of *local evil* (another important point is Leibniz's affirmation and Spinoza's denial that 'good' can be truly ascribed to God). Whereas for Leibniz limited segments of the world may appear evil (as long as we disregard their contribution to the overall greatest good), Spinoza would deny that even the slightest segment of the picture, even when taken in isolation, is evil. On this issue I disagree with Carriero's line of defense against Bayle's argument, which contends that "since it is impossible to make local assessments of evil and perfection, it is impossible to pin responsibility for *local evil* on God" ("Mode and Substance in Spinoza," 272-3. Emphasis mine). Unlike this Leibnizian line of defense, I do not think that the *locality* of evil is the issue here.

<sup>111</sup> This passage may provide another argument against Curley's interpretation of the substance-mode relation. When Spinoza claims in this passage that God is not composed "*from different modes*" he clearly takes modes as inhering in the substance, and not as effects. I have not discussed this passage among the other arguments against Curley's interpretation since it belongs to Spinoza's early period and the extent to which it represents Spinoza's mature position is unclear.

The reference at the end of this passage is to Descartes' claim that

[W]e 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 (*Principles of Philosophy*, I, 56| AT VIII A, 26| CSM I, 211).

For both Descartes and the early Spinoza, God cannot have modes insofar as modes are by-products of alterations in substance, whereas God is immutable.<sup>112</sup> The Spinoza of the *Ethics* clearly holds that there *are* modes in God. I have argued that Spinoza conceives modes just like Descartes, i.e., as non-essential properties inhering in their substance. Consequently, it would seem that God changes. But does not the Spinoza of the *Ethics* openly deny *any* change in God? According to Curley, Spinoza states this very claim in E1p20c2:<sup>113</sup>

God, or all of God's attributes, are immutable [*Deum, sive omnia Dei attributa esse immutabilia*].

Let's look at this text carefully. Firstly, note that in E1p20c2 Spinoza explicates God's immutability with the claim that the *attributes* are immutable. Why does Spinoza make this qualification (and not state simply that 'God is immutable, period')? Secondly, compare E1p20c2 with Spinoza's treatment of the same topic in the *Cogitata Metaphysica*:

By *change* we understand here whatever variation there can be in a subject while the very essence of the subject remains intact. (CM II, iv| I/255/25)

The last sentence begins a chapter whose title is "Of God's Immutability." In this chapter Spinoza proves that *no* change can occur in God. Now, E1p20c2 and the passage from the *Cogitata Metaphysica* seem to make very different claims. Both passages claim that God is immutable, but the two passages have opposite explications of what God's immutability is. E1p20c2 equates God's immutability with no change in God's *essence* (i.e., the attributes). The CM passage makes the far stronger claim that there is not even any *non-essential*

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<sup>112</sup> In his early (as well as later) period Spinoza seems to maintain the bi-conditional 'x is immutable if and only if x is simple.' Spinoza states the right-to-left side of the bi-conditional in *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*, 1p18 (I/178/3-7). The passage I have just quoted from the *Cogitata Metaphysica* relies on God's immutability in order to prove divine simplicity, viz. it states the left-to-right side of the bi-conditional.

<sup>113</sup> "It is clear that Spinoza will not allow that God can change (E1p20c2)," *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 34.

variation in God. Neither in E1p20c2, nor (as far as I know<sup>114</sup>) in any other passage in the *Ethics* does Spinoza make the claim that there is no non-essential variation in God. The question then arises, why does Spinoza limit himself in the *Ethics* only to the weaker explication of divine immutability? Finally, it seems that within the Cartesian framework, in which Spinoza was working, E1p20c2 amounts to nothing over and above a trivial tautology. For Descartes, *all* essential attributes are immutable.<sup>115</sup> The essence (i.e., the essential attributes) of the mouse is not less immutable than God's; why then make such a fuss about divine immutability which is shared by any other thing having an essence?

My answer to these questions is that in the *Ethics* (unlike his early period when he was just restating the Cartesian view that God has no modes and is truly immutable) *Spinoza accepts change and movement in God*. I am not aware of *any* late text which contradicts this conclusion.<sup>116</sup> What Spinoza was doing in E1p20c2 was just to re-define divine immutability according to his own views, a practice in which Spinoza is frequently engaged in the *Ethics*.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, the immutability of essential attributes is not something that is unique to God. E1p20c2 provides a deflationary definition of divine immutability.<sup>118</sup>

Finally, we may wish to consider Curley's claim that ascribing change to God goes against the dominant philosophical and theological tradition in Western thought. We could argue whether there is such a

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<sup>114</sup> Spinoza employs '*immutabilis*' in only two other places in the *Ethics*. In E1p21d, he claims that "since Thought is supposed to be an attribute of God, it must exist necessarily and be immutable" (II/66/6). In the fifth part of the *Ethics*, immutability plays a role in Spinoza's account of blessedness, which "begets a Love toward a thing immutable and eternal" (E5p20s| II/294/12). In both cases it is employed in relation to *Natura naturans*.

<sup>115</sup> "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 question*" *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* (AT VIII B 348| CSM I 297). Emphasis mine.

<sup>116</sup> Carriero arrives at a similar conclusion, though he considers the mutability of Spinoza's God "an unavoidable cost" ("Mode and Substance in Spinoza," 266). I do not think God's mutability is an undesired outcome for Spinoza. Bennett's "field metaphysics" also appears to endorse divine mutability.

<sup>117</sup> Take, for example, Spinoza's redefinition of divine eternity in E1p19 (upon which E1p20c2 relies): "*Deus, sive omnia Dei attributa sunt aeterna.*" Note the similarity of the Latin sentences of E1p19 and E1p20c2. Arguably, for Spinoza, eternity as well belongs to God only in some respects.

<sup>118</sup> For a similar view according to which Spinoza's modes are changing, non-identifying characteristics, whereas attributes are identifying, immutable characteristics, see Keith Campbell, *Metaphysics*, 1976, pp. 79-81.

general agreement on the issue,<sup>119</sup> but this would be beside the point. Suppose there is such a consensus. Why cannot Spinoza still be innovative on that issue? (Especially since we have plenty of evidence that he was considered as non-conventional by his contemporaries, and that he was well aware of this common perception of himself). In fact, the issue of divine immutability seems to stand or fall together with that of Spinoza's pantheism. It is claimed (whether rightly or not) that the mainstream of Western thought (if there is any such thing) rejects the identification of God with nature. I have argued that the textual evidence shows categorically that Spinoza embraces pantheism. Even if Spinoza's pantheism places him *against* the mainstream, it should by no means count as evidence against ascribing pantheism to him, since we have plenty of testimonies which show that this is indeed how he was considered, both by himself and his contemporaries. The same applies to the issue of divine immutability.

### 5. "Wrong logical type," Charitable Interpretation, and Spinoza on Part and Whole

At the beginning of this paper we encountered Curley's main argument: that to consider mountains, animals and other bodies as modes (in the traditional sense of the term) is to commit a category mistake:

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 things (E1p25c), not qualities.<sup>120</sup>

With these claims, Curley was not criticizing Spinoza, but rather arguing that Spinoza's understanding of the substance-mode relation cannot be identified with the common, Cartesian, understanding of this relation, since this would ascribe to Spinoza an extremely implausible view, one that borders on nonsense. These claims clearly rely on a *charity principle*. It is more charitable, one may argue, to interpret a speaker in a way that will not assign to him or her a category mistake. In a well-known example, Quine argues that were we to meet a speaker who explicitly asserts a contradictory sentence, such as, 'It is and it is not raining now,' we should "impose our logic upon [the speaker]" and avoid ascribing to him the literal and illogical meaning of the sentence

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<sup>119</sup> In fact, it seems to me that religious thought less influenced by Greek philosophy (which commonly associates change with imperfection) does assign change to God. The common Talmudic and Rabbinic perception of God clearly takes God as deliberating, responding, and even regretting his acts toward creatures, not to mention the Christian belief that at some point in history God was incarnated.

