SPINOZA

Metaphysical Themes

Edited by
OLLI KOISTINEN
JOHN BIRO

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
2002
# CONTENTS

Contributors, vii
Abbreviations, ix
Introduction, 3

1 Spinoza's Substance Monism, 11  
   *Michael Della Rocca*

2 Monism in Spinoza, 38  
   *John Carriero*

3 Causation in Spinoza, 60  
   *Olli Koistinen*

4 Concrete Logic, 73  
   *Richard Mason*

5 What Counts as an Individual for Spinoza? 89  
   *Steven Barbone*

6 Mirroring Spinoza's Mind, 113  
   *Peter Dalton*

7 Spinoza's Conatus Argument, 127  
   *Don Garrett*

8 Spinoza on the Relativity of Good and Evil, 159  
   *Charles Jarrett*

9 Spinoza, Thoughtful Télèology, and the Causal Significance of Content, 182  
   *Richard N. Manning*

10 The Middle Spinoza, 210  
   *Charles Huenemann*

11 Leibniz, Spinoza, and Tschirnhaus: Metaphysics à Trois, 1675–1676, 221  
   *Mark A. Kulstad*

Bibliography, 241
Index, 249
CONTRIBUTORS

Steven Barbone is an associate professor of philosophy at San Diego State University. He is currently finishing the notes and introduction for Samuel Shirley’s translation of the *Tractatus logico-philo*.


John Carriero is professor of philosophy at UCLA. He is especially interested in the ways in which early modern philosophy developed, under the pressure of the scientific revolution, out of and in reaction to scholastic Aristotelianism. He has published articles, connected with this theme, on Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz.

Peter Dalton is a faculty member in the Department of Philosophy at Florida State University. He teaches courses primarily in nineteenth-century and modern philosophy and ethics. His most recently published articles have been on Descartes and Thoreau, and he has just completed two long articles on Hume’s account of causality.

Michael Della Rocca is an associate professor of philosophy at Yale University. He is the author of *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (Oxford University Press, 1996) and articles on seventeenth-century philosophy and contemporary metaphysics.

Don Garrett is Kenan Distinguished Teaching Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of *Cognition and Commitment in Hume’s Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1997) and the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (1996). He is also the co-editor of the journal *Hume Studies*. 
Charles Huenemann is assistant professor of philosophy at Utah State University. His essays have appeared in *New Essays on the Rationalists* (Oxford University Press, 1999), *Piety, Peace, and the Freedom to Philosophize* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), and *History of Philosophy Quarterly*. His other academic interests include late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century epistemology.

Charles Jarrett is an associate professor of philosophy and chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Rutgers University: Camden College of Arts and Science. He received the Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley and is the author of several articles on Spinoza, including "The Logical Structure of Spinoza's Ethics, Part I," in *Synthese* 1977, and "The Development of Spinoza's Conception of Immortality," in F. Mignini, ed., *Dio, L'uomo, La Liberta: Studi sul Breve Trattato di Spinoza* (L. U. Japadre Editore, 1990). Other articles concern Descartes, Leibniz, the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of law. His other interests include the philosophy of language, metaphysics, existentialism and phenomenology, and ethics.

Olli Koistinen is academy research fellow at the University of Turku. He has published articles on Spinoza and Descartes. His other interests are action theory and epistemology.

Mark A. Kulstad is professor of philosophy at Rice University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in 1975 and is former president of the Leibniz Society of North America (1981-83). He is author of *Leibniz on Apperception, Consciousness, and Reflection* (Philosophia, 1991) and "Spinoza's Demonstration of Monism: A New Line of Defense," in *History of Philosophy Quarterly*. He is editor, with J. A. Cover, of *Central Themes in Early Modern Philosophy: Essays presented to Jonathan Bennett* (Hackett, 1990).

Richard N. Manning received his Ph.D. from Northwestern University in 1992 and a JD from the same institution in 1985. He is currently assistant professor of Philosophy at Carleton University and has also taught at the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Oregon, and Ohio University. His main areas of research include the philosophy of mind, epistemology, modern philosophy, analytic philosophy, and the philosophy of science. His articles have appeared in various journals, including *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, Canadian Journal of Philosophy, and Metaphilosophy*.

