CHAPTER 7

The metaphysics of the Theological-Political Treatise

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> "[The common people] love the relics of time more than eternity itself."
>
> (*Theological-Political Treatise*, Preface [*G* III 10])

1 INTRODUCTION

In a certain, seemingly possible world in which Spinoza's *Ethics* had not been published, the *Theological-Political Treatise* would have become Spinoza's major *oeuvre* for generations to come. How likely such a world would have been – an issue which is primarily a function of the determination and capacities of Spinoza's circle of friends, as well as those of the Dutch authorities – is not for us to tell. But given the possibility, one might be tempted to consider the following question: had it been the case that the *Ethics* did not survive, what would we know about the metaphysical views of Spinoza? Unfortunately, this counterfactual exercise is virtually impossible to carry out, for we cannot un-know what we know about Spinoza's late views in the *Ethics*, nor can we truly avoid reading the *TTP* with an eye towards the *Ethics*.

For these reasons, it is not surprising that, with a few exceptions,[1] the existing literature on the *TTP* pays little attention to the metaphysical doctrines of the book, while on the other hand, studies of Spinoza's metaphysics commonly make little use of the *TTP*. These complementary attitudes, while understandable, seem to be mistaken for two reasons. First, a study of the *TTP* can tell us quite a bit about the development of Spinoza's metaphysical views. Second, and more importantly, on *some* metaphysical

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[1] Two notable exceptions are Curley's "Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece" and Miquel Beltrán's "The God of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*."

issues, Spinoza's discussion in the *TTP* is more elaborate than the equivalent discussion of the same topic in the *Ethics*. One obvious case in point is the identity of God's essence and existence.

In this chapter I will attempt to reconstruct and draw an outline of the metaphysics of the *TTP*. I will begin with a brief overview of two methodological principles that play a central role in motivating Spinoza's metaphysics, and then delve into the issues of Spinoza's alleged pantheism, the identity of God's essence and existence, substance and attributes, and finally, the *conatus*.

Before we begin, let me briefly address one notable worry. It is commonly argued that many of Spinoza's claims in the *TTP* are veiled due to political circumstances and Spinoza's caution. This is not a groundless worry, yet I think it has been somewhat overstated since Spinoza usually gives very clear indications – far *too* clear, in fact, since many of his orthodox readers were immediately alarmed by them – as to his true views. We will encounter several examples of this practice.

2 METAPHYSICAL PRINCIPLES: THE PRINCIPLE OF SUFFICIENT REASON AND THE PRIORITY OF THE INFINITE

In E1p11d, Spinoza stipulates:

> For each thing there must be assigned a cause or reason, both for its existence and for its non-existence.[2]

This strict demand for universal explicability and the rejection of any brute facts has been termed in recent literature – adequately to my mind – Spinoza's own version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.[3] Since similar statements of the Principle of Sufficient Reason can be found in Spinoza's earliest works,[4] one may wonder what role, if any, the principle plays in the *TTP*.

At the end of Chapter 15 of the *TTP*, concluding his discussion of the relation between reason and theology, Spinoza makes the following quite extraordinary announcement:

> [W]hat altar of refuge can a man find for himself when he commits treason against the majesty of reason [*nam quam aram sibi parare potest, qui rationis majestatem lædit*].[5]

[2] Cf. E1p8s2; *G* II 50/28. E1a2, which states that all things are conceived (and hence explained), could also be read as a statement of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.
[3] See Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, pp. 4–9, and Della Rocca, "A Rationalist Manifesto."
[4] *DPP*, 1a11; *G* I 158/3. [5] *G* III 188.

There is much to be said about this image of reason, which ascribes to reason the same exhaustiveness, dominance, and omnipresence that traditional theologies ascribe to God. This passage leaves no room for anything that is beyond, or against, reason. Similarly, in the page preceding the above-mentioned announcement, Spinoza argues:

> No one who is not without hope or insane would want to abolish reason completely and . . . deny [*negare*] the certainty of reason.[6]

Yet in spite of these bold statements, as well as Spinoza's severe critique of the commoner's tendency to prefer the imagination over the intellect,[7] it is not easy to find a clear statement in the *TTP* to the effect that *every* fact demands an explanation. The closest that Spinoza comes to making such a statement is, unsurprisingly, in his discussion of miracles. Let us have a close look at the following passage:

> But since miracles were produced according to the capacity of the common people who were completely ignorant of the principles of natural things, plainly the ancients took for a miracle whatever they were unable to explain in the manner the common people normally explained natural things, namely by seeking to recall something similar which can be imagined without amazement. *For the common people suppose they have satisfactorily explained something as soon as it no longer astounds them*.[8]