<sup>120</sup> *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 18



(e.g., by taking it to mean “it’s just dripping”).<sup>121</sup> Though one may in general question the justification and usefulness of such a principle, my aim here is much more modest. I want to show that the principle of charity can be used only in a very limited and careful manner once we are engaged in fundamental theoretical thinking (and that Curley’s interpretation of the nature of Spinozistic modes fails to do just that). Here are two illustrations of a questionable use of the principle.

The first may appear straightforwardly absurd. In his *Politics*, Aristotle famously asserts that slavery is natural and that it is right and natural for some people to be slaves and for others to be masters.<sup>122</sup> Now, suppose a certain scholar argues that we should interpret the terms ‘slave’ and ‘master’ in senses different from the usual ones (perhaps as designating an employee and an employer), since it is uncharitable to ascribe support of slavery to a great moral philosopher such as Aristotle. This scholar might add that perhaps his view does not fit all the relevant Aristotelian texts, but given the attractiveness of Aristotle’s position under the new interpretation, it is worth bending the texts in order to absolve Aristotle from such an unreasonable position.<sup>123</sup> One may respond to this example by saying that the application of charitable interpretation in moral discourse is much more prone to yield absurd results, and thus cannot be compared with the use of the principle of charity in other fields, such as logic or metaphysics. Well, consider the following example.

In *The Concept of Mind* (1949), Gilbert Ryle argued that Cartesian dualism, which claims that both minds and bodies exist, commits a category mistake by presupposing that there is a logical type under which both minds and bodies fall and that existence can be univocally ascribed to both kinds of things.<sup>124</sup> Suppose that instead of criticizing the Cartesian position he suggested that we should reinterpret Descartes in a way that rids him of the alleged category mistake imbedded in dualism. Here again one could argue that the revisionist interpretation may not fit all the texts, but it might be worth bending some texts

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<sup>121</sup> Quine, *Word and Object*, 1960, p. 58.

<sup>122</sup> *Politics*, 1255b7-10.

<sup>123</sup> Unlike the case of slavery, which was embraced by most of Aristotle’s contemporaries, the view of particular things as properties inhering in God was not widely embraced by Spinoza’s contemporaries. This dissimilarity does not seem to me to wreck the analogy. The comparison, I think, is still valid since we have clear evidence that Spinoza was considered by his contemporaries to have a very unusual view of the relation of particular things to God. Hence, the historical context in *both* cases (i.e., Aristotle’s view of slavery and Spinoza’s view of modes) supports an interpretation of these philosophers as making claims that are inconsistent with our so-called “common sense.”

<sup>124</sup> Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 1949, pp. 16-22.

in order not to suppose that a great philosopher like Descartes committed a category mistake.

I believe that in both cases, as long as the more charitable interpretation contrasts with a significant corpus of the author's texts, it would not be right to adopt such an interpretation only because it makes the author's view more attractive. Were we to accept these charitable interpretations, we would not only be engaged in a historically anachronistic practice, but most importantly we would miss the opportunity to challenge our own fundamental conceptions against those held by other intelligent people of the past. This point is most crucial when we deal with alleged category mistakes in texts dealing with foundational issues, since quite a few philosophical and scientific breakthroughs resulted from category mistakes (from the point of view of the old system). A Newtonian or medieval physical theorist would most likely consider the concept of time of the theory of relativity as such a mistake. Of course, this does not mean that *every* category mistake leads to a theoretical breakthrough, but only that we must be open to the possibility that what we see *might* be a genuine and new way of understanding things.

When we do history of philosophy and encounter a claim that *prima facie* seems to be a category mistake we should listen to Nietzsche's old advice that a philosopher must know how to ruminate thoughts. We should ask ourselves questions such as: How central is the claim to the wider system of that philosopher? To what extent was he aware of the innovative nature of his claim? Is the said claim consistent with the rest of his system? These questions will help us decide whether the claim is a mere slip of pen, or one which adequately represents the considered view of the philosopher. In the next stage, we should openly consider the *plausibility* of the view against our own intuitions. If we find that the alleged category mistake is well supported by the texts of the relevant writer and we remain convinced of the nonsensical nature of the claim, we should simply conclude that the writer/philosopher was wrong.

When we apply these methodological suggestions to the case of Spinoza's conception of the substance-mode relation, we find that the text is hardly reconcilable with Curley's reading (or at least that's what I have been trying to show so far). If so, we can either reject Spinoza's position (that particular things, like mountains, are modes) as a category mistake, or reconsider our own views.

In the rest of this section, I will try to help make intelligible Spinoza's claim that things, such as Mt. Rushmore, are modes inhering in God (the issue of predication will be discussed in the following section). I will do this in two ways. First, I will argue that though Spinoza's metaphysics was definitely innovative to his contemporaries, the specific claim that things can be considered as modes of other things was not

anathema in the seventeenth century. Second, I will suggest an explanation as to what brought Spinoza to view particular things as modes of God, and how this claim is related to pantheism and to God's indivisibility. Yet, before I turn to these tasks, let me briefly add one more point regarding charitable interpretation.

One could, and I think should, argue that considerations of charity work *against* Curley's position. If, as Curley suggests, Spinoza takes modes to be just effects of the substance, then (as I have already mentioned) Spinoza turns out to be much closer to good old theism.<sup>125</sup> For many, this may seem to disappointingly flatten Spinoza's far more bold and interesting position.<sup>126</sup> The price we pay for making Spinoza *like us* is that it is no longer clear why we should have an interest in Spinoza (we have plenty of ourselves even without Spinoza, and we have plenty of other theists in the seventeenth century).

I turn now to examine Spinoza's view of the substance-mode relation in the context of his contemporaries. Arguably, it is not at all clear that to consider things as modes is indeed such an uncommon view that it is not to be found among Spinoza's contemporaries. Clearly many philosophers adhered to the view that a *mental* thing can inhere in another thing (either mental or physical).<sup>127</sup> This is most evident when we consider views which take the mind to be a *simple*. In such a case whatever is in the mind cannot be *part* of the mind, and hence one natural way of explaining mental change and the internal working of the mind is by taking intra-mental items as qualities or modes of the mind (rather than parts). An example of such a view is Leibniz's claim that the perceptions in the monads are the *affections* (or as Ariew and Garber translate it, "properties") of these monads.<sup>128</sup> But even when

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<sup>125</sup> Or, as Curley puts it, a "good Cartesian" (*Behind the Geometrical Method*, 12). Obviously, some theists may not like the conception of God as a law of nature.

<sup>126</sup> See Carriero, "Mode and Substance in Spinoza," 254.

<sup>127</sup> In his unpublished paper "Predication and Pantheism in Spinoza," Della Rocca rightly points out that to view modes as inhering in the substance is hardly problematic as long as we deal with the attribute of thought (i.e., the relation of modes of Thought to the thinking substance). In other words, Curley's problem seems to be not so much about how Spinozistic modes (in general) can inhere in, and be predicated of, the substance, but rather how *bodies* can inhere in, and be predicated of, anything.

<sup>128</sup> See *Monadology*, sections 13 ("there must be a plurality of properties [*affections*] and relations in the simple substance, although it has no parts") and 17 ("...this is all one can find in the simple substance—that is, perceptions and their changes") (Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 214-5). It is possible that Leibniz's use of '*affection*' follows Spinoza's definition of mode (E1d5). For another example, see Descartes' suggestion in the Second Meditation that the faculties of imagination and sense perception are modes inhering in the thinking substance (AT VII 78| CSM II 54).

we deal with physical things, it is not clear that one physical thing cannot be considered a mode of another thing. In his correspondence with Arnauld, Leibniz suggests that beings through aggregation [*entia per aggregationem*], i.e., bodies, are only states or modes of the substances which constitute them.<sup>129</sup>

Even more telling are the following two passages from Arnauld and Nicole's *Logic*. The first passage presents a three-fold distinction between kinds of modes, of which the first are *substantial* modes:

We should note further that some modes can be called *substantial* [*substanciels*] because they represent true substances applied to other substances as modes and manners [*parcequ'ils nous représentent de veritables substances appliquées à d'autres substances, comme des modes & des manieres*]. Being clothed and being armed are modes of this sort other modes can be called simply *real*. These are true modes which are not substances but manners of a substance. Finally, some can be called *negative* because they represent the substance with a negation of some real or substantial modes (*Logic or the Art of Thinking*, Part 1, Chapter 2).

