VIRTUAL MEREOLOGY: POWER, AFFECT AND RELATION IN SPINOZA
VIRTUAL MEREOLGY: POWER, AFFECT AND RELATION IN SPINOZA'S *ETHICS*

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

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McMaster University DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2015) Hamilton, Ontario (Philosophy)

TITLE: Virtual Mereology: Power, Affect and Relation in Spinoza's Ethics

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NUMBER OF PAGES: 158
LAY ABSTRACT

This thesis explores some basic questions: 1) what is the essence of existing things? 2) On what do such things, both causally and conceptually, depend for their existence? 3) How are these things basically related? 4) How can we come to know such things? The thesis enlists Baruch Spinoza’s Ethics to help find answers to these questions. In doing so it forges a novel interpretation of Spinoza’s mature philosophy by answering the questions thus: 1) The essence of any existing thing is the power to both be and act. 2) Any finite thing that exists depends for its existence on that which has the power to exist and act absolutely infinitely. 3) This dependence relation is mereological in nature; i.e. things are parts of the whole infinite power of existing. 4) We know these things by understanding our own particular power of activity.
ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers a novel interpretation of the metaphysical system Spinoza presents in his *Ethics* by considering it entirely in terms of power, affectivity and part/whole relations. I begin by arguing that the central concern of the *Ethics* is what I term ‘the problem of passivity’. Namely, if as part of nature, we are necessarily always subject to passive emotions, we could seemingly not become active to the point of adequate conception without ceasing to be a part of Nature. I argue that adequate conception, rather, requires a mereological conception of oneself as part of the whole of Nature. Since such understanding requires a conception of the whole in which these parts inhere, I explicate Spinoza’s conception of substance as that which enjoys an absolute and infinite power of existence. Inasmuch as this power of existence necessarily involves a coextensive power to act, I then argue that for Spinoza the whole of Nature is defined in terms of power. Consequently, the infinite modifications following from eternal substance ought to be considered as powerful parts of this potestative whole. Individual things are, then, to be defined as dispositional structures manifesting their capacities in interdependent relations. The thesis comes to explain this by using the Medieval mereological category of a ‘virtual whole’ (i.e. a unique particular power whose parts are inseparable from it, and only differentiated according to their own capacities). The dissertation concludes with a suggestion for further research on the possibilities that the presented theory of virtual mereology could have in relation to Spinoza’s ethico-political philosophy.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Spinoza thought that there was no better aid to human power than to combine with others with whom you find yourself in agreement. I have found this to be true. There have been many over the years that have enhanced my capacity to understand, many who have helped me become what I am. I would like to take this time to thank those people who have increased my joy in some way or another. I would first of all like to thank my wife Evelina, and our two sons, Jalen and Kenyon, without whom I would be lost; the word ‘love’ is woefully inadequate. I would like to thank my parents, David and Anita, and my siblings Christine, Dave, Joe and Mitch, for all of their love, guidance and friendship. I also would like to thank all of my extended family, but especially my Uncle John and Aunt Wynne for their friendship and support over the years. In the academic context I thank the many primary and secondary school teachers who frustratingly tried to get me to apply myself. I thank my first philosophical mentors, professors Theodore Plantinga and Craig Bartholomew, for their wisdom and encouragement. I thank all of the professors at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles with whom I had the privilege of taking seminars. Of them I would especially like to thank Dr. Mark Morelli for allowing me late admission into a program that proved so formative for me, and Dr. Brad Stone, whose exemplary scholarship and continued mentorship has meant so much. I would like to thank the Department of Philosophy at McMaster University. A special thanks is owed to both Kim Squissato and Rabia Awan, for all of your warmth and willingness to help with anything and everything over the years. Thank you to Joanna Zaslow and Scott Balasak with whom I shared both an office and many a good conversation. Thank you to Justin Morris for the pleasure of your friendship. Thank you to Dr. Barry Allen for sharing your hard-won insights in the three seminars in which I participated, and for being an example of what it is to engage in rigorous philosophical inquiry. Thank you to Dr. Mark Johnstone for your invaluable input as a committee member, and for teaching me what a great philosophy teacher looks like. Thank you to Dr. Brigitte Sassen for your work on the committee, but most of all for your friendship, humor and mentorship. And, finally, thank you to my supervisor Dr. Richard Arthur. Thank you for your invaluable insights that acted as a guide when I would become perplexed. Moreover, thank you for your example of how to be a serious scholar that is, at the same time, full of grace and kindness. It has been a pleasure to have worked on this project under your tutelage.
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I – The Problem of Passivity: Affect, Adequacy and Mereology