What precisely went wrong in the *vulgus*' attempt (and failure) to explain miracles? Obviously they erred, according to Spinoza, by "being ignorant of the principles of natural things"; but why did they stay ignorant in spite of their genuine attempt to trace the causes of miracles? Why did they not look for the natural explanations of miracles? The *vulgus* were definitely not wrong in trying to find a causal explanation for miracles; Spinoza openly argues that we ought to try to explain things through their proximate causes.[9] What went wrong in the method of the "common people" was that they did not go far *enough* in their attempt to explain the nature of things. Instead of stubbornly seeking the complete causal chain for each fact, they felt content once an extraordinary fact was shown to be the result of a familiar phenomenon, while paying no attention to the need to explain the familiar. In a way, they were rudimentary common-sense philosophers who asked for an explanation for what appears to be against common sense, and were completely reassured once the unfamiliar turned out to be a result of the common. For Spinoza, our familiarity with a phenomenon does not render it intelligible, and the familiar, just like the extraordinary, demands

[6] *G* III 187. [7] *TTP* Ch. 5; *G* III 77 and *TTP* Ch. 6; *G* III 81.
[8] *G* III 84; emphasis mine. [9] *TTP* Ch. 4; *G* III 58/19–20.

a clear causal explanation. Indeed, it is precisely at this point that the thoroughness of one's commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason is tested. Few people would deny the need to explain unusual phenomena (e.g., flying hippos), but fewer would demand an explanation for what is common and ordinary (e.g., time), and it is precisely here where the task of the philosopher begins, first in making us de-familiarize ourselves with, and question the nature of, the ordinary, and then in attempting to explain it.

The other major metaphysical principle which motivates much of the metaphysics of both the *Ethics* and the *TTP* is *the ontological, as well as epistemological, priority of the infinite*.[10] In one of his boldest moves in the *Ethics* (and Spinoza's philosophical temper was never too mild), Spinoza criticizes his predecessors who

> did not observe the [proper] order of Philosophizing. For they believed that the divine nature, which they should have contemplated before all else (because it is prior both in knowledge and in nature) is last in the order of knowledge, and that the things that are called objects of the senses are prior to all. That is why, when they contemplated natural things, they thought of nothing less than they did of the divine nature; and when afterwards they directed their minds to contemplating the divine nature, they could think of nothing less than of their first fictions, on which they had built the knowledge of natural things, because these could not assist knowledge of the divine nature.[11]

One may debate the precise target of this criticism (Descartes is clearly one of the targets), but as far as I can see, it is clear that this criticism is at least applicable to the Platonic path of epistemological ascent from the knowledge of beautiful bodies, through knowledge of beauty in the soul and the sciences, and which culminates in contemplation of "the very soul of the beauty . . . which neither flowers nor fades."[12] But Spinoza, unlike Socrates, does not seem to be impressed by Diotima's speech. If you begin with the beauty of Callias, you will end up with the purified beauty of Callias, which (at least for Spinoza) is still all too human. If you arrive at God at the end of the process you are likely to have a conception of God cast in the image of the things with which you began your journey. That is, I think, the meaning of Spinoza's claim that "when afterwards they directed their minds to contemplating the divine nature, they could think of nothing less than of their first fictions." But, for Spinoza, the Platonic path furthermore does not allow us to know finite things, since all things are to be known through their causes.[13] Hence, one *must* begin with the

[10] This paragraph is modified from my recent review of Michael Ayers, ed., *Rationalism, Platonism, and God*.

[11] E2p10s. [12] Plato, *Symposium*, 210–211. [13] E1a4.

knowledge of the infinite, the cause of all things, before turning to the knowledge of finite things ("when they contemplated natural things, they thought of nothing less than they did of the divine nature"). The immediate result of this epistemological revolution which makes the knowledge of any thing dependent upon our having a prior knowledge of God's essence (the ultimate cause of all things), is the trivialization of the knowledge of God's essence by making the knowledge of God's essence something one *cannot fail to have* – "God's infinite essence and his eternity are known to all"[14] – if one is to know anything at all.

In the *TTP* we find a very similar view, though it is never explicated in any systematic way and is presented in a manner that invites association with more traditional, primarily Christian, views. In Chapter 2 of the *TTP*, Spinoza scolds "those who freely admit that they do not possess the idea of God and know him only through created things (whose causes they are ignorant of), and do not hesitate to accuse philosophers of atheism."[15] Like the adversaries he takes to task in E2p10s, Spinoza criticizes here those who invert the order of philosophizing by trying to understand the infinite through created things, and as result fail to know both God and finite things.