Richard Mason is a Fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge. He is the author of *The God of Spinoza* (Cambridge University Press, 1997) and *Before Logic* (SUNY Press, 2000), as well as of articles on the history of philosophy and philosophical logic. He is working on a philosophical study about Robert Oppenheimer.
ABBREVIATIONS

Spinoza, Benedictus de (1632–1677):
Editions
(for further details, see the bibliography)


The first arabic number specifies the part of the *Ethics*. The abbreviations that follow the arabic number are explained as follows:

\begin{itemize}
  \item a = axiom  
  \item aff = definition of the affects in the third part of the *Ethics*  
  \item app = appendix  
  \item c = corollary  
  \item d = definition (when not after a proposition number)  
  \item d = demonstration (when after a proposition number)  
  \item le = lemma  
  \item p = proposition  
  \item po = postulate  
  \item pref = preface  
  \item s = scholium  
\end{itemize}

For example, 1p16c1 refers to the first corollary of the sixteenth proposition in the first part of the *Ethics*.

Other works by Spinoza

CM = *Metaphysical Thoughts (Cogitata Metaphysica)*. In G I, C I, Spinoza 1914 (vol. IV), and Spinoza 1998a.

KV = *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being (Korte Verhandeling van God de Mensch, en des zelfs Welstand)*. In G I, C I, Spinoza 1914 (vol. IV), and Spinoza 1986.


PPC = Principles of Cartesian Philosophy (Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae, Pars I & II, More Geometrico Demonstratae.) In G I, Spinoza 1914 (vol. IV), and Spinoza 1998a.

Reference to Spinoza’s correspondence
Ep followed by an arabic number specifies a letter in Spinoza’s correspondence. The correspondence is completely contained in G IV, Spinoza 1914 (vol. III), and Spinoza 1995.


Other Authors


A = Leibniz, G. W. 1923. G. W. Leibniz: Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe, German Academy of Sciences, ed. (References are to series and volume.)


INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Bennett’s A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics was published about seventeen years ago. In that book Bennett shows convincingly that the problems Spinoza tackled are relevant to our current philosophical concerns and that Spinoza’s metaphysics has still much to offer to those who are interested in the ultimate nature of reality. Bennett’s book set new standards for philosophical research on Spinoza, and the writers of this book have tried to meet those standards. The essays in this volume are, then, philosophical, rather than merely historical. They highlight our contention that in addition to being a visionary, Spinoza was an acute philosopher who anticipated philosophical problems that still are at the center of attention.

In this volume Spinoza is seen mostly as a metaphysician, but it should be emphasized that his philosophy had a mainly practical aim. Spinoza’s ultimate goal in doing philosophy was gaining knowledge not for its own sake but, to put it bluntly, for the sake of his own well-being. In TdIE (C I 7, G II, 5) he writes as follows:

After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile, and I saw that all the things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as [my] mind was moved by them, I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which would be the true good.

Thus, it seems that Spinoza’s philosophy was directed not just toward finding the truth but toward finding happiness. Indeed, for Spinoza salvation lies in knowledge, because the mind’s eternity depends on knowledge.

Spinoza’s philosophy matured in a very stimulating intellectual atmosphere. The new science taught that the world is not what it seems to be. The external world has no perceptible qualities except those postulated by the new physics, such as size, shape, and motion. Colors, sounds, and smells were moved from the external world to the mind of the perceiver. The ancient distinction between appearance and real-
ity became acute in the distinction between the commonsense view of the world and the scientific image. Because the world is not the way our senses tell us it is, the ultimate nature of reality that physics describes became an urgent topic. For Descartes, the world consists of thinking substances, extended substances, and their respective modifications. Leibniz, who inherited much from Spinoza, claimed that the world was made up of unextended monads. What motivated these views? To what problems were they thought to be solutions?

There were two pressing problems in seventeenth-century philosophy. The first was how to reconcile the theological worldview, in which everything is dependent on God, with the new science, according to which all changes are explainable through laws. What room does the new physics leave for God? The second arose from the underlying ontological assumption of the new science, that of efficient causality, according to which finite things cause changes in each other. Suppose that "a moves b" is true. On the scholastic conception of causality, this requires that something of a's movement literally pass from a to b. However, movement is a mode, and modes are tied to their bearers, which seems to make the property transference required by causal interaction impossible. This question was widely discussed in early modern philosophy. Descartes seems to have believed that causal interaction between physical things is impossible, and his occasionalist follower, Nicholas Malebranche, explicitly held that all apparent causal interaction between distinct finite things is only apparent and that God is the only agent capable of true causal efficacy. Leibniz held a similar view, claiming that God has pre-established a harmony between different individuals and that the appearance of causal interaction is due to this pre-established harmony.

