INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI
University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0500
Spinoza’s concept of power

Reilly, Richard, Ph.D.

Rice University, 1994
RICE UNIVERSITY

SPINOZA'S CONCEPT OF POWER

by

RICHARD REILLY

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

MARK KULSTAD, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR PHILOSOPHY

DONALD MORRISON, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR PHILOSOPHY

CAROL QUILLEN, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR HISTORY

Houston, Texas

April 1994
ABSTRACT

Spinoza’s Concept of Power

by

Richard Reilly

Power, according to Spinoza, is God’s essence. Hence understanding Spinoza’s thoughts about power will help us understand Spinoza’s God. Since Spinoza’s metaphysics is the foundation for his ethics, this understanding will provide insights into the latter as well.

I begin by examining Spinoza’s interpretation of Descartes. This has God outside the universe recreating it each moment; otherwise it would cease to exist. Spinoza concludes that all events exist solely through God’s power; neither minds nor bodies have power of their own. In other words, Spinoza’s Descartes is an occasionalist.

I then argue that the primary difference between Spinoza’s God and Descartes’ God is that Spinoza places God’s power inside the universe, rather than outside. Spinoza’s God is an immanent creative power: a power in all things which continually creates them, keeping the universe itself from disappearing.

Next I explain why Spinoza thinks the existence of motion in the universe follows from God’s power. Spinoza believes modes in extension are only differentiated by their motion. God’s power necessarily creates infinitely many modes. Therefore, there must be motion.

Next I argue that God’s attributes include infinite powers of thought and of extension. Individual beings are finite modifications of these powers. This metaphysics is extended into Spinoza’s ethics, showing
that it is a system which describes how we share in God's power and how virtuous behavior increases our power, thereby increasing our joy. Then a discussion of power in Spinoza's epistemology shows that ideas are not conceived by him as inert, but as acts of understanding, which strive to maintain themselves in our minds and cause other ideas to follow from them. This leads to an examination of ways in which an individual person, by increasing knowledge of the passions that afflict him or her, is supposed to gain power over them. The concluding chapter speculatively ties the earlier discoveries to other important aspects of Spinoza's metaphysics, striving toward a more comprehensive understanding of Spinoza's God.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Don Morrison and Carol Quillen for their help; John Olson, Robert Schmunk, Dusty Capistran, all my friends, and the members of the Rice Philosophy Department for their support; Lucy, for teaching me patience; Mark Kulstad, for his valuable advice, encouragement, and friendship; Ann Voelkel, for a lot of typing, computer work, and for putting up with me in general; and most of all I would like to thank Mom and Dad, for everything.
Spinoza's Concept of Power

Table of Contents

Chapter I.
Introduction. . . 1
An exchange between Tschirnhaus and Spinoza: How is it possible to show that the existence of bodies in motion follows from the nature of extension? This question prompted my study. The significance of E I P34: God's essence is power. Some implications of this. Outline of the project. A few words about my goals and procedure. Spinoza's philosophizing motivated by existential concerns.

Chapter II.
On Some Recent Interpretations. . . 8
Bennett's view: God is the universe. Bennett dismisses the subject of power. Objections to Bennett's view. Curley's view: God is the laws of nature. Possible interpretations of this view. Criticisms of Curley's view.

Chapter III.
Spinoza on Descartes: Descartes Occasionalized. . . 19
We can better understand Spinoza's ideas if we relate them to Descartes' ideas. How Descartes is usually interpreted. Spinoza's interpretation: Cartesianism amounts to occasionalism. God's power continually recreates the universe. God is the only cause of motion. Laws of nature only describe God's activity. What applies to bodies also applies to minds, Spinoza argues. Descartes clearly believes minds have some power. According to Spinoza, this is incoherent: if God is continually creating all things, they can have no power of their own. Difficulty of deciding the issue. Repercussions of Descartes' view. Garber argues that for Descartes laws of nature allow for exceptions in the case of mind-to-body causation. If we grant the coherence of the concept of a free-will, it is impossible to show the incoherence of Descartes' view. A distinction made between Causes of Being and Causes of coming into being.

Chapter IV.
God as Immanent Creative Power. . . 35
The primary difference between Spinoza and Descartes: according to Spinoza, God's power is immanent. Descartes' and Spinoza's views contrasted. A common confusion about the universe and time. Time is not a dimension. The confusion exhibited by Descartes. Three elements of
Spinoza's view: God's essence is power; God's power is immanent; God's power continually creates all things. Proof of this interpretation. Summation of the argument.

Chapter V.

Why Motion and Rest?...

Tschirnhaus' question: Can it be shown that God's nature necessitates change? Spinoza begs off answering; but offers clues. The importance of E I P16. The more real a thing is, the more we may infer from its definition. From God's essence infinitely many things follow. Without motion there could not be infinitely many modes. A thought experiment. A valid argument using only Spinoza' own premises that proves there must be motion and rest. But what is moving? The solution to a problem: the relationship of God's causation to modal causation.

Chapter V. Appendix I...

Is E I P17 the proof that God acts? No: it proves that God alone causes God's acts.

Chapter V. Appendix II...

An alternative argument for why there must be motion. Motion is required because change is required. Without change, an infinity of possible things would never exist. God must create all possible things.

Chapter VI.

Power and Reality...

What is the reality that moves and rests? The attributes are infinite powers. Thought is an infinite power of thinking. Extension is an infinite power of "extending." This interpretation verified by the nature of modes. Singular things are certain and determinate expressions of God's power. Their striving is God's power. A singular thing is nothing apart from its striving. Spinoza's Ethics a guide to increasing our power. Increased power is joy, decreased power is sadness. Refutes Bennett's interpretation.

Chapter VII.

A Problem, and Its Solution...

Does the essence of individual things involve existence or not? Yes, but no finite mode is great enough in power to resist all other powers. And that mode did not create itself.

Chapter VIII.

Power in Spinoza's Epistemology...
Ideas are essentially active in nature. God understands himself. The human mind understands the human body; and itself. Imagination tied to the body. Ideas persist. Reason founded upon common notions. There are common notion about the mind also. Intuition compared to reason. Intuition understands the essences of singular things; and God's essence. Intuition an awareness of God's essence in ourselves.

Chapter IX.

Spinoza's Self-Help Program. . .

How to cure an affect. An example: Orange-Gluttony. Spinoza's analysis of the affect: a learned association of oranges with pleasure. The mind's own striving to understand maintains the association. When reason realizes that oranges do not increase its power, it ceases to love the oranges. Reason and Intuition may sometimes understand the same things. Intuition more effective than reason. Individual essences are unique. Reason can't understand unique aspects of an essence. Reason is theoretical, intuition is self-awareness. Empowerment through self-awareness the ultimate goal of the Ethics. Why we love God when we understand him.

Chapter X.

Spinozistic Speculations. . .

Modes as powers. Concrete examples. Mind-to-mind interaction. An unaffected mind would be nothing but pure potential; as would an unaffected body. But potential power is always expressing itself. Powers over time may become anything. Power has two functions: causes itself to be, and causes others to perceive its being. Conditions any interpretation of Spinoza must satisfy. Attributes without modes would be nothing except potential; no length, breadth, depth, or figure. Spatial perception a mode of imagination. To say all things are in God doesn't require space.

Appendix I.

Hallett. . .

Appendix II.

Does Motion and Rest follow a priori from Extension?

Appendix III.

Spinoza and Hume. . .
Abbreviations

In the text I refer to items in the *Ethics* using the "standard method," according to which "EI II, P7 Schol." refers to Book II, Proposition 7, Scholium; "Dem." refers to the demonstration; "D" refers to a definition. Other works are referred to as follows:

**B**
  (Indianapolis, IN; Hackett, 1984)

**C**
- Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometric Method.*

**DP**
  (Princeton, N.J.; Princeton University Press, 1985)

**Ep.C**
- Spinoza, Letters in *The Collected Works of Spinoza.*

**Ep.S**
- Spinoza, Letters in *The Ethics and Selected Letters.*

**Ep.W**
  (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963)

**H**

**Med.**
- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes.*
  trans. Cottingham, Stoothoff, & Murdoch (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1984)

Opera  Spinoza, *Benedicti De Spinoza, Opera Quotquot Reperta Sunt.* ed. Vloten & Land; (MCMXIII)

OR  Descartes, *Objections and Replies,* in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes.*

PoP  Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes.*


TEI  Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect,* in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*

Spinoza's Concept of Power

Chapter I.

Introduction

In 1676, near the end of his life, Spinoza received a pair of letters from Ehrenfried Walter von Tschirnhaus. Among other matters, the letters expressed interest in Spinoza's solution to the following problem: how is it possible to show that the existence of bodies in motion follows from the nature of extension.

I find it exceedingly difficult to conceive how the existence of bodies having motion and figure can be proved a priori, since there is nothing of this kind in Extension when we consider it absolutely. (Ep. W LXXX)

The problem: extension considered by itself is nothing but extended. It is three-dimensional nothingness. Spinoza's God is infinitely extended, infinite in length, breadth, and width. As Spinoza puts it, infinite extension constitutes God's essence. How does it follow from this essence that it should have moving bodies distinguished within it? In his second letter Tschirnhaus gives us Descartes' solution:

For you remember the opinion of Descartes whereby he maintains that he can deduce this variety from Extension in no other way than by supposing that this was the effect produced in Extension by motion which was started by God. (Ep. W LXXXII)

This was, in fact, a question that much interested philosophers of the time. Descartes, Boyle, and (the young) Leibniz had addressed it, each concluding that, since extended substance did not in itself possess any power capable of putting it into motion, the power must have been put into it by God. Extension left by itself would remain inert. God, therefore, gave it a push, so to speak, and set things going.
Spinoza's response to Tschirnhaus was maddeningly brief:

... from extension as Descartes conceives it— that is, as an inert mass— it is not only difficult, as you say, to prove the existence of bodies, but quite impossible. For inert matter, regarded simply in itself, will continue in a state of rest, and will not be set in motion unless by a more powerful external cause. For this reason I have not hesitated to say on a former occasion that Descartes' principles of natural things are without value, not to say absurd. (Ep. S LXXXI)

The problem, says Spinoza, is with the Cartesian concept of extension. Extension is not simply inert; it is somehow in its very nature that it moves. But this simply begs the question. Hence in his second letter Tschirnhaus is a little more insistent:

I should like you to do me the favour of showing me how, according to your thoughts, the variety of things can be deduced a priori from the conception of Extension. (Ep. W LXXXII)

To which Spinoza responds:

With regard to your question as to whether the variety of things can be demonstrated a priori solely from the conception of Extension, I believe I have already shown sufficiently clearly that this is impossible, and that therefore Descartes is wrong in defining matter through Extension; it must be explicated through an attribute that expresses eternal and infinite essence. (Ep. S LXXXIII)

The answer is dissatisfying, to say the least. Again he criticizes Descartes' views, but does not explain his own. What does it mean to say matter "must necessarily be defined by an attribute which expresses eternal and infinite essence"? In what way does Spinoza's concept of extension differ from Descartes?

It is this exchange, and these questions, which prompted me to study Spinoza's concept of power. Why power? First of all, because Spinoza's critique of Descartes suggests that part of the problem with Descartes' concept of extension is that it is quiescent, quiescentem. The
implication is that extension must be conceived as inherently active, self-moving, or in other words: empowered. Second, and more important, is the reference to "an attribute which expresses eternal and infinite essence." Looking to Spinoza's *Ethica* for more on the subject of essences I found numerous passages identifying the essence of things—both God and individual modes—with power. Since much of the rest of this work will be spent looking at such passages, here I call your attention to just one:

I P34: God's power is his essence itself.
Dem.: For from the necessity alone of God's essence it follows that God is the cause of himself (by P11) and (by P16 and P16C) of all things. Therefore, God's power, by which he and all things are and act, is his essence itself, q.e.d.

This passage will perhaps prove to be the most important to this entire study; I will return to it again and again throughout. For now, just consider briefly a few of its implications. It tells us that God's essence causes God's existence, that it causes God's actions, that it causes the existence of all things, and that it causes the actions of all things. God's essence does all this: God's essence is the power that explains the existence and actions of all things. But what, you may ask, about extension and thought? Doesn't Spinoza say that these attributes are what the intellect perceives as God's essence? Well, if so, and if the intellect is not deceived, and if God's essence is power as P34 suggests, then perhaps we must rethink our understanding of the attributes. As Spinoza said to Tschirnhaus, extension is not like Cartesian extension, and perhaps we shall also find that thought, for Spinoza, is not a mental stuff in which ideas inhere. Rather, they may be powers of some sort. And if that is what attributes are, we may wonder what the modes—the modifications—of these attributes will be like?
These are some of the questions to be addressed in the pages that follow. Focusing on the idea that God's essence is his power, I will explore the role of God's power in the creation of God and in God's creation of the modes, both infinite and finite. I will examine the nature of these modes, and the relationship of their power to God's power. I will also look at the role of power in Spinoza's epistemology and psychology, and will attempt to show how Spinoza's metaphysics, epistemology, and psychology provide a foundation for his ethical doctrines. Power is the key.

I begin the main argument (Chapter 3) with an examination of Spinoza's explication of Descartes. In *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy* Spinoza not only summarizes Descartes' views in geometric fashion, but extends and criticizes them as well. Spinoza's version of Cartesianism has God outside the universe continually causing its existence. At every moment God must recreate the universe, otherwise it would cease to exist. Since this includes both minds and bodies, Spinoza concludes that all events, whether mental or physical, happen solely through God's power, and that neither minds nor bodies have power of their own (although Descartes--mistakenly, in Spinoza's opinion--thinks minds do). Spinoza's Descartes is, in other words, an occasionalist.

Oversimplifying a bit, I then argue (Chapter 4) that the primary difference between Spinoza's God and Descartes' God (as Spinoza understood him) is that Spinoza places God's creative power inside the universe, rather than outside. God, according to Spinoza, is an immanent creative power: it is a power in all things, and it must continually preserve the
Being (Essendi) of things, not just in the sense of continually providing food, air, and water, or by other activities within nature, but by keeping all things from, as it were, popping out of existence. My argument rests on: (1) comparison of passages in the Ethics to Spinoza's work on Descartes, which show him using the same language to describe his own metaphysics as he used to describe an occasionalized Descartes; (2) passages from works other than the Ethics which indicate clearly that Spinoza at least believed what I've said at one time; (3) to show that he continued to believe it, I tie together many passages from Spinoza's mature works which fit most naturally into my interpretation, and explain how many passages which were previously obscure, or which under other interpretations were simply nonsense, now make sense.

Chapter 5 explains why Spinoza thinks motion and rest in the universe must follow from the power of God. I put together a valid argument, using only premises that can be found in the Ethics, which leads to the conclusion that there must be motion and rest. It is not a sound argument, but since Spinoza clearly accepted its premises, we can assume he wouldn't have perceived its unsoundness.

Chapter 6 extends the metaphysics outlined in the previous chapters into the realm of ethics. That it can be done so successfully and that it helps make greater sense of the ethical doctrines I take as further verification of my interpretation. In brief, Spinoza's ethics is a system that describes how we share in God's power—our power being a portion of God's immanent power—and how we may increase our share of that power, by virtuous behavior, thus increasing our joy.

Chapter 7 resolves an apparent contradiction in Spinoza's writings:
how it is that all things share in God's essence—a power which continually causes all existence—while yet they cannot be said to include existence in their own essence.

Chapter 8 discusses the role of power in Spinoza's epistemology. There I show that Spinozistic ideas are not conceived by him as inert, but as acts of understanding, which strive to maintain themselves in our minds and cause other ideas to follow from them. This leads to Chapter 9, where I examine specific ways in which an individual person, by increasing knowledge of the passions that afflict him or her, is supposed to gain power over them.

Chapter 10 speculatively ties the discoveries of the previous chapters to other important aspects of Spinoza's metaphysics, striving toward a more comprehensive understanding of Spinoza's God.

Before beginning, a few words about my procedure are in order.

My goal is to get inside Spinoza's head and understand the world as he looked at it. I want to know what his words are referring to, or whether they refer to nothing. None of us, I think, can ever claim with certainty to fully understand Spinoza. I am excited by the inroads I feel that I've made, but very much aware that there are gaps and confusions in my work. It is sometimes discouraging, for I often feel like I'm on the verge of understanding some obscure passage, but the meaning eludes me. I suspect this is a common experience among Spinoza scholars.

My method is a combination of historical work (looking at a problem of the time, and how it might connect to Spinoza's thought); textual work (finding every passage I can throughout Spinoza's writings that has
anything to do with the problem I'm focused on, comparing them to each
other, and trying to understand each in its context and in relationship to
others); and finally, some imaginative speculation and self-reflection.
The last of these might seem strange in a work of historical scholarship.
But my justification is this: I am convinced that basic metaphysical
world views are often tied into our personal lives. Such was the case for
Spinoza: if we are to take him at his word, his philosophizing was
motivated by emotional crisis, by spiritual crisis. That is how he
thought of it. (See the first several pages of his earliest work, the
Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect.) One might dismiss these
words as a literary convention, not to be taken seriously, or at least as
having nothing to do with his philosophy or the soundness of it. But the
problem with such a dismissal is this: that motivation would have
influenced what Spinoza thought about. He was trying to solve certain
problems, and they were not all theoretical problems. They concerned his
own life, his own well-being. The best way to understand those parts of
his philosophy may therefore be to try to understand the existential
problems they were meant to solve: how can I find happiness? peace of
mind? joy? power over myself? control of myself? And the best way to
understand these problems may be to try to understand them in ourselves.

This explains some of the more speculative portions of the book, and
perhaps also has something to do with my choice of topics.

I would like to connect Spinoza's thought to real life, because it
seems clear it had a personal connection to his life. I want to
understand that connection, by trying to connect it to mine.
Chapter II.

On Some Recent Interpretations

Since I will be dealing with topics that have been worked over many times before, and in recent years by such excellent scholars as Jonathan Bennett and Edwin Curley, it is incumbent upon me to first explain why yet another interpretation of Spinoza's metaphysics is needed. The answer, of course, is quite simple: I believe none of the recent commentators have understood Spinoza correctly, although, as will be seen, my interpretation shares elements with many of them. Moreover, I believe that one of Spinoza's not-so-recent commentators--namely, Hallett--has many things to say about Spinoza that are more fruitful than the interpretations of recent scholars. I shall devote a section later to discussion of Hallett's views. At this point, I offer preliminary criticisms of Bennett and Curley, who I consider the most important of recent commentators. Further criticisms of Bennett, Curley, and others will be given later as they become relevant.

We begin with Jonathan Bennett. Bennett's view, in brief, is as follows: Spinoza "identified God with the whole of reality."(B,32) "'God' (is) a name for the universe, (B,32). . . "the familiar, everyday, natural world."(B,33) The attribute of extension, according to Bennett, is what we would call space: Euclidean space, infinite in all directions.(B,87) Modes of extension are qualities in various regions of space: "qualities such as impenetrability, mass, and so on."(B,89)

Bennett's interpretation has many important strengths: in
particular, it allows him to explain Spinoza's meaning when he claims substance cannot be divided and that it does not consist of parts. Thus there is strong textual support for Bennett's interpretation. (See B, p. 81-88) Furthermore, it is an interpretation which has plausibility for those who are of a scientific frame of mind, and which has similarities to views expressed by other scientists and philosophers since Spinoza's time: Newton, Kant, and Faraday, for example. (B,91) Indeed, Spinoza's metaphysics, on Bennett's view, turns out to be an anticipation of—or at least compatible with—quantum field theory. (B,92)

What about the concept of power, on which we intend to focus? Bennett should be quoted in full on this issue:

Spinoza, incidentally, sees these laws((the laws of physics)) as not merely regulating what happens but as keeping it happening. He does not picture the world as inherently inert and kept moving by an interfering God; and he would never entertain the thought—later embodied in the second law of thermodynamics—that the universe is running down. So he thinks of the world as somehow self-moving, perhaps like an animal. Although he attached importance to this, I can't make it yield interesting philosophy, because I can't find any clear content in it beyond the two denials I have mentioned—of an extra mundane God and of increasing entropy. I shall say no more about it. (B,107)

In short, Bennett dismisses Spinoza's ideas about power, because he can't find anything philosophically interesting in it. In so doing he also, incidentally, dismisses the views of Edwin Curley, who sees the laws of physics as doing exactly what Bennett describes—keeping things happening—and who does find it philosophically interesting. We will turn to that matter shortly. Meanwhile, the subject of power does come up at other points in Bennett's work, although it is hardly a major theme. He notes, for example, that Spinoza ties "'perfect' to 'powerful' by tying each to 'real'"(B,297), but then immediately dismisses the connection with 'real'
as irrelevant. (B, 297) This, I hope to show, is a serious mistake. As for
EI P34, where Spinoza says power is God's essence, Bennett interprets that
simply as an expression of determinism. (B, 120) At one point, Bennett does
note briefly that "Spinoza saw a thing's having a nature which must be
instantiated as its being powerful enough to cause its own
existence," (B, 74) an idea which will prove important to us in what
follows. But again, Bennett doesn't pay much attention to it, immediately
moving to other topics.

All in all, the notion of power in Spinoza gets short shrift from
Bennett. Spinoza himself provides our first objection to Bennett's
theory: Velthuysen had claimed, just as Bennett does, that according to
Spinoza, God is the universe. (Ep. W XLII) Spinoza responds, "I do not here
inquire why it is the same, or not very different, to assert that all
things emanate necessarily from the nature of God, and that the universe
is God; but I should like you to note the remarks which he no less
spitefully adds." (Ep. W LXIII) This is not an outright denial of the
views that God is the universe, but it certainly suggests it. Spinoza had
said that the universe emanates from the nature of God, not that it is
God, as Velthuysen accused. Thus he sees no need to inquire why someone
would think the first claim implies the latter.

Letter LXXI, to Oldenberg, clarifies the issue:

I maintain that God is, as they say, the immanent cause of all
things. . . those who think that the Tractatus Theologico-
Politicus rests on this, namely, that God and Nature (by which
they mean a certain mass, or corporeal matter) are one and the
same, are entirely mistaken. (Ep. W LXXI)

And what, after all, does Bennett's view amount to? Extension as infinite
space seems not much different from extension as infinite mass, especially
since the qualities moving about in Bennett's space are not given any
power to move about. And will Bennett say these qualities emanate from
space? Certainly not, for that would make space something a bit more than
space, something I suspect Bennett would not approve of. Again, there is
the problem which prompted our study: Spinoza says the concept of
extension as a quiescent mass is absurd. Prima facie, extension as
infinite space seems a lot like quiescent mass: it is not "mass," exactly,
but it is very quiet.

In summary, my objection to Bennett is that his theory is not truly
representative of Spinoza's views because he ignores ideas about power
which Spinoza thought were important, and his central claim, that God is
the universe, is one that Spinoza apparently denies.

Let us now turn our attention to another Spinoza scholar: Edwin
Curley. His view, in brief, is that Spinoza... identified God with (the attributes in which are
inscribed) the fundamental laws of nature, which provide the
ultimate explanation for everything that happens in nature.
That is, he identified God with Nature, not conceived as the
totality of things, but conceived as the most general
principles of order exemplified by things. (C,42)

Curley goes on to equate God's laws with God's power, and thence with
God's essence. (C,43)

Here is another view which will have an appeal for those of a
scientific frame of mind. However, before we can evaluate it, we will
need to understand it. We must ask: in what sense of the words "laws of
nature" is it meaningful to identify them with power? What exactly does
Curley's view amount to? There is more than one way to conceive of
nature's laws. I shall distinguish three.