The dependence of all knowledge on the prior knowledge of God is stated explicitly in Chapter 3:

> [A]ll our knowledge and the certainty which truly takes away all doubt depends on a knowledge of God alone, and . . . without God nothing can exist or be conceived, . . . we are in doubt about everything as long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God.[16]

In several places in the *TTP* Spinoza also alludes to the view that the knowledge of God's essence is most common and unavoidable. In Chapter 1 Spinoza makes the apparently enigmatic claim that God communicates his essence to our minds *directly* "without the use of any physical means,"[17] and later, in the same chapter, he adds that we have "natural knowledge" that is "common to all" and by which "God's mind and his eternal thoughts [*æternæ sententiæ*] are indeed ascribed on our minds."[18] According to Spinoza, for God to speak to us "directly without the use of any physical means" is just to conceive things as eternal truths [*æternas veritates*].[19] Hence, we can conclude that God's "eternal thoughts," which are common

[14] E2p47s. [15] *G* III 30.
[16] *G* III 59–60. For the dependence of all knowledge on our knowledge of God see further Annotation 6 to the *TTP* (*G* III 252).
[17] *G* III 20. [18] *G* III 27. [19] *G* III 63.

to all, are nothing but the eternal truth. Indeed later, in Chapter 16, Spinoza notes that eternal truths are such that "no one can fail to know."[20] Similarly, in Chapter 4 of the *TTP*, Spinoza suggests an interesting interpretation of Paul's announcement that all are without escape and cannot be excused by ignorance, by arguing that "assuredly they could have been excused were [Paul] talking about supernatural inspiration, the suffering of Christ in the flesh, the resurrection, etc."[21] Unlike the case of these supernatural beliefs, men could not be excused, says Spinoza, for failing to know God's eternity and power, which "each man fully understands by the natural light of reason."[22] Given Spinoza's claim in the *Ethics* that God's power is his essence,[23] and that eternity pertains to the nature or essence of God,[24] it is clear, I think, that in the last passage Spinoza alludes to the doctrine of the unavoidability of the knowledge of God's essence.

As I suggested above, Spinoza's main reason for demanding that the proper order of philosophizing is to begin with God is primarily the need to avoid an anthropomorphic conception of God. The critique of anthropomorphic and anthropocentric thinking is clearly one of the major underlying themes of the *TTP*.[25]

3 THE GOD OF THE *TTP*: GOD AND NATURE

In *Ep*. 6, addressed to Henry Oldenburg, Spinoza announces openly:

> I do not separate God from nature as everyone known to me has done.[26]

This explicit admission of the novel nature of Spinoza's conception of God turns into a much more cautious expression in his late correspondence. Following the publication of the *TTP*, some of its readers detected the same view in the book. Lambert van Velthuysen charged Spinoza with "asserting that all things emanate from God's nature and that the universe itself is God,"[27] and Oldenburg noted that many readers of the *TTP* thought that Spinoza "confused" God with nature.[28] Spinoza does not really respond to Velthuysen's charge. He notes briefly that he does not wish to inquire "why it is the same, or not very different, to assert that all things emanate necessarily from God's nature and that the universe is

[20] *G* III 192. [21] *G* III 68. [22] *G* III 68. [23] E1p34. [24] E1p19d.

[25] See Spinoza's critique of those who "consider nature to be so limited that they believe men are its most important part" and believe "that they are dearer to God than others and are the ultimate reason for God's creation and continual governance of all things" (*TTP* Ch. 6; *G* III 82). Cf. *G* III 88, and *TTP* Ch. 16 (*G* III 190–191).

[26] *G* IV 36/24. [27] *Ep*. 42; *Letters*, p. 227. [28] *Ep*. 71; *Letters*, p. 329.

God,"[29] and moves on to another issue. In response to Oldenburg's query, he first states that his views are not really anything new since Paul, "the Ancient Hebrews,"[30] and "perhaps all ancient philosophers" all shared the same view of God's relation to nature. Spinoza's attempt to present his views of God and nature as being traditional and in contrast only with the innovations of the "modern Christians"[31] is a sharp change of strategy from his presentation of the same views in *Ep*. 6. Spinoza's second line of defense against Oldenburg's query is to claim that those who thought that the *TTP* "rests on the identification of God with Nature . . . are quite mistaken"; and then he adds in brackets that this is so if "by the latter of which [Nature] they understand a kind of mass or corporeal matter."[32] The clear implication of the provision in brackets is that under a different understanding of nature (i.e., one which does not identify nature with "mass or corporeal matter"[33]), God *is* identical with nature.