Monism

Spinoza espoused substance monism, according to which there is only one ultimate subject of predication, only one thing that does not inhere in some other thing. Spinoza's monism can be seen as containing an answer to both of the questions just outlined. There can be no problem of interaction among substances, because there is only one substance. Spinoza calls this one substance God, because he believes that it satisfies most of the predicates traditionally ascribed to God. He also argues that this God causes all changes in accordance with the laws of nature.

Spinoza's monism has been widely discussed. Philosophers have focused on two questions:

1. The intelligibility of monism
   If there is only one substance, then, in traditional substance-property ontology, it follows that all finite things must be properties of that substance. But what does it mean to say that paradigmatic Aristotelian substances, such as horses and men, are properties?

2. The proof of monism
   Spinoza seems to prove his monism from the assumptions of traditional sub-
The question of the intelligibility of monism has been most thoroughly discussed by Edwin Curley (1969, 1988), who asserts that Spinoza did not use the language of substances, attributes, and modes in the traditional Aristotelian way. Rather, he was an innovator who identified a substance with its attributes and for whom the attribute of thought consisted of the basic natural laws and the attribute of extension of the physical correlates of those laws. Curley’s argument has stimulated much discussion, and it has led to the sharpening of the traditional interpretations of Spinoza’s monism.

The proof of Spinoza’s monism has also been widely discussed in recent years. Spinoza seems to have reached his conclusion assuming a straightforward Cartesian substance-property ontology, in which the properties of substances are divided into attributes and modes. However, in clear opposition to Descartes, Spinoza argues that substances cannot share an attribute. This is a surprising claim. Is Spinoza implying that Descartes’s basic assumptions were such that he was, without realizing it, really committed to the ‘no-shared-attribute’ thesis? Spinoza seems to share Descartes’s view that attributes (principal attributes for Descartes) are properties that are conceived through themselves: they are basic ways of being, as Bennett (1984) puts it. But he needs, in addition to the ‘no-shared-attribute’ thesis, two important theorems for his proof of monism: that each possible substance exists by necessity (1p7) and that a substance having all possible attributes is possible. Spinoza’s proof can then be summarized as follows:

1. There are several substances. (*Reductio* premise)
2. An all-attribute substance is possible. (Premise)
3. An all-attribute substance exists. (From 2 and 1p7)
4. Each substance has some attribute. (Premise)
5. Two substances share an attribute. (From 1, 3, and 4)
6. Two substances cannot share an attribute. (The ‘no-shared-attribute’ thesis).
7. There cannot be more than one substance. (From 1, 5, and 6)

The proof of the ‘no-shared-attribute’ thesis is, perhaps, the most obscure part of Spinoza’s proof of monism. In this volume, it and related questions are examined by Barbone, Carriero, Della Rocca, Koistinen, and Mason.

Michael Della Rocca supports what we would like to call an identification-oriented interpretation of the argument for substance monism. Della Rocca emphasizes the conceptual barrier between different attributes and the conceptual-independence condition in the definition of substance. Della Rocca shows that in Spinoza the difference between different substances must be grounded in their different attributes, because if that were not the case, substances would not be in themselves. Moreover, he shows that if it were possible that substances shared some, but not all, of their attributes, that would break the conceptual barrier between attri-
Della Rocca concludes his chapter by showing that if substances consisting of fewer than all attributes were possible, that would leave some brute facts in Spinoza's philosophy, something his commitment to the principle of sufficient reason forbids.

John Carrico distinguishes between individuation-oriented and substance-oriented interpretations of Spinoza’s argument for monism. In individuation-oriented interpretations, as in those of Bennett and Curley, monism is thought somehow to follow from certain assumptions about the nature of identity. In substance-oriented interpretations, as in those of Donagan and Wolfson, monism is somehow built into the definition of substance. Substance is something that is absolutely independent of everything else. But, of course, there can be only one such thing, God. Carrico presents still another account, drawing on the correspondence between Spinoza and Henry Oldenburg. On this interpretation, Spinoza’s monism about extended substance grows out of, indeed, is a natural development of, Descartes’s conception of matter.

