



## Spinoza on God (II)

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## SPINOZA ON GOD (II).\*

**T**HE *Definition of God*.—We have now to consider Spinoza's definition of God. The preliminary argument used when we considered the definition of attribute applies with equal force to that of God. God must, by force of axiom, be either in Himself (*in se*) or in something else (*in alio*); that is, He must be either substance or mode. When we examine Spinoza's definition of God we find that he is not defining a kind of metaphysical existent which is different from substance and mode; he is defining a substance which consists of infinite attributes. The definition reads: "By God I understand Being absolutely infinite, that is to say, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence."<sup>24</sup>

The conception of God as a Being absolutely infinite, contained in Spinoza's definition, is the traditional conception of God as a supremely perfect being, an *Ens Realissimum*. Spinoza has taken this conception and defined it more carefully and more significantly than had been done before. The general consideration that guided him in the construction of his definition we learn from a letter to Tschirnhaus: "When I define God as the supremely perfect Being, since this definition does not express the efficient cause (for I conceive that an efficient cause can be internal as well as external) I shall not be able to discover all the properties of God from it; but when I define God as a *Being* etc. [see Definition VI, Part I of the *Ethics*] . . . I know that I can deduce from it all [His] properties."<sup>25</sup> From another letter to Tschirnhaus we learn that Spinoza did not question the validity of the idea of God as a supremely perfect or absolutely infinite Being; he concerned himself only with developing the implications of this conception in accordance with the principles of his philosophy: "The axiom of the Scholium to Proposition X, Part I, as I suggested at the end

\* The first part of this article appeared in the January, 1930, issue of this REVIEW, p. 56.

<sup>24</sup> *Ethics*, I, Def. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Letter LX; A. Wolf's translation.

of that Scholium, we form from the idea which we have of an absolutely infinite Being, and not from the fact that there are, or may be, beings which have three, four or more attributes.”<sup>26</sup>

It goes without saying that God must be defined as having or as consisting of attributes. Tradition was firm on this point; and just as Spinoza retains the term God, instead of consistently using the term Nature, he also naturally uses the term attribute. (This is another reason why he could not discard the term attribute, but had to redefine it in terms of substance.) The argument showing why God must be defined as consisting of no less than infinite attributes, each of them infinite in its own kind, is a very simple one. “Nothing is clearer”, he says, “than that Being absolutely infinite is necessarily defined as we have shown (Def. 6) as Being which consists of infinite attributes each one of which expresses a certain essence, eternal and infinite . . . [for] each being must be conceived under some attribute, and the more reality or being it has, the more attributes it possesses expressing necessity or eternity and infinity.”<sup>27</sup> This argument is the same as his more succinct statement in the Explanation to the Definition of God.

Although Spinoza repeatedly states that the more reality a being has the more attributes must be predicated of it,<sup>28</sup> there have not been wanting interpretations that maintain that he is compelled by virtue of the doctrine that *determinatio est negatio* to deny all predicates of God; and that therefore his conception of God is a pure abstraction, empty of all content. With this view we disagree. Spinoza makes use of the phrase “determination is negation” in one of his letters: “As to the doctrine that figure is negation, and not something positive, it is clearly evident that the totality of matter, considered without limitation, can have no figure and that figure has a place only in finite and limited bodies. For he who says that he apprehends a figure wants to express thereby nothing else than that he is apprehending a limited thing, and how it is limited. The limitation, therefore, does not belong to the thing in virtue of its being, but, on the contrary, it is its not-being. Since then, figure is nothing but limitation and limitation is nega-

<sup>26</sup> Letter LXIV.

<sup>27</sup> *Ethics*, I, Prop. 10, schol.

<sup>28</sup> *Ethics*, I, Def. 6; Explanation. Props. 9, 10, schol. Letter IX.

tion [*determinatio est negatio*] therefore, as has been said, it can be nothing but negation.”<sup>29</sup> It is clear from the context, and especially so in Mr. Wolf’s translation, that Spinoza employs the expression *determinatio est negatio* when he is concerned with finite and not infinite things. In the *Ethics* the term ‘determinate’ is unfailingly used in similar fashion. It is true that some theologians considered God to be superior to any specifiable attributes; but we know that Spinoza thought that it was not beneath God’s nature even to be extended. By preying upon the ambiguity of the term ‘determination’ we can come to the conclusion that God must be empty of all content so as not to be ‘determined’. The ambiguity rests in the fact that ‘determination’ may mean either setting a limit to, or giving a character to. When we confuse these two meanings and hold that to give a character to a thing is to limit it, we have no difficulty in deriving any paradoxical conclusion. Spinoza, however, never maintained that to give a character to a thing is to limit it; he consistently maintained that to give a character to a thing is to give it reality or being. Hence God must be given infinite attributes so that He may have infinite being, that He may be supremely perfect.

