

### 3 Spinoza's Ontology

In the opening definitions of the *Ethics* Spinoza mentions three kinds of basic entities, *substance*, *mode*, and *attribute*, after defining which he is quickly on the way to building his metaphysical system. In what follows, I present the basics of Spinoza's ontology<sup>1</sup> and attempt to go some distance toward clarifying its most pertinent problems. I start by considering the relationship between the concepts of substance and mode; my aim is to show that despite his somewhat peculiar vocabulary there is much here that we should find rather familiar and intelligible, as Spinoza's understanding of these matters harks back to the traditional distinction of substance and accident, or thing and property. After this I move on to fitting the concept of attribute into Spinoza's conceptual architecture, and then examine the implications concerning real existents and causation that Spinoza sees these fundamental conceptual commitments as having. The most startling of these implications is of course his monism, according to which there is only one substance. Through this examination it becomes clear that it is only when Spinoza makes the transition from considerations concerning concepts to existential claims that the collision with what was previously commonly accepted becomes inevitable.

#### I. SUBSTANCE AND MODE

Right at the beginning of the *Ethics*, Spinoza states his definitions of substance, attribute, and mode:

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. (1d3)

By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence. (1d4)

<sup>1</sup> Ontology is the study of the general nature of being, or the most basic features of what exists; as such, it is something found already in Aristotle, in his discussion of 'being as being' (see, e.g., *Metaphysics* IV).

By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived. (1d5)

Attributes pose some time-honoured and thorny interpretative problems, but we can leave them aside for now and focus on the relationship between substance and mode.

That substances are in and conceived through themselves, whereas modes are in and conceived through another, clearly implies that substances hold some kind of ontological and epistemological priority over modes. But what kind of priority? For someone proceeding 'in geometric order' it is of course of the utmost importance that the basic building blocks – definitions and axioms – are clearly stated and cogent. Spinoza obviously thinks that his definitions of substance and mode are precisely that, but it would be hard to claim that they are – at least for us – particularly transparent in their meaning. As a consequence, it is difficult to form an opinion concerning their adequacy. However, if we remain alive to certain key features pertaining to the philosophical landscape of Spinoza's times, his treatment of substance and mode starts to make sense; in fact, I would claim that he does not pack anything particularly controversial into his definitions. Here, as so often, two of Spinoza's most important philosophical sources make their presence felt: Descartes, who arguably was Spinoza's most influential predecessor, and the Aristotelian scholastic tradition, which still dominated much of Western thought in the seventeenth century.

As we have seen, a substance is 'what is in itself', whereas a mode is an affection of a substance, which, according to Spinoza, means that a mode 'is in another'. The fundamental question would thus seem to concern *what it means to be in itself or in another*. I would like to argue that here Spinoza offers us his understanding of the classic distinction between substance and accident. In the Aristotelian tradition, an accident is an entity that cannot exist on its own but needs something (ultimately a substance) to serve as a subject in which it exists; accidents are thus said to *inhere* in subjects, whereas substances are entities that *subsist*. Although scholastic debates concerning substances and different kinds of accidents are complicated, it still seems possible to define the difference roughly as follows: accidents are dependent on the substances in which they inhere, but substances are not similarly dependent on their accidents. What individuates substances, makes them the entities they are, is not accidents, but certain basic features constituting their essences; more to the point, substances do not exist in subjects and thus they occupy an ontologically privileged position. For instance, yellow is an accident and can only exist, ultimately, in a substance, let us say in Garfield the cat; Garfield himself, in contrast, does not exist in any other

subject.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, consider how strongly the wording of 1d3 and 1d5 echo the following passage from Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* (I, 29.2, resp.): '[T]hose things subsist which exist in themselves, and not in another.' Spinoza's 'being in itself' and 'being in another' would thus seem to track rather faithfully the traditional Aristotelian distinction between subsistence and inherence.

The aforementioned Peripatetic framework can be found practically unscathed in the thought of such an innovator as Descartes, who in the first part of the *Principles of Philosophy* (henceforth PP) discusses the meaning of the terms important for our purposes.<sup>3</sup> Much attention has been directed to the fact that he starts by emphasizing the causal independence of substances in Proposition 51 – which is a point to which we will return later – but the governing assumption underpinning much of what Descartes says is that there are things, that is, substances, in which some other entities – Descartes refers to them variably as attributes, qualities, modes, and properties – inhere. In this connection, at least the following passages are especially noteworthy. First, the French version of the *Principles* contains a supplement to the just-mentioned proposition, and in it Descartes notes that apart from substances, there are 'qualities' or 'attributes', which 'are of such a nature that they cannot exist without other things' (PP 1.51; CSM I, 210). Second, he claims that 'we cannot initially become aware of a substance merely through its being an existing thing', but the presence of a substance can easily be inferred from the perception we have of some of the attributes the substance possesses (PP 1.52; CSM I, 210; see also PP 1.63; CSM I, 215). Third, in his explication of what is meant by 'modal distinction' (PP 1.61; CSM I, 214), Descartes notes that modes inhere in substances, and he repeats this later. Finally, in the second set of replies, Descartes begins the definition of substance by saying that it is the term that 'applies to every thing in which whatever we perceive immediately resides, as in a subject' (CSM II, 114; see also the Sixth Meditation, CSM II, 54).

It seems to me that Descartes's view can be expressed using only the terms Spinoza later adopts, by saying that modes and attributes inhere in substances; modes are determining properties which make change

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle's *Categories* (1a16–3b23) is here the most important original source (see also *Metaphysics* 1017b10–25); for a very illuminating discussion of these matters, to which I am here indebted, see Carriero 1995, 245–7. Likewise Charles Jarrett (1977b, 84–5) draws attention to the fact that Spinoza's way of understanding the relationship between substance and mode matches the Aristotelian idea of accidents inhering in a substance. See also Bennett 1984, 55–6; Steinberg 2000, 8–10.

