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## SPINOZA'S MONISM\*

William Charlton

At the beginning of his discussion of monism in the *Physics*,<sup>1</sup> Aristotle lists a number of different possible versions of the thesis that "all things are one." One of these is espoused by Spinoza. In *Ethics* I.14 and Coroll. 1 Spinoza says that there is, and can be, only one substance. My aim in this paper is to reconstruct and evaluate the argument by which he reaches this position.

The outline of the argument is clear enough:

- (a) There cannot be two substances with the same attribute (E.I.5, I.8. Sch. 2).
- (b) It belongs to the nature of anything which is a substance to exist (E.I.7, I.8. Sch. 2).
- (c) Hence it belongs to the nature of a substance with all possible attributes to exist (E.I.11).
- (d) Hence there cannot be a second substance (if there were, it would have an attribute in common with the substance with all possible attributes, and there would then be two substances with the same attributes) (E.I.14).

(d) here appears to follow from (a) and (c), the premises actually used in the proof of E.I.14. (c) is derived from (b) with the aid of a definition of God as "a being which is absolutely infinite," and although, as we shall see, the derivation is rapid and questionable, we can understand Spinoza's thinking it natural. But the part of the argument which concerns (a) and (b) is puzzling. For what does Spinoza mean by a "substance" (*substantia*)? If he is using this word in the traditional way, as an equivalent of Aristotle's *ousia*, he is using it to express a notion which is tradi-

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<sup>1</sup> *Phys.* I. 185a20-26.

tionally thought to apply to material objects. Aristotle reckons sortal concepts like the concept of a man or a horse as substance-concepts.<sup>2</sup> The ordinary educated person of Spinoza's time would have considered such things as individual men as paradigm examples of what is meant by a "substance" (see Ep. 3, discussed below). But if Spinoza is starting with a traditional concept of substance, propositions (a) and (b) seem plainly false, and it is hard to see how he can have believed them defensible. On the other hand if we ascribe to Spinoza any concept of substance according to which (a), (b), or (d) is not obviously false, it is hard to see why he offers the arguments for these propositions which we in fact find.

In the treatise *On the Improvement of the Intellect*, Spinoza declares that we have the idea of a being which is "unique and infinite, that is, it is all being (*esse*), and besides it there is nothing."<sup>3</sup> If Spinoza were to define substance in these terms:

$x$  is a substance =<sub>df</sub>  $x$  is unique, infinite, and the totality of all that exists,

that there can be only one substance would be true by definition. But it is plain that this is not how he defines substance. The most we can say is that, having argued that some other concept of substance applies to only one thing, he infers in E.I.15 that this one thing comprehends all that exists: "Whatever is, is in God, and without God can neither be nor be conceived." And even here Spinoza is not claiming that all things are in God in the way in which all my sisters might be in the group under the tree: the one substance is not a mere aggregate.

Leibniz has been credited with the view that if  $A$  is a substance, then whatever is true of  $A$ , even if this is expressed by a relational phrase (or, as he himself would put it, a phrase containing a "partial term"<sup>4</sup>) like "is the father of  $B$ " or "is ten miles from  $C$ ," must

<sup>2</sup> Hence to Aristotle the thesis that all things are a single substance is the thesis that they are a single man, horse, or the like: *Phys.* I. 185a23–24.

<sup>3</sup> *De Intellectus Emendatione* (DIE) 76, *Opera*, ed. C. Gebhardt (G) (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1925), II.29.17–18.

<sup>4</sup> *Opusculs et fragments inédits*, ed. Couturat (Paris: F. Alcan, 1903), p. 357, of which there is a satisfactory discussion by F. D'Agostino in "Leibniz on Compossibility and Relational Predicates," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 26 (1976), 125–38.

be true of it by virtue of some internal feature of *A*: *A*'s having some nonrelational property must be a *sufficient* condition of its being the father of *B*. Stuart Hampshire in Chapter 2 of *Spinoza* suggests that Spinoza made this part of his conception of a substance. If he did, he could have argued that there cannot be two substances which are related to one another. If *A*'s having some nonrelational property is sufficient for *A*'s being *R* to *B*, it will be sufficient for the existence of *B*, and therefore *B* will not be a distinct substance from *A*. There is, however, no argument of this kind in Spinoza.

Hampshire himself attributes to Spinoza a different argument:

If the Universe were conceived to consist of two (or more) such substances—and Descartes, in his all-embracing distinction between Thought and Extension . . . in effect made this supposition—then an explanation would be required of why just two (or more) such substances exist . . . To provide an explanation of their nature [Hampshire surely meant to write “existence”] must be to represent these two (or more) substances as the effects of causes other than themselves; but this is contrary to their definition, as being causes of themselves. [38]

There is an argument which bears some resemblance to this in E.I.8. Sch. 2, and I shall consider it below. For the present it is enough to say two things. First, Spinoza's argument is intended to prove only that there cannot be two substances with the same attribute (*ejusdem naturae*: G.II.50.20–21 and 51.20–21), whereas Hampshire's is apparently meant to prove that there cannot be two substances with different attributes, e.g., Thought and Extension. Secondly, neither argument seems to depend on the concept of a substance which I have just described.

In the passage quoted above, Hampshire says that Spinoza defines a substance as something self-caused. This view is shared by Russell,<sup>5</sup> and G. H. R. Parkinson says that this is Spinoza's definition of “the most perfect Being.”<sup>6</sup> If Hampshire and Russell are right, (b) is true by definition, and if Parkinson is right, (c) is true by definition. A glance at the *Ethics*, however, shows that this

<sup>5</sup> *Philosophy of Leibniz* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1937), Ch. IV, §16.

<sup>6</sup> *Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), Ch. IV, §1.

is not how Spinoza defines either substance or God, and that he treats (b) and (c) as theorems to be proved.

Perhaps the most common view is that Spinoza conceives a substance as a thing which exists independently of anything else. E. M. Curley says that Spinoza "simply defines substance in terms of independent existence, taken in the broadest sense."<sup>7</sup> In support of this commentators refer to Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*, I.51:

By "substance" we can understand nothing other than a thing which so exists that it stands in need of no other thing for existing. And indeed there can be understood to be only one thing which stands in need of nothing whatever (*nulla plane re*), namely God.

