

Another Kind of Spinozistic Monism

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1.0 Introduction – Raising the question

The momentous opening pages of Spinoza's *Ethics* are well known for his efforts to prove a remarkable thesis: there is only one possible substance and it necessarily exists. But concurrent with his drive towards substance monism is another equally striking but more easily overlooked monistic project. This project concerns the relations between various kinds of metaphysical dependence. What, according to Spinoza, are the relationships between causation, inherence, conceptual connectedness, following-from, and existential dependence? My proposed answer is that Spinoza thinks all metaphysical dependence relations are conceptual containment relations, a single kind of dependence that Spinoza labels “conceptual involvement.” I call Spinoza's thesis that every relation of metaphysical dependence just is a relation of conceptual dependence the thesis of *conceptual dependence monism*.

Although the topic of dependence relations in Spinoza may have the air of hyper-specialized historical arcana, understanding Spinoza's conceptual dependence monism yields important insights into many of his most striking and pervasive metaphysical views, including the intensionality of causal contexts, the nature and relations of substance and modes, necessitarianism, the demands of metaphysical perfection, and the content of his explanatory rationalism. It also provides us with a neglected step in Spinoza's proof for his more famous substance monism, one that prevents the whole proof from otherwise begging the question against substance pluralists like Leibniz. And whereas Spinoza's substance monism may appear to be an historically interesting, but philosophically untenable project¹, Spinoza's interest in the relationship between various kinds of metaphysical dependence mirrors a vibrant research project in contemporary metaphysics.

Spinoza has an especially strong motivation for addressing this topic – or so I argue in the next section, “Motivating the question.” According to Spinoza, understanding the nature of metaphysical dependence is one of the first and most fundamental components of a proper metaphysics. Seeing this point will better illuminate both the content of his rationalist demands for explanation and the source of his confidence that these explanatory demands can, in principle, be satisfied. In section three, “Answering the question,” I make the textual case for concluding that Spinoza endorses conceptual dependence monism. In the fourth and final section, “Motivating the Answer,” I sketch what I think is behind Spinoza’s conceptual dependence monism. I argue that it is not based on a direct appeal to the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), as might initially seem to be the case. I suggest his motivation is based on an appeal to metaphysical serviceability: conceptual dependence monism provides Spinoza with a powerful way of consistently satisfying what he takes to be the demands of metaphysical perfection at work in our world.

2.0 Motivating the Question

The sheer range of dependence relations that Spinoza mentions in the first few pages of his *Ethics* alone is breathtaking. Before reaching the mid-point of Part One (Ip16)², Spinoza appeals to the following sundry list of anti-symmetrical dependence relations: causing, explaining, inhering in, determining, producing, creating, generating, corrupting, following from, depending on, acting on, constituting, being conceptually involved in, being formed from the concept of, conceiving through, conceiving by, contained in, belonging to, flowing from, existing on account of, being understood through, and being prior in nature to. Whew!³ Equally striking is that the fact that with one possible exception, none of these relations are formally defined in the *Ethics*, despite the metaphysical heavy lifting they do in Spinoza’s arguments and the supposedly rigorous geometrical structure of the book. (The possible exception is causation, since Spinoza defines *self*-causation in Id1 and one may be able to infer a generalized definition of causation from it.)

This is an especially frustrating state of affairs since the most basic and important pieces of Spinoza’s ontology are all defined in terms of these dependence relations. For instance, Spinoza defines a substance as that which is “in itself and conceived through itself” (Id3). But without understanding what it means to inhere in or be conceived through oneself, it is hard to know exactly what to make of Spinoza’s grand conclusion in Ip15 that there exists only one substance in which everything else inheres and through which everything else is conceived. I believe Spinoza tries to provide such an account of metaphysical dependence, though he does so in his usual economical, circuitous, and easily missed manner.

Spinoza's interest in dependence relations did not begin with his mature *Ethics*, however. He began developing his thinking on the topic in his earliest work, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (*TIE*). In an important passage, Spinoza writes:

Our ultimate end requires (as we have already said) that a thing be conceived either through its essence alone or through its proximate cause. If the thing is in itself, or as is commonly said [*ut vulgo dicitur*], is the cause of itself, then it must be understood through its essence alone; but if it is not in itself, but requires a cause to exist, then it must be understood through its proximate cause (C 38–9; G II/34).

There is a wealth of theory packed into that short statement, much of which will be carried over into the *Ethics* in more elaborate and careful form. The dependence characterized by Spinoza here in terms of requirements for existence is an instance of what is sometimes called “existential dependence.” What is it in virtue of which a thing exists? In the background is Spinoza’s belief that everything requires something to exist, either itself or another. Everything stands in relations of existential dependence, a point he will later connect to the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). But what is most striking about this passage is how closely Spinoza associates existential dependence with other, perhaps more familiar types of dependence, such as causation, inherence, and being conceived through. The inferences and substitutions he makes in this passage suggest that, at minimum, Spinoza endorses the *Co-Extensive Thesis* [CET]:

Co-Extensive Thesis [CET]: Necessarily, for all x and y, x is conceived through y iff y causes x iff x inheres in y iff x requires y to exist.⁴

(In the next section, I will give the detailed textual basis for attributing CET to Spinoza, though I will also argue that CET is ultimately too weak to capture Spinoza’s full view.)

Spinoza also connects these dependence relations in this passage with *understanding*. Things that are conceived through themselves, caused by themselves, and inhere in themselves are also understood through themselves. They wear their intelligibility on their sleeve, as it were. The entailment from conceptual to mental relations is certainly true for Spinoza, as we will later see. But his slide here and elsewhere (Ep 9; Id4) from broadly conceptual talk to overtly mental talk invites a tempting but inaccurate interpretation of Spinoza’s appeals to the conceptual that is worth heading off at the outset. Conceptual relations are not, for Spinoza, exclusively mental relations, though the term may have purely mental connotations to some readers.⁵ When he is being careful, Spinoza makes clear that though his conceptual relations share some important features with what may now be more familiar,

wholly mental accounts of conceptual relations, they are attribute-neutral.⁶ I will sometimes follow Spinoza by substituting *explanation* into these contexts to help highlight the extra-mental character of his fundamental conceptual relations.

In this TIE passage then, Spinoza infers explanatory facts from parallel facts about conceiving, causation, inherence, and existential dependence. The dependence relations an object stands in partly explains that object.⁷ Indeed, Spinoza goes further a few paragraphs later and claims that the best and most adequate account of an object, its definition, *must* provide an account of the dependence relations in which the object stands.⁸ Things are best explained, in other words, through their dependencies. It will take us some time to unpack why Spinoza thinks this is so.

But I want to highlight first just how central these accounts of dependence are to Spinoza's own conception of a proper metaphysics. Spinoza claims that not only should metaphysicians pursue the project of explanation through articulating dependencies, but that philosophy in general ought to begin here. He even suggests in the passage quoted above that human happiness and fulfillment itself rests on how well we do in sorting through these relations. Talk about pressure! I'll focus here on the more modest, though still quite controversial claim that progress in metaphysics is based primarily on explaining things through appeals to dependence relations.

According to Spinoza's vision, the overriding project of metaphysics is to explain the world by discerning and articulating dependence.⁹ "For each thing," he writes in a version of the PSR in the *Ethics*, "there must be assigned a cause or reason as much for its existence as for its non-existence" (Ip11d). But although previous interpreters have recognized the centrality of the PSR in Spinoza's thought, it has remained unclear exactly what the PSR-based demands for explanation amount to. Here, I believe, we catch a more informative glimpse: to provide explanations is to articulate facts about dependence. In fact, explanations, in the objective sense that Spinoza seeks, obtain in all and only cases of dependence; x explains y iff y depends on x , according to Spinoza. Once we add in what I will later argue, namely that all dependence is a matter of conceptual containment, we will have penetrated deep into the heart of Spinoza's metaphysical ambitions: metaphysics is ultimately the project of explaining everything by discerning and articulating conceptual connections. Spinoza begins to realize this ambition in the very opening definitions of the *Ethics*, where he explains his basic substance-mode ontology in terms of the dependence relations they enter into (Id3 and 5).

But Spinoza demands yet further explanation. For not only ought the metaphysician correctly discern and articulate how things depend on other things; she also must discover how the dependence relations themselves relate to and perhaps even depend upon one another. That is, Spinoza's explanatory rationalism demands not only that we explain everything and that proper explanation proceeds by appeal to dependence relations, but

it also requires that the *explanans* of everything else – the dependence relations – become the *explananda* as well.¹⁰ In fact, failing to adequately address this further issue leaves one especially vulnerable to confusing the first-order dependencies of things.¹¹

Once again, the opening of Spinoza's *Ethics* is instructive. For not only does he define his ontology in terms of dependence relations, he first begins by defining the dependence relations themselves. (I will say much more about the content of these definitions in the next section.) Thus it is no great mystery why Spinoza does not begin with a definition of God or substance, but instead opens with an account of a kind of metaphysical dependence (self-causation in Id1). Since metaphysical explanation proceeds by articulating dependence, and Spinoza tries to articulate how dependence relations depend on each other, he in effect begins by explaining what it is to successfully explain. That is, Spinoza begins his most systematic work of metaphysics by trying to prioritize the prioritizing relations. Rationalist charm at its best.

Reflecting on how central this project is for Spinoza's metaphysics also reminds us of a second characteristic of his rationalism. For not only does Spinoza charge us with the task of explaining through discovering and articulating dependence, Spinoza remains supremely confident that the ordering of the world that needs discovering is in principle discoverable by minds like ours. Spinoza's rationalist impulse to relentlessly pursue answers to this “in virtue of what” question is undergirded by his uncompromising belief in the in-principle transparency of reality to the rational inquirer. But I doubt that Spinoza's conviction here is an instance of 17th century “pre-critical dogmatism” about the power of human reason that would have been easily cured by reading some Kant. Rather, Spinoza thinks that the explanatory demands of his rationalism provide the very grounds for confidence in its success. That is, the priority that Spinoza thinks needs discovering is one that is especially well suited to be discovered.

The guiding insight here is Spinoza's belief, shared by other seventeenth-century philosophers like Descartes and Locke, that conceptual relations are, in principle, transparent to the intellect. Spinoza writes in a letter to Tschirnhaus, “Next, *in order that I may know* which out of many ideas of a thing will enable all the properties of an object to be deduced, I follow this one rule, that the idea or definition of the thing should express its efficient cause” (Ep60, emphasis mine). Read against the backdrop of his claims about explanation and dependence, this is a very illuminating claim. Spinoza asserts that his epistemic confidence is vouchsafed by the explanatory practice of articulating dependencies. But why? Because, I proleptically suggest, Spinoza believes that (a) the metaphysical dependence holding among objects is ultimately and exclusively conceptual dependence and (b) conceptual relations are in principle perspicuous to the rational inquirer. It is thus a happy conclusion within Spinoza's system that the explanatory discoveries

of his rationalist metaphysics also help establish for us the possibility of its in-principle success in the first place.