There are interpretations which agree that Spinoza’s God is not a purely empty abstraction, but has definite characteristics or attributes. But many, if not all, of these interpretations, maintain that in some way or other the infinite number of attributes must be reduced to two, or even one. In western philosophy, mind and body, thought and extension, have been the two exclusive categories in terms of which the universe has been construed. Sometimes both thought and extension are given equal reality as characteristics of the world; sometimes one has been made *the* reality and the other derogated to mere appearance. This inveterate habit of thinking exclusively in terms of mind and body, or of mind alone (idealism), or of body alone (materialism), has tried, time and again, to fix itself upon Spinoza’s system. Idealistic interpretations of the attributes of his God base themselves squarely on the fact that attribute is defined as that which the *intellect* perceives as constituting the nature of substance; and hence, all attributes other than mind or thought are simply subjective ex-

<sup>29</sup> Letter L.

pressions of mind or thought. Materialistic interpretations, on the other hand, support themselves on the fact that the mind is defined as the idea of the body; and therefore the only thing that possesses ultimate reality is the body. Other interpretations hold that mind and body have equal standing in Spinoza's system, but that the other attributes are, as Professor S. Alexander recently put it, "otiose" and meaningless. The purpose here is logical, not metaphysical. It may be that a true metaphysics does not need infinite attributes, that Spinoza's ascribing to God an infinite number was a wild and fantastic act of the imagination. All we are concerned to determine here is whether he did ascribe an infinite number of attributes to God and whether he intended them all to be real and objective characteristics of God's nature. That he intended the attributes to be real and objective we can determine by propositions which are crucial on this point. As we have already seen, he asserts that one attribute cannot produce another, that all attributes were eternally together in God. From this it is obvious to conclude that there is no causal relation between them. However, in subsequent parts of the *Ethics* he recurs to this same point, and we are spared the need for drawing the conclusion ourselves. "The body", he says, "cannot determine the mind to thought, neither can the mind determine the body to motion nor rest, nor to anything else, if there be anything else."<sup>30</sup> This proposition is proved by means of a proposition which applies to all of God's attributes, asserting their complete causal independence of each other. "The modes of any attribute have God for a cause only in so far as He is considered under that attribute of which they are modes and not in so far as He is considered under any other attribute."<sup>31</sup> This proposition is proved, in turn, by means of Proposition 10 of the First Part (which we have already discussed) in which Spinoza proves that each attribute is conceived through itself and without another. Since the infinite attributes of God are all causally independent of and causally unrelated to each other, it follows necessarily that, if they are at all, then they must be objective and real. We must either deny that God has any attributes in Spinoza's system or else assert that He

<sup>30</sup> *Ethics*, III, Prop. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ethics*, II, Prop. 6.

has an infinite number, all of them possessing equal objectivity and reality.

But when we grant that the infinite attributes are real and objective, each existing causally independent of the other, what happens to the unity of God? Is it shattered into infinite fragments? At best, is it anything more than the sum of His attributes? There are expressions in the *Ethics* which would seem to support the interpretation that the term God merely designates the sum of the attributes. Proposition 19 reads: "God is eternal or (which is the same thing) all His attributes are eternal" (Deus, sive omnia Dei attributa sunt æterna). This phraseology is repeated in the second corollary to the next proposition: "God is immutable or (which is the same thing) all His attributes are immutable" (Sequitur, Deum, sive omnia Dei attributa esse immutabilia). In opposition to these pronouncements there is Spinoza's unambiguous reiteration that God is one. How can these two assertions be reconciled? Camerer<sup>32</sup> and others maintain that the opposition cannot be overcome, that the unity of God and the infinity of attributes stand in unrelievable contradiction one with the other.

It is true that Spinoza nowhere clearly explains how God's unity can persist despite the diversity of His attributes, but there are sufficient indications to show us how that unity must be understood. The clue we need is to be found in the nature of man. Man is a mode of the attributes of thought and extension; but because he is a mode of two diverse attributes he is not, according to Spinoza, any the less *one* individual. Camerer does not hesitate to say that the unity of man's nature is no less shattered and impossible to conceive on Spinoza's principles of the relation of mind and body than is God's nature; and for the same reason: qualitative diversity does not permit the real existence of unity. However, the reason why for Spinoza man is not two distinct individuals is because the *order* of ideas in man's mind is the *same* as the *order* of causes in man's body. The divisive duality in man's nature is overcome by the unifying singleness of order discoverable in both parts of his nature. If the order and connection of ideas in his mind differed from the order and connection of

<sup>32</sup> *Die Lehre Spinoza's*, pp. 9 ff.

causes in his body, then man would indeed be two separate individuals. His unity, in such case, would be at best only nominal, the unity of the sum of his parts. But the singleness of order is not merely a sum of parts; it is a principle that truly unifies; indeed, it is because of the singleness of order that Spinoza refers to mind and body as *aspects* instead of as parts of man's nature.

What is true of man's nature is true of God's—since man is nothing more than a mode of two of God's attributes. It is more than merely probable that Spinoza's conception of the relation of the attributes of God other than thought and extension was determined by his conception of the relation between thought and extension in man. Since the only attributes we do know actually are these two, it is difficult to understand how else Spinoza could have come to any conclusion concerning attributes whose existence is demanded solely by the formal consideration that God is an absolutely infinite or supremely perfect being. In the scholium to Proposition 7 of the Second Part he almost says so: "the circle existing in nature and the idea that is in God of an existing circle are one and the same thing, which is manifested through different attributes; and, therefore, whether we think of nature under the attribute of extension or under the attribute of thought or under any other attribute whatever, we shall discover *one and the same order* or one and the same connection of causes; that is to say, in every case, the same *sequence* of events. *Nor have I had any other reason* for saying that God is the cause of the idea, for example, of the circle in so far only as He is a thinking thing, and of the circle itself in so far as He is an extended thing, but this, that the formal Being of the idea of a circle can only be perceived through another mode of thought as its proximate cause, and this again must be perceived through another, and so on *ad infinitum*. So that when things are considered as modes of thought, we must explain the *order* of the whole of nature or the connection of causes by the attribute of thought alone, and when things are considered as modes of extension, the *order* of the whole of nature must be explained through the attribute of extension alone, *and so with other attributes.*" Neither in this scholium nor in any other place does Spinoza ever tell us anything directly about the attributes other than thought and extension; he always states that

what holds of thought and extension also holds of them. The ground for his conviction is none other than his belief in the regularity and uniformity of God's nature.