<sup>3</sup> For discussions emphasizing the close relationship between Spinoza's ontology and that of Descartes, see Curley 1988; Koistinen 2002; Della Rocca 2008.

possible, whereas attributes are properties that remain constant during a finite substance's existence (see PP 1.56; CSM I, 211–12; see also PP 1.64; CSM I, 215–16); among the attributes there is always one that is principal, that which constitutes nothing less than the substance's essence (PP 1.53; CSM I, 210). Interestingly, this part of the *Principles* makes it, to my mind, rather clear that Descartes really *is* conceiving the conceptual framework involving substances, essences, and different kinds of (necessary and non-necessary) accidents in a remarkably non-Aristotelian fashion. However, he is not radical to the extent of discarding the basic traditional tenets concerning inherence; he obviously accepts the idea that modes or properties inhere in substances, whereas substances do not inhere in anything – they need only the ordinary concurrence of God in order to exist (PP 1.51, French edition; CSM I, 210).<sup>4</sup>

When Spinoza says that substances are in themselves whereas modes are in another, he is thus respecting the traditional way of conceiving things and their properties: there are those things, namely substances, that do not exist in anything else but are ontologically self-supporting; and there are those things, namely modes or modifications – Spinoza's gloss for accidents – that exist in, or inhere in, something, namely substances.<sup>5</sup> I think that we should recognize the fact that nothing more and nothing less is put forward at this stage; most importantly, as has been observed,<sup>6</sup> the definitions at hand do not contain any causal notions. It is thus understandable that Spinoza takes himself to be entitled to hold, without offering any further proof, that modes are affections of substance (1d5). And as it is an axiom for him that '[w]hatever is, is either in itself or in another' (1a1), he feels entitled to arrive at the conclusion that 'outside the intellect there is nothing except substances and their affections' (1p4d). It thus seems not improper to say that the only entities in Spinoza's ontology classifiable as *things* are substances and modes.

Spinoza's definitions, as noted above, contain not only claims concerning being in itself or being in another, but also the corresponding claims that what is in itself is 'conceived through itself' (1d3) and that what is in another is also conceived through that (1d5). In other words, a

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Descartes contends that if we tried to consider modes 'apart from the substances in which they inhere, we would be regarding them as things which subsisted in their own right, and would thus be confusing the ideas of a mode and a substance' (PP 1.64; CSM I, 216).

<sup>5</sup> This is the way in which Pierre Bayle already read Spinoza; for Bayle's objections against Spinoza, see n. 49. For Edwin Curley's important objection against interpreting modes as properties, see n. 48.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Carriero 1995, 261; but also Koistinen 1991, 14.

mode does not merely inhere in a substance; it is also conceived through that substance. What, exactly, is at stake here?

It is well founded to claim, as John Carriero (1995, 248–50) does, that the way in which conceivability is treated in 1d3 and 1d5 reflects the definitional priority Aristotelians considered substances to have over accidents: a definition reveals the essence of the thing defined, and the definition of an accident must refer to something other than the accident, namely the subject in which the accident in question inheres, whereas a substance is definable without reference to anything external to the substance. So when Spinoza elucidates his claim that a substance is conceived through itself by saying that a substance's 'concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed' (1d3), he can be regarded as proceeding broadly along traditional lines. The only problem with this interpretation is that conceiving a thing through understanding its definition seems to be a rather adequate and intellectual way of forming an idea of the thing; as Carriero notes, he is discussing 'a full characterization of an accident'.<sup>7</sup> But Spinoza's definitions do not say anything about the adequacy of the conceiving in question; and later (2p45, 2p45d) he makes it clear that *any* idea we may form, regardless of its level of adequacy or intellectual sophistication, of *any* finite mode involves the concept of something else, namely of the attribute that constitutes the essence of the substance in which the mode inheres.

Even if we grant that 1d3 and 1d5 echo certain Aristotelian doctrines, Descartes still seems to play a much more important role here.<sup>8</sup> The crucial passage of the *Principles* reads:

A substance may indeed be known through any attribute at all; but each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred. Thus extension in length, breadth and depth constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance. Everything else which can be attributed to body presupposes extension, and is merely a mode of an extended thing; and similarly, whatever we find in the mind is simply one of the various modes of thinking. *For example, shape is unintelligible except in an extended thing; and motion is unintelligible except as motion in an extended space; while imagination, sensation and will are intelligible only in a thinking thing. By contrast, it*

<sup>7</sup> Carriero 1995, 250.

<sup>8</sup> Carriero 1995, 250 argues rightly that 'Descartes's view is not completely novel' because it reflects the Aristotelian idea of definitional priority. A truly important element in Descartes's approach that I have not been able to locate in any of his predecessors is the idea that there are only two basic properties, of which other properties are modifications and through which those other properties are conceived. On this, see also Gueroult 1968, 60–63.

*is possible to understand extension without shape or movement, and thought without imagination or sensation, and so on; and this is quite clear to anyone who gives the matter his attention.* (PP 1.53; CSM I, 210–11, emphasis added)

In other words, no body or idea can be conceived without conceiving extension and thought, respectively. Here we encounter the notion of attribute; I examine it below, but for present purposes it suffices to note that there are things that do not require anything other than themselves to be conceived, and things the conceiving of which always involves conceiving something else. Obviously, then, Spinoza is treading on well-established grounds when he claims substances to be conceived through themselves, modes through another; this is just his way of formulating the conceptual priority traditionally given to substances over properties. Hence the preliminary conclusion we can draw is that Spinoza's definitions of substance and mode do not contain anything controversial; these basic premises could not easily be rejected by his contemporaries.<sup>9</sup> Substance is a self-supporting and conceptually independent entity, mode an entity that inheres in a substance through which it is also conceived.<sup>10</sup> All this means that Spinoza can be said to operate with a basic idea that could hardly be more accessible: whenever we think of something, we are thinking of some *thing* (i.e., a substance), but that thing must always be a thing of some *kind*, it cannot be without some qualities, properties, or characteristics (i.e., modes).

<sup>9</sup> I would thus agree not only with Carriero (1995) but also with William Charlton (1981, 509–11), who explicates Spinoza's position by invoking PP 1.53 and ends up defending the view that Spinoza's concept of substance is in line with that of Aristotle and Descartes; see also Steinberg 2000, Ch. 2. Although I agree with the claim of Curley (1988, 111–12) that there is nothing in 1d3 and 1d5 Descartes would find objectionable, I would not find it preferable, as Curley does, to understand the relationship between mode and substance 'not as the inherence of a property in its subject, but as the relation of an effect to its cause' (Curley 1988, 31; see also 1969, Ch. 1). Moreover, I would disagree with Harry Wolfson (1934 I, 61–78), who contends that although Spinoza's understanding of substance is in line with the tradition, he is offering a new way of understanding mode; and, finally, I would not be ready to endorse the view put forward by Gueroult in one passage, that the notions of being in itself and in another should be translated in terms of causality (Gueroult 1968, 63), although it is not clear how strong the "translation" suggested here ultimately is (for discussion, see Carriero 1995, 254–5).

<sup>10</sup> Clearly, there is a close connexion between inherence and conception. As Don Garrett (1990, 107) puts it, Spinoza's way of deducing the claim that there is nothing apart from substances and modes (in 1p4d) from 1d3, d5, and a1 'suggests that Spinoza understands "a is in b" and "a is conceived through b" as mutually entailing, either through their own meaning, or through the mediation of one or more axioms.' If a mediating axiom is needed, 1a4 is to my mind an especially strong candidate for such (Garrett considers also 1a6). See also Curley 1969, 15–18, 163.

