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# Spinoza's Monism I: Ruling Out Eternal-Durational Causation

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**Abstract:** In this essay, I suggest that Spinoza acknowledges a distinction between formal reality that is infinite and timelessly eternal and formal reality that is non-infinite (i.e., finite or indefinite) and non-eternal (i.e., enduring). I also argue that if, in Spinoza's system, only intelligible causation is genuine causation, then infinite, timelessly eternal formal reality cannot cause non-infinite, non-eternal formal reality. A denial of eternal-durational causation generates a puzzle, however: if *no* enduring thing – not even the sempiternal, indefinite individual composed of all finite, enduring things – is caused by the infinite, eternal substance, then how can Spinoza consistently hold that the one infinite, eternal substance is the cause of *all* things and that *all* things are modes of that substance? At the end of this essay, I sketch how Spinoza could deny eternal-durational causation while still holding that an infinite, eternal God is the cause of all things and that all things are modes. I develop the interpretation more in the companion essay.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Introduction

Spinoza argues that God, the one and only substance, is infinite and eternal (*E1p11*, *E1p19*).<sup>2</sup> He also argues that God is the immanent cause of the essence and existence of all things (*E1p18*, *E1p25*). But, as Leibniz was perhaps the first to

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1 In "Spinoza's Monism II," in the next issue of this journal.

2 According to Descartes, God's existence is an eternal truth (AT I.150); Descartes is not just claiming that it is always true that God exists, but also saying something about how God's very existence is to be understood. For the purposes of this essay, I will assume that despite disagreeing on other issues, Spinoza agrees with Descartes that God's reality, properly conceived, is timelessly eternal, immutable, and infinite (for other readings according to which God's reality is eternal rather than sempiternal, see Hardin 1978, Steinberg 1981, Nadler 2006, and Schmaltz 2015).

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point out, it is not clear, given other theses in *Ethics* Part I, how God is the cause of *all* things.<sup>3</sup> First, what follows either directly or indirectly from the divine nature is also infinite and eternal (E1p21–23); it seems an infinite, eternal God’s effects are limited to what is infinite and eternal.<sup>4</sup> Second, finite things depend on the causal activity of other finite things: a thing with “finite and determinate existence” causally depends on other things with finite and determinate existence, which in turn causally depend on other things with finite and determinate existence, and so on, *in infinitum* (E1p28). The question is whether Spinoza’s system is coherent. If an infinite, eternal God causes only what is infinite and eternal, how does God cause anything that is finite and non-eternal? How is God the cause of *all* things, and not just the cause of infinite, eternal things?<sup>5</sup>

According to most interpreters, Spinoza has the resources to explain how an infinite, eternal substance causes the finite, non-eternal things described in E1p28. Proposals tend to take one of the following two basic forms. According to one kind of account, Spinoza’s claim that an infinite and eternal God is the cause of all things should not be taken as the claim that God’s activity is *sufficient* to cause all things: while God, an infinite and eternal substance, is the sufficient cause of the necessary, universal features of nature described by laws of nature, a finite thing only comes to be (and be determined to produce effects) given these

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<sup>3</sup> See Leibniz’s comments on Wachter 1999, 70.

<sup>4</sup> E1p21 explicitly concerns modes that are infinite and *eternal*, while E1p22–23 explicitly concern modes that are infinite and *exist necessarily*, a shift that an anonymous referee suggested indicates that *only* the entities in E1p21 are supposed to be eternal. I think the shift is merely terminological; *all* the “infinite modes” are eternal. In the immediately preceding propositions (E1p19 and E1p20), Spinoza uses E1def8 (according to which “eternity” is “existence itself” insofar as it follows necessarily from the divine nature) to translate talk of God’s *necessary existence* into talk of God’s existence as something *eternal* (cf. E1p10s, where Spinoza says that attributes express necessity, *sive* eternity, and E2p44c2, where Spinoza argues that to conceive something under a species of eternity is to conceive it as necessary.). Although the propositions E1p21–23 concern what *follows* from the divine nature and not the divine nature itself, it is plausible that what “exists necessarily” in E1p22–23. can also be understood as what exists, or is real, as something *eternal*. Indeed, in E1p23d Spinoza takes what is infinite and exists necessarily to be at least coextensive with what is infinite and eternal: there, the entities in E1p21 that had hitherto been described as “eternal” are presented as “existing necessarily” (cf. the 1677 Dutch translation of the *Ethics*, in which both E1p21 and E1p22 concern infinite modes that are “eternal”; E1p23d describes the modes in both propositions as “existing necessarily”). For more discussion of these propositions and their demonstrations, see Primus 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Leibniz had other objections to Spinoza. For recent discussion of other important objections, see Laerke 2017.

universal features *and* other finite things.<sup>6</sup> According to a more common kind of account, the entire causal nexus of all “things with finite and determinate existence” is identified as one of the “infinite modes,” the entities discussed in *E1p21–23*.<sup>7</sup> An infinite and eternal substance cannot cause a finite, non-eternal thing in isolation, but an infinite and eternal substance causes finite, non-eternal things by causing an infinite, everlasting mode that is the transitive causal system of all finite, non-eternal things.<sup>8</sup>

I will not examine versions of each kind of interpretation or canvas the philosophical or textual difficulties specific to each; such discussions can already be found in the literature.<sup>9</sup> Instead, in this essay, I will challenge an assumption common to both kinds of interpretation: viz., that Spinoza's infinite, eternal substance can cause something enduringly real, provided that that something is 1) everlasting and 2) not finite.<sup>10</sup> On the first kind of interpretation, the threat of inconsistency is defused by invoking sempiternal, universal effects: God causes finite things by causing the fundamental structures of reality that are necessary for finite things to cause other finite things. Here God, an infinite, eternal substance, has effects that are operative in the enduring world and so enjoy a kind of reality that can – unlike substance's reality – be explicated by duration or time. The second kind of interpretation relies on a different “infinite mode” that can be explicated by duration or time: God causes finite things by causing an infinite mode that is the entire transitive causal system of all finite, enduring things.

That Spinoza thinks there is a causal bridge from the infinite, eternal substance to finite, enduring things is a natural enough assumption. Indeed, one might hold that any proposal according to which there is *not* a causal bridge is a non-starter: Spinoza calls finite, enduring things “modes” (e. g., *E1p25c*) and all modes are in, conceived through, and somehow caused by the infinite, eternal substance. Furthermore, there are texts that seem to concern eternal-durational causation. For example, *E1p21* is sometimes read as saying that God has *sempiternal* effects, effects which must “*always [semper]*” exist. The demonstration posits,

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6 Curley 1969, 1988, and 1990. Cf. Watt 1972 and Yovel 1989, 157–59, and 1991.

7 The view that there is an “infinite mode” constituted by all things with finite and determinate existence is ubiquitous. For a small sample, see Gueroult 1968/1974, 1.312f., Della Rocca 1996, 174 n14, and Melamed 2013, 131.