First there is what we will call the Humean conception. According
to this view of natural laws—something like which, I suspect, lies behind Bennett's dismissal of the concept of power—a law of nature will simply be a regularity in nature: i.e. the stated law will be a description of a constant conjunction which has been observed between events. A law of nature then is not really a "law" at all in the sense of being something which causes things to happen in a certain way, or which cannot be violated. On the Humean view of things, there is no reason to expect that the future will resemble the past. But according to Curley the laws of nature "provide the ultimate explanation for everything that happens in nature." (C, 42) Humean laws certainly do not do this: they describe, but never explain. Likewise, the equation of God's laws with God's power indicates that the laws are meant to be a power or force of some sort which causes things to happen: a distinctly non-Humean notion. Hence the Humean conception of laws is not Curley's.

A second way of interpreting laws of nature is what we will call the Platonic conception, according to which a law of nature describes a transcendental force, somehow separate from nature, yet at the same time playing a causal role in nature. Such laws play a role similar to the God of the occasionalists: they are outside nature, causing everything which happens in nature. We will discuss later whether or not this is Spinoza's view of things (passages quoted above indicate that it could be), but it is certainly not Curley's view. The laws of nature, according to Curley, are inscribed in nature, in the attributes. They are a power in things which causes things to happen. They are immanent, not transcendent, and hence not Platonic (as we have defined it).

The third way we shall call the Common Sense view (it being the view
many of my students seem to hold). According to this view, a law of nature describes a power in nature: a power, force, or capacity in things which makes them act in accordance with that law. And this is the view Curley seems to hold. Paraphrasing Curley, the laws are "general principles of order," "inscribed" in the attributes. They are the ultimate explanation of events in the world, the "primary cause of motion."(C,43) The principles are themselves God's power. They are what causally determines one event to be followed by another. If Body A rolls from one position to another, it is the law of nature inscribed in that body which makes it do so. Or, in Spinozistic terms, it is the law inscribed in the attribute that Body A is a mode of, which causes Body A to act.

I see no important difference between this view of God's power and that of other commentators who wish to identify God's power with a power in things that moves them about. The difference between saying: "there is a power in things which causes them to move" and "there is a principle in things which causes them to move" seems merely verbal. Granted, Curley gives a sophisticated account of the deduction of infinite modes from the most general principles, and of the actions of finite modes. Ultimately, however, his view of things comes down to this: the attribute of extension exists as an infinitely extended stuff. In extension--inscribed in it--are principles/power/laws/forces/energies--whatever you want to call them--which causes the modes of extension to behave in various ways. The modes are not themselves really the cause of anything, except insofar as they have this causal agent--the principle or power--within them. God then is identified with this causal agent that is in all
things. Analogous statements can, of course, be made about the attribute of thought.

I see several problems with any such interpretation of Spinoza.

First of all, they get backwards the relationship which Spinoza says exists between God and all things. "I assert that all things live and move in God." he tells us. Curley's view, however, and those views I here group with his, assert that God moves and lives in all things. This is not a mere quibble about words. Consider again Bennett's view of things: there the modes of God are in God, in space. This gets the relationship right. In Curley's view, the attribute of extension is much the same as in Bennett's, but it is not God. Rather, God is a power in the attribute of extension, "inscribed" in it. Likewise for the other views: the power is in the modes, the energy is in the space.

Curley, I suspect, is bothered by this problem. Spinoza, he said, "identified God with (the attributes in which are inscribed) the fundamental laws of nature." What means this phrase in parentheses? Is God identified with the laws, or with the attributes in which the laws are inscribed? Or is it with the law-inscribed attributes? As he goes on it becomes clear that Curley favors the first option: God is the laws. But then what of the attributes? Are they God? Are the properties of God? Curley's not sure: hence the parenthetical phrase.

There indeed seems to me to be a fundamental incoherence in Curley's book, *Behind the Geometrical Method*. Curley uses the first thirty pages to show how Spinoza's philosophy of God and the attributes can be derived from the philosophy of Descartes. This gives us the view of extension as infinitely extended stuff, and God as consisting of infinite attributes.
But then he apparently drops this view, in favor of his "radical suggestion." (C,36) The point, perhaps, was means to be that the attempted derivation of Spinoza's philosophy from that of Descartes simply fails. Because of problems he outlines in section 12, Spinoza's view of things must not be that of a modified Cartesian. If this was Curley's intention, perhaps it might have been made clearer. In any case, we are left with this tension between the identification of God with the attributes—a view Curley seems not quite ready to leave behind—and with the laws of nature.

Secondly, with regard to Curley's view in particular, it must be pointed out that nowhere does Spinoza say God is the laws of nature, although Spinoza does talk of the laws of nature, and even of their relationship to God's nature. Indeed, some of the passages Curley draws on for support really weigh against him. He laws great weight on Spinoza's claim that "the laws (are) inscribed in these things, as in their true causes, according to which all singular things come to be, and are ordered." (TEI,Sec.101) The "things" referred to are, Curley claims, the attributes. If so this amounts to a claim that the laws of nature are inscribed in the attributes, not that they are the attributes, and if God consists of attributes then it follows that the laws are inscribed in God, but not that they are God.

My third objection to these views is that in each of them, the laws of nature are said to be the essence of God, but the laws of nature as conceived—according to the common-sense view—are the wrong sort of thing to be the essence of God or substance. Thus the essence of extension is conceived as a power in extension which causes the modes of extension to move around. So conceived, laws of nature fail to meet Spinoza's own
definition of what an essence is:

II, D2: I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is [NS: also] necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily [NS: also] taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing. (E II D2)

According to this definition the essence of a thing must be a necessary and sufficient condition for that thing. Given the essence, you have the thing; take away the essence, you take away the thing. So we may ask, quite simply, whether the laws of nature—conceived of as powers which move things—are necessary and sufficient conditions of the attribute of extension, or not. As conceived, they quite plainly are not. They do seem to be a sufficient condition for extension. It is true that given a certain power of extended nature, there would have to be something in existence which it is the power of. Thus, given a power of extension, we must have extension. But suppose there were no powers in extended nature. Would it follow that there could be no extension? It appears to me that extension could still exist, either as 1) an unmodified, quiescent mass, a la Descartes, or 2) an active, but chaotic, mass, i.e. one in which there were no laws of nature governing anything, sort of a radical Humean universe. Hence laws of nature so conceived are a sufficient condition for extension, but not a necessary one. So they do not meet Spinoza's own definition of essence.

To this one might object that, even for the quiescent mass or the chaotic mass, there will always be some laws of nature which describe/govern the events—or the lack of events—in that mass. So for extension, however conceived, some laws of nature necessarily accompany it. Granted. But this will not save Curley's view, for Curley wants to
identify Spinoza's God with a specific set of natural laws: the laws of nature. Indeed, he sees these laws as--in Spinoza's mind--beyond explanation: "the laws involved in the attributes of substance, are necessary in the sense that they could not have had a cause distinct from themselves, and hence, could not have been otherwise."(C,49)

If the fundamental laws of nature can't, precisely because they are so fundamental, be explained by anything else, then we must regard them as self-explanatory. There is, and could have been, nothing other than the fundamental laws themselves which causes them to be what they are.(C,45)

The laws of nature could not have been other than what they are, Curley claims. But there doesn't seem to be any logical reason why they couldn't, as our examples, the history of science, and many science-fiction writers, have shown. It is easily conceivable that the laws of nature, and even the laws of extension, might have been otherwise. Hence the laws of nature cannot be the essence of extension. Given any particular set of laws of extension. we must have extension; but given extension, no particular set of laws is necessary.

Finally, all these views fail to explain something which was of great importance to Spinoza. God's power, said Spinoza, is the power by which he both is and acts. None of these views explain the first part of the clause: how this power is the power by which God is. At best they only explain the second part: how God acts. The views are, admittedly, attractive, as they present Spinoza as a philosopher whose views are plausible--even, dare I say, common sense--to the average person today. (Recall the aforementioned students, who imagined the laws of nature in just this way, although not, of course, as God.) But Spinoza attached
great importance to the first idea as well, as much of this project will be an attempt to prove. In the end, we shall see a radically different Spinoza than what these commentators have suggested: less modern and less scientific perhaps, but all the more interesting for it.
Chapter III.

Spinoza on Descartes: Descartes Occasionalized

We turn now to Descartes. ... or rather, to Spinoza’s understanding of Descartes. As said earlier, I believe we can better understand Spinoza’s ideas about the power of God if we see them in relation to Descartes’ ideas. Not only do Spinoza’s views share elements with those of Descartes’, but also some of the differences may be seen as corrections to the Cartesian system. So my plan in this chapter is to present some of the key aspects of Spinoza’s reading of Descartes on the subject of power. Our primary source is Spinoza’s Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy Demonstrated in the Geometric Order. (Hereafter referred to simply as Descartes’ Principles.) where we will see that Spinoza interpreted Descartes as being an occasionalist, albeit an inconsistent one. Moreover, since I believe Spinoza’s reading of Descartes a plausible one, we will look not only at Spinoza’s writings but also at passages from Descartes' Principles and from the Meditations which show that Spinoza’s interpretation may be correct.

Regarding the issue of power, the Cartesian metaphysics is, I assume, generally interpreted in something like the following way: God causes himself to exist as well as causing the existence of the universe, hence God has the power to cause his own existence and the existence of all things. Moreover, God does not just create the universe in the beginning, but must continually cause it to exist, as it cannot sustain
its own existence. So God's power may be said to be continually recreating or sustaining the existence of the universe. However, things in the universe also have power: bodies to be moved by other bodies; and minds to think, will actions, and to affect bodies.

But this is not what Spinoza found in his reading of Descartes. According to Spinoza's interpretation of Descartes, God causes his own existence, God continually recreates the universe, and this logically implies, Spinoza thinks, that bodies and minds apart from God can have no power of their own. He acknowledges, however, that Descartes believes in freedom of the will, and hence that the mind has power, but makes it clear that he thinks this view incompatible with what otherwise amounts to occasionalism.

Let us look first at the issue of God's power causing our existence. According to Spinoza, Descartes believed that the universe could not sustain its own existence from moment to moment, and therefore thought God must be continually recreating it. In other words, without God the universe would disappear in the very next moment, for the universe has no power to keep itself in existence. Hence the fact that we do continue to exist proves that God exists, since some such power (namely, God) is necessary. In Descartes' words:

21. The fact that our existence has duration is sufficient to demonstrate the existence of God.

It will be impossible for anything to obscure the clarity of this proof, if we attend to the nature of time or of the duration of things. For the nature of time is such that its parts are not mutually dependent, and never coexist. Thus, from the fact that we now exist, it does not follow that we shall exist a moment from now, unless there is some cause—the same cause which originally produced us—which continually reproduces us, as it were, that is to say, which keeps us in existence. For we easily understand that there is no power in
us enabling us to keep ourselves in existence. We also understand that he who has so great a power that he can keep us in existence, although we are distinct from him, must be all the more able to keep himself in existence; or rather, he requires no other being to keep him in existence, and hence, in short, is God. (PoP, 13)

Spinoza, in his geometric exposition of Descartes' *Principles*, restates this proof:

I cannot now exist without being preserved as long as I exist, either by myself, if in fact I have that power, or by another who has it (by A10 and A11). But I exist (by P45) and nevertheless I do not have the power to preserve myself, as was just now proved. Therefore, I am preserved by another. But not by another who does not have the power to preserve himself (by the same reasoning by which I just demonstrated that I cannot preserve myself). So I am preserved by another who has the power of preserving himself, i.e. (by L2), whose nature involves necessary existence, i.e. (by L1C), who contains all the perfections which I understand to pertain clearly to a supremely perfect being. And therefore a supremely perfect being, i.e. (by D8), God, exists, as was to be demonstrated. (DP I, P7 Dem.)

We also find there a number of passages such as the following:

... at each moment God continually creates a thing, anew as it were. (MT I, Ch.XI)

... no created thing can exist by its own nature for even a moment, but each is created continually by God. (MT I, Ch.XII)

This part of Spinoza's interpretation seems indubitably correct: the passage from Descartes' *Principles* is clear in its meaning, and Spinoza commits no gaffes in his reading of it. I also want to underscore the fact that he shows Spinoza to be well aware of Descartes' belief that we are sustained in existence by God, and also of his belief that God is able to keep himself in existence.

But what of the other sorts of causation? Do bodies and minds apart from God have any power of their own? Here is how Spinoza reads Descartes:
P11 Scholium: So far we have dealt with the nature of motion. Now it is necessary for us to inquire into its cause, which is twofold. There is the primary, or general, cause, which is the cause of all the motions that there are in the world, and there is the particular cause, by which it comes about that the individual parts of matter acquire motions that they did not have before. As far as the general cause is concerned, since nothing is to be admitted except what we perceive clearly and distinctly (by IP14 and P15S), and since we do not clearly and distinctly understand any other cause except God (i.e., the creator of matter), it is evident that no other general cause except God should be admitted, and what we say here about motion should also be understood to be true of rest. (DP II, P11 Schol.)

This passage corresponds to Passage 36 in Descartes' Principles, where Descartes says the cause of motion is twofold:

36. God is the primary cause of motion; and he always preserves the same quantity of motion in the universe.

After this consideration of the nature of motion, we must look at its cause. This is in fact twofold: first, there is the universal and primary cause—the general cause of all the motions in the world; and second there is the particular cause which produces in an individual piece of matter some motion which it previously lacked. Now as far as the general cause is concerned, it seems clear to me that this is no other than God himself. In the beginning (in his omnipotence) he created matter, along with its motion and rest; and now, merely by his regular concurrence, he preserves the same amount of motion and rest in the material universe as he put there in the beginning. . . thus, God imparted various motions to the parts of matter when he first created them, and he now preserves all this matter in the same way and by the same process by which he originally created it; and it follows from what we have said that this fact alone makes it most reasonable to think that God always preserves the same quantity of motion in matter. (PoP, 61-62)

Thus God created the universe with motion in it, and now preserves that motion. This is the primary cause of motion. But what of the particular causes mentioned? What are they? Descartes' answers:

From God's immutability we can also know certain rules or laws of nature, which are the secondary and particular causes of the various motions we see in particular bodies. (PoP, 62)

So Descartes believes there are only two causes of motion: the Primary
Cause, God; and the Secondary Cause, the Laws of Nature. Spinoza, however, in the passage above leaves out discussion of the particular causes, the laws of nature. He simply drops the subject, and never indicates what the particular causes are supposed to be. The reason soon becomes clear: Spinoza thinks Descartes' God is the only cause of motion in the world.¹ Thus:

P12: God is the principal cause of motion.
Dem.: Examine the immediately preceding Scholium. (DP II, P12)

P13: God still preserves, by his concurrence, the same quantity of motion and rest which he first imparted to matter.
Dem.: Since God is the cause of motion and of rest (by P12), he still preserves them by the same power by which he created them (by IA10), and indeed, in that same quantity in which he first created them (by IP20C), q.e.d. (DP II, P13)

Note that God has gone from being the primary cause, in P12, to simply the cause, in P13. Next, in P14, Spinoza will make it clear that God is the only cause of motion:

P14: Each thing, insofar as it is simply, undivided, and considered in itself alone, always perseveres in the same state as far as it can. This proposition is like an axiom to many; nevertheless, we shall demonstrate it.
Dem.: Since nothing is in any state except by God's concurrence alone (IP12) and God is supremely constant in his works (IP20C), if we attend to no external, i.e., particular causes, but consider the thing by itself, we shall have to affirm that insofar as it can it always perseveres in the state in which it is, q.e.d. (DP II, P14)

This is Descartes' first law, and Spinoza reads Descartes as saying that

---

¹Curley, in a footnote to his translation of this passage suggests the identification of the secondary causes with the laws of nature is suppressed because "according to Spinoza's own philosophy God's power of acting is to be identified with the laws of nature." (DP II, P11 Schol. note 36) Perhaps. I think the passages from Spinoza which follow—P12, P13, P14, and P15—provide a more plausible explanation for this suppression: specifically, as I argue, that according to Spinoza's interpretation of Descartes, God is the only cause of motion, and the laws of nature merely describe God's activity in doing so, hence they are not really causes at all.
the law depends on God's being "supremely constant in his works," i.e. immutable. And "nothing is in any state except by God's concurrence alone." Nothing other than God causes anything to move or rest in any way. The first law itself in effect just describes how God always acts.

Likewise in P15:

P15: Every body in motion tends of itself to continue to move in a straight line, not in one which is curved.

It would be proper to number this proposition among the axioms, but I shall demonstrate it as follows from what has been shown above.

Dem.: Because the motion has only God as its cause (P12), it never has any power to exist of itself (IA10), but is as it were created by God at every moment (by those things which are demonstrated concerning the axiom just cited). [The rest of the demonstration is irrelevant.](DP II, P15)

This is Descartes' second law, which Spinoza again reads as depending on God's power. Later, in the Metaphysical Thoughts, Spinoza sums up what has been shown:

We have shown that at each moment God continually creates a thing, anew as it were. From this we have demonstrated that the thing, of itself, never has any power to do anything or to determine itself to any action, and that this applies not only to things outside man, but also to the human will itself. (MT II, Ch.XI)

Thus Descartes has been occasionalized.

But is this a plausible reading of Descartes? Initially the answer might seem to be "No," because Descartes has called Laws of Nature causes as well, and even says bodies have power. For example:

what is joined to another thing has some power of resisting separation from it; and what is separated had some power of remaining separate. Again, what is at rest has some power of remaining at rest and consequently of resisting anything that may alter the state of rest; and what is in motion has some power of persisting in its motion, i.e. of continuing to move with the same speed and in the same direction. (PoP, 66-67)

This passage may make it sound as if bodies have power, but other passages
suggest that bodies do not really have any power of their own. Rather, what power things have depends entirely on their state, and on the laws of nature which govern them:

In this connection we must be careful to note what it is that constitutes the power of any given body to act on, or resist the action of, another body. This power consists simply in the fact that everything tends, so far as it can, to persist in the same state, as laid down in our first law. (PoP, 66) (Emphasis added)

I.E. According to the First Law of Nature, everything tends to persist in the same state. So the "power" a thing has to affect other things depends on its state. It's power consists simply in the fact that it will tend to continue in the same state. This is the first law as applied to it. Now the question is, of course: why does it continue in the same state? Does the law describe the way a power belonging to the body acts? Or is the law itself a power separate from the body? Or, as Spinoza claimed in his interpretation, does its action depend on God’s constant activity, i.e. depend on God's power? The following passage from Descartes, explaining his second law ("that every piece of matter, considered in itself, always tends to continue moving, not in any oblique path but only in a straight line (PoP, 63), I believe gives a fairly clear answer:

The reason for this second rule is the same as the reason for the first rule, namely the immutability and simplicity of the operation by which God preserves motion in matter. For he always preserves the motion in the precise form in which it is occurring at the very moment he preserves it, without taking any account of the motion which was occurring a little while earlier. (PoP, 63-64)

Hence the laws of nature should not themselves be in any way thought of as forces or powers governing things. Rather, the laws of nature are simply the laws according to which God preserves/recreates the universe. A body continues in its state because God preserves it in its state. In fact,
the immutability of the laws of nature is a result of the immutability of
God's nature. God is immutable in the sense that his activity in
recreating the universe is always done according to the same laws. God
does not change the laws of nature that he guides himself by. This is why
we can know the laws "from God's immutability." Similarly, when
explaining his third law of nature ("if a body collides with another body
that is stronger than itself, it loses none of its motion; but if it
collides with a weaker body, it loses a quantity of motion equal to that
which it imparts to the other body") (PoP, 66) Descartes says again:

The second part of (this) law is proved from the immutability
of the workings of God, by means of which the world is
continually preserved through an action identical with its
original act of creation. . . . Thus since God preserves the
world by the selfsame action and in accordance with the
selfsame laws as when he created it, the motion which he
preserves is not something permanently fixed in given pieces
of matter, but something which is mutually transferred when
collisions occur. (PoP, 66)

So the situation is as follows: although Descartes sometimes speaks of
individual bodies as having powers, they in fact have no power of their
own. All changes are produced by God in the same process by which he
sustains the world in existence. These changes are produced in accordance
with immutable laws, because God's action of continually preserving is
itself immutable. When one body strikes another, it is really God's power
which causes the motion to be transferred from one body to the next. We
may speak of matter as having power, in accordance with its state, because
of the laws of nature which govern it. Thus if Body A is moving at a
certain speed in a given direction, and we know the laws governing its
motion, we may say that because of its present state it has a certain
power to continue moving and/or to affect other bodies. But its power is
entirely a result of the fact that God will be continually recreating it in motion in accordance with those laws that govern it.

So only God's power is "really" a cause of bodily events. Laws are only "causes" in the sense that they are rules which God always follows in his creation. Descartes speaks confusingly in passages such as Principles, Part II, Section 36, where he distinguishes two causes of motion: God's concurrence, and the movements of particular things. Because God's laws are immutable, we can use our knowledge of the current motions of things to predict how they will move in the future, but in fact their future movements are not caused by any power they have in themselves. What power they have is really God's power.

So Spinoza's interpretation of Descartes regarding body to body causation is at least not implausible, but Spinoza also thinks that what applies to bodies applies to minds. Spinoza explains:

since the parts of duration have no connection with one another, we can say, not so much that God preserves things as that he creates them. So if a man now has a determinate freedom to do something, it must be said that God has created him thus at this time. Nor is it an objection to this that the human will is often determined by things outside it, and that in turn all things in nature are determined by one another to activity. For they have been determined so by God. No thing can determine the will, nor can the will in turn be determined, except by the power of God alone.(MT II, Ch. XI)

This is quite a bombshell to be dropped in a book about Descartes, and is, of course, more Spinoza's view than Descartes'. Spinoza sees Descartes' metaphysics as ultimately entailing that all things happen by the will of God. At every moment God recreates the universe, and neither bodies nor minds have any power of their own. So if I will to do a certain thing it is because God created that will, and if I then do it, it is God who creates me doing it.
Could Descartes possibly have gone so far in his occasionalism? It hardly seems likely. Consider the following passage from the *Meditations*:

It is only the will, or freedom of choice, which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp; so much so that it is above all in virtue of the will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God. For although God's will is incomparably greater than mine, both in virtue of the knowledge and power that accompany it and make it more firm and efficacious... nevertheless it does not seem any greater than mine when considered as will in the essential and strict sense. This is because the will simply consists in our ability to do or not do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); (Med, 57)

At this point, let us not worry about what other powers Descartes may believe the mind might have. That is not vital to our purpose. All that is important is that Descartes believes human minds do have some power which is not just the power of God, as was the case for extended substance. They have a power to will which is, "in some way," like God's will. Human minds thus are able, to some extent at least, to direct their own actions and even to influence the movements of their bodies. Nevertheless they still do not have the power to maintain themselves in existence. In the *Third Meditation*, speaking specifically of his existence as a mental substance, Descartes says:

For a lifespan can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the other, so that it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I exist now, unless there is some cause which as it were creates me afresh at this moment--that is, which preserves me. For it is quite clear to anyone who attentively considers the nature of time that the same power and action are needed to preserve anything at each individual moment of its duration as would be required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence. (Med, 49)

This is just another version of the argument presented earlier (PoP, 13). Descartes goes on to ask whether he might have that power to cause his
continued existence. His answer: "--if there were such a power in me, I should undoubtedly be aware of it. But I experience no such power, and this very fact makes me recognize most clearly that I depend on some being distinct from myself."(Med.49) And of course this being turns out to be God.

Thus here we have two processes of causation working together. We have God maintaining minds in existence--continually preserving or continually creating--the distinction, as Descartes says, being only conceptual(Med.49). But in part at least the minds themselves determine what the nature of that creation will be. God creates a mind at any given time, but is not the sole cause of the mind's nature at that time. The mind itself contributes.