According to Parkinson (op. cit., p. 67) the definition of substance in *Ethics* I "approximates to that given by Descartes" here.

This interpretation is attractive because of Descartes' observation that there is only one substance which fully satisfies his description, namely God. It looks as if from this concept of substance Spinoza can derive (d), which in E.I.14 is formulated, "Besides God no substance can either be or be conceived." But Descartes can say that only God stands in need of nothing whatever, because he believes that all material things depend for their existence on the creative activity of a single personal God distinct from the universe. This is an orthodox Judaeo-Christian view, but why should Spinoza share it? Why not think that there is no god, that the universe has always existed, and that material things are all brought into existence by other material things? Why not think there are many gods? Commentators should say how Spinoza gets from Descartes' description of substance to E.I.14.

In his work on Descartes' *Principles* (*Principia* I.9 and *Appendix* II.2) Spinoza offers a proof that there is only one God which does depend on the idea that God is independent. If there were two Gods *A* and *B* each, *qua* God, would be supremely intelligent. Each, then, would have to know all about the other. But *A*'s knowledge of *B* would depend on *B*—*A* would know, say, that *B* was thinking about himself because *B* was so thinking—and

<sup>7</sup> *Spinoza's Metaphysics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), Ch. I, p. 38.

*B*'s knowledge of *A* would depend on *A*. But then neither would be independent. Hence neither would be God. But although this argument turns on God's independence, there is nothing corresponding to it in the *Ethics*. On the other hand, in *Principia* I.9 Spinoza adds that he has a way of proving "from this alone, that something of itself necessarily involves existence, that it is unique." He does not offer the proof here because it is "not easily graspable by everyone," but he is referring, I suspect, to the proof given in E.I.8. Sch. 2, which will be considered below. It may be remarked that Aquinas, when trying to prove that there is only one God, has recourse to the identity of indiscernibles;<sup>8</sup> we shall find Spinoza doing the same in E.I.4-5.

A further objection to relying on Descartes' *Princ.* I.51<sup>9</sup> is that the description of substance there does not seem to be either intended by Descartes or understood by Spinoza as a formal definition. Descartes' most formal definition runs:

Everything in which is present as in a subject, or through which exists, anything we cognize (*percipimus*), i.e., any property, quality or attribute the real idea of which is in us, is called "substance."<sup>10</sup>

It is this definition which Spinoza reproduces in his *Principia* (G.I.150), and this definition does not have, even for Judaeo-Christians, the consequence that there can be only one substance.

We can see a possible intellectual route from the definition in the *Second Replies* to the conception in *Princ.* I.51. That in which a property exists stands in no need of anything in which to exist itself. It therefore enjoys a certain kind of independence. Someone reflecting on this might proceed to a conception of something which is independent in every way. But the step from this special kind of independence to independence of every kind is considerable. Are we to believe that Descartes and Spinoza took it unconsciously? Or if they know they are taking it, why do they not say they are? We should like at least to be assured that when Descartes in *Princ.* I.51 allows created substances a relative in-

<sup>8</sup> *Summa contra Gentiles* I.42, *Summa Theologiae* I.11.3, second argument.

<sup>9</sup> Or the partly parallel passage at *Oeuvres*, ed. Adam and Tannery (AT) (Paris: L. Cerf, 1897-1913), VII.226.3-5.

<sup>10</sup> *Second Replies*, AT.VII.161.

dependence, it is independence of this special kind, independence of anything to exist in. He does not say that it is. His opinion about material substances is obscured by his belief that the physical universe is a single, homogeneous plenum. That being so, the question whether trees and houses exist independently hardly arises below the phenomenal level. I am inclined to think, however, that created substances are independent for Descartes because, as he puts it in the *First* and *Fourth Replies* (AT.VII.120–21, 221–23), they can be understood in a complete manner, or as complete things; and an *f* is a complete thing, not if the concept of an *f* is not the concept of a property, but if it is a concept of a thing with properties than which it needs no others in order to exist. The dependence which is relevant here is not that of properties on property-owners, but that of properties like circular shape on properties like being extended. It could be the same in *Princ.* I.51.

Instead of speculating on what concept of substance Spinoza might have had at the back of his mind, we should examine the definition actually provided in *Ethics* I:

By “substance” I understand that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; i.e., that the concept of which does not stand in need of a concept of any other thing from which it would have to be formed. [E.I. Def. 3]

It looks as if we are here given two characterizations, one ontological, in terms of being in, the other epistemological, in terms of being conceived through. How are we to understand these characterizations, and are they independent, or does one explain the other?

They can hardly be independent. On the one hand, any ontological characterization must be, in a sense, conceptual. To say that Rome is in Italy is not to say that it is conceived as being in Italy; but if to say that substances are in themselves is to make a philosophical point, it is to say that they are conceived as being in themselves. On the other hand, there are different ways in which one thing can be conceived through another, different ways in which the concept of *x* can depend on the concept of *y*. To say that *x* is, or is conceived as being, in *y* is to say how it is

conceived through  $\gamma$ . What, then, does Spinoza mean by "being in"?

Most writers who have raised this question have been trying to see, not how Spinoza arrives at the doctrine that there is only one substance, but how he conceives the relationship between this substance and the finite modes which he identifies with particular things like men and trees. His definitions of substance and mode in *Ethics* I are certainly relevant to this problem. But for our purposes we should be wary of reading back his conception of this relationship into the definitions.

In his chapter "The Definitions of Substance and Mode," Curley appears to suggest (he does not put the point in so many words) that by "being in" Spinoza meant "being somehow dependent on." It is clear from E.I.18, 25, etc., that Spinoza thinks the finite modes depend causally on the one substance. He holds also (E.I. Ax. 4) that the knowledge of an effect, and hence, if "knowledge" (*cognitio*) and "concept" (*conceptus*) are interchangeable (they are interchanged in E.I. Def. 3 and 8. Sch. 2, G.I.50.5) the concept of an effect, depends on that of its cause. The relationship of mode to substance, however, is not just any relationship which entails conceptual dependence. For one finite mode is caused by another, and the knowledge of the first depends on knowledge of the second (see E.II.19. Dem., etc.), but the first is not a mode of the second. If "to be in" were just "to be somehow dependent on," when Spinoza defines a mode as something which is in something else, he need not suppose that the something else, the *aliud*, is a substance. Yet surely in E.I. Def. 5 and the parallel definition in E.I.8. Sch. 2 he does suppose this. Moreover, to interpret "being in" as meaning "being somehow dependent on" is very forced. (Aristotle in *Phys.* IV 210a21-22 notes such a use of "in," but as an idiomatic oddity.)