[W]hen two substances are considered together, one can be viewed as a mode of the other [*quand on considere deux substances ensemble, on peut en considerer une comme mode de l'autre*]. Thus a clothed person could be considered as a whole composed of the person and the clothing. But with respect to the person, being clothed is only a mode or a manner of being under which one is considered, although the clothes are substances (Part 1, Chapter 7).

In the background of these two passages are similar—though significantly different—claims of Descartes in the Sixth Set of Replies:

I do admit that one substance can be attributed to another substance; yet when this happens it is not the substance itself which has the form of an accident, but only the mode of attribution. Thus when clothing is the attribute of a man, it is not the clothing itself which is the accident, but merely 'being clothed' (AT VIII 435| CSM II 293).

For Descartes, the claim 'clothing is a mode or accident of person x' is merely a loose formulation of the claim 'x's being clothed.' This does not seem to be the case with Arnauld and Nicole's discussion of the issue. Unlike Descartes, they do *not* deny that, in some

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<sup>129</sup> "What constitutes the essence of a being through aggregation is only a state of being of its constituent beings" (*The Leibniz-Arnauld Correspondence*, 121). See Donald Rutherford, "Leibniz's Analysis of Multitude and Phenomena into Unities and Reality," 1990, p. 531.

respects, (“... could be considered”) the clothes (and not just ‘being clothed’) are modes of the person. They seem to acknowledge the existence of a genuine class of ‘substantial modes,’ i.e., modes that “represent true substances applied to other substances as modes and manners.”<sup>130</sup>

Finally, we should consider Descartes’ claim in the Synopsis to the *Meditations* that only “body, taken in the general sense, is a substance, so that it never perishes.” Unlike this “body in the general sense,” the human body (and other particular bodies) is just “made up of certain configurations of limbs and other accidents of that sort [*non nisi ex certâ membrorum configuratione aliique ejusmodi accidentibus constare*]” (AT VII 14| CSM II 10). The passage takes the whole physical realm as one indestructible substance,<sup>131</sup> and it can be read as considering particular bodies and their parts as accidents of the one extended substance. While some scholars deny that in this passage Descartes considers finite bodies to be modes or accidents,<sup>132</sup> Curley, with impressive candor, takes the passage to make this very proto-Spinozistic claim. Curley is clearly bothered by this precedent,<sup>133</sup> yet he points out that in many other texts Descartes refers to particular bodies as independent

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<sup>130</sup> Whether one substance can be a mode of another substance is a function of one’s definition of substance. As we have seen above (§2), Arnauld and Nicole define substance as identical with “thing.” Substance is said to be “conceived as subsisting by itself,” but this does *not* rule out the possibility of that substance being a mode of another on certain occasions (*Logic or the Art of Thinking*, Part I, Chapter ii.). In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza himself suggests that the thinking *substance* and extended *substance* are *modes* of God (i.e., that substances can be considered as modes of another substance). In the first dialogue of the book, Reason [*Reede*] the interlocutor that usually presents the author’s views, claims: “And if you want to call the corporeal and the intellectual substances in respect to the modes which depend on them, you must equally call them modes too, in relation to the substance on which they depend. For you do not conceive them as existing through themselves. In the same way that you call willing, sensing, understanding, loving, etc., different modes of what you call a thinking substance (all of which you lead back to one, making one of them all), so I also infer, by your own proof, that infinite extension and thought, together with other infinite attributes (or as you would say, substances) are nothing but modes of that unique, eternal, infinite Being, existing through itself” (I/29/24-34). I do not place much weight on this passage, since it is clear that in his mature period Spinoza did not maintain this position. The definition of substance in the *Ethics* clearly cannot tolerate one substance being dependent on another substance. Note, however, that this is a change in the criteria for *substantiality* (not of *thinghood*); we have no indication that in his mature period a *thing* [*res*] could not be a mode of a substance.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Guérout, *Spinoza I*, 63.

<sup>132</sup> See Woolhouse, *The Concept of Substance in Seventeenth Century Metaphysics*, p. 53, n. 36.

<sup>133</sup> Curley refers to this passage in virtually all of his discussions of the substance-mode relation. See “On Bennett’s Interpretation,” 50 n. 10, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 32-3, 142 n. 9, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, 646.

substances, not modes, and hence suggests that the Synopsis passage (and a similar text in the *Principles*<sup>134</sup>) does not represent Descartes' considered view. While I tend to agree with Curley as to Descartes' considered view, I still think that the very fact that Descartes seriously weighed this Spinozistic path shows that it was not a *senseless* category mistake.

I return to Spinoza. Having encountered passages of this sort,<sup>135</sup> Spinoza could have been triggered to pursue this intriguing line, especially if it could solve one of the major problems he was facing in the development of his system. In the following I will suggest an outline of the reasoning which could have motivated Spinoza to view particular things as modes. The way I present this outline is close, but not identical, to Spinoza's actual argumentation in the *Ethics*. In a sense, I will try to explain what motivated Spinoza to define substance and modes in the way he did. We will consider Spinoza's arguments in two stages.

*First Stage: From God's Absolute Infinity to Pantheism.* We begin with the definition of God (E1d6)—perhaps the most important passage in the book—as a “being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.” For Spinoza, infinity entails unlimitedness (See E1d2 and E1d6e). For God to be absolutely unlimited, he must be everywhere, i.e., he must have the attribute of extension, and cannot be external to—or limited by—anything extended.<sup>136</sup> In other words, the mere absolute infinity of God directs Spinoza

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<sup>134</sup> Descartes, *Principles*, II, i, 23. Cf. Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Order*, 142 n. 9.

<sup>135</sup> Obviously, Spinoza was well acquainted with Descartes' works. Spinoza's relation to the Port-Royal Logic is an intriguing issue which has hardly been studied. The first three editions of the Logic appeared during Spinoza's lifetime (the first in 1662), and were immediately influential. The list of Spinoza's personal library includes a copy of the Logic in the original French. Yet, as far as I know, Spinoza did not know French. The story is even more interesting since the Logic seems to be the only French book in Spinoza's library (in fact, the only item in a language Spinoza did not know). I *suspect* that Spinoza became interested in the book from what he heard from his friends, and that in studying it he relied on his extensive knowledge of other Romance languages. He could also have relied on friends for translation and study of the book.