Olli Koistinen considers whether Spinoza’s monism can be seen as solving the problem of causal interaction that was so important in early modern philosophy. Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz all seem to deny causation by finite individuals. However, they are not very successful in their attempts to explain away the appearance of finite causation. Koistinen argues that Spinoza’s necessitarianism, which is not inferred from causal determinism, yields a worthwhile solution to that problem.

Richard Mason considers logical and physical readings of the Ethics. He asserts that the attempt to logelize Spinoza is misguided. Mason uses Kantian language in arguing that the Ethics was written to make the new physics possible. In particular, Mason writes that the standard interpretation, according to which Spinoza wanted to reduce causal relations to logical relations between propositions about the relata, is mistaken. Mason boldly suggests that instead of trying to reduce physics into logic, Spinoza wanted to see logic as physics.

Steven Barbone’s chapter is not directly about monism, but its principal claims depend on Spinoza’s peculiar conception of an individual. The discussion centers on the ontological status of the political state. After a careful analysis of Spinoza’s writings on the subject, Barbone rejects Matheron’s celebrated view that political states are individuals. This rejection carries with it important consequences. For Spinoza, as Barbone points out, “individuals are first and foremost,” so that the nonindividuality of the political institutions means that political states should be seen as existing for the individuals living in them.

Mind

In addition to threatening to leave God inert, the new physics also made the status of mentality problematic. Physical reality was regarded as causally closed, something experience seems to cry out against. Desires and beliefs seem to cause changes in our bodies and, in perception, physical events seem to cause new beliefs, emotions, and desires. Spinoza tried to solve this problem by arguing for parallelism. “The order
and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things,” he writes in 2p7. More boldly, he also claimed that mental events and physical events are identical. Spinoza’s identity theory, however, seems to be inconsistent with the rest of his philosophy. In his system, thought and extension are different attributes of God, and this is hard to reconcile with the identity of mental and physical particulars.

In this volume Spinoza’s philosophy of mind is examined by Peter Dalton, who draws our attention to certain difficult problems in it. According to Dalton, the four most serious are these: (1) The identity of the human mind and a body seems to run counter to Spinoza’s view that extended modes cannot be conceived as thinking and vice versa. (2) It seems that an idea for Spinoza is always an idea of its owner’s body or an idea of an idea of that body. How is it, then, possible that there are ideas of external objects? (3) What explains the parallel between bodily goings-on and the contents of ideas? (4) Why does Spinoza banish causal relations between mind and body? Dalton tries to answer these questions by constructing an elaborate model of Spinoza’s doctrine based on the idea of one thing mirroring another.

Conatus and Values

Descartes thought that there was no power inherent in extension. Only minds, finite and infinite, were capable of genuine causal activity. Spinoza rejected this conception of matter as inert. In a letter to Walther von Tschirnhaus (1995, 355), he writes: “Descartes is wrong in defining matter through extension; it must necessarily be explicated through an attribute which expresses eternal and infinite essence.” For Spinoza, extension is essentially active, and there is a certain power or force in all things. Spinoza calls this force the conatus of an individual. He writes in 3p6: “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power [quantum in se est], strives to persevere in its being.” This force or striving is what makes action possible, and it also lies at the heart of Spinoza’s moral philosophy. For Spinoza all our desires flow from the striving to persevere, but because actions flow from desires, it follows that all our actions flow from our desire to persevere in existence. From this it is but a small step to a value theory in which things are deemed good because they are desired, not the other way round.

One central question that concerns the conatus doctrine has been its derivation. One key premise in the demonstration of 3p6 is 3p4, according to which “[n]o thing can be destroyed except through an external cause.” Spinoza believes that this proposition is self-evident, because the definition of a thing does not involve anything that could destroy it. However, even if 3p4 is granted, it is somewhat problematic to see how one could derive the striving to persevere from it.

Don Garrett gives a detailed interpretation of Spinoza’s argument for the thesis that each thing strives to persevere in its being. As Garrett points out, this argument has been the cause of considerable consternation. Its twelve steps seem to involve no less than five equivocations. Garrett indicates what these are, and he considers various interpretations of the argument by Curley, Donagan, and Allison. After showing why none of these interpretations is wholly satisfying, Garrett presents his own,
based on what he calls Spinoza's theory of inference. Once individual things are seen as finite approximations of Spinoza's infinite substance, the conatus argument can be seen to be valid.