8 D. Garrett 1991 (cf. Lennox 1976, Friedman 1986). Schmaltz 1997 has a subtly different view according to which the key infinite mode is an infinite, sempiternal whole that is prior in being and essence to finite things (cf. Nadler 2012 and Scribano 2008).

9 For an overview and bibliography, see Newlands 2018.

10 Melamed 2013, 121–26; Grey 2014, 458; A. Garrett 2003, 40–42; Lin 2012, 436; Garber 2015, 517; Schmaltz 2015.

for *reductio*, that “God’s idea in thought” has but a “determinate existence, or duration.” The point seems to be that the *durational* existence cannot be limited: God’s idea “must *always* exist,” or be a sempiternal “infinite mode.”<sup>11</sup>

Yet, as I hope to show, there are also reasons to think that there might not be a causal bridge from God, conceived as eternal and infinite, to the non-eternal, non-infinite things of *E1p28*.<sup>12</sup>

I begin by discussing *E2p8–9*. I argue that in this stretch of text, Spinoza argues that an idea of a thing *t* does not simply represent *t* as formally real; what is also represented is whether *t* enjoys formal reality that is infinite and eternal or formal reality that is non-infinite and non-eternal.<sup>13</sup> There are, as it were, two “flavors” of formal reality in Spinoza’s system. I then take a broader view in Section 3, arguing that if we think Spinoza is committed to the intelligibility of divine causation (and the inherence of effects in the divine cause), we can expect Spinoza to reject causation between infinite, eternal formal reality and non-infinite, non-eternal formal reality and to hold that an infinite, eternal substance cannot cause *anything* enduring.<sup>14</sup>

But if an infinite, eternal substance cannot cause *anything* enduring, then available strategies for responding to Leibniz’s objection on Spinoza’s behalf will not work, since God, the infinite, eternal substance, cannot cause either the entire enduring world over all time or some everlasting, universal feature of enduring reality. I will conclude the essay by outlining an interpretation according to which it is consistent for Spinoza to deny eternal-durational causation

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**11** Curley 1969, 107, and 116; Gueroult 1968, I.309; Melamed 2013, 122–26; Wolfson 1934, I.376 f. See Primus 2019 for an alternative reconstruction of *E1p21d*.

**12** Although he does not argue for the point as I do, Schnepf also puts pressure on the idea that we should seek such a causal link. On Schnepf’s reading, there are distinct aspects of a thing that call for distinct kinds of causal explanation (Schnepf 2011, 51–56). Importantly, we should be careful not to conflate the explanations: “an actual deduction [from God] of the concrete history of individual things is [...] by principle, excluded” (Schnepf 2011, 55). Cf. Youpa, who argues that “insofar as a singular thing is in the common order of nature [the transitive causal series of *E1p28*], it is not in God, and insofar as it is in God, it is not in the common order of nature” (Youpa 2011, 324).

**13** Here “formal reality” is understood in the Cartesian sense of the reality a thing enjoys in virtue of being an existent thing (cf. *AT VII.41 f.*, 102–4). Granted, Spinoza does not tend to use the term ‘formal reality’ (*realitas formalis*), preferring ‘formal being’ (*esse formale*) (see, e.g., *E2p5*, *E2p7s*, *E2p15*). Spinoza does occasionally equate ‘*esse*’ and ‘*realitas*’ (see *E1p9*, *E1p10s*), so I do not think it is that misleading to discuss kinds of *formal reality* rather than kinds of *formal being*.

**14** What I say in this essay complements Primus 2019, in which I argued that the propositions concerning the “infinite modes” (*E1p21–23*) help establish that *all* effects of an infinite and eternal substance are infinite and eternal modes.

while also holding that God, the infinite, eternal substance, is the cause of all things. I develop this interpretation further in the companion piece.

## 2 A Closer Look at E2p8

In this section, I suggest that a takeaway from E2p7–E2p9 is that an idea does not just represent a body as either existent or non-existent: an idea represents a body either 1) as something that exists in the way that enduring things exist, as *enduringly* formally real, or 2) as something that exists in the way that eternal things exist, as *eternally* formally real.<sup>15</sup> A body either exists or does not exist, but to merely say that it exists is underspecified: does the thing exist as something with the reality of an eternal truth or true and immutable nature, or does it exist as something with the reality of a thing that came to be and is now actually enduring in time?<sup>16</sup>

Consider E2p7, which introduces the “doctrine of parallelism”: “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.”<sup>17</sup> I first want to highlight the proposition’s corollary:

God’s [NS actual] power of thinking is equal to his actual power of acting. That is, *whatever follows formally* from God’s infinite nature *follows objectively* in God from his idea in the same order and with the same connection. (my emphasis)

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**15** In arguing that Spinoza distinguishes eternal, infinite formal reality from non-eternal, non-infinite formal reality, I will be advancing what Laerke 2017 calls a “Platonizing interpretation” (other Platonizers include Bennett 1984, Delahunty 1985, Donagan 1988, Matson 1990, Rivaud 1905, Jarrett 2001, Martin 2008, Scribano 2008, D. Garrett 2009, Viljanen 2011 and 2014, Ward 2011, and Schmaltz 2015). Laerke rejects all such interpretations, instead advancing an “aspectual” interpretation that he argues better captures Spinoza’s monist framework. I will not be able to address Laerke’s proposal here; my aim in this essay and the companion essay is to introduce a new “Platonizing” interpretation of Spinoza’s monist framework – one that is, as will become clearer in the companion essay, also an acosmist interpretation.

**16** Note that to say that something does *not* exist is also underspecified. It is one thing for something to not exist as a true and immutable nature; it is another thing for something to not exist *now*. Spinoza does not use the term ‘true and immutable nature,’ but for defense of the idea that the entities discussed in E1p21–23 are conceptual descendants of Cartesian true and immutable natures and eternal truths, see Primus 2019.

**17** There is, of course, a lot of debate about Spinoza’s “parallelism” of minds and bodies. Here I will assume that the *one and the sameness* in E2p7 is the one and the sameness of a *representation* of a body, i.e., an *objectively real body* in thought, and a *formally real body* in extension. Here there is *one essence* conceived under different attributes as enjoying different realities. Cf. Hübner 2019.

According to *E2p3*, there is an idea of *God's essence and all that follows with necessity from that essence*. This idea of God's essence and everything that follows from it is God's infinite intellect.<sup>18</sup> Ideas in this intellect are *true*: the order and connection of objectively real representations is the same as the order and connection of *formally real ideata* (*E2p7*).<sup>19</sup> There is perfect agreement of a *representation of a body B* and *body B* itself because the objectively real body and the corresponding body existing outside of thought, a formally real body, are “one and the same thing, which is explained through different attributes” (*E2p7s*).<sup>20</sup>

*E2p8*, which Spinoza says in the demonstration is “evident” from *E2p7* and “is understood even more clearly” from *E2p7s*, is this:

The ideas of singular things, or [*sive*] of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended [*comprehendi*] in God's infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of the singular things, or [*sive*] modes, are contained [*continentur*] in God's attributes.