For light on how Spinoza intends us to understand Definition 3, it is natural to look first at Ep. 2. He there explains "attribute" in the same terms, and adds examples:

I understand by "attribute" all that which is conceived through itself and in itself, so that its concept does not involve the concept of another thing. For example extension is conceived through itself and in itself; but not so motion. Motion is conceived in another thing, and its concept involves extension.



Spinoza's starting point here, I suggest, is that motion is conceived, and has to be defined, as a state or change *of* something extended. To generalize from this: *A* is conceived through *B* if *B* comes into the account of *A*; *B* comes into the account of *A* if *A* is defined as a state of *B*; and to say that *A* must be defined as, or essentially is, a state *of B*, is to say that *A*, if it exists at all, exists *in B*.

Support for this interpretation can be obtained from Descartes, *Princ.* I.53, since just the same thought is expressed there:

Everything else besides extension which can be attributed to body presupposes extension, and is only a certain mode (*modus*) of extended thing: just as all the things we find in the mind are only different modes of thinking. Thus shape, for example, cannot be understood except in an extended thing, or motion except in an extended space; or imagination, sense-perception, or will except in a thinking thing. On the other hand extension can be understood without shape or motion, and thought without imagination or sense-perception.

That is, shape and motion, imagination and sense-perception, must be defined in terms of extension and thought, and not vice versa.<sup>11</sup>

I suggest, then, that we explain Spinoza's concept of substance in this way. If some things have to be defined in terms of others, then (unless we allow a disastrous regress) there must be other things which are not definable in terms of anything further. If some things are conceived as states or modifications of other things, there must be others which are not conceived as states or modifications of anything further. Our concepts of these other

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<sup>11</sup> Does Descartes also think that extension and thought can exist without these, or any other, modes? He says (*Princ.* I.56) that there are no modes, strictly speaking, in God, and an infinitely extensive body, such as he takes the physical world to be, might have no shape. On the other hand he calls cognition and volition "modes" of thinking and pure intellection a mode of cognizing (*Princ.* I.32), and God has pure intellection. A Cartesian mode seems to be related to an attribute like extension or thought as determinate to determinable and to a substance as property to property-owner. I doubt if Descartes would allow that anything can have indeterminate attributes, but since in the case of God the determinations are essential and not accidental, he prefers "attribute" as a term for them to "mode."

things are substance-concepts. If  $c$  is a substance-concept, our only concept of what  $c$  applies to is  $c$  itself. Hence substances may be said to be conceived through, or to exist in, themselves. What I here call a "substance-concept" Spinoza, defining an attribute as "that which the intellect cognizes concerning substance as constituting its essence,"<sup>12</sup> might prefer to call an "attribute-concept." Suppose the concept of  $f$ -ness is primitive in the way just explained: suppose we conceive  $f$ -ness, and do not conceive it as something in or of anything further. Then anything which satisfies the concept of  $f$ -ness, any  $f$  thing, will be a substance; our notion of  $f$ -ness will be a notion of the essential nature of  $f$  things; and hence  $f$ -ness will be an attribute of them.

If this interpretation is correct, the concept of substance from which Spinoza starts is, after all, a traditional one. It is in line with Descartes'<sup>13</sup> and even with Aristototele's. In *Metaphysics*  $\Gamma$  1003b5–10,  $Z$  1028a18–20,  $\Theta$  1045b29, etc., Aristotle says that other things are affections or qualities or destructions or what not of substances, and substances are what these other things are of. In other places (e.g., *Posterior Analytics* I 73b5–8) he says that substances are "said of themselves," whereas other things (except in special cases described in *Topics* I 103b25–39) are said of things other than themselves. Spinoza, indeed, accepts as attribute-notions only the concepts of extension and thought. Aristotle does not consider these *ousia*-concepts at all,<sup>14</sup> and classes as substance-concepts ordinary sortal concepts like that of a man. The divergence between them, however, is less about what it means to describe a concept as a concept of a substance or attribute than about which of our concepts ought to be so described. Moreover, Spinoza does not simply assume that the concept of a man is not a substance-concept; we shall see him arguing this.

<sup>12</sup> "Id quod intellectus de substantia percipit, tanquam eiusdem essentiam constituens" E.I. Def. 4. One may detect an echo of Descartes' account of an attribute in *Princ.* I.53: "quae ipsius naturam essentiamque constituit."

<sup>13</sup> Descartes' concept of substance is a controversial topic; but Spinoza's definition is in line with the words of Descartes, interpreted in the light of *Princ.* I.53 and 61–62.

<sup>14</sup> On extension see, e.g., *Met.*  $Z$  1029a14–15, and on thought *Met.*  $\Theta$  1048b18–36. The notion of extension is a formal concept of a *genos ton onton*, and the notion of thought is an *energeia*-concept. Aristotle could allow, at most, that "an extended thing" and "a thinking thing" express respectively the matter and the form of a substance such as a man.

The real evidence that Spinoza is operating with a quasi-Aristotelian conception of substance lies in the arguments he actually gives for our propositions (a) and (b). To these I now turn. Spinoza has two separate lines of argument. In E.I.4-7 he tries to establish (a) first and to derive (b) from it; in E.I.8. Sch. 2 he tries to derive (a) from (b) and offers a fresh argument for (b). We may start with the argument of E.I.4-7.

E.I.4 may be translated:

Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another either by diversity of attributes of substances or by diversity of affections of substances.

*Proof:* All things which are, are either in themselves or in something else (Ax. I), that is (Defs. 3 and 5), there is nothing outside the intellect except substances and their affections. Therefore there is nothing outside the intellect by which a plurality of things can be distinguished from one another, except substances or, what is (Def. 4) the same, their attributes, and their affections.