This chapter is concerned with working through ‘the problem of passivity’. Spinoza gives his readers an account of what constitutes both an adequate cause and an adequate idea. But given his accounts of both partial causality and the inadequate ideas attendant with such passive states, it is not clear that adequacy of either cause or idea is, in actuality, possible. If, pace IVp2-4, we are necessarily part of Nature as a whole and, as such a part, “necessarily always subject to passive emotions” (IVp4c), in what way can one be active to the point of adequacy in any given event? At what point can our determination to act stem from our understanding and to that extent be considered active rather than passive in a given encounter? If being a part of Nature necessarily involves partiality, and partiality inadequacy, in order to attain adequacy it would seem that one would need to cease to be a part. But this does not seem possible for (at least) two reasons: a) the transition from passivity to adequate activity would involve a substantial change (which for Spinoza is tantamount to the death/dissolution of an individual), or b) even if a substantial change were possible, this change would require a mode to have independent existence (which for Spinoza would be to conceive of it as a substance, which is absurd). Since neither of these alternatives appears to be viable, the present chapter will argue that the actuality of adequacy in both cause and idea is located in what I would like to call Spinoza’s virtual mereology. That is, given that an adequate idea is one which conceives something “equally in the part as in the whole” (IIp38), and inasmuch as this conception is owing to the nature of the thing so conceived (viz. as a part of the power of Deus sive Natura), adequacy in relation to both ideas and causality is owing to the understanding of the power of parts, both in relation to each other, and consequently, the whole of which they are a part. The chapter begins by setting up the problem of passivity by explaining Spinoza’s understanding of the natures of both affectivity and error. It will then turn toward explicating Spinoza’s understanding of the nature of passive transitions to higher or lower levels of activity. This discussion will serve as a proopædeutic to an explanation of common notions. Common notions will then be explained in terms of a mereological understanding of the agreement between (powerful) parts and, consequently, the (powerful) whole of which they are a part. The chapter will then conclude with a definition of virtual mereology and will give some preliminary indications of its application to other areas of Spinoza’s philosophy.

II – Power-Based Ontology and Dispositional Causality

This chapter gives an exposition of Spinoza’s identity of being with power. In it, I explain why Spinoza thinks that the ability to exist is power, why this power is absolutely and infinitely enjoyed by natura naturans alone, why this power necessarily involves the absolutely infinite power to act, and finally, what the nature of natura naturata or infinita res infinitis multis modus is as necessarily following from this infinite activity. Being and acting are the same in Deus sive Natura because God’s nature is defined by power (potestas), and power is itself understood as an ability or capacity to act (potestas or aptus). The identity of being with power supplies the ground for
considering modes as the infinite affections of God’s power of acting. As expressions of God’s absolutely infinite power, modes are just modicums or parts of the substantial power in which they inhere. The formal essence of modes is, therefore, defined by their intrinsic capacity to have an effect. The effect modes actually have as durational existents is, then, nothing other than the active actuality of their formal essence engaged in interdependent affective relations. Thus, in the same way that God is essentially defined by Its ability to exist and act, so too are modes so defined. The difference between substance and modes is that the former can only affect (affectio) and not itself suffer affects (affectus), while the latter has the limited capacity for both. If all of this is granted, then it seems to me that a dispositional account is the best candidate for thinking of causality in relation to Spinoza’s ontology. Insofar as natura naturans just is an absolutely infinite power to exist, and furthermore, inasmuch as this absolutely infinite power of existence necessarily involves the power to act solis suae naturae legibus, every effect of this Cause will itself be a causal power whose disposition is interdependent on every other and, consequently whose manifestations will occur in relation to every other such effect (i.e. affection or modification). Anything exists only insofar as it can, and insofar as it can exist, what it is, is nothing other than its power or disposition to do whatever it can while it endures. Thus, when Spinoza declares that we “do not know what the body can do, or what can be deduced solely from a consideration of its nature,” (IIIP2s) that it can act, and that it is nothing other than this ability, is a foregone conclusion.