Here is one way to understand this passage. Where *E2p7* concerns ideas of *existing* things, *E2p8* concerns ideas of *non-existing* things. In both cases, in the infinite intellect, there is a “parallelism” of objective reality and a formally real ideatum in extension: in each case, *one and the same* thing is conceived under different attributes. Just as an idea representing an existing circle and the circle existing in nature are one and the same thing conceived under different attributes (*E2p7s*), so

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**18** Spinoza does not use the term “infinite intellect” in *E2p3* or its demonstration, but that term does appear in *E1p16*, which is cited in *E2p3d*. That *E2p7* relies on *E2p3* has been noted by Curley 1988, Della Rocca 1996, and Wilson 1991.

**19** A true idea agrees with its object [*ideato*] (*E1a6*). There are two words Spinoza uses for the “object” of an idea, ‘*ideatum*’ and ‘*objectum*.’ The latter term is used more broadly, referring to what is objectively real, what is real outside the idea, or both. For example, when Spinoza says that the “object constituting the human mind is the body” (*E2p13*), he uses ‘*objectum*’: in this context, the point seems to be both that a human mind represents the human body (i. e., the human body is objectively real in thought) and that that human body is formally real in extension. ‘*Ideatum*’ is used when Spinoza discusses the truth of ideas; when ideas are true, what is objectively real in thought is also formally real, and what is formally real is the true idea's *ideatum* (see *E1p30d*, *E2p43s*). Here I disagree with D. Garrett, who holds that ‘*ideatum*’ is the broader notion (D. Garrett 2017, 201).

**20** Cf. Descartes, AT VII.102f. In taking the “one-and-the-sameness” of *E2p7s* to be the “one-and-the-sameness” of a thing existing in thought and a thing existing outside of thought, I am reading Spinoza as coopting a Cartesian account of representation (cf. Hübner 2019). While *E2p7* hinges on conceiving an idea in terms of what the idea represents, the reality of ideas is not exhausted by objective reality, as one may also conceive the idea in terms of formal reality (*E2p5*, *E2p7s*). I read *E2p21* as also about ideas conceived as formally real acts of thinking. I say more in Section 3. For more discussion see Primus 2021.

the idea representing a non-existing circle and a non-existing circle are one and the same thing conceived under different attributes. The “non-existing circle” is a “formal essence” that is “contained” in an attribute, and this “formal essence” is not something that exists or is real.

However, I do not think the “parallelism” of E2p8 is between *ideas of non-existing things* and *non-existing things*. Rather, the parallelism is between *ideas of eternally formally real essences* and the *eternally formally real essences*. We can understand E2p8 as conveying the following. Because all essences following from the divine nature are “contained” in God’s necessarily (eternally) real attributes, all essences have *eternal* formal reality as eternal modes caused by substance.<sup>21</sup> (As I will explain in the next section, this eternal reality is also *infinite* reality, but here I will couch the discussion just in terms of *eternal* reality.) And because the “order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things” (E2p7), there are true *ideas* of these eternal essences “comprehended in God’s infinite intellect”: one and the same thing can be conceived either as an eternal essence in thought or as an eternal essence in extension. Even things that do not *now* exist as enduring singular things have eternally formally real essences, so in “God’s infinite idea,” there are true ideas of those things “that do not [*now*] exist [*as enduring things*].”<sup>22</sup>

The infinite intellect’s ideas represent things as existing *eternally*, or as enjoying *eternal* formal reality; the ideas represent the eternal things in virtue of the eternal things being objectively real in thought. In the corollary, Spinoza notes that there are also ideas representing things *as enduring things*:

When singular things are said to exist, not only insofar as they are comprehended in God’s attributes, but insofar also as they are said to have duration, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration. (E2p8c)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> One might think that Spinoza’s saying that formal essences are “contained” in God’s attributes implies that they are *not* caused by God and thus do not have any formal reality; in that case, a formal essence is not a *formally real* essence. However, in E2p7s, Spinoza uses ‘formal’ in referring to *formal reality that has a cause*: the “formal being [*esse formale*] of the idea of the circle can be perceived only through another mode of thinking, as its proximate cause.” I think it is unlikely that Spinoza employed a different sense of ‘formal’ in E2p8 (cf. Yovel 1989, 162). Note too that in E1p17s, Spinoza uses “formal essence” to mean what is *formally* (rather than objectively) real: “the truth and formal essence of things [*formalis rerum essentia*] is what it is because it exists objectively in that way in God’s intellect.”

<sup>22</sup> Granted, taking E2p8 this way, with these interpolations, requires reading ahead to E2p8s and E2p9. Given E2p8’s obscurity, I think looking to the proposition’s immediate textual context for some help is warranted.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *CM* I.2 (G I.238f.). It is unclear from the text whether Spinoza means that there is *one* idea of a thing that gains content when that thing is said to exist not just as an eternal essence,

We might read “ideas also *involve the existence* through which they are said to have duration” (my emphasis) in two ways. On one reading, the claim is that when a thing  $x$  has duration, there is an idea of  $x$  as enduring, and that idea involves or implicates the existence of the particular things  $q$ ,  $r$ ,  $s$  that caused the thing’s initial generation or help the thing endure over time.<sup>24</sup> On another reading, the claim is just that when a thing has duration, there is an idea of that thing as continuing in its existence, and this idea does not involve or implicate other particular things  $q$ ,  $r$ ,  $s$ , but rather a kind of existence or formal reality which can be described as *continuing*.<sup>25</sup>

Cognition of an effect depends on and involves cognition of its cause (E1a4), so there is a case to be made that the idea of an enduring thing *will* implicate the causes of its becoming (and/or remaining) an enduring thing. However, I think the latter reading better captures the emphasis in E2p8c. Consider the illustration Spinoza provides in E2p8s. This scholium does not explicitly mention the causes of the coming to be of an enduring thing, but it does seem to underscore that ideas can differ in the formal reality they represent things as having:

[...] I shall try as far as possible to illustrate the matter: the circle is of such a nature that the rectangles formed from the segments of all the straight lines intersecting in it are equal to one another. So in a circle there are contained infinitely many rectangles which are equal to one another. Nevertheless, none of them can be said to exist except insofar as the circle exists, nor also can the idea of any of these rectangles be said to exist except insofar as it is comprehended in the idea of the circle. Now of these infinitely many [rectangles] let two only, namely [those formed from the segments of lines] D and E, exist. Of course their ideas also exist now, not only insofar as they are only comprehended in the idea of the circle, but also insofar as they involve the existence of those rectangles. By this they are distinguished from the other ideas of the other rectangles.



but also as a presently enduring thing. I am inclined to say that there are *two* ideas of the thing, one which represents the thing’s essence as something eternal and the other which represents it as something enduring. As Spinoza points out in E2p9, the “idea of a singular thing which actually exists has God for a cause not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea of a singular thing which actually exists”; the implication is that this idea’s formal reality does not have the same cause as the idea representing the thing as something eternal.