3.0 Answering the Question

Having shown that Spinoza himself cares about the nature of metaphysical dependence, I will now make the case for interpreting Spinoza as embracing conceptual dependence monism. A second statement of the PSR in the *Ethics* also makes a claim about metaphysical dependence: “There must be, for each existing thing, a certain cause on account of which it exists [*dari necessario uniuscujusqua rei existentis certam aliquam causam, propter quam existit*]” (Ip8s2, emphasis mine). This *propter* relation, which Spinoza described in *TIE* as a requirement for existence, is again a form of what is now called the “grounding” relation, the “in virtue of” relation, or the “existential dependence” relation.¹² What is it for one thing to exist on account of another thing? As he did in the previously quoted version of the PSR (Ip11d), Spinoza closely associates his answer with a natural companion: causation. Causation is at least one way in which one thing can be said to exist in virtue of another thing.

A close analogue in Spinoza to existing on account of another is being prior in nature to another.¹³ If *x* exists on account of *y*, then *y* is prior in nature to *x*. This is clearest in Ip1: “A substance is prior in nature to its affections.” In the demonstration, Spinoza cites the definitions of substances and modes, which in turn define substances and modes in terms of other dependence relations (inherence and conceptual dependence). Spinoza is explicit that modes exist on account of substance (Ip15d), a dependence that explains why Ip1 is true: substances are prior in nature to their modes.¹⁴ And whereas his claim about existential dependence in Ip8s2 appealed to causation, his related claim about ontological priority in Ip1 appeals to inherence and conceptual dependence. In other words, Spinoza uses facts about causation, inherence, and conceptual connectedness to account for facts about existential dependence and ontological priority.

We have already seen indications of Spinoza’s willingness to tightly associate existential dependence and ontological priority with causation, inherence, and conceptual dependence, an association of necessary co-extension captured by CET. And despite the wide variety of terminology in that initial laundry list I provided from the beginning of the *Ethics*, Spinoza treats all instances of metaphysical dependence as synonymous or reducible to causation, inherence, or conceptual dependence. Examining these three relations in more detail will help us grasp Spinoza’s remarkable monistic conclusion: *all* relations of dependence are just conceptual dependence relations.

3.1 Causation

We have seen Spinoza appeal to causation in Ip8 as one way in which a thing depends on, or exists on account of, another. So if *x* causes *y*, then

y exists on account of x. More strikingly, Spinoza also moves from right to left: if y exists on account of x, then x causes y.¹⁵ Furthermore, Spinoza thinks these are non-contingent bi-conditionals; causation and existential dependence are necessarily co-extensive.¹⁶ But why can't one thing exist in virtue of another without being caused by it? Why think that the relata must line up so cleanly?¹⁷

Spinoza affirms the necessary co-extension of existential and causal dependence because he believes he can provide a further analysis of *both* relations in terms of a single, more fundamental form of dependence. If so, there is nothing mysterious about the necessary co-variation of causation and existential dependence; both track the same relations of conceptual dependence. Of course, that reply only introduces more co-variation (now causal/existential with conceptual) that demands an explanation. This is one reason that I will ultimately argue that causation and existential dependence do not simply covary with conceptual dependence; they are, in some yet unexplained sense, *reducible* to this kind of dependence. CET is true, but it does not capture the whole truth for Spinoza. There is, I will show, a genuine priority of conceptual dependence over causal and existential dependence in virtue of which causal and existential dependence relations yield the relevant bi-conditional truths about each other. (And yes, something will have to be said about *that* "in virtue of" too.)

To see all this more explicitly in the case of causation, notice first that Spinoza believes causal relations are, more fundamentally, explanatory relations. We can quickly see this now familiar point in Spinoza scholarship by repeating an expanded version of Spinoza's PSR, quoted previously:

For each thing there must be assigned a cause or reason [*causa seu ratio*], as much for its existence as for its non-existence. For example, if a triangle exists, there must be a reason or cause why it exists; but if it does not exist, there must also be a reason or cause which prevents it from existing, or which takes its existence away (Ip11d).

Causes for Spinoza are not merely one way of providing reasons; causes *are* reasons. Spinoza shifts regularly between productive and explanatory language and he never suggests that there is a distinction between causation and explanation. For instance, he writes in Ip3d that "If [things] have nothing in common with one another, then (by Iax5) they cannot be understood through one another, and so (by Iax4), one cannot be the cause of the other." Here Spinoza infers facts about causation from facts about understanding or, more generally, explanation. That is, necessarily, if x causes y, then x explains y.

Recall that Spinoza also thinks that the most adequate explanation of a thing, its definition, is provided by citing its causes. So moving in the other direction, to give an explanation of an object is to cite its causes; appeals

to causes provide adequate explanations of objects. That is, necessarily, if *x* explains *y*, then *x* causes *y*. Such bi-conditionals between causation and explanation are displayed vividly in IIp5: “The formal being of ideas admits God as a *cause* only insofar as he is considered as a thinking thing and not insofar as he is *explained* by any other attribute” (emphasis mine).

Spinoza also connects causation with conceptual connection in a bi-conditional manner: *x* is conceived through *y* iff *y* causes *x*. The textual locus for the left to right version is based on Iax4, “The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause,” though the uses to which Spinoza puts Iax4 suggests he endorses the right to left direction as well.¹⁸ But as appeals to conceptual connections are generally paradigms of explanation for Spinoza (e.g. IIp7s), the bi-conditionals among causation, explanation, and conceptual connection are readily forthcoming.

However, now entering more controversial interpretative territory, does Spinoza believe that there are *more* than just bi-conditional truths about the relation between causation, explanation, and conceptual connectedness? That is, is causation in some sense a less fundamental form of dependence? I believe Spinoza’s answer is “yes,” a point he brings out in the opening definition of the *Ethics*: “By *causa sui*, I understand that whose essence involves existence, or [sive] that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing” (Id1). Here Spinoza defines causal dependence (or at least a reflexive version of it) in terms of another kind of dependence, first expressed as “involvement,” then put in more explicitly conceptual terms. Between these two parts of the definiens of causation lies “*sive*,” usually translated “or.” But as is generally recognized, Spinoza usually uses “*sive*” not as genuinely disjunctive, but rather as a further elaboration of what precedes *sive* by what follows it (closer to our English expression, “or better yet”). If so, then in Id1 the involvement relation that explains causation is better expressed by an appeal to a *conceptual* relation: an object is the cause of its own existence in virtue of a *conceptual* involvement relation between its essence and existence. Hence, Id1 is saying something stronger than merely that causation co-varies with conceptual connectedness. Rather, causes are more fundamentally conceptual connections.¹⁹

This analysis of causation continues into the early parts of the *Ethics*. In Ip3d, Spinoza infers facts about causation from facts about intelligibility in order to reject Cartesian interactionism. In order to justify this inference, Spinoza appeals to Iax5: “Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, or [sive] the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other.” Once again linked by *sive*, Spinoza’s claim is that facts about causation (in Id3) are due more fundamentally to facts about conceptual involvement (in Iax5).

A similar point was also implied in the *TIE* passage quoted above. There Spinoza began with a claim about the way things can be conceived, from which he inferred facts about the causal (and inherence) relations in which

they stand. He concluded that therefore things must be understood or explained in virtue of how they are conceived. Though these inferences are consistent with the weaker conclusion that causal relations are coextensive but not reducible to conceptual relations, his wording appears more lopsided than the CET bi-conditional captures. He seems to be saying, and clearly is saying by the time of the *Ethics*, that causal relations obtain *in virtue of* conceptual relations.²⁰ Eventually, we will need to cash out more carefully what *that* “in virtue of” relation amounts to. But for now, let’s settle for a more minimal conclusion: causal facts depend on conceptual facts.

As will become clear, this pattern of analysis will generalize: necessary co-variation *follows from* and *is explained by* the dependence of causal facts on conceptual facts. CET itself cries out for explanation, and Spinoza, never shy about addressing an in-virtue-of-what question, answers with a reductive thesis. More generally, Spinoza reasons that co-extension falls out of further facts about ontological grounding. (Later, I will show how this general pattern of inferring co-extension from grounding brings to light an overlooked step in Spinoza’s argument for substance monism.)

Seeing more explicitly the priority of conceptual dependence over causal dependence in Spinoza also helps us understand another central, puzzling matter in Spinoza’s thought. In IIp6, Spinoza endorses an intensional account of causation.²¹ He writes,

The modes of each attribute have God for their cause only insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute.

That is, whether or not “x causes y” is true depends in part on how x and y are considered or conceived. Thus “x causes y” may be true according to one pair of ways of conceiving x and y and false according to a different pair of ways, where the relevant ways of conceiving here are distinguished by attribute contexts.²² Conceived under the attribute of extension, Bill causes no thinking effects; conceived under the attribute of thought, the very same Bill causes only thinking effects. Consistency is preserved by making causation sensitive to attribute contexts, i.e., by claiming that cross-attribute causal contexts are referentially opaque.

On the face of it, this is a counter-intuitive picture of causation. Why should claims about causation admit of substitution failures? Why think any causal ascriptions involve intensional variability? I believe Spinoza’s answer turns on his attempt to ground causal facts in conceptual facts. Since causation obtains in virtue of conceptual relations, if the relevant conceptual relations turn out to be referentially opaque, so too will the causal relations. Hence the appeal to intensionality in causal contexts will be justified by features of the conceptual relations underlying causal ascriptions. In this case, Spinoza’s *conceptual* barrier between attributes (Ip10) explains why

conceiving one and the same object across different attributes can generate substitution failures among predication of causal relations. And in the demonstration of IIp6, this is exactly how Spinoza's proof runs: he appeals to conceptual facts and Ip10 to explain and justify the causal isolation of modes under different attributes.²³ Because Spinoza thinks that (a) causal facts obtain in virtue of conceptual facts and (b) conceptual relations between attribute-specific properties are referentially opaque, he infers that (c) ascriptions of attribute-relative causal properties will also invoke referential opacity.