<sup>136</sup> According to E1p6e, God is absolutely infinite while the attributes are only infinite in their own kind. The latter infinity is constituted by the fact that it is possible “to deny infinite attributes” (i.e., all the other attributes) of each attribute. Of God's absolute infinity it is impossible to deny any attribute. Hence, *no thing under any attribute* can limit God. Cf. Letter 36, where Spinoza replaces his usual distinction between the absolute infinity of God and the infinity in their own kind of the attributes by the claim that God is absolutely indeterminate while the attributes are indeterminate in their own kind.

toward pantheism.<sup>137</sup> If, as Curley suggested, God were identical with *Natura naturans*, but not with *Natura naturata*, God would be limited by *Natura naturata*, and hence, not be infinite.<sup>138</sup>

*Second Stage: From the Priority of God to the Rejection of Whole-Part Pantheism.* If God is identical with nature, or with existence in general,<sup>139</sup> there arises the question of how finite things are related to God. One natural path is to consider particular things as parts of God. I will call this view ‘Whole-Part Pantheism.’ However, Spinoza cannot embrace whole-part pantheism for the following reasons. Spinoza’s understanding of the part-whole relation is quite traditional. Parts are prior to their whole, both in nature and in our knowledge.<sup>140</sup> In E1p12d, Spinoza states that it would be absurd to think that “the whole could both be and be conceived without its parts.” Similarly, in Letter 35 Spinoza argues that the being which includes necessary existence (i.e., God) “is simple and not composed of parts. For in respect of *their nature* and *our knowledge* of them component parts would have to be prior to that which they compose” (S 203, emphasis mine).<sup>141</sup> Given the ontological and epistemological priorities Spinoza assigns to parts, he would have to hold that parts of God, such as finite things, are prior to God (both in nature and in knowledge),

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<sup>137</sup> Here one may object that many other philosophers ascribe infinity to God without thereby endorsing pantheism. Spinoza’s view, however, is different. For Spinoza, God’s absolute infinity entails that he must have all the attributes (including Extension), and that in each attribute, God must be infinite in its kind, i.e., completely unlimited. Perhaps one could still argue that limitation should not be construed as mutual exclusion. The Cartesian God is not identical to other thinking substances, but Descartes would clearly try to reject the conclusion that God is limited by other thinking substances. Descartes might suggest that  $x$  is limited by  $y$  if and only if  $x \neq y$  and  $x$  is caused by  $y$ . It is obvious, however, that Spinoza defines limitation in terms of mutual exclusion (see E1d2), and that limitation cannot be defined through causal relations. The attributes are causally independent of each other, yet in Letter 36 Spinoza strongly hints that the attributes limit each other (in this letter God is taken as *absolutely* unlimited, while Thought and Extension are merely *unlimited in their kinds*. Presumably the reason why Thought and Extension are not absolutely unlimited is because they limit each other).

<sup>138</sup> Spinoza does not use this short argument for pantheism when he proves that all things are in God (E1p15). Presumably, this is because E1p15 attempts to prove not only pantheism, but also that all things are modes of God.

<sup>139</sup> I avoid defining pantheism as the claim that God is identical with the *totality* of things (or the totality of existing things), since the notion of totality may imply accumulation or aggregation, while God (qua *Natura naturans*) is indivisible.

<sup>140</sup> For some twentieth century endorsements of the priority of parts over their wholes, see G.E. Moore, *Philosophical Studies*, 1922, pp. 287-8, and McTaggart, *Some Dogmas of Religion*, 1906, p. 108. Cf. Chisholm, “Parts as essential to their Wholes,” 1973, pp. 582-3.

<sup>141</sup> In the early *Cogitata Metaphysica* I, v (I/258/15) C 324), Spinoza makes the slightly more moderate claim that “component parts are prior in nature at least to the thing composed.”

were he to embrace whole-part pantheism. The latter, however, would bluntly conflict with one of the deepest and most important tenets of his philosophy—the strict priority of the infinite over the finite. A clear statement of this tenet appears in E2p10s2, where Spinoza harshly criticizes his philosophical predecessors who

did not observe the [proper] order of philosophizing. For they believed that the divine nature, which they should have contemplated before all else (because it is *prior both in knowledge and in nature*) is last in the order of knowledge, and that the things which are called objects of the senses are prior to all. (E2p10s2, emphasis mine)

Obviously, if God is prior (both in knowledge and in nature) to finite things, and parts are prior (both in knowledge and in nature) to their whole, then finite things cannot be parts of God. But if God is everything that is, then finite things cannot be external to God either. What then can they be?<sup>142</sup>

Well, let's see. Finite things are in God, but they are not parts of God (since God is indivisible). The relation  $Rxy$  (def= $x$  is in  $y$ , but not as part of  $y$ ) has a clear precedent in the history of philosophy.<sup>143</sup> This is precisely how Aristotle defines 'being in a subject,' the relation which holds between an accident and the subject in which it inheres.

By 'in a subject', I mean what is in something, not as a part, and cannot exist separately from what it is in. (*Categories* 1a20)

Accidents, but not substances, are in something else.<sup>144</sup> A traditional example in this context is the relation of knowledge-of-grammar to the soul; it is *in* the soul, but not *part of* the soul. Earlier in this paper we

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<sup>142</sup> One interesting answer that I consider in another place (*The Metaphysics of Substance and the Metaphysics of Thought*, 83-95) is that for Spinoza finite things are illusions. This is the so-called 'acosmist' reading of Spinoza that was common among the German Idealists and some late nineteenth-century British scholars. Though this line of interpretation has, I believe, *some* support in Spinoza's thought, it conflicts with too many important doctrines of Spinoza's and as a result should be ultimately rejected.

<sup>143</sup> For the distinction between 'being part of  $x$ ' and 'being a mode  $x$ ,' see Descartes' claim in the Sixth Set of Replies that "a mode cannot be part of a substance" (CSM II 292| AT VII 433). Although the stipulation that the mode is not part of the substance does not appear explicitly in some seventeenth century *definitions* of the term, it is implicitly stated by the standard stipulation that modes cannot be or be conceived without their substance (in conjunction with the common view that parts are conceived prior to their whole). See, for example, the Port Royal stipulation that a mode is "not able to subsist without [its substance]" (*Logic, or the Art of Thinking*, First part, Chapter 2, p. 30). Cf. Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* I 64 (AT VIIIA31| CSM I 216).

<sup>144</sup> See 3.10. above



have seen that in the early modern period many philosophers started using ‘mode’ instead of ‘accident’ to make clear that the entity at stake cannot exist independently from its subject.<sup>145</sup> Given this state of affairs, the substance-mode relation was the perfect solution to the problem of relating particular things to Spinoza’s absolutely infinite and indivisible God/Nature. Particular things are *in* God, but are *not parts* of God. They are *modes* of God.

Indeed, Bayle, who was one of Spinoza’s most careful readers, observes this point very clearly:

[Spinoza] taught not that two trees were two parts of extension, but two modifications...One of the principle pillars [of Spinoza’s system] was the alleged difference between the word ‘part’ and the word ‘modification.’<sup>146</sup>

### 6. Modes, Tropes, and other Things (or Properties)

I have argued that Spinoza’s pantheism and his defense of the indivisibility of God could explain his motivation to view particular things (such as Mt. Rushmore) as being in God in the way a mode inheres in a substance. In other words, though the common view of Spinoza as a pantheist is correct, it is important to make clear that Spinoza maintains a Substance-Mode Pantheism and not a Whole-Part Pantheism.

At this point we should consider one further question. Are Spinozistic modes *predicated of*—or are they *properties of*<sup>147</sup>—God? I have so far argued that for Spinoza modes *inhere in* God. Cartesian modes are also *predicated of* their substance. Yet some scholars have interestingly suggested that Spinoza divorces inherence (and being a property) from

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<sup>145</sup> See 3.10 above.

<sup>146</sup> *Dictionary*, 306 (remark N)| *Dictionnaire*, V 211.