**24** See Laerke 2017, 30–33. See footnote 28 below.

**25** Spinoza clarifies in E2def5 that ‘duration’ [*duratio*] means an “indefinite continuation of existing” (cf. *Principles* I 55, AT VIIIA 26). So, to “have duration” does not mean having some *definite*, or determinate, duration (i. e., existing for some specified span of time); it is to exist as something that endures over time, where the measure of that endurance is not encoded in a thing’s essence or determined by the thing’s efficient cause (E2def5exp., cf. E3p8). I assume that the efficient cause in E2def5exp. is the cause of the coming to be of the thing, or the kind of efficient cause I take to be under discussion in E1p28.

From the circle's nature it follows with necessity that the circle "contains" infinitely many equally sized rectangles. Although Spinoza does include a diagram with a circle with lines inscribed within it, I do not think that at the beginning of *E2p8s* we are supposed to attend to the circle as an actually-drawn figure on the page. If the circle is supposed to be a stand-in for *substance*, it makes sense to conceive of the circle as existing as substance does: namely, as an eternal truth (*E1def8exp.*) – with the caveat that unlike substance, the circle does not exist as an eternal truth by its own nature alone. Insofar as the circle exists as an eternal truth or true and immutable nature, an infinity of rectangles also exists as eternal truths, as *propria* of the circle's essence. Analogously, from the nature of substance infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, i. e., "everything which can fall under an infinite intellect" (*E1p16*), follow with necessity, and these are all *in* substance (*E1p15*). If substance exists as an eternal truth, then *all* the things following with necessity from that eternal truth – all the *propria* – also exist as eternal truths, eternal modes of an eternal substance.<sup>26</sup>

The ideas of the rectangles only exist insofar as there is an idea of the circle's essence. Yet these ideas of the rectangles are not ideas of rectangles that have been constructed and now endure; the ideas of the rectangles are ideas of what specific geometrical natures there must be given the nature of a circle. Similarly, the ideas of each of the infinity of things following from substance's nature are ideas of what things must be given God's eternal attributes.

When, at some time, two equally sized rectangles are constructed from the lines D and E that are inscribed in an actually-drawn circle, there are ideas of these "actually existing" rectangles; these ideas represent the two rectangles as enduring things, not as eternal truths. These ideas are distinguished from the ideas of eternal truths in virtue of differing in the kind of reality the rectangles are represented to have.<sup>27</sup>

In *E2p9*, Spinoza turns to ideas of the causes (and effects) of finite, enduring things. The order and connection of finite things coming to be, enduring for a while, and ceasing to be is the same as the order and connection of the *ideas* of those finite things:

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<sup>26</sup> See Primus 2019 for further defense of the claim that in Spinoza's system, *everything* following from the divine nature (as in *E1p16*) exists as eternal truths.

<sup>27</sup> One might suppose that an idea of an eternal formal essence is an idea representing something as *possible*; the idea representing the thing as enduring, or actual, is the idea of the actualization of the formal essence (cf. D. Garrett 2009). On my reading of *E2p8*, Spinoza is not arguing that ideas of formal essences are ideas of things as *possible*: they are ideas of eternally formally real things, and such things *are* actual, or real, in the second sense of "actual" in *E5p29s* (i. e., *sub specie aeternitatis* as "contained in God" and "following from the necessity of the divine nature").

The idea of a singular thing which actually exists [i. e., is enduringly real] has God for a cause not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea of a singular thing which actually exists [i. e., is enduringly real]; and of this [idea] God is also the cause, [...] and so on, to infinity.

Things conceived of as *eternally* real cannot ever be conceived as not eternally real; such things are *eternal* modes necessarily caused by a necessarily eternal substance. However, things conceived as finite, enduringly real things can be conceived as changed (or even destroyed) by other finite, enduringly real things.<sup>28</sup>

In sum, *E2p7* focuses on the *one-and-the-sameness* of ideas of bodies and bodies: there is a representational parallelism of objective reality in thought and formal reality in extension. *E2p8* and *E2p9* introduce another layer of complexity.<sup>29</sup> There is a parallelism of *ideas* of eternally formally real things and eternally formally real things, as well as a parallelism of *ideas* of enduringly formally real things and enduringly formally real things.

It has been suggested that *E2p8* can help us understand how an infinite, eternal God causes finite, enduring things.<sup>30</sup> From what I have said here, however, *E2p8* and *E2p9* establish that there are ideas of the formally real causal structures described in *E1p21–23* and *E1p28*. How these formally realities (or ideas thereof) are related is not yet clear.

### 3 Putting Some Pressure on a Common Assumption

Spinoza is famously strict about what must be the case for one thing to *cause* another thing. Things that “have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, or the concept of one does not involve the concept of the other” (*E1a5*). Things that cannot be understood through one

<sup>28</sup> While I do not think Spinoza does so in these propositions, he can account for how a mind represents a thing as *non-existing* in the sense representing a thing as not being, at some point, *enduringly* real (see, e. g., *E2p49s/G II 134*). To represent something as that which did endure but is no longer enduring, one represents causes of that thing’s coming to be as well as causes of its destruction; in the absence of representations of destructive causes – but with the presence of representations of the thing’s coming to be – the idea will be of the thing as (now) enduring. See Laerke 2017, 30–33. Cf. Moreau 1994, 501.

<sup>29</sup> There is yet another layer of complexity that I will not discuss here: the parallelism of modes across God’s other attributes. See Melamed 2013, ch. 5.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Tad Schmaltz 1997, 217 f.

another cannot be causally related (E1p3): “cognition of an effect depends on and involves cognition of its cause” (E1a4). A difference in attribute precludes causation: the concept of a body does not depend on or involve the concept of thought, but it does depend on and involve the concept of extension; a body thus cannot be understood as caused by substance considered under the attribute of thought (E2p6, E3p2d).

Interpreters have assumed that something enduringly real *can* be a mode immanently caused by an eternal, infinite substance, provided the enduring thing is “infinite” and that the substance and enduring thing are understood under the same attribute. In this section, I put some pressure on this assumption. I will not claim that the infinite, eternal substance conceived under, say, the attribute of extension and some indefinite and sempiternal extended thing have “*nothing* in common” – they are both thought to enjoy reality outside the mind or outside of thought. I will argue, however, that there are basic features of the putative effect (e. g., a transitive causal structure) that are not explained by the putative eternal, infinite cause. It seems that for causation (and, I suggest, the inherence of the effect in the cause) to be intelligible, it is not enough for the cause and effect to both be thinking or both be extended: cause and effect must also be both eternal and infinite or both non-eternal and non-infinite.