We must first consider what Spinoza means by "are distinguished from one another." "How are *A* and *B* distinguished from each other?" might mean:

- (i) "What makes *A* and *B* two different things?"
- (ii) "How do we tell that *A* and *B* are two different things?"
- (iii) "How do we tell *A* apart from *B*? When both are presented to us, how do we know which is which?"

The difference between (ii) and (iii) is exploited by Max Black in "The Identity of Indiscernibles,"<sup>15</sup> and illustrated at the end of *The Comedy of Errors*. The Duke knows, in the last scene, that Antipholus of Syracuse and Antipholus of Ephesus are two different men, but he can still say, "I know not which is which." Spinoza's answer, that *A* and *B* must be distinguished either by different essential or by different nonessential properties, is a satisfactory answer to (iii). But since he is about to argue that there cannot be two substances with the same essential nature, he has to claim,

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<sup>15</sup> *Mind*, 61 (1952), 153-64.

and clearly does claim, that it is also an answer to (i): the only thing which can make *A* a different thing from *B* is a different essential nature or a different nonessential property.

Why does Spinoza think this? The proof he gives requires the premise, "If *A* is different from *B* there must be something real, something 'extramental,' which makes it different." An opponent might say that we recognize two ways in which things can differ, two senses, if you like, of "different." They can be instances or examples of different things: *A* an instance of spherical and *B* an instance of cylindrical shape, or *A* a specimen of a frog and *B* a specimen of a toad. Or they can be different instances of the same thing: different spheres or frogs. In the second case there is nothing which makes them different. Their difference is a brute fact, and a precondition of anything's making them different in the first way. Spinoza thinks the second way of being different is spurious or reducible to the first. Things can be different instances only through being instances of different things. What leads him to this view can be gathered, I think, from his proof of E.I.5.

Spinoza is there arguing that "there cannot be in reality two or more substances with the same nature or attribute" (our proposition (a)). Suppose, he says, there are. Then they will have (by Prop. 4) to be distinguished by their nonessential properties or "affections." But,

since a substance is by nature prior to its affections (Prop. 1), it follows that, when the affections are set aside, and the substance is considered in itself, that is (Def. 3 and Ax. 6), considered truly, it will not be able to be conceived to be distinguished from any other, that is (Prop. 4), there will not be able to be several substances, but only one.

The reference to conceiving, I suggest, is a clue to why Spinoza accepts E.I.4. If *A* and *B* have different properties, or are instances of different things, there is what we might call a "conceptual" difference between them. A concept of a property *A* has and *B* lacks is a concept of how *A* differs from *B*. Spinoza can say that insofar as we have a concept of how *A* differs from *B*, *A* must differ from *B* in its properties. But because differentiating properties are the only kinds of difference which are conceivable in the sense that we can form concepts of them, he thinks that any other kind

of difference is inconceivable in the sense of being impossible. Because conceptual differences are the only differences of which we have straightforward concepts, he thinks that they are the only differences we can suppose there to be.

A critic might object to this inference and argue that we could not have the notions of a concept and a conceptual difference unless we had the correlative notions of an object and what is called "numerical" difference. But if we grant Spinoza E.I.4, does the proof of (a) in E.I.5 go through? It might seem at first that Spinoza's argument is quite superficial: "If we ignore what differentiates two things, we shall no longer see any difference between them, and must conclude that they are not, after all, two but only one." If we did conclude this we should be wrong. But I think Spinoza's reasoning goes a little deeper. Since, as he puts it, substances are prior to their affections, since nonessential properties exist, if they exist at all, because they are had or exemplified by substances, then it cannot be because *A* is, say, spherical and *B* cylindrical that *A* is different from *B*. Rather, *A* must already be different from *B* if these two properties are to be exemplified by them. There is surely something in this. It is true of any nonessential *f* (whether *f* is nonrelational like being red or relational like being a mile north of *C*) that if *A* is *f* and *B* is not *f*, we can infer that *A* is nonidentical with *B*. But there is no nonessential *f* (not even a property which *A* happens to have and *B* to lack) such that from *A*'s being *f* we can infer the *A* is nonidentical with *B* or vice versa.<sup>16</sup> Suppose that at *t*<sub>1</sub> I am in London and you are not, and at *t*<sub>2</sub> you are in London and I am not. It is absurd to say that being in London makes me different from you at *t*<sub>1</sub> and not being in London makes me different from you at *t*<sub>2</sub>. I must be different from you in some constant way throughout.<sup>17</sup> I am

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. G. E. Moore, "External and Internal Relations," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 20 (1919-20), 40-62.

<sup>17</sup> I am always at a place at which I am, but that is because it is a necessary truth that if I am a mile north of *C*, I am a mile north of *C*. It is not a necessary truth that if I am a mile north of *C*, you are a mile north of *C*. Is it a necessary truth that if I am a mile north of *C* and you are nonidentical with me, you are not a mile north of *C*? I think not. If *A* and *B* meet at a place a mile north of *C*, they must be different yet both there. It may be a necessary truth that if *A* fills a cubic yard, and *A* is a different body from *B*, *B* does not fill that cubic yard. But we need not conclude that bodies are individuated by the yards they fill.

inclined, then, to concede to Spinoza that *if* things can differ only in having different properties, if we reject the notion of numerical difference as a brute fact, there cannot be two things which differ only in having different nonessential properties.

The derivation of (b) from (a) in E.I.6–7 is comparatively simple. If a substance were produced by another substance, both would have to have the same nature. Since, by E.I.5, there cannot be two substances with the same nature, it follows that a substance cannot be produced by another substance (E.I.6). Neither, *a fortiori*, can a substance be produced by anything else (E.I.6. Coroll.). Hence a substance must be a cause of itself as defined in E.I. Def. 1:

By “a cause of itself” I understand that, the essence of which involves existence, or that, the nature of which cannot be conceived except as existing.

The last step of this argument is dubious. If a substance is *produced*, if it even *comes into existence*, then if it is not produced by anything else, Spinoza may be excused for saying that it is a cause of itself. But what if a substance should exist without ever having come into existence? Why say that it causes itself, or that its essence involves existence, rather than that its existence is a brute fact?