Here's the bite: if instead there were *only* bi-conditional entailments between causation and conceptual facts (as per CET), IIp6 would be vulnerable to a very tempting *modus tollens*. Why not reason from the fact that causal ascriptions are referentially transparent to the conclusion that there can be no conceptual barrier between the attributes? Why start with facts about conceptual isolation and infer facts about causation, rather than moving from seemingly intuitive facts about causation to a lack of conceptual isolation? A mere bi-conditional relation is consistent with both forms of reasoning, and it would be heavy-handed for Spinoza to insist we move in one direction rather than another. But if instead causal facts *depend* on more fundamental conceptual facts, Spinoza will be justified in rejecting the *modus tollens* on the plausible grounds that we should explain the nature of the less fundamental by appeal to features of the more fundamental, and not vice versa. Hence the success of Spinoza's claim in IIp6, it turns out, actually presupposes that causal relations depend on more fundamental conceptual relations, a presupposition his demonstration of IIp6 acknowledges.

3.2 Inherence

There is a similar pattern to Spinoza's remarks on inherence: although at first he appears to be making claims about mere co-extensiveness, he is in fact attempting to ground facts about inherence in conceptual facts. But whereas causation (or a reflexive instance of it) is defined independently in Id1, Spinoza packs his theory of inheritance itself right into his definitions of substances and modes in the *Ethics*. So it is unsurprising that interpretations of the status and nature of inheritance in Spinoza are far more controversial.²⁴ But I think a closer look at the texts will reveal that Spinoza is making the same dependence monism move again.

Spinoza's third definition reads:

"By substance I understand what is [a] in itself and [b] is conceived through itself, [c] that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing from which it must be formed [*Per substantiam intelligo id, quod in se est et, & per se concipitur: hoc est id, cuius conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei, a quo formari debeat*]."²⁵

It is tempting to read [c] as an elaboration of [b] alone, in which case Spinoza glosses just the locution “conceived through itself” as conceptual independence. But I do not think this is Spinoza’s point. Rather, as I will now try to show, Spinoza intended [c] as a gloss on *both* [a] and [b]. In other words, the conceptual independence of [c] is what accounts for substance’s being in itself. And so again, mere bi-directional entailments between inherence and conceptual dependence will be insufficient to capture this point.

In Ip2d, Spinoza restates the definition of substance, only this time he explicitly appeals to the conceptual involvement relation and links it to inherence through *sive*: “This also is evident from Id3. For each [substance] must be in itself and must be conceived through itself, or [*sive*] the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other.” Although, as noted above, Spinoza generally uses what follows *sive* as a further explanation of what precedes it, we must again wonder exactly how much of the preceding clause the elaboration is intended to explain. A clearer answer can be found by looking outside of the *Ethics*.

Spinoza’s appeals to conceptual relations in his definitions of substance extend back to some of his earliest extant writings. In a very early letter to Henry Oldenburg (Ep2), Spinoza defines attributes in almost the same way that he will define substances in the *Ethics*. But more important than the shift in the *definiendum* is the slight variation of the definition itself: “By attribute I understand whatever [**b**] is conceived through itself and [**a**] in itself, [**c**] so that its concept does not involve the concept of another thing [*concipitur per se, & in se; adeo ut ipsius conceptus non involvat conceptionem alterius rei*].” Here Spinoza inverts the ordering of [a] and [b] from the *Ethics* formulation, uses a slightly different connective to [c], and drops the more emphatic *esse* from the *in se* phrase.²⁶ The first of these variations is the most important for our purposes (though *adeo ut* also makes reading [c] as applying to both [a] and [b] quite natural). If we are to read the [c] clause in 1d3 of the *Ethics* as applying to *only* the [b] conjunct, what are we to make of Spinoza’s inversion here? It seems a big stretch to read [c] as applying only to the second conjunct in the *Ethics* and then only to the first conjunct in Ep2, when the construction is otherwise so similar. A much more natural way to read the variation is that the ordering of [a] and [b] is not essential to the definition, and this precisely because *both* [a] and [b] are supposed to be glossed in terms of [c] conceptual involvement in both definitions.

A month later, Spinoza offered the following definitions to Oldenburg: “For by substance I understand what is conceived through itself and in itself, i.e., [*per se, & in se concipitur, hoc est*] that whose concept does not involve the concept of another thing; but by modification or accident, what is in another and is conceived through what it is in [*in alio est, & per id, in quo est, concipitur*]” (Ep4). Again Spinoza inverts the ordering of the *Ethics* passages in his definition of substance, and he glosses the entire conjunction in terms of conceptual involvement (this time by the stronger *hoc est*, which he uses in

the *Ethics*). And in the definition of a mode, which is clearly intended to be a contrast to the definition of substance, he uses the more emphatic expression of inherence (*in alio est*), making it clear that he also has *inherence*, and not some yet further relation of “conceived in itself,” in view. Substance is in itself, which means that substance is conceptually independent and that its concept involves only itself; modes are in another, which means that modes are not self-conceived and that their concepts asymmetrically depend on the concepts of other things.

Spinoza shifts comfortably between conceptual and inherence talk, as seen in his early version of Iax1 in Ep4: “for whatever there is, is conceived either through itself or through another, and its concept does or does not involve the concept of another thing.” By the time of composing the first part of the *Ethics*, perhaps three or four years later, he puts the axiom in terms of inheritance: “Whatever is, is either in itself or in another” (Iax1). But on my interpretation, this represents no great shift or development, and I am aware of no evidence that Spinoza took it to be one. Rather, Spinoza freely moves back and forth between inheritance and conceptual involvement because he thinks these different expressions point to the same relation of metaphysical dependence. And just as he did with causation, he repeatedly glosses and explains inheritance in conceptual terms and he never reasons in the reverse direction.²⁷ In all these cases, what it is for something to inhere in another is for the concept of the former to depend on, or be “involved in,” the concept of the latter. Inherence, like causation, is a matter of conceptual connection.

3.3 Following-from²⁸

I have claimed that aside from conceptual dependence, Spinoza appeals most often to causation and inheritance when ascribing dependence to things. However, Spinoza also writes frequently about things “following from” other things, by which he clearly intends to invoke a dependence relation.²⁹ Is following-from a different kind of dependence, perhaps akin to logical entailment? Some of the liveliest debates in recent Spinoza scholarship turn on how one interprets this following-from relation. It impacts how one understands the relation between modes and substance (did Spinoza think everyday things like buses and bees inhere in God?), the general relation between logic and metaphysics (was Spinoza some kind of logicist, assimilating causation to logical consequence?), and the strength of Spinoza’s modal commitments (was Spinoza a necessitarian?). In this section, I will argue that Spinoza understands following-from to be a relation of conceptual dependence, and then indicate briefly how this sheds light on the above, deeply entrenched interpretive issues.

A short, indirect argument for my monistic interpretation is that Spinoza thinks the following-from relation is a causal relation and he thinks all causal relations are conceptual relations. I’ve argued above for the second conjunct

(section 3.1). As for the first, Spinoza regularly inter-substitutes universal following-from claims with universal causal claims.³⁰ In other words, now adding a clause to CET, x follows from y iff y causes x . But Spinoza goes further, making it clear that following-from is a causal relation, not merely coextensive with one.³¹ For instance, Spinoza writes in Ip28d, “[A finite mode] had, therefore, to follow from, or be determined to exist and produce an effect by God or an attribute of God...” Here following-from a thing is explained in terms of being determined and produced by another.³² In Ip17s, Spinoza writes, “...the things which we have said follow from [God’s] nature, (that is [*hoc est*], which are in his power), do not happen or are not produced by him.” To follow from a thing’s nature just is to be within that thing’s expression of power, by which Spinoza again means causation (Ip35–6).

Further proof of this causal reading lies in the most scrutinized of Spinoza’s following-from claims, Ip16: “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways, i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect.” Spinoza’s demonstration appeals to the range of properties that can be inferred from definition of God, which has led some to think that things are supposed to follow from God in a broadly logical or deductive manner, the ontological counterpart to entailment relations between propositions.³³ But the three corollaries to Ip16 make clear that Spinoza intends Ip16 as a *causal* claim about the range of things that God’s nature generates.³⁴ And so, taking all these passages together, we should conclude that what it is to follow from something is to be caused by it. Hence, assuming the results of section 3.1, what it is to follow from something is to be conceptually dependent on it.

There is also a more direct route to the conceptual nature of following-from. The scholium to Ip17 contains the following elaboration of Ip16:

from God’s supreme power or infinite nature, infinitely many things must follow in infinitely many ways, that is, all things have necessarily flowed or always follow by the same necessity and in the same way as from the nature of a triangle it follows, from eternity to eternity, that its three angles are equal to two right angles.

Things follow from God in the same manner in which geometrical properties follow from the natures or definitions of figures in Euclidean space.³⁵ So what, according to Spinoza, is the relation between the nature of a triangle and the sum of its interior angles? I think Spinoza’s primary answer is conceptual containment.

To see this, consider first IIp8s, in which Spinoza makes another appeal to containment. Here Spinoza uses geometrical figures to illustrate how the ideas of non-existing things are “comprehended in God’s infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of singular things, or modes, are

contained in God's attributes" (Ip8). This emphasizes the link in Spinoza's mind between geometrical truths and the more general containment of all things in God. In Ip35, Spinoza eschews geometrical illustrations altogether and claims that "whatever is in God's power must (by Ip34) be so *comprehended* by his essence that it necessarily follows from it" (emphasis mine). That is, necessarily following from God's essence, the subject of Ip16 and cited in Ip34, is a matter of being *comprehended* in God's nature, a relation Spinoza equates with containment in Ip8 and illustrates with examples from geometry.

What, then, is the manner in which all things are comprehended in God's nature, the kind of following-from that the geometrical illustrations of Ip17s and Ip8s are supposed to elucidate?³⁶ Ip8s2 is clear: the "essences [of non-existing things] are comprehended in another *in such a way that they can be conceived through it*" (emphasis mine).³⁷ I think Spinoza intends his point to generalize: *everything* follows from God (Ip16), or equivalently, is comprehended in the nature of God (Ip35), in the sense that everything is conceptually contained in God.

I claimed that how one interprets the following-from relation in Spinoza has important implications for several central interpretive disputes. For instance, what is the relationship between substance and modes – God and all other things – according to Spinoza? Edwin Curley famously argued that all things follow from, or depend on, God for Spinoza just in the sense that all things are caused by God. According to Curley, when Spinoza writes that all things are modes that inhere in and are conceived through God (Ip15), he is actually making the relatively unremarkable claim that all things causally depend on God.³⁸ Critics have argued, convincingly in my opinion, that such a reading fails to correctly capture the closeness between God and everything else for Spinoza, resulting in a "flattened" interpretation that doesn't do justice to the striking heterodoxy of Spinoza's ontology.³⁹

But does my conceptual monistic reading fair any better on this front than Curley's causal monistic reading? Well, if I am right, Spinoza thinks everything follows from God, is caused by God, and inheres in God – all of which amount to the fact that everything is conceptually dependent on God. But I think that, unlike Curley's purely causal reading, conceptual dependence monism adequately capture the unorthodox closeness in Spinoza's system between God and everything else. On my reading, that closeness is as tight as they come: all things follow from God for Spinoza in the sense that all things are conceptually dependent on, or conceptually contained in the nature of, God, a relation as intimate as that between a triangle and the sum of its interior angles in Euclidean space.