First consider the inter-attribute case. Substance conceived under the attribute of extension cannot cause either a thinking substance or thinking modes, and a body and a mind cannot causally interact. What is extended and what is thinking have “nothing in common,” or the “concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other.” While a full discussion of the attributes is well beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth saying a bit more about the concepts of thought and extension relevant to the causal prohibition.

Return once again to the example in E2p7s: the *idea of a circle existing in nature* and the *circle existing in nature* are one and the same thing considered under different attributes. An idea represents the circle existing in nature in virtue of the circle being objectively real in thought. Yet one and the same thing can be conceived in different ways *within* the attribute of thought, either as the “idea” or as the “idea of the idea” (E2p21), where the “idea of the idea” is the “form of the idea insofar as this is considered as a mode of thinking without relation to the *objectum*” (E2p21d). I think Spinoza is making a few points in E2p21. First, any idea can be conceived either in terms of what it represents (i. e., in terms of what is objectively real) or in terms of the formal reality ideas have, regardless of what is represented. To conceive of a thought “without relation to the *objectum*” is, I take it, to conceive of it just qua act of thinking, bracketing both what is objectively real (e. g., the objectively real body) and the idea’s formally real ideatum

(the formally real body).<sup>31</sup> Second, the formal reality of ideas is distinctive in that it makes objectively real contents (whatever they may be) present to mind.<sup>32</sup> Third, and relatedly, the objectively real content, a representation, can be conceived as a representation. If the “idea” of the circle is the representation of a circle in nature, then the “idea of the idea” is the representation of the representation of a circle in nature; a mind can thus distinguish between the objectively real circle with radius R in thought and the formally real circle with radius R in extension.<sup>33</sup>

I take it that the concepts behind the ability to make this distinction are the concepts of extension and thought relevant to the inter-attribute causal prohibition (E1a5, E1p3, E2p6, E3p2, E5pref/II.278–80). Although an idea represents a body, thinking reality and extramental extended reality can be conceived independently of the other (see E1p10s). What is real in thought is explained by what is also real in thought: some *objectively real j* is caused by another *objectively real k*; conceived in terms of formal reality, that there is an act of thinking about *j* is caused by there being acts of thinking about *k*.<sup>34</sup> What is formally real in extension is explained by what is also formally real in extension. Mind-body causation is not intelligible, as there is no generic kind of reality common to both the reality of thought and the reality of extramental extension; the idea of such generic reality is a highly confused idea labeled by “transcendental” terms like *being*, *thing*, and *something* (E2p40s1).

### 3.1 Inexplicable Shifts Between Cause and Effect

I now want to turn from the attributes case to the case of formal reality, and to the assumption that an eternal, infinite substance can cause what is *enduringly* real, provided that the effect is “infinite” and conceived under the same attribute.

Note that whether conceived under the attribute of extension or under the attribute of thought, substance’s reality and the reality of the things figuring in E1p28 and E2p9 are structurally different. Substance’s reality is self-causing and absolutely necessary (E1p7). Substance is *infinite* by nature (E1p8), where being

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Descartes, AT VII 8, 40f.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Descartes, VII 160.

<sup>33</sup> The ability of a mind to distinguish an objectively real circle in thought and the formally real circle in extension is presupposed in E2p7s; I think this ability is explained in E2p21. For further discussion of E2p21, see Primus 2021.

<sup>34</sup> An idea is adequate in a mind when it can be completely explained by other ideas within the same mind (see E2p11c, E2p29s, and E2p38d).

infinite is an “absolute affirmation of the existence of some nature” (E1p8s1): substance could not have more (or less) reality than it in fact has. I think Spinoza would also say that it is confused to conceive of substance’s reality under any attribute as a maximum degree or amount of reality.<sup>35</sup> To think in terms of degrees or amounts is to think in terms of units of reality, but this invites the mistaken thought that substance’s reality is posterior to the reality of those units, or that substance’s *infinite* reality is just indefiniteness.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, substance’s reality is not to be conceived as enduring, *sempiternal* reality. Substance is immutable (E1p20c2) and an eternal truth (E1p20c1) which “cannot be explicated by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end” (E1def8exp.).<sup>37</sup>

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**35** While Spinoza tends to treat reality (i. e., perfection) as a gradable notion (see E5p40d), it is sometimes asserted that Spinoza does not treat ‘existence’ (or ‘actual’) as gradable. I think Spinoza’s usage is not this tidy, however. Sometimes Spinoza treats existence as not gradable: e. g., in the context of arguments for the existence of God. However, in other contexts, it seems ‘existence’ could be a synonym for gradable reality. Consider E1p8s1, where Spinoza says that “being infinite is an absolute affirmation of the existence [*existentiae*] of some nature”; being *finite* is “a negation” that involves denying “existence” to a nature. Here it seems the notion of the existence of a finite thing is gradable: to be finite is to be something with *some* existence or reality – something that would have *more* existence or reality were it not limited by other things (see E1d2). While it is not yet clear in E1p8s1, I think it becomes clearer later that the reality that is “absolutely” affirmed of a nature is not the same sort of reality that can be thought of as gradable.

**36** Cf. Descartes, *Principles* I.26 (AT VIII.A.14 f.). See also Spinoza’s discussion of “quantity as it is in the imagination,” which is “finite, divisible, and composed of parts” (E1p15s (G II.59)). Although I will use the term ‘indefinite’ as a marker, I should note that Spinoza does not tend to use this term (but see Letter 12 (G IV.61)).

**37** In E1def8, Spinoza associates what is eternal with what exists by its nature alone (where this nature is captured by a real definition): “by eternity I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing.” Yet I do not think that Spinoza means here that *only* what exists by nature (i. e., substance) is eternal. As Spinoza will later argue, there are *modes* that do not exist by nature (E1p24) but are still eternal (including the human mind, insofar as it understands (E5p31, E5p40s)). E1def8 does not seem to me to be incompatible with there being modes that are eternal as ways that the “existence itself” following from the divine nature is modified; substance exists as an eternal thing by its nature alone, while eternal modes of substance exist as eternal things by being immanently caused by and inhering in the eternal substance. While it is perhaps not made so explicit in the texts, I follow others in thinking that the eternity in E1def8 is timeless eternity, and in thinking that God is, for Spinoza as for Descartes, timelessly eternal (see footnote 2). For more defense of the idea that the eternity of eternal modes is also timeless eternity, see Primus 2019.