But where in the *TTP* does Spinoza assert or allude to the identity of God and nature? We have seen that Spinoza understands (or perhaps pretends to understand) Velthuysen as ascribing to him the identification of God and the universe on the basis of Spinoza's alleged claim that "all things emanate necessarily from God's nature." However, I am not aware of any place in the *TTP* in which Spinoza makes the latter claim. Spinoza perhaps comes close to this by suggesting that the laws of nature "follow [*sequuntur*] from the necessity and perfection of the divine nature,"[34] but this does not have to be read as a pantheistic claim. Nor should Spinoza's claim that "the power of Nature is nothing other than the power of God itself"[35] have to be read as an endorsement of pantheism.[36] Yet, there are at least two passages in the *TTP* which strongly suggest a pantheistic view.

Spinoza begins the passage below with the rather weak claim that by knowing nature we improve our knowledge of God, the creator, or cause, of all things.[37] Yet, in the second half of the passage he makes the much stronger claim that our knowledge not only depends on the knowledge of

[29] *Ep*. 43; *Letters*, p. 239.

[30] On the identity of the "Ancient Hebrews," see my "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance," p. 40 n. 72, and "From the 'Gates of Heaven'" (unpublished manuscript).

[31] *Ep*. 73; *Letters*, p. 332. [32] *Ep*. 63; *Letters*, p. 332.

[33] See Spinoza's footnote in *TTP* Ch. 6; *G* III 83, where he says that by "nature" he means "not only matter and its affections, but other infinite things besides matter." See section 5 below.

[34] *G* III 82–83. [35] *G* III 28.

[36] Nature could be independent of, and yet caused by, God, and then in its turn, cause other things. In such a scenario the causal power of nature will be ultimately traced to God, but without identifying the two.

[37] This weaker claim appears quite commonly in the *TTP*. See, for example, Ch. 6; *G* III 86.

God, but "consists altogether [*omnino consistit*]" in the knowledge of God, clearly implying that there is nothing "outside" God.

> Further (since knowledge of an effect through a cause is simply to know some property of the cause [*causæ proprietatem aliquam congnoscere*]) the more we learn about natural things, the more perfectly we come to know the essence of God (which is the cause of all things); and thus *all our knowledge*, that is, our highest good, *not only depends on a knowledge of God but consists in it altogether*.[38]

The interesting doctrine with which Spinoza begins the passage – that knowledge of an effect through its cause is nothing but knowledge of a property of the cause – provides the ground for the identification of God and nature. The essence of God is the cause of all things. An effect is a property of the cause. Hence, all things are just God's properties that follow from his essence. As a result, Spinoza can say that whatever we know is nothing but God (or properties of God).[39]

The second passage in which Spinoza clearly alludes to the identification of God and nature appears in Chapter 14 of the *TTP*. In this chapter, Spinoza sets out to "propose the separation of faith from philosophy which, indeed, has been the principal purpose of the whole work."[40] The separating line between the two is drawn very clearly: faith and philosophy have different aims. Philosophy attempts to discover the truth, while the aim of faith is not truth but obedience: "faith requires not so much true as pious dogmas, that is, such tenets as move the mind to obedience, even though many of these may not have a shadow of truth in them."[41] Thus, the dogmas of faith must be such that belief in them is conducive to obedience. Obviously, the believer must believe that the tenets of faith are true, but those who disseminate and teach faith should not be much bothered by the truthfulness of the doctrines, but rather by their usefulness. Spinoza even suggests a detailed list of the tenets of faith, each of which is necessary, and all of which are sufficient to secure obedience. These doctrines are (1) that there is a God, (2) that he is one, (3) that he is present everywhere and all things are manifest to him, (4) that he possesses supreme right and dominion over all things, (5) that the worship of God consists solely in justice and charity, (6) that all who obey God, and only they, are saved, and finally, (7) that God forgives the repentant their sins. Spinoza did not hold many of these beliefs (e.g., divine forgiveness), but more interesting is the way he

[38] *G* III 60. Emphasis mine.
[39] Spinoza makes a very similar claim in the *Ethics* in E1p16d. See my "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance," pp. 66–69.
[40] *G* III 174. [41] *G* III 176.

formulates some of the beliefs in a manner that could be interpreted in two ways: one consistent with popular, traditional, religion, the other being in agreement with philosophical truth.[42] Indeed, immediately following the enumeration of his seven principles of faith, he adds:

> No one can fail to recognize that all these things absolutely need to be known, so that all men without exception may be able to love God. By the command of the Law explained above, for if any of these is removed, obedience too is gone. But what God, or the exemplar of true life, is, e.g., whether he is fire or spirit or life or thought, etc. is irrelevant to faith [*fidem*], as are questions about the manner in which he is the exemplar of the true life; for example, is it because he has a just and merciful mind? Or is it because all things exist and act through him [*vel quia res omnes per ipsum sunt, & agunt*] and therefore we understand them through him and see what is true, right and good through him? Whatever one's views on these questions it makes no difference.
>
> Furthermore, it has nothing to do with faith whether one believes that God is everywhere[43] in essence or in potential [*secundum essentiam, vel secundum potentiam ubique sit*], whether he issues edicts like prince or teaches them as eternal truth, whether man obeys God of his own free will or by the necessity of the divine decree, or whether reward of the good and punishment of wrongdoers takes place naturally or supernaturally.[44]