A second application concerns the place and nature of logical entailment in Spinoza's system. Many interpreters have argued, also convincingly in my opinion, that Spinoza's following-from relation cannot be assimilated to our modern logical entailment relation, despite the affinity the two may seem to

have.⁴⁰ Their arguments often use counter-examples which suggest that the truth-value of “x follows from y” is sensitive to more than just the values of x and y, unlike (on most accounts) “y entails x.” In this spirit, Don Garrett has suggested that some form of relevance logic comes closer to capturing the entailments between Spinoza’s following-from facts, adding that the order of causal priority is the relevant relevance condition.⁴¹

Once again, conceptual dependence monism better explains what is going on here. Following-from fails to correspond to logical entailment because entailment, on most systems, is insensitive to the ways in which objects are conceived.⁴² This again reminds us why cross-attribute following-from claims can invoke referential opacity, as Spinoza thinks they do (IIp6 and IIp6c). Substitutions of co-referring designators in following-from predication can fail to preserve truth-values because following-from, like causation, is the relation of conceptual dependence. Hence the ways objects are conceived will contribute to the truth-values of following-from claims in ways that strict entailment can fail to pick up on.

This point is extremely important when considering Spinoza’s views on modality. Garrett notes that “Spinoza also holds that, in some cases, a y can ‘follow from’ some x ‘insofar as’ x is ‘considered in’ one way, but not ‘insofar as’ x is ‘considered in’ another way.”⁴³ This should come as no great surprise if following-from is a conceptual relation; of course differences in ways of conceiving can correspond to differences in following-from facts. Garrett then applies this conceptual variability to Spinoza’s views on modality. For whether or not a finite object is necessary, according to Spinoza, depends on whether or not it “follows from the absolute nature of an attribute of God” (Ip28d). And whether or not a finite mode follows from the absolute nature of an attribute of God turns on whether it is conceived in relation to the whole series of finite modes, or in partial isolation from it.⁴⁴

If so, then Spinoza’s views on modality are more complicated than they initially appear. For if finite things can be genuinely conceived in more than one modally salient way – say, both in relation to the “absolute nature of an attribute of God” and apart from such a relation – then Spinoza can consistently affirm *and* reject necessitarianism, relative to these different ways of conceiving objects. This would make Spinoza closer to modern day anti-essentialists than previous interpreters have realized.⁴⁵ More generally, since the interpretation of Spinoza’s modal commitments turns, in large part, on following-from facts, conceptual dependence monism entails and explains why understanding Spinoza’s modal views depends, like so much else, on understanding his views on conceptual relations.

3.4 Conceptual Dependence

Given Spinoza’s frequent appeals to conceptual relations in a variety of contexts, it is disappointing how under-developed his theory of conceptual dependence itself turns out to be. As we have seen, Spinoza generally prefers

speaking of conceptual dependence in terms of conceptual “involvement.” He also uses “conceiving through” to describe conceptual dependence, and it is clear that if *x* is conceived through *y*, then the concept of *y* is involved in the concept of *x*. He also refers to modal facts about concept formation to elucidate conceptual dependence, describing it as “that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing from which it must be formed” (Id3). But this elucidation cannot be a genuine, non-circular analysis if, as I have argued elsewhere, modal relations are themselves to be analyzed in terms of conceptual dependence for Spinoza.⁴⁶

The closest Spinoza comes to offering directly a more illuminating account of conceptual dependence is buried deep in his commentary on Descartes: “For the concept which we have of our thought does not involve, or contain [*non involvit, sive non continet*] the necessary existence of the thought” (C 245; G I/157). Here, conceptual independence is glossed as a kind of containment relation, an account Spinoza also embraces in the *Ethics* (see section 3.3 above).⁴⁷ Relatedly, in his *TIE* (C 28; G II/24), Spinoza describes conceptual relations in terms of a “connection of subject and predicate,” though he does not clarify the nature of this “connection.” At the very least, we must admit that Spinoza never develops a theory of conceptual containment relations as rich as the one Leibniz will later champion.

What then should we make of Spinoza’s terminological gesturing? Probably not as much as we would like. It is clear that Spinoza thinks there is a univocal kind of conceptual dependence relation in which partial concepts are intimately and asymmetrically “involved in,” contained within, and posterior to other, more complete concepts, giving conceptual dependence a kind of discernible structure. Of course, it would be unfair to insist that Spinoza provide a further analysis of conceptual dependence in terms of something yet more fundamental. Conceptual dependence monism denies this is possible. And while Spinoza does not offer a further analysis of this containment relation, I suspect he thinks part-whole conceptual relations are as explanatorily transparent as any ground floor could be. If explanations have to end somewhere, conceptual truths are a promising terminus. Trying to raise further in-virtue-of questions may betray a failure to grasp adequately the concepts involved.

If so, Spinoza’s conceptual dependence monism, when combined with other pieces of his metaphysics, can be summed up by the claim that *all forms of metaphysical dependence are structured containment relations between more and less complete ways of conceiving God*. There is an air of Fregianism in that formulation – “ways of conceiving” – that I’m happy to interpretively embrace, though without Frege’s abstract Platonism.⁴⁸ That is, the structured conceptual relations that Spinoza invokes are objective and concretely reified, and not all of them are identical to mental representations (human or divine).⁴⁹ They are, in Spinoza’s framework, attribute-neutral, though at least some of them are mental.⁵⁰

This last point is worth reemphasizing, lest Spinoza's conceptual dependence monism sound like some form of idealism, according to which relations between ideas underlie and constitute relations between things.⁵¹ Spinoza's brand of conceptual dependence does not locate the domain of all conceptual relations within a purely mental space, despite the influential views of Locke and Hume on this topic. A reduction of the conceptual to the purely mental in Spinoza would violate, among other things, the parity and parallelism among the attributes (Ip10, IIp7s).

Admittedly, Spinoza sometimes writes off-handedly as though token psychological states ("ideas") are equivalent to concepts (e.g. Vp23). But when he is explicitly discussing the matter, Spinoza is clear that there are many more ways of conceiving substance than through mental representations alone. After making this point in the opening propositions of Part Two, Spinoza concludes in IIp6d, "So the modes of each attribute involve the concept of their own attribute, but not of another one." I do not know how to make sense of this claim (in the light of IIp6 itself) if the conceptual involvement of each mode in its own attribute is a relation entirely within the attribute of Thought. Spinoza's claim is, however, easier to understand if the conceptual relation he invokes to explain attribute relations is itself attribute-neutral, as Ip10 itself suggests it must be.⁵²

3.5 *The Nature of Grounding*

We have seen that Spinoza repeatedly accounts for facts about other forms of metaphysical dependence, such as causation and inherence, in terms of facts about conceptual dependence without ever moving in the reverse direction. I claimed that this unidirectional explanatory tendency is based on Spinoza's privileging of conceptual dependence over all other forms. Causation, inherence, following-from and existential dependence obtain *in virtue of* conceptual connections between relata. But what is this further in-virtue-of, if not a kind of dependence? What is the way in which causal facts depend on or are grounded in conceptual facts? Don't we, by Spinoza's own lights, also need an explanation of *that* form of dependence too?

I am not sure how aware Spinoza was of this question. But there are not many options left on the table. If *all* metaphysical dependence is to be explained in terms of conceptual connections, then almost all familiar middle-ground options will be unavailable. Appeals at this juncture to, say, common causes or to some kind of non-reductive supervenience would introduce yet further dependence facts to be explained.

One possibility available to Spinoza would be to let structured containment relations also play the grounding role. On this account, causation is grounded in conceptual containment in the sense that the concept of causation is contained in the concept of conceptual involvement. That is, x causes y in virtue of the conceptual containment of y in x. And *that* in-virtue-of

is itself a conceptual containment relation. That *x* causes *y* is contained in the complex concept of *y* being conceptually contained in *x*.⁵³ In other words, in-virtue-of relations are conceptual containment relations all the way down.

Whatever may be the promises of such an account⁵⁴, the dependence pluralist will likely cry “Foul!” if Spinoza embraced it. The pluralist will object that Spinoza would provide merely the *appearance* of dependence monism, all the while sneaking back in the *content* of dependence pluralism. Instead of having the pluralist’s distinct relations of causation, inherence, existential dependence, and conceptual dependence, we would now have the “monist’s” distinct relations of *causal-cum-conceptual* dependence, *inherence-cum-conceptual* dependence, etc. But unless much more is said about how adding a reference to part-whole conceptual structure converts the original plurality into a genuine unity, Spinoza’s dependence monism would begin to sound like just a renamed version of dependence pluralism.⁵⁵

In reply, Spinoza should and does embrace a starker eliminative option: there are no distinctions between causation, inherence, following-from, and the rest of his non-conceptual laundry list. All forms and instances of metaphysical dependence just are conceptual in the stronger sense that there are neither extensional nor intensional differences among the conceptual relations that are the truth-makers for predication of causation, inherence, and the rest.⁵⁶

That certainly answers the charge of cheating, but perhaps at the cost of interpretive plausibility. After all, doesn’t Spinoza make use of at least an intensional distinction between some of these forms of dependence, even if he embraces necessary co-extension? The short answer is “no.” A bit more expansively, I think there are good textual grounds to attribute to Spinoza precisely the intensional collapse that, philosophically, his dependence monism pressures him to embrace.

Throughout this section (3.0), I have presented passages in which Spinoza claims that conceptual dependence, on the one hand, and all other forms of dependence, on the other, are not distinct relations. For instance, I argued that what it is for there to be a cause just is for there to be a conceptual containment relation. But what about distinctions between these less fundamental forms of dependence? I argued that some candidates, such as following-from and produced by, are just causal relations for Spinoza. The more difficult interpretive question is whether Spinoza tries to keep *causation* and *inherence* meaningfully distinct, even if both are grounded, as I have argued, in conceptual dependence relations. Does Spinoza maintain some kind of intensional distinction between causation and inherence (or between the fundamental conceptual relations that are the grounds or truth-makers for predication of causation and inherence)?

One interpreter, John Carriero, has argued that the distinction between causation and inherence is “deeply etched” in Spinoza’s texts and that

Spinoza “never refers to Ip15 [inherence] and Ip16 [causation] in a way that suggests that they are interchangeable.”⁵⁷ But I think there is compelling textual evidence against any deep causal-inherence divide.