## 2. ATTRIBUTE

The third fundamental ontological concept that receives its own definition in the opening pages of the *Ethics*, that of attribute, complicates matters considerably. Recall that an attribute is ‘what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence’ (1d4). We can tentatively characterize attributes along the lines suggested by Jonathan Bennett (1984, 61), as basic ways of being.<sup>11</sup> The historical context of the concept is not hard to locate: the notion matches the Cartesian notion of principal attribute or property ‘which constitutes its [the substance’s] nature and essence’ (PP 1.53; CSM I, 210). Now, as ‘human being’ was traditionally defined as ‘rational animal’, the property of being rational could be said to ‘constitute the essence’ of any human being. As a consequence, 1d4 would quite naturally be read as saying no more than that there are certain properties that count as essential to a thing, properties so fundamental to a substance that conceiving that substance apart from them is simply impossible.<sup>12</sup> Here, however, interpretative challenges begin to crop up: if a substance is conceived through itself, how can it not be conceived apart from an attribute? These worries are exacerbated if we take a look at 1p10 and its scholium, where Spinoza does not hesitate to claim – solely on grounds of 1d3 and 1d4 – not only that attributes are conceived through themselves but that ‘each being must be conceived under some attribute’ (1p10s). This means, obviously, that any substance must be conceived under some attribute. But would all this not give conceptual priority to attributes over substances, thus conflicting with the conceptually preeminent and independent position just assigned to substances?

One approach to these problems is to identify substances with attributes.<sup>13</sup> Apart from solving the problem of how a substance can be conceived both through itself and through its attribute, there are passages that taken at face value rather straightforwardly confirm this position: in 1p4d, for instance, Spinoza contends that ‘there is nothing outside

<sup>11</sup> ‘An attribute for Spinoza is a *basic way of being* – a property which sprawls across everything on one side of the dualist split, and nothing on the other side’ (Bennett 1984, 61).

<sup>12</sup> The status of attributes would thus appear to resemble the status of things that Aristotelians considered to be, as Carriero (1995, 246) puts it, ‘too closely bound up with’ the things they are predicated of for the relation of inherence to apply: ‘[W]ithout his [Socrates’s] humanity, there would be no “him” for anything to exist in’ (Carriero 1995, 247). This points towards understanding attributes, as Carriero (1995, 252) does, as definitions of essence.

<sup>13</sup> At least Gueroult (1968, 47–50) and Curley (1969, 16–18) endorse this approach, and Jarrett (1977a, 451–2) reconstructs from Spinozistic premises an argument for the identity of substance and attribute.

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'.<sup>14</sup> This approach, however, encounters the following problem: Spinoza holds that 'it is far from absurd to attribute many attributes to one substance' (1p10s), so if we think that substances are identical with attributes, how can a substance with many attributes be *one* substance and not many substances, in fact an aggregate of substances? Although arguments have been put forward to solve this problem,<sup>15</sup> it seems that substances cannot be simply identified with attributes; this move threatens the high demands of unity Spinoza sets for substances (see 1p12, 1p13). I think it is fair to say that Spinoza cherishes the idea that one substance can have many attributes while being perfectly unified, completely free of all division.

How, then, should the relationship between a substance and its attribute be understood? I believe that Olli Koistinen's (1991, 18–24) answer to these questions is the best one available. Koistinen accepts that the concept of substance and its attribute must be identical, but observes that somewhat surprisingly this does not entail, for Spinoza, that a substance would be identical with its attribute. This is so, Koistinen suggests, because ideas are active affirmations, that is, propositions that always predicate properties of something, and we can regard the idea of a certain substance whose essence is constituted by a certain attribute, let us say *E*, as a proposition that predicates *E* of the substance in question. Thus a proposition 'Substance is *E*' – or, more exactly, 'Something is *E*'<sup>16</sup> – expresses the absolutely primitive ontological feature of Spinoza's system. That is, substances and attributes are as it were inextricably fused together: the above proposition is not only the concept of the substance in question but also the concept of the attribute in question, that is, of *E*. There can be no idea of a substance without an idea of an attribute, and the idea of an attribute always contains the idea of a substance. That the above-mentioned complex proposition reveals the foundation of Spinoza's ontology explains how the *concepts* of substance and attribute can be identical while substance and attribute still remain distinct *entities*. And because the concepts of substance and

<sup>14</sup> Consider also 'God is eternal, or all God's attributes are eternal' (1p19) and 'God, or all of God's attributes, are immutable' (1p20c2).

<sup>15</sup> See especially Curley 1969, 78; 1988, 29–30.

<sup>16</sup> As Koistinen (1991, 23) observes, the proposition 'Something is *E*' would be of a more accurate form, as the proposition 'Substance is *E*' might be seen as already presupposing knowledge of substance; in Koistinen's words, what makes the former 'proposition a proposition about *s* [substance] must be a feature of the predicate "is *E*". Since attributes are essences, the proposition "Something is *E*" cannot be about any other individual but *s*'.



attribute are identical, that it can be said that a substance is conceived both through itself and through its attribute poses no threat to the tenet that the concept of a substance – and thus also of an attribute – does not refer to or involve any other concept, making it conceptually independent.

But even if this were right and solved the problem of how a substance may be conceived both through itself and through its attribute, there is still another famous problem plaguing Spinoza's doctrine of substance and attribute: how are we to understand the claim that one substance may have many attributes, each truly predicable of a substance, and each constituting the essence of the substance? One approach to this problem is to take attributes to be ways in which an intellect can know a substance, which introduces an element of subjectivity to attributes.<sup>17</sup> It can even be argued that this is in fact something Spinoza quite explicitly says, because he defines attributes as 'what the *intellect perceives of a substance*, as [*tanquam*] constituting its essence' (1d4, emphasis added).<sup>18</sup> There would thus be no special problem in one substance having many attributes: one and the same object can of course be perceived in many different ways, and Spinoza's claim would simply be that there are certain basic ways in which a substance can be perceived, and he calls these basic ways attributes. However, emphasizing the subjective element pertaining to attributes risks, I think, making Spinoza too much of an idealist. On the whole, attributes certainly are depicted as something very objective, real, or actual – hardly something whose existence would depend on a perceiving subject<sup>19</sup> – and certain passages are especially difficult to reconcile with any kind of subjectivist interpretation of attributes.<sup>20</sup> Thus I would argue that the reference to 'the intellect'

<sup>17</sup> Scholars who may be seen as proponents of this overall approach hold differing views on the nature and role of the subjective element. For a strong form of subjectivism, according to which attributes are subjective concepts invented by the mind and do not have independent existence, see Wolfson 1934 I, 142–57; for more moderate views, which do not regard attributes as inventions of the mind, see Eisenberg 1990, I, 11–12; Carriero 1994, 634–5.