III – The Metaphysics of Mixture: A Theory of Virtual Mereology

The purpose of this chapter is to revisit the difficult problem in Spinoza’s metaphysics of the nature of the existence of concrete individuals as depending on, inhering in, and being properties of absolutely infinite substance. The explanation will proceed by means of a problem. The problem for Spinoza is akin to the mereological problem of mixtures and their parts that Medieval philosophers inherited from Aristotle. The problem is as follows: on the one hand, if the parts of a mixture exist as individuated particulars they will not, in actuality, have been combined into the whole, but will, rather, retain their separate existence. In this case, a mixture (or whole) cannot be said to exist at all, for there will rather exist a heap of indivisible and disjoint autonomous parts juxtaposed one to another. Ontologically speaking, this entails substance pluralism. On the other hand, if the parts of a mixture homogeneously combine, they will cease to be individual existents in the event of their total fusion. In this case, there will still be no whole (or mixture) on account of the parts ceasing to be in the process of intermingling and there will, rather, exist a single, unified, undifferentiated particular. Ontologically speaking, this entails an Eleatic or acosmic substance monism. I will argue that Spinoza’s metaphysics can cross this hurdle if it is understood through a theory of virtual mereology. This involves interpreting Spinoza’s metaphysics by means of an extension of the Medieval mereological concept of a virtual whole and its parts in the first place and, additionally, an extension of the Stoic concept of total blending. By a virtual whole I understand a unique, particular power that is neither composed out of nor actually divisible into proper parts. It is a totally blended mixture whose parts are distinct properties (propria) of the whole in which they inhere. Since this whole is itself an absolutely infinite power to both be and act, the parts inhering in it will themselves be powers to both be and act.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Spinoza’s Works:

CM – *Metaphysical Thoughts* (*Cogitata Metaphysica*)
E – *Ethics* (*Ethica*)
Ep – *Letters* (*Epistolae*)
KV – *Short Treatise* (*Korte Verhandeling*)
TIE – *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*)
TP – *Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Politicus*)
TTP – *Theological-Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*)
Introduction

His notion of a single substance is that ens realissimum, in which everything that constitutes truth, intimacy, and existence is united intus and radicaliter; it is that substance alone through which all things can be conceived; and in all the appearances of individual things, as modifications of the supreme, eternal intimate existence, these attributes are only conceivable insofar as they are of its nature and insofar as that single, dynamic existence continually dwells in them. Do not make this being into an abstract concept! This being alone exists; I exist through it, only insofar as I blossom like a small branch on this eternal and unending root of the tree of life. (…) What should God mean to you, however, if he is not in you, and if you do not feel and taste his existence in an infinitely intimate way, and if he does not also enjoy his own being in you as one part of his thousand million parts?

This is an excerpt of a letter written by Johann Gottfried Herder to one Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi right before the “Pantheism Controversy” between the latter and Moses Mendelssohn became public in 1785. The thoroughly consistent immanent ontology and theology of Spinoza, an ontology that identified spirit or mind with matter, was the object of a debate that informed the reception of Spinoza’s philosophy to such an extent that Hegel was later inclined to comment that “the atheism, and as a further charge, the pantheism of the system has formed the commonest ground of accusation. These cries are because of Spinoza’s conception of God as substance, and substance only.” Contrary to Herder’s pleading, what this involves according to Hegel is a renunciation of “all that is determinate and particular”. This was neither the first nor the last accusation of Spinoza’s apparent ‘acosmism’. Indeed, prior to the Pantheism Controversy it was Pierre Bayle who, in

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2 G.W.F. Hegel, Encyclopaedia, §151.
3 G.W.F. Hegel, Philosophy of History II.1.A2 “Spinoza” … in §151 of his Encyclopedia Hegel repeats his insistence that Spinoza’s system involves an ‘Acosmism’ by saying that “finite things and the world as a whole are denied all truth”
1697, colored the reception of Spinoza’s philosophy with his rather uncritical second-hand reading of Spinoza in his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. In his entry on Spinoza, Bayle levels a similar complaint to Hegel’s, namely that since all particulars are indistinctly absorbed into the one substance, the existence of particulars is impossible. Bayle maintains, for example, that when any particular denies something, affirms something, or wants something according to this theory, it is God who denies, wants, affirms; and consequently all the denominations that result from the thoughts of all men are properly and physically to be ascribed to God. From which it follows that God hates and loves, denies and affirms the same thing at the same time … It must be the case in Spinoza’s system that they belong to that single and indivisible substance called God. It is God then who, at the same time, forms an act of will and does not form an act of will with regard to the same object. Two contradictory terms are then true of him, which is the overthrow of the first principles of metaphysics.4

In opposition to either Bayle or Hegel, Herder seems to think that there is nothing problematic about Spinoza’s asserting both the absolute existence of substance and the relative existence of its modes. Indeed, Herder appears to think that the latter would be impossible without the former. What is interesting, and is, furthermore, the point of departure for the present dissertation, is Herder’s formulation of modal existence “as one part of his (viz. God’s) thousand million parts.” I think this is precisely the way that one ought to think of the reality of the many finite, individual modes in relation to the one, infinite substance: as parts of a whole.