(God must not, of course, be identified simply with the *order*, discoverable in Him. God consists of infinite attributes, and the *order* of events within these attributes can never supersede in reality the attributes themselves. It is not the order *instead of* the attributes that gives us God's nature; it is the order *within* the attributes (and therefore including them) that gives us that. This may appear very unsatisfactory to some; some may still maintain that the contradiction is still unrelieved. But surely it is not an indisputable axiom that real unity is impossible with qualitative diversity. Unless we are ready to admit that internal qualitative diversity is necessarily incompatible with individuality or unity, there is no reason why we should admit that Spinoza's God loses His unity in the infinite diversity of His attributes. We have to keep in mind that Spinoza was writing at a time when mechanical concepts held exclusive sway. The concept of an organism had not yet made its appearance on the intellectual horizon. Even though Spinoza maintained that all things are in various degrees animated, yet when he came to explain the nature of the human body, he did so, following Descartes, wholly in terms of the mechanical laws of motion. The intellectual tools he had at his command were altogether inadequate for the clear expression of his ideas. But what his idea of God is, despite the obscurity of his statement, is in general outline, at any rate, sufficiently clear and consistent.

There is one more element in Spinoza's definition of God that has to be discussed: the use and meaning of the term substance. God of course must be a 'substance' because He is in Himself and must be conceived through Himself. There is no difficulty here. But what is the relation of substance consisting of infinite attributes (God) to substance as defined in Definition 3, which we have shown is denotatively equivalent to attribute, and not an infinite number of attributes? We can come to understand the meaning of Spinoza's usage of the term substance best if we first consider his usage of the terms idea and body. These three terms embrace the total content of his known universe.



He uses the term idea to designate (1) an absolutely simple idea. This is clear from a passage in the *De Emendatione*: "If the idea of a thing be very simple, it cannot but be clear and distinct; for such a thing cannot be known in part, but either as a whole or not at all." (2) He uses the term idea to denote a finitely complex idea, consisting of a number of simple ideas: "the *idea* which constitutes the formal Being of the human mind, is *not simple* but is composed of a number of ideas."<sup>33</sup> (3) He uses the term idea to designate an infinitely complex idea, consisting of an infinite number of simple ideas: "The *idea* of God from which *infinite numbers* of things follow in *infinite* ways can be *one* only."<sup>34</sup> "The *ideas* of non-existent individual things are comprehended in the infinite *idea* of God."<sup>35</sup>

We find upon examination that he uses the term body in the same three senses in which he uses the term idea. (1) We understand from the following sentence in Axiom 2 that he has been using in his first Axioms and Lemma the term body to mean absolutely simple bodies: "Thus much for simplest bodies which are distinguished from one another by motion and rest, speed and slowness *alone*; let us now advance to composite bodies." (2) The term body is used to designate a finitely complex (composite) body: "When a *number of bodies* of the same or of different magnitudes are pressed together by others . . . these *bodies* are said to be mutually united, and taken altogether are said to compose *one body or individual*" (Definition after Axiom 2). (3) The term body is used to designate an infinitely complex body: "Up to this point we have conceived an individual to be composed . . . of the most simple bodies. If we now consider an individual of another kind, composed of many individuals of diverse natures, we shall discover that it may be affected in many other ways, its nature nevertheless being preserved. Thus if we advance *ad infinitum*, we may easily conceive the whole of Nature to be *one* individual, whose parts, that is to say, *all bodies* differ in *infinite* ways without any change of the whole *individual*" (Lemma 7, schol.).

<sup>33</sup> *Ethics*, II, Prop. 15.

<sup>34</sup> *Ethics*, II, Prop. 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Ethics*, II, Prop. 8.

Now unless we recognise that Spinoza uses the term substance as he uses the terms idea and body, that is in the three different senses just pointed out, we cannot possibly read his propositions on God without accusing him of the most outrageous confusion or redundancy or both. (1) He uses the term substance to designate an absolutely simple substance, that is a substance consisting of only one attribute; this is evident from the definitions of substance and attribute; it is also more plainly evident in the following sentence: "substance which has only one attribute cannot exist except as substance."<sup>36</sup> (2) He uses the term substance to designate a finitely complex substance, that is, a substance consisting of more than one, but not necessarily of infinite attributes: "It is very far from being absurd to ascribe to one substance a *number* of attributes."<sup>37</sup> (3) He uses the term substance to designate an infinitely complex substance, that is a substance consisting of infinite attributes: "God or substance consisting of infinite attributes. . . ."<sup>38</sup>

It must be understood, of course, that in Nature neither absolutely simple ideas, nor absolutely simple bodies, nor absolutely simple substances, exist. Indeed, when we consider the whole of infinite Nature only one absolutely infinite idea (consisting of an infinite number of simple ideas) and only one absolutely infinite body (consisting of an infinite number of simple bodies) as well as only one absolutely infinite substance (consisting of an infinite number of simple attributes or substances) exist. But Spinoza first considers, in the intellectual order of presentation, simple ideas, simple bodies, and, as we shall see, simple substances, because it is his fundamental methodological rule to start with simples and by means of them build up systematically the complex.

If we consider the definition of God from a strictly logical point of view, we can now see how Spinoza constructed it. God is metaphysically a unity, but He is a unity in diversity. For purposes of logical analysis it will be best to speak of Him as a complex entity, not meaning thereby to impugn in any way his real unity. That is to be understood all along.

<sup>36</sup> *Ethics*, I, Prop. 8, dem.

<sup>37</sup> *Ethics*, I, Prop. 10, dem.

<sup>38</sup> *Ethics*, I, Prop. 11.