First, Spinoza clearly *does* blur the divide between Ip15 and Ip16. In Ip28s, Spinoza appeals to Ip15 – not Ip16 – to prove a point about causation.⁵⁸ More strikingly, Spinoza blurs the inherence-causation divide in Ip16 itself. As Michael Della Rocca has pointed out, Spinoza’s proof of the range of God’s causal activity in Ip16 appeals to *property* dependence, a clear reference to the inherence relation.⁵⁹ Furthermore, there are passages in which Spinoza slides casually between causation and inherence in ways that make them sound quite interchangeable. Consider IIIDefAff22: “Overestimation, therefore, is an *effect*, or *property* [*effectus sive proprietas*], of love” (emphasis mine). Or consider a passage from Spinoza’s *TPP*: “knowledge of an effect through its cause is nothing other than knowledge of a property of that cause.”⁶⁰

The more compelling story is that Spinoza inherited from previous philosophers a range of terms for dependence relations, including “causation” and “inherence.” Sometimes he is content to make his points using those traditional categories, even though, in the hands of many of his predecessors, those terms named distinct relations. But like so much else in Spinoza, behind his choices of familiar terminology is a more radical revisionist project. As with other surprising collapses to identity in Spinoza’s system, the apparent plurality of the dependence relations that his predecessors endorsed is, for Spinoza, merely apparent. Not solely for his views on substance is Spinoza rightly judged a monist.

4.0 Motivating the Answer

I argued throughout the third section that Spinoza thinks conceptual relations ground and explain the metaphysical dependencies of the world – mental and non-mental alike. In this fourth and final section, we’ll consider why Spinoza thinks this, as it is a very controversial view, and not merely among contemporary metaphysicians.

Upon reading the *Ethics*, Leibniz objected to Spinoza’s definition of substance (Id3) as that which is in and conceived through itself: “the contrary seems rather to be true, that there are some things which are in themselves though they are not conceived through themselves. And this is how men commonly conceive of substances” (L196). Leibniz keenly saw that if Spinoza’s claims about causation, inherence, and conceptual dependence were granted, Spinoza would have a strong basis for rejecting the possibility of finite substances. For while Leibniz accepts that everything causally and conceptually depends on God, he firmly denies that all things inhere in God. But there is no space for such a denial if Spinoza’s conceptual dependence monism is correct. So, Leibniz presses, why think inherence and conceptual dependence

can't come apart? As he puts it, "It would be necessary for [Spinoza] to prove that whatever has one property also has the other," (L 196, emphasis mine), something Leibniz doesn't think Spinoza has done – except by definitional fiat.

Before giving what I take to be Spinoza's reply, it will be instructive to consider an alternative attempt to motivate Spinoza's position. This route, defended by Della Rocca, appeals directly to the PSR as the basis for dependence monism, an appeal that Leibniz, at least, would find congenial. I will argue, however, that this approach fails to avoid the charge of question-begging, though seeing why will shed new light on Spinoza's argument for substance monism and pave the way for an alternative reconstruction of Spinoza's reasoning.

Della Rocca has powerfully argued that Spinoza's identity claims are often underwritten by appeals to the PSR.⁶¹ This rationalist tendency, Della Rocca claims, lies behind Spinoza's dissatisfaction with primitive non-identity claims, such as Descartes' distinction between the will and the intellect (IIp49). According to this very strong version of the PSR, non-identity supervenes on explanatory differences and all appeals to primitive non-identity should be rejected on grounds of inexplicability. Call this move the *rationalist reduction*:

Rationalist reduction: Necessarily, for all x and y, the existence of some explanatory grounds for the identity of x and y, and the lack of any non-primitive explanatory grounds for the non-identity of x and y entail the identity of x and y.⁶²

Could the *rationalist reduction* lie behind Spinoza's dependence monism?

Initially, we have a good case for answering affirmatively. In general, the most salient explanatory grounds for identity and non-identity in the rationalist reduction will be facts about overall similarity. In the case of dependence monism, the relevant grounds will likely involve similarity of formal properties and facts about the extensions of the terms. For Spinoza, there are several important formal similarities between, say, inherence and conceptual dependence. Both are forms of metaphysical dependence, both are antisymmetric and transitive, both obtain with metaphysical necessity, and both play wholly overlapping roles in defining and explaining his basic ontological categories. Furthermore, by CET, both relations are necessarily co-extensive. Such features would be sufficient explanatory grounds for identifying inherence and conceptual dependence unless any non-primitive dissimilarities could be found. And so, barring the discovery of any such non-primitive grounds for distinction, Spinoza could apply his *rationalist reduction* and reject the Leibnizian distinction between inherence and conceptual dependence on grounds that it introduces a primitive distinction, *pace* the PSR.⁶³

Thus, the rationalist reduction refrain runs, given the PSR, inherence and conceptual dependence cannot be distinct dependence relations. Notice that on this account, Spinoza reasons *from* the PSR *to* dependence monism. And although this story would not yet explain why Spinoza takes *conceptual* dependence (as opposed to, say, causal) to be the most adequate way of characterizing the sole form of metaphysical dependence, it would at least explain why he was attracted to dependence monism in the first place.

However, while I agree that Spinoza's rationalism deeply shapes his metaphysics, I do not think the rationalist reduction is or should be part of Spinoza's reasoning here. A crucial step in the rationalist reduction is rejecting non-primitive grounds for non-identity. And CET itself, I suggested, seems to provide Spinoza with sufficient grounds to make the key rationalist move. Spinoza would in effect ask us, "Wouldn't it be a brute fact to have necessarily co-extensive relations that nonetheless remain distinct in kind?" But though I agree that Spinoza accepts CET, I do not think he can or does reason *from* co-extension *to* identity in this case.

For one, this would leave Spinoza vulnerable to Leibniz's charge that Spinoza simply begs the question against substance pluralists. In questioning the definitions, Leibniz wondered why Spinoza was entitled to CET in the first place. Indeed, here is a good, non-primitive reason for *not* identifying inherence and conceptual dependence: it is the nature of some kinds of objects, namely finite substances, to be conceptually dependent on something else (God) without inhering in anything else (including God). And while Spinoza thinks that there can be no such things as finite substances, he can hardly *assume* this without argument in his very definitions of substances and modes.⁶⁴

Furthermore, Spinoza's proof for substance monism explicitly presupposes that inherence and conceiving through are necessarily co-extensive relations. That is, *dependence* monism (or a consequence of it) is actually prior in the order of Spinoza's proof to his famed *substance* monism. Spinoza concludes in Ip14 that only one substance can exist as fully self-conceived. Though it is often presented as his grand conclusion, Ip14 cannot be the final step in Spinoza's argument for substance monism. To reject the possibility of finite substances, Spinoza also needs to show that all and only self-conceived things are self-inhering. This is just what the easily overlooked Ip15 adds to the proof of substance monism: "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God."

But Spinoza's demonstration of this final step relies explicitly on the necessary co-extension of inherence and conceiving through: "Except for God, there neither is, nor can be conceived, any substance (by Ip14), that is, (by Id3), a thing that is in itself and is conceived through itself" (Ip15d). Notice that Spinoza infers facts about inherence from facts about conceptual dependence, an inference that he then justifies by appealing to a consequence of CET in Id3. In other words, CET itself provides the justification for Ip15.

But, as Leibniz pressed, that is hardly a convincing inference to substance pluralists not antecedently committed to CET in the first place. So while the PSR may help Spinoza reach Ip14, I do not see how it can directly justify his conclusion in Ip15 on the basis of a rationalist reduction without simply begging the question.

The real error in both Leibniz's complaint and Della Rocca's rationalist reconstruction is their misconstrual of the order of Spinoza's reasoning. He does not reason *to* dependence monism *from* a belief in CET. As we saw in section 3.1 in the case of causation, the pattern of Spinoza's reasoning moves in the opposite direction. CET is a conclusion of dependence monism, not a premise for it. This is why Spinoza's opening definitions in the *Ethics* are so well-crafted. He first states his dependence monism and then uses it to derive significant ontological conclusions. Next, in the first half of Part One, Spinoza moves (i.) from conceptual dependence monism to CET and then (ii.) from CET to the rejection of finite substances. The PSR certainly plays a central role in (ii.), but it alone cannot justify (i.).

What then *does* motivate Spinoza to adopt conceptual dependence monism? Although we are quickly approaching the ground floor of his system, I believe that Spinoza was attracted to conceptual dependence monism at least partly because of its metaphysical and epistemological serviceability. Conceptual dependence monism provided him a key for solving several problems facing some of his other basic systematic commitments. We've already seen one example of this. The (alleged) explanatory transparency of conceptual facts undergirds Spinoza's belief that his rationalist demands for explanation could in principle be met (section 2).

But there is a more difficult metaphysical problem facing Spinoza's system, of which he was well aware. In a very early dialogue, Spinoza portrays Reason and Desire engaging in a significant metaphysical debate.⁶⁵ Reason proclaims its confidence that the world is an infinitely powerful, maximally perfect, and fundamental unity. Desire responds, a bit sarcastically: "It will be marvelous indeed if this should turn out to be consistent: that Unity agrees with the Diversity I see everywhere in nature. But how could this be?" (KV I/ii; C 74). How indeed? In this passage, Spinoza has put his finger on one of the most difficult issues facing any serious monist. How can the truth of monism be reconciled with the wide-ranging diversity we seem to find in the world?⁶⁶

Spinoza's mature metaphysics raises a particularly difficult version of this long-standing question of the one and the many. For not only does Spinoza believe that there is exactly one fundamental entity – substance, God, or nature. He also believes that it contains or supports a plentiful and seemingly incompatible range of non-fundamental natures, powers, modifications, individuals, relations, and true predication. Anticipating Leibniz, Spinoza further believes that the metaphysical perfection of our world requires the maximization of both ontological plenitude and parsimony – maximal unity in substance and maximal diversity in attributes and modes. "The more

reality or being one single thing has, the more attributes belong to it" (Ip9; Ep9). Spinoza equates reality and perfection (IId6), so a maximally perfect object must be able to support maximally many distinct ways of being, both in terms of attributes (Ip16, IIp1s).