Now consider the formal reality of enduring things.<sup>38</sup> Whether conceived as extended or thinking, an enduring finite thing can be thought of as a part of a greater whole or itself a whole composed of parts. Enduring formal reality is gradable and spread out, as it were, and it is not incoherent to think of such reality in terms of units, including temporal units. However long a striving finite thing manages to actually endure can be thought of in terms of temporal parts and admits of temporal measure.<sup>39</sup> The reality the thing has is limited (and limiting) and can also be thought of as more or less limitable (or limiting): an enduring finite body can be coherently thought of as enduring for more or less time than it in fact does, as being bigger or smaller than it is, or as more or less powerful than it in fact is.<sup>40</sup>

When it comes to the series of enduring things, there are always *more* things beyond any possible imposed bound, and there is no thing one could non-arbitrarily designate as a “first” or “last” cause. All members of the series are such that each of them implicates the enduring formal reality and transitive causal activity of other things, and there is no enduring formally real mind or body one could identify as so great that one could not conceive of another that is even greater (*E1p27f.*, *E1def2*, *E4a*). The series of all enduring, finite things is infinite in the sense of *indefinite* and eternal in the sense of *sempiternal*. While there are direct or indirect transitive causal connections between all things, there is, importantly,

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**38** This is the formal reality with which we human beings are most familiar. It is even an axiom that we “feel a certain body [NS: our body] is affected in many ways” (*E2a4*), where this body is not something infinite and necessary (*E2p11d*). Spinoza does not always flag when he is talking about *enduring* bodies or minds (but see *E5p21* and *E5p23d*), but we can assume that when Spinoza discusses things that strive to persevere in being but can be affected (or destroyed) by other striving things, he is discussing enduring things. Such striving things have “duration” in the sense that they continue to exist, where this continuation is “indefinite” because the extent of the continuation is neither determined through “the very nature of the existing thing” or by the cause that brought it into being (see *E2def5*, *E2def5expl.*, and *E3p8*). Note that Spinoza sometimes uses “duration” to mean a *determinate* span of existence or the measure of how long a thing has continued to exist (*E2p30–31*), even though in *E2def5* he had defined *duratio* to mean an *indefinite continuation of existence*. *E2def5* is not cited in *E2p30–31* or in any other demonstration, but I suspect that “duration” in *E2def5* is what shows up in Part III as *striving*.

**39** A few points of clarification. First, different units (seconds, years) may be used in different contexts, and the units that are in fact used are not the only possible temporal units. Second, even if one is able to determine how long a finite thing has endured, and so provide a determinate measure of its duration, this does not mean that the entire transitive causal series of finite enduring things as a whole admits of a determinate measure: that series is indefinite.

**40** While I cannot discuss this more here, I agree with Hübner 2017 that the identification of power and essence must be qualified: it seems an enduring thing must be able to undergo at least some changes while remaining the thing it is.

asymmetry in the causation: causes precede their effects, and not all things are real at the same time.

Are these differences enough to preclude substance, conceived as infinite and eternally formally real, from causing enduring formal reality, even if that effect is the entire transitive series of all finite things taken together or some pervasive, universal, and sempiternal feature of enduring reality? If the standard for genuine causation is intelligibility, there cannot be aspects of the effect that cannot be explained by the cause.<sup>41</sup> It seems that an eternal, infinite substance's causation of enduring reality – even if it is indefinite and sempiternal – does not meet this standard, as there are inexplicable shifts between cause and effect. Suppose the effect is the entire series of finite things taken as a whole, the individual that is the whole of nature (*E2lemma7s*). There are features of the putative effect that do not seem to be explained by the cause, like an indefinite enduring individual's divisibility and transitive causal structure. “For each thing there must be assigned a cause or reason [*causa sive ratio*], as much for its existence as for its non-existence” (*E1p11d*), but here a reason or cause seems to be lacking for why these basic features exist. More generally, we might ask what reason there could be for substance, whose formal reality is atemporally eternal, to cause an effect whose reality can be explicated in terms of duration or time.<sup>42</sup>

It has been assumed that an infinite substance's causation of a pervasive, sempiternal feature of the enduring world or the series of enduring things considered as a whole is intelligible because the effect is “infinite.” There is, the thought goes, no inexplicable gain or loss of reality: whatever reality there is in the effect can be traced to the reality of the cause, so there is no unexplained surplus of reality in the effect, and since the effect is infinite, there is no reality whose *non*-existence is unexplained.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In *E1p17s*, Spinoza does write that “the thing that is the cause both of the essence and of the existence of some effect must differ from such an effect, both as to its essence and as to its existence” (*G II.63*). This, however, is not an articulation of his own position. First, it seems to contradict *E1a5*. Second, it is a claim asserted in an argument establishing that *if* we conceive the divine intellect (or will) to be the divine essence and the cause of all things, then we must conclude that the divine intellect is very different from our own intellect (or will) – a conclusion Spinoza later rejects (*E2p11c*).

<sup>42</sup> Nadler raises, but does not answer, a similar question (see Nadler 2012, 236).

<sup>43</sup> For Cartesians, something cannot come from nothing: for anything that is real, there is a cause of that reality. Spinoza agrees, but, as just mentioned, says that there must also be an explanation for something *not* being real (*E1p11d*). It is widely acknowledged that Spinoza rules out infinite-finite causation. There is not something else to limit the one and only substance's causal output, and substance does not impose limits on itself (see *E1p16–E1p17*), so it seems substance's effects cannot be finite modes (see *E1p21–23*). Substance cannot, without explanation,

Yet to say that the cause, substance, and effect, the enduring world or some feature of that enduring world, are both “infinite” elides the distinction between the infinite and the indefinite. Once we attend to this distinction, the idea that infinite-indefinite causation does not involve an inexplicable gain or loss of reality becomes harder to understand. The indefinite can be thought of in terms of finite parts, and so *indefinite-indefinite* causation could be understood as not involving any inexplicable gain or loss in the “amount” of reality. However, the reality of the infinite substance is not supposed to be thought of in terms of parts.<sup>44</sup> In *infinite-indefinite* causation, the effect and cause are not commensurable in the way they are in indefinite-indefinite causation<sup>45</sup>; the claim that there is not *more* or *less* reality in the effect as in the cause only makes sense if the cause, like the effect, can be thought of in terms of parts or amounts.<sup>46</sup>

One might argue that Spinoza can accept the differences between God’s eternal, infinite formal reality and enduring, indefinite formal reality while still insisting that the former can cause the latter: God’s eternal, infinite formal reality can *contain* non-eternal, indefinite reality *eminently*, so God can cause enduring formal reality without being enduringly real himself.<sup>47</sup>

It should be noted that Spinoza elsewhere rejects appeals to eminent containment. Spinoza’s God does not cause what is extended because God contains extension eminently – rather, God causes extension because one of God’s attributes *is extension*.<sup>48</sup> An appeal to the eminent containment of extended reality in God’s thinking reality is a cover for ignorance:

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cause *less* than it *can* cause, and what substance *can* cause is infinite. As I said at the outset of the paper, it is generally accepted that the infinite substance can cause what is finite, provided an “infinite mode” is part of the causal explanation; there is a variety of ways of spelling out the details, but most presuppose an “infinite mode” that is *indefinite*. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me to clarify this here.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *PPC* I.19 (G I.178), *CM* I.6 (G I.246), *CM* II.1 (G I.250 f.), *Ep.* 50 (G IV.239).