<sup>18</sup> That the word *tanquam* in 1d4 can be translated both as 'as' and 'as if' has been important for the debate concerning the status of attributes ('as if' would arguably speak for the subjective interpretation). On this, see n. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Note that Spinoza holds any intellect to be 'only a certain mode of thinking' (1p31d); on this, see also Gueroult 1968, 50.

<sup>20</sup> I agree with Jarrett (1977a, 447–8; 2007, 55) that 1p20d is such a piece of text:

God (by p19) and all of his attributes are eternal, i.e. (by d8), each of his attributes expresses existence. Therefore, the same attributes of God which (by d4) explain God's eternal essence at the same time explain his eternal existence, i.e., that itself which constitutes God's essence at the same time constitutes his existence. So his existence and his essence are one and the same, Q.E.D.

in 1d4 is there because a substance can only be known under some attribute, as an entity of some basic kind; but we perceive attributes as constituting the essence of a substance simply because those attributes really *do* constitute the essence of a substance.<sup>21</sup> An essence of a substance can be perceived as constituted in many different ways, but not in just any way.

Still, if we take attributes to be objective features constituting nothing less than the essence of a substance, is it not problematic to claim that one substance can have many attributes? It is an intriguing fact that Spinoza shows at most extremely mild concern about this. The important 1p10s, as we have seen, asserts that it is 'far from absurd to attribute many attributes to one substance', but the scholium is not as enlightening as one might wish on the question of the relationship between substance and attribute.<sup>22</sup> The beginning of the scholium reads:

From these propositions it is evident that although two attributes may be conceived to be really distinct (i.e., one may be conceived without the aid of the other), we still can not infer from that that they constitute two beings, or two different substances. For it is of the nature of a substance that each of its attributes is conceived through itself, since all the attributes it has have always been in it together, and one could not be produced by another, but each expresses the reality, or being of substance. (1p10s)

The propositions referred to in the beginning ('[f]rom these propositions it is evident') are presumably 1p9 and 1p10. The former contends that it is 'evident from' 1d4 that reality and being correlate with the number of attributes of a thing; the latter says that attributes are conceived through themselves. The foremost aim of 1p10s is obviously a negative one, namely to show that from the fact that attributes are really distinct it does not follow that each attribute must constitute a thing of its own; this is an important point, given the Cartesian doctrine that each substance can have only one principal attribute.<sup>23</sup> Spinoza's idea

Moreover, propositions 1p21–p23 describing 'what follows from the absolute nature' of attributes and thus, obviously, assigning causal efficacy to attributes (on this more below) fit poorly, to my mind, with an interpretation according to which attributes are only subjective ways of perception. Consider also 1p9, 2p1, and 2p2.

<sup>21</sup> Alan Donagan (1988, 70) argues, correctly and based on Martial Gueroult (1968, 428–61), that 'what the intellect perceives' cannot mean 'what the intellect (possibly) falsely perceives'; as Donagan puts it, 'Spinoza himself treats his definition as implying that attributes really are what the intellect perceives them to be.'

<sup>22</sup> Note also that even though this question has haunted his readers for ages, Spinoza discusses it in a *scholium*; that is, he does not seem to feel the need to offer a more "official" proposition and demonstration for his stand.

<sup>23</sup> The topic is also discussed in Spinoza's correspondence; see Ep8 and Ep9.

here may well be, as Michael Della Rocca has argued, that no attribute, say *E*, can offer grounds for a substance not to have some other attribute, say *T*, because then a fact about *T* – that it is not possessed by a certain substance – would be explained by *E*; but then something concerning *T* would be conceived through *E*, and this would go against *T*'s status as an attribute, that is, as something that is conceived solely through itself (there is hence what Della Rocca calls a *conceptual barrier* between attributes, which in this kind of case would be violated).<sup>24</sup> In any case, the scholium under scrutiny does not shed much positive light on our present question; and having established the negative claim, Spinoza appears to see it as plainly unproblematic to hold that, just as we are fundamentally both mental and physical creatures, a substance can be for instance both thinking and extended.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the scholium's explicit concern is to show that Spinoza's stand does not present a radical departure from what was commonly thought in his times – it is something even Cartesians should allow – but the all-important underlying view obviously is that a substance can be conceived under many different aspects, can have several objective essential features, many basic ways of being. Moreover, as 'each being must be conceived under some attribute' (1P10S), this applies to modifications as well: they must always be conceived under some attribute, which means that they must be modifications of some objective feature of a substance.

There is one absolutely focal contention concerning attributes that we have not yet discussed: the claim that substances cannot share attributes, or, as Spinoza puts it, '[i]n nature there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute' (1P5). This proposition receives a detailed demonstration:

If there were two or more distinct substances, they would have to be distinguished from one another either by a difference in their attributes, or by a difference in their affections (by p4). If only by a difference in their attributes, then it will be conceded that there is only one of the same attribute. But if by a difference in their affections, then since a substance is prior in nature to its affections (by p1), if the affections are put to one side and [the substance] is considered in itself, i.e. (by d3 and a6), considered truly, one cannot be conceived to be distinguished from another, i.e. (by p4), there cannot be many, but only one [of the same nature or attribute], Q.E.D.

Leibniz is, of course, most often identified as the classic thinker championing the principle of the identity of indiscernibles; but it is clear that

<sup>24</sup> Della Rocca 2002, 18, 28–9.

<sup>25</sup> The relationship between attributes and substance has been further explicated with the help of the Scotist doctrine of formal distinction; see Schmidt's contribution in this volume.

in 1p4, on which 1p5d is partly based, Spinoza is relying on a version of that principle.<sup>26</sup> All along he seems to assume that if there is no feature with regard to which two things differ from each other, they must be identical; so if there are to be two distinct things, there must be something with regard to which they differ. Understandably, attributes and modes are the only candidates for entities that can be used to distinguish substances from each other. I think Spinoza's argument is easier to grasp by first considering the passage concerning affections. The crucial and often asked question is, what licenses Spinoza to put the affections 'to one side' when considering substances? Given what we found in the previous section, the case is in a sense rather straightforward: by remarking that 'a substance is prior in nature to its affections', Spinoza is reminding us that distinguishing a substance by its modes would amount to a situation in which a substance is individuated by and conceived through something external to it (i.e., external to its essence); this would be at odds with the very definition of substance, which, as we have seen, characterizes a substance as a self-supporting entity, and one that does not require anything external to be conceived. Moreover, on this point Spinoza is in accordance with more or less the entire Western tradition.<sup>27</sup>

So two substances cannot be distinguished from each other by their modes, and we are left with attributes to do the job. Spinoza remarks briefly that if substances were distinguished 'only by a difference in their attributes, then it will be conceded that there is only one of the same attribute.' In other words, if we take any attribute, say *E*, it is evident that if both substance *s* and substance *z* have *E*, it cannot be *E* that differentiates *s* and *z* from each other; thus, given the identity of indiscernibles, *s* and *z* must be identical. Any (putative) case of attribute sharing between two distinct substances is on closer inspection a case of substance identity – and so, Spinoza thinks, he can confidently assert that no two or more substances can have the same attribute.