What is interesting in this passage is that here Spinoza gives clear indications as to his own philosophical views. A reader of the *TTP* could hardly fail to comprehend that for Spinoza God is not just, since "just" is decried by Spinoza repeatedly as an anthropomorphic way of talking about God.[45] Hence, the true meaning of God's being the exemplar of true life is clearly "because all things exist and act through him." Similarly, given Spinoza's harsh critique of the anthropomorphic conception of God as judge or prince,[46] and of the illusory belief in free will,[47] it is clear that Spinoza's

[42] Cf. Pines ("Spinoza's TTP," p. 33): "The true philosophers . . . can unhesitantly give their assent to the dogmas . . . the dogmas can be interpreted in accordance with [the adequate knowledge of God]."

[43] In Annotation 6 to the *TTP* (*G* III 253), Spinoza asserts again that once we conceive of God's nature it becomes evident that "God is everywhere [*ubique esse*]."

[44] *G* III 178

[45] "[Paul] spoke 'in human terms', expressly admitting this when he calls God 'just'. Likewise, it is undoubtedly due to this 'weakness of the flesh' that he attributes pity, grace, anger etc. to God" (*G* III 65). Cf. *G* III 42 and *G* III 64. For Spinoza, even ascribing "mind" [*mens*] to God is an act of anthropomorphism (*G* III 25).

[46] "Thus [Moses] perceived all these things not as eternal truths but as precepts and teachings, and prescribed them as decrees of God. That is why he imagined God as ruler, legislator, king, merciful, just etc., despite the fact that all the latter are merely attributes of human nature and far removed from the divine nature" (*G* III 64).

[47] "Nor did Moses adequately grasp that God is omniscient and directs all human actions by his decrees alone" (*TTP* Ch. 13; *G* III 38, cf. *G* III 33 and 42–43).

philosophical truth is that God teaches morality as eternal truth, and that men obey him "by the necessity of the divine decree." Spinoza's claim that for faith it does not matter whether "God is everywhere in essence or in potential" should be understood along the very same lines. One of the disjunctives indicates a belief that is conducive to obedience, but not precisely true, while the other indicates the precise philosophical teaching. The claim that God is everywhere *secundum potentiam* means simply that God's power extends everywhere. This is clearly a very traditional belief, and in fact Spinoza should have no reason to reject it, apart from noting its being a certain understatement of God's ubiquity. Indeed, the other disjunct makes the bolder, and for Spinoza more precise, claim that God is everywhere *secundum essentiam*; but to say that God is *essentially* everywhere is just to claim that physical nature is not and cannot be distinct from God.

4 THE GOD OF THE *TTP*: GOD'S ESSENCE IS EXISTENCE

In the course of his discussion of the different aims of faith and philosophy, Spinoza also digresses into the issue of the meaning of the Tetragrammaton, which, as it will turn out, pertains to the very core of Spinoza's metaphysics. At the beginning of Chapter 13 of the *TTP* Spinoza argues that "biblical teachings contain no elevated theories or philosophical doctrines but only the simplest matters comprehensible to even the very slowest."[48] Yet, it is only a few pages later that Spinoza points out a deep metaphysical issue alluded by the word of God.

In order to show that true knowledge of God is not necessary for piety and faith, Spinoza brings forth the case of the Patriarchs, about whom, he claims, Scripture attests that they did not know the true essence of God, and yet were most pious.

> For the first point ["that an intellectual or precise knowledge of God is not a gift generally given to the faithful"], most evidently follows from Exodus 6:3, where in showing Moses the singular grace given to him, God says: "And I was revealed to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as *El Shaddai*, but I was not known to them by my name Jehova." To clarify this, we must note that *El* Shaddai in Hebrew signifies "God who suffices" because he gives each person what suffices to him; and although *Shaddai* is often used on its own to refer to God, we should not doubt that the word *El* ("God") should always be silently understood. We should further note that no name is found in the Bible other than Jehova to indicate the absolute essence of God [*Dei absolutam essentiam*] without relation to created things. The

[48] *G* III 167. Cf. Spinoza's claim that at Sinai God did not reveal to the Hebrews the attributes of his absolute essence, but only roused them to obedience (*G* III 179).