<sup>147</sup> In the following I will treat ‘being predicated of x’ and ‘being a property of x’ as roughly the same. Properties are commonly taken as metaphysical entities. Predicates are taken to be linguistic expressions, though occasionally also the entities designated by the expressions. Whether predicates designate properties or other entities (such as sets, or relations between objects in possible worlds) is a controversial issue. Ramsey has pointed out that the same content can be expressed by sentences which switch the roles of subject and predicate (as in “Socrates is wise” and “Wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates.” See Ramsey, “Universals,” 1997, p. 60). All this should not concern us here, since it is clear that Curley’s query does not deal with the expression ‘Mt. Rushmore’ but rather with the question of whether it is a category mistake to take a *body* such as this mountain as a property of God. We will see that in E3p55c2d, Spinoza takes powers to be *predicated* of the subject (body or mind) to which they belong, i.e., he uses predication in the *metaphysical*, rather than linguistic, sense. Finally, I am in agreement with Garrett’s note that describing the relation of modes to substance as “adjectival” is too linguistic “to match Spinoza’s primary metaphysical concerns” (“Spinoza’s *Conatus* Argument,” p. 156, n. 16).

predication, and hence that Curley's query about the mystery of "how one thing is predicated of another"<sup>148</sup> is ill-targeted since Spinoza takes particular things to inhere in (and be properties of) the substance, but *not* to be predicated of the substance.<sup>149</sup>

In the following I will argue for the stronger claim that for Spinoza modes not only inhere in God but are also properties predicated of God. First, I will present textual evidence in Spinoza's writings that support my claim. Second, I will argue that there is no category mistake involved in the claim that Mt. Rushmore is a property of God. Curley's assumption of a clear dichotomy between things and properties was neither generally accepted by Spinoza's contemporaries nor is it unchallenged in current metaphysics.

I turn first to the text. A crucial piece of evidence is E1p16:

P16: From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect.) [*Ex necessitate divinae naturae infinita infinitis modis (hoc est, omnia, quae sub intellectum infinitum cadere possunt) sequi debent*].<sup>150</sup>

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 mine)

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 infinitely many things in infinitely many ways from God's essence. But before we approach these questions let me begin with a short clarification of the proposition itself. Some readers of this proposition tend to see it as claiming that the *infinita infinitis modis* which follow from the necessity of God's nature are the infinite attributes (each of which has infinitely many

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<sup>148</sup> Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 18.

<sup>149</sup> "I conclude that the objection that ... modes are of the 'wrong logical type' to be particulars rests on an assimilation of inherence with predication and a closely related dismissal of the notion of an individual accident ..." (Carriero, "Mode and Substance in Spinoza," 256-9). Similarly, see Jarrett, "Substance and Mode in Spinoza," 85. Carriero and Jarrett are presumably hesitant to call the relation of non-universal properties to their subject 'predication.' See note 8 above. The issue of individual accidents (tropes) will be discussed later in this section.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Ep. 43 (IV/223/6), where Spinoza suggests that the modes emanate [*emanare*] from God's nature.

modes).<sup>151</sup> This does not seem to be the case. According to E1p29s, what “follows 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*. Here 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* [*propria*] in its place (TdIE § 95| II/34/29-31).

Indeed, in several places Spinoza stresses that a precise definition must specify only the essence of the thing defined,<sup>152</sup> so much so that in some places he takes ‘essence,’ ‘nature’ and ‘definition’ of a thing to be interchangeable.<sup>153</sup> But what are the *propria* which Spinoza warns us not to confuse with the essence of the thing? Here, Spinoza follows a common Scholastic (and ultimately Aristotelian) threefold distinction between qualities which make the thing what it is (these are 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 (these are the *propria*), and qualities which are at least partly caused by a source external to the thing, and which are termed ‘accidents’ (or ‘extraneous accidents’).<sup>154</sup> Though a thing has necessarily both its essence and its *propria*,<sup>155</sup> it is only the former that provides us with an explanation of the nature of the thing, and hence should be included in

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<sup>151</sup> Note that the Latin does not mention ‘things.’

<sup>152</sup> See Ep. 8 (IV/42/30), Ep. 34 (Shirley 201).

<sup>153</sup> See, for example, Ep. 12 (IV/53/3-5).

<sup>154</sup> ‘Extraneous accident’ is the term used by Aquinas to designate these qualities (see Carriero, “Spinoza’s view on Necessity,” 1991, p. 69). Garrett simply uses ‘accidents’ instead (see his “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism,” 1991, p. 201).

<sup>155</sup> In fact, even some accidents are inseparable from their substratum, despite the fact that these accidents do not follow from the thing’s essence. A common example of such accidents is the blackness of the crow (see Porphyry, *Isagoge*, 12-13). However, in the case of inseparable accidents, the substratum can be *conceived* without the accidents (*Isagoge*, *ibid.*). Another important difference between *propria* and inseparable accidents is that accidents, but not *propria*, admit of more or less of the accident (i.e., a crow can be more black or less black, but risibility (like rationality) is shared equally by all particulars who have it. See *Isagoge*, 9/18 and 22/10).

the definition. Spinoza explains that the reason why it is important that the definition should capture the essence of the thing rather than its *propria* is “because the properties of things [*proprietates rerum*] are not understood so long as their essences are not known” (TdIE §95| II/35/6-7).<sup>156</sup> Notice that in this passage the word ‘*proprietates*’ has the technical sense of *propria* rather than property 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*.<sup>157</sup> 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. In *both* cases, however, Spinoza stipulates that “all the thing’s properties” [*omnes proprietates rei*] must be inferred [*concludantur*] from the definition, insofar as the definition states the essence.<sup>158</sup>

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*.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, modes stand in the same relation to God’s essence as the *propria* of a thing related to the thing’s essence. They cannot be understood without God’s essence (E1d5), and according to E1p16, all modes follow (or

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<sup>156</sup> See *Short Treatise*, I iii, note a (I/34/30), for a similar point regarding God’s *propria*.

<sup>157</sup> “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). For a discussion of Descartes’ view of the relation between substance and its *propria*, see Garber, *Descartes’ Metaphysical Physics*, 68-9.

<sup>158</sup> TdIE § 96 (II/35/19), and § 97 (II/36/1).

<sup>159</sup> In other words, non-*propria* qualities (such as accidents) do not follow from a thing’s essence.

can be deduced) from God's essence. In other words, Spinoza's modes *are* God's *propria*.<sup>160</sup>

E1p16 is central to the *Ethics*. Numerous later propositions rely on it. It is not a proposition which one can dispense with and leave the rest of the book intact. The fact that in this text Spinoza explicitly considers modes as properties of God should count as very strong evidence that modes not only inhere in God, but are also properties of God. There are other texts which further support this conclusion. First, let us recall texts we discussed when we tried to show that modes inhere in God. Some of these texts clearly support the further claim that modes are properties of God. The passage from Spinoza's *Compendium of the Hebrew Grammar*, in which Spinoza claims that participles relate to adjectives just as modes relate to attributes clearly implies that modes are (non-essential) properties.<sup>161</sup> Similarly, Leibniz's report on his conversations with Spinoza, in which he ascribes to Spinoza the "paradoxical" view that apart from God all things are "only modes or accidents" of God, implies that Leibniz takes Spinoza's modes to be properties predicated of God (since, for Leibniz, accidents are properties predicated of their subject<sup>162</sup>). Finally, we have seen that the same relation which holds between God and his affections (i.e., modes) must also hold between the body and the affections of the body [*corporis affectiones*], i.e., between modes of modes and the modes they modify.<sup>163</sup> Now, in E3p55c2d Spinoza considers affects<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> 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 very close to Garrett's reading of this crucial text (in his "Spinoza's Necessitarianism" and "Spinoza's *conatus* Argument").

<sup>161</sup> See §3 argument (xi) above.

<sup>162</sup> See 3.9 above (cf. argument (x)). In *De Summa Rerum* 574, Leibniz defines an "accident of a thing" [*Accidens rei*] as a contingent *predicate* [*praedicatum contingens*]. Similarly, in the *Addenda to the Specimen of the Universal Calculus*, Leibniz defines 'accident' as "the adjectival predicate of a substantival subject in a particular affirmation proposition only" (Leibniz, *Logical Papers*, 46).

<sup>163</sup> See §3 argument (viii) above.