Spinoza struggled to explain how these demands of metaphysical perfection could be met. In this early dialogue, for instance, the anti-Spinozistic character Desire argues in a Cartesian fashion that if thinking and being extended are such comprehensive and irreducibly different ways of being (as Spinoza thought they were), then such attributes must constitute the natures of distinct things. In his reply, Spinoza could not yet explain how the world could be consistently unified in one substance if it admits of such a plurality of attributes and relations. He continued to face similar kinds of objections from the earliest readers of drafts of *Ethics* to his most acute correspondent near the end of his life.⁶⁷ Even after 200 years of reflections on Spinoza's mature claim in IIp6 that substance causes extended effects only insofar as [*quatenus*] it is conceived to be extended, readers continued to question his consistency:

in order to conceal the contradiction into which [Spinoza] thus falls, he separates his pantheism and individualism (monism and pluralism) by the word *quatenus*, which Herbert has humorously called the charm that made everything possible with Spinoza.⁶⁸

There is something to Herbert's quip, though Spinoza's key move has nothing to do with the magic of "*quatenus*," despite its frequent appearance in the *Ethics*. "*Quatenus*," especially when paired with expressions like "*concipitur*," is just Spinoza's mature way of invoking his most valuable philosophical tools: conceptual variability and conceptual dependence.⁶⁹

For Spinoza saw that one and the same thing could be conceived in a plentiful number of ways without upsetting its underlying identity. And so if some kinds of property ascriptions to an object were sensitive to some of these different ways of conceiving an object, a variety of otherwise contradictory predication could be truly and consistently made of one and the same thing. And one way to guarantee such concept-variability is to make the ascriptions involve conceptually structured properties, which is exactly what his conceptual dependence monism does. Spinoza sometimes highlights this phenomenon with examples of co-referring descriptions and names (Ep9), but more often he appeals directly to conceptual variation via conceptual dependence as the way to consistently maintain parsimonious identity (substance monism and mode identity theory) alongside plentiful diversity (attribute and mode plenitude) in the perfect world.

In the case of attributes, Spinoza claims that attribute-specific properties and predication are sensitive to ways of conceiving substance and that the conceptual distinctions between attributes generate referentially opaque

environments (Ip10; IIp6). So although one and the same substance is both extended and thinking, relativizing those ways of being to ways of being conceived prevents contradictions from arising and preserves the unity of substance. Similarly, as we saw in section 3.1, Spinoza identifies causal relations with conceptual relations via conceptual dependence monism so that the parsimonious identity of modes across attributes will not be threatened, even though one and the same mode enters into infinitely many, seemingly incompatible causal relations (e.g., causing both mental and non-mental effects). The same holds for relations of inherence and following-from. Spinoza's conceptual dependence monism explains how and why these cross-attribute dependence relations do not entail the non-identity of the relata.⁷⁰ This is the key to preserving consistency in Spinoza's parsimonious system without sacrificing the demands of plenitude. Turning all instances of metaphysical dependence into fine-grained, identity-preserving, concept-sensitive relations via conceptual dependence monism is an important step in showing how these twin demands of metaphysical perfection might both be met.

Over thirty years ago, Margaret Wilson noted that “*any* success in understanding Spinoza is going to require whacking one’s way through a thicket of intensionality of which only the bare outlines have so far been discerned.”⁷¹ Great, whacking advances in discernment have since been made.⁷² But if I’m right, Spinoza’s conceptual dependence monism explains why that thicket is so pervasive in the first place – opacity will be exactly as pervasive in all dependence relations as it is in conceptual relations. We should now continue the task of discerning and explaining those structured conceptual relations and whatever intensionality Spinoza thought they so helpfully created.

Seeing the work conceptual dependence monism can do to consistently maintain both The One and the many ways of being The One helps us understand why Spinoza found the view so attractive, even if it doesn’t amount to an independent *proof*. Looming as a deep, but discernible background assumption in the *Ethics* that shapes many of his most prized metaphysical conclusions, Spinoza’s conceptual dependence monism ought to be attractive to anyone sharing his convictions about rationalist demands for explanation and perfection.

It is here that we can at last discern a promising Spinozistic reply to Leibniz’s charge of question-begging. After all, Spinoza can retort, he is hardly alone among his peers in endorsing this geometrically-inspired, structural model of the perfection of the world. Early in his career, Leibniz himself aptly describes this model as “harmony, that is, diversity compensated by identity” (CP 29).⁷³ And so at least from Leibniz’s perspective, Spinoza should not be seen as guilty of reasoning from an arbitrary and unmotivated definitional stipulation in his ontology to substance monism. Rather, I have suggested, Spinoza reasons from a shared belief about the metaphysically perfect structure of our world to the utility of conceptual dependence monism for its realizability. On this account, Spinoza’s proof of substance monism shows

how conceptual dependence monism plus the PSR entails the denial of finite substances.

Of course, Leibniz is free to *modus tollens* away. But, Spinoza would caution, there will be a steep price: no longer will Leibniz be able to provide as satisfying an account of how the demands of metaphysical perfection are to be met. He will have to settle for less plurality and/or less unity in his universe. (And I suspect that to Spinoza, this is exactly what we get in Leibniz: only one fundamental attribute, thought, and a huge ontological bifurcation between God and everything else.) So, the Spinozistic challenge runs, Leibniz can reject conceptual dependence monism at the cost of abandoning the possibility of a truly metaphysically perfect world. Or he can accept the demands of perfection at the cost of abandoning the possibility of finite substances. But he can't have both.⁷⁴ And to the extent to which Leibniz was attracted to an account of perfection that truly maximized both identity and diversity, perhaps he too should have admitted just how much Spinoza's conceptual dependence monism has going for it, after all.⁷⁵

Notes

¹ I emphasize the “may,” since there has been a recent resurgence of interest in some forms of monism in contemporary metaphysics. (For a representative sample of recent work, see Jonathan Schaffer, “Monism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (2007); Schaffer, “Monism: The Priority of the Whole,” *Philosophical Review* 119 (2010): 31–76; Terence Horgan and Potrž Matjaž, *Austere Realism: Contextual Semantics Meets Minimal Ontology*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press (2008); Michael Rea, “How to Be an Eleatic Monist,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 35, (2001); Theodore Sider, “Against Monism,” *Analysis* 67, (2007); Kelly Trogdon, “Monism and Intrinsicality,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83, (2009): 1–4.) Interestingly, Spinoza’s conceptual dependence monism concerns an issue that does not usually come up in these more recent discussions, though it lurks in the background. Using Schaffer’s taxonomy, this form of monism is distinct from both existence monism – the view that exactly one concrete object exists – and priority monism – the view that exactly one object is ontologically fundamental. Instead, dependence monism claims that there is exactly one type of metaphysical dependence, a view that neither entails nor is entailed by these other kinds of monisms.

² All otherwise unlabeled references to Spinoza’s text refer to the internal references of the *Ethics* by PartTypeNumber (e.g., Ip33). All other abbreviations of Spinoza’s works refer to the actual name of the text (CM = *Cogitata Metaphysica*; Ep = *Epistolae*; PP = *Descartes Principiorum Philosophiae*; TIE = *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*; TTP = *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*). I have used Curley’s translations when available, sometimes with slight modifications.

³ Those now hesitant at reading further should be comforted; there turns out to be a lot of redundancy in that list and I do not work through these notions one by one.

⁴ In Spinoza’s mature thought, all of these relations come in degrees, akin to partial causes.

⁵ Aristotelian scholastics debated extensively about whether there existed any distinctions that were neither *real* nor purely *mental* [*rationis ratiocinantis*], and if so, how many and of what kinds. Some candidates, such as modal distinctions, remain familiar to us through Descartes, while others, such as formal, virtual, *ex natura rei*, and reasoned reason [*rationis ratiocinatae*] now sound more exotic (again, *if* these are even distinct – a central question in the then ongoing debate). I don’t think Spinoza picked up on, or particularly cared about, all the details of this long dispute. But it is noteworthy that some of Spinoza’s predecessors described a range

of relations that had mental connotations while still being *fundamentum in re*. Although Suarez ultimately criticizes the view as too coarse-grained, Spinoza's conceptual relations approach what Suarez describes as one possible sense of a *distinctio rationis ratiocinatae*: "pre-existing in reality, prior to the discriminating operation of the mind, so as to be thought of as imposing itself, as it were, on the intellect, and to require the intellect only to recognize it, but not to constitute it" (*DM* VII.1.4).

⁶ Keep in mind that *Spinoza* is the one who so thoroughly uses "conceptual" terminology. We will see that his conceptual relations share *some* important features with what some philosophers now (and some in the British early modern tradition) take to be purely mental conceptual relations, so Spinoza's choice of terminology is not wholly misleading or unhelpful. Nonetheless, it will be *those* features of conceptual relations that Spinoza wants, not the mentalist assumption. And while not all conceptual relations are mental relations for Spinoza, in virtue of his parallelism there will be a mental representation of every conceptual relation (see section 3.4). So, while Spinoza appeals regularly to the conceptual, I don't think he intends to embrace all of the natural affinities there may be between the conceptual and the mental, especially since (a) doing so would wreak havoc on central parts of his metaphysics (3.4); (b) he sometimes explicitly disassociates the two (3.4); and (c) the aspects of the conceptual he is attracted to and that do all the work for him can sustain and require a fully attribute-neutral interpretation (4.0). If one is unable to hear anything but a purely mental relation by "conceptual," one is welcome to substitute a new term, *conschmeptual*, that has all and only those features that we will see Spinoza intends by his "conceptual." (Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this.)

⁷ This is also the likely reason that he appeals to such dependence relations in the midst of articulating his two most complete versions of the PSR in the *Ethics* (Ip8d and Ip11d). Here and throughout, I intend "object" in a fairly neutral and wide-ranging sense without (so far as possible) committing myself to any particular interpretation of what counts as an individual in Spinoza.

⁸ TIE 95–6 (C 39–40); see also Ep60.

⁹ In advocating this, Spinoza identifies himself with a long-standing Aristotelian tradition in metaphysics that is at odds with more recent, Quine-inspired approaches that seek progress in metaphysics through discerning ontological *commitment*, as opposed to ontological *priority*. (For more on this general distinction, see Jonathan Schaffer, "On What Grounds What," in *Metametaphysics*, ed. David Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 347–383.)

¹⁰ And so while Spinoza would doubtlessly applaud the renewed interest in metaphysical monism, I suspect he would be disappointed that the contemporary discussion so often treats the notion of "ontological priority" as either primitive or as so sufficiently transparent that it needs no further grounding except by citing a few stock examples.

¹¹ This point is arguably behind one of Spinoza's complaints against Divine teleologists (IApp) and his rejection of Cartesian interactionism (Ip3). Without a proper explanation of causation, we are especially vulnerable to confusing causes and effects ("For what is really a cause, [a divine teleologist] considers as an effect, and conversely. What is by nature prior, [Divine teleologists] make posterior") or to positing impossible causal relations ("If things have nothing in common with one another, one of them cannot be the cause of the other," *pace* Descartes).

¹² For some recent discussions, see E.J. Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Fabrice Correia, *Existential Dependence and Cognate Notions* (München: Philosophia Verlag, 2005); Benjamin Sebastian Schnieder, "A Certain Kind of Trinity: Dependence, Substance, Explanation," *Philosophical Studies* 129 (2006).