The present dissertation is, therefore, interested in investigating and articulating Spinoza’s latent mereological theory. That such a purported theory

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remains merely latent within Spinoza’s philosophy may have contributed to the sparse treatment the topic has received in the extant secondary literature.\textsuperscript{5} Despite this paucity, I do not think I am remiss in maintaining that, a) Spinoza’s philosophy contains quite a robust and complex mereological theory,\textsuperscript{6} b) the articulation of such a theory will help to improve the understanding of Spinoza’s system generally, and of his views on the status of individual things specifically, and c) understanding this aspect of Spinoza’s metaphysics will have myriad implications for understanding other areas, not least of which is the social, political and moral philosophy toward which Spinoza’s own metaphysical researches ultimately aimed.

There has been some opposition to undertaking a mereological investigation of Spinoza’s metaphysics. In his treatment of substance and modes, H.F. Hallet scoffs at the enterprise and rather considers that “the notion, sometimes entertained, that Spinoza’s substance is a totum of which its modes are the parts, is too jejune to merit refutation.”\textsuperscript{7} While it refrains from such condescension, and is at least willing to entertain the possibility that substance constitutes a whole of which


\textsuperscript{6}I take Melamed seriously when, in the abstract to his paper on the topic, he attests that, “Mereology and the concept of part has a central role in Spinoza’s metaphysics and is closely related to many of his key notions, such as substance, Extension, power, infinity, infinite modes, parallelism, adequacy and inadequacy of ideas, individuals, and singular things \textit{[res singulares]}. Yet, the topic has hardly been discussed in the existing literature.” (from the abstract to his paper entitled “Spinoza’s Mereology” given at the Central European University \textit{http://philosophy.ceu.hu/events/2012-11-28/yitzhak-melamed-johns-hopkins-university-spinozas-mereology} )

the modes are parts, Ghislain Guigon’s treatment of mereology in relation to Spinoza results in the conclusion that mereological formulas are merely beings of reason (entia rationis) enlisted by Spinoza for heuristic purposes.\(^8\) Guigon’s position is predicated on two basic theses: a) Spinoza affirms that substance is prior to its affections (Elp1),\(^9\) b) Spinoza maintains the mereological view that parts are prior to the wholes they compose.\(^10\) So, by virtue of, e.g. Spinoza’s vacuum argument in Ip15s, or the ‘Letter on the Infinite’ (Ep12), Guigon concludes that Spinoza does not, and could not, hold that substance constitutes a whole posterior to the parts composing it. Since this would make Spinoza a substance pluralist, it would seem that one could only agree with Guigon’s conclusion that Spinoza’s uses of mereological terms and formulas are indeed simply heuristic beings of reason. In relation to the current literature on monism and pluralism, then, Spinoza subscribes neither to priority monism, nor existence monism, nor priority pluralism, but does subscribe to a quasi existence pluralism and weak priority monism of sorts.\(^11\) Since this, however, is tantamount to Spinoza’s preferred understanding of substance monism, Guigon simply concludes that this appellation is yet warranted and scholarship ought to be conducted as usual. While I think Guigon’s treatment is more or less correct, I do not, for all of that, think that a real (as opposed to nominal)
mereology is impossible within Spinoza’s philosophical system. On the contrary, I think that understanding Spinoza as holding a real (albeit latent) mereological theory is essential to reaching an adequate understanding of his mature philosophical system; one simply needs to consider a different mereological concept in relation to Spinoza’s system.

Near the conclusion to his letter to Oldenburg, Spinoza maintains that “every body, in so far as it exists as modified in a definite way, must be considered as a part of the whole universe and must agree with the whole and cohere with the other parts. Now since the nature of the universe ... is not limited, but is absolutely infinite, its parts are modified by the nature of this infinite potency in infinite ways and are compelled to undergo infinite variations” (Ep32). I do not think this mereological formulation is a mere being of reason, but an adequate understanding of the whole of nature, precisely because it is not understood to be the result of an integral composition of parts, but an infinite power whose parts are modifications of this infinite, potestative whole.