God, then, is a complex entity; the idea of God is therefore correspondingly a complex idea. The method we should pursue in seeking to discover His nature so that it may be defined, is the same as the method we should pursue in seeking to discover the nature of any other thing, ideas or bodies for example. Does the complex entity, God, consist of simple constituents? If so, are the simple constituents all of one sort, or are there many sorts of them? Spinoza's definition of God plainly answers these questions: God is a complex entity consisting of only one sort of simple constituent; that simple constituent is attribute (substance). Simple substance (or attribute) is infinite only in its own kind; God is absolutely infinite; therefore He must be defined as consisting of an infinite number of attributes (substances). God, that is, must be defined in terms of substance or attribute, since substance or attribute is the simple constituent of His nature. Yet how can this be done without involving oneself in dialectical difficulties?

It will not do to define God (say) as a "Being absolutely infinite, that is, a Being consisting of infinite attributes", because attribute has been defined with reference to substance, not with reference to "being". Hence if God is defined as a Being consisting of infinite attributes, there is nothing in this definition to indicate that the infinite attributes express the essence of His nature. There is nothing in the definition to prevent our inferring that God is something which transcends the infinite attributes; or something which has the attributes but is different from them; or something in which the attributes inhere, as qualities are defined to inhere in the subject in traditional metaphysics. With such a definition it would be impossible rigorously to prove any proposition concerning the nature of God and His attributes; its ambiguity would necessarily infect and vitiate the validity of any proof.

For the same reasons God cannot be adequately defined (say) as a "Being consisting of infinite substances", for substance is defined as that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; and as God is (in this second conjectural definition) defined, we do not know how these infinite substances are related to Him or whether He is a single integrated entity.

This problem *in definition* Spinoza solved by using the two terms substance and attribute. Just as substance is identical with its attribute, being one and the same thing viewed and named in two different ways, so is God a Being at one with His attributes. The infinite attributes are not merely attributes which God has; they are not predicates stuck into a substantive; the infinite attributes *are* God; they constitute His nature. The term substance, besides stating that God is in Himself and must be conceived through Himself, also mediates between the terms attribute and being.

We have now examined the four definitions that it is necessary to understand in order to be able formally to analyze the propositions on God in the First Part of the *Ethics*. Before we proceed to that task one further comment on the order in which these definitions are stated may not be out of place. First we have the definition of substance; then the definition of attribute, which is a re-definition of substance; then the definition of mode, which must be defined with respect to substance, since mode is *in alio* and hence must be in substance. Finally, the definition of God must be defined in terms of substance and attribute; but it cannot be defined until mode has been defined, since modes are in substance and by virtue of that are in God. The definition of God thus sums up in itself the results of the three antecedent definitions.

*The Simplicity of Substance and the Unity of God.*—The opening propositions of the *Ethics* have been a constant source of perplexity for students of Spinoza. The solution of the difficulties these propositions present, that has commended itself to interpreters as being the best, is the solution of virtually reading these propositions out of Spinoza's doctrine. This point of view is most emphatically expressed by Sigwart: "The first seven or eight propositions can only be explained if we assume that Spinoza is attacking the ordinary conception of substance. To any one who has Spinoza's own conception of Substance in mind, they cannot but appear almost ridiculous."<sup>39</sup> Mr. Joachim, although not quite so emphatic, really assumes the same stand: he says that Spinoza defines God "as one Substance amongst others . . . a view which

<sup>39</sup> Sigwart, *Der Spinozismus*, historisch und philosophisch erläutert, p. 238; quoted by Joachim, *op. cit.*

no doubt reflected popular opinion. . . . The first fourteen propositions develop the definitions of God and Substance and thus show that the popular view is untenable." Professor Wolfson, in his detailed historical analysis of the propositions in question, agrees in essence with Sigwart and Mr. Joachim when he asserts that Spinoza is, in his first six propositions, presenting his refutation of "philosophic dualism".<sup>40</sup> However these interpreters may differ from one another, they are in fundamental agreement on the view that the first propositions of the *Ethics* have nothing to do directly with Spinoza's own positive doctrine.

In opposition to this, the interpretation here advanced is that the opening propositions (be they six or eight or fourteen) are the indispensable preliminary propositions by means of which Spinoza established his own positive doctrine. In his first propositions he is engaged in the important task of laying the foundations of his own doctrine of substance, not in undermining the conception of any one else. There is in Propositions I–XV a gradual logical development of one consistent and constructive argument; step by step—proposition by proposition—Spinoza leads up to his culminating Proposition that "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can either be or be conceived without God".<sup>41</sup>

In the first six propositions Spinoza is concerned with establishing the irrefragable simplicity of substance infinite in its own kind; that is the simplicity of substance of Definition 3. We find, therefore, throughout the first six propositions, the unequivocal and unimpeachable plural form "substances". This plural form would be unthinkably erroneous did substance mean only God. For God is one and only the singular would be permissible. It is on this that Sigwart and those who follow him base their interpretations. But if we distinguish between the various meanings of the term substance pointed out above, we can come to understand the meaning and order of Spinoza's propositions without having either to deny his unequivocal use of the plural form "substances" or to construe those propositions in which this plural form occurs in such a way that they have no proper place in his system. In the following discussion the difference between substance infinite only

<sup>40</sup> H. A. Wolfson, *Chronicon Spinozanum*, II, p. 92.

<sup>41</sup> *Ethics*, I, Prop. 15.

in its own kind (Def. 3) and Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6) must be clearly and constantly kept in mind. The difference may be conveniently registered by using a small 's' for the former and a capital 'S' for the latter.