<sup>45</sup> In indefinite-finite causation, the putative cause and effect are commensurable, as both can be thought of in terms of parts or “amounts” of formal reality. Such causation is ruled out, as there cannot be less reality in the effect as was in the cause.

<sup>46</sup> In Primus 2019, I suggest that Spinoza can be understood as criticizing the Cartesian idea that the finite (and the indefinite) could be understood as the idea of the infinite with something “taken away” (AT V.356).

<sup>47</sup> See Descartes, AT VII.41, 79, 105, 135, 367.

<sup>48</sup> Schmaltz 1999, 188, argues that extended substance is not spatially extended, but substance causes spatially extended things because substance contains spatial extension eminently. I agree with Schmaltz (and Peterman 2015) that extended substance is not spatially extended, but hold, with Peterman, that Spinoza would reject the eminent containment of spatial extension in non-spatial extension.

Meanwhile, by other arguments [...] they clearly show that they entirely remove corporeality or extended substance itself from the divine nature. And they maintain that it has been created by God. But by what divine power could it be created? They are completely ignorant of that. And this shows clearly that they do not understand what they themselves say. (E1p15s)<sup>49</sup>

Given the differences outlined above, eternal-durational causation arguably raises comparable questions, making an appeal to eminent containment in this case as much a cover for ignorance as it is in the other case.

### 3.2 The Issue of Inherence

The assumption that an infinite, eternal substance's *immanent* causation of something indefinite and sempiternal is intelligible is the assumption that the *inherence* of the effect in the cause is intelligible, or that something enjoying indefinite, sempiternal reality can be understood as a way that substance's reality is modified. However, it seems that to make sense of the inherence of something indefinite and sempiternal in the infinite, timelessly eternal substance, one either has to give up a straightforward understanding of what it is to enjoy formal reality *as a mode* or give up thinking of substance's reality as infinite and timelessly eternal.

Here is a straightforward understanding of modes and substance. Modes depend for their formal reality on substance's formal reality, but a substance does not depend on its modes for its formal reality. This asymmetric dependence distinguishes modes' formal reality from substance's formal reality. Nevertheless, what seems distinctive about the mode-substance relation is that in another sense, the formal reality of modes and the formal reality of their substance is the *same formal reality*. Modes are just *ways* the substance's formal reality is. The modes of substance conceived under the attribute of extension are ways that substance's extended formal reality is; the modes of substance conceived under the attribute of thought are ways that substance's thinking formal reality is.

The question is whether formal reality that is divisible, can be thought of as having parts, and is temporally spread out (with a transitive causal structure) is a *way* substance's infinite, eternal formal reality is. If one assumes the straightforward understanding, there is some pressure to say no: insofar as formal reality is *in time*, that formal reality is not *literally* a way that *eternal* formal reality is, and

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. *KV* II.19 (G I.90), *CM* I.2 (G I.237 f.), and *Ep.* 4 (G IV.14).

insofar as the formal reality is divisible or composed of parts, it is not *literally* a way that *infinite* formal reality is.

One could, of course, retort that the straightforward understanding of modes and substance is not *Spinoza's* understanding of modes and substance. One could say that modes of substance need to depend on substance, but modes and their substance need not *literally* have the same formal reality.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps some modes (infinite, eternal ones) are literally ways that substance's infinite, eternal reality is modified, but other modes (non-infinite, non-eternal ones) are not; there are perhaps two distinct ways a mode can be related to substance. One kind of mode can be understood in the straightforward way: an infinite, eternal mode is a way substance's infinite, eternal formal reality is modified. Yet the other kind of mode's relation to substance is different: the other kind of mode is not literally a modification of substance's infinite, eternal formal reality, but is a mode because it has a causal connection, perhaps via the first kind of mode, to the infinite, eternal substance (a causal connection which, as I suggested above, might not be intelligible).

If one wants to retain a straightforward understanding of *all* modes and substance, one could insist that substance's formal reality is not timelessly eternal and infinite, but sempiternal and indefinite.<sup>51</sup> A sempiternal, indefinite mode (e. g., a pervasive, universal feature of enduring reality, or the entire transitive series of finite things) is *literally* a way that substance's sempiternal, indefinite formal reality is modified. But it also seems that a temporally limited and finite mode is also *literally* a way that substance's formal reality is modified. If substance's formal reality is thought of as an enduring substratum, then a temporally limited, finite thing is *literally* a modification of some finite portion of that enduring substratum.

On this proposal, the sempiternal, indefinite substance's immanent causation of its indefinite, sempiternal modes is intelligible. It seems its causation of finite, enduring things is also intelligible, given the intelligibility of indefinite-indefinite causation: an indefinite, sempiternal substance could cause the indefinite, sempiternal mode that is the entire series of finite, enduring things (where such causation might involve the causation of the pervasive, universal features described by laws of nature). Yet this proposal does require that God *not* be conceived as (timelessly) eternal and infinite (and not indefinite), and more than a

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Curley 1969 and 1988.

<sup>51</sup> Some discussions of Spinoza's monism have something like this in mind: e. g., Schaffer 2010 (cf. Campbell 1990. For discussion of Schaffer, see Schmaltz 2019, ch. 7). On my proposal, particular finite, enduring bodies (minds) could be thought of as modes of an *enduring* extended (thinking) substratum. However, such an enduring substratum is not *substance*.

few scholars have thought that a sempiternal, indefinite conception of God is in tension with the text of the *Ethics*.<sup>52</sup>

Another option for those wishing to retain the straightforward understanding of modes and substance is the following: infinite, eternal formal reality and non-infinite, non-eternal formal reality are both ways that a generic *formal reality* or *existence* is. One way of being something rather than nothing is to be eternal and infinite, to be an eternal, *non-finite* entity that neither limits the reality of other things nor is limited by the reality of anything else (see *E1def2*). Another way of being something rather than nothing is to be non-eternal (enduring) and non-infinite (whether finite or indefinite).

This option also involves giving up on thinking of *substance's* formal reality as infinite and eternal, since being infinite and being eternal are, on this view, merely ways substance is; substance's reality is not itself infinite and eternal. This is certainly a monist view, but I am not sure it is Spinoza's: Spinoza argues that *substance's* reality is itself eternal and infinite. Moreover, one could worry that to think of substance's reality as some generic formal reality is to think of it in objectionably confused terms (e. g., as a *being, thing, or something*. *E2p40s1*).

## 4 Looking Ahead

Leibniz identified what looks like a big problem at the center of Spinoza's system. Spinoza says that God, the one and only substance that is infinite and eternal, is the cause of all things, but Spinoza also seems to suggest that the things in *E1p28* cannot be caused by what is infinite and eternal. As I described at the beginning of the paper, commentators have sought to save Spinoza from the charge of incoherence by showing how the things of *E1p28* are indeed caused by God. To explain how these finite, enduring things are caused by God, commentators tend to invoke something *sempiternal* and *indefinite*.