Axiom 4 runs: “Knowledge of an effect depends on knowledge of the cause, and involves the same.” This means, presumably: “If *A* is the cause of *B*, knowledge of *B* depends on, and involves, knowledge of *A*.” It might be thought that if Spinoza were to assert the converse—“If knowledge of *B* depends on knowledge of *A*, *A* is the cause of *B*”—then from his definition of substance as that which is conceived through itself he could infer that a substance is caused by itself. He does not, however, offer this argument, and I do not know whether he would have thought it satisfactory. What underlies E.I.7, I think, is reasoning which can be seen in Descartes’ *Replies to Objections*:

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I should prefer to say that yards are individuated by their fillers. I have argued elsewhere (“Time,” *Philosophy*, 56 (1981), 149–60) that we can hold that any actual cubic yard is the yard, or one of the yards, for which some body extends, and still deny that the world is a plenum.

Nothing exists concerning which we may not ask why it exists, whether we are enquiring into its efficient cause, or, if it does not have one, demanding why it does not need one. [*First Replies*, AT.VII.108.19–21]

In the case of God,

since we see that this fact . . . that he has no cause separate from himself derives not from nothing, but from the real immensity of his power [i.e., it follows logically from his being immensely powerful], it is wholly permissible for us to think that he stands to himself somewhat as an efficient cause stands to its effect. [AT.VII.111.2–7]

To Arnauld Descartes adds:

Those who follow the guidance of natural light alone spontaneously form here a concept common to both an efficient and a final cause. [AT.VII.238.22–25; French version: un certain concept qui participe de la cause efficiente et de la formelle, et qui est commun à l'une et à l'autre]

For Spinoza, that a substance is not produced by anything else is proved partly from a logical feature of substances—that they are prior to their affections—and partly from the principle that things can be different only through having different properties, a principle which also, he claims, can be derived from the definitions of a substance and a mode. Hence it can be said that the logical character of substance-concepts provides a formal-cause-type explanation of why substances do not have efficient causes separate from themselves. Whether those who abandon themselves to natural light spontaneously produce here the concept of something which is both a formal and an efficient cause is a psychological question outside our province. But I suggest that Spinoza produces this monstrous concept in E.I.7. He thinks that if it is provable from the logical character of substance-concepts that substances are not caused by anything else, it follows that the essence of a substance involves existence.

In 1661 Spinoza sent Oldenburg a draft of the propositions we have been considering, and Oldenburg objected against (a):

Two men are two substances, and with the same attribute, since the one and the other both have reason. From this I conclude that there are two substances with the same attribute. [Ep. 3]

In his reply Spinoza says that he cannot answer this point because of shortage of time (*temporis brevitatem*, Ep. 4). I doubt if he was so busy that he could not have corrected an elementary misunderstanding. If, for instance, he was thinking as some of his commentators suggest, it would not have taken him long to say, "Men are not substances because they stand in need of other things to exist, such as food and air." He must have thought some fuller response was needed. Perhaps he already had in mind the proof, "not easily graspable," or, no doubt, formulable, mentioned in *Principia* I.9. At any rate five years later, in Ep. 34, we find him offering, as "what seems to me at this time the best way" of proving monism, a completely different argument which does not rest on the dubious principle of E.I.4. It is this argument which appears in E.I.8. Sch. 2. For this and other reasons we may think that Spinoza himself had less than complete confidence in the slightly facile line of reasoning which runs through E.I.4-7, and that his monism really rests on the considerations in that scholium.

In E.I.8. Sch. 2, as I said earlier, (a) is derived from (b). Since the proof of (b) in E.I.7 depends on (a), he needs a fresh proof of (b), and having restated his definitions of substance and modification he offers this:

We can have true ideas of modifications which do not exist, because even if they do not actually exist outside the intellect, their essence is comprehended in something else in such a way that they can be conceived through that. But the truth of substances is not outside the intellect except in the substances themselves, because they are conceived through themselves. If, then, someone were to say that he has a clear and distinct, that is, a true idea of a substance, and yet doubts whether such a substance exists, that, by Hercules, would be the same as saying that he has a true idea, but nevertheless wonders whether it is false.

This argument is based on considerations about true ideas, and seems to have two steps. In DIE.69-70 (G.I.26), Spinoza says:



A true thought is distinguished from a false one not just by an extrinsic denomination [sc., agreement with reality] but above all by an intrinsic one. For if a mechanic conceives some machine in due order, even though such a machine never existed or will exist, his thought is nonetheless true . . . Hence it follows that there is something real in ideas by which the true are distinguished from the false . . . That thought is said to be true which involves objectively [i.e., which has a part of what it is an idea of] some principle which does not have a cause and which is known through itself and in itself.

When Spinoza says in our Scholium that we can have true ideas of nonexistent modes, he doubtless has in mind cases like that of the mechanic. The mechanic's idea of the pulley which has not yet been made is true because the pulley is conceived in accordance with the laws of mechanics, which describe the nature of extension. It is conceived as having the specification which would enable it to do the required work if it were made. The uncaused principle involved in the mechanic's thought is the nature of extended substance. This guarantees the truth of his conception because the laws of mechanics really hold, that is, extended substance really exists. But now, what of our idea of extended substance itself? If that is true, the only thing which can make it true is the existence of extended substance, the very thing of which it is an idea, so what it is an idea of must exist.

We might agree about that, but say that the question whether the idea is true or not remains open. The second step of Spinoza's argument is intended to show that this is not an open question. To understand it we must draw again on the DIE.

Certitude is nothing but the essence of something existing in the mind (*ipsa essentia objectiva*); that is, the mode of thinking by which we perceive a real essence is certitude itself. [DIE.35, G.I.15]

According to Spinoza, having a clear and distinct idea of something is the same as being certain. Being certain of what? In DIE.96 (G.I.35) it is recommended that we define a circle as

that figure which is described by any line of which one end is fixed and the other mobile.

If we conceive a circle in this way we shall be certain, no doubt, that this is what a circle is. But what does this knowledge amount to? Not just to the knowledge that this is what the English word "circle" signifies. I think Spinoza would say we are certain that if a line with one end fixed were rotated, a figure with the properties we assign to a circle would be produced. Our idea of a circle is not chimerical (on the Chimera see DIE.54, G.I.20), but an idea of a genuine, physical possibility. Similarly the mechanic can be certain that his machine is a genuine possibility.