There is, then, another mereological category that merits consideration in relation to Spinoza’s philosophy: the Medieval category of a virtual (virtualis) or potestative (potestativus) whole and its parts. By the term ‘virtual whole’ I understand a unique, particular power that is neither composed out of nor divisible into proper parts. It is neither the sum of its parts, nor is it something other than its

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12 So, for example, if Guigon is correct, there is still no sufficient reason given for squaring the seeming opposition between existence pluralism (of modes) and priority monism (of substance). The virtual mereological theory I will propose is intent on providing this sufficient reason.

parts. Rather, it is itself a power expressing itself in (infinitely) many ways through different regions of itself. Its parts are, therefore, themselves powers that are inseparable from the whole within which they function and are only distinguishable within it by their capacities to act in relation to every other such part.\(^{14}\) When Spinoza maintains, e.g., that “the power whereby each single thing, and consequently man, preserves its own being is the very power of God, or Nature ... the power of man in so far as it is explicated through his actual essence is part of the infinite power of God, or Nature” (IVp4d), I do not think that this mereological conception could be considered a mere entia rationis. Rather, I understand him to mean that individual things are parts of the virtual whole that is God or Nature (Ip18d; Ip34d; IIIp7d; IVp24d). Indeed, as I come to argue, it would be impossible to form an adequate idea tout court without an appeal to virtual mereology so construed. The possibility of forming an adequate idea is, according to Spinoza, predicated on the conception of something that is, “common to all things and (is) equally in the part as in the whole” (IIp38d; mine). How could mereological formulas be a mere being of reason for Spinoza when he uses them to formulate the principle means for having adequate ideas? I say they could not.

The dissertation is structured as follows. It begins by arguing that the central concern of the Ethics is what I term ‘the problem of passivity'; i.e., if as part of nature we are necessarily always subject to passive emotions, it would seem that we could

\(^{14}\) See, again, Andrew Arlig’s "Medieval Mereology." Whereas an integral whole is a collection or composition of separable (least) parts, and a universal whole is an abstract denomination or general term (genera) under which other individuals fall (species), a virtual whole is a unique particular whose parts are inseparable from it, yet distinguished by the different powers it displays or functions it is able to perform (§2.1-2.3).
not become active to the point of adequate conception without ceasing to be a part of Nature. I argue that, far from requiring that one conceive of oneself in isolation, adequate conception rather requires a mereological conception of oneself as part of the whole of Nature. Since such understanding requires a conception of the whole in which these parts inhere, I move to an explication of Spinoza’s conception of substance as that which enjoys an absolute and infinite power of existence.

Inasmuch as this power of existence necessarily involves a coextensive power to act, I argue that for Spinoza the whole of Nature is defined in terms of power, and that, consequently, the infinite modifications following from eternal substance ought to be considered as powerful parts of this potestative whole; i.e., individual things are themselves to be defined as dispositional structures manifesting their capacities in interdependent relations. However, as it is not clear how something can both be a particular power and a part, I elucidate the process of individuation by enlisting the Medieval mereological category of a ‘virtual whole’ as an explanatory aid (i.e. a unique particular power whose parts are inseparable from it, and only differentiated according to their own capacities). I argue that an individual is rather like an ingredient in a totally blended mixture, and that while it is both composed out of other individuals and composes others still, it remains the particular power of activity defining it by virtue of the relations constituting it. The dissertation concludes with some remarks on the many ways in which this theory of virtual mereology could help us better understand Spinoza’s ethico-political philosophy.
I

The Problem of Passivity: Affect, Adequacy and Mereology

If there are antecedent causes for everything that happens, then everything happens within a closely knit web of natural connections. If this is so, then necessity causes everything. And if this is true there is nothing in our power. There is, however, something in our power.

- Cicero, On Fate

Infinitely Surpassed

On the eve of the second Anglo-Dutch War, Spinoza, responding to a letter from Henry Oldenburg, is happy to hear of the health and well-being of the philosophers of the Royal Society, and, though manifestly averse to the war and its motivations, nevertheless maintains that, “for my part, these troubles move me neither to laughter nor again to tears, but rather to philosophizing, and to a closer observation of human nature” (Ep30).\(^{15}\) While we may admire Spinoza’s rather Stoic resolve, or chide him for being so dispassionate, it would be prudent to heed his reason for being moved to philosophize. “For I do not think it right,” Spinoza continues, “to laugh at nature, and far less to grieve over it, reflecting that men, like all else, are