Hebrews therefore claim that this is the only proper name of God and that all the others are forms of address [*appellativa*]; and in truth [*et revera*] the other names of God, whether they are nouns or adjectives, are attributes which belong to God in so far as he is considered in relation to his creatures or manifested through them. An example is *El*, which means simply "powerful" . . . Elsewhere the virtues of his power are given in full, as *El* ("powerful"), great, terrible, just, merciful, [*ut El magnus, tremendous, Justus, misericors*] etc.[49]

Two observations seem to be in place here. First, Spinoza's concurrence ("and in truth") with the claim that only the Tetragrammaton indicates God's essence is not demanded by his polemical objectives. His argument would have held even had he not endorsed the claim of "the Hebrews," i.e., had he just showed that according to the biblical authors God's essence was not known to the obedient and pious Patriarchs. Therefore, I suggest that we should take the "*et revera*" seriously as communicating Spinoza's genuine agreement with this interpretation of the Tetragrammaton, especially if the ensuing view of God's essence would turn out to be in agreement with Spinoza's exposition of his metaphysics in some other texts.

The second observation which we should not miss is the strong similarity between Spinoza's and Maimonides's claims about the meaning of the Tetragrammaton. Although many medieval commentators with whom Spinoza was acquainted adopted similar explanations of the meaning of the Tetragrammaton and of *ego sum qui sum* [*Eheye asher Eheye*] (Exodus 3:14),[50] there is little doubt that Spinoza relates here primarily to Maimonides's discussion in *Guide of the Perplexed* I, 61. Spinoza's claims that the Tetragrammaton is, strictly speaking, God's only name and that "no name is found in the Bible other than Jehova to indicate the absolute essence of God [*Dei absolutam essentiam*] without relation to created things" are just restatements of Maimonides's claims in *Guide* I, 61.[51]

[49] *G* III 168–169.

[50] Such as, Ibn-Ezra, Gersonides, and Aquinas. See Ibn Ezra's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, Exodus 3:14–15, Gersonides's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, Exodus 3:13–15, and Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia Q. 13, 11. Cf. Harvey, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Hebraism," pp. 110 and 114 (n. 23). For Christian interpretations of Exodus 3:14, see Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 51f. The view of the Tetragrammaton as indicating God's self-necessitated existence appears also in Avraham ha-Kohen Hererra's *Beit Elohim* [Hebrew: *The House of God*] (1755), p. 33. This is a Hebrew translation (from the original Spanish) by Yitzhak Aboav De Fonesca, who was one of the rabbis of the Amsterdam community at Spinoza's time and might have been one of Spinoza's teachers. The question of Herrera's possible influence on Spinoza is still unsolved.

[51] "All the names of God, may He be exalted, that are to be found in any of the books derive from actions. There is nothing secret in this matter. The only exception is one name: namely, *Yod, He, Vav, He*. This is the name of God, may He be exalted, that has been originated without any derivation, and for this reason it is called the *articulated name*. This means that this name gives a clear unequivocal indication of His essence, may He be exalted" (*Guide* I 61). Cf. "Thus it has

But what then is God's absolute essence which is indicated uniquely by the Tetragrammaton? For Maimonides, the answer is straightforward: God's essence is nothing but simple, unadulterated existence (or rather, necessary existence).[52] Following an initial hesitance to publicly expound the meaning of the Tetragrammaton,[53] Maimonides concludes his discussion of God's unique name with a brief yet unequivocal statement:

> He, May He be exalted, has no *name* that is not derivative except the *name having four letters*, which is *the articulated name*. *This name is not indicative of an attribute but of simple existence and nothing else*. Now absolute existence implies that He shall always be, I mean He who is necessarily existent.[54] Understand the point at which this discourse has finally arrived.[55]

Spinoza's understanding of this issue is not very different from that of Maimonides. In the only other passage in the *TTP* in which the meaning of the Tetragrammaton is discussed, Spinoza writes:

become clear to you that *the articulated name* is the *name having four letters* and that it alone is indicative of the essence without associating any other notion with it. For this reason the Sages have said of it that is the name *that is peculiar to Me* [*shmi ha-meyuhad li*]" (*Guide* I 61. Italics mine). Interestingly, Maimonides's discussion of the meaning of the Tetragrammaton is cited extensively in the work of Rabbi Shaul Mortera, who was one of Spinoza's teachers in the Jewish community of Amsterdam. See *Giveat Shaul* [Hebrew: *Saul's Hill*], p. 60.

In this context, Spinoza also explains that the name "'*El Shaddai*' in Hebrew means 'the God who suffices' [*Deum, qui sufficit*]" (*G* III 169/4). Compare this with Maimonides's claim that the meaning of the same name is "*He who is sufficient*" (*Guide* I 63). Finally, the examples of "qualities of potency" which Spinoza brings to bear – "the great [*magnus*], the awful [*tremendus*] . . . " are just the attributes which begin the daily Jewish prayer of *Shmone Esre* ("The Eighteen Benedictions"), of which Maimonides says that such anthropomorphic language would have been prohibited were it not inserted into the daily prayer by "the Men of the Great Synagogue" (*Guide* I 59).