¹³ See Harry Wolfson's discussion of this expression in Spinoza and some of its Aristotelian heritage (Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), 77–78).

¹⁴ The textual basis for thinking Spinoza moves in the other direction (if y is prior in nature to x , then x exists on account of y) utilizes more of Spinoza's ontology. Substances do not exist on account of anything distinct from themselves (Ip6). So if everything that exists is either a substance or a mode (Ip4d), and substances are always prior in nature to their modes (Ip1), then the only cases in which a mode (m_1) could be posterior in nature to a substance (s_1), but fail to exist on account of s_1 would be if m_1 were modifying a different substance (s_2). But if there could be no distinct s_2 , as Spinoza claims in Ip14, then the bi-conditional will be true: x exists on account of y iff y is prior in nature to x .

¹⁵ Spinoza writes as though the relata of ordinary causal relations are objects, not events.

¹⁶ Exhaustively proving the point about the modal strength of these conditionals in Spinoza would require us to understand Spinoza's theory of necessary connections. I have offered such an account elsewhere (Samuel Newlands, "The Harmony of Spinoza and Leibniz," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, forthcoming), but the relevant point here is that necessary connections are just conceptual connections, for Spinoza. As we will see, these bi-conditionals are also conceptual truths, for Spinoza. Hence, they are necessarily true.

¹⁷ At least some counter-examples to the co-extension claim will involve suppositions that Spinoza would reject. For instance, one might think that causation fails to generate any metaphysically necessary connections, whereas ontological dependence relations must. (This concern is raised in E.J. Lowe, *Locke* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 66.) But the objection presupposes a view of causation denied by Spinoza (Ix3), though it may be that he is entitled to this view only in virtue of his efforts to ground causation in conceptual dependence. So, to press the point, if we do not antecedently agree with Spinoza's account of causation, why shouldn't we reason from the contingency of causal connections to their non-identity with ontological dependence? In other words, Spinoza needs an independent motivation for his conceptual dependence monism; I will suggest the beginnings of one in the final section of this paper (though it may well involve presuppositions that are also unpalatable to some).

Another potential point of contrast, raised by Jonathan Schaffer (Schaffer, "On What Grounds What."), is that causation, unlike ontological grounding, does not require minimal elements. However, this too involves a presupposition that Spinoza rejects (as does Leibniz in his PSR-based cosmological argument). But Spinoza's rejection (see Ip23 and Ip25) may be tied up in his substance monism, which, I later argue, is itself tied up in his conceptual dependence monism. And so, like the previous case, Spinoza at least has internal systematic resources for rejecting the counter-example.

¹⁸ For further discussion on this point, see Don Garrett, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument," in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, ed. Olli Koistinen and John Biro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 136; Michael Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (Oxford, 1996), 11; Margaret D. Wilson, "Spinoza's Causal Axiom," in *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 128n57; Charles Jarrett, "The Logical Structure of Spinoza's *Ethics*, Part I," *Synthese* 37 (1978): 29.

¹⁹ For further passages in support of reducing causation to conceptual connections in Spinoza, see Michael Della Rocca, "A Rationalist Manifesto: Spinoza and the Principle of Sufficient Reason," *Philosophical Topics* 31 (2003), 75–93.

²⁰ Besides the passages already cited, there is also a bit of negative evidence: despite Spinoza's regular restatement of causal facts in terms of conceptual facts, he never (so far as I know) moves in the opposite direction.

²¹ For a lucid defense of this claim and the methodology behind appealing to intensionality in interpreting Spinoza, see Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*. esp. pp. 118–140.

²² This is another reason we should understand Spinoza's conceiving relation to be attribute-neutral. (Thanks to a referee for emphasizing this point to me.)

²³ Spinoza might also appeal to what he takes to be the connection between explanation and causation and argue that since some explanatory contexts are plausibly referentially opaque,

so also will be some causal contexts. (Thanks to Marian David for this point.) But in IIp6d at least, Spinoza appeals explicitly to conceptual relations and the conceptual barrier between attributes to justify the opacity of causal contexts, rather than to an intuitive point about the intensional character of some explanations.

²⁴ For instance, Curley and Martial Gueroult favor a kind of eliminativist reading of inherence (Edwin Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard, 1969), 18–19 and M. Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, 2 vols., vol. I: Dieu (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968), 63–65.). John Carriero and Don Garrett endorse the co-extensive reading. Garrett is silent on whether the mutual entailments he cites are based on a further reduction, whereas Carriero explicitly rejects any reduction (John Carriero, “Spinoza’s Views on Necessity in Historical Perspective,” *Philosophical Topics* 19 (1991), 74; Carriero, “On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33 (1995), 255–61; and Garrett, “Spinoza’s Conatus Argument,” 136–37.). Della Rocca favors a reductionist reading that reaches some similar conclusions to the ones I offer here, though he argues for it in very different ways and suggests a motivation for the position that I will later argue is insufficient (Michael Della Rocca, “Rationalism Run Amok: Representation and the Reality of Emotions in Spinoza,” in *Interpreting Spinoza*, ed. Charles Huenemann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)).

²⁵ The divisions into [a], [b], and [c] are mine. There is a difference between the punctuation of the Latin (in both the OP and Gebhardt) and Curley’s translation. The original Latin edition uses a colon, which to modern eyes makes what follows in [c] more obviously apply to everything that precedes it, namely [a] and [b], and not [b] alone. But 17th century punctuation was not nearly as stable as this suggests to us, and throughout his translation Curley rightly adjusts Spinoza’s clunky punctuation for readability.

Interestingly, there is surprisingly wide variation across English translations of Id3 when it comes to the punctuation and connective in [c] – even by the same translator! Curley’s *Collected Works* volume renders *hoc est* as “i.e.” whereas his *Spinoza Reader* renders it “that is,” as I have done here. The use of a comma most naturally makes [c] a modification of [b], and so Curley’s translation subtly emphasizes that interpretation. Shirley’s translation reads “through itself; that is.” White also uses the more ambiguous semicolon and “in other words,” leaving it unclear how much of the preceding is being explained by [c]. Elwes, in most editions I have looked at, also uses a semicolon, but in at least one modern edition of Elwes’ translation, a colon is used (this is the edition listed in the bibliography). Fortunately, the cogency of my interpretation will not turn on exactly how we punctuate Spinoza’s sentence in Id3; my point is rather that we should not put much stock in how English translators have rendered the connective and punctuation.

²⁶ Shirley’s translation of Ep2 inexplicably and misleadingly reverses the order of the Latin and repeats the order of the *Ethics*: “by attribute I mean everything that is conceived in itself and through itself.” Of course, according to my interpretation, the order turns out to be insignificant; but as a matter of translation, it is important to be able see how Spinoza himself is comfortable inverting the phrases without concern.

²⁷ For example, in Ip15d Spinoza clearly argues *from* the fact that modes are conceptually dependent on substance *to* the fact that they inherence in substance.

²⁸ I am grateful to a referee for suggesting that I add a section on this relation.

²⁹ As in the cases of causation and inherence, the relata of Spinoza’s follow-from relation are “things” (*res*, sometimes elided in the Latin), which I take to be another attribute-neutral term for modes that Spinoza later fills out in more attribute-specific ways, e.g., “bodies” and “ideas.”

³⁰ For example, see Iax3, Ip16c1 (alongside Ip16); Ip28d, Ip32c2, and Ip36 (alongside Ip36d).

³¹ This point has been made in different ways by others: see Carriero, “Spinoza’s Views on Necessity in Historical Perspective,” 61ff.; Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body*

Problem in Spinoza, 4–11; Garrett, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism,” in *God and Nature in Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 193–4; Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, 55ff.

³² Causation and production are equated in Ip6d.

³³ For discussion, see Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 45–7 and 75–6. For acute criticisms of attempts to assimilate causation to logical consequence in Spinoza, see Richard Mason, *The God of Spinoza* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 55–60. However, I take the real error in such readings to be the incorrect assimilation of conceptual dependence to logical consequence, not the claim that Spinoza assimilates causation to conceptual relations.

³⁴ See Garrett, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism,” 194 and Carriero, “Spinoza’s Views on Necessity in Historical Perspective,” 61–3.

³⁵ Spinoza later introduces a wrinkle into the picture, distinguishing between things that follow more directly from God’s nature (so-called “infinite modes”) and those that follow more indirectly (“finite modes”), a distinction that need not concern us here, since Spinoza is clear that both types of modes still “follow from” God.

³⁶ In his very interesting discussion of geometrical containment in Spinoza, Charles Huenemann concludes that “when X geometrically contains Y, it means that X has sufficient features for producing Y, in accordance with sanctioned means of construction” (Charles Huenemann, “The Necessity of Finite Modes and Geometrical Containment in Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” in *New Essays on the Rationalists*, ed. R. Gennaro and C. Huenemann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 233). While I don’t disagree that geometrical containment has a causal upshot for Spinoza, I do not think that causation is *only* or even primarily what Spinoza intends by geometrical containment, as Huenemann claims. Productive ability alone is, to put it metaphorically, too distant a connection for the kind of containment Spinoza has in mind. (We’ll see a similar worry about Curley’s pure causal reading of following-from below.) Things are contained in God in a tighter, more intimate sense than simply as potential or “virtual” effects; conceptual dependence, I think, comes closer to capturing this intimacy (though, of course, on my reading it turns out that causation just is conceptual containment, so our differences may be slight in the end.)

³⁷ See also IIp7s, where Spinoza glosses “comprehends” with “expresses,” “explains,” “considers” and “conceives” – all expressions in Spinoza that more directly invoke conceptual containment than pure causation. Another synonym in this context that suggests more than a purely causal reading is “pertains” in Ip11d and Ip19d.

³⁸ Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 37–42; 74–6. Curley argues that this enables Spinoza to avoid steep worries facing the claim that things inhere in and are predicated of God as properties inhere in and are predicated of a substance. I won’t pursue this much larger issue here, except to point to a promising recent reply; see Yitzhak Melamed, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics of Substance: The Substance-Mode Relation as a Relation of Inherence and Predication,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 78 (2009), 17–82.

³⁹ See Carriero, “On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” 254–7; Jonathan Bennett, “Spinoza’s Monism: A Reply to Curley,” in *God and Nature: Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 53–5; Steven Nadler, “Whatever Is, Is in God”: Substance and Things in Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” in *Interpreting Spinoza*, ed. Charles Huenemann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 61–4.

⁴⁰ Carriero, “Spinoza’s Views on Necessity in Historical Perspective,” 61–3 and 76; Garrett, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism,” 193–4; Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*, 4; Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, 55–60.