What, then, if we have a clear and distinct idea of a substance? The idea will not, presumably, be the idea defined in E.I. Def. 3. That may be clear and distinct, but it is purely formal, an idea of the logical character of substance-concepts. The argument here concerns substance-concepts themselves, such as (in Spinoza's view) the concept of an extended thing, the concept of a conscious thing. We are certain that a circle or a pulley is a genuine possibility because its possibility—Spinoza might prefer to say (E.II.8), the circle or the pulley itself—is contained in the nature of extended substance. But the possibility of extended substance itself, the possibility of something to which geometry and the laws of physics apply, cannot be contained in anything else. It must be contained in its own nature. Hence, Spinoza seems to infer, if we are certain that it is a genuine possibility we must be certain that it pertains to its nature to exist.

Two questions arise about this argument. First, *is* extended substance a genuine possibility over and above, or distinct from, extended things like pulleys? To ask whether a certain machine or organism is a genuine possibility is to ask whether it could be produced in accordance with natural laws. We cannot ask whether things to which geometry and natural laws apply can be produced in accordance with natural laws, unless this is to ask whether natural laws permit any sort of extended thing to be produced at all. If Spinoza thinks there is a question about extended substance over and above the questions about pulleys, chimeras, etc., he must be employing one or both of two concepts. First, whether a machine which will do a certain job is possible depends on the nature of the material available, and ultimately, perhaps, on the nature of the most primitive kinds of material

in the universe. It might seem legitimate to ask about the physical possibility of a material which is not produced from any other kind of material. Alternatively, Spinoza could be thinking about the totality of extended things, the physical universe as a whole. This cannot be produced out of anything in accordance with physical laws.

The second question is how we should interpret the claim that it belongs to the nature of extended substance to exist. There are two ways in which it might be reformulated.

- (i) It is part of the concept of extended substance that there should be something which satisfies that concept.
- (ii) It is part of the concept of extended substance that anything which satisfies it should exist at all times, i.e., should not come into existence or cease to exist.

These formulations sound very different, and our first inclination may be to say they are formulations of quite different theses. Spinoza, I think, identifies them. When in E.I.7 he says that existence belongs to the nature of substance, it is natural to understand his claim along the lines of (i). He refers to Definition 1, in which a cause of itself is defined as that the nature of which cannot be conceived except as existing. In our present argument, on the other hand, he seems to be thinking along the lines of (ii). That existence belongs to the nature of extended substance is supposed to be something we see in seeing that extended substance is a genuine possibility. If something which cannot be produced is to be a genuine possibility, it must belong to the nature of such a thing to exist at all times. Only then will its not being producible be no bar to its possibility. But neither here nor later is (ii) distinguished from (i).

In E.II.45 and Sch., having said that the idea of any particular thing as actually existent involves the essence of God, Spinoza continues:

I am speaking of the very existence of particular things insofar as they are in God. For even if each particular thing is determined by another to existing in a certain way, still, the force by which it

perseveres in existing proceeds from the eternal necessity of God's nature. On this see I.24. Coroll.

In that Corollary we read:

God is the cause not only of the beginning to exist of things, but of their persevering in existence . . . [for] it is to his nature alone that it pertains to exist.

We might take Spinoza to mean that particular things continue to exist—the universe does not suddenly cease to exist—because it is the nature of extended substance to exist at all times. But in the next proposition, E.I.25. Sch., he reverts to the thesis of E.I.7:

In that sense in which God is said to be cause of himself, he should also be said to be cause of all things.

It looks as if we may say indifferently that particular things continue to exist because substance is cause of itself, or that substance is cause of itself in that it belongs to the nature of substance to exist at all times. (i) and (ii) are equated.

The equation is possible because (ii) also involves a confusion of formal and efficient causes. In reply to the question "Why do particular things continue to exist? Why does not history give out?" we may invoke two principles: that causal explanation is required only for changes, not for stayings unchanged, and that for any change there must be a cause. Given these principles we can say that particular things continue to exist so long as there is in fact no cause of their ceasing to exist, so long as nothing destroys them, and the universe as a whole continues to exist because there is nothing outside it to destroy it. The principles to which we are here appealing are rather metaphysical than physical, and our explanation is rather logical than causal. But Spinoza, insensitive to these differences, and feeling that it would be a violation of a fundamental law of nature if history gave out, thinks that it pertains to the nature of extended substance to exist.

That (ii) is nevertheless attractive is shown by the inability to detach himself from it of so staunch a Humean as J. L. Mackie.

Speaking of self-maintaining processes like the spinning of a top, Mackie says:

The earlier phase of a self-maintaining process surely brings about, or helps to bring about, the later phase. If the concept of cause and effect does not yet cover them, it should: we can recognise immanent as well as transeunt causation. But if this extension is accepted, can we reasonably stop there? Should we not extend the concept still further to include the relation between the earlier and later phases of the existence of any material object?<sup>18</sup>

The immanent causation to which Mackie refers can only be that of which Spinoza speaks in E.I.18: "God is the immanent, not the transeunt, cause of all things." Despite his use of the expression "bring about" Mackie can hardly mean that a pen's existing from  $t_1$  to  $t_2$  (his example) is the causal action by which the pen brings about its existence from  $t_2$  to  $t_3$ . Rather his thought is that it would be contrary to the nature of extended substance if phases did not have successors—and also, presumably, predecessors. The top goes on spinning and the pen existing because it is the nature of extended substance to exist at all times.

Version (ii) of our proposition (b), then, however questionable it may be in the long run, is not without appeal, and Spinoza has considerations to support it. These considerations, it may be observed, do not apply to Aristotelian substances like men and bronze circles. In the present argument, at least, Spinoza is using a restricted concept of substance as something the physical possibility of which is not contained in anything further. (This needs generalizing to cover attributes other than extension, but Spinoza gives us little guidance on how to generalize it. Perhaps we might speak of "psychological" possibility.) Even, however, if Spinoza is using "substance" in a special sense, (b)(ii) is not an empty tautology. An opponent could concede that we have concepts of primitive materials and the universe as a whole distinct from our concepts of things like pulleys without conceding that we can ask about the possibility of the former in the way we can ask about the possibility of the latter. Furthermore, (b)(ii) as an explanation of why particular things continue to exist is open to

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<sup>18</sup> *The Cement of the Universe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), Ch. VI.

serious objections, as I have tried to indicate.