Now, from Spinoza's point of view, this is incoherent, and he lets us know as much in no uncertain terms. If God is continually creating all things, there is simply no room for men to have any power of their own, in their minds or their bodies. All power of causation is really God's power. Hence in the Metaphysical Thoughts Spinoza emphasizes strongly the unsolvability of this problem:

But how the human will is produced by God at each moment in such a way that it remains free we do not know. (MT I, Ch.III)

And again later:

How this is compatible with human freedom, i.e. how God can do this and human freedom be preserved, we confess that we do not know. . . .(MT II, Ch. XI)

It is clear, I think, from Spinoza's tone, that he does not think it a mystery we must simply accept. He thinks it a flat impossibility that God should continually create all things but also that we should have free-will. He does not, however, want to say it straight out. . . for it is,
after all, a book about Descartes that he's writing.

Is Spinoza right in his criticism? The question is difficult to evaluate, especially since we are dealing with a variety of causation and creation not quite comparable to any we can normally observe. One might wish to compare Descartes' view to any number of cases where two or more sources are needed to produce a third item: for example, oxygen and wood supporting a flame. But in cases like these we are dealing with the manipulation and alteration of already existing matter and energy which, presumably, continue to exist. The oxygen and wood become the flame. In the case we're trying to decide, however, God is not just acting on and/or modifying the existing thing to create its new state. He is, rather, causing its very Being, creating it afresh.

Spinoza's position is that, if this is the case, and God is therefore creating all aspects of a being, including the will, completely anew, then the will can not be free. Descartes, on the other hand, must hold that when God creates the will afresh, he does not completely determine the nature of what he creates. The will must have some power, if not to create the being of the next moment, then to determine the state of the being.

This has further repercussions. For Descartes also apparently holds that mind-body interaction is possible. The will is capable of affecting the body—indeed, what point would there be in calling it a free-will if it couldn't influence our actions? But if my will can affect the states of my body, then God's power cannot be the sole cause of the movements of my body. Which would also mean the laws of nature only describe God's activity of continual recreation in the case of bodies that are not being
affected by any human will. This causes difficulty for the claim that God's laws are immutable: when the human will intervenes, they are no longer so. Of course, Descartes could get out of this difficulty by introducing another law which says, in effect: these other laws are exempt when the human will intervenes. But has Descartes even considered this difficulty?

According to Daniel Garber, he has. Garber points to two passages in the *Principles* which imply that the laws there discussed allow for exceptions in the case of mind-body causation.

In defending the conservation principle, for example, he argues that we should not admit any changes in nature "with the exception of those changes which evident experience or divine revelation render certain, and which we perceive or believe happen without any change in the creator." (Pr II, 36) Such a proviso would certainly leave open the possibility that finite substances like our minds can be genuine causes of motion. Similarly, in presenting his impact law, Law three in the *Principles*, he claims that the law covers the causes of all changes that can happen in bodies, "at least those that are corporeal, for we are not now inquiring into whether and how human minds and angels have the power[vis] for moving bodies but we reserve this for our treatise On Man" (Pr II, 40). Again, Descartes is leaving open the possibility that there may be incorporeal causes of bodily change, that is to say, motion. (DMP, 303)²

So Spinoza was mistaken when he interpreted Descartes as saying God is the only cause of motion in bodies. Passages in the *Principles*—which Spinoza either ignored, suppressed, or simply did not notice the significance of—indicate that bodies can be affected by minds.

Moreover serious, however, is Spinoza's suggestion that God's

---

²For a more thorough discussion of this matter I refer the reader to Daniel Garber, *Descartes' Metaphysical Physics*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) pp. 280-293
continual recreation of bodies and minds does not allow minds to have a will of their own. At first I found this argument persuasive, but now I am not so sure. How can we decide what is possible for unobservable powers, in or our of minds and bodies, to do or not to do? Spinoza's position has the advantage of simplicity, and doesn't introduce impossible to solve mysteries about the human will. There is just one power, the power of God, continually causing all things to exist and act according to laws of nature. But I find it impossible to show that Descartes' position is incoherent, if we grant that the concept of a free-will is coherent in the first place. If a free-will, responsible for its own volitions, can exist, then perhaps God's power can continually sustain the existence of such a will without completely determining its nature. Personally, I think the concept of a free will is incoherent, but that is the subject of another debate.

* * *

Before leaving Descartes, there is one other issue we should cover. It is not a key element of Spinoza's interpretation of Descartes--I have not found a passage in his Descartes' Principles referring to it--but it concerns a distinction which Spinoza does make reference to in his Ethics. In the Fifth Set of Replies to Descartes' Meditations, Gassendi objected that no cause outside of us was necessary to keep us in existence.

Your conclusion, that you depend on some being distinct from yourself, is in fact correct, not in the sense that you are created anew by this being, but rather in the sense that you were once created by it. You go on to say that this being is not your parents or any other such cause. But why should it not be your parents, since it seems to evident that it was they who produced you, along with your body? This is not to mention the sun and other concurrent causes. (OR, 302)
Descartes replies:

the uneducated. . . pay attention only to the causes of coming into being and not the causes of being itself. Thus an architect is the cause of a house and a father of his child only in the sense of being the causes of their coming into being; and hence, once the work is completed it can remain in existence quite apart from the "cause" in this sense. But the sun is the cause of the light which it emits, and God is the cause of created things, not just in the sense that they are causes of the coming into being of these things, but also in the sense that they are causes of their being; and hence they must always continue to act on the effect in the same way in order to keep it in existence. (OR, 369)

A cause of coming into being is a cause like procreation, or building a machine. The thing caused does not continue to rely on that cause once it is created. The sun, and God, however, are cause of being, in that their continued activity is necessary to sustain the existence of the thing caused. Sunlight would immediately cease to be if the sun disappeared. The universe and all things in it would cease to be if God were to disappear. Gassendi is confused because he is only thinking of causes of coming into being: creations of things within the universe. If he considered the universe itself, and us as parts of it, and asked, what keeps it and us in being, he would see that God is necessary to cause its being, and our being, in a way analogous to the way the sun and sunlight themselves are items in the universe which must continually be cause by God to be, and Descartes can hardly mean in this context that God is a cause of being within the universe, which sustains other things in the universe, as does the sun. His reply to Gassendi would be totally ineffective if he did mean this, for Gassendi himself recognizes the sun as a concurrent cause, a cause which continually sustains us. When he says God is a cause of being and that all things in the universe require God to continually sustain their existence, he must mean God is neither a
cause of coming into being, nor a concurrent cause such as the sun, but a
cause of the very existence, or being, of things.
Chapter IV
God as Immanent Creative Power

It was shown in the last chapter that Spinoza was well aware of Descartes' belief that the universe is continually recreated by God, and that Spinoza thought this view incompatible with the idea that bodies and minds apart from God have any power of their own. The question before us now is: to what extent did these views influence Spinoza's philosophy?

The answer, in brief, is that the influence is great. Spinoza took seriously the question of why the universe continues to exist from moment to moment, and the question of why there is motion in the universe. And he felt there must be answers to these questions. Descartes' answers, however, seemed absurd to him. Absurd because they separated God from the universe, and in so doing removed all power from things. However, I shall argue that Spinoza agreed with Descartes that God's power is continually recreating things. The primary difference is that Spinoza thought God's power is immanent. The result: Spinoza will develop a view according to which God is an immanent power in things which continually creates them. At each and every moment, God's power—which is inside, not outside--of all things, creates them anew. He causes their existence at every moment by keeping them--by keeping the universe--from disappearing; from, as it were, popping out of existence.

My order of presentation in this chapter will be as follows. I begin by laying out more clearly, without supporting passages, Spinoza's
view of things, contrasting it with the occasionalized Cartesianism presented in the last chapter, and specifying certain terms and phrases that we will continue to use later with regard to certain aspects of it. Then we shall turn to the passages in Spinoza which verify this interpretation, focusing first on the idea that God's essence is power, second on the idea that God's power is immanent, and third on the idea that it continually creates things. My reason for this order of presentation is the density of Spinoza's writing. As we shall see, relatively short passages contain a wealth of theoretical information, often not fully spelled out, and individual passages can often be fully understood only in the context of the overall theory. Moreover, the same passage might be used several times to support different claims. Hence, I present the overall theory first.

So I return for a moment to Spinoza's version of Cartesianism. According to Descartes, the universe and God both exist, but the universe has no power to maintain its own existence. It is constantly in danger of disappearing—of popping out of existence, as it were. And it would pop out of existence, if it weren't for the fact that God exists, and God has power enough to maintain both himself, and the universe, in existence. Fortunately for us, he does. Doing so requires action on God's part: if God were to cease his activity of creation at any moment, the universe would disappear. I like to imagine the universe as a pool table, with God below it keeping it from falling into non-existence, although of course the spatial metaphor of "falling out of existence" is somewhat misleading.

Pool would be a boring game, however, if the balls didn't roll, so God livened things up a little. At each moment, when he recreates the
universe, he recreates it differently from the previous moment. He does this in accordance with certain rules he has chosen—laws of nature—such as that: if a body is in motion it will continue in motion unless prevented by another body. So if, for example, Body A was in position 1 at time 1, and position 2 at time 2, God will recreate the universe with the body in position 3 at time 3.

Only one simple step really need be made to get from this view to Spinoza’s view. Descartes’ God is a transcendent God. He is outside the universe. Spinoza, however, rejected the idea that the universe’s power of activity comes from a god who is separate from the universe. The Cartesian universe, is essentially a dead universe, a lifeless mass of extension. Witness Spinoza’s dismissal of this view in his reply to Tschirnhaus (See Ch. 1):

On the other point, from Extension as Descartes conceives it—that is, as an inert mass—it is not merely difficult, as you say, to prove the existence of bodies, but quite impossible. For inert matter, regarded simply in itself, will continue in a state of rest, and will not be set in motion unless by a more powerful external cause. For this reason I have not hesitated to say on a former occasion that Descartes’ principles of natural things are without value, not to say absurd. (Ep. S LXIV)

Descartes’ concept of Extension as an “inert mass” is absurd, Spinoza tells Tschirnhaus. Hence, Spinoza places the power of God in the universe. His universe is an active universe, a living universe. It’s power is inside it. Yet that power still performs the same functions as
the power of Descartes' God: it creates the universe continually, according to laws of nature, slightly different at each moment. Thus when billiard ball A moves from its position at time 1 to its position at time 2 and on to its position at time 3, God's power is in that pool ball causing it to exist continually as it moves from place to place. Moreover, as the "new" pool ball in its new position and time are brought into existence, the old one, in a sense, ceases to exist.

I have gone on at length with this illustration in part because I believe it all too easy to get confused due to the way we commonly think of the universe. Indeed, I believe it is our common conception of the universe which has gotten in the way of our understanding Spinoza. We tend to imagine the universe as if it were a giant container, an infinite aquarium (or a finite but unbounded one) in which things move around. We also think of time as if it were another dimension of space, thinking things move through time, toward the future. We wonder why things move forward through time, not backward. We illustrate time with "timelines." Thus the universe becomes a sort of infinite four-dimensional aquarium.\(^3\) In normal day to day life, we do not usually wonder why the container

---

\(^3\)"The besetting sin of philosophers, scientists, and, indeed, all who reflect about time is describing it as if it were a dimension of space." Mundle, C.W.K. "Time, Consciousness of" in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1967) Vol. 7-8, p. 138
exists, although we often wonder why things happen inside the universe, and explain events by causes within the universe. These constitute the normal investigations of scientists. But when, in a philosophical mood, we ask why anything exists at all, we tend to think, first of all, either that God created the universe, or that there is no cause, or maybe that the question is unanswerable; but secondly, whatever our answer to the first question, we think that within the universe things cause themselves and each other to act and to exist in certain ways. So we end up thinking in terms of two processes of causation; the cause of the existence of the universe (or perhaps, the lack thereof), and the various causes of activity within the universe. That is, we split causation into these two types:

![Diagram]

Descartes' metaphysics, for example exhibits this very confusion. On the one hand, Descartes' God is continually recreating the universe, while on the other hand, minds (although not bodies, as I argued in chapter 3) are supposed to have some power of their own to cause their future states, although they do not create them.

From the Spinozistic standpoint this is a muddle. Spinoza would have us alter our way of imagining the universe. He would point out, first of all, that the universe does not just need an explanation for its coming into existence, but also for its continued existence, for its existence at every moment. The fact that it exists now does not guarantee
it will continue to exist a moment from now. Hence something must be keeping it in existence. So we must also think differently of the nature of motion. When I begin moving from here to the other side of the room, that me which will exist at the other side of the room in a few moments does not yet exist, nor does the universe, with me in it at that time, yet exist. Or rather, yes, it exists Now, but it will need to be created a moment from now, and when it has been, the universe of Now will no longer exist. For the only thing that ever exists is the universe of the moment, not a universe extended through time, as it were. So I do not simply move over there within existence: I must be created, caused to Be, over there. Or at least, sustained in Being, as part of Being, as I move over there. I must, in fact, be caused to Be every step and moment of the way, as must the universe itself. My movement from place to place is really the result of God's continual creation of the universe. Hence there is only one process of causation going on, not two: God's power causing the existence and actions of all things in the process of continually creating them.

In the pages that follow, then, when I speak of "Being," I am referring to the universe, but not the universe as we normally imagine it; rather, the universe as a continually self-generating existence, an existence in which modes are continually generated. When I speak of "causing to be," or use other similar phrases, I mean this continual creation of existence at every moment. Thus I distinguish this sort of Being and causation of Being from our normal conception of causation, where I am, for example, caused to be on the other side of the room by walking over there, or caused to exist by continually breathing. To those who suspect me of some sort of mysticism in my use of the term "Being,"
capitalized, I reply that I have precedent in Spinoza's writings for using it as a special term in this way, as I shall soon reveal.

Finally, I should point out that I have, for the moment, oversimplified the relationship between Spinoza and Descartes. To those who object that there are more differences between them than I have indicated, I grant as much. I am merely trying to focus on a single issue. I will present further refinements of our model as necessary later.

As noted earlier, there are three central elements to this picture, which I shall now deal with one at a time. The first element is the idea that God is power. The second, that God's power is immanent. Third, that God's power continually creates things.

1. That God's essence is power is clearly indicated by many passages. One of the best statements of it is in the TTP:

   The same could also be easily proved from the fact that the power of Nature is the divine power and virtue, and the divine power is the very essence of God. (TTP, 126)

What "could easily be proved" is not presently relevant to us. The equating of divine power and virtue will become important later. That "the divine power is the very essence of God," is what I have claimed. This power is the same as the power of Nature. The divine power, God's essence, is Nature's power.

Proposition 34 of the Ethics tells us the same thing:

P34: God's power is his essence itself.
Dem.: For from the necessity alone of God's essence it follows that God is the cause of himself (by P11) and (by P16 and P16C) of all things. Therefore, God's power, by which he
and all things are and act, is his essence itself. (EI P34)

God's essence causes God's existence. (P11) God's essence causes all things. (P16 and P16C). Thus God's essence is equivalent to God's power. God's essence may be thought of as a power which causes his own existence as well as the existence and actions of all things. Likewise, P16 shows that "from God's supreme power, or infinite nature, infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, i.e. all things, have necessarily flowed." (EI P17 Schol.I) God's infinite nature is an infinite power which causes infinitely many modes. Numerous passages throughout Book I referring to God as a cause of things and as omnipotent verify that God is thought of as a causal agent, a power that makes things happen. (see for example IP16, IP16 Cor.1, Cor.2 & Cor.3; IP17, P17 Cor. 1, Cor. 2, & Schol.) Look especially at IP29 Schol.:

Before I proceed further, I wish to explain here—or rather to advise [the reader]—what we must understand by Natura naturans and Natura naturata. For from the preceding I think it is already established that by Natura naturans we must understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, or such attributes of substance as express an eternal and infinite essence, i.e. (by P14C1 and P17C2), God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause.

But by Natura naturata I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, or from any of God's attributes, i.e., all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God. (EI P29 Schol.)

It should likewise be easy to understand from the preceding how to understand this passage. God is Natura naturans—naturating nature—-infinite, unrestricted (hence free) power which (I shall contend) continually creates itself and all things. Natura naturata—natured nature—are all the things—trees, people, motion, thoughts—which flow continually from God's power. In any case, the fact that God is power
should be relatively uncontroversial. What exactly it means is yet to be
discovered.

2. Nature's power could be considered none other than God's power,
as we've claimed, while still within the Cartesian framework, if one were
willing to think of Nature's power as transcendent. But according to
Spinoza, God's power is immanent.

P18: God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all
things.
Dem.: Everything that is, is in God, and must be conceived
through God (by P15), and so (by P16c1) God is the cause of
[NS:all] things, which are in him. That is the first [thing
to be proven]. And then outside God there can be no substance
(by P14), i.e. (by D3), thing which is in itself outside God.
That was the second. God, therefore, is the immanent, not the
transitive cause of all things, q.e.d.(EI P18)

Likewise Letter 73 to Oldenberg explains: "I maintain that God is, as
they say, the immanent cause of all things, but not the transeunt
cause."(Ep.W LXXIII) Several passages in the Short Treatise also tell us
the same (for example, I/30: 29-30; I/26: 17-18; and I/35: 19-21). Thus
God's power, cause of himself and of all things, is in those things, and
not separate from them. Hence the Platonic conception of nature's laws,
described in chapter 2, is not Spinoza's.

3. So I have established that God's essence is to be thought of as
an immanent causal power, whatever else it may be. This seems pretty much
the view advocated by Curley, and so far I do not disagree with him. The
next point, however, is the crucial point: God's power is not just a
power in things causing them to move around. Spinoza, like his
contemporaries Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz, thought God's power
was creating things at every moment.

A nice statement of this belief is the following passage from the
Short Treatise.

...I shall...show briefly that Freedom of the Will is completely inconsistent with a continuous creation, viz. that the same action is required in God to preserve [a thing] in being as to create it, and that without this action the thing could not exist for a moment. If this is so, nothing can be attributed to [the Will]. But one must say that God has created it as it is; for since it has no power to preserve itself while it exists, much less can it produce something through itself. If someone should say, therefore, that the soul produces the volition of itself, I ask: from what power? Not from that which was, for that no longer exists. Nor from that which it now has, for it does not have any by which it could exist or endure for the least moment, because it is continuously created. So because there is no thing which has any power to preserve itself or to produce anything, the only conclusion left is that God alone is, and must be, the efficient cause of all things, and that all Volitions are determined by him. (ST I/82/23-40)

This argument against freedom of the will is basically the same as that given by Spinoza in *Descartes' Principles*: if God is continually creating things, they can have no power of their own, for their actions are really a result of God's creating them at each moment. Most of this passage is, I think, clear enough, given what we've covered already, except for one part. "If someone should say, therefore, that the soul produces the volition of itself, I ask: from what power? Not from that which was, for that no longer exists. Nor from that which it now has, for it does not have any by which it could exist or endure for the least moment, because it is continually created." The argument, I think, is this: if the soul is supposed to produce actions itself, it must do so either from a power it had in the past or from power it has now. The first alternative is ruled out, however, because what is past no longer exists, and so can no longer produce anything. Only things in the present moment exist, so if the soul is to produce anything, it must do so from its present power. But the soul has no power in the present moment to create itself in the
next moment--only God has that power--and so it can hardly produce its own actions. So only God could cause its actions. Thus all things must happen through God's power.

This passage does not, however, appear in the *Ethics*, and scholars may doubt whether it represents Spinoza's mature views. So let us turn to the *Ethics* itself:

P24: The essence of things produced by God does not involve existence.
Dem.: This is evident from D1. For that whose nature involves existence (considered in itself), is its own cause, and exists only from the necessity of its nature.
Cor.: From this it follows that God is not only the cause of things beginning to exist, but also of their persevering in existing, or (to use a scholastic term) God is the cause of the being of things. For--whether the things [NS: produced] exist or not--so long as we attend to their essence, we shall find that it involves neither existence nor duration. So their essence can be the cause neither of their existence nor of their duration, but only God, to whose nature alone it pertains to exist, [can be the cause] (by F14C1).(B1 P24)

This passage could almost have been lifted straight from Descartes' *Principles*. Note the similar phrases: the talk of persevering in existing, and of causing the being of things. P24 Cor tells us that God is the cause of things "persevering in existing, or (to use a Scholastic term) God is the cause of the being of things." The Scholastic term used is "essendi" for "being." It is used by Aquinas to refer to God as the cause of the continued existence of the universe. Aquinas thought not only that God caused the universe to begin existing, but also that he caused its continued existence, that God is a "causa essendi." Spinoza's special use of the term indicates that he too thinks God continually causes the existence of all things, not just in the sense of providing food and air to nourish us, but causing our very Being. The passage continues:
For. . . their essence. . . involves neither existence nor duration. So their essence can be the cause of neither their existence nor their duration, but only God, to whose nature alone it pertains to exist, can be the cause. . .

This seems to be a restatement of the reasoning underlying the argument against Free-Will found in the Short Treatise, except that here Spinoza is not just talking about the will, but all things. The essence of things cannot cause the existence or duration—the continued existence—of those things. They do not have that power. Only God's power, which continually creates them, can do this. Only God is "causa essendi."

And look now at some other things Spinoza says about God's power.

For example:

P34: God's power is his essence itself.
Dem.: For from the necessity alone of God's essence it follows that God is the cause of himself (by P11) and (by P16 and P16C), of all things. Therefore, God's power, by which he and all things are and act, is his essence itself, q.e.d. (EI P34)

What I wish to take special note of here is the phrasing: "God's power, by which he and all things are and act, is his essence itself." Spinoza pairs the cause of existence with the cause of activity as if they were the same. Similar expressions occur in the Political Treatise:

... the power of things in nature to exist and act is really the power of God. (PT Ch.II, Sec.3)

... the power by which things in nature exist, and by which, in consequence, they act, can be none other than the eternal power of God. (PT Ch.II, Sec.2)

The Latin has changed from "sunt et agunt" in the Ethics to "existunt et operantur" in the Political Treatise (Opera), but the meaning seems the same. God's power, by which he causes himself to exist, to Be, is none other than the power by which all things exist, and as the Political Treatise says, it must therefore also be the cause by which they operate.
This is just what we should expect Spinoza to say according to my interpretation. For if God's power is creating all things at every moment—causing them to Be—then it must indeed be the cause of their actions as well.  

Note that this does not fit well with Curley's interpretation of things. Curley's God—the laws of nature—cause the actions of things within the universe, but do not cause their own existence.

Curley, of course, would respond that God causes his own existence in a different sense:

If the fundamental laws of nature can't, precisely because they are so fundamental, be explained by anything else, then we must regard them as self-explanatory. There is, and could have been, nothing which, had it been different, would have led to their being different. But if there are no conceivable circumstances under which they would have been otherwise—no circumstances conceivable by a finite human intellect—then what sense would there be in saying that they could have been otherwise? They could not have been otherwise. This gives a reasonable sense to the notion of god as a self-sufficient, necessary being, and makes good on the promissory note issued at the beginning of S12. (C, 45)

But this cannot be right, for IP25 Schol. tells us that "In a word, God must be called the cause of all things in the same sense in which he is called the cause of himself." Curley's God does not cause himself in the same sense that he causes all things. The laws cause themselves by being beyond explanation; they cause other things by being a power in them that causes their actions. As I have shown, however, God causes himself and all things in the same sense, by causing himself, and all things to Be.