⁴¹ Garrett, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism,” 194 and 215n6. This also prevents trivial entailments from establishing following-from facts. The true proposition that snow is white entails that snow is white, but there is no corresponding following-from relation.

⁴² Hence Garrett’s suggestion that *causal* priority is the relevance condition is not quite correct – the relevance condition needs to be sensitive to the ways in which the objects involved

are conceived, though, once again, taking *that* into account will *ipso facto* take into account the order of causal priority, according to conceptual dependence monism.

⁴³ Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism," 215n6.

⁴⁴ Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism," 198–9. I have discussed Garrett's reading, and criticisms of it, elsewhere (Newlands, "Spinoza's Modal Metaphysics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2007)).

⁴⁵ I have defended this reading of Spinoza's modal views elsewhere (Newlands, "The Harmony of Spinoza and Leibniz").

⁴⁶ Newlands, "The Harmony of Spinoza and Leibniz".

⁴⁷ See also TIE 72 (C 32; G II/27), Ip8s2, and related passages discussed in section 3.3.

⁴⁸ By contrast, Bennett thinks Spinoza was confused (or ignorant) here, blurring together mental and Fregian "third realm" differences (Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1984), 52).

⁴⁹ If I am right that they are not abstract objects in the Fregian sense, nor always psychological entities, then Spinoza's views on the nature of concepts and conceptual dependence will not sit easily with some familiar taxonomies of views. (For one such recent taxonomy, see Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, "The Ontology of Concepts," *Noûs* 41, no. 4 (2007).)

⁵⁰ There is another possible distinction between kinds of conceptual relations in Spinoza that will be orthogonal to the one that corresponds to differences between the attributes. Some interpreters have seen a distinction between "vertical" and "horizontal" dimensions of causal relations in Spinoza's system. Stemming from Curley's elegant and influential interpretation, finite modes have been interpreted as being partly determined "from above" by laws of nature (or better: by their ontological counterparts, the infinite modes) and partly "from behind" by other finite modes. Whether Spinoza in fact had such a divided causal framework is still a matter of on-going interpretive disagreement, so I will make a neutral observation. If Spinoza distinguishes between the *forms* of dependence holding between God and infinite modes (say, emanative), on the one hand, and between a finite mode and other finite modes (say, transitive), on the other (horizontal vs. vertical, where that is not just a difference in *relata* but also a difference in the *kind* of causal dependence), then Spinoza will need a corresponding distinction in forms of vertical vs. horizontal conceptual dependence. This distinction in kind will be orthogonal to the distinction corresponding to attribute differences. (Thanks to a referee for suggesting that I make this point explicit.)

⁵¹ I explore this further elsewhere ("Thinking, Conceiving, and Idealism in Spinoza," (ms)), arguing against the worry that Spinoza's privileging of the conceptual introduces what Bennett colorfully described as "a lopsidedness in Spinoza's system which he does not mention, could not explain, and should not have tolerated" (Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 62).

⁵² Again, given Spinoza's parallelism, it is true that for every conceptual relation, there is a corresponding relation between ideas and (in God's mind at least) a more complex idea representing those two ideas and their relation. So there will always be mutual entailments between conceptual and mental facts according to Spinoza, an important point for his rationalism (see section 2 above). But Spinoza is careful to avoid assimilating mutual entailments to identity without further reason.

⁵³ Given Spinoza's holism, the more complex concept will be the container of (and hence more fundamental than) the simpler conceptual constituents. He usually thinks the arrow of dependence runs from the complex wholes to their parts, hardly a surprising direction for a committed monist to endorse.

⁵⁴ Benefits would include (a) providing a non-empty, asymmetrical sense in which causation (et al.) depends on conceptual connection without introducing a new *explananda* and (b) immediately explaining the necessity of CET (since Spinoza also analyzes necessity as conceptual involvement). Furthermore, if conceptual relations are paradigmatic *explanans* (as Spinoza believes they are), containment-all-the-way down will also yield explanations all the

way down – a happy upshot, given Spinoza started the whole grounding project with a search for explanation.

⁵⁵ This objection was pressed forcefully and constructively by a referee, who urged that I endorse the eliminativist alternative I turn to in the next paragraph. Of course, there are important differences between the pluralist's causation and the quasi-monist's causation-cum-conceptual. The latter will admit of substitution failures in co-referring expressions, whereas the former may not (to use a Spinoza-friendly example). But the fact that, on the quasi-monist's view, all forms of dependence share striking features with conceptual dependence is not enough to convert them all into a single form of dependence. To do *that*, a more drastic elimination is needed or else more needs to be done to fill out the different containment structures of causal-cum-conceptual, inherence-cum-conceptual, et al. relations. Spinoza himself accepts the first option, I will argue, and does not attempt the second.

⁵⁶ Again, there will remain intensional differences that correspond to *attribute* distinctions (and horizontal vs. vertical dependence differences, if there are any), but those will not correspond to any differences between the kinds of conceptual dependence underlying causation, inherence, and so forth.

⁵⁷ Carriero, "On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics," 255. Ip15 is about the inherence of all things in God and Ip16 is about the causal dependence of all things on God.

⁵⁸ Admittedly, the portion of Ip15 that Spinoza needs in Ip28s is the portion about conceptual dependence, but I have already presented my case for why there is no "deep etching" between conceiving and inherence (a point I take Ip15d itself to reinforce). In any case, Spinoza could have proved the point in Ip28s through Ip16, which would have more clearly kept a "deep etching" between Ip15 and Ip16 in place. Why didn't he, unless the divide isn't as deep as Carriero suggests?

⁵⁹ Della Rocca, *Spinoza* 67–8.

⁶⁰ S 428; G III/60 (I am grateful to Yitzhak Melamed for bringing the latter passage to my attention). More indirect evidence is found in Spinoza's occasional use of the language of emanative causation (Ip17s; Ep 43), which traditionally blurs the inheritance/productive divide. (For more on 17th century Dutch discussions of emanation, see Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, 244–252.) Gueroult is certainly correct that Spinoza would have found a formal, immanent, and emanative (to use the traditional terminology) account of causation more attractive than, say, purely efficient models (see especially Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, 296–299). Conceptual dependence monism explains why this is so.

⁶¹ To my mind, Della Rocca's most decisive instance of this interpretive strategy concerns IIp48–49 in Michael Della Rocca, "The Power of an Idea: Spinoza's Critique of Pure Will," *Noûs* 37 (2003). He has used this strategy in many papers, and it is a guiding thesis of his *Spinoza*.

⁶² In this formulation, x and y can range quite widely, including over types and tokens of objects, powers of objects, and relations between objects. This formula leaves open the possibility of *self-explanatory* non-identity, which presumably is the non-brute basis for the non-identity of attributes in Spinoza's system. Admittedly, the line between the *brute* and the *self-explanatory* is a thin one – but Spinoza clings firmly to this thin reed.

⁶³ Della Rocca argues in this vein in *Spinoza*, 65–8.

⁶⁴ The same point would apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to substance pluralists who simply assume the falsity of CET without argument. But stalemates over fundamental ontology ought not be satisfying to rationalists like Spinoza and Leibniz.

⁶⁵ G I/28; C 74. I follow Shirley's translation of "Desire" instead of Curley's "Lust." See Curley's helpful note of the translational difficulty of the Dutch *Begeerlijkhed* (C 73, n3).

⁶⁶ In contemporary discussions, this issue has taken two main forms, one semantic and one metaphysical. On the semantic front, questions are often raised about how well versions of monism can handle our everyday assertions that seem to imply commitments to forms of

pluralism. Replies are given in terms of various paraphrasing strategies, such as forms of adverbialism. (For instance, see Horgan and Matjaž, “Blobjectivism and Indirect Correspondence,” *Facta Philosophica* 2 (2000): 249–70; Horgan and Matjaž, *Austere Realism*; and John Hawthorne and Andrew Cortens, “Towards Ontological Nihilism,” *Philosophical Studies* 79 (1995)). On the metaphysical front, the debate often centers on how well monism squares with (allegedly) pluralist-implying theses, drawing on examples from contemporary physics, standard mereology, the metaphysics of change, metaphysical intuitions, and the possibility of sub-world intrinsic properties (For instance, see Rea, “How to Be an Eleatic Monist”; Schaffer, “Monism: The Priority of the Whole”; Sider, “Against Monism”).

⁶⁷ See Ep 8, written in 1663 by Simon de Vries on behalf of a small reading group of an early draft of the opening passages of the *Ethics*, and Ep 82, written in 1676 by Walter von Tschirnhaus.

⁶⁸ Johann Erdmann, *A History of Philosophy*, trans. Williston S. Hough, vol. II (London: Swan Sonneschein & Co., 1890), 90. Nor has this tension been lost on more recent interpreters, some of whom (in effect) emphasize the substance monism over, for instance, the plurality of attributes (e.g., Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 146–56), and others of whom (in effect) emphasize the plurality of attributes over the substance monism (e.g., Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, 51–55 and Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 28–30).

⁶⁹ They are “philosophical tools” for Spinoza in the same sense in which intensionality was a philosophical tool for developing a mind-body theory that maintained mental and physical causation without mental-physical interactionism (IIp6). In fact, as I’ve argued above, behind his well-recognized appeal to the tool of intensionality in IIp6 lies conceptual dependence monism itself.

⁷⁰ An entailment in which Descartes certainly believed (CSM 210; 298).

⁷¹ Margaret D. Wilson, “Review of Thomas Carson Mark’s *Spinoza’s Theory of Truth*,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1975): 24–5.

⁷² An important leader here as been Della Rocca himself, who also cites this wonderful quote from Wilson in *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*, 118.

⁷³ So far as I can tell, neither Spinoza nor Leibniz offered any explicit, independent proof for this belief about the contours of metaphysical perfection. But I don’t think Spinoza at least was particularly interested in offering such independent proofs, any more than he was interested in offering an independent proof of the PSR. Rather, he seems more concerned with spelling out the consequences of his basic presuppositions than motivating them on entirely system-neutral grounds.

⁷⁴ I certainly do not think Leibniz is without reply here. He would doubtlessly dispute that the perfection Spinoza claims to capture is sufficient to describe the perfection of our world, though he will need to be careful that he does not in turn beg the question against Spinoza by including premises that presuppose the existence of a good and transcendent God. But notice that now the discussion has moved to substantive philosophical grounds: are the structural requirements Spinoza asserts (and Leibniz sometimes echoes) sufficient to account for the world’s perfection? Surely adjudicating *that* question moves us well beyond complaints about definitional stipulation in Id3.

⁷⁵ I would like to thank Robert Merrihew Adams, Marian David, Michael Della Rocca, Alex Skiles, an especially helpful anonymous referee, and participants in the 2007 Oxford Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy for suggestions, comments, criticisms, and encouragements.

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