only a part of nature, and that I do not know how each part of nature harmonises with the whole, and how it coheres with other parts” (Ep30). It appears that the motivation to philosophize is related, for Spinoza at least, to a mereological quandary that Oldenburg, in his response to ‘The Esteemed B.d.S,’ articulates precisely. Incredulous toward Spinoza’s professed ignorance of the matter, or perhaps noting it as the quandary Spinoza’s philosophizing is in the midst of striving to resolve, Oldenburg beseeches Spinoza “to cast light on the difficult question as to how each part of Nature accords with its whole, and the manner of its coherence with other parts” (Ep31). This was certainly a particularly vexed question for proponents of the mechanical or corpuscularian philosophy, not to mention the history of philosophy more generally, so Spinoza obliges his friends’ request, and

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16 It must be stated that Oldenburg, joining with Mr. Boyle in sending his greetings in this letter, must have had the corpuscularian philosophy of Boyle in mind when asking this question. For, however “enormously comprehensive” the principles of matter and motion, the mechanical philosophy could not, without recourse to a spurious notion of God or Nature, sufficiently account for either the forces constituting the cohesion of bodies both large and small (i.e. either in-themselves or with another), or the capacity of matter to both move and be moved (i.e. there is no possible explanation for the origination of either principle, nor their possible relational interaction). Thus, when Boyle maintains, e.g., that chemical ingredients cannot provide “fundamental and satisfactory” explanations for phenomena, the reasons he provides are equally applicable to the two principles of the mechanical philosophy. If chemical explanations are insufficient on the grounds that “the chemical ingredient itself must owe its qualities to the union of invisibly small particles in a suitable size, shape, motion or rest, and texture, and all of these are merely mechanical features of gathered-together corpuscles,” he can only be guilty of the very charge of hearkening to the occult qualities the corpuscularian philosophy was meant to banish from consideration. For how are corpuscles constituted such that they actually ‘gather together’? Boyle will wish to say that, “the corpuscularians will show that the qualities of that ingredient flow from its structure and the mechanical qualities of the corpuscles it is made up of,” but surely this constitutes the avoidance of an explanation, or recourse to the very occult qualities he sought to avoid. To say that the qualities of ingredients (i.e. gathered-together corpuscles) flows from the structural relation of those component parts, and that each part owes its structure to the ‘mechanical qualities’ that make them up, is to say nothing other than, ‘the mechanical qualities of x, are constituted by mechanical qualities.’ A sufficient reason for bodies and motion, as both Spinoza, and especially Leibniz after him, clearly and perspicuously realized could not rely on the alleged structure of those simple bodies or least parts, but must have recourse to dispositions, powers or forces upon which they depend. This will be dealt with more extensively in the second chapter. (From Robert Boyle, The Grounds for and Excellence of the Corpuscularian or Mechanical Philosophy, translated and edited by Jonathan Bennett (Copyright 2010-2015) pp.3,7,8,11 respectively. http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdf/boylece.pdf
returns a letter articulating his "belief that each part of Nature accords with the whole and coheres with other parts" (Ep32).

Before setting out to give his account of the agreement\(^\text{17}\) of Nature’s parts with one another and with the whole of which they are a part, Spinoza provides a proviso, in keeping with his previously stated aversion to prejudice, opinion and the tyranny such things instigate, as expressed in Ep30. “I do not attribute to Nature,” says Spinoza, “beauty, ugliness, order or confusion. It is only with respect to the imagination that things can be said to be beautiful, ugly, well-ordered or confused” (Ep32). This must be seen to be in direct opposition to the Platonic account to which ‘Master Boyle’ gives his assent by submitting that “I think it was Plato who said that the world is God’s epistle written to mankind (and he could have added, in line with another saying of his, that it was written in mathematical letters); so what is happening when men offer physical explanations of the parts and system of the world is rather like (I think) what happens when men conjecturally develop several different keys to enable us to understand a document written in code”.\(^\text{18}\) The decoding enterprise that the mechanical philosophy attests to having successfully achieved is dismissed by Spinoza as being predicated on a product of the imagination. The decoding of the document of nature can only run according to the image-idea of what constitutes an ideal or model document and, correlatively, what

\(^{17}\) By ‘agreement’ I understand Spinoza to mean the compatibility of affective activity and reactivity that exists amongst the parts of the whole of Nature. This will be developed in later chapters.