<sup>26</sup> See Bennett 1984, 66; Garrett 1990, 98–100; Steinberg 2000, 12; Della Rocca 2002, 13–14; 2008, 47.

<sup>27</sup> Here I would wholeheartedly agree with Carriero (1995, 251), who contends, '[a]s would have been obvious to a contemporaneous reader of the *Ethics*, to make a substance depend on its accidents for its individuation would be to make a substance depend on its accidents for its existence, a dependence that is incompatible with its status as a substance.' Moreover, the type of approach presented by Willis Doney (1990, 37) and Della Rocca (2002, 14–17) strikes me as particularly apt: were two substances distinguished by their modes, the substances would have to be conceived through their modes; but this cannot be, given that substances are entities conceived through themselves. For more discussion, see Gueroult 1968, 118–20; Charlton 1981, 514–15; Bennett 1984, 67–9; Curley 1988, 17–19, 145; Garrett 1990, 73–83.

Here, however, Spinoza appears to be on less solid ground than with regard to modes: as has often been noted, the argument seems to go through only if we make an un-Spinozistic assumption, for otherwise it cannot escape an important objection that goes all the way back to Leibniz.<sup>28</sup> Namely, why could not *s* and *z* share *E* and differ with regard to some other attributes, so that *s* would have *E* and *T*, *z* have *E* and *X*? There would, then, be a way to distinguish *s* from *z* based on their attributes even though they shared *E*, and this would undermine Spinoza's argument: it would be valid on the assumption that there are only one-attribute substances, but this, as we have seen, is not enough for Spinoza's purposes, and he holds dear the idea that one substance can have many attributes. We should note that even though this objection of considerable force is rather easy to state, it is uncertain whether Spinoza recognized it. In what follows, I first try to explicate why he might not have, thinking that 1p5d could handle the above objection, and then present another, and probably better, argument that is designed to do the same thing.

In general, Spinoza seems to think that essences are highly individual, unique to their possessors. Consider the following definition, which, despite the great importance of its *definiendum*, comes as late as the beginning of Part 2 of the *Ethics*:

I say 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. (2d2)

The claim that an essence 'can neither be nor be conceived without' its possessor is the most surprising ingredient in this definition, and it can shed light on Spinoza's mindset in 1p5d. Given it, there cannot be two distinct things of the same essence; and as attributes constitute essences, Spinoza is led to think that it is impossible for two substances to share an attribute, because whenever there is an attribute constituting an essence, we have a particular substance without which the attribute could not exist.<sup>29</sup> As we have seen, Spinoza is at pains to show, in 1p10s, that there is nothing dubious about claiming that one and the same substance can have as essential attributes both, say, *E* and *T*. The relation between essences and attributes is tight enough for it to go

<sup>28</sup> The objection is located in Leibniz 1969, 198–9. For expositions and evaluations of this objection, see Bennett 1984, 69–70; Curley 1988, 15–16; Garrett 1990, 83–101; Della Rocca 2002, 17.

<sup>29</sup> At least Koistinen (1991, 13–14) puts forward this kind of reading of 1p5d.

against the doctrine of attributes constituting – whatever may be the exact meaning of this – individual essences to claim that *s* can have *E* and *T*, while *z* has *E* and *X*: if *E* constitutes the essence of *s*, it cannot also constitute the essence of *z* distinct from *s*, because *s* and *z* would, then, have the same essence and thus be identical. In 1p8s2, the no-shared-attribute thesis receives another argument, which is in line with this line of thought: without leaning on anything previously said, only on the linkage between definitions and essences,<sup>30</sup> Spinoza claims that because the definition that expresses the nature of the substance does not involve ‘any certain number of individuals,’ there can be only one substance ‘of the same nature’. The idea thus seems to be that any essence pertains to one individual only, and so, if an attribute constitutes an essence, we see that there can only be single substance of a particular nature, and there is nothing to be distinguished, no several substances left to share an attribute.<sup>31</sup> This, then, would block the above objection to 1p5d.

Even if the present argument were what Spinoza really has in mind, it is only as strong as its point of departure, his definition of essence (2d2). The problem with the idea of individual essence is that it would have a hard time convincing any dedicated Cartesian. Thought and extension are principal attributes that constitute the essences of their possessors, but it would seem strange, especially for Cartesians, to claim that there is anything individual about them, or that an attribute could not be or be conceived without a certain substance; on the contrary, they appear to be quite easily shareable by many substances.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps Spinoza could say in rebuttal (relying on a widely accepted seventeenth-century way of conceiving essences and the definitions that express those essences) that as both attributes and definitions express essences, and definitions

<sup>30</sup> There appears not to be anything idiosyncratic in Spinoza's way of understanding definitions as expressions of essences; cf. Mercer 2001, 227.

<sup>31</sup> A similar argument has been put forward by Koistinen (1993, 149): ‘[A]ttributes for Spinoza are those properties that make individuation through itself possible and for that reason they must be non-relational individuating properties which means that they cannot be shared by several substances: they are individual essences – rejected by all things except their bearer.’ For other arguments turning on the close connection between essence and attribute, see Allison 1987, 52–3; Donagan 1988, 70–71; for criticism of Allison's and Donagan's positions, see Garrett 1990, 89–93. For a line of argument against Leibniz's criticism that turns on the traditional tenet of the simplicity of God's nature, see Carriero 1994, 631–4 and Schmidt's contribution in this volume.

<sup>32</sup> In correspondence, Henry Oldenburg expresses his sentiments in a clear manner: ‘Against the first I hold that two men are two substances and of the same attribute, since they are both capable of reasoning; and thence I conclude that there are two substances of the same attribute’ [Ep3; Spinoza 1995, 65].

do not involve any number of individuals, even a Cartesian has to admit that only one particular kind of individual can be constituted by each attribute. However, it is unclear how convincing this argument is.<sup>33</sup>

There is, however, another argument, presented recently by Della Rocca in Spinoza's defence, and one that is partly based on the same material as the previous one. The starting point of this argument is that Spinoza accepts the claim that '[e]ach attribute of a substance, independently of any other attribute of that substance, is sufficient for conceiving of that substance.'<sup>34</sup> This certainly seems to be a plausible claim in the Spinozistic framework, and Della Rocca gathers a convincing body of evidence that Spinoza really does endorse it; among other things, when Spinoza's definition of attribute (1d4) is combined with his definition of essence (2d2), the claim follows.<sup>35</sup> Now, given this, it is well grounded to maintain that there cannot be cases in which for instance *s* has *E* and *T*, and *z* has *E* and *X*, for then *s* could not be conceived solely through *E*, that is, as the substance that has *E*, because this would not be enough to distinguish *s* from *z*; instead, *s* would have to be conceived as the substance with *E and T*, and this would mean that the concept of a certain substance with *E* would require not only the concept of *E* but also the concept of *T*, and would thus be partly conceived through *T*.<sup>36</sup> But this would violate the conceptual barrier between the attributes: conceiving a substance with a certain attribute would depend on conceiving some other attribute. Thus, the conceptual independence of attributes