So my sketch of Spinoza's God as an immanent power which continually

---

4 See also: I P29; I P32; I P32 Cor. 2; and I P33 for similar expressions in the Ethics. Note especially III P6 and IV P4 which infer from I P34 that the power of all things (III P6) and human power (IV P4) are parts (or modes) of "God's power, by which God is and acts." (III P6).
creates the universe is complete. That God's essence is power, and is immanent, should be uncontroversial. The third component of the theory, however, will probably not seem beyond dispute; passages I have relied on may be interpreted differently. At this point, therefore, I would like to remind the reader of a few things.

First of all one must keep in mind the intellectual culture of Spinoza's time. We might think it silly to ask why the universe continues to exist from moment to moment. Spinoza's contemporaries did not. Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz all felt it necessary to answer the question in their metaphysical systems. And Spinoza was undeniably aware of Descartes' answer, as we showed in Chapter III. Moreover, Spinoza apparently accepted something like Descartes' answer at one time, as shown by the passage from the Short Treatise in which Spinoza denies that there is free-will on the grounds that God is continually recreating things. And in the Short Treatise one can already find the other elements of my view: that God is power and is immanent in things.

The only other question then seems to be whether or not Spinoza continued to hold this combination of views in later years. The passages I have cited in support of this view read most naturally if he has. His referring to God as the cause of being (essendi) of things; his referring to the power of God as the power by which things exist and (therefore) act, implying that it is the same power that causes both; the claim that God causes himself to exist in the same sense that he causes things to exist; and finally his use of the same terminology as found in Descartes; all these point toward a theory in which God is an immanent power which continually recreates all things.
In the next chapter, we shall review still more evidence for this interpretation. But first, we will have to understand some things about motion and rest.
Chapter V.

Why Motion and Rest?

Let us now return for awhile to the question which prompted this study: how is it possible to show that the existence of bodies having motion and rest follows a priori from the nature of extension? As we have already seen, it is quite easy to imagine an infinitely extended universe with no change in it. We have claimed in Chapter IV, however, that God's power continually recreates the universe, and creates it differently at each moment. Thus the universe is continually changing, and because of this things are in motion. But the question then is: why does God create the universe differently at each moment? Can it be shown that God's nature necessitates continual change?

Unfortunately, when Tschirnhaus asked this, Spinoza begged off answering:

. . . perhaps, if life lasts, I will discuss this question with you some other time more clearly. For so far I have not been able to write anything about these things in proper order. (Ep. W LXXXIII)

The implication is that, although Spinoza has an answer to Tschirnhaus' question, he has not yet written it down anywhere, so is not able to write up a well prepared answer. It also implies that we might search in vain for an answer in the Ethics (although, as I hope to show, this will not prove to be the case.) Nevertheless, the same letter offers clues. . .

With regard to your question as to whether the variety of things can be demonstrated a priori solely from the conception of Extension, I believe I have already shown sufficiently clearly that this is impossible, and that therefore Descartes is wrong in defining matter through Extension; it must be
explicated through an attribute that expresses eternal and infinite essence. (Ep.S LXXXIII)

Extension conceived of as an inert mass cannot yield bodies in motion. Therefore, if we are to understand how motion follows from extension we must necessarily define matter "through an attribute that expresses eternal and infinite essence." The problem then may be that Tschirnhaus doesn't understand extension; if he did, he would be able to see how motion and rest followed from it.

The discussion of definitions in the letter is also pertinent: Tschirnhaus had claimed that from a given definition only one property could ever be deduced:

This seems to a certain extent to oppose Proposition XVI of the Ethics, which is almost the most important one in Book I of your Treatise. In this it is assumed as known that several properties can be deduced from the given definition of a thing. This seems to me impossible. . . . As a consequence I cannot see how from an Attribute, considered by itself, for instance from infinite Extension, there can arise a variety of bodies. (Ep.W LXXXII)

If Tschirnhaus were right, the task of showing how many things having motion and rest follow from one essence would indeed be impossible. But, Spinoza say, Tschirnhaus' claim is not true. . . .

. . . with real things. For from the mere fact that I define God as a Being to whose essence belongs existence, I infer several properties of him, namely, that he exists necessarily, that he is unique, immutable, infinite, etc. (Ep.S LXXXIII)

So also perhaps if we define matter by an attribute which expresses eternal and infinite essence we may be able to infer several properties from that attribute, if we perceive it clearly. This indeed is part of what P16, to which Tschirnhaus eluded, had claimed. And I agree with Tschirnhaus: P16 is one of the most important passages in the Ethics. For there I think we can find important clues suggesting why there is
motion and rest.

That this is so the Ethics itself suggests. Look again at P34:

P34: God's power is his essence itself.
Dem.: For from the necessity alone of God's essence it follows that God is the cause of himself (by P11) and (by P16 and P16C) of all things. Therefore, God's power, by which he and all things are and act, is his essence itself. (EI P34)

Proposition 34 points to P16 and P16C as the proof that from the necessity of God's essence it follows that God is the cause of both the existence and actions of all things. Tschirnhaus had read P16, but failed to understand it, because he thought only one property could follow from a given essence. Spinoza corrected his mistake, but could not (I suggest) find a way (or maybe the stamina) to explain his thoughts more fully than they had already been explained in P16. Let us then look at P16, and see if we can understand what Tschirnhaus did not. . .

P16: From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect.)
Dem.: This Proposition must be plain to anyone, provided he attends to the fact that the intellect infers from the given definition of any things a number of properties that really do follow necessarily from it (i.e. from the very essence of the thing); and that it infers more properties the more the definition of the thing expresses reality, i.e., the more reality the essence of the defined thing involves. But since the divine nature has absolutely infinite attributes (by D6), each of which also expresses an essence infinite in its own kind, from its necessity there must follow infinitely many things in infinite modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect), q.e.d. (EI P16)

Since this passage is fairly long and somewhat obscure, we must spend some time to interpret it. Keep in mind that definitions express natures or essences, as do attributes. An attribute is what the intellect perceives
to be an essence of substance.\(^5\)

The first half of P16's demonstration is not, strictly speaking, part of the argument; it is a reminder to the reader of what he must keep in mind—must attend to—if he is to understand the demonstration. What he must remember is that what follows in reality from the nature or essence of a things the mind will be able to infer from its definition. Thus if in reality it follows from the nature of a right triangle (where \(a\) and \(b\) are the lengths of the sides forming the right angle, and \(c\) the length of the third side) that \(a^2 + b^2 = c^2\), the mind will be able to infer that fact from the definition of the right triangle. This is the first thing that must be recalled. The second thing is that the more reality the actual thing involves, the more properties the mind will be able to infer from its definition. The idea, I believe, is that a human being, for example, has more reality than a worm. Thus from the essence of a human being more properties follow than do from the essence of a worm. Therefore, the definition of a human being will express more reality than the definition of a worm will express, and so the mind will be able to infer more properties from the definition of a human being than it would be able to infer from the definition of a worm.

The demonstration of P16 then occurs in the last sentence. Here is how I read it: by definition, God is a being that has absolutely infinite attributes. That is, God has all possible attributes. Each of these attributes expresses an essence infinite in its own kind, which means that for each attribute there is an infinite reality, nature, or essence

\(^5\)For more on the relationship between attributes and definitions, see Chapter 10 of this work.
corresponding to that attribute which is infinite in its own way: as extended being, for example, or as thought, etc. And so, from its necessity—the necessity of the divine nature as defined—the intellect can infer infinite many things in infinite modes, because in reality infinitely many things in infinite ways will necessarily follow from that divine reality. From the divine essence corresponding to the attribute of extension, infinitely many modes of that essence or reality will follow, and from the divine essence corresponding to the attribute of thought, infinitely many modes of that reality will follow. Likewise for any other essences that may exist.

What about the parenthetical clause in P16? What is its import?

To understand it, we must first get clear about what exactly the infinite intellect is. IIP3 and P4 provide the answer:

P3: In God there is necessarily an idea, both of his essence and of everything that necessarily follows from his essence. Dem.: For God (by P1) can think infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, or (what is the same, by I P16) can form the idea of his essence and of all the things which necessarily follow from it. But whatever is in God’s power necessarily exists (by IP35); therefore, there is necessarily such an idea, (by IP15) it is only in God, q.e.d. (EI P3)

From God’s nature as an infinite thinking being, infinitely many thoughts follow. Each of these thoughts is the idea of an essence in reality or something in reality which follows from that essence. God can do this, so he necessarily must. Therefore, God has an idea of everything that exists in reality. (Including, incidentally, this infinite idea—hence an infinite regress begins.) This idea of all essences and things following from them is the infinite intellect. (As II P4 makes clear.)

So the significance of the reference to the infinite intellect in P16 is that just as God can form the idea of his essence and of all things
following from it, and therefore must; so also everything which can fall under an infinite intellect i.e. everything which God can have an idea of—everything which can exist in reality—must exist in reality.

So Spinoza takes it as demonstrated that from God's essence infinitely many things in infinite ways follow. The question then is: how does the existence of bodies in motion follow?

To understand the answer to this question, we need simply consider the related question, which we have, in effect, been asking all along: couldn't there be infinitely many modes in extension without motion and rest?

The answer, surprisingly, is "No." That it is the correct answer, however, should not be difficult to make clear. I will do so by means of a thought experiment.6

Picture in your mind the world of extended things as it exists apart from secondary qualities: subtract everything which doesn't belong to the pure extended realm: smells, sounds, and especially colors (for they in particular get in the way of our perceiving extension properly). Imagine, that is, a realm of extended things whose only qualities are qualities such as shape, size, texture, solidity, and of course, motion and rest. Trees, humans, rocks; all are just configurations of little extended bodies, structured and moving together in particular ways.

Now imagine that they all stop moving; that all are frozen in time. Every extended thing comes to a complete halt: not just the rocks and trees and other objects we normally imagine as being "in space," with

---

6Credit is due to Don Rosa's, "On Stolen Time" in Donald Duck Adventures #24 (Burbank, CA: Disney Comics Inc.; May, 1992) for inspiring this thought experiment.
emptiness between them, but also the water, the air, and all the other
gases and liquids which fill every bit of space between the other objects.
All stop.

How many modes would be left?

Spinoza says in his book on Descartes that "the parts of matter that
are in motion in the same direction, and do not depart from one another by
their motion, are not actually divided." (DP Pt.III A4) So if two bodies
lie against each other and move together, they are not really separate.
Likewise if they are at rest: if two bodies lie against each other, they
in effect become one body. For bodies are, after all, nothing but
extension, so there would be nothing to separate the bodies from each
other. But then, if the whole extended realm were to come to rest, all
the modes of extension would effectively become one big "mass" of
extension. It would not be like there were extended solids in empty
space, floating motionlessly. For remember, the air and gases--themselves
just extended bodies--would have frozen too, so all the air and gases
would be lying motionless against all the other objects. Hence all things
would no longer be divided. All that would be left is pure extension: a
quiescent mass, as Spinoza said to Tschirnhaus.

We could not distinguish modes by reason of their substance.
Fundamentally, all bodies are just extension. Different regions of
extension do not have different qualities. Nor would any structure or
patterns of movement remain to distinguish things by. Each mode of
extension would now be lying solidly against all the surrounding modes;
thus it would be joined to all of them. We could not distinguish hard
from soft regions, wet from dry, or thick from thin. All such qualities
are due to arrangements of extended modes in motion or at rest and lying against one another in certain ways. With no motion, and all bodies lying equally against all other bodies, these qualities would disappear.

There simply could be no modes in a motionless extended realm. It is not even clear whether or not we could say that the world was a solid mass. Solidity only arises when things lie together and move together in such a way that they resist penetration by other bodies. If there were no objects with edges which resisted penetration by other bodies, could we call the whole extended realm solid? Extension, it seems, would become infinite nothingness.

This is just what Spinoza says in Book II of the *Ethics*, in the discussion of the nature of bodies:

L1: Bodies are distinguished from one another by reason of motion and rest, speed and slowness, and not by reason of substance. (EII L1)

Motion and Rest are what distinguishes bodies from each other, not different types of substances. And it is only Motion and Rest that distinguishes bodies, as Axiom 2 makes clear:

A2: ... the simplest bodies... are distinguished from one another only by motion and rest, speed and slowness. (EII A2)

If bodies are only distinguished by their motion and rest, speed and slowness, it follows that without these things, there could not be bodies, just as we've envisioned. But P16 tells us that from God's essence infinitely many things in infinite modes follow; i.e. there must be bodies in infinite variety. Therefore, there has to be motion and rest,
q.e.d. 7

We can also understand from this why motion and rest must continue forever, and why motion throughout the universe could not entirely stop for brief periods of time. God's essence is supposed to be eternal. From God's essence infinitely many things in infinite modes always follow. But suppose all motion stopped for a moment. Then, as we've seen, there would no longer be infinitely many modes following from God's essence, i.e. God would no longer be God, which is absurd. Therefore the universe must be in continual flux, q.e.d.

And what about the chaotic universe we've imagined? Why could things not continually appear and disappear, not by means of motion and rest, but rather just popping into and out of existence? The answer: with no motion and rest, there is no way things could do so. What would be appearing and disappearing? Extended things? What are these extended things? Just extension. So we would have extension appearing and disappearing in extension; which amounts to nothing appearing and disappearing. So the chaotic universe is not a possible one.

7That this is Spinoza's way of thinking is further indicated by passages in the Short Treatise, where he tells us:
Each and every particular thing that comes to exist becomes such through motion and rest. The same is true of all modes in the substantial extension we call body.(ST I/52, 1-6)
Later in the same work Spinoza tells us:
So we should note that all the effects which we see depend necessarily on extension must be attributed to this attribute, e.g. Motion and Rest.(ST I/90, 24-26)
and:
When we consider extension alone, we perceive nothing else in it except motion and rest, from which we find that all its effects derive.(ST I/91, 10-12)
So here as well Spinoza is asserting that there would be nothing in extension if there were no motion and rest.
But one may object: the same problem exists for motion in extension. What, after all, is supposed to be moving? Extension? But extension is just extended nothingness. How can nothing move or rest? How can an area of nothingness move from one place to another? This is a serious problem: there are supposed to be small bodies which are in motion, but also distinguished from each other only by their motion. How can this be?

This will only be answerable if extension is not just conceived of as nothingness. It must be a reality of some sort.

*   *   *

I will return to these questions in the following chapter. For now, I would like to turn to a few other matters. In the last chapter I showed that God is a power which continually creates things. In this chapter we've seen that motion and rest is required, hence God must create things a bit differently at each moment. This allows us to solve a long standing problem in Spinoza scholarship. God is supposed to be the cause of all things. But P28 tells us that each thing is supposed to follow from another mode, and that from another, and so on to infinity.

P28: Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity. (EI P28)

How then is it possible, if individual finite things are determined to exist and produce effects by other finite things, that they are also determined to exist and produce effects by God? It would be tempting at
this point to propose two orders of causation: God's immanent causation of Being, and a transeunt causation of events within Being. (As discussed on page 43.)

My interpretation makes clear, however, that there is only the one order of causation. As has already been explained, God, causing all things to Be at each moment, creates them slightly differently. So modes move from place to place in time. This motion causes the formation of various things in Being: the creation of beings in Being. The nature of these things is a structure of a particular type, a pattern of bodies in motion and rest. This structure depends on the motions which produced it. But the Being of those things in motion depends on the power in them which continually causes them to be and to act.

Hence in P28 Schol. Spinoza explains:

Since certain things had to be produced by God immediately, viz, those which follow necessarily from his absolute nature, and others (which nevertheless can neither be nor be conceived without God) had to be produced by the mediation of these first things, it follows:

I. That God is absolutely the proximate cause of the things produced immediately by him, and not [a proximate cause] in his own kind, as they say. For God's effects can neither be nor be conceived without their cause (by P15 and P24C).

II. That God cannot properly be called the remote cause of singular things, except perhaps so that we may distinguish them from those things that he has produced immediately, or rather, that follow from his absolute nature. For by a remote cause we understand one which is not conjoined in any way with its effect. But all things that are, are in God, and so depend on God that they can neither be nor be conceived without him. (EI P28 Schol.)

We are at last in a position to understand this passage. God necessarily (and immediately) produces motion and rest in order to create infinitely many modes in infinitely many ways. That is, he produces the universe at every moment with things slightly changed and moved. Thus we can
understand why "God cannot properly be called the remote cause of singular things:" it is because he is always immanent in things, causing them to be. However, we can call him a remote cause in a sense, to distinguish modes such as individual human beings from infinite modes such as motion and rest. This latter is produced immediately, everywhere, always; the former result from that motion and rest, rather like the way whirlpools form in rivers, and so are only temporary, local, and of finite duration. Thus the infinite mode—Motion and Rest—causes finite modes to come to be in Being.

Finally, a few words ought to be said about the three corollaries to P 16, to which Spinoza also referred in P 34 as part of the proof that God causes all things to act. Cor. 1 seems to affirm my interpretation of P16:

Cor.1: From this it follows that God is the efficient cause of all things which can fall under an infinite intellect. (EI P16 Cor.1)

An efficient cause is simply a source of change, according to the traditional medieval distinction of types of causes. Thus this corollary tells us that it follows from P 16 that God is, as a source of change, the cause of all things. Chapter III of Spinoza's Short Treatise provides this useful note also:

1. We say that God is an emanative or productive cause of his actions, and in respect to the action's occurring, an active or efficient cause. We treat this as one thing, because they involve each other. (ST I/35, 15-18)

So an efficient cause is the same thing as an emanative or productive cause. And this is exactly what I've claimed: that all events emanate from God's power at every moment. The cause of change is also the cause of the existence of things.
Cor. 2 tells us "that God is a cause through himself and not an accidental cause." (EI P16 Cor.2) God is causa per se, not causa per accidens. A causa per accidens is, basically, a contingent cause, an unnecessary cause. Cor. 2 therefore indicates that all things follow necessarily from God, not accidentally, by chance.

Finally, Cor. 3 says "God is absolutely the first cause." (EI P16 Cor.3) This of course does not mean first temporally: rather, God is the absolutely primary cause, himself the cause of all things and not dependent on anything else.

Chapter V, Appendix 1

1. It might be claimed that IP17 is the proof that God acts, not P16. Hence, a few brief words about I P17 may be useful here. The proof reads:

P 17: God acts from the laws of his nature alone, and is compelled by no one
Dem: We have just shown (P 16) that from the necessity of the divine nature alone, or (what is the same thing) from the laws of his nature alone, absolutely infinite things follow, and in P15 we have demonstrated that nothing can be or be conceived without God, but that all things are in God. So there can be nothing outside him by which he is determined or compelled to act. Therefore, God acts from the laws of his nature alone, and is compelled by no one, q.e.d. (EI P17)

This must not be taken as a proof that God acts, but that he acts from the laws of his own nature alone: i.e. no other being causes God's actions. In brief, we may restate the proof thus:

1. All possible things follow from the divine essence. (From P16)
2. All things are in God. (From P15)
3. Therefore: there is nothing outside God from which anything follows. (From 2)

Therefore: all possible things follow from the divine essence and not from anything outside God; i.e. they follow from the divine essence
Appendix 2

There are other ways one might try to show how motion must follow from God's nature. Before reaching the conclusion presented in this chapter, the argument that follows (which I owe largely to Mark Kulstad) had largely persuaded me. Although I now no longer think it the best reason Spinoza has for believing motion and rest follow necessarily from God's nature, it still seems of interest, and perhaps indicates other considerations that were in Spinoza's mind.

In brief, the argument is this: motion is required because change is required. And change is required because without change there would be infinitely many possible modes which would not be instantiated. But God must create everything he can create. Therefore, change is necessary.

Jonathon Bennett's discussion of Spinoza's concept of infinity will prove useful in what follows. Bennett argues that by "infinity" Spinoza often means "totality" (B, 75), and that phrases such as "infinite things" mean "all things."

For example, p16 contains the phrase 'infinite things. . . (i.e. all things which can fall under an infinite intellect), which I take to mean about the same as 'all logically possible things'. (B, 75)

I agree with Bennett's interpretation of the last part of P16, and I suggest that if God must create all logically possible things, change must occur. The argument is simple. Imagine a universe containing Spinoza at age 2. Imagine also that the universe is unchanging. In an unchanging universe Spinoza would remain a small lad, frozen in time, as it were, forever. It is logically possible, however, that an older Spinoza, at age 20, should also exist. But what is not logically possible is that both
Spinozas should exist at the same time in the same unchanging universe, unless they are not the same Spinozas. Therefore, if God is going to create a Spinoza who exists both as a 2 year old and as an adult—and since this is logically possible, he must do it—change will have to occur.

Question: if Spinoza’s God must create all logically possible things, does this mean God will have created another universe in which Spinoza did other things besides what he did in this world? The answer is no: that would require a separate extended universe, which Spinoza would regard as logically impossible, since there can be only one attribute of extension. Similarly, God could not create Spinoza at age 2 and Spinoza at 20 by creating two separate unchanging universes, one for each Spinoza, because that would also require more than one attribute of extension. If God is to create both Spinozas, change in the one attribute is required.

Still one might ask, even granting that change is required, why, it has to take the form of motion? Earlier in this chapter we imagined the possibility that the universe might be a chaotic one, in which things appear and disappear at random. There does not seem to be any logical impossibility in this. One might also ask a question which subsumes the above: why does this changing universe exist instead of the one in which, say, Spinoza never existed; why does this universe exist instead of some other possible universe?

With regard to the latter question, it is certain that Spinoza would say that this universe is the necessary one, but my suspicion is that he would not think we can know why it is the necessary one. That Spinoza thought this universe was the necessary one is clear from P33:
P33: Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced. 
Dem: For all things have necessarily followed from God's given nature (by P16), and have been determined from the necessity of God's nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way (by P29). Therefore, if things could have been of another nature, or could have been determined to produce an effect in another way, so that the order of Nature was different, then God's nature could also have been other than it is now, and therefore (by P11) that [other nature] would also have had to exist, and consequently, there could have been two or more Gods, which is absurd (by P14C1). So things could have been produced in no other way and no other order, etc., q.e.d. (EI P33)

That is clear enough. Thus the only reason we can imagine that another universe is possible is that we are unable to comprehend the whole infinite series of causes which led to this universe:

But a thing is called contingent only because of a defect of our knowledge. For if we do not know that the thing's essence involves a contradiction, or if we do know very well that its essence does not involve a contradiction, and nevertheless affirm nothing certainly about its existence, because the order of causes is hidden from us, it can never seem to us either necessary or impossible. So we call it contingent or possible. (EI P33 Schol.1)

So it only seems to us that a universe without Spinoza is possible because the order of causes is hidden from us.

As for the possibility of a chaotic universe, my suspicion is that the possibility simply did not occur to Spinoza. He believed, after all, that this universe was necessary, and he believed in the mechanical science of his time. So he was certain that these laws, like everything else, were necessary ones. I also suspect he would have thought that a chaotic universe would lack laws of nature. That there must be laws of nature which strictly governed nature in all its aspects was an unproven assumption of his: a necessary one, he thought, if the universe were to be intelligible.
Chapter VI.

Power and Reality

In the last chapter I left the following question unanswered: what is the reality that moves and rests? It doesn't make sense to say nothing moves, so extension must be a reality of some sort. At this point I would like to make some suggestions about how we are supposed to conceive of that reality. However, I will not just be looking at the attribute of extension. For the rest of this work I will be interested in minds as well as bodies, hence in this chapter I will consider the nature of both thought and extension, and of the modes of both these attributes. I will also look at Spinoza's psychology and ethics which, since they are founded upon Spinoza's metaphysics, will help verify my interpretation of it. My interpretation: that the attributes are infinite powers—a power of thought and a power of extension—and individual things (like human beings) are modifications of these powers. That is, they are God's power existing and acting in particular ways.