<sup>164</sup> An affect [*affectus*] is an affection (i.e., a mode) [*affectio*] of the body or of the mind that increases or diminishes its power of acting (E3d3).

such as the powers of the body or mind to be *predicated* [*praedicare*] of human beings.<sup>165</sup> But if affections such as these powers are predicated of the body, the same should hold in the relation of the affections of God to God.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> “So no man desires that there be predicated of him [*praedicari cupiet*] any power of acting, or (what is the same) virtue, which is peculiar to another’s nature and alien to his own” (E3p55c2d). The issue at stake here is jealousy; hence the desire to have certain powers predicated of oneself is not a desire to be known as having these powers, but rather the desire to actually have the powers. The predication is a predication of the powers themselves rather than the reputation of having the powers (i.e., being known or being described as having the powers).

<sup>166</sup> The last piece of evidence I wish to consider here is E3p5, a crucial proposition in the development of the doctrine of the *conatus*. I will not discuss this text in detail because it will force us to consider Spinoza’s view of logic, an issue as fascinating as it is difficult.

P5: Things are of a contrary nature, i.e., cannot be in the same subject, insofar as one can destroy the other [*Res eatenus contrariae sunt naturae, hoc est, eatenus in eodem subiecto esse nequeunt, quatenus una alteram potest destruere*].

Dem.: For if they could agree with one another, or be in the same subject at once, then there could be something in the same subject which could destroy it, which (by P4) is absurd. Therefore, things etc., q.e.d.

Two questions suggest themselves regarding this text. First, what does Spinoza mean by the relation of ‘being in the same subject’? Obviously, he cannot mean that two conflicting *parts* cannot be in the same whole, since he openly discusses various conflicts between opposite forces that are parts of the same whole (such as opposing parties in the state). Second, why does Spinoza use the logical term ‘*subjectum*’ to describe one *thing* being in another? One may argue that ‘things’ are *prima facie* of the wrong logical type to be capable of being in a logical subject (what is in a subject should be properties).

If I understand Spinoza correctly, this proposition does in fact deal with a logical subject, and what he is asserting here is that a subject cannot have opposite properties or modes *because* (that’s how I understand the role of ‘*quatenus*’ here) this would cause an internal destruction of the subject. Modes are ‘in a subject.’ When two opposite things are both internal to a certain third thing, they cannot be modes of that thing, but only parts of it (as in the relation of two parties to their state). Were the subject to have two opposite modes, a logical contradiction would follow since a subject would have opposite properties (note Spinoza’s use of the clause “at the same time” [*simul*], which seems to be modeled after the common formulation of the law of non-contradiction). What is most fascinating in E3p5d is that the mere fact that certain state of affairs (in our case, a subject having opposite modes) constitutes a contradiction does not seem to suffice to show that this state of affairs cannot obtain. It is only the resulting internal destruction of the subject (the impossibility of which Spinoza proved in E3p4) that excludes the possibility of a contradictory state of affairs. Hence, I suspect that for Spinoza the law of non-contradiction is a consequence of the more fundamental principle of the *conatus* (E3p4). This daring view needs to be carefully examined and clarified, a task that should not be carried out here.

Yet even our preliminary discussion of E3p5 seems to show quite clearly that for Spinoza things (just like properties) can be in a subject, and that having two opposite things in the same subject (just as having two opposite properties in the same subject) yields a contradiction. In other words, Spinoza does not seem to reject the possibility that things, at least in certain contexts, function as properties of other things. For an illuminating and comprehensive discussion of the doctrine of the *conatus*, see Garrett’s article “Spinoza’s *conatus* Argument.” I believe that the few suggestions I sketch in this footnote are mostly in agreement with his interpretation. In particular, I believe Garrett is right in reading the ‘*in se*’ clause in E3p6 in its technical sense.

One last note on this issue. Spinoza is commonly considered to have assimilated causality to conceptual derivation.<sup>167</sup> Once we realize that for Spinoza particular things are properties, much of the mystery about this assimilation disappears, since it is much easier to explain causal relations between *qualities* (such as essence and *propria*) as conceptual derivations than to consider causal relations between *things* as conceptual derivations.<sup>168</sup>

Once we have arrived at the conclusion that for Spinoza modes are properties, we can address the question of whether Spinoza committed a category mistake in maintaining this position. As one may expect from the line of argumentation I have been developing, I do not think that Spinoza committed such a mistake. His view of particular things as God's *propria* is bold, innovative and counter-commonsense (all of which might well be characteristics of good philosophy, depending on what one seeks when philosophizing), but as far as I can see, no category mistake has been committed. In order for particular things to be of the wrong logical kind and thus unable to serve as properties, there should be at least two well-distinguished and mutually irreducible categories of properties and things.<sup>169</sup> Although such a distinction is present in our colloquial talk, it was thoroughly undermined by the philosophers of the early modern period, and is further challenged in contemporary discussions of the metaphysics of properties.

We can begin with Descartes' claim that entities have different degrees of reality or thinghood, and that "real qualities or incomplete substances" (if there are any) are more real than modes and less real than complete substances.

I have also made it quite clear how reality admits of more and less. A substance is more of a thing than a mode; if there are real qualities or incomplete substances, they are things to a greater extent than modes, but to a lesser extent than complete substances; and, finally, if there is an infinite and independent substance, it is more of a thing than a finite and dependent substance. All this is completely self-evident. (Third Set of Replies (AT VII 185| CSM II 130))

Descartes does not say this explicitly, but the logic of his text seems to commit him to the claim that the more complete a substance becomes, the more real it is and the more it is a thing [*res*]. Hence, the difference

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<sup>167</sup> See, for example, Curley, "On Bennett's Interpretation," 48.

<sup>168</sup> Indeed, the first conclusion that Spinoza draws from his claim in E1p16d that all particular things follow from God's essence as his *propria* is that God is the efficient cause of all things (E1p6c1).

<sup>169</sup> If things like Mt. Rushmore are reducible to certain properties, then there should not be any problem in saying that Mt. Rushmore is a property.

between qualities and things seems to be one of degree and not an unbridgeable dichotomy. Similarly, Arnauld and Nicole's talk about "substantial modes"<sup>170</sup> clearly rejects any clear-cut distinction between substance and mode (a distinction which should have barred one kind of thing from functioning as the other). The most famous early modern attack on the distinction between things and qualities was Hume's critique of the notion of substance. According to Hume, substances are nothing but bundles of qualities, and any theory that assumes a bare particular underlying these qualities is just playing with unwarranted fiction.<sup>171</sup> Finally, certain texts of Descartes<sup>172</sup> and of Leibniz<sup>173</sup> seem to suggest that at least in some period of their philosophical development, each of the two considered substances to be identical with the totality of their essential properties.

In the twentieth century the view of things as bundles of qualities was argued by several notable scholars. In his *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, Russell argued that "what is commonly called a 'thing' is nothing but a bundle of coexisting qualities such as redness, hardness, etc."<sup>174</sup> Among contemporary trope theories,<sup>175</sup> the bolder (and

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<sup>170</sup> See §5 above.

<sup>171</sup> "We have therefore no idea of substance, distinct from that of a collection of particular qualities, nor have we any other meaning when we either talk or reason concerning it" (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part I, Section VI). Cf. Book I, Part IV, Section VI.

<sup>172</sup> See Descartes' *Conversation with Burman*, §22: "It is true that the attributes are the same as the substance, but this is when they are taken together, not when they are taken individually, one by one." In the very same conversation, however, Descartes seems to make the opposite claim, i.e., that "in addition to the attribute which specifies the substance, one must think of the substance itself which is the substrate of that attribute" (§25). In his editorial comments, John Cottingham makes, I think, a good case for the view that "Descartes did not subscribe to the real existence, behind observable qualities, of a 'naked and hidden substance'" and that, for Descartes, "when you have created all the attributes of a thing you have *eo ipso* created the substance" (pp. 78-9).