Although the argument for (a) in E.I.8. Sch. 2 is presented as a sequel to the argument for (b), Spinoza seems to return to a more traditional concept of substance. The argument runs as follows:

Suppose there exist in reality twenty men; and, for the sake of greater clarity, suppose that they exist simultaneously, and have no predecessors. To give a reason why twenty men exist it will not be enough to show the cause of human nature in general. It will also be necessary to show a cause why no more and no fewer than twenty exist. For . . . there must necessarily be a cause why each exists. But this cannot . . . be contained in human nature, since the true definition of man does not involve the number twenty. [Spinoza has correctly pointed out that it cannot be part of any definition that any particular number of individuals fall under it.] Hence the cause why these twenty exist, and consequently why each exists, must necessarily be external to each. Hence we are absolutely forced to conclude that that, of the nature of which several individuals can exist, must necessarily have an external cause.

Since, "as has been shown in this Scholium," the explanation of the existence of a substance is to be found in its own nature, Spinoza can conclude that where there are several individuals of the same nature, they cannot be substances.

Before we can form an opinion of this argument we must consider what, in Spinoza's view, *is* the cause of the twenty men. Not, it seems, twenty pairs of parents, since the men "have no predecessors." There can be little doubt that the cause is extended substance, but just how is that responsible? Spinoza thinks not only that everything in the world is causally determined (E.I.28–29), but also that the actual course of world history is the only course the history of a world of extended things could have taken (E.I.33). That being so, he might think that if there are twenty men at time  $t$ , that is because it is the nature of extended substance that the world should have a history in which there are twenty men at  $t$ . But although this is an intelligible view, it involves the supposition that the men do have predecessors. There is a further awkwardness. Spinoza insists that we must say why there are exactly twenty men, and no more or fewer. A critic

might object that there is no cause of there being a certain number of individuals over and above the set of causes of each of the individuals. The cause of there being no more than twenty men is the lack of a cause for a twenty-first. This criticism would have point if Spinoza is getting back to the nature of extension through the whole history of the universe. For these reasons I am inclined to attribute to him a different line of thought.

Spinoza's concept of extended substance coincides pretty much with the traditional concept of matter. A famous topic of scholastic dispute was the principle of numerical plurality: what is it in things which makes them many not in kind but in number? Things were taken to consist (in some sense of "consist") of form and matter. Since twenty men will be the same in form, some (though not all) medieval thinkers held that what makes them numerous is their matter. I suggest that Spinoza takes over this speculation. He is looking for something internal to the men (an "immanent," not a "transeunt" cause) to account for their number. Human nature is a factor of the right sort: it is internal, the form present in each of them. But the men are not twenty because they are men. If we are given a specification, e.g., "a disk 3 cm. in diameter and 1 mm. thick," the number of things of the specified kind we can obtain depends on the amount of material we have. There are twenty men, Spinoza might think, because there is just enough flesh and bone, or extended substance, to constitute that number of human organisms.

If that is his thought, his argument may be put like this. A substance is something which does not depend for its possibility on anything else. The possibility of a number of things of the same nature depends on the presence of material for that nature to inform. Therefore no concept which can apply to a number of things can be a substance-concept. How good is this argument?

One merit is that it does not depend on the dubious principle of E.I.4, that the only way in which things can differ is by having different properties. It is an assumption of the argument that the same properties can be exhibited by indefinitely many things. On the other hand Spinoza may have to shift from the physical possibility of the argument for (b) to a kind of logical possibility. So far as physical possibility goes, the possibility of a number is no more contained in the existence of a quantity or amount than the

other way round. The number of gold coins the Mint can produce depends on the amount of gold in the vaults, but equally the amount of gold a pickpocket can amass depends on the number of gold coins in circulation. If the possibility of a number of men is to depend unilaterally on the nature of extended substance, the dependence must be of a different kind. There can be twenty men only if they are "numerically" different. Matter is the principle of plurality only if it is the principle of individuation. The twenty men must be different because they are made of different material.<sup>19</sup>

If Spinoza makes matter the principle of individuation he can say that men are not substances even in the Aristotelian sense. An Aristotelian substance is an entity which is primary in various ways. In particular, it should be primary for purposes of identification. If matter is the principle of individuation, things like men will not be primary identifiables. *This* man will have to be identified as the man composed of *this* material. Hence men will not be substances: as Aristotle himself would put it, substance will be matter. That is not Aristotle's own view,<sup>20</sup> but many of his readers have thought it should be; it is quite plausible in itself—we can easily think our sortal concepts are really concepts of shapes, arrangements, or the like—and the argument from plurality and individuation is a powerful one which is not easily met.

It should now be clear why I say that E.I.8. Sch. 2 contains Spinoza's real arguments for (a) and (b). It contains considerations which make those theses seem at once nontrivial and attractive. It is true that (b) turns out to be the thesis that existence belongs to the nature not of Aristotelian substances, but of matter or the universe as a whole. The argument for (a), however, is an argument to show that ordinary material objects do not measure up to Aristotle's conception of a substance as a primary entity.

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<sup>19</sup> That is, because they are modifications of different parts of extended substance. Not (E.I.12 and 15. Sch.) that extended substance is really divisible into parts: to the scientist, thinking of the world as consisting of numbers of men, trees, etc., is as arbitrary as thinking of a homogeneous, undivided rod as consisting of inches or centimeters.

<sup>20</sup> In "Aristotle and the Principle of Individuation," *Phronesis*, 17 (1972), 239-49, I argue that Aristotle makes form the principle of individuation. I think he must do this if he is to deny that matter has the best claim to be called "substance."



The argument of the Scholium, if successful, shows that if a concept is such that several different things can fall under it, it cannot be a substance-concept, and hence that there cannot be several substances of the same sort. It does not purport to show that different substance-concepts cannot be concepts of different things, that the extended substance, for example, which makes bodies many cannot be different from the thinking substance which makes thoughts many. For this Spinoza needs thesis (c), that there is a substance with all possible attributes. His arguments for this thesis, however, seem to me slight and uninformative, so I shall touch on them only briefly.