What is an attribute? Spinoza tells us in I D4: "By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence." Two attributes are perceived by our intellect: thought and extension. If the intellect's perception is true, then thought and extension must constitute the essence of substance. God, of course, is

---

8I am aware of the scholarly debates about the exact meaning of this definition, and am regretfully not prepared to enter into a discussion of them here. I will simply assume that the intellect's perception of the attributes is objective and true.
the only substance according to Spinoza, so thought and extension constitute God's essence. I assume this is all uncontroversial. But as I argued in Chapter 4, God's essence is power: God is Natura Naturans, the immanent cause of the existence and actions of all things. The conclusion seems obvious: if God's essence is power, and thought and extension are God's essence, then thought and extension must themselves be powers. I.E. God's essence is constituted by an infinite power of thought and an infinite power of extension.

That this is in fact the case can be supported by passages from the *Ethics*. For example, in II P1, where Spinoza proves that thought is one of God's attributes he says: "Thought is an attribute of God, or God is a thinking thing." Apparently to say that thought is one of God's attributes is equivalent to saying God is a thinking thing. Which is to say, the attribute of thought is inherently active, empowered. Spinoza explains in the Scholium:

This Proposition is also evident from the fact that we can conceive an infinite thinking being. For the more things a thinking being can think, the more reality, or perfection, we conceive it to contain. Therefore, a being that can think infinitely many things in infinitely many ways is necessarily infinite in its power of thinking. So since we can conceive an infinite Being by attending to thought alone, Thought (by ID4 and D6) is necessarily one of God's infinite attributes, as we maintained.(II P1 Schol.)

If God can think infinitely many things, Spinoza argues, then God's power of thinking must be infinite, which is to say, thought (an infinite power of thinking) is one of God's infinite attributes.

What about extension? Well, consider II P2, where Spinoza proves that extension is one of God's attributes:

P2: Extension is an attribute of God, or God is an extended thing.
Dem.: The demonstration of this proceeds in the same way as that of the preceding Proposition.

It is interesting that Spinoza does not give us the demonstration for this proposition, but merely refers us to II P1, and says the demonstration here is the same as there. Was Spinoza just being economical? I suggest rather that the problem is one of locution. It is perfectly natural to talk of a being thinking, but not of a being extending. Let's try, for example, filling out the Scholium in terms of extension and bodies:

This proposition is also evident from the fact that we can conceive an infinite extended being. For the more things an extended (extending?) being can extend, the more reality, or perfection, we conceive it to contain. Therefore, a being that can extend infinitely many things in infinitely many ways is necessarily infinite in its power of extension. So... Extension is necessarily one of God's infinite attributes.

The problem of course is that extension—and the Latin extensio—is a noun, not a verb. In any case, if we are to take Spinoza at his word that the demonstration of II P2 is the same as II P1, we may take him as saying that God's essence includes an infinite power of extension, from which all extended things flow.

That this interpretation of the attributes is correct may be further verified if we consider the nature of the modes of these attributes. Spinoza tells us in I P25 that:

Particular things are nothing but affections of God's attributes, or modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.

A particular thing is a mode by which one of God's attributes is expressed in a certain and determinate way. God's attributes, I've suggested, are powers. So a particular thing ought to be a mode by which God's power is expressed in a certain and determinate way. That is, they are God's power expressing itself by acting in a certain and determinate way. This is
verified in III P6:

For singular things are modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way (by IP25C), i.e. (by I P34), things that express, in a certain and determinate way, God's power, by which God is and acts.

This clearly implies that God's attributes are powers, and that singular things are certain and determinate expressions of that power. So a singular thought is a certain and determinate expression of God's power of thought, as Spinoza says in the demonstration of II P1:

Singular thoughts, or this or that thought, are modes that express God's nature in a certain and determinate way (by IP25C). Therefore (by ID5) there belongs to God an attribute whose concept all singular thoughts involve, and through which they are also conceived. Therefore, Thought is one of God's infinite attributes, which expresses an eternal and infinite essence of God (see ID6), or God is a thinking thing.

and singular bodies are expressions of God's power of extension, as Spinoza says in II D1:

"By body I understand a mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God's essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing (see IP25C)."

Now since, as I have argued, God's power is a power which continually creates things, it should follow that if singular things are expressions of that power, they ought to include in themselves a power to continually create themselves. And this, I think, is what Spinoza says:

III P6: Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being.

and:

III P7: The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing.

Dem.: From the given essence of each thing some things necessarily follow (by IP35), and things are able [to produce] nothing but what follows necessarily from their determinate nature (by IP29). So the power of each thing or the striving by which it (either alone or with others) does anything, or strives to do anything—i.e. (by P6), the power, or striving,
by which it strives to persevere in its being, is nothing but the given, or actual, essence of the thing itself, q.e.d.

From this passage we learn that the essence of a thing is its striving: its power to do things. The power by which it does anything is equated with its power to persevere in its being. Saying this is the actual essence of a thing suggests that fundamentally, this is what it is.

Similarly, consider III P57:

Desire is the very nature, or essence, of each (individual).

and III P56:

Desire is the very essence, or nature, of each (man)...

and:

Desire is appetite together with the consciousness of it. And appetite is the very essence of man, insofar as it is determined to do what promotes his preservation. (II/190 5-7)

. . . by the word Desire I understand any of a many's strivings, impulses, appetites, and volitions, which vary as the man's constitution varies. . . (II/190 28-29)

The third quotation above defines "desire" as appetite which we are conscious of, and the fourth explains that it covers all our "strivings, impulses, appetites, and volitions." So if Desire is also the essence of an individual, as the first quotation suggests—and, in particular, is the essence of man, according to the second—then the essence of an individual is a collection of strivings, impulses, appetites, and volitions. Desire equals appetite, appetite equals essence, "insofar as it is determined to do what promotes his preservation." And in III P9:

this striving (to persevere in its being) . . . when it is related to the Mind and Body together. . . is called Appetite. This Appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation.

So it is clear that the essence of a man is his appetite for self-
preservation, which causes all his actions.

Now we have seen before that the word "essence" is defined as that which is a necessary and sufficient condition for the thing it is essence of. So we can conclude that wherever we have a striving to persevere in being, we have a being, and wherever we have a being of any sort—even if only a corpuscle—we have a striving to persevere in that being. Well of course, a human is a being of some sort, so we must have an appropriate striving to persevere in that sort of being wherever we have a human.

But continuing my earlier line of thought, I am suggesting that a human being is nothing else but his or her striving. Granted, this striving manifests itself in various ways, hence Spinoza's reference to various appetites as constituting the essence of man. But I am also suggesting there is nothing else besides these strivings. Man is not a striving in a body, or a striving plus a body held together by that striving. What we perceive as a body, or think of scientifically as a collection of corpuscles in motion, is really power manifesting itself, or rather behaving, in a certain way.

The passages above I think mesh nicely with this point of view, but I grant they are compatible with other views. So I begin my proof with the following passage from the Theologico-Political Treatise:

Man, in so far as he is a part of Nature, constitutes a part of the power of Nature. (TTP 101)

I call your attention to what this passage did not say, but could have easily said, and I think would have said, if Spinoza had meant it. It does not say "Man's power is part of the power of Nature." It says "Man is part of the power of Nature." The former is what we would expect if Man's power were something in him, yet distinct from him. The latter is
just what I have suggested.

Let us turn to the Ethica. The passages which really make it clear that Man is power are those which explain Spinoza's ethical doctrines.

. . . by perfection in general I shall, as I have said, understand reality, i.e., the essence of each thing insofar as it exists and produces an effect, having no regard to its duration. (E IV Preface)

This is explicit: perfection is equal to reality, and reality is "the essence of each thing insofar as it exists and produces an effect." We've already shown that a thing's striving to persevere in its being is the source of all its activities. Hence reality is the striving to persevere in being, as is perfection. What, then, is Spinoza's Ethica all about?

It is about increasing our power, i.e. our reality.

The emotions of Spinoza's psychology are all tied to this idea of increasing or decreasing power. Look at the definition of the affects:

III D3: By affect I understand affections of the Body by which the Body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections.

If our power of acting is increased, we feel Joy. If decreased, we feel sadness.

By Joy, therefore, I shall understand in what follows that passion by which the Mind passes to a greater perfection. And by Sadness, that passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection. (E III P11 Schol.

We feel these emotions as we pass to a greater or lesser perfection, i.e. reality, i.e. as our power is decreased or increased.

Joy and Sadness are passions by which each one's power, or striving to persevere in his being, is increased or diminished, aided or restrained (by P11 and P11S). But by the striving to persevere in one's being, insofar as it is related to the Mind and Body together, we understand Appetite and Desire (see P9S). So Joy and Sadness are the Desire, or Appetite, itself insofar as it is increased or diminished,
aided or restrained, by external causes. (III P57 Dem.)
The experience of Joy is the increasing power: it is not something added on, or that comes later. Hence virtue is its own reward.

the greater the Joy with which we are affected, the greater the perfection to which we pass, i.e., the more we must participate in the divine nature.

The more joy we feel, the more perfect, the more real, we are since reality is power.

Again: this power gained is God's power. Our power/realities is not something created by God yet distinct from God. We are part of God; our power is God's power; it is that very same power which causes God to exist and act.

As usual, we turn first to the TTP:

since the power of Nature in its entirety is nothing other than the power of God through which alone all things happen and are determined, it follows that whatever man--who is also a part of Nature--acquires for himself to help to preserve his own being, or whatever Nature provides for him without any effort on his part, all this is provided for him solely by the divine power, acting either through human nature or externally to human nature. Therefore whatever human nature can effect solely by its own power to preserve its own being can rightly be called God's internal help, and whatever falls to man's advantage from the power of external causes can rightly be called God's external help. (TTP 89-90)

This passage makes it clear that Man's power to persevere in its own being is God's power, working through Man, as it were, or inside him. Of course, Man is just an instance of a universal truth: all powers are part of God's power.

Now if we combine this fact with the ethical doctrines we've already noted, we can conclude that Spinoza's Ethica is a guide to increasing our share of God's power:

it teaches that we act only from God's command, that we share
in the divine nature, and that we do this the more, the more perfect our actions are, and the more and more we understand God. (II P49 Schol. IV A)

This passage concludes the metaphysical parts of the Ethics, and it makes clear that the metaphysics is indeed meant as a foundation for the ethical doctrines. It says, essentially, that we are part of God, and become more so the more perfectly we act, and the more we understand God. Notice that this passage cannot make sense on an interpretation such as Bennett's where God's essence is extension, and extension is infinite space. On Bennett's interpretation sharing more in God's nature would mean becoming more extended spatially. The road to joy would be through the kitchen; Blue whales would be the happiest creatures on Earth. Now while this is quite possibly true (although, to be quite honest, dolphins and otters seem happier to me) I am sure this is not what Spinoza means. My interpretation makes good sense of it however: the divine nature we share in, and which we increase our share of, is God's power.

But again it is not just God's power of activity. We must get away from the idea that God's power is simply in God, moving things around. The power we share is the power that causes change in the act of creating the universe from moment to moment:

IV P4 Dem.: [i] the power by which singular things (and consequently, [any] man) preserve their being is the power itself of God, or Nature (by IP24C), not insofar as it is infinite, but insofar as it can be explained through the man's actual essence (by IIIIP7). The man's power, therefore, insofar as it is explained through his actual essence, is part of God or Nature's infinite power, i.e. (by I P34), of its essence. This was the first point.

Here is my reading of this admittedly somewhat obscure passage. Man's power of persevering in being is a portion of God's power. It is not God's infinite power that preserves man's being, but only that portion of
it which constitutes Man's essence. That power—the striving to persevere in being—is part of God's essence. And the reference to I P34 makes it clear what essence it is we're referring to:

I P34: God's power is his essence itself.
Dem.: From the necessity alone of God's essence it follows that God is the cause of himself (by P11) and (by P16 and P16C) of all things. Therefore, God's power, by which he and all things are and act, is his essence itself, q.e.d.

Thus man's power is part of the power by which God and all things are and act. It is part of that immanent creative power which continually recreates the universe, continually causes it to Be.

III P6 strongly supports this interpretation:

P6: Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being.
Dem.: For singular things are modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way (by IP25C) i.e. (by IP34), things that express, in a certain and determinate way, God's power, by which God is and acts.

Singular things are expressions of the power by which God is and acts: they are expressions of the power which continually recreates the universe.

But also, as I have already said, Man's power, or any thing's power, is not distinct from that thing. We must then conclude that an individual thing of any sort is just God's power behaving in a particular fashion. It is the divine power expressed in a certain way. It is a modification of the infinite creative power that is God.
Chapter VII

A problem, and its solution.

My work so far has left the following problem unresolved: in Book I, Proposition 24 of the *Ethics* Spinoza tells us that "The essence of things produced by God does not involve existence." Individual things cannot cause their own Being, hence God (as I showed in Chapter 4) must be the cause of the Being of things. But (as I showed in Chapter 6) Spinoza seems to be saying in the later books of the *Ethics* that the essence of any mode is part of the power of God which causes their Being. So it seems that the essence of things does include the power to cause their own existence. But this seems to contradict the earlier passage. How do I resolve this question?

Before suggesting what I believe is the correct answer to the question, I would like to mention one other possibility. It is that the contradiction exists because of an inconsistency in Spinoza's own thought, due perhaps to the fact that the *Ethics* took many years to write. I have already pointed out the similarity of I P24 to works written earlier than the *Ethics*. Perhaps later in his life Spinoza realized he was mistaken in his earlier views. I P24, which still separates God's power from things, might be a Cartesian holdover. But when his own thoughts led to the conclusion that God's power is not separate from things, Spinoza claimed modes do have a power to cause their own Being. And perhaps he did not notice the inconsistency of the later writings with the earlier.

We should keep this possibility in mind. Nevertheless, I want to
suggest that the inconsistency is only apparent, not real. I will begin by summarizing the main points which are at issue.

In Book I of the *Ethics* we learn that God's immanent power causes the existence and actions of all things. We also learn (I P24) that the essence of any mode does not involve the existence of the mode. Rather: the essence and existence of individual things follows only from God's essence (I P25 Schol.) I P25 Cor. tells us also that particular things are "affections of God's attributes, or modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way." Modes are certain and determinate expressions—modifications—of the attributes. As I argued in Chapter 6, the attributes themselves should be thought of as powers: thought is an infinite power of thinking, and extension is an infinite power of "extending". Thus modes are powers which have a definite form, location, and structure within Being. Or, to put it another way: the essence of an individual thing—what it essentially is—is a certain determinate modification of part of God's infinite power. As Spinoza says in IV P4:

The power by which singular things (and consequently, [any]man) preserve their being is the power itself of God, or Nature (by IP24C), not insofar as it is infinite, but insofar as it can be explained through the man's actual essence (by IIIIP?). The man's power, therefore, insofar as it is explained through his actual essence, is part of God or Nature's infinite power, i.e. (by IP34), of its essence.

I have already commented on this passage in Ch. 6. In brief: the power—that is, the essence—of a singular thing (such as a man), is God's power, God's essence. But not all of God's power can be considered part of an individual man's essence. Rather, only a certain and determinate modification of it. A single person's essence can be considered a small
portion of God's essence: it is that portion of God's power acting as a human being.

How then can Spinoza say the essence of individual things, and individual humans, doesn't involve existence? The rest of the demonstration for IV P4, I believe, addresses that very question:

Next, if it were possible that a man could undergo no changes except those which can be understood through the man's nature alone, it would follow (by IIIP4 and P6) that he could not perish, but that necessarily he would always exist. And this would have to follow from a cause whose power would be either finite or infinite, viz either from the power of the man alone, who would be able to avert from himself other changes which could arise from external causes, or from the infinite power of Nature, by which all singular things would be directed so that the man could undergo no other changes except those which assist his preservation.

But the first is absurd (by P3, whose demonstration is universal and can be applied to all singular things).

The passage begins by telling us that if all changes to a man followed from that man's essence alone, he would in fact never perish, and indeed "necessarily he would always exist."(1) And this is what we should expect, if my interpretation is correct. For a man's power, being a portion of God's power which causes the continued Being and activity of all things, is therefore itself a power which causes his Being and activity. So, if nothing else—no other power—were affecting that man, and all his changes followed only from his own power, he would continue always to exist.

Next Spinoza considers the two cases in which all the changes might conceivably follow from a man's essence alone. The first possibility is that the changes might follow from the man's own finite power. That is, his finite power might be great enough that it could resist any change from outside. But this is absurd, Spinoza says, for he has shown in P3 that:
P3: The force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and
infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes.
Dem.: This is evident from A1. For given a man, there is something
else, say A, more powerful. And given A, there is something else
again, say B, more powerful than A, and so on, to infinity.
Therefore the power of man is limited by the power of another thing
and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes, q.e.d.(IV
P3)

This follows from A1:

There is no singular thing in nature than which there is not another
more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given, there is another
more powerful by which the first can be destroyed.(IV A1)

No finite mode is so great in power that it can resist all other powers;
there is always a greater which can destroy it. Hence no man's essence
can be so great in power that he can resist all other powers. Note that
the last clause of P3 suggests this greater power may be a collection of
external causes. Note also that this proves there can be no simple bodies
in nature which are indestructible. All simple bodies are modes of power,
and might be literally forced out of existence by other powers pushing
against them.

The argument continues:

Therefore, if it were possible for a man to undergo no changes
except those which could be understood through the man's nature
alone, so that (as we have already shown) he would necessarily
always exist, this would have to follow from God's infinite power;
and consequently (by IP16) the order of the whole of Nature, insofar
as it is conceived under the attributes of Extension and Thought,
would have to be deduced from the necessity of the divine nature,
insofar as it is considered to be affected with the idea of some
man. And so (by IP21) it would follow that the man would be
infinite. But this (by part [i] of this demonstration) is absurd.
Therefore, it is impossible that a man should undergo no other
changes except those of which he himself is the adequate cause,
q.e.d.(IV P4)

The second possibility is that all the other forces in nature--all of
God's infinite power--are so organized that they support that man's
existence, and none interfere with it. I am not sure I understand exactly
what Spinoza is saying here, but his response to this possibility seems to be that this would mean we could deduce all things from the idea of a single man. That is, the man's power would be infinite. But this, he says, has already been shown to be false. In any case, the exact reasoning here is not important at the moment. What is important is this: it is true that Spinoza thinks a man's essence is a determinate modification of God's infinite essence. Hence a man's essence causes his Being and actions. But Spinoza can also claim, in Book I, that man's existence doesn't follow from man's essence, because man's essence is too limited in power to maintain its existence against external forces. Furthermore, that essence did not cause itself in the first place. Rather, it is the result of the processes of change—motion and rest in Extension, and thinking in Thought—in Being. It is the result of the order of causation Descartes called "causes of coming into being." (See Ch. 3) As I suggested in Chapter 5, a mode is like a whirlpool created by other currents. Once formed, its power can cause it to Be and to act for a time, but not indefinitely against the power of other things. Always God's infinite power—expressed as other modes—affects it. At any moment it could be torn apart or crushed out of existence. Thus the essence of an individual thing, considered by itself, involves neither existence nor duration. It only has them insofar as God's infinite power causes the essence in itself and maintains it.
Chapter VIII
Power in Spinoza's Epistemology

This project cannot be completed without a venture into the obscure realm of Spinozistic epistemology. Earlier I showed that Spinoza's ethical doctrines are a guide to increasing our share of God's power. But I have yet to show how it is to be increased. That is the subject of the next two chapters. In this chapter I will focus on knowledge, and the relationship of knowledge to God's power of thought. In the next I will look at specific ways in which gaining knowledge of God and ourselves increases our power and, hence, our joy.

To make things manageable, I shall again divide the chapter into sections.

First, I shall make some general observations about the nature of Spinozistic ideas, showing how an idea can be considered a modification of God's power.

Then I will focus on the different types of knowledge: imagination, reason, and intuition. I shall especially want to show how each is tied to the activities of the body; how just as bodies persist in their being, so do ideas persist in minds.

Please note, however, that this is not intended to be an exhaustive discussion of Spinoza's epistemology. I chiefly wish to do two things: 1) explain the role of God's power in Spinoza's epistemology, and 2) make the differences between these different kinds of knowledge clear enough to provide a foundation for the work to be done in Chapter IX.
I. Ideas as Active Modes.

The first claim I shall make is that all ideas are modes of God's power. Ideas are essentially active in nature. They have effects.

... to have a true idea means nothing other than knowing a thing perfectly, or in the best way. And of course no one can doubt this unless he thinks that an idea is something mute, like a picture on a tablet, and not a mode of thinking, viz. the very [act of] understanding. (E II P43 Schol.)

Having a true idea means knowing something perfectly. An idea is an act of understanding, a mode of the activity of thinking. So a true idea is a perfect act of understanding.

II D3: By idea I understand a concept of the Mind that the Mind forms because it is a thinking thing.

Exp.: I say concept rather than perception, because the word perception seems to indicate that the Mind is acted on by the object. But concept seems to express an action of the Mind.

An idea is a concept of the Mind, by which is meant an action of the Mind, Spinoza explains.

That ideas are actions should not be surprising. I have shown before how modes of the attributes can be thought of as determinate modifications of them. That the attribute of thought is an active creative power is even clearer: "God is a thinking thing," Spinoza tells us, and "is necessarily infinite in its power of thinking." As I have shown before, our power is a portion of God's power. Our activity is a portion of God's activity. Hence our ideas, our acts of understanding, are the portions of God's activity of understanding which is in us. The essence of our minds is a portion of God's active thought essence, from which our ideas—our acts of understanding—flow.

II. Minds and Bodies.

What does God understand in his acts of understanding? Himself, of
course: what else is there to understand?

II P3: In God there is necessarily an idea, both of his essence and
of everything that necessarily follows from his essence.

and

II P30: An actual intellect, whether finite or infinite, must
comprehend God's attributes and God's affections, and nothing else.

This is clear enough. If God didn't understand some aspect of himself, he
would be limited, and hence, not God. And there is nothing else outside
of God to understand. So God only understands himself. Note also how
this leads to the infinite regress of ideas of ideas: if God understands
all aspects of himself, and his understanding is an aspect of himself, he
must understand that also, and so on. (See II P20 and P21)

Likewise for the human mind, of course, which is a portion of God's
infinite understanding. The human mind is the activity of understanding
the human being. First of all, of course, it is an understanding of the
human body; i.e. our activity in extension:

II P11: The first thing that constitutes the actual being of a
human Mind is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which
actually exists.

That singular thing being, Spinoza explains, is the human body:

II P13: The object of the idea constituting the human Mind is the
Body, or a certain mode of Extension which actually exists, and
nothing else.⁹

⁹ Note that Spinoza calls this the first thing that constitutes the human
mind. Later he explains that the mind also perceives itself:

II P20: There is also in God an idea, or knowledge, of the human Mind,
which follows in God in the same way and is related to God in the same way
as the idea, or knowledge, of the human Body.

II P21: This idea of the Mind is united to the Mind in the same way as
the Mind is united to the Body.

This is part of that infinite regress mentioned earlier. One question we may ask
is: when Spinoza says the idea of the body is the first thing that constitutes
the human mind, what does he mean by "first"? Two possibilities come to mind:
The human mind also understands itself:

II P20: There is also in God an idea, or knowledge, of the human Mind, which follows in God in the same way and is related to God in the same way as the idea, or knowledge, of the human Body.

and:

II P21: This idea of the Mind is united to the Mind in the same way as the Mind is united to the Body.

So again, an infinite regress begins, for the mind also understands its understanding of itself, and also its understanding of its understanding, etc. I will not, however, pursue this subject further at this time.