<sup>33</sup> For criticism of this argument, see Bennett 1984, 69–70. A more convincing way to defend Spinoza's position is, however, available. As Koistinen (1993) maintains, not only Descartes but also Kant and Frege hold that 'substances cannot be individuated or thought about directly' (p. 144), and Spinoza joins their company when he claims that 'each thing must be conceived under some attribute' (1p105); and because it holds that if all things were individuated through something else, an infinite regress would follow (p. 142), 'we have to individuate at least one thing with the help of a property which is non-relational (qualitative, intrinsic) and identifying. But it is not conceivable that this property could be anything else but the essence of the thing' (p. 145). Thus, 'individual essences make individuation possible' (p. 146), and an argument for the no-shared-attribute thesis relying on attributes as individual essences is on rather strong grounds.

<sup>34</sup> Della Rocca 2002, 18.

<sup>35</sup> Della Rocca 2002, 19. Della Rocca (2002, 20–21) argues that it is also entailed by Spinoza's claim that attributes express the reality of the substance (E1p105), for Spinoza accepts the assertion that 'x expresses y if and only if x is sufficient for conceiving of y' (Della Rocca 2002, 20).

<sup>36</sup> Later Della Rocca presents his view as follows: '[I]f a substance has more than one attribute, each attribute by itself must enable us to conceive of the substance, and this can be the case only if each attribute that a substance has is unique to that substance. Thus Leibniz's scenario is ruled out' (Della Rocca 2008, 49).

guarantees that the kind of situations depicted in the objection cannot occur.<sup>37</sup> An argument put in epistemological terms thus seems to fare better than one based on the doctrine of individual essences.

We can sum up the offerings of these examinations as follows. Spinoza adheres quite closely to traditional lines of thought with regard to the concepts of substance and mode: substance is a self-supporting and conceptually independent entity through which are conceived the modes that inhere in it. Attribute too is defined in a Cartesian fashion, as that which constitutes the essence of a substance; but Spinoza departs from Descartes in asserting not only that one substance can have many attributes but also that substances cannot share attributes. Both claims certainly bring with them complex issues, but as we have seen, Spinoza is not left without resourceful arguments for his position. In any case, it can be said that in defining the basic concepts of his ontology Spinoza is treading rather familiar ground, and it is difficult to regard the novelties concerning the relationship between substance and attribute as presenting any truly radical departure from the tradition; as we shall see, it is not so much these basic conceptual issues pertaining to ontology as certain theorems Spinoza draws from them that so alarmed his contemporaries.

### 3. EXISTENCE AND CAUSALITY

It is noteworthy how little, in a sense, has thus far been achieved: despite all the conceptual moves made, it has not yet even been established whether any such entities as substances, modes, or attributes really exist.<sup>38</sup> Claims concerning real existence appear only when Spinoza hooks the notions of substance, attribute, and mode up with causal notions, which – strikingly – are missing from 1d3–d5.<sup>39</sup> This is when his unique philosophical system begins to quickly take shape.

The seventh proposition of the opening part of the *Ethics* makes the crucial existential claim concerning substances and can serve as a vantage point from which to examine the way in which Spinoza moves from purely conceptual considerations to existential ones. The proposition states,

<sup>37</sup> Della Rocca 2002, 17–22.

<sup>38</sup> 'Man thinks' (2a2) is an axiom in the *Ethics*, so there seems to be a path open to a *cogito* argument for the existence of the thinking subject. However, Spinoza makes no move to take it.

<sup>39</sup> As Carriero (1995, 261) perspicaciously puts it, '[t]here may, indeed, be some fairly quick routes from being a substance to being causally independent (as, for example, the alternative demonstration to IP6C testifies), but we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that there is distance to be traveled.'



[i]t pertains to the nature of a substance to exist (1p7),

and it is proved as follows:

A substance cannot be produced by anything else (by p6c); therefore it will be the cause of itself, i.e. (by d1), its essence necessarily involves existence, or it pertains to its nature to exist, Q.E.D. (1p7d)

Now, before considering the overall validity of the argument, we may note that it may in fact take two routes, corresponding to the two ways in which 1p6c – the corollary stating the causal independence of substances – can be demonstrated. The quicker route is the more interesting one for our purposes; according to it, adding merely the following axiom to the notion of substance is needed to show that a substance is *causa sui*:

The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause. (1a4)

Now, whatever the exact meaning of this axiom – it is not clear what kind of knowledge Spinoza here has in mind – it enables Spinoza to argue that if a substance had an external cause, it would be conceived through that cause; and because this would violate the ‘what is conceived through itself’ claim of 1d3, a substance cannot be produced by anything else and is thus, according to Spinoza, the cause of itself. There is, then, an exceedingly quick route from the conceptual independence of substances to a fundamental causal claim.<sup>40</sup> If conceiving things requires conceiving their causes (as 1a4 says), everything conceptually independent must be causally self-sufficient.<sup>41</sup>

The obvious and often repeated objection to 1p7 is that even if a substance cannot be produced by anything external to it, it does not follow that it necessarily exists – it only follows that if a substance exists, the cause of that existence must lie within it. Spinoza seems to think that

<sup>40</sup> The longer route goes via 1p5: because substances cannot share an attribute (1p5), they do not have anything in common (1p2) and so (by 1p3) one cannot be the cause of the other; because the only external thing that could produce a substance is another substance (from 1d3, 1d5, and 1a1), a substance cannot be produced by anything else. It should be noted that also 1p3d invokes 1a4.

<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that, as Don Garrett (2002, 136) has convincingly shown, inherence implies, for Spinoza, causation, and for the following reason. Spinoza endorses (this is indicated by the way in which he uses 1d3, 1d5, and 1a1 in 1p4d) the doctrine that ‘If y is *in* x, then y is conceived through x’ (p. 136; on this see n. 10); and because he also accepts (by 1a4) that ‘If y is conceived through x, then y is caused by x’ (p. 136), we reach what Garrett dubs the ‘Inherence Implies Causation Doctrine’: ‘If y is *in* x, then y is caused by x’ (p. 137). This doctrine, Garrett (p. 137) points out, ‘when applied to the definitions of *mode* and *substance*, entails both that every mode is caused by the substance that it is *in* and that every substance is self-caused’.

because everything must be caused either by external causes or by itself, and because in the case of a substance external causes are ruled out, the only option is that it is self-caused, which, by 1d1, means that it must exist already by its own essence; thus, given such an essence, the entity in question must exist. Nevertheless, it may surely be pressed: on what grounds can it be claimed that such an essence is given?