Spinoza establishes in I, 1, the general relationship of modes to substance. That "substance is by its nature prior to its modes" is demonstrated by a simple reference to the definitions of substance (Def. 3) and mode (Def. 5). He needs this proposition in order to be able to demonstrate I, 5.

The absolute simplicity of substance (Def. 3) is established in I, 2, and I, 5. In I, 2, Spinoza demonstrates (by means of Def. 3 alone) that "two substances having different attributes have nothing in common with one another"; in I, 5, he proves that "in nature there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute". For the demonstration of I, 5, he needs to demonstrate the fourth proposition, that "two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another either by the difference of the attributes of the substance or by the difference of their modes"; this is demonstrated by references to Def. 3 and 5, and Ax. 1.

Propositions I, 2, and I, 5, are not redundant, as they may appear to be at first glance. All that is demonstrated in I, 2, is that *if* two substances have *different* attributes they have nothing in common. This proposition does not demonstrate however that two substances *cannot* have the *same* attribute. If one substance can have an attribute which is the *same* as the attribute which another substance has, then it would follow that such two substances would have something in common, although two substances which have *different* attributes have nothing in common. In order to establish the absolute simplicity and diversity of substances (Def. 3) it is necessary, that is, to demonstrate that two substances (Def. 3) *cannot* have the same attribute, as well as to demonstrate that two substances having *different* attributes have nothing in common. It is necessary to demonstrate I, 5, as well as I, 2.

From I, 2, and I, 5, and the axioms on causality it follows that "one substance cannot be produced by another substance" (I, 6). Since "there cannot in nature be two substances of the same attribute" (I, 5), that is to say, two which have anything in common with one another (I, 2), one substance cannot be the cause of the

other, or in other words "one cannot be produced by the other" (I, 3). Proposition I, 3, that "if two things have nothing in common with one another, one cannot be the cause of the other", is demonstrated by referring to the Axioms on causality, namely, that "the knowledge of an effect depends upon and involves the knowledge of the cause" (Ax. 3), and "those things which have nothing mutually in common with one another cannot through one another be mutually understood" (Ax. 4).

That one substance cannot be produced by another is a direct consequence of the simplicity and diversity of substances (I, 2 and 5) and the axioms on causality; utterly distinct things are according to Spinoza necessarily causally independent of one another. I, 6, does nothing more than make explicit what is already implied.

We have then established in I, 1-6, (1) the simplicity of each substance (Def. 3); (2) the diversity of each substance from every other (Def. 3); (3) the causal independence of each substance from every other (Def. 3). The propositions which establish these three points are I, 2, I, 5, and I, 6. Propositions I, 1, I, 3, and I, 4, do not contribute anything directly to the argument; they are indirectly necessary for the establishment of the other propositions referred to. And they are indirectly necessary only because it is a practice with Spinoza to convert into propositional form what he has already laid down in his Definitions and Axioms. He could have demonstrated I, 5, by direct reference to Axiom 1 and Definitions 3 and 5, instead of by indirect reference to them through Propositions I, 1, and I, 4; so too he could have demonstrated I, 6, by direct reference to Axioms 3 and 4 instead of by indirect reference to them through Proposition I, 3. Indeed this is what he does do in his *variorum* demonstration of I, 6, although he does it by a *reductio ad absurdum*, which form of argument, however, it was not necessary for him to use in order to prove the proposition directly. It is more in the style of the geometer to build up a series of propositions, the antecedent ones used for the demonstration of subsequent ones, than to have a series of propositions each one of which is immediately demonstrated by reference to the definitions and axioms. The advantages of this gradual method of procedure are considerable: the demonstrations of the propositions are more reliable because the elements entering

into the complex propositions have each been separately demonstrated; hence the possibility of error and confusion is reduced to a minimum. The simpler the intermediate steps, no matter how numerous they may be, the surer and better the demonstration. Spinoza is clearly guided by this consideration.

Once the simplicity of each substance (Def. 3) is established, once Spinoza has demonstrated what the essence of substance is, he goes on to demonstrate its two most important properties, namely (1) necessary existence (I, 7) and (2) infinity (I, 8). That "it pertains to the nature of substance to exist" is demonstrated by means of I, 6, and Def. 1; that "every substance is necessarily infinite" is demonstrated by means of I, 5, and I, 7, and Def. 2. We need not dwell on these demonstrations any further since we are concerned primarily with the development of the argument, the formal relationships of the propositions, their general structure and meaning.

Having demonstrated what is the essence of substance and what are its two most important characteristics or properties, Spinoza introduces two propositions which serve as *transitional* propositions from substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) to Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6).

The term substance, as we noted above, has, besides its twofold meaning of substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) and Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6), the meaning of entity or thing which consists of more than one attribute—but not necessarily infinite attributes. In the *transitional* propositions I, 9, and I, 10, substance has this intermediate meaning.

Spinoza states an absolutely general truth in I, 9, the general relationship of attributes to the reality of the thing constituted by them. Although he uses the term thing to denote either a substance or a mode, it is clear from the demonstration as well as from the general argument that in I, 9, he is concerned with substance. That "the more reality or being a thing possesses the more attributes belong to it" (I, 9) is demonstrated by reference to Def. 4. Unless *substance* consisting of more than one attribute is here meant by the term thing, the demonstration would be irrelevant, since attribute is defined as constituting the essence of substance and not the essence of mode—or anything else. Since



an attribute constitutes the essence of a substance consisting of only one attribute, the essence of a complex substance (entity or thing) is constituted by a number of attributes corresponding to the complexity of the substance. Furthermore, since that which constitutes the essence of substance also constitutes its reality, if A has more attributes than B it has a correspondingly greater reality than B.