III. Imagination, Reason, and Intuition.

It is important to note the way ideas—acts of understanding—are tied to the body. Consider first Spinoza's theory of imagination. In brief, his theory tells us that, in the human body, sense experience is simply the striking of body against body. Some parts of the human body are soft. Impressions get left in these soft parts, and when bodies strike these impressions again, they deflect in ways similar to the way they've done before. The mind is aware of these activities of the body.

While external bodies so determine the fluid parts of the human body that they often thrust against the softer parts, they change (by Post. 5) their surfaces with the result (see A2" after L3) that they are reflected from it in another way than they used to be before, and still later, when the fluid parts, by their spontaneous motion, encounter those new surfaces, they are reflected in the same way as

1) "first" means metaphysical priority. First there is the idea of the body, then the idea of that idea, then the idea of that idea, but all are simultaneous temporally. As Spinoza explains: "As soon as someone knows something, he thereby knows that he knows it, and at the same time knows that he knows, and so on, to infinity." 2) He may mean first temporally. First we have an understanding of our body and how it is affected; later we learn to understand our own mind. Later parts of the Ethics support this reading, as the next chapter will show. However, although I raise this question here, I do not intend to answer it. To be honest: I do not know the answer, and it does not seem relevant to our present discussion.
when they were driven against those surfaces by the external bodies. Consequently, while thus reflected, they continue to move, they will affect the human body with the same mode, concerning which the Mind (by P12) will think again, i.e. (by P17), the Mind will again regard the external body as present; this will happen as often as the fluid parts of the human body encounter the same surfaces by their spontaneous motion. So although the external bodies by which the human Body has once been affected do not exist, the Mind will still regard them as present, as often as this action of the body is repeated, q.e.d. (II P17 Cor. Dem.)

Ideas of imagination are the ideas, the X, of these impressions and bodily movements, Spinoza goes on to explain. They are what we would call sense experience, or sensations. To put it another way, imagination is the mind's activity of understanding the impressions and changes made in our body by external objects. And here is an important point: the impressions in the body persist. And so, of course, do the ideas in the mind corresponding to them. This is what we should expect: the body's essence is a striving to persist in its being, whatever its being has become. If soft impressions are made in it, it strives to retain those also. (Or rather, they maintain themselves, for the striving is in them. Or, to be still more precise: they are the striving.) And when the mind understands things a certain way, that mode of understanding strives to maintain itself. The result: memories, ideas learned from experience. Thus the first kind of understanding persists.

Spinoza also ties reason to the body, but not quite in the same way.

Reason is founded upon the "common notions."

II P38: Those things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole, can only be conceived adequately. Den.: Let A be something which is common to all bodies, and which is equally in the part of each body and in the whole. I say that A can only be conceived adequately. For its idea (by P7C) will necessarily be adequate in God, both insofar as he has the idea of the human Body and insofar as he has ideas of its affections, which (by P16, P25, and P27) involve in part both the nature of the human Body and that of
external bodies. That is (by P12 and P13), this idea will necessarily be adequate in God insofar as he constitutes the human Mind, or insofar as he has ideas that are in the human Mind. The Mind therefore (by P11C) necessarily perceives A adequately, and does so both insofar as it perceives itself and insofar as it perceives its own or any external body. Nor can A be conceived in another way, q.e.d.

Cor.: From this it follows that there are certain ideas, or notions, common to all men. For (by L2) all bodies agree in certain things, which (by P38) must be perceived adequately, or clearly and distinctly, by all.

What is common to all bodies?

L2: All bodies agree in certain things.
Dem.: For all bodies agree in that they involve the concept of one and the same attribute (by D1), and in that they can move now more slowly, now more quickly, and absolutely, that now they move, now they are at rest. (II L2)

In brief, if something is common to all bodies, including our own, we will have an adequate understanding of it. All bodies are extended, and they move and rest. So we have an adequate understanding of extension and of motion and rest. I follow Wolfson in believing that the other common notions include the axioms of geometry, mathematics, and physics.

Note that Spinoza's theory also leads to the conclusion that there are common notions about the mind. (A fact Wolfson misses.) The common notions are first of all ideas—understandings—of bodies. There must then be understandings of these understandings. Consider the following passage:

II P4: There is no affection of the Body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct concept.
Dem.: Those things that are common to all can only be conceived adequately (by II P38), and so (by II P12 and L2 [II/98]) there is no affection of the Body of which we cannot form some clear and distinct concept, q.e.d.
Cor.: From this it follows that there is no affect of which we cannot form some clear and distinct concept. For an affect is an idea of an affection of the Body (by Gen. Def. Aff.), which therefore (by P4) must involve some clear and distinct concept.

The affections of the human body discussed throughout the latter books of
the *Ethics* are common to all. Hence we can adequately understand these affects and the ideas of them. This will prove of great importance to us later.

Another important fact about common notions: they are the beginnings of demonstrations. They are, after all, the foundations of what Spinoza calls reason. They are referred to also as axioms. I follow Wolfson in this. The example of reason in II P40 Schol. IV bears this out.

One other important fact: common notions do not concern the essences of singular things.

II P37: What is common to all things (on this see L2, above) and is equally in the part and in the whole, does not constitute the essence of any singular thing.

Dem.: If you deny this, conceive (if possible) that it does constitute the essence of some singular thing, say the essence of B. Then (by D2) it can neither be nor be conceived without B. But this is contrary to the hypothesis. Therefore, it does not pertain to the essence of B, nor does it constitute the essence of any other singular thing, q.e.d.

And later Spinoza says:

... the foundations of Reason are notions (by P38) which explain those things that are common to all, and which (by P37) do not explain the essence of any singular thing. (II P44 Schol.)

So apparently the individual's idea of his or her own essence is not a common notion. That is, if we are aware of God's essence, it is not because we observe it in all things, but because we observe it in ourselves.\(^{10}\)

\(^{10}\)This does not exclude the possibility that we have some knowledge of the second type concerning essences. For example: the essence of each thing is a striving to preserve its being. This is a fact common to all things. Hence we ought to be able to reason from it, as Spinoza in fact does, beginning in Book III of the *Ethics*. There might also be facts common to the essences of all members of a species, and if so we could reason about these. But individual modes—such as an individual human being—have their own unique essences, and
Now the question is: what's the difference between reason and intuition?

For one thing, Intuition knows without demonstration. For example, in the TEI:

... they see it not by the force of that Proposition, but intuitively, [NS: or] without going through any procedure. (TEI 24)

From the example of intuitive understanding in the Short Treatise:

... a fourth, who has the clearest knowledge of all, has no need either of report, or of experience, or of the art of reasoning, because through his penetration he immediately sees the proportionality in all the calculations. (I/55,10-13)

And in the Ethics:

Given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth proportional number is 6—and we see this much more clearly because we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance, we see the first number to have the second. (II P40 Schol. 2)

Intuition is an immediate seeing, an act of understanding not based on experience or demonstration. Often intuitively understood truths can be demonstrated. His numerical examples make that clear.

What sorts of things do we understand by intuitive acts of understanding?

Unlike reason, which, as we have seen, is not concerned with individual essences, intuition understands the essences of singular things. It first of all understands God's essence, and proceeds from the knowledge of God's essence to the knowledge of individual things.

... this kind of knowing proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [NS: formal] essence of things. (II P40 Schol. 2)

common notions do not explain these. That is, they do not explain unique facts about singular things. For more on this, see the next chapter.
V P25 Dem.: The third kind of knowledge proceeds from an adequate idea of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things (see its Def. in IIP40S2),

It is capable of gaining an understanding God's essence because God's essence is immanent:

II P47: The human Mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence.
Dem.: The human Mind has ideas (by P22) from which it perceives (by P23) itself, (by P19) its own Body, and (by P16C1 and P17) external bodies as actually existing. And so (by P45 and P46) it has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence, q.e.d.

The argument, in brief: our mind understands itself, its body, and external bodies as existing, and so it has an adequate understanding of God's essence. Why? Spinoza refers us to II P45 and P46:

P45: Each idea of each body, or of each singular thing which actually exists, necessarily involves an eternal and infinite essence of God.
Dem.: The idea of a singular thing which actually exists necessarily involves both the essence of the thing and its existence (by P8C). But singular things (by IP15) cannot be conceived without God—on the contrary, because (by P6) they have God for a cause insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which the things are modes, their ideas must involve the concept of their attribute (by IA4), i.e. (by ID6), must involve an eternal and infinite essence of God, q.e.d.
Schol. By existence here I do not understand duration, i.e., existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly, and as a certain species of quantity. For I am speaking of the very nature of existence, which is attributed to singular things because infinitely many things follow from the eternal necessity of God's nature in infinitely many modes (see IP16). I am speaking, I say, of the very existence of singular things insofar as they are in God. For even if each one is determined by another singular thing to exist in a certain way, still the force by which each one perseveres in existing follows from the eternal necessity of God's nature. Concerning this, see IP24C.

Recall what has been said earlier in this dissertation and the meaning of this passage should become clear. God's power is immanent in all things, causing them continually to Be. God's essence is power of extension and of thought. Singular things cannot be conceived without this power, this
essence. They depend on it. Indeed, they are it: finite determinate modifications of it. So if we adequately conceive an existing singular thing, we must conceive it as having God's immanent creative power in it causing it to Be.

P46 then shows that this idea must be adequate:

II P46: The knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence which each idea involves is adequate and perfect.

Now, what I want to suggest is that the understanding we have of God's essence is an awareness of God's essence in ourselves. That is: my knowledge of God's essence is an awareness of God's essence acting in myself, not in all things. Consider the wording of II P45, 46, and 47, which we have just looked at. For example:

Each idea of each body, or of each singular thing which actually exists, necessarily involves an eternal and infinite essence of God.(II P45)

Recall what was said earlier: the human mind is the idea of the human body--a "singular thing which actually exists." (II P11) Each individual mind is such an idea. So we may read II P45 as saying: each mind necessarily involves an eternal and infinite essence of God. Why? Because "The idea of a singular thing which actually exists necessarily involves both the essence of the thing and its existence."(II P45) That is: the mind is aware of the body's essence and existence, and the idea of the mind is aware of the mind's essence and existence, and so on through the eternal regress of ideas. That essence is, as we've said, a portion of God's essence. Hence we are aware of God's essence, God's power, insofar as it acts in us.

II P47 basically shows that II P45--which applies to all minds--applies to the human mind as well.
P47: The human mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence.

Dem.: The human mind has ideas (by P22) from which it perceives (by P23) itself, (by P19) its own body, and (by P16c1 and P17) external bodies as actually existing. And so (by P45 and P46) it has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence, q.e.d.

The clause concerning external bodies may make one think we are aware of God's essence in other things as well. But remember that our idea of an external body is really a perception of a modification to our own body: of the affect the external body has had on us. So our perception of God's essence in our idea of an external body is really a perception of God's essence in us, causing that affection to be.

An important difference between the second and third kind of knowledge is that the latter, based on common notions, is universal, for it is based on ideas of properties shared by all things. Thus any universal truth can be applied to each singular thing. Intuition is a knowledge of singular things. Or to be more precise: an individual person's intuition is a knowledge of one singular thing: that person's own essence. It is an awareness of one's own powers, one's power of understanding and power of bodily activity. This last difference will prove important in discussing Spinoza's self-help program, to which we now turn.
Chapter IX

Spinoza's Self-Help Program

In Chapter Six I showed that Spinoza's *Ethics* is meant as a guide for increasing our share of God's power and, in so doing, our joy. But I have not yet shown how this is to be done. In fact, Spinoza describes several methods for so doing in the first twenty propositions of Book V, and a complete explication of Spinoza's self-help program could be the subject of another book. For that reason, I will not attempt such a project here. Still, some work in this direction seems called for. What I wish to do in this chapter is focus on a specific type of affect—indeed, on a specific example as it would be experienced by an individual person—and on the cure for that affect which comes from understanding its nature. Since this affect can be understood by the use of reason and by intuition, we shall consider both sorts of understanding, and try to get some idea of the differences between them. Focusing on a particular affect will have several advantages. By giving a specific example, one such as many of us may have experienced, Spinoza's system will seem less abstract, less unworldly. His ideas might even seem to have relevance to people today. (As I, in fact, believe.) Moreover, it will aid us in evaluating Spinoza's psychology and, for that matter, the rest of his philosophy.

Let's begin by looking at the example.

Suppose you are obsessed with oranges. You lust after oranges. You
eat several every day. You can't resist the offer of an orange, nor pass one by in the store. When visiting friends you peek into their fruit drawer and ask "Mind if I have an orange?"

You seek oranges because you have what Spinoza would call confused ideas about them. In your subjective experience this confused understanding manifests itself in various ways. Your perception of the oranges is different from that of other people. As Spinoza would say, oranges affect your imagination differently. Oranges, for you, are imbued with a certain quality, hard to define exactly. You see oranges as beautiful, desirable, perfectly round, glowing with inner light and goodness. The sight of an orange arouses other thoughts: you imagine peeling it, biting into it, the sweet spray of juice in your mouth and running over your fingers. The desire for these sensations drives you to eat oranges, to consume them in large quantities.

How would Spinoza analyze this affect?

I will begin with the sort of analysis performed by reason. As I showed in the last chapter, reason begins with common notions, and then deduces other facts from the common notions. That is: "...it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions." (II P29 Schol.) So in dealing with this particular affect, it would look at what the affect has in common with other affects.

We can look in the Ethics for the details of this analysis, for the analysis of the affects in Book III of the Ethics seems to be exactly the sort of thing reason would perform. It proceeds from axioms and definitions through propositions deduced from them. Spinoza himself provides the justification for thinking of the axioms and definitions as
common notions in I P8, when he says:

... if men would attend to the nature of substance, they
would have no doubt at all of the truth of P7. Indeed, this
proposition would be an axiom for everyone, and would be
numbered among the common notions.

Moreover, such demonstrations are certainly not the province of
imagination, and intuition doesn't need such demonstrations, understanding
things immediately. So the assumption that the analysis in the Ethics is
an example of reason at work seems a safe one.\textsuperscript{11}

First, perhaps, I should identify what type of affect this is we're
dealing with. Spinoza would call it "Gluttony... an immoderate Love or
Desire for eating." (III P56 Schol.) Presumably he would be willing to
give this particular appetite its own name--orange-gluttony--since "there
are as many species of Joy, Sadness, Love, Hate, etc., as there are
species of objects by which we are affected." (III P56)

Now, what does reason tell us about gluttony? That gluttony is a
desire, and a "desire can be defined as appetite together with
consciousness of the appetite." (III P4 Schol.) And all appetites are
ultimately "nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there
necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation." (III P9
Schol.) This particular appetite is just part of that total drive. Now,
some things increase our power, some things decrease it: the former cause
joy, the latter sadness. (See Chapter 6 for more on this) "The Mind, as
far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the

\textsuperscript{11} See: G.H.R. Parkinson, "Language and Knowledge in Spinoza" and Guttorm
Flostad, "Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge in the Ethics", both in Spinoza: A
Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Marjorie Grene (Notre Dame, Indiana:
University of Notre Dame Press, 1973) pp. 73-100 and 101-127, respectively. Both
support the idea that the demonstrations in the Ethics are (primarily) examples
of the second kind of knowledge.
Body's power of acting." (III P12) Remember that when Spinoza talks about imagination, he means regarding things as present, that is, through sense perception. So if the mind believes that oranges will increase the Body's power of acting, it will want to "imagine" oranges; that is, to regard them as present. In other words, to be around them.

Now "Love is nothing but Joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause. . . " and so "one who loves necessarily strives to have present and preserve the thing he loves."(III P13 Schol.) This, Spinoza says, is understood from III P12. So if you love oranges, it must be because the idea of oranges—that is, the experience of them—increases your power, which is experienced as Joy. Your mind seeks to increase its power—seeks to be joyful—so it seeks oranges.

Oranges are, of course, good for you. But how would one gain such an immoderate desire for oranges? Well:

III P14: If the Mind has once been affected by two affects at once, then afterwards, when it is affected by one of them, it will also be affected by the other.

Dem.: If the human Body has once been affected by two bodies at once, then afterwards, when the Mind imagines one of them, it will immediately recollect the other also (by II P18). But the imaginations of the Mind indicate the affects of our Body more than the nature of external bodies (by II P16C2). Therefore, if the Body, and consequently the Mind (see D3) has once been affected by two affects [NS: at once], then afterwards, when it is affected by one of them, it will also be affected by the other, q.e.d.

Hence:

Any thing can be the accidental cause of Joy, Sadness, or Desire. (III P15)

We are, in other words, like Pavlov's dogs in this respect. If someone gives us pleasure after ringing a bell, we will experience pleasure again when the bell is rung again. Something like this must have been the case
with the oranges. "From this alone—that we have regarded a thing with an effect of Joy or Sadness, of which it is not itself the efficient cause, we can love it or hate it." (III P15 Cor.) and so "we understand how it can happen that we love or hate some things without any cause known to us." (III P15 Cor. Schol.)

This is about all Spinoza has to say, really, about the genesis of the sort of desire we are considering. At some time in the past you must have been affected with feelings of great pleasure while eating oranges. In other words, something happened which increased your power, and you associated this power increase—and the accompanying joy—with oranges. It perhaps happened many times, and the oranges must never have been associated with pain, otherwise your mind would vacillate (see II P17). Now whenever you see an orange, and feel its firm skin and taste its sweetness, that joy arises again that has been associated with it, even though the original external cause of the joy is gone. For this is the understanding your mind has of oranges. It has inadequate, confused ideas about the oranges, and it strives to maintain those ideas, as I argued in the last chapter. Because, of course, it believes oranges really do increase its body's power to such a great degree.

The trouble, of course, is that they do not really do so. To some extent, the orange-glutton will be aware of this. Indeed, it is likely that this gluttony will lead to health problems. Eat a dozen oranges one day and you'll get an idea of what I mean. Thus orange-gluttony will ultimately lead to a decrease of one's power, and so, of course, to sadness. And the mind desires to decrease sadness, to avoid that which causes sadness. This is when reason would actually begin its work; that
is, in response to the sadness that afflicts the mind.

It is possible, of course, that a person's power of understanding will be so weak that he won't even begin reasoning about it. He will be driven this way and that by his gluttony and his sadness. If he does not connect the two he will have no peace of mind. But let's suppose it does its work. It does an analysis such as we've been doing, perhaps in more detail, if it can. It sees how all affects, in all their variety, stem from the "three primitive affects, viz. Desire, Joy, and Sadness." (III P59 Schol.) It understands that the joy people feel is a feeling of increasing power, and their sadness a feeling of decreasing power. So in studying the nature of gluttony, its common features and effects, it realizes that its own gluttony must be the result of imagining that the oranges will increase its power in some way. For what it has discovered is knowledge that applies universally, which can therefore be applied to particulars as well.

Most importantly, reason realizes that the oranges do not really increase its power. Rather, it sees that it is the mind's own striving to understand which has joined the feeling of increased power to the idea of oranges as a cause, and which now maintains that association. In other words, it is not really the oranges which cause the joy; it is the mind which imagines they will, which causes it.

This is the crucial move in curing an affect which Spinoza discusses, beginning in V P2:

P2: If we separate emotions, or affects, from the thought of an external cause, and join them to other thoughts, then the Love, or Hate, toward the external cause is destroyed, as are the vacillations of mind arising from these affects.

Dem.: For what constitutes the form of Love, or Hate, is Joy, or Sadness, accompanied by the idea of an external
cause (by Defs. Aff. VI, VII). So if this is taken away, the form of Love or Hate is taken away at the same time. Hence, these affects, and those arising from them, are destroyed, q.e.d.

What happens when we understand that the inadequate ideas in us are not being caused by external objects, but are being caused by ourselves? We cease to hate or love the external object we imagined was the cause. We should, it seems, hate or love ourselves instead (!). More about this will be said at the end of the chapter. Meanwhile, it might be objected that the passage above says nothing about recognizing ourselves as the cause. It only says we separate the affect from the idea of an external cause and join it to other thoughts. But I believe this implies what I have claimed. It is clear that we are joining the affects to some other thoughts, and if these are not external, they must be internal. The only question is which internal thoughts we are joining them to. The analysis of the affects we have just completed provides a natural answer to this question: the external object doesn't cause the joy, it is the mind's own drive to understanding maintaining a confused association of ideas about the external object, which causes its joy. Furthermore, as I shall show later, other propositions suggest that the idea we are joining the affect to is the idea of God's power immanent in us; i.e. our power, which is that small portion of God's power which constitutes our essence.

What, then, happens in the case of orange-gluttony? Well, what constituted the gluttony was a feeling of joy accompanied by the idea of oranges as a cause. But reason, in discovering the true cause of the gluttony, "takes away" the idea that oranges cause the joy. Hence, knowing that oranges do not increase its power, the glutton ceases to love the oranges. The love, and all the other feelings which were associated
with it, is destroyed. The oranges no longer seem unusual: they are just ordinary pieces of fruit.\textsuperscript{12}

As indicated earlier, there are two perspectives from which we may understand an affect: reason and intuition. So far we have been speaking mostly from the standpoint of reason. What of intuition?

First of all it must be recalled that the understandings gained by reason and intuition are not exclusive of one another. As we saw earlier, for example, both reason and intuition may understand mathematical truths, but they do so in different ways. Reason must proceed by demonstration, but intuition understands immediately, without demonstration.

The same is true of knowledge of the affects. In Spinoza's guide for remedying the affects, which occupies the first twenty propositions of Book V, it is not specified whether the understandings which provide the cure are those of reason or of intuition. We are told only that the cure requires clear and distinct ideas of the affects. Both reason and intuition involve clear and distinct ideas. Hence these propositions could be speaking about reason or intuition, or, as I believe is the case, both. That this is so is suggested by Spinoza's summary of the remedies which occurs in V P20 Schol.:

From what we have said, we easily conceive what clear and distinct knowledge—and especially that third kind of

\textsuperscript{12}If this interpretation of Spinoza is correct, it may be noted that his theory is not unique. His insight seems essentially the same as that of Epictetus: "Men feel disturbed not by things, but by the views they take of them." I don't know if Spinoza read Epictetus, but we do know he was familiar with the Stoics. Perhaps that is one source of his views here.

It also seems worthy of note that some psychologists today hold this view. Most notably Albert Ellis, who, incidentally, speaks of Spinoza as a predecessor of his Rational-Emotive Therapy.
knowledge (see II P47S), whose foundation is the knowledge of God itself—can accomplish against the affects. Insofar as the affects are passions, if clear and distinct knowledge does not absolutely remove them (see P3 and P4S), at least it brings it about that they constitute the smallest part of the Mind (see P14).

"From what we have said" refers to the previous twenty propositions. This makes it clear that the previous twenty propositions were meant to show how any clear and distinct knowledge is useful against the affects. That provided by intuition is especially effective, but the ways in which either type are effective are covered by the same twenty propositions.

Why is intuition more effective? I suggest there are several reasons, having to do with the fact that intuition is an understanding of our own individual essence, and of God's immanent power in us. Because each individual essence is unique, there may be some things we can understand about ourselves only by intuition. Also, since intuition is immediate, we can expect it to be more effective in a moment of crisis than reason, which needs time to work things out. Third, and I believe this may be most important: intuition is a kind of self-awareness which is more effective than the theoretical awareness of reason.

I'm sure no Spinoza scholar will doubt that each thing has its own essence. But can it be shown that Spinoza believes in unique individual essences? This is easy enough:

We have already seen that the essence of all things is a striving to Be. But what distinguishes the essence of a man from a horse?