The new science had negative implications for value theory. It seems that there is no room for values in the world of pure motion. Spinoza's value theory holds interest from a contemporary perspective, too. In the appendix to the first part of the Ethics, Spinoza rejects the objectivity of values. People are prone to believe in the existence of such things, but this belief is false. It is rooted, Spinoza thinks, in the false assumption that things act for an end. This is what he says:

After men persuaded themselves that everything that happens, happens on their account, they had to judge that what is most important in each thing is what is most useful to them, and to rate as most excellent all those things by which they were most pleased. Hence, they had to form these notions, by which they explained natural things: good, evil, order, confusion, warm, cold, beauty, ugliness. (Iapp, G II, 81, 25–30)

If value terms are taken to refer to things outside the mind, all value judgments are false. However, value concepts are useful, and it is unwise to try to remove them completely from our language:

As far as good and evil are concerned, they also indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another. For one and the same thing can, at the same time, be good, and bad, and also indifferent. For example, Music is good for one who is Melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf. (4pref, G II, 208)

Spinoza says of the usefulness of value terms:

[W]e must retain these words [good and evil]. For because we desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature which we may look to, it will be useful for us to retain these words with the meaning I have indicated. (ibid.)

Spinoza, then, endorses an error theory of ethics. Value language is deceiving in that it seems to involve reference to external reality. What he seems to have in mind is close to Mackie's influential recent theory (1977).

In this volume, Spinoza's value theory is discussed by Charles Jarrett. He argues that Spinoza sees good and evil as relative in at least three different ways. Jarrett distinguishes (1) speaker relativity; (2) correlativeity; and (3) model relativity. He considers the relations between these different types of relativity and how distinguishing between them helps us to understand the main claims in Spinoza's value theory. He applies the results of his analysis to the evaluation of two of Spinoza's important theses. According to the first, a rational agent always chooses the best of the available alternatives (Jarrett expresses this also by saying that rationality is a maximizing principle); according to the second, having inadequate ideas is a necessary condition
for forming the idea of goodness. Jarrett shows that in arguing for these theses, Spinoza moves, illegitimately, from one kind of relativity to another.

As we have seen, it was Spinoza’s banishing of teleological explanations that led him to deny the existence of objective values. Spinoza argues against explanation in terms of ends as follows:

This doctrine concerning the end turns nature completely upside down. For what is really a cause, it considers as an effect, and conversely. What is by nature prior, it makes posterior. And finally, what is supreme and most perfect, it makes imperfect. (1app, G II, 80)

It may seem that the explanation of intentional action must be teleological. However, it is easy for Spinoza to translate the ‘in order to’ explanations of intentional action into explanations in terms of efficient causation:

For example, when we say that habitation was the final cause of this or that house, surely we understand nothing but that a man, because he imagined the conveniences of domestic life, had an appetite to build a house. So habitation, insofar as it is considered as a final cause, is nothing more than this singular appetite. It is really an efficient cause, which is considered as a first cause, because men are commonly ignorant of the causes of their appetites. (4pref, G II, 207).

Bennett (1984, 213–26) has argued that Spinoza’s denial of teleology goes farther than denying that ends from the future could somehow determine what happens now. Bennett claims that Spinoza also maintained that even what represents something in the future cannot have any causal effects. Bennett believes that Spinoza thought that the representational features of ideas are not causally relevant.

Spinoza’s denial of all purpose is discussed in this volume by Richard Manning. He examines the way Spinoza himself seems to be committed to explanations in terms of ends. It does seem that Spinoza clearly allowed such explanations. For example, in 3p28, Spinoza writes that we strive to do whatever we imagine to be conducive to joy. But Bennett has argued that Spinoza’s system does not allow teleological explanations. Manning criticizes Bennett’s account of the concept of conatus as passive. Manning sees the conatus as active and does not believe that we should try to explain away the apparent teleological theorems in Spinoza. Manning concedes, however, that from a philosophical point of view, Spinoza’s doctrines about teleology and representation are unacceptable.

Charles Huenemann’s and Mark Kulstad’s essays deal with historical aspects of Spinoza’s thought. Huenemann considers Spinoza’s early work, Metaphysical Thoughts, which Spinoza wrote as an appendix to his exposition of Descartes’s Principles of Philosophy. Huenemann’s essay offers an interesting view of the development of Spinoza’s philosophy concerning the four topics on which Huenemann concentrates: (1) the identity of will and intellect in God; (2) the necessity of all things; (3) God’s moral character; and (4) the relation of creatures to God.