[52] This very same view is also suggested by Salomon Maimon (1753–1800), the great modern disciple of both Maimonides and Spinoza: "But the greatest of all mysteries in the Jewish Religion consists in the name Jehova, expressing *bare existence*, in abstraction from *all particular kinds of existence*, which cannot of course be conceived without *existence in general*. The doctrine of the unity of God, and the dependence of all beings on Him, in regard to their possibility as well as their actuality, can be perfectly comprehended only in conformity with a *single system*" (*Autobiography*, pp. 181–182). The "single system" at stake is, I believe, Spinozism. See my "Salomon Maimon."

[53] "There can be no doubt about the fact that this great name, which as you know is not pronounced except in the *Sanctuary* by the *sanctified Priests of the Lord* and only in *the benediction of the Priests* and by *the High Priest* upon *the day of fasting*, is indicative of a notion with reference to which there is no association between God, may He be exalted, and what is other than He. *Perhaps it indicates the notion of necessary existence*, according to the [Hebrew] language, of which we today know only a very scant portion and also with regard to its pronunciation. Generally speaking, the greatness of this name and the prohibition against pronouncing it are due to *its being indicative of the essence of Him, may He be exalted, in such a way that none of the created things is associated with him in this indication* (*Guide* I 61. Italics mine).

[54] By "necessary existence" Maimonides refers here to the Avicennian notion of a thing which exists necessarily and not by virtue of a cause (while all other things – those we call "possible" – are necessitated as they are caused by the thing which is "necessary of existence").

[55] Maimonides, *Guide* I 63.

Anyone who reflects on Moses' opinions without prejudice, will plainly see that he believed God to be a being that has always existed, exists and will always exist, and for this reason he calls him "Jehova" by name, which in Hebrew expresses these three tenses of existence [*quod Hebraice hæc tria tempora existendi exprimit*].[56]

Spinoza agrees with Maimonides that the Tetragrammaton indicates necessary existence, and from Spinoza's brief interpolation that the Tetragrammaton "in truth [*revera*]" indicates God's essence, we can conclude that for Spinoza, as for Maimonides, God's essence is necessary existence.[57] Indeed, in the *Ethics* Spinoza argues and proves that God's essence is nothing but existence.[58] Furthermore, since Spinoza defines eternity (*aeternitas*) as self-necessitated existence,[59] and since eternity is the manner of existence of *natura naturans*, i.e., God's essence,[60] it is clear that in the *Ethics* as well God's essence is self-necessitated existence.[61]

5 SUBSTANCE AND ATTRIBUTES

So far we have seen that on the two crucial metaphysical issues of God's identity with nature and of the essence of God as pure existence, the *TTP* provides important indications as to Spinoza's late views. We may thus be surprised to find that two of the most central concepts of Spinoza's ontology – "substance" [*substantia*] and "mode" [*modus*] – are completely absent in the *TTP*. In fact, it is the only philosophical composition of Spinoza in which *substantia* and *modus* (and their equivalent Dutch terms) do not appear.[62]

When we look at Spinoza's use of *attributum* in the *TTP*, we find that in most cases the term is not reserved, as in the *Ethics*, to God's essential attributes,[63] but is rather used to include also attributes by which various

[56] *G* III 38. [57] Cf. Beltrán, "The God of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," p. 30.
[58] E1p20. [59] E1d8.
[60] "The difference between Eternity and Duration arises from this. For it is only of Modes that we can explain the existence by Duration. But [we can explain the existence] of Substance by Eternity, i.e., the infinite enjoyment of existing, or (in bad Latin) of being" (*Ep*. 12; *G* IV 54–55).
[61] In the history of Western metaphysics we find two competing conceptions of eternity. The one understands eternity as existence in all times, the other as existence that is utterly alien to any temporal existence (a remnant of this second kind of eternity can still be found today in the conception of the existence of numbers among mathematical realists or Platonists). For Maimonides, the existence indicated by the Tetragrammaton is clearly atemporal. One of Spinoza's notes in *TTP* (*G* III 38) might suggest that he understands the meaning of the Tetragrammaton to refer to existence in all time. Yet, in his explanation of the definition of eternity in the *Ethics* he stresses that eternity "cannot be explained by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end" (E1p8e). For further discussion of the nature of God's essence as existence, see my "Spinoza's Deification of Existence."
[62] Cf. Curley, "Notes," p. 115.
[63] *G* III 169–170 (discussed above in section 4) and *G* III 179/20–22 are notable exceptions.