Consider III P3:

The first thing that constitutes the essence of the Mind is nothing but the idea of an actually existing Body (by II P11 and P13).

This follows from II P11:
The first thing that constitutes the actual being of a human Mind is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which actually exists.

and II P13, which explains what the singular thing is:

The object of the idea constituting the human Mind is the Body, or a certain mode of Extension which actually exists, and nothing else.

I think it is clear from these passages that each mind has its own individual essence. What all minds share in common is that they are all ideas of bodies, but every body is unique in some ways. Hence the essence of a human mind will differ from the essence of a horse's mind as much as their bodies differ. As for human bodies, they are similar, but each has its own unique constructions. Because of this, affects themselves may differ from individual to individual:

III P57: Each affect of each individual differs from the affect of another as much as the essence of the one from the essence of the other.

Hence:

From this it follows that the affects of the animals which are called irrational (for after we know the origin of the Mind, we cannot in any way doubt that the lower animals feel things) differ from men's affects as much as their nature differs from human nature. Both the horse and the man are driven by a Lust to procreate; but the one is driven by an equine Lust, the other by a human Lust. So also the Lusts and Appetites of Insects, fish, and birds must vary. Therefore, though each individual lives content with his own nature, by which he is constituted, and is glad of it, nevertheless that life with which each one is content, and that gladness, are nothing but the idea, or soul, of the individual. And so the gladness of the one differs in nature from the gladness of the other as much as the essence of the one differs from the essence of the other.

Finally, from P57 it follows that there is no small difference between the gladness by which a drunk is led and the gladness a Philosopher possesses. I wished to mention this in passing. (III P57 Schol.)

The important point for our purpose is this: if each singular thing has
its own unique essence, then there may be some facts about each individual essence which are not shared in common with any other individuals. If so, reason will not be able to deal with these differences, since reason deals with what is common among separate individuals. Thus in the Ethics itself Spinoza looks at what our essences have in common—that they all are strivings for being—and deduces by reason conclusions which apply to all those beings. But insofar as a person’s particular affect has its own unique genesis, because of the way his or her body and mind are constituted and the way he or she has been affected by others, his or her reason might not be able to deal with it. At least, not completely.

Suppose, for example, your appetite for oranges is due to some peculiar facts about your genetic make-up. Suppose your taste-buds just happen to be built in such a way that they are particularly affected by orange juice. And what about the unique circumstances that may have contributed to your orange gluttony? Perhaps the woman singing on the orange juice commercials reminds you of your mother. Maybe when you were young your mother would put an orange into your crib to comfort you. Whatever the cause, your essence will in some ways be unique, and it is the function of intuition to understand, I suggest, just these sorts of things.

Of course it may be objected that individual essences are unique, but not in a way that prevents their properties from being shared with others. If an essence is only unique in being a unique configuration of properties, while each property is shared with others, then each of those properties might be understood by reason. Yet perhaps reason could not understand the configuration as a whole, so this still might be a subject
for intuition.

Another part of the difference between intuition and reason is that, whereas reason is a universal knowledge—what we might call theoretical knowledge—intuition is particular, or, I might say, personal. It is understanding things in yourself. It is like the difference between knowing how to drive a car, because you've read a book that tells you how, and knowing how to drive through actually driving. In this case it is the difference between knowing by reasoned argument that God's power is immanent in all things and being aware of God's power immanent in yourself. Intuition is, in other words, self awareness. I argued in the chapter on epistemology that intuition was an immediate awareness of God's essence in one's self. I want to elaborate on that point here, and suggest that, among other things, it amounts to an awareness of one's own self, of one's own nature and power.

A survey of Spinoza's writings does not reveal much about intuition, but I believe what little there is supports my reading. First of all, it is perhaps worth noting, one of Spinoza's earliest readers—the author of the introduction to the Short Treatise—seems to have understood Spinoza in this way. The fourth kind of knowledge, he tells us, consists in the "internal enjoyment and clear intuition of the thing itself." (I/5 29) And shortly after, he says it consists "of an internal enjoyment of and immediate union with God's essence." (I/8 14-15) I.E. an enjoyment of God's essence inside ourselves. Of course, this early commentator could be wrong. But we may find corroboration in Spinoza's own words.

For example: in Chapter II of the Short Treatise, where Spinoza says of intuition that it is: "being aware of and enjoying the thing
itself."(I/55 28-29) He contrasts this, significantly, with reason, saying "the things we grasp only through reason we do not see, but know only through a conviction in the intellect that it must be so and not otherwise."(I/55 23-26) We know things by reason, but we do not see their truth. That is, we do not experience it. Spinoza continues:

For as we have said in our example of the rule of three, if someone can discover through proportionality a fourth number that agrees with the third as the second does with the first, then (having used multiplication and division) he can say that the four numbers must be proportional; but if this is so, then he speaks about it just as of a thing that is outside him. But if he comes to see the proportionality, as we have shown in the fourth example, then he says that the thing is truly such, since then it is in him, not outside him.(I/59 12-21)

This is an important passage. It tells us there are two ways of knowing that four numbers are proportional. The first way seems to be that of reason, and someone who knows this way knows it "as of a thing outside him." But when he sees it, intuitively, "then it is in him, not outside him." Thus intuition is an awareness of something in one's self: in this case, a mathematical truth.

Let us turn now to the final pages of the Ethics. In the Scholium to V P31, speaking of intuition, Spinoza says:

the more each of us is able to achieve in this kind of knowledge, the more he is conscious of himself and of God, i.e. the more perfect and blessed he is."(V P31 Schol.)

The more intuitive knowledge we have, the more we are conscious of ourself--of our essence, our power--and of God, whose infinite power ours is part of. And let's look at V P36:

P36: The Mind's intellectual Love of God is the very Love of God by which God loves himself, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explained by the human Mind's essence, considered under a species of eternity; i.e., the Mind's intellectual Love of God is part of the infinite Love
by which God loves himself.

Dem.: This Love the Mind has must be related to its actions (by P32C and IIP3); it is, then, an action by which the Mind contemplates itself, with the accompanying idea of God as its cause (by P32 and P32C), i.e. (by IIP25C and IIP11C), an action by which God, insofar as he can be explained through the human Mind, contemplates himself, with the accompanying idea of himself [as the cause]; so (by P35), this Love the Mind has is part of the infinite love by which God loves himself, q.e.d.

I do not intend to give a complete interpretation of this passage. Like most scholars, I don't fully understand the last passages in the *Ethica*. Nevertheless, a few things seem clear: namely, that this intellectual love of God, which comes from intuitive knowledge (see V P32C) is "an action by which the Mind contemplates itself." It is part of God's infinite self-awareness, God's awareness of himself as infinite immanent power.

Two other passages are worth noting, although they do not speak directly of intuitive knowledge:

. . . he who, like an infant or child, has a Body capable of very few things, and very heavily dependent on external causes, has a Mind which considered solely in itself is conscious of almost nothing of itself, or of God, or of things. On the other hand, he who has a Body capable of a great many things, has a Mind which considered only in itself is very much conscious of itself, and of God, and of things. (V P39 Schol.)

and

. . . not only is the ignorant man troubled in many ways by external causes, and unable ever to possess true peace of mind, but he also lives as if he knew neither himself, nor God, nor things, and as soon as he ceases to be acted on, he ceases to be. On the other hand, the wise man, insofar as he is considered as such, is hardly troubled in spirit, but being, by a certain eternal necessity, conscious of himself, and of God, and of things, he never ceases to be, but always possesses true peace of mind. (V P42 Schol.)

The ultimate goal of the *Ethica* is empowerment through self-awareness.

The wise man is aware of himself. He knows his own power, knows how it
operates, knows it is God's power in him.

This self-awareness is more powerful than reason, Spinoza tells us:

Again, because the essence of our Mind consists only in knowledge, of which God is the beginning and foundation (by I P15 and II P47S), it is clear to us how our Mind, with respect both to essence and existence, follows from the divine nature, and continually depends on God.

I thought this worth the trouble of noting here, in order to show by this example how much the knowledge of singular things I have called intuitive, or knowledge of the third kind (see II P40S2), can accomplish, and how much more powerful it is than the universal knowledge I have called knowledge of the second kind. For although I have shown generally in Part I that all things (and consequently the human Mind also) depend on God both for their essence and their existence, nevertheless, that demonstration, though legitimate and put beyond all chance of doubt, still does not affect our Mind as much as when this is inferred from the very essence of any singular thing which we say depends on God. (V P36 Schol.)

So also with orange-gluttony. Suppose you've used reason to discover the causes of orange-gluttony, and its effects, and you have some reasoned ideas for a cure. That is, suppose your understanding is like that provided by the Ethica. Knowing by reason that all affects stem from our striving for being is not the same knowing how your own affects stem from your own striving for being. Knowing the common characteristics of gluttony is not the same as knowing the features of your own gluttony. Intuitive knowledge of orange-gluttony is knowledge of your own feelings and beliefs about oranges, gained by focusing attention on those feelings and beliefs. It is knowledge of the way your gluttony arises from your own striving for being, of the thoughts you have as you are driven to consume the oranges, and of the thoughts which arise in consequence. This sort of understanding, I dare say, would be far more effective at destroying your obsessive love for oranges than would the more abstract, theoretical understanding of reason. For you might prove to yourself by
reason that your gluttony is somehow the result of your own striving, but that is far different from seeing exactly how it is so by observing it in yourself.

If something like this is an accurate interpretation of Spinoza's theory of knowledge, I think we may set aside Jonathon Bennett's assessment of it as "worthless." It seems to me that being aware of yourself as a source of action and understanding and of the way in which your own irrational ideas weaken or harm you, keeping you from enjoying life, would be far from worthless. I dare say—in a society filled with gamblers, drug-addicts, child-molesters and, for that matter, ordinary people of all sorts who are unhappy with their lives and don't know why—this idea of being aware of one's self as an individual, independent of external causes, is worth thinking about.

I argued earlier that when we separate an affect from the idea of an external cause, we are recognizing that we ourselves are the cause. In particular: reason understands generally that affects of this sort stem from our own strivings; intuition is aware of how it stems from that mind's own striving.

It is because we join the affect to the idea of our own essence that we love God. For remember, our essence is just a portion of God's essence. So really, when we separate the emotion from the idea of an external cause, and join it to our own essence, we are joining it to the idea of God.

Thus in VP14:
P14: The Mind can bring it about that all the Body's affects, or images of things, are related to the idea of God.

Dem.: There is no affection of the Body of which the Mind cannot form some clear and distinct concept (by P4). And so it can bring it about (by I P15) that they are related to the idea of God, q.e.d.

Forming a clear and distinct idea of an affection involves relating it to the idea of God, for all things are of course in God and inconceivable without God. Forming an intuitive awareness means knowing its connection to God's power in yourself. Because "whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be conceived without God,"(I P15) and because it is God's power acting in you which sustains an affect, understanding that affect means connecting it to the idea of God: the understanding we have because, as we showed in Ch. 8, God's power is in us.

But, someone might object, doesn't this mean God is the cause of pain and sadness? If so, how can we love God? Spinoza responds to this objection in V P18:

Schol.: But, it can be objected, while we understand God to be the cause of all things, we thereby consider God to be the cause of Sadness. To this I reply that insofar as we understand the causes of Sadness, it ceases (by P3) to be a passion, i.e. (by IIIP59), to that extent it ceases to be Sadness. And so, insofar as we understand God to be the cause of Sadness, we rejoice.

When we understand the cause of our pain, our clear and distinct idea of it changes it nature, as we've seen. Thus the oranges cease to lead us to pain. Rather, our adequate ideas of the affect will cause other adequate ideas which increase our power. And so, if we actually understand God, we cannot hate him, because we can't help but feel joy.
Chapter X.

Spinozistic Speculations

At this point, what I'd like to do is broaden our view. The reader would perhaps like to see how our ideas about power relate to other aspects of Spinoza's metaphysics. In particular, I want to say more about God and the attributes. Now, I am not prepared to give anything like what I would call a "final word" on Spinoza. What I offer here instead are speculations, sometimes wild or confused, sometimes playful, intended seriously but hardly definitive. They represent the current state of my thoughts about Spinoza, and I hope the reader finds them of some value.

Let's begin with modes. Modes, I claimed, are modifications of God's power. What does that mean? Well, consider a body in extension. It is distinguished from other bodies by its power of extension. It causes itself to Be in a certain place; it continually creates itself, whether at motion or rest. It strives to keep itself in Being. I think this means its nature is to affect other bodies—other powers—in certain ways. It is a power to resist penetration by other bodies; a power to push against other powers, to force them out of its way, out of the space it is moving into. It is a power that affects other powers, and is in turn affected by them, depending on the current state of its activity and the others which affect it.

A complex body, such as a human body, is a complex of powers. It is quite clear in the latter books of the **Ethics** that Spinoza thinks of the
body as such (as shown in Ch. 6). Admittedly there is some mystery as to why this complex of powers comes together and stays together. Ultimately it is a question of why the laws of nature are what they are. It is the nature of the powers—the modes, the simple bodies—that when they come together in certain ways they behave in certain ways. Why they do so is a mystery. Somehow, powers that come together fuse to become a new power, which has its own striving to Be. Two powers come together, and their combination is something new. Like blue and yellow forming green; or two forces that combine to push something in a new direction. A body forms; it is a new force built out of other forces. It is also, moreover, a collection of forces each of which would cease to exist unless in that form. Consider any uniquely human desire, and especially any desire unique to an individual. Suppose Ralph desires Edna. Somehow that desire has been created out of a combination of Ralph's own powers, Edna's powers affecting Ralph, and other forces as well, such as past influences and the like. However it was created, that new desire has its own conatus, part of the Ralph-complex of powers. It contributes to the conatus of Ralph's body considered as a whole, since it could not continue its own existence without Ralph's body. Thus the body's various desires strive to keep it together at the same time they strive to keep themselves in existence, for they could not survive without the body. The body's conatus is derived from all these separate conatuses.

Analogous events must be going on in the attribute of thought. Consider a simple mode of thought. Spinoza claims every simple body has a mode of thought corresponding to it. What could this mean? Actually, it becomes quite simple when we begin to think of ideas not so much as
images but as powers. That there is an idea corresponding to every aspect of reality means there is a power that mode has in the attribute of thought to affect other modes of thought, other minds, in a certain way. Consider our senses. The green leaf I see in front of me has a power in it which causes me to see it as green. If no one is around to perceive it the thought-aspect of it is still there ready to cause a perception in someone when they come near, if they have a mind capable of perceiving it. It has a power of greenness. But of course, as Spinoza emphasizes, different minds are affected different ways. I see a color I call green: its power is affecting my mental powers in a way that creates that image. Others might be affected differently: the power in the leaf hasn't changed.

Suppose we examine the leaf more closely. Suppose it is a photograph of a leaf, and the green really an "illusion" caused by dots of blue and yellow. The power in the attribute of thought to make us see it as blue and yellow was already there, already affecting us, but our perception of it was confused, and thus we saw it as green. Suppose we look closer at a real leaf and see cells, then molecules, then atoms. The powers that cause these sense perceptions were already there in the leaf insofar as it is a mode of thought. We are seeing new aspects of its power, more details of the complex of powers which, from a distance, looks like a mere leaf. And of course each of these aspects in thought corresponds to a power in extension which would affect our body in certain ways. I would like to point out also how this enriches Spinoza's meaning when he says attributes express themselves in infinitely many modes. The leaf seems infinitely complex, has infinite depth. The more we study it,
the more powers we find.

Can we say the same things about the idea that constitutes the human mind?

Yes. Remember that according to Spinoza there is no mind-body interaction. But Spinoza was a realist: that is, he did not think all our sense perceptions were self-generated, were delusion. No, our sense perceptions are caused by a reality outside our minds. And if they can't be caused by bodies, because there is no mind-body interaction, they must be caused by external minds. So when I see another person's body, what is happening? Their body affects my body in the attribute of extension. But their body does not affect my mind. So where does this image, in my mind, of their body come from? Obviously, it comes from their idea of their body; that is, their mind. Their mind is the idea of their body. As Spinoza says:

II P13: The object of the idea constituting the human Mind is the Body, or a certain mode of Extension which actually exists, and nothing else.

Moreover, their mind includes in it an idea of each part of their body.

Dem.: The idea that constitutes the formal being of the human Mind is the idea of a body (by P13), which (by Post. 1) is composed of a great many highly composite individuals. But of each Individual composing the body, there is necessarily (by P8C) an idea in God. Therefore (by P7), the idea of the human Body is composed of these many ideas of the parts composing the Body, q.e.d.(II P15)

Hence when I see their body, what is happening really (according to Spinoza) is that the complex idea of their body, which is their mind, is showing me their body as it is at that time. I look at a bodybuilder flexing her biceps. Her mind has as object her body with its strong
muscles, and one of the ideas in her mind will be of her flexing biceps. Note I am not talking about a little voice in her head thinking: "I am flexing my biceps." It is rather an awareness her mind has of all its body parts and what they are doing. When she flexes her biceps she feels them flexing: that feeling is her mind's idea of the biceps flexing. Suppose she has exercised so hard that now her biceps are stiff and sore: that feeling is her mind's idea of the biceps in its exhausted state. Her mind "directly explains the essence of" her "body." (II P17 Schol.) Now my mind perceives her mind. Her mind causes my mind to perceive an image of a muscular human female body flexing its biceps. Since that is what her body is and is doing, that is how her mind "explains" it, and that is why it causes the image in my mind that it does. Of course, the nature of my own mind affects that perception: "what seems good to one, seems bad to another; what seems ordered to one, seems confused to another; what seems pleasing to one, seems displeasing to another, and so on." (EI Appendix at II/83,1-3) Hence I might perceive her as beautiful or ugly, impressive or frightening, small or large, etc. depending on how she affects me... on how my body is affected by her body and hence how my mind is affected by her mind. But again, as with the power in the leaf, her mind remains unchanged, however I perceive it.

Keep in mind also that my perception really is a confused perception of her powers. Like the leaf, she is infinitely complex, and indeed more perfect (in Spinozistic terms) than the leaf, as she has more powers. She is more real than the leaf. We could examine her more closely and discover more and more details. Under the skin we would find muscle, blood, bones, and organs, each with an idea in her mind corresponding to
it, and each further divisible into other ideas just as the extended organs are divisible into smaller bodies. And they all affect me, though my perception of them is more confused, because less direct. Thus I see the skin, but it is the muscle under the skin that presses out, and the bone that supports the muscle. In her mind the idea of the flexing biceps is really the awareness of her whole arm, the complex of ideas of all the arm's parts—bones, muscles, skin, etc.—and though I perceive only the idea corresponding to the surface of her skin, the rest of the complex affects me as well, indirectly, because it affects the idea of the skin which affects me.

And what about her thoughts? Do I perceive these as well? Yes, but again, only confusedly, so confusedly that I will never perceive them clearly. Let's see how this must work:

Every thought in a mind has some affect. It causes other thoughts, first of all. Corresponding to these thoughts are motions in the brain, and each of these, of course, causes further motion. Now these motions in the brain may be so minute as to little affect the body, or they might affect it greatly. For example, right now I am thinking of Spinoza and female bodybuilders. The motions in my brain corresponding to these thoughts are causing (ultimately) my extended hand to write these words on a page. The motions in my brain cause motions in my nerves, which in turn transmit motion into the muscles of my hands, and the muscles to the bones. (I am oversimplifying a bit. Other causes contribute as well, but were I to try delineating them all, this chapter would never end.) Corresponding to all these activities in the brain and body are activities in thought. I think a word that I want to write: that thought causes a
change in mental state of the mode of thought corresponding to my nerves. That in turn causes the idea of the hand to change: I feel my muscles tense, I feel my hand move, my fingers grip the pen. These feelings are modifications of the idea of my hand. My physical hand moves the pen; the idea of my hand "moves" the idea of the pen. Not the image of the hand or the image of the pen. The moving hand-idea and pen-idea cause, in turn, an image of them, which is, again, a confused image. And of course, anyone watching gets a confused image as well. The idea--my mind--of my crossed leg and moving hand and bowed head affects the viewer's mind, causing an image of me, and perhaps thoughts of me as a writer and thinker.

In this way the thoughts in my mind ultimately cause thoughts in other minds. The idea they have, of course, does not give a clear perception of my mind. They have a picture of me that they see, and thoughts about me such as "he is deep in thought. Look at the concentration in his face." or "what a geek; studying when he could be partying." The thought they have depends more on their nature than on mind. As William Blake might suggest, what for me is experiences as heaven might look to them like the torments of hell.

If this seems confusing perhaps it will help to keep in mind that my mind is not the image of my body. Spinoza gives us the warning: "to distinguish accurately between an idea, or concept, of the Mind, and the images of things that we imagine." For "an idea (since it is a mode of thinking) consists neither in the image of anything, nor in words." (II P49 Schol. 2) I see my arms and legs and stomach, and indeed the image of
them is in my mind. But the object of that image really is the motions in the brain caused by the extended hand affecting my eyes. In thought, the image itself is caused by the idea of the hand, the idea whose object is the hand. All the ideas outside my mind affect the idea that is my mind: they cause it to experience mental images of trees and plants, dirt and fallen leaves, and my girlfriend, and other things. Now suppose my body were not affected by outside bodies, and my mind not affected by outside minds. (And furthermore, that neither had ever been affected.) What then would the idea of my body be like?

II P19: The human Mind does not know the human body itself, nor does it know that it exists, except through ideas of affections by which the body is affected.

It is clear, from the demonstration of this proposition, that the affections Spinoza refers to are affections caused from outside. Hence a human mind (or any mind) which had never been affected by outside ideas would, it seems, be nothing. Normally a mind is constituted by a collection of images, sensations, and thoughts; that is, by all the affections of it. It is a power which, when affected by other powers, becomes thoughts. It is in fact a myriad of such powers. It has, for example, various powers of perceiving. It can see, it can hear, etc. But imagine a mind totally alone with nothing to perceive. If never affected,

---

There appears to be a contradiction in some of the things Spinoza says about ideas and images. In II P49 Schol. II, he denies that ideas are images. But this contradiction is only apparent; at II P17 Schol. Spinoza defines "image" as an affection of the body. But he also talks in II P17, P18, and P40, and other places also, of the mind imagining things. I suggest that what we would call a mental image Spinoza would not call an image, but an idea of an image in the body. Still, I must admit to being worried about this. Is it possible that when Spinoza says "images" are affections of our body he means the sensory images—the things I see and hear right now—are modifications of my body???
it would remain empty, pure potential, unmodified ("unmoded") power. Then suppose another object affects it: a red ball floating in the void near it. That ball's power in the attribute of thought affects the lone mind, affects its power of perception, and the two create an image of a red ball. The potential power—a power that could become any image—becomes the image of a red ball. The image of the red ball is a modification of the mind's power, of its reality. Affected only by the red ball that mind would become nothing but the image of the red ball, plus of course the potential to become other images and thoughts.

Fortunately for us there are an infinite variety of other things besides the red ball affecting us: green leaves, female bodybuilders, butterflies, and so on. Note also that our mind is both affected by outside things, and is also an affection of them. It thoughts are shaped by its experiences, but it shapes them also. It has its own essence, its own power. The red ball affects my mind, but that I see it as a red ball is largely because of my mind's powers of perception. Does the red ball perceive me? Well, I doubt it has a power of perception. But my mind can affect its "mind." Suppose I bat it away. Corresponding to the activities in extension—my body forcing its body away—are modes of thought: the feeling of my swinging arm, the sting of my palm slapping against the ball, the red-ball image appearing to move away, becoming smaller and less distinct. The idea of my body has altered its power, as evidenced by the fact that its power is affecting me differently.