Above I argued that an eternal, infinite substance's immanent causation of something sempiternal and indefinite involves an inexplicable shift in realities that renders the causation (and inherence of the effect in the cause) unintelligible. If Spinoza rules out inter-attribute causation on the grounds that inter-attribute causation would involve an inexplicable shift in realities from cause to effect, then it seems he should also rule out eternal-durational, infinite-indefinite causation as well. But if the infinite, eternal substance cannot have sempiternal,

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52 E.g., Hardin 1978, Steinberg 1981, Nadler 2006, and Schmaltz 2015.

indefinite effects, then we are once again faced with the old Leibnizian charge: it seems that despite Spinoza's assurances, it turns out that Spinoza's God cannot be the cause of *all* things after all.

But I will not be concluding that Leibniz has, in the end, triumphed: there is an interpretation of Spinoza's system on which God is still the cause of all things, even if there is no causal link between the infinite, eternal substance and enduring, striving things. I will defend this interpretation more in the companion essay.

In brief, I will propose that Spinoza's system is structured by *two* intersecting causal-explanatory barriers. The first is the much-discussed barrier between attributes: bodies are only caused by bodies and minds by minds. This barrier is obviously a response to Descartes' system: Spinoza deemed Cartesian mind-body causation unintelligible and sought to develop a more intelligible alternative. According to Spinoza, what is thinking only causes (and is caused by) what is thinking and what is extended only causes (and is caused by) what is extended, but *one and the same thing* can be conceived either as a thinking mind or as an extended body.

The second barrier is between infinite, eternal formal reality and non-infinite, enduring formal reality: the former does not cause the latter. The institution of this barrier can be understood as a critical response to the thesis that an infinite and eternal God creates and conserves the very being of finite things over time, a thesis about God's activity *secundum esse* found in Cartesianism and in many other theistic systems.<sup>53</sup> Spinoza deemed this widespread thesis unintelligible and again sought to develop a more intelligible alternative. There is no eternal-durational causation, but *one and the same thing* – one and the same *essence* – can be conceived either as enjoying timelessly eternal, infinite formal reality or as enjoying non-eternal, enduring, and finite (or, in some cases, indefinite) formal reality.<sup>54</sup> Insofar as the essence is conceived as enjoying enduring reality, it is something whose very being *cannot* be immanently caused by an eternal and infinite substance. Insofar as the essence is conceived as enjoying eternal and infinite reality, however, it is something sustained in its very being

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<sup>53</sup> Most early modern European philosophers held that God was a sustaining cause of the very being of things, a *causa secundum esse*. God does not just bring things into being, but continuously acts to sustain thing in their being: in the absence of this sustaining causal activity, creatures simply cease to have any reality or being (*esse*).

<sup>54</sup> I also understand the one-and-the-sameness of a mind and body to be the one-and-the-sameness of an *essence*: one and the same essence can be conceived as enjoying either reality in thought or reality in extension. See the companion piece for more discussion.

as a *mode* of an eternal and infinite substance.<sup>55</sup> All things, conceived *sub specie aeternitatis*, are *literally* ways that substance's eternal and infinite reality is.<sup>56</sup>

The observation that in Spinoza's system, a thing can be conceived as actual in two ways, one of which involves conceiving things in and caused by the eternal and infinite substance, is not new. Spinoza seems to say as much himself. In a passage I take to hearken back to the distinction between formal realities (and correspondingly distinct causal structures) and ideas thereof I argued is developed in E2p8–9, Spinoza writes,

We conceive things [e. g., the body, which is under discussion in E5p29] as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature. But the things we conceive in this second way as true, *or* real, we conceive under a species of eternity, and their ideas involve the eternal and infinite essence of God. (E5p29s)<sup>57</sup>

What is new is my account of how Spinoza could be responding to a common view of divine sustaining causation and my suggestion that conception *sub specie aeternitatis* and conception *sub specie durationis* might be more like conception under different attributes than has been appreciated.<sup>58</sup>

Although they are similar, there is an important disanalogy between conception *sub specie aeternitatis/sub specie durationis* and conception under different attributes: substance can be adequately conceived either as an *extended* substance or as a *thinking* substance, but substance can *only* be adequately con-

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<sup>55</sup> Spinoza says that to the “essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is [NS: also] necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily [NS: also] taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing.” (E2def2) I follow D. Garrett 2009, 286, in holding that an essence can be given, and a thing “posited,” in more than one way (although I disagree that when the (eternal) “formal essence” is given, the thing is posited *as possible*; on my view, it is posited as something actual – albeit actual as a mode enjoying infinite, eternal reality). In the companion essay, I say more about how I understand the “one and the sameness” of infinite, eternal modes and non-infinite, non-eternal things, as well as how the attribute dimension of one-and-the-sameness intersects with the formal reality dimension of one-and-the-sameness.

<sup>56</sup> So, on this interpretation, we can retain the straightforward view of inherence of modes in substance as well as the idea that Spinozan substance is infinite and timelessly eternal (rather than indefinite and sempiternal or some more generic kind of existence). See Section 3.2 above.

<sup>57</sup> There is textual evidence that the distinction in E5p29s refers back to the distinction between formal realities I discussed in Section 2: E5p29s cites E2p45, which cites E2p8c.

<sup>58</sup> It is suggestive that Spinoza even calls eternity and duration “attributes” in the *Cogitata metaphysica* (G I.244).

ceived as something whose reality is infinite and eternal. On the reading I just sketched, it is *only* when a thing is conceived as infinite and eternal that it is a mode inhering in and immanently caused by the infinite, eternal substance; it is *only* when a thing is conceived as an infinite and eternal mode that its very being (*esse*) is explained. When a thing is conceived as a finite, enduring thing, its formal reality is not ultimately explicable, as it is not caused by the one and only substance. But then such formal reality is not real after all. What is real are the one and only substance and its modes. In other words, Spinoza ends up being a kind of *acosmist* who denies the world, or *cosmos*, of enduring, finite things but who still holds that there is a “world” of eternal, infinite modes in the eternal, infinite substance.

In the companion piece, I spell out some more details and answer some objections. I will readily admit that the *acosmist* consequence may not be a welcome one.<sup>59</sup>

AT Descartes, *Œuvres de Descartes*. Eds. Ch. Adam/P. Tannery, 1964–74.

‘AT VII.41f.’ stands for volume VII, pages 41 to 42

CM Spinoza, *Cogitata Metaphysica*

E Spinoza, *Ethics*; ‘E1p15’ stands for *Ethics*, part one, proposition 15

Ep Spinoza, Letters

G Spinoza, *Spinoza Opera* (4 vols.). Ed. by C. Gebhardt. Heidelberg, 1972/[1925]

KV Spinoza, *Short Treatise*

PPC Spinoza, *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy*

Bennett, J. 1984. *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*. Indianapolis.

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