\(^{18}\) Ibid, p.11. In Plato’s Timaeus, the eponymous expert in astronomy and physics asks, “Has it always existed? Was there no origin from which it came to be? Or did it come to be and take its start from some origin? It has come to be (...) Which of the two models did the maker use when he fashioned it? Was it the one that does not change and stays the same, or the one that has come to be? (...) Now surely it’s clear to all that it was the eternal model he looked at (...) it is the work of craft, modeled after that which is changeless…” (28a)
counts as an ideal or model interpretation of that document. Not only does this idea involve a conception of Nature as the completed product of a Deity acting for an end, it also involves the conception of Nature as fitted according to a transcendent, teleological order of perfection. Rather than being adequate to reality, Spinoza considers such ideas as products of an imagination beholden to passive desires. Humans, thinks Spinoza, “are wont to form general ideas both of natural phenomena and of artifacts, and these they regard as models, and they believe that Nature (which they consider does nothing without an end in view) looks to these ideas and holds them before herself as models” (IVpreface). With this conception in place, we conceive of the parts of nature in the same way we would the cogs of a machine that ought to function a certain way (viz. integrally) in order for the whole to achieve its intended end. Spinoza’s dismissal of such a view is based on his onto-theological understanding of the coextension of God’s being and acting. Since God “does not exist for an end, so he does not act for an end” (ibid). The coherence of parts with each other and the whole of Nature could not, at the outset, be thought of as owing to a pre-established harmony according to final causes, but to a relativity of the agreement of parts in their relations of affection.19 And yet, rather than offering a solution to the ‘troubles’ instigated by the passions, the mechanical philosopher’s understanding, or rather lack of understanding, of the part-whole relation seems to condemn the individual to an enslavement to the passions without hope of emancipation.

19 As we will come to see, the part-whole relation for Spinoza cannot be thought in terms of an ‘integral whole,’ i.e. a whole composed of proper parts whose summary relation constitutes the individual (in this case, the universe).
According to Spinoza, the problem is that like the worm in the blood,\(^{20}\) while we are “living in our part of the universe,” we will have “no idea as to how all the parts are modified by the overall nature of the blood and compelled to mutual adaptation as the overall nature of the blood requires, so as to agree with one another in a definite relation” (Ep32). Inasmuch as we are “part of the whole of Nature whose order we follow,” we are “infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes” (IVAppendix,32) and consequently have only a partial understanding of both ourselves and the things constantly affecting us. That is, our particularity, understood in terms of parthood, seems to involve partiality and, insofar as partiality only involves a fragmentary understanding of ourselves and the things affecting us, it would appear that we are not entitled to an impartial, holistic understanding. Yet Spinoza believes that our understanding of the agreement of things with our nature is an endeavor of “the better part of us” and is necessarily “in harmony with the order of the whole of Nature” (ibid; IVp30, 31). The question is, how do we come to a knowledge of this ‘better part of us’ (viz. conatus intelligendi) if we are nothing but parts of Nature, and as such, passive in our ideas of affections? From whence adequate activity?

This is, of course, a vexed question in the literature on Spinoza. In his Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza, Deleuze relates, somewhat radically, that, “Spinoza’s philosophy does not fix itself in God, or find its natural starting point in God. The conditions in which we have ideas seem to condemn us to having only inadequate ones, and the conditions in which we are affected seem to condemn us to

\(^{20}\) ‘Worm in the blood’ refers to the example Spinoza uses in Ep. 32 to explain both the agreement of parts with one another in the whole and our natural state of ignorance regarding these relations.
experience only passive affections.”21 I think this is basically right. It is a mistake to begin reading the Ethics without fully appreciating the problem with which Spinoza is occupied: the problem of passivity. With the Ethics Spinoza does not change the trajectory of his earlier Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect. In a manner reminiscent of Qohileth, Spinoza, in this earlier work, decries the vanity of our diurnal pursuits, the “hollowness and futility that is ordinarily encountered in everyday life,’ and wonders, ‘whether, in fact, there was something whose discovery and acquisition would afford (...) a continuous and supreme joy to all eternity” (TIE,1). Absent such a something, the influence of affecting bodies causes only very inconstant, ephemeral states of pain or pleasure, joy or sorrow and the desires attendant with each. Not possibly able to enjoy enduring possession of those things that provide a modicum of happiness, or dispossession of those instilling sadness, our pursuits of possessing or dispossessing invariably result in our being possessed or dispossessed by the very things we seek to have or avoid having. I am happy when a thing with which I have been pleasurably affected reciprocates my affection, dejected when that same thing disinclines. And should an object that I love come to destruction, “a profound depression” (TIE,5) will ensue, for I have failed to obtain the object of my desire and am disappointed.22 At the mercy of the “common order of nature” (ElVp4c) whose powers infinitely surpass my own (ElVp3d), I do not