The following observations help to answer this question. Spinoza demonstrates the claim 'God, or a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists' (1p11) in several ways, and the one I would regard as the most important demonstration contains a line of argument revealing Spinoza's conception of the principle of sufficient reason that can be used to defend 1p7. *Ethics* 1p11d2 starts by maintaining, '[f]or each thing there must be assigned a cause, or reason, as much for its existence as for its nonexistence.' In other words, there must be a sufficient reason not only for the existence but also for the nonexistence of anything. That reason, Spinoza continues, must be located either inside or outside of the thing in question, and because in the case of God – who is a substance – it cannot be outside of it, the reason for the existence or nonexistence of God must be found in God's essence. Now, the only possible reason for the latter would be that God's essence is contradictory, like that of a square circle; and because this cannot be, God's essence can only be the cause or reason for God's existence; thus God necessarily exists. As has been pointed out by Don Garrett (1979, 209–10), this line of argumentation applies to any substance whatsoever, because each one of them seems to have a noncontradictory essence.<sup>42</sup> Thus the idea behind 1p7 could be spelled out as follows. Substances are causally isolated entities (by 1d3 and 1a4); hence, given the principle of sufficient reason, only a substance's essence can be the cause or reason either for its existence or for its nonexistence; but not for nonexistence, for this would mean that the essence in question was contradictory and the substance an unthinkable, self-denying nonthing – such as a square circle. As there can be no reason for the nonexistence of the substance, there must be one for its existence, and that reason can only be its essence itself; thus that essence involves existence, that is, a substance is *causa sui*.

So, when we add to 1p7d Spinoza's version of the principle of sufficient reason, together with the assumption that a substance cannot

<sup>42</sup> I thus think Garrett (1979, 208) is right in claiming that '[t]he second proof of Proposition XI, we now see, is simply a more explicit formulation of the argument which is needed to justify Proposition VII, but made for the special case of God rather than the general case of substance(s).' It should be noted, however, that this generates the widely discussed problem – one that I do not examine here – of on what grounds can Spinoza claim that only one God with an infinity of attributes exists, rather than many substances with, say, one attribute.

have a contradictory nature, we arrive at a valid argument. In particular, the commitment to the principle of sufficient reason is contentious indeed; but neither of the additional premises is easy to reject, especially for Spinoza's contemporaries, who would not be particularly strongly inclined to deny the conclusion, either: as noted above, Descartes *starts* by holding that a substance is a causally independent entity when he contends, '[b]y *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' (PP 1.51; CSM I, 210). And there is probably much that a good Aristotelian could find acceptable in this way of understanding a substance; any substance, even a created one, is to a certain important extent independent of other things.<sup>43</sup> Spinoza shows acquaintance with this when he writes in his early *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, '[i]f the thing is in itself, or, as is commonly said, is the cause of itself' (TdIE § 92); characteristically, however, in the *Ethics* he gives an argument for the move from ontological and epistemological independence to causal independence and the necessary existence that results from it.

Thus, granted certain additional premises, Spinoza has succeeded in covering the distance from mere conceptual considerations to contentions concerning real existence. The claim of 1p11, that God necessarily exists, was of course a cornerstone of traditional philosophical theology, so there is nothing unacceptable about that; the claim of 1p7, that any substance must be a necessary existent, admittedly sounds strange and suspiciously strong,<sup>44</sup> but it is still close enough to the Cartesian conception of substance so that when it is left to its own devices, it is difficult to say what to think about it; perhaps it may be mitigated, somewhat as Descartes does in PP 1.51, to fit the traditional picture? But Spinoza is not ready to make any such concessions, and so is led to a collision of the greatest magnitude, long in the making, with traditional philosophical theology: 'Except God, no substance can be or be conceived' (1p14). I do not here discuss in detail the way in which Spinoza proves his monism;<sup>45</sup> briefly stated, the argument is that

<sup>43</sup> On this, see Carriero 1995, 247.

<sup>44</sup> Oldenburg certainly saw the threat posed by Spinoza's position:

With regard to the second I consider that, since nothing can be the cause of itself, we can scarcely understand how it can be true that 'Substance cannot be produced, nor can it be produced by any other substance.' For this proposition asserts that all substances are causes of themselves, that they are each and all independent of one another, and it makes them so many Gods, in this way denying the first cause of all things. (Ep3; Spinoza 1995, 65)

<sup>45</sup> For more on Spinoza's monism and its derivation, see Miller's and Schmidt's contributions in this volume.

as God, the being with all the attributes, necessarily exists and as substances cannot share attributes, there can be no other substances besides God.

From the claim that there is only one substance, it is – given Spinoza's understanding of substance and mode – only a stone's throw to 1p15, '[w]hatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God', which demotes a plethora of things – horses, chairs, human beings – from substances to modes of the one substance. There has been considerable discussion as to how we should conceive finite things as God's modes. Proposition 1p16, '[f]rom the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes', along with others, such as 1p25, make it clear that some kind of causal relation obtains between God-substance and his modes;<sup>46</sup> but based on the preceding discussion, it is also evident that finite modes inhere in God, just as 1p15 says they do.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, we should be clear as to where Spinoza's radicalism lies: in the claim that the substance–property relationship obtains between God and finite things,<sup>48</sup> not in the claim that

<sup>46</sup> For my attempt to explicate this relationship, see Viljanen 2008b.

<sup>47</sup> Much of the discussion has revolved around Curley's (1969) claim that modes do not inhere in substances as properties, but that the relationship between substance and modes is exclusively one of (efficient) causation; but I would agree with Jarrett (1977b, 92–3) and Carriero (1995, 254–6) that already the way in which 1p15 (that concerns inherence) and 1p16 (that concerns causality) differ from each other (they are proved differently and have differing deductive progeny) strongly suggests that there are two different relations, inherence and causation, at work in Spinoza's system. However, for recent criticism of this view, see Della Rocca 2008, 67–8.