Kulstad considers the relation between Spinoza and Leibniz. Spinoza’s influence
on Leibniz has always interested scholars, and Kulstad advances the hypothesis that
Leibniz's metaphysical views about how finite things follow from God and his attri-
butes should be understood as comments on the exchanges between Spinoza and
Tschirnhaus. Tschirnhaus, who was a friend of both Spinoza's and Leibniz's, in-
formed the latter about the former's views. In particular, Leibniz was moved by the
problem presented by the variety of things in the world. Tschirnhaus wanted to
know whether one could deduce an infinite variety of things from the attribute of
extension alone. Leibniz thought not, but he argued that when the attributes are
taken together, variety can be deduced. Another problem is that of other worlds. It
seems that Spinoza's views about the unknown attributes led him to postulating
things that consist of modifications of thought and of some attribute other than ex-
tension. These things would be quite separate from us and could be seen as com-
posing other worlds. Kulstad shows how that view arises in Spinoza and how Leib-
niz toyed with the idea before rejecting it.

We wish to thank Jussi Haukioja, Timo Kajamies, and Arto Repo for their in-
valuable assistance in the preparation of this volume. We also express special thanks
to Michael Della Rocca for his help and encouragement.

Note

1. In this introduction, all Spinoza references, unless indicated otherwise, are from
Edwin Curley's C 1. For a complete list of abbreviations, see the Abbreviations in the front
of this book.
I
SPINOZA’S SUBSTANCE MONISM
Michael Della Rocca

Certain of Spinoza’s basic principles enable him, in often surprising ways, to argue validly for the claim that there is only one substance. I argue this point here primarily by explaining how Spinoza’s denial of conceptual or explanatory relations between different attributes (such as thought and extension) obviates—in ways that have not been adequately appreciated—certain important challenges that face his argument for monism. This conceptual barrier between the attributes is introduced in a claim the import of which is not immediately evident: “Each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself” (Ip10). One of my aims is to go some distance toward unpacking the meaning of this proposition.

My focus will not, however, be exclusively on this conceptual separation. To prepare the way for my account of this divide, I will first spend some time on a different kind of restriction Spinoza places on conceptual or explanatory relations. This is Spinoza’s view that each substance is conceptually prior to its modes (Ip11). By explaining how the conceptual priority of substance over its modes validates a crucial step in Spinoza’s argument for monism, I will be in a position to reveal one of the ways in which the conceptual barrier between the attributes is also importantly at work in that argument.

1. An Overview of Spinoza’s Position

I begin with a rather brief sketch of the meaning of Spinoza’s claim of substance monism and of his argument for it. I also introduce certain other metaphysical claims of Spinoza’s that will be relevant later in this chapter.

For Spinoza, a substance is that which is in itself and is conceived through itself (I1d3). My focus, for now, is on the notion of being conceived through itself, instead of on the notion of being in itself. According to Spinoza, x is conceived through y if and only if x is explained by, or in terms of, y. This is evident from the second half
of 2p7s, where Spinoza says that when we perceive effects through their causes, we are explaining the order of nature or the connection of causes. Spinoza sometimes uses perceives and conceives interchangeably,\textsuperscript{5} so that, for him, when we conceive effects through their causes, we are explaining the order of nature. This suggests that Spinoza regards claims about conceiving one thing through another as claims about the explanation of one thing by another. Further evidence for the equation of conception and explanation comes from 1a5: “Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, or the concept of one does not involve the concept of the other.” Here Spinoza treats as equivalent the notion of conceiving a thing and the notion of understanding a thing or rendering it intelligible (the Latin word here is intelligi). Thus he seems to treat conceiving a thing as explaining that thing. Even further evidence for the equivalence is that Spinoza moves freely from the assertion that substance is conceived under a certain attribute (1p10s) to the assertion that substance is explained by that attribute (1p14d, 2p5). Spinoza also holds that \(x\) is conceived through \(y\) if and only if \(x\) is caused by \(y\).\textsuperscript{6} Given these equivalences, we can conclude that when Spinoza says that a substance is self-conceived, he implies that the substance is somehow self-explanatory: in order to explain why a given substance exists, one does not need to appeal to anything else besides that substance. He is also committed to the assertion that each substance is self-caused—a conclusion that Spinoza explicitly draws in 1p7d.