In I, 10, Spinoza is concerned with demonstrating an absolutely general truth about the independence within a complex substance of each of the attributes which constitute it; that is that "each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself". In I, 2, and I, 5, he has established the simplicity of substance (Def. 3) consisting of only one attribute; in I, 10, he establishes the simplicity of attribute (substance) within a complex substance. The demonstration consists in referring to the Definitions of substance and attribute: since an attribute constitutes the essence of substance (Def. 4), the attribute must be conceived through itself (Def. 3). We have already discussed what this demonstration implies about the identity of attribute and substance; we need not therefore refer to it again here.

The scholium to I, 10, is interesting and important. It reads:

It is apparent that although two attributes may be conceived as really distinct—that is to say, one without the assistance of the other—we cannot nevertheless thence conclude that they constitute two beings or two different substances; for this is the nature of substance that each of its attributes is conceived through itself, since all the attributes which substance possesses were always in it together, nor could one be produced by another; but each expresses the reality or being of substance. It is very far from being absurd, therefore, to ascribe to one substance a number of attributes, since nothing in nature is clearer than that each being must be conceived under some attribute and the more reality or being it has the more attributes it possesses expressing necessity or eternity and infinity.

The language of this scholium is somewhat equivocal, and on the surface confusing and obscure. It would be clear and straightforward if Spinoza used throughout the expression "beings or substances" instead of sometimes using the term substances, sometimes the term being, after his initial statement where both terms are used conjointly. Although at first confusing, this alternating usage serves to bring out, even more emphatically than a consistent

conjoint usage would, the equivalence of the two terms as here used. The preposition 'or' may or may not join equivalents (as it clearly does not join equivalents in the phrase 'may or may not'), but an alternating use of two terms for the same purpose, to designate the same thing, is only possible when they are equivalent. Otherwise such usage would inevitably result in either falsehood or nonsense. The reader should recall in this connection Spinoza's alternating usage of the terms God, Substance and Nature. Spinoza could not indicate in a more conclusive way the equivalence of these three terms.

When we get over the possible source of confusion in this scholium just pointed out, Spinoza's meaning and purpose become evident; he is preparing the reader for the next proposition (I, 11), the first proposition in the *Ethics* that is about God or Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6). Having emphasized so strongly up to now the simplicity and independence of the constitutive element in infinite Being, he is naturally very anxious to have it clearly understood that the constitutive elements do not exist in a separate elemental state in the order of nature, but that in the order of nature "all the attributes which substance possesses were always in it together". Because every substance consisting of only one attribute is an absolutely independent unity, as far as its own nature is concerned, it does not follow that two simple substances, each consisting of only one attribute, must constitute two separate, unrelated entities. If this were so, no complex entity would or could exist. Metaphysically Spinoza starts with his universe as being an absolutely infinite complex entity; but dialectically he starts with the constitutive element that can be intellectually discriminated within that entity. But the intellectually discriminated constitutive elements do not exist, metaphysically, as independent discrete universes. A discrimination made in thought, for purposes of analysis, must not be taken as implying that a separation exists in nature. It is this that Spinoza is trying to drive home in the scholium quoted.

In I, 9, and I, 10, he has made the transition from substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) to Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6). In I, 11—that "God or Substance consisting of in-

finite attributes each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists"—the results of I, 9, and I, 10, are tacitly embodied. Since the more reality a thing has the more attributes it has (I, 9), the most real of beings—the *Ens Realissimum*—will consist of infinite attributes; and since each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself (I, 10), each of the infinite attributes of God will express eternal and infinite essence.

The only proof of the existence of Substance (Def. 6) that concerns us here is the first and fundamental one. And what concerns us in it is the part of it that depends upon I, 7. (Besides I, 7, Spinoza refers in this proof to Axiom 7.) If Sigwart and his followers are right in maintaining that the first eight propositions have nothing to do with Spinoza's own conception of God, it is surpassing strange that the very existence of the God of Spinoza should be dependent upon the existence of this non-Spinozistic (even anti-Spinozistic) God. And the existence of the God of Spinoza is not alone in being dependent upon propositions which are alleged to have nothing to do with Him: that "substance does not constitute the form of man" (II, 10) is also dependent for its demonstration on I, 7. This would seem to indicate that I, 7, is a vital part of the whole Spinozistic system, for although we may possibly believe that the God of Spinoza may have something to do, at the beginning, with strange gods, it is impossible to believe that man should have anything to do with them. Man, in the *Ethics*, is defined by the nature of the God of Spinoza, not by the nature of any other God.

Furthermore, unless we distinguish between substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) and Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6), Spinoza has, in I, 11, merely repeated I, 7. This is but one of the instances of redundancy which cannot be accounted for on the current interpretations—unless it be considered sufficient explanation to say, as does Couchoud, that there are in the argument of the First Part of the *Ethics* "des répétitions, des empâtements, des 'trous'".<sup>42</sup> Besides the redundancy of I, 11, there is, on the current interpretation, an even more striking redundancy in I, 13.

<sup>42</sup> P. L. Couchoud, *Benoît de Spinoza*, p. 34.