people inadequately conceived God.[64] Neither Extension nor Thought is described as a divine attribute. It seems that in the *TTP* Spinoza tried to avoid the use of technical terminology by employing more common and traditional terms instead of the rigid terminology of the *Ethics* (for example, by claiming that God's essence is eternal existence instead of saying that God is a substance, or by insinuating that God is everywhere in essence, instead of claiming that Extension is one of God's attributes). There is one interesting footnote in the *TTP* in which Spinoza clearly refers to the doctrine of the infinity of God's attributes, though intriguingly he does not use the term *attributum* in this place. In this note Spinoza glosses his use of the term "nature" with the following warning:

> Note that here I mean not only matter and its affections [*affectiones*], but other infinite things [*alia infinita*] besides matter.[65]

Why Spinoza does not mention the term "attribute" here is somewhat unclear. It could definitely be a coincidence. Yet we would like to point out that in *Ep*. 36, probably dated June 1666, Spinoza expounds expansively on the nature of Extension and Thought without even once mentioning the term "attribute." It is, I think, possible that in this period of time Spinoza was still hesitating as to the precise nature of Extension and Thought. *Ep*. 36, however, survives only in translation, and hence it is hard to clarify this point.

6 THE *CONATUS*

Chapter 16 of the *TTP* begins the part of the book which is dedicated primarily to Spinoza's political philosophy. So it is fitting that Spinoza begins this discussion with the metaphysical principle that grounds much of his politics:

> It is the supreme law of nature that each thing strives to persist in its own state [*suo statu*] so far as it can, taking no account of another's circumstances but only of its own.[66]

Following the statement of this "supreme law" Spinoza stresses the exhaustive universality of the law:

> Here we recognize no difference between human beings and other individual things of nature [*reliqua naturæ individua*], nor between human beings who are

[64] See, for example, *G* III 48/30, 169/12–13, 170/34–35, 171/23, 172/16.
[65] *G* III 83. I have here corrected the translation of Silverthorne and Israel.
[66] *G* III 189.

endowed with reason and others who do not know true reason,[67] nor between fools or lunatics and the sane.[68]

Spinoza applies the *conatus* doctrine to all individuals in nature: human beings, animals, rocks,[69] and political entities.[70] The *conatus* doctrine is not unique to Spinoza; variants of this doctrine can be found in numerous early modern works, including the sermons of Rabbi Shaul Mortera, Spinoza's teacher in the Jewish community of Amsterdam.[71]

One important feature of Spinoza's discussion of the *conatus* in the *TTP* is that unlike the equivalent discussion in Part Three of the *Ethics* (E3pp4–6), Spinoza does not ground the principle in the impossibility of self-destruction (or self-negation), but rather leaves it as a supreme, most universal, and yet, unexplained, law of nature.[72]

7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have attempted to outline the metaphysical views of the *TTP*. I have concentrated on what I consider to be the core of Spinoza's metaphysics. Several important issues, such as Spinoza's conception of laws of nature and his remarks about the love of God and eternity of mind[73] (which may shed light on the enigmatic conclusion of the *Ethics*), were left aside. Each of these two issues deserves a study of its own. We have noticed that in the *TTP* Spinoza avoided his key terminology of substance and mode. Similarly, there seems to be no trace in the *TTP* of the issue of the nature of infinity with which Spinoza was engaged throughout his life. The *TTP* is clearly not a work of technical philosophy. Yet it is a rather precise book, and for the most part, Spinoza seems to be quite cautious not only in trying to avoid political trouble but also in trying to avoid going too far from or being too vague about what he believed to be the exact truth. For these reasons I believe the book is an invaluable resource for understanding Spinoza's metaphysics.

[67] Cf. *TTP* Ch. 5; *G* III 73: "All men do indeed seek their own interest, but it is not from the dictate of sound reason; for the most part they pursue things and judge them to be in their interest merely because they are carried away by sensual desire and by their passions."

[68] *G* III 189–190.

[69] See *Ep*. 58.

[70] On the striving of each state "to be beyond fear, and hence, to be its own master," see *TP* Ch. 3; *G* III 290.

[71] See *Giveat Shaul*, Chapter 18, p. 136.

[72] For Spinoza a law of nature "is one that necessarily follows from the very nature or definition of a thing" (*TTP* Ch. 4; *G* III 57), i.e., it is a proprium which follows from the essence of the things that fall under this law. Presumably, a supreme and most universal law of nature should follow from the essence of *all* things (or all finite things).

[73] See *TTP* Ch. 4; *G* III 60, and *TTP* Ch. 5; *G* III 71.