21 Gilles Deleuze, Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza (New York: Zone Books, 1994), p.273. Deleuze goes on to say that, "as long as we are affected by passions we have not come into full possession of our power of action. But joyful passions lead us closer to this power, that is, increase or help it; sad passions distance us from it, that is, diminish or hinder it. The primary question of the Ethics is thus: What must we do in order to be affected by a maximum of joyful passions? Nature does not favor us in this respect." Marx W. Wartofsky argues for a similar view in his article "Nature, Number and Individuals: Motive and Method in Spinoza's Philosophy," (Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy, 20:1-4: 457-79; pp.461-3).
22 See Epictetus, Enchiridion 2.
know, and am alienated from, my power of action, inundated as I am by the ceaseless flow of passions. Insofar as we are beholden to external affects, we are in a state of internal flux, dominated as we are by those things over which we feign mastery. But, if our daily pursuits of "riches, honour, and sensual pleasure," (TIE,3) proves "a vanity and a chasing after the wind,"\textsuperscript{23} what could possibly provide a secure anchor in such a tempest?\textsuperscript{24} For Spinoza, it is, “the knowledge of the union which the mind has with the whole of Nature” (TIE,13).

Born and raised in captivity or enslavement (i.e. to the passions), we are no more warranted in hoping for a savior to free us from our abject state than we are in thinking our initial condition is one involving a privation of the good that ought to be in us (\textit{privatio boni}\textsuperscript{25}). Spinoza’s critique of evil does not permit a transcendence from our perfection nor, consequently, does it require or permit a transcendent redemption. What then will cause us to transition out of our abject state? In his essay, “Transcending Mere Survival: From \textit{Conatus} to \textit{Conatus Intelligendi},” Yirmiyahu Yovel explains that this problem stems in part from Spinoza’s, “need to derive \textit{conatus intelligendi} from the original \textit{conatus} as a separate issue – and his relying on a complex argument, whose stages are not all clear and distinct, presupposing that \textit{ratio} has already arisen in the mind in some other way (through

\textsuperscript{23} Ecclesiastes, 1:14 (New Revised Standard Version)

\textsuperscript{24} Spinoza puts the matter quite eloquently in the scholium to the last proposition of Part III: “From this (i.e. the preceding account of the emotions) it is clear that we are in many respects at the mercy of external causes and are tossed about like the waves of the sea when driven by contrary winds, unsure of the outcome of our fate” (EIIIp59s; brackets mine).

\textsuperscript{25} See Augustine, \textit{Confessions}, III.7.
‘common notions’).”\textsuperscript{26} Indeed, if it is the common notions that are the engine motivating and animating the adequate understanding of ourselves as parts of the infinite whole, then it would be of great benefit to come to an understanding of just what a ‘common notion’ is and how it functions. This is easier said than done. It is, firstly, mysterious how we come into possession of a common notion and, secondly, difficult to understand its nature and function. If we are not able to get clear on this however, we may have to agree with Yovel who in the same essay later submits that, “I take Spinozistic (and Hegelian) belief in absolute rational knowledge to be dogmatic and also dominated by the imagination (i.e. as an illusion), and, in this way, it is another form of self-alienated reason.”\textsuperscript{27} While I think Yovel is wrong to equate Spinoza’s alleged ‘absolute knowing’ with Hegel’s, the worry that Spinoza achieves adequate understanding by means of a quasi-Humean extension of the imagination is a legitimate one. If one becomes active in either cause or understanding through imaginative extension, and if one is “passive only to the extent that we form mental images (imaginatur; IIIp56d; IIp17s), then Yovel would, of necessity, be correct in believing Spinoza’s entire system to be itself predicated on error or illusion. In order to understand why this is not the case, we must return to the mereological quandary Oldenburg sets before Spinoza.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, p.57.
On Passion: Affection and Expression

*Nos corpus quoddam multis modis affici sentimus:* “We feel a certain body affected in various ways” (*EII*ax.4). According to Spinoza, the feeling of a body multifariously affected is the original power of a mind. Itself a modification, the body, so long as it endures, undergoes ceaseless modifications. This is the problem of passivity *in nuce*. Whatever the body is, it appears to be something capable of suffering affects. Deleuze names this the “power of suffering” and asks the question that occupies us at present: “can they (finite modes) attain to active affections, and if