Now we have been on a bit of a digression, and one may wonder what all this has to do with God and the attributes. My answer is that we can learn a lot about the nature of the attributes by thinking about the
modes, and asking questions about their natures. In the process of working out the answers for ourselves, we learn much about Spinoza that we could not learn just by reading the text.

What I want to point out here are the different aspects of power we've discovered. We looked at the human mind and saw that if unaffected it would be empty; it would be pure potential. Can we not say something analogous of the body? An unaffected body would have to be a motionless one, in a motionless universe. And as we've seen before (Chapter V), a motionless universe is nothing, except potential.

But mind and body are never unmodified. The potential power of my mind/body is always manifesting itself as something, a mode of thought and a mode of extension. The human mind and body express their potential power in a great variety of ways. The mind becomes all sorts of thoughts and feelings and images; the body all sorts of organs and muscles and bones. But more importantly, these powers have the potential to become virtually anything.

This last statement may seem too strong. "Anything?" But I mean what I say. For example, consider one of the simple bodies of which my human body is composed: a single corpuscle. Say it is part of my skin. The skin flakes off, the corpuscle becomes dust. The dust settles on dirt. It becomes part of the dirt. Rainwater pulls it into the soil: a plant's roots take it in: now it is part of a leaf. A giraffe eats it: it becomes part of the giraffe's brain. The giraffe dies in a flood, is buried. Over the course of millions of years, it becomes oil. Millions of years later the oil is used as fuel.

One corpuscle might do all these things. It's power remains the
same in one sense: the laws of nature governing it never change. Whatever it becomes, it becomes according to constant rules which define its nature. But in another sense, its power does change. First it moves this way, then that. It becomes part of one formation, then another. Now it moves fast, now slow. It acts differently in different situations. The insight is, I believe, similar to that of modern physics: that matter and energy are just different states of the same basic reality. A brain is a collection of simple bodies—simple powers—behaving like a brain; those same bodies could later become parts of something else. Remember: all simple bodies are essentially the same for Spinoza; it is their motion and arrangements—their activity—which determines what they are. And of course, corresponding to every simple body is an idea. So suppose the simple body moves from my brain to a giraffe’s brain. The corresponding mode of thought also changes, from sensation of sound in my mind to a sensation in the giraffe’s. And likewise for any other changes that occur.

Yes, a given mode could, hypothetically, become anything. It will not, of course, become everything, and in a deterministic universe each mode is restricted in what it will become by its situation. Nevertheless, each mode will, over time, become an infinite variety of things.

Now, the power that constitutes any mode performs two functions. If we consider any mode, say, the idea of the bodybuilder’s arm, we see it both causes itself to be, and causes others to perceive its being. It is both an experience in the mind of the bodybuilder—an awareness of the current state of her powers—and a showing of itself. So at any moment the power in it has two affects: 1. it causes itself to Be in a certain
way; and 2. it causes others to perceive its Being, by modifying their Being. And when it causes itself to Be in a certain way, what is it doing? In the attribute of thought, it is making itself a certain type of thought, a particular sensation or feeling or idea or experience. In extension, it makes itself a certain type of body in motion or at rest, a body Being and behaving a certain way. Yet note also that although I distinguish these two functions, it seems to me that in reality they are not separate. Rather, the first is the subjective experience of the latter. When the bodybuilder curls a barbell, the strain she feels is her experience of her power. It is the way her power currently feels. And here we have further insight into Spinoza's ethical doctrines: the joys and sorrows of which he speaks are not the consequences of the activity or passivity of our powers. They are the feeling of the activity or passivity of those powers.

Joy and Sadness are the Desire, or Appetite, itself insofar as it is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, by external causes. I.e., it is the very nature of each individual. (III P57 Dem.)

and:

Joy is a man's passage from a lesser to a greater perfection. (II/191,1)

and

Sadness is a man's passage from a greater to a lesser perfection. (II/191,2)

Shortly after, he explains that "the affect of Sadness is an act, which can therefore be no other act than that of passing to a lesser perfection." (II 191 14-15) The feeling is the passage, the changing state itself. Or rather: it is the act of changing. And since all the other feelings—pain, pleasure, love, hate, etc.—are (according to Spinoza)
varieties of these three, it follows that all are the feelings of particular types of activity. They are, as we have said, the experience of God's power behaving in various ways. And lest this seem an odd way of looking at things, I would point out that it seems to me quite insightful. If I am engaged in some pleasurable activity, for example, it is misleading to think of the pleasure as an effect of the activity, thus separating the two. It is rather pleasurable-activity; physical pleasure, mental pleasure, sensual pleasure, sexual pleasure. The nature of the pleasure is different for every activity, because every activity is in some ways unique. The unique form of any activity gives the pleasure its own unique form, since the pleasure is the feeling of that specific act.

Now, as I've said before, all these modes are portions of the infinite attributes. God is infinite power of thinking and infinite power of extending. Let's turn our attention toward some of God's other characteristics. I will start by listing a number of conditions any interpretation of Spinoza ought to satisfy; then (still speculatively, mind you) I will work toward doing so myself.

The Conditions.

1. I D6: By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, i.e. a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.

2. I P7: It pertains to the nature of a substance to exist, i.e. it is "the cause of itself," and "has . . . an absolutely infinite power of existing."(II 54, 5-8)
3. God is indivisible. (I P13)
4. God is unique. (I P14 Cor.1)
5. Everything is in God. (I P15)
6. God has no length, breadth, or depth, or figure. (I P15, Schol. 1)
7. Extension is one of God's infinite attributes. (I P15 Schol. 1)
8. Thought is one of God's infinite attributes. (II P1)
9. Parts are distinguished only modally, not really. (I P15 Schol. 1)
10. All things flow from God's supreme power, or nature. (I P16, P17 Schol.)
11. God is the immanent cause of all things. (I P18)
12. God is eternal. (I P19)
13. God is immutable. (I P20 Cor.2)

It should be clear already how I satisfy some of these conditions. In particular, conditions 2, 10, and 11 are given clear meaning by the idea of God as an immanent creative power, an essence which causes its own being continually and, in so doing, causes the modes within its being. Three conditions out of thirteen, however, is not very impressive. In no particular order, then, let me say how I think Spinoza perceives Being and the modes of Being, to show that my interpretation thus far can fit into a more elaborate system.

I'll begin with the attribute of extension. What is the attribute of extension? What reality do we perceive when we have that attribute clearly in mind? We can get some help from our earlier work concerning motion and rest and the nature of modes. In Ch. 5 we asked the question: what would we have if all motion stopped? Our answer: infinite extended nothingness. And earlier in this chapter we asked what a mode of thought
or extension would be if unaffected. Well, it would be unmoded, i.e. nothing, except potential.

I am inclined to say that that is what the attributes would be if they had no modes. They would be nothing except potential. Infinite potential, perhaps, but still nothing.

Regarding extension, however, the question is whether or not that infinite potential is an infinitely extended potential. That is, is it an unbounded space which has the power to produce modes in itself? This is close to Bennett's interpretation, and is, I believe, Donagan's. The question is: does it cohere with what Spinoza has to say about God?

God has no length, breadth, depth or figure, Spinoza says (I P15 Schol.) Does this fit with the idea of extension being space? Well, if it is unbounded, having no edge, it can have no figure, no outer shape. But doesn't it have length, breadth, or depth? As described, it seems like one would have to say it has an infinite length, breadth, and depth. But I'm not sure this is right. Spinoza might have one of several ideas in mind here. For example, he might mean God has no definite or measurable length, breadth, or depth. It cannot be said, for example, that "God is exactly 1,000 light years across." Or perhaps he means our measurements, or any measurements, in some sense cannot apply to God. How big is God? Shall we measure God in feet, meters, miles? We cannot step outside God to measure him, as we can measure a box or a planet. I am reminded of what might be considered adolescent metaphysical speculations: how do we know our whole universe isn't the size of a grain of sand? Such thoughts weren't necessarily foreign to Spinoza. Leibniz seems to have thought something like them. So perhaps Spinoza thought we couldn't
measure extension because we cannot get outside to measure it. From our perspective it seems infinitely vast, but our perspective is severely limited, like that of the tiny worm in the blood vessel Spinoza compares us to.

Or perhaps there is another possibility. Perhaps extension is not "extended" at all. This would explain why God has no length, breadth, depth, or figure. What do I have in mind, you ask? That our perception of things as spatial—existing in three-dimensions—is a mode of imagination, not an intellectual perception. It is, as it were, a visual interpretation of the relation of powers to each other. But it is—as all sensory perceptions are, according to Spinoza—an inadequate perception, what Spinoza calls "imagination," not truly representative of things as they are.

In brief, the metaphysics I am suggesting is this: God is pure potential, power unmanifested. His attributes include thought and extension: that is, an infinite power of thinking and an infinite power of "extending." There is strong evidence that Spinoza at least thinks of the attribute of thought in this way. For example, in Letter XXXII he tells Oldenburg: "in Nature there also exists an infinite power of thinking." (Ep. S) And in the Ethics he asserts: "Thought is an attribute of God, or God is a thinking thing." (II P1) and explains in the Scholium:

This Proposition is also evident from the fact that we can conceive an infinite thinking being. For the more things a thinking being can think, the more reality, or perfection, we conceive it to contain. Therefore, a being that can think infinitely many things in infinitely many ways is necessarily infinite in its power of thinking. (II P1 Schol.)

To say thought is an attribute of God is to say God "is necessarily infinite in its power of thinking." What about extension? Look at II P2,
which immediately follows the above passage:

P2: Extension is an attribute of God, or God is an extended thing.

Dem: The demonstration of this proceeds in the same way as that of the preceding Proposition. (II P2)

Hence, if saying thought is an attribute of God means God is infinite in its power of thinking, then to say extension is an attribute of God must mean God is infinite in its power of extension... or perhaps I should say: "extending."

These infinite powers express themselves as modes: modes of extension, modes of thought, and perhaps, if there are other attributes, other modes as well. "Particular things are nothing but affections of God's attributes, or modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way." (I P25 Cor.) The attribute of thought expresses itself infinitely as modes of thought: it continually causes an infinity of thought-modes to be. Particular thoughts are modifications of God's infinite power of thought. Thus

I maintain that the human mind is the same power of thinking, not in so far as that power is infinite and apprehends the whole of Nature, but in so far as it is finite, apprehending the human body only. The human mind, I maintain, is in this way part of an infinite intellect. . . .(Ep. S 32)

Likewise for the power of extension: a particular body is a modification of God's power of extension.

From this we can see that the distinction between naturing nature and natured nature is a conceptual one, not so much a real one. The attributes are never undifferentiated, never modeless. Their nature is creative, to act. They would, as we've seen, be nothing without their modes, but they are never without them.

At this point, however, one might ask: what about motion and rest,
the immediate infinite mode of extension? Doesn't motion require an extended space for the motion to take place in? And what, for that matter, does it mean to say all thing are in God, if God is not extended spatially? I will answer these questions together. First of all, saying all things are in God does not require that they be "in" spatially. Modes of thought are "in" the attribute of thought, but that doesn't mean the attribute of thought is a sort of mental space. When Spinoza says all thoughts are in God, he means they are all modes of the infinite power of God. In a sense they could be said to be "surrounded" by other modes of thought, but this surrounding should not be conceived of spatially. Rather, it may be conceived as a surrounding by influences. That is, any given mode of thought is always being affected by other modes of thought—an infinite number, in fact—and it cannot escape them. The same, I suggest, may be true of modes of extension. They are in extension as modes of the infinite extensive power. They are "surrounded" by other modes of power. But not spatially. The powers immediately surrounding a given mode are those that are affecting it immediately. More "distant" powers are powers that are affecting it through other modes. "Movement" is a change of influence-relationships among the modes. "Rest" is maintaining the same influence-relationship relative to other modes.

Although the modes are constantly changing there is still a sense under this interpretation in which God is unchanging. Modes come and go, but the laws according to which the attributes manifest themselves are unchanging. Power may manifest itself as a butterfly, but it is always power which manifests itself according to laws of nature.
Again, let me point out that much of this is speculation. I do not intend the preceding as a definitive interpretation. It is, rather, an indication of where my thoughts are now, and perhaps of the direction they are going. Also, I recognize that I have not satisfied all the conditions I claimed earlier any interpretation must satisfy: I have said nothing about God's indivisibility, uniqueness, or eternity. I am afraid, however, my speculations must cease regardless. All good things must come to an end sometime.
Appendixes

Containing Thoughts on Assorted Related Subjects

Appendix I

Hallett

Readers familiar with some of the older Spinoza literature may recognize my views as being remarkably similar to those of H.P. Hallett. I should say that when I first read Hallett on Spinoza, I found him nearly incomprehensible, as difficult to understand as Spinoza himself. But as I worked through these questions about power myself, occasionally looking back at Hallett, I realized that I understood more and more of what he was saying. Perhaps then my work might be regarded, in part, as an argument in defense of the views of a too frequently ignored interpretation. . . ignored simply because it's old, or perhaps because others, like myself, did not understand it.

Hallett's view:

Spinoza's philosophical intention, therefore, is to derive all things from a primordial infinite power or indeterminate potency self-actualized in an infinite and exhaustively determinate eternal universe; and it is thus that he conceives that "infinite beings follow in infinite ways from the divine nature," i.e. from the self-actualizing creative potency-in-act. (H 9)

This seems as good a summary as any of what I've been trying to say. God or substance is the primordial infinite power from which all things flow. It is indeterminate, or, as I said earlier, "unmanifested." But it
manifests itself, creates itself, as an infinite universe of modes.

Moreover, it is not that the power is in the modes, but separate from them: rather, the power is the modes. In Hallett's words:

> the mode is the actuality of the potency-in-act which is substance: it is an affection of substance... substance actualizes and manifests itself in the mode--it is the active cause, and the mode its enacted effect. Self-actualizing and self-manifesting substance is thus essentially real and intelligible as "cause of itself," i.e. as creating its own actuality, exhaustively and eternally. (H 12)

Now, all this is not to say that Hallett and I are totally in agreement. Hallett denies, for example, that a mode can be identified with things such as rocks and men, whereas I believe Spinoza would merely have us think differently of these things. However, I cannot yet claim to fully understand what exactly Hallett thinks a mode is. Perhaps some day, as my own understanding of Spinoza becomes clear, I will understand more of Hallett's writings as well.
Appendix 2

Does Motion and Rest follow a priori from Extension?

I concluded Chapter 5 on the following note: according to Spinoza modes in extension are to be distinguished from each other only by their motion and rest. But it doesn't seem to make sense to say that nothing moves. So if areas of extension are moving extension must be more than infinite nothingness. It must be something, a reality of some sort.

In Chapter 6 and Chapter 10 I argued that a body is its striving to preserve its state of being. If it is a body in motion, we may say it is a striving to preserve its state of motion. Now we saw earlier that a body is distinguished from other bodies only by its state of motion or rest. Well if a body is distinguished from others only by its motion or rest, and if a body is also a striving to preserve its state of being, then it seems to follow that a body in motion is a striving to move and a body at rest is a striving to rest. That is, the state of motion or rest is the body's striving to preserve the state of motion or rest.

What all this points to, I think, is a theory like that of modern physics in which matter is a state of energy. Bodies, in Spinoza's physics, are really forces. Forces of motion and rest, forces which continue in their state until affected by other forces that they encounter.

If this is correct, we may continue the argument of Chapter 5 in the following manner:

Premise 1: From God's essence, the existence of infinitely many modes
follows. (I P16)

Premise 2: Modes are distinguished only by motion and rest. (II A2")

Conclusion 1: There must be motion and rest. (P1, P2)

Premise 3: Motion = force of motion/striving to move. (MT I Ch. VI)

Conclusion 2: Modes are distinguished only by their force of motion/striving to move. (P2, P3)

Conclusion 3: There must be forces of motion/strivings to move. (P1, C2)

Things are just different strivings to move and rest, fast, or slow, in extension. So, for example, a billiard ball in motion is not an inanimate body with a force in it moving it around. It is a force or striving to preserve its motion or rest.

Spinoza has therefore saved himself from the charge of espousing nonsense in suggesting that nothingness moves. What moves are forces of motion. Now, however, his argument suffers from a different problem: it begs the question. The original argument was based on the idea that if there were no motion and rest, there could be no modes, because motionless modes in extension laying against each other would be indistinguishable. They are nothing but extension. But now we are told they are not just extension. Extension is not infinite nothingness. It is filled with forces of motion: these are what distinguish modes from one another. They question is, why must these forces be forces of motion? Consider the argument again; what it comes to is this:

Premise 1: From God's essence, infinitely many modes follow. (I P16)

Premise 2: Modes are distinguishable only by their motion and rest; i.e. by their forces of motion and rest.

Conclusion: Therefore, there must be motion; i.e. forces of motion.
Premise 2 is only an assumption. We might ask, for example, why the modes couldn't all be distinguished entirely by forces of rest? Why couldn't there be infinitely many forces, each maintaining itself in existence without moving? Or another possibility: forces that appear and disappear, creating a universe in continual flux, yet without motion?

I don't think Spinoza can answer these questions. It seems to me possible he knew that he couldn't, or at least was troubled by them. After all, he might simply have said to Tschirnhaus: there must be motion because modes are distinguished by motion, and infinitely many modes follow from God's essence. (He did in fact stress the latter, as we've seen.) Perhaps he didn't say so because he perceived the problem, and couldn't resolve it.

One might object, of course, that since the first version of the argument is nonsense for suggesting that nothingness moves, while the second begs the question, and since Spinoza used neither in his letter to Tschirnhaus, perhaps he never believed either in the first place. But I think we have strong evidence to the contrary. Spinoza clearly believed I P16 was the key to understanding why there is motion in the universe (for reasons given in Ch. 5). The second premise, that things are only distinguished by motion and rest, is taken directly from Spinoza's Ethics, and creates a valid argument when combined with I P16 leading to the conclusion that there must be motion. It is unsound, but Spinoza at one time at least believed its premises true, and so would not have perceived its unsoundness. My impression, therefore, is that Spinoza at one time accepted the argument which we explicated in Chapter 5, perceived its difficulties, but never saw his way through to a totally satisfactory
revision of it. Nevertheless I also believe it would be a mistake to
disparage Spinoza's efforts here. Spinoza's rejection of a purely
mechanistic conception of Nature—a "dead" universe—in favor of a
"living" universe of powers/strivings is remarkably advanced. His mistake
is in thinking he can logically prove that the universe must be this way, not in thinking that it is.
Appendix 3

Spinoza and Hume

One of the great things about Spinoza's philosophy is its simplicity. Where other philosophers saw the need for multiple powers, Spinoza realized that only one was needed. There is no need for a cause of Being separate from a cause of activity, no need for distinctions between types of causes of the sort made by Medieval philosophers. Since there is only one Being, God, there need be only one power. And though we may still in normal talk distinguish the cause of our actions from the cause of our existence, we must not fool ourselves into thinking that these are different causes. Being is action, in the philosophy of Spinoza, hence to say God causes my existence and God causes my actions ultimately, for Spinoza, amounts to the same thing.

But what, in our Post-Humean age, are we to say about this philosophy of power? All Being-Acts are caused by God's immanent power, Spinoza tells us. Or, to put it another way that will seem more comfortable to the modern reader: my existence and acts are caused by my power, which is in me—not just "in", but is me, is my essence, not separable from my being—and also by the power of things which affect me from outside myself, all of which constitutes the power of the universe. But the question is, of course, is there any power there at all? Humean analysis of the situation might suggest that we are at least not aware of any such power. We see one event, one action, follow another, but never do we see anything in one event which causes the next. We only see
conjunction, which may or may not remain constant in the future. And if a Spinozist were to suggest that God's power explains why the events occur, a Humean might respond by saying: that is no explanation at all. You have solved the mystery with another mystery.

I suspect most philosophers today would accept that answer. But I would like to suggest that there is more that can be said in Spinoza's favor. To understand, we must look not just at Spinoza's philosophy, but at his life and the experiences which helped shape his philosophy. If we may trust Spinoza's own report in the Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect, philosophizing for Spinoza began as a spiritual quest. He sought a better way of life, a life in pursuit of a "true good," not the commonly esteemed goods that in fact lead to sadness or that perish.

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, capable of communicating itself, and which alone would affect the mind, all others being rejected—whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity. (TEI 1)

But Spinoza ran into difficulties. For after resolving to seek the true good, he found that his desire for the other goods did not go away. Spinoza's words:

By persistent meditation, however, I came to the conclusion that, if only I could resolve, wholeheartedly, [to change my plan of life], I would be giving up certain evils for a certain good. For I saw that I was in the greatest danger, and that I was forced to seek a remedy with all my strength, however uncertain it might be—like a man suffering from a fatal illness, who, foreseeing certain death unless he employs a remedy, is forced to seek it, however uncertain, with all his strength. For all his hope lies there. But all those things men ordinarily strive for, not only provide no remedy to preserve our being, but in fact hinder that preservation,
often cause the destruction of those who possess them, and always cause the destruction of those who are possessed by them. (TEI 7)

Spinoza sees the danger he's in, but:

But not without reason did I use these words if only I could resolve in earnest. For though I perceived these things [NS: this evil] so clearly in my mind, I still could not, on that account, put aside all greed, desire for sensual pleasure and love of esteem. (TEI 10)

In other words, despite his own clear perception of the dangers attending his desire for wealth, fame, and the pleasures of the senses, and his desire to be rid of them, he found himself unable to let go of them. And so Spinoza's philosophic project began, a quest for true peace of mind, and power over one's own passions.

The points I wish to make, however, are these: first of all, we can see in this the source of Spinoza's interest in power as a subject. What he sought for was power over himself: power to control his passions and focus his attention on the true good. Understanding, he found, gave him this power; or rather, the power of understanding is the power he sought. That is what we've discovered in Chapter 9.

Regarding Hume, however, my point is this: it is precisely in personal experiences such as these described by Spinoza that one gets the idea of power. Spinoza was trying to make radical changes in his own personality. But the old personality persisted, despite his desire for change. It is that persistance, that tendency to continue, of desires and behaviors and beliefs, that gives the idea of power. This is the conatus of the thing. As we saw in the previous chapter, the body and mind persist in their state. If we learn to fear something, that fear returns again and again despite our attempts to overcome it. It is in such
internal struggles that we get our idea of power. For we do not just experience, say, a constant conjunction of an image of a snake with a sensation of fear; rather, we experience the fear as something which overpowers our other desires or attempts to think rationally. We experience such things as feelings which drive us, compel us.

Hume might respond, of course, that Spinoza is only thinking of things that way, but really, there is only constant conjunction of perceptions and feelings. Perhaps. Personally, I find Spinoza's account truer to my own experience. But perhaps that "experience" is shaped too much by my own prejudices about the matter, and has nothing to do with the truth. All I can say in the end is that Spinoza's mysterious explanation seems more satisfying than Hume's lack of one.
Works Referred To


Jonathon Bennett, A Study of Spinoza's Ethics, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1984)


R.J. Delahanty, Spinoza (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985)


Descartes, The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, eds. Cottingham, Stoothoff, & Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)


Don Rosa, "On Stolen Time" Donald Duck Adventures #24 (Burbank, CA: Disney Comics, Inc.; May 1992)

Leon Roth, Spinoza (London: Ernest Benn Limited; 1929)

George Sessions, "Spinoza and Jeffers on Man in Nature," Inquiry, 20, 481-528

------, *The Correspondence of Spinoza*, ed. A. Wolf (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1928)


------, *Opera*, ed. Vloten & Land: (MCMXII)


------, *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951)


Timothy Sprigge, "Spinoza's Identity Theory," *Inquiry* 20, 419-45