<sup>48</sup> Curley presents a powerful objection against this line of interpretation:

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 substance, for they are particular things (*E* 1p25C), 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. (Curley 1969, 18)

Now, I think that finite modes can be predicated of God; and, of course, Spinoza speaks of finite modes as things. Obviously, much here hinges upon what kind of entities, in the end, one takes Spinozistic finite modes to be. Bennett presents an interpretation that makes 'particular extended things adjectival on regions of space' (Bennett 1984, 95); according to this view, there is no problem in claiming the relation of a subject and a predicate – or a thing and a property – to hold between the one extended substance and its modes (see especially Bennett 1984, 93). Jarrett (1977b, 85) maintains that the difficulty presented by Curley 'can be solved by distinguishing inherence from predication'; and Carriero (1995) rejects Curley's objection similarly on the grounds of the fact that in Aristotelianism, the distinction between *what can be said of a subject* and *what cannot be said of a subject* is orthogonal to the distinction between *what exists in a subject* and *what*

both inherence and causation are at play in that relationship. In a widely endorsed Aristotelian view, substances cause those properties they necessarily have (the so-called *propria*), and these properties inhere in their causers.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, I would like to point out certain claims Spinoza draws from God's causal efficacy – claims that can shed light on the way in which substance, mode, and attribute should be conceived. Now, because God is, in virtue of his essence, the cause of himself (1P11) and of all things (1P16), Spinoza claims his essence to be power (1P34). This brings us back to attributes: as they too are conceived through themselves, they must be causally efficacious in a way that differs rather clearly from what the Cartesian conception of attributes seems to imply. There are passages in the late correspondence in which Spinoza delineates the difference between his and Descartes's conceptions of the attribute of extension:

[F]rom Extension as conceived by Descartes, to wit, an inert mass, it is . . . quite impossible to demonstrate the existence of bodies. For matter at rest, as far as in it lies, will continue to be at rest, and will not be set in motion except by a more powerful external cause. For this reason I have not hesitated on a previous occasion to affirm that Descartes' principles of natural things are of no service, not to say quite wrong. (Ep81; Spinoza 1995, 352)

*does not exist in a subject*; according to Carriero, '[i]f we keep these distinctions separate, there is no immediate barrier to counting particular things as accidents' (Carriero 1995, 256).

<sup>49</sup> In his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* of 1697, Pierre Bayle interprets Spinozistic modes as properties of substance and famously levels a series of criticisms against Spinoza. Three objections raised by Bayle and taken up by Curley (1969, Ch. 1) have been the subject of recent discussions (see Jarrett 1977b; Carriero 1995; Nadler 2008). (1) If modes are God's properties, because there is change in modes, God cannot be immutable; (2) because modes can be predicated of God, it follows that God is the subject of contradictory terms (e.g., if both Peter and Paul are God's properties and Peter denies what Paul affirms, God both denies and affirms the same thing); (3) if modes are God's properties and the modes, e.g., human beings, commit evil acts, it is ultimately God who is evil. A thorough exposition of the ways in which Spinoza could answer these accusations would take us too far afield, but the following brief points can be made in his defence. (1) From the adequate point of view, that is, *sub specie aeternitatis*, everything follows, as in geometry, from God's nature as it does, from eternity to eternity, and hence God is immutable; (2) if God *modified* as Peter denies something that God *modified* as Paul affirms, Bayle's formulation of contradiction, that 'two opposite terms' are 'truly affirmed of the same subject, *in the same respect*, and at the same time' (Bayle 1965, 309, emphasis mine), is not violated (see Jarrett 1977b, 87; Carriero 1995, 263; Nadler 2008, 60); (3) evil is nothing positive but only something that we imaginatively, and hence inadequately, attribute to things (see especially Ep19, but also Curley 1969, 13; Carriero 1995, 266–73; Nadler 2008, 60).

With regard to your question as to whether the variety of things can be demonstrated a priori solely from the conception of Extension, I think I have already made it quite clear that this is impossible. That is why Descartes is wrong in defining matter through Extension; it must necessarily be explicated through an attribute which expresses eternal and infinite essence. (Ep83; Spinoza 1995, 355)

There is thus something seriously wrong in the way Descartes understands extension: he does not acknowledge the fact that extension, like any attribute, expresses God's essence. The crux of this criticism seems to be that the Cartesian conception of attributes fails to take into account that substance, or Nature, is something essentially dynamic in character. In light of the preceding discussion, these contentions make sense: a substance causing itself and an attribute doing the same just means that the primitive state 'something is *E*' is realized solely by the constituents involved in that state. So we can say both that a substance is self-caused and that an attribute is self-caused; and by this causal power are brought about all the modes as well. As we have seen, a substance cannot be conceived other than under some attribute, but all the ways in which the substance can be conceived – all the ways in which its nature is constituted – involve causal power; that much is certain. Being in itself, or subsistence, equals power to exist (cf. 1p11d3). All this suggests, I think, that the Spinozistic God can be characterized as an absolutely infinite power, producing all existents as determined by essence-constituting attributes, which makes attributes God's powers as it were, fundamental manifestations of the one basic power.<sup>50</sup> In consonance with this – indeed, due to it – the backbone of Spinoza's theorizing concerning human existence is based on the idea that striving (*conatus*) – which is undoubtedly something dynamic in character – 'to persevere in being' forms the very essence of our actual existence (3p7). In other words, as all finite things are modifications of the intrinsically dynamic God-nature, human beings as well are, in Spinoza's framework, *beings of power* striving for their own kind of existence.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Already H. H. Joachim (1901, 65) sees 'attributes as "lines of force," or forms in which God's omnipotence manifests its causality to an intelligence', and A. Wolf (1974 [1927], see especially 19, 22–4) draws attention to Spinoza's identification of God's essence with power and emphasizes the dynamic character of attributes. More recently, Sherry Deveaux (2003, 334) underscores that 'an attribute is a different way in which absolutely infinite and eternal power is expressed', and Della Rocca (2003, 225) maintains that 'extension conceived as inherently dynamic is, for Spinoza, an attribute.' The powerful or active nature of God and attributes is widely recognized in French Spinoza scholarship; for classic interpretations, see Gueroult 1974, 188–9; Matheron 1988 (1969), 13; Deleuze 1997 (1968), 90–95, 198–9. For my analysis of the concept of power, see Viljanen 2008a, especially 99–101.

<sup>51</sup> For my detailed argument for this conclusion, see Viljanen 2008a.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the *Ethics* we find Spinoza operating the way he is inclined to, drawing momentous conclusions from relatively uncontentious – or at least not easily rejectable – definitions and axioms. This, of course, makes sense: should he begin with unusual and unbelievable contentions, his arguments expressed in geometrical fashion, regardless of their sophistication, would hardly have any force. Proceeding by way of certain innovations concerning the relationship between substance and attribute, Spinoza then arrives at his monism, in which the things around us are not only effects but modes of the single substance. Understandably enough, this ontological upheaval is not without its ethical implications: in the ensuing theorizing concerning human happiness, wherever it may eventually lead us, the fact that we are all modifications of an intrinsically powerful God-nature should never be lost from sight.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>52</sup> I would like to thank Olli Koistinen, John Carriero, Juhani Pietarinen, Arto Repo, and Hemmo Laiho for many constructive comments and criticisms concerning this essay.