For Spinoza, a substance must be conceived under one or more attributes (1p10s), each of which somehow constitutes its essence (1d4). Spinoza mentions thought and extension as examples of attributes (2p1 and 2p2), yet he holds that there is actually an infinity of attributes. Human beings are aware only of thought and extension.\textsuperscript{7} It is important to note that the fact that, for Spinoza, a substance is conceived under an attribute does not imply that it is conceived through something else. This is, I believe, due to the fact that the attributes are so intimately related to the substance that they constitute its essence. I should emphasize, though, that I do not investigate in detail here the difficult problem of precisely what Spinoza means by saying that each attribute constitutes the essence (or an essence?) of the substance and why he qualifies this by saying, famously, that an attribute is what the intellect perceives of a substance as constituting its essence (1d4).\textsuperscript{8} Although my claims about Spinoza’s substance monism in this chapter do rely heavily on some of Spinoza’s views about substance and about attributes, they do not turn on any particular solution to the problem just raised concerning the relation between a substance and its attributes.

The way in which a substance is conceived through itself and is independent of other things is to be contrasted with the way in which nonsubstances are conceived through and dependent on something else. Spinoza makes clear that such dependent beings depend, ultimately, on an independent being, that is, on a substance,\textsuperscript{9} and he calls these dependent beings modes of the substance (1d5).

For Spinoza, the modes of a substance depend on that substance by depending on its attributes. Thus the modes that depend on or are conceived through the attribute of thought are called modes of thought and similarly for modes that depend on extension, and so forth. My body and its states are examples of modes of extension, for Spinoza; my mind and its ideas are examples of modes of thought. Here,
also, I do not take up a number of major issues. In particular, I do not characterize the ways in which modes depend on a particular attribute. Further, I do not get embroiled in the controversy over whether modes are to be understood as somehow predicated of the substance or merely dependent on the substance without being predicated of the substance. These are debates for another occasion.10

Let us return to Spinoza's substance monism, the claim that there is only one substance and that it has all the attributes: thought, extension, and so on. Since Spinoza defines God as the substance of all attributes (1p16), he holds that the unique substance is God (1p14).

Spinoza argues for his monism along the following lines: The first step is 1p5: "In nature there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute." On the assumption that, say, thought and extension are attributes, Spinoza's employment of this claim indicates that he sees it as entailing that there is at most one thinking substance, one extended substance, and so on.

The second step is 1p7: "It pertains to the nature of a substance to exist." For Spinoza, since a substance is conceived through itself, it is, as I showed, independent of everything else. Nothing therefore can prevent it from existing. That is why, for Spinoza, each substance by its very nature exists. This entails that if a substance is possible, it is actual and, indeed, necessary.11

The third step is 1p11: "God, or a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists." One of the ways Spinoza demonstrates this claim is simply by applying 1p7 to God, in particular. Since God is, by definition, a substance, and since each substance exists necessarily, it follows that God exists necessarily (1p11d1).

We are now in a position to reach the claim of substance monism: since God has all the attributes, for another substance besides God to exist, that substance would have to share attributes with God. But since, for Spinoza, substances cannot share attributes and since God does exist, Spinoza concludes that no substance except God exists (1p14).

To begin to understand and evaluate this argument, I focus first on two challenges to Spinoza's demonstration of 1p5, the claim that substances cannot share attributes.12 The demonstration relies on 1p4: "Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another, either by a difference in the attributes of the substances or by a difference in their affections."13 This entails that any two distinct substances must differ either in their attributes or in their modes. But, Spinoza argues in 1p5d, substances that purportedly share the same attribute cannot legitimately be distinguished either by their modes or by their attributes. Thus, by 1p4, it follows that there are no substances that share the same attribute. Speaking of two substances that purportedly share the same attribute, Spinoza says, "[O]ne cannot be conceived to be distinguished from another, that is (by p4) there cannot be many, but only one [of the same nature or attribute]" (1p5d).

Spinoza seems to be saying in 1p4 that any two distinct things must have some difference between them and that this difference must concern the modes or attributes of a substance or substances. Further, Spinoza seems to be saying at the end of 1p5d, when he cites 1p4, that if two things are distinct, one must be able to conceive
them as such by appealing to a difference between them, by appealing to those features with regard to which they differ. A version of the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles is at work here:

(PII) If \( x \not= y \), then there is some difference between \( x \) and \( y \) that enables us to conceive them as distinct.