<sup>173</sup> According to some interpretations, Leibniz's doctrine of the "predicate in concept" (see §8 of the *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686)) makes substances to be just "the totality of their predicates" (see Ian Hacking, "Individual Substance," 1972, p. 138. Cf. Bigelow's view of Leibnizian Monads as "unshareable conjunctions of severally-shareable properties" ("Particulars," § 3)), though, obviously, not every aggregation of predicates constitutes a substance. This line of thought was adopted by Leibniz's eighteenth century successors, Wolff and Baumgarten.

<sup>174</sup> Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, 1940, p. 97.

<sup>175</sup> Tropes are (roughly speaking) non-universal properties, or properties which are particular to their subjects (e.g., 'the whiteness of this wall,' or 'the height of the Empire State Building'). The term 'trope' was coined by D.C. Williams (see his "On the Element of Being: I," 1997, p. 115). Other terms used to designate these entities are 'moments,' 'abstract particulars,' 'particular properties,' and 'particular qualities.'



arguably, more interesting<sup>176</sup>) cluster of theories takes both universals and individuals to be constructs of tropes.<sup>177</sup> Universals are bundles of tropes which *exactly resemble* each other; individuals are bundles of *comprement* (or *concurrent*) tropes.<sup>178</sup> Hence, to predicate a property  $\varphi$  of an individual  $a$  is nothing but saying that  $\varphi$  is part of the compresent cluster of tropes  $a$ .<sup>179</sup>

If individuals are bundles of qualities (either particular or universal properties), the allegedly clear-cut distinction between things (individuals) and properties is thoroughly undermined.<sup>180</sup> Clearly, Spinoza would reject many of the views we have just surveyed.<sup>181</sup> In particular, Spinoza would strongly reject the suggestion that the *indivisible* substance (qua

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<sup>176</sup> The main motivation for trope theories (at least in contemporary discussions) is ontological parsimony. Hence, theories which reduce both individuals and universals to tropes (perhaps together with the two universal operators of compresence and precise resemblance) have the significant advantage of being the most parsimonious (assuming that this reduction turns out to be successful). For a similar argument against theories which assume *both* universals and tropes as primitive, see Armstrong, "Properties," 1997, p. 168.

<sup>177</sup> See D.C. Williams, "The Elements of Being: I." Cf. Bacon, "Tropes," 2002. Keith Campbell ("The Metaphysics of Abstract Particulars," 1997) endorses Williams' claim that individuals are bundles of tropes, though he is less optimistic about trope theory's ability to account for the problem of universals (133-5).

<sup>178</sup> In many trope theories the relations of 'exact resemblance' and 'comprement' are defined in a second-order language (though Williams ("On the Elements of Being: I," 120) rejects this suggestion).

<sup>179</sup> Williams, "The Elements of Being: I," 113, 117-9.

<sup>180</sup> Mellor and Oliver (1997) suggest that trope theories "accept that particulars and universals differ in kind" (17). This does not seem to be the case, at least not with regard to trope theories which take tropes to be *parts* of the individual they constitute. Indeed, D.C. Williams is quite explicit on this issue: "What a difference of logical 'type' amounts to, particularly in the philosophy of tropes, is far from clear, but everybody agrees that a sum is of the same type with its terms, as whole is of the same type with its parts, a man of the same type with his arms and legs" ("Elements of Being: I," 117). A few lines down, Williams argues that tropes relate to individuals as parts to a whole (117-8), though he leaves open the question whether the relation of tropes to universals is a part-whole relation or that of a member to its set. The general tone of Williams is quite critical of theories of logical types. See particularly his criticism of the view which holds that "if  $y$  can be 'predicated' of  $x$ , or 'inheres in' or 'characterizes'  $x$ , or if  $x$  is 'an instance' of  $y$ , then  $x$  and  $y$  must be sundered by a unique logical and ontological abyss" (119). In Campbell's theory the issue is somewhat less clear. Campbell sometimes seems to take the distinction between 'abstract' and 'concrete' entities to be clear-cut, though he still maintains that concrete particulars (individuals) are just sums of abstract particulars, or tropes (see p. 128).

<sup>181</sup> It is also the case that for Spinoza ordinary objects (e.g., chairs, gorillas, kings of France) are *each* a property of God (and not each a *bundle* of properties), but this dissimilarity with contemporary bundle theorists does not undermine my main point that there is no category mistake involved in conceiving things as properties.

thing) is a bundle of properties.<sup>182</sup> But this is beside the point. I do not discuss these theories in order to show their “support” of Spinoza’s views, but rather to argue that a view which takes things—like Mt. Rushmore—as properties is far from being nonsense or a category mistake. If Curley wishes to substantiate his claims, he would first have to provide a detailed defense of the view that things and properties belong to two irreducible categories, or types, and, secondly, show that Spinoza accepts a clear-cut distinction between things and properties. As far as I can see, there are clear indications that Spinoza rejects this distinction.

One important element that Spinoza did have in common with the theories we have just surveyed is the rejection of bare particulars. If particular things are not reducible to their qualities, then (insofar as the non-reducible residue is quality-free) we seem to be committed to the existence of the notorious “bare substratum.” An entity of that sort, whose essence and existence cannot be explained (insofar as it has no qualities) is intolerable for an unyielding rationalist like Spinoza.<sup>183</sup> Indeed, when Spinoza encounters Aristotelian prime matter—the oldest member of the bare particulars clan—he offers nothing but ridicule. For him, the statement “extended thing without extension,” just like “thinking thing without any thought” (i.e., will) is simply an oxymoron.<sup>184</sup>

Before we conclude our discussion, let me briefly address the views of two other scholars who attempted to defend the traditional view of modes. Charles Jarrett and John Carriero have suggested (independently) that Spinozistic modes are particular qualities (or tropes) that inhere in the substance.<sup>185</sup> I agree that Spinozistic modes are properties of the

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<sup>182</sup> Campbell points out the “long-standing and deeply ingrained prejudice” according to which individual things are “the minimal beings capable of independent existence” (127). Obviously, Spinoza shares this “prejudice” against the self-subsistence of tropes, since modes depend on the substance. Another possible conflict between Spinoza’s view and trope theory is the issue of the possibility of perfectly similar tropes, which Spinoza, following his endorsement of the Identity of Indiscernibles (E1p4), would be pressed to reject.

<sup>183</sup> For this point I am indebted to several discussions with Michael Della Rocca and particularly to his explication of Spinozistic rationalism.

<sup>184</sup> See CM II, xii| I/280/18-32. For a similar twentieth century criticism of bare particulars see Sellars’ claim (*Science, Perception, and Reality*, 1963, pp. 282-3) that proponents of bare particulars endorse the contradictory view that things which possess attributes have in fact no attributes.

<sup>185</sup> See Jarrett, “Substance and Mode,” 86, and Carriero, “Mode and Substance in Spinoza,” 256-9. As mentioned above, Jarrett and Carriero have also argued (again, independently of one another) that Curley wrongly assimilates inherence with predication, and that, if I understand them correctly, modes inhere in the substance but are not predicated of the substance. They presumably distinguish ‘being predicated of x’ and ‘being a property of x’ (perhaps they consider only universals to be predicated of things). It appears to me, however, that given Spinoza’s explicit use of *predicare* in E3p55c2d, we cannot ascribe to Spinoza such a distinction.

substance, and it is also clear that Spinoza does not believe in the reality of universals. For Spinoza, universals are mere mental abstractions that compensate for the limited capacities of our imagination by allowing it to represent a large number of things through one vague representation (E2p40s1).<sup>186</sup> If modes are properties rather than universals, it may seem obvious that they are particular properties. Yet the issue is somewhat more complicated. I earlier noted that Spinoza cannot accept most modern trope theories, since he clearly denies that substance is a bundle of modes or tropes. But even if we consider the understanding of particular accidents as it was articulated by the Scholastics (and suggested by Jarrett and Carriero as an explanation of Spinozistic modes),<sup>187</sup> there are still issues that need to be addressed. Since for Spinoza there is only one ultimate subject of predication (i.e., God), one may wonder whether the distinction between particular and universal properties has any place in such a theory. The distinction between universals and particular properties is commonly viewed as a distinction between repeatable and unrepeatable properties. Obviously, a Spinozistic mode does not repeat itself in two substances because there is only one substance,<sup>188</sup> but perhaps it would have been repeatable had there been more than one substance.<sup>189</sup>

One way to approach this problem is to consider whether, for Spinoza, modes of modes are repeatable, i.e., whether two modes of God can share the same mode of a mode. Although I tend to believe that for Spinoza two bodies cannot have the very same affection, I am not

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Bennett originally rejected the very concept of particular qualities, as well as the attribution of this doctrine to Spinoza, as “non-sense” (*A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, 94). Recently, he has apparently changed his views and escorted both trope theory and its attribution to Spinoza (*Learning from Six Philosophers*, I 145).