In this proposition Spinoza proves that "Substance absolutely infinite is indivisible". This proposition follows hard and fast upon I, 12, where it is demonstrated that "no attribute of substance can be truly conceived from which it follows that substance can be divided". The redundancy of I, 13, is more striking than that of I, 11, because the juxtaposition of the two propositions (presumably) saying the same thing is so close. On our interpretation, however, Spinoza does not repeat himself at all. In I, 12, he is concerned with substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3), considered from the point of view of attribute; in I, 13, he is concerned with Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6), as he unambiguously states to be the case. In I, 12, as in I, 7, he demonstrates a characteristic or property of substance (Def. 3), and what is true of substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) is necessarily true by extension of Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6). The logic of proceeding by means of simple ideas requires that a complex idea be built up out of its simple constituents. And when a complex entity has a property by virtue of the fact that each of its constituent elements has it, that complex entity is demonstrated to have that property by first demonstrating that the constituent element has it. Hence Spinoza first demonstrates that Existence (I, 7), Infinity (I, 8) and Indivisibility (I, 12) are properties of substance consisting of only one attribute (Def. 3), and then he demonstrates, by means of these propositions, that Substance absolutely infinite, consisting of infinite attributes (Def. 6), has these properties (I, 11, and I, 13).

It is clear from what has just been said that I, 12, really belongs with I, 7, and I, 8, *i.e.*, with the propositions that demonstrate properties of substance infinite only in its own kind (Def. 3). And Spinoza would, I think, undoubtedly have placed I, 12, along with I, 7, and I, 8, if he were not intent upon developing a consecutive argument. Nowhere in the *Ethics* does he break up the sequential development of the argument merely for the sake of grouping all the propositions of a given sort together. (Appendices are, of course, excepted.) It is this fact that contributes greatly to making the *Ethics* such hard reading. For the demonstration of I, 11, propositions I, 7-10, are indispensable; but I, 12, is quite unnecessary.

The two meanings of substance, for the recognition of which we have been arguing throughout, are sharply juxtaposed once more in I, 14. This proposition reads: "Besides God no substance can be nor be conceived." That by substance in this proposition Spinoza means substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3), and not Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6), is made clear more than once in the course of the demonstration of the proposition. It reads:

Since God is Being absolutely infinite of whom no attribute can be denied which expresses the essence of Substance (Def. 6) and since He necessarily exists (I, 11) it follows that if there were *any* substance besides God it will be explained by some *attribute* of God, and thus two substances would exist possessing the same *attribute* which (I, 5) is absurd (*italics mine*).

If by substance in this proposition Spinoza did not mean substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) he would have had to say that "if there were any substance besides God it would have to be explained by *infinite* attributes of God and thus two substances with the same *infinite* attributes would exist etc." Also, his reference to I, 5, shows that he was referring to Definition 3 when he spoke of substance; when he speaks of God or Substance absolutely infinite he unfailingly refers to Definition 6.

In the opening sentence of the demonstration to I, 15, the distinction between Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6) and substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) is again evidenced. This sentence reads: "Besides God (Def. 6) there is no substance, nor can any be conceived (I, 14) that is to say (*Def. 3*) nothing which is in itself and is conceived through itself."

The central doctrines which Spinoza establishes concerning the nature of God (in the propositions we have discussed) are (1) that God exists, and (2) that He is a unity. We have sufficiently remarked on the demonstration of His existence; we shall therefore say a few words more about His unity, summarizing what has already been said.

In I, 5, Spinoza establishes the doctrine that two substances (Def. 3) cannot have the same attribute. It is by means of this proposition that he demonstrates that "Besides God, no substance can be nor be conceived" (I, 14). For if any substance were to exist outside of God, it (Def. 3) would have an attribute which

was also an attribute of God (since God consists of infinite attributes); and therefore two substances would exist having the same attribute, something that is proved impossible in I, 5. Since the same argument can be repeated for the infinite attributes of God, it follows that there is only one God (I, 14, corol. 1), that is, one Substance consisting of infinite attributes (Def. 6).

In I, 10, Spinoza restates the irrefragable simplicity and identity of every attribute (substance) within a complex substance consisting of more than one attribute. Unless this is established the proof of the existence of a Substance consisting of *infinite* attributes (I, 11) fails to have any real significance. For if the attributes are not absolutely distinct one from the other within a complex substance consisting of more than one, the statement that Substance consists of infinite attributes has no more value than the statement that Substance consists of only one. If all attributes within a complex entity have something in common, then that common element most truly expresses its essence. It is for this reason that Spinoza takes the very greatest care to establish the simplicity and diversity of each attribute (substance), both when it is the attribute of substance consisting of only one attribute (I, 2 and I, 5) and when it is an attribute of substance consisting of more than one or of infinite attributes (I, 10).

The central proposition of the First Part of the *Ethics* is I, 15, that "Whatever is, is in God and nothing can either be or be conceived without God". It is the proposition to which all the preceding propositions lead up, step by step, and the proposition from which all subsequent propositions are derived. It is, in pictorial language, the apex to which we climb up on one side by means of the first fourteen propositions and from which we gradually descend by means of the remaining fourteen propositions—because strictly speaking the First Part ends with I, 29. (Propositions 30–36 do not formally belong to the First Part, because they are not exclusively concerned with the general characteristics of God, which is its legitimate subject-matter; for example, I, 30–32, belong with the Second Part, for only there is it demonstrated that one of the attributes of God is thought.)

If we consider the First Part to end with I, 29, we have ex-

emplified in the order of the propositions perfect logical symmetry—fourteen propositions leading up to the culminating proposition, and fourteen leading away from it. I, 16–20, demonstrate properties of God’s essence; I, 21–23, demonstrate properties of the infinite attributes, that is the nature of their infinite modes; 24–25 demonstrate the nature of the things produced by God and their causal relation to Him, 26–27 the consequences that follow from being so causally related to God; in I, 28, we reach the final step in our gradual declension from God’s absolutely infinite nature—we reach the particular finite mode; and in I, 29, the ultimate causal dependence of all things, finite and infinite, upon God is re-asserted. In these fourteen propositions there is a gradual declension from the absolutely infinite nature of God or Substance to the finite nature of particular modes; which is a beautiful counterbalance for the gradual ascension in the first fourteen propositions from substance infinite in its own kind to Substance absolutely infinite.