E.I.9, that "the more reality or being (*esse*) each thing has, the more attributes belong to it," is said to be "clear from Definition 4." The idea that there are degrees of reality is not peculiar to Spinoza, but needs more justification than this. E.I.10 states that "each attribute of a single substance must be conceived through itself." If that is true, it may be impossible to prove a priori that any two attributes are incompatible. But if it cannot be proved from their concepts that, say, thought and extension are incompatible, does it follow that they are in fact compatible? And even if they are, is there anything which has both? Spinoza may persuade us that it belongs to the nature of matter to exist. Since he thinks that psychology cannot be reduced to physics, that consciousness cannot be explained as a consequence of cerebral complexity, he may also hold that it belongs to the nature of conscious substance to exist. But it still seems to be a genuine problem whether that which is conscious is identical with that which is extended. What we need is a proof that if a substance with any attribute exists, a substance with all possible attributes exists. Only the third and fourth arguments in E.I.11 and Sch. purport to show this. These arguments depend on the doctrines that "the ability to exist is a power" and that "power to exist is proportional to reality" (G.II.53.29–30, 54.5–7). The notion of a power to exist (*potestas existendi*) has not been explained earlier, and is suspect.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The arguments in E.I.11 are well reconstructed by Don Garrett, "Spinoza's 'Ontological' Argument," *Philosophical Review*, 88 (1979), 198–223. As Garrett observes, the first and second arguments could apply to any substance, and rest on E.I.7. Garrett finds little to say in justification of the *potestas existendi*.

Spinoza deals with difficulties on the subject in Epp. 9, 35, and 36. The last letter is the most substantial. Spinoza there says:

If we say that there exists by its own sufficiency something which is unlimited and perfect only in its kind, we must also admit the existence of a being which is absolutely unlimited and perfect.

He continues:

Since the nature of God consists not in any certain kind of being, but in Being which is absolutely unlimited, his nature also requires everything that expresses "to be perfectly."<sup>22</sup>

The idea seems to be that in addition to our notion of extension and our notion of thought we have a notion of being *tout court*, a notion of a substance which simply exists. Anything, therefore, which involves existence without involving any limitation on existence (and Spinoza thinks this is true of extension and thought) must belong to this. If we did have a concept of existent substance as we have a concept of extended substance, this might be arguable. But we have no such concept, as Spinoza ought to recognize. In DIE.55 (G.I.20) he says:

The more generally existence is conceived, the more confusedly it is conceived, and the more easily it can be affixed to any chance thing. On the other hand the more particularly it is conceived, the more clearly it is understood.

If there were something the nature of which consisted simply in Being, Being, like thought and extension, would be an attribute. But whereas we can conceive shape through extension and love and anger through thought, there is nothing we conceive simply through Being. I do not think, therefore, that Spinoza proves that there is a substance with all possible attributes.

We have now surveyed the argument leading up to E.I.14. I conclude by asking: how important to Spinoza is it? This opening section is the hardest in the *Ethics*; is it dispensable?

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<sup>22</sup> G.IV.185.31 reads "quod *τὸ esse* perfecte exprimit." I have adopted, as giving a better sense, "quod *τὸ esse perfecte* exprimit."

Spinoza fails, in my opinion, to prove (c) or, consequently, (d). But this, though regrettable, is not disastrous, since he can put forward his version of mind-body identity as an economical and illuminating hypothesis.

The argument for (a) in E.I.4–5 is unconvincing. It depends, in effect, on the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, and Spinoza fails to prove that principle. The argument in E.I.8. Sch. 2 is better. Diehard Aristotelians might resist it. According to Aristotle, sortal concepts involve matter. A saw is not just a cutting instrument but one composed of iron; a man is not just a thing which behaves in a certain way but one consisting of flesh, bone, and materials sensitive to various sensory stimuli. It can be maintained that our form-concepts are prior to our matter-concepts and that the alleged nature of extended substance is simply what is common to the material natures of different sorts of things. But this position will not appeal to everyone, and against anyone who adopts it Spinoza can deploy a line of thought which I have not discussed above, but which underlies E.I.15. Sch. and Ep. 12. To the physical scientist, our sortal concepts are mere aids to the imagination. In a scientific account of the world men, pulleys, and the like disappear and are replaced by events at instants at points fixed by three spatial coordinates.

It is not, in fact, too difficult for Spinoza to deny that there are more substances than one; what is important for him is, while denying this, to maintain that there are as many substances as one. The danger is that if the notion of substance does not apply to ordinary material objects it will apply to nothing at all, and we shall be left with a mere plurality of nonsubstances.

Spinoza's main philosophical concern is ethical. His ethical teaching is based on his philosophy of mind, and his philosophy of mind on his metaphysics. Two themes are central to his ethics. One is that the notion of substance does have application. Our aim in life is to identify ourselves with, and recognize our identity with, the one all-inclusive substance. The other is that we can be active as well as passive. The two themes are connected in that the more we are active, the more we identify ourselves with the one substance. Now the distinction between activity and passivity depends on the idea that existence can pertain to the nature of something. It is just insofar as our life is part of that existence

which pertains to the nature of substance that we are active. And the notion of substance has application, given that it does not apply to ordinary material objects, only if there is something the nature of which is to exist. Only then can we distinguish substance from its modes; only then have we something to which we can assign a definite identity. What is crucial to Spinoza, then, is our proposition (b).

The proof of this in E.I.4–7 is unsatisfactory. The considerations underlying the argument of E.I.8. Sch. 2 are more appealing, but they appear at first to justify only version (ii) of (b), that it is part of any substance-concept that anything falling under it should exist at all times. Is this strong enough to sustain the two central theses of the ethical teaching? Our answer, perhaps, will depend on whether we think it can be equated with (b)(i). If it cannot, if it amounts simply to the thesis that a universe like ours could have no natural beginning or end, that hardly seems adequate for *Ethics* V. Many people, at least, accept it without feeling bound in consistency to admit that happiness consists in “knowledge of the union the mind has with the whole of nature” (DIE.13, G.II.8). My own view is that (b)(ii), at least if it can be used to explain why tops go on spinning and pens continue to exist, *is* equivalent to (b)(i). If that is correct, it may do Spinoza’s business for him, but we ought to look again at our reasons for accepting it.

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