Since Spinoza sees conceiving a fact as explaining it, we can say that for Spinoza

(PII') If \( x \not= y \), then there is some difference between \( x \) and \( y \) that explains their nonidentity.

That the notion of explanation is thus operative in Spinoza’s version of the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles shows that he would defend it, at least in part, by appeal to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, which he also accepts. According to that principle, all facts must be explainable. (PII') states how facts about nonidentity in particular must be explained. We will see later in this chapter that there may be another point at which Spinoza employs (PII') in the argument for monism.

There are two challenges to Spinoza’s argument in 155d that I explore: first, why, for Spinoza, cannot substances that share the same attribute legitimately be distinguished by their modes? Second, why, for Spinoza, cannot substances that share the same attribute be distinguished by their attributes? After all, if they share some attributes but differ in others, then there would be a way to distinguish them by their attributes. I call the first problem the different modes problem and the second the different attributes problem. I consider them in turn in the next two sections, before examining the later stages of Spinoza’s argument for monism.

2. The Different Modes Problem

Suppose that substance \( a \) and substance \( b \) share attribute \( x \). Suppose further, for the sake of simplicity, that neither substance has any attribute besides \( x \). Spinoza claims that \( a \) and \( b \) cannot be distinguished by their modes. His reason appears, if we quote in full the sentence I just cited as evidence that Spinoza accepts an indiscernibility principle:

If [two substances are distinguished] by a difference in their affections, then since a substance is prior in nature to its affections (by p1), if the affections are therefore put to one side [depositis ergo affectionibus] and [the substance] is considered in itself, that is (by d3 and a6), considered truly, one cannot be conceived to be distinguished from another, that is (by p4), there cannot be many, but only one [of the same nature or attribute] (155d; cf. KV App. 1, Prop. 1, dem.).

Spinoza’s point seems to be this: since a substance is somehow prior to its modes, we are entitled to put the modes to the side when it comes to individuating substances.
But, as in the case of substances a and b, once the modes are put aside, we seem to have no way to distinguish between a and b; so we must conclude that a = b, after all.

To see why, for Spinoza, the priority of a substance over its modes would make modes irrelevant to the individuation of substances, we must look more closely at what Spinoza means by 'priority'. When he makes the claim of priority in 1p1, Spinoza says that it is evident from 1d3, the definition of substance, and 1d5, the definition of mode. These specify that a substance is in and is conceived through itself, while a mode is in and is conceived through another. In particular, as I noted, a mode is in and conceived through the substance of which it is a mode.

In asserting priority of a substance over its modes, Spinoza is clearly asserting that a substance and its modes stand in some kind of asymmetrical relation. The definitions of substance and mode suggest the following two claims as constituting the relevant asymmetry:

1. A substance is not in and is not conceived through its modes.
2. The modes of a substance are in and are conceived through that substance.

In invoking 1p1 in 1p5d, is Spinoza concerned, in particular, with one of these two aspects of his thesis of priority; that is, does Spinoza reject a situation in which substances are individuated by their modes because such a situation would violate a particular one of the above pair of claims? It is clear, I believe, from 1p5d, that Spinoza is more directly concerned with a violation of (1) than with a violation of (2).

To see that this is true, return to the crucial passage from 1p5d:

If [two substances are distinguished] by a difference in their affections, then since a substance is prior in nature to its affections (by p1), if the affections are therefore put to one side and [the substance] is considered in itself, that is (by d3 and a6), considered truly, one cannot be conceived to be distinguished from another, that is (by p4) there cannot be many, but only one [of the same nature or attribute]. (1p5d; my emphasis)

Notice that Spinoza here invokes the definition of substance and the claim, from that definition, that a substance is in itself. Why does he invoke the notion of being in itself? The italicized passage indicates that the following is what Spinoza has in mind. If we do not put the modes aside, that is, if we allow a substance to be individuated by its modes, then we are not considering that substance truly. We will, Spinoza is saying here, be considering it not in itself. Since, for Spinoza, everything is either in itself or in another (1a1), by considering a substance not in itself, we would, it seems, be considering it in another. This other consists, presumably, of the modes of the substance by which we are individuating the substance.

Spinoza's emphasis on the notion of being in itself in this context, therefore, implies that if we allow modes to individuate a substance, then we are treating that substance not as in itself, but rather as in its modes. Such a result would directly violate the definition of substance and also (1), the first component of the priority relation. Notice, however, that it would not, by itself, violate (2), the other component