*Conclusion.*—There can be no doubt that the geometrical order of demonstration is admirably suited for precise statement and exact logical inference. In these respects, it has great advantages over any other form of exposition. But that it has also serious disadvantages, when used as a medium for philosophy, cannot be denied. It was a major difficulty Spinoza had to contend with in demonstrating, in the manner of a geometer, his doctrine on God.

The attributes of God, we have throughout maintained, have all the characteristics that substances have; attributes and substances, we have claimed, are denotatively equivalent; only connotatively do they differ. Accordingly, we may substitute the term substance (Def. 3) for the term attribute wherever the latter occurs. Making this substitution in the definition of God—which we may rightly consider a test-case for all such possible substitutions—it will read: “By God, I understand a Being absolutely infinite, that is to say, Substance consisting of infinite substances, each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence.” I have already proved that attribute and substance (Def. 3) have precisely the same characteristics and function in Spinoza’s system when considered by themselves. What remains to be proved is that the unity of God is preserved when we make the substitution our

analysis justifies, if not demands. This I shall do now. I shall show that when we read the definition of God in the way just given, we are no more drawn to the inference that He is *not* one, that He is merely the sum of an infinite number of infinite parts, than we are drawn to this inference by the definition of Him as originally given by Spinoza.

Attributes are distinguished from one another in the way extension is different from thought; and the infinite other attributes are analogously different from these both and from each other. But in respect of absolutely infinite Substance (Def. 6) the infinite attributes are not distinguished from one another but are the same. Each attribute expresses "one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes; that is to say, in every case the same sequence of things" (II, 7, schol.). Each attribute, that is, expresses the eternal and infinite essence of God's absolutely infinite nature (I, 19, dem.; I, 20, dem.). If each attribute were distinguished from every other in respect of absolutely infinite Substance or God (Def. 6), Substance or God would perforce have no unity; He would merely be a summary term to denote the infinite collection of infinite attributes. Each attribute would limit every other, in respect of its being an expression of God's essence; and, therefore, God would be reduced from an absolutely infinite Being to a collection of merely infinite beings. There would be an infinite series of 'finitely' infinite gods instead of one absolutely infinite God. Attributes, consequently, are no more to be conceived of as being separated and separable parts of God's nature than bodies are to be conceived of as being separated and separable parts of extended substance.<sup>43</sup> We must, as already suggested, sedulously distinguish between a dialectical separation made in thought for the purposes of analysis and a metaphysical separation which is asserted to exist in fact. The unity of God is not disrupted by His infinite number of infinite attributes; on the contrary, they leave it intact, for the infinite attributes, whether they be considered distributively or collectively, express His eternal and infinite essence. The relation of attribute infinite in its own kind

<sup>43</sup> See Spinoza's lengthy discussion of this point in his scholium to I, 15.



to Substance absolutely infinite is parallel to the relation of finite modes to their attributes.<sup>44</sup>

There are profound difficulties inherent in Spinoza's conception of the unity of God—difficulties celebrated in the Problem of the One and the Many, but it must be admitted that the geometrical order of demonstration, for reasons already indicated, accentuates them to a serious degree. We may justly lay at the door of the exotic form of philosophic discourse Spinoza was so singularly devoted to an important measure of the blame for the misunderstanding his metaphysics has suffered from. When we come to state the compatibility of qualitative diversity with essential unity—the compatibility of the many with the one—, we reach a point where exact expression is impossible; it must be left to the powers of each individual to grasp the idea that at most can only be adumbrated. In order to state and express we must analyze and distinguish,—a fatal necessity when we deal with the problem of the many and the one. We should do well to confess, with Spinoza, that we are ignorant of the means whereby the parts are really associated so as to maintain the whole in such a way that no separation between part and whole exists.<sup>45</sup>

We have made it clear—what no one has ever denied—that we are not without a problem on our hands when we speak of God as consisting of infinite *attributes*; and we have indicated how that problem is to be understood in Spinoza and how it may be solved. But what has this to do with what we set out to prove, namely, that the unity of God is left intact when we take the definition of God to read that He is a Being “consisting of infinite *substances*”? To go over some of the ground covered earlier: each attribute expresses the infinite and eternal essence of God; and the modes of each attribute must be conceived through that attribute alone of which they are modes. Therefore, when we begin to explain the order of Nature through one attribute we must continue to explain the *whole* of Nature through that one attribute alone, since “the modes of any attribute have God for a cause only in so far as He is considered under that attribute of which they are modes,

<sup>44</sup> Hence the reference to I, 15, schol.; which is most profitably read in conjunction with the Axioms and Lemmas after II, 13.

<sup>45</sup> See Letter XXXII.

and not in so far as He is considered under any other attribute" (II, 6). Thus, if we start with the modes which are ideas "we must explain the order of the whole of Nature or the connection of causes by the attribute of thought alone" (II, 7, schol., and II, 5). Likewise, if we start with modes which are extended things (II, 7, schol.; II, 6). "And so with the other attributes" (II, 7, schol.), because, to put it in universal terms, "each attribute is conceived by itself and without any other" (II, 6, dem.; I, 10). When we substitute the term substance for the term attribute in the definition of God we do not say anything less, but neither do we imply anything more. God's unity is just the same whether we speak of attributes or whether we speak of substances since, like each attribute, each "substance is in itself and is conceived through itself" (Def. 3), and modes are in substance, through which also they must be conceived (Def. 5). The problem of God's unity is the same whether He is defined in terms of substances or of attributes, and so is the solution.

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