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Ep. 2 (IV/9/12-15), Ep. 19 (IV/91-92), CM I, i (I/235/14-15), CM II, vii (I/263/8), TdIE 99 (I/36/18).

<sup>187</sup> Whether Aristotelian non-substantial particulars are tropes is a subject of major scholarly dispute. For three different opinions, see Ackrill (*Categories and De Interpretatione*), Owen (“Inherence”), and Frede (*Essays*).

<sup>188</sup> Similarly, one cannot say that the same mode of God repeats itself in two temporal locations, since in such a case the two alleged mode-instances will be distinguished only by their temporal indexicals, while Spinoza denies that time, duration, as well as number belong to the essence of anything (E1p8s2 and E3p4d), and holds that things can be distinguished from each other only by their essences (E1p5).

<sup>189</sup> In such a case, a mode would seem to be a universal, yet Spinoza’s critique of universals would not apply to it insofar as it is not an abstraction that aids our limited memory.

aware of any explicit text that rules out this possibility.<sup>190</sup> Another way to resolve the issue is by looking more carefully at the alleged possibility of two substances A and B sharing a mode *m*. Let's assume that there's a change in mode *m*. The cause of the change can come from either of the two substances. However, if A is the cause of the change in *m*, it would seem that substance A caused a change in substance B (since *m* is also a mode of B), whereas Spinoza strictly rejects any causal interaction between substances (E1p6d). We therefore conclude that a mode cannot be shared by two substances, and is thus an irrepeatable property.

Yet before we endorse the conclusion that modes are tropes, we should clarify our understanding of the concept of 'trope' in relation to the things vs. properties distinction. If tropes are taken to be on the side of properties in a clear-cut distinction between things and properties, it would seem that we cannot aptly describe Spinozistic modes as tropes. All the evidence that we have shows that Spinoza takes modes to be *both* things and properties, i.e., that he is consciously undermining the distinction between things and properties. But, if one takes tropes to be entities which bridge, or even undermine, the distinction between things and properties (just as in D.C. Williams's view of tropes<sup>191</sup>), then modes can be identified with tropes.

We can conclude that modes may be identified with tropes, depending on our understanding of the nature of tropes.

Another interesting approach that tried to defend the view of modes as predicated of substance is Bennett's *field-metaphysic*. Bennett attempts to explain how bodies can be reasonably considered as predicated of the substance by suggesting that extended modes are continuous strings of place-times. Just as the motion of a storm is nothing but

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<sup>190</sup> E3p57s seems to be a crucial passage in this context, but it is quite ambivalent. On the one hand Spinoza talks about affections belonging to certain kinds of things, such as 'human lust' and 'equine lust' (presumably allowing the same lust to repeat itself within the domain of the same genus), but on the other hand he claims that "the gladness of one [individual] differs from the gladness of the other as much the essence of the one differs from the essence of the other," a claim which seems to make each affection particularized to its individual. I tend to see Spinoza's talk about 'equine lust' as merely loose (or perhaps he takes 'equine lust' as a mere abstraction from the variety of lusts we have encountered in horses), but I would be somewhat hesitant to rely merely on this text in order to resolve the issue of whether modes of modes are repeatable. If I am not mistaken, part of the problem lies in the fact that Spinoza does not clearly distinguish between modes of the body which are the body's *propria* (which should be unrepeatable), and modes of the body of which the body is only a partial cause. In the latter case, one can read the first axiom of the short physical discussion in Part 2 (II/99) as allowing modes of modes (which are not *propria*) to be in more than one subject.

<sup>191</sup> See footnote 180 above.

a (continuous) temporally spread string of continuous regions of space having a certain property, so Napoleon and Mt. Rushmore are nothing but temporally-spread strings of regions of space having certain properties.<sup>192</sup> Now, I think that something like this should be true of the way Spinoza considers extended modes to be properties of the substance.<sup>193</sup> I also agree with Bennett's recent claim that his field-metaphysic interpretation is consistent with the view that modes are particular properties.<sup>194</sup> However, Bennett's field-metaphysic provides an explanation as to how modes can be considered properties of substance only with regard to one out of infinitely many attributes, i.e., Extension. A far more general explanation of the issue is needed, and I hope that in the work we have done so far, we have made significant progress toward providing it.<sup>195</sup>

## 7. Conclusions

Our close examination of a significant body of texts shows that Spinoza considered particular things, such as Mt. Rushmore and Napoleon, to be modes inhering in God, and that Spinoza was a pantheist. I have suggested that Bayle's three objections to Spinoza's view of particular things as modes of God rely on certain misunderstandings of Spinoza, such as the attribution of traditional views regarding evil and divine immutability to him that he in fact rejected. I have also argued that Spinoza considered modes—such as Mt. Rushmore—not only to inhere in God but also to be a property of God. Specifically, I suggested that for Spinoza, Mt.

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<sup>192</sup> See Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 89-90 and *Learning from Six Philosophers*, I 142-4.

<sup>193</sup> I do not agree with Bennett's identification of the extended substance with space. Space, insofar as it has regions, is divisible. The account of the indivisibility of space Bennett develops (*Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 85-8) seems to me much weaker than Spinoza's actual view as to the indivisibility of substance. As far as I can see, Extension has neither actual nor potential parts, whereas regions of space seem to be potential parts of space. If I understand Spinoza correctly, space is just an infinite mode (either immediate or not) of Extension. Hence, though I agree with the basic idea of explaining extended modes through the field-metaphysic, I think it should be applied merely to the infinite mode of Extension, while keeping the attribute of extension completely indivisible. In this account, regions of space (such as bodies) are just parts of a property, i.e., parts of an infinite mode of Extension. For a similar criticism of Bennett, see Schmalz, "Spinoza on Vacuum."

<sup>194</sup> See Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, I 145.

<sup>195</sup> Another point on which I somewhat disagree with Bennett is his view of "Spinozistic 'modes' as belonging to the property side of the line between things and properties" (*A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 92). As previously mentioned, I do not see any reason to believe that Spinoza marked any clear line between things and properties, and he certainly never hesitated to call modes 'things [res].'

Rushmore and all other finite modes are God's *propria*. Finally, I have claimed that Spinoza's view of Mt. Rushmore as inhering in, and being a property of, God does not commit any category mistake. It is certainly a bold and interesting view, but it is far from being nonsense. Even if Spinoza's metaphysics is wild, it is, I believe, far more interesting and instructive to observe the beast rather than domesticate it.

The historical and philosophical import of Curley's bold interpretation of the substance-mode relation in Spinoza can hardly be overestimated. It was not only crucial insofar as it made Spinoza a respectable philosopher within the community of analytic philosophy and set strict scholarly demands for clarity and precision, but most importantly it was powerful enough to make people think through—rather than recite—Spinoza. As one can see from my arguments, I have significant disagreements with his interpretation. Yet, as basic fairness demands acknowledgement of one's debts, it would not be inappropriate to say—using a phrase originally said of the great Russian writer Gogol—that “we all came out of his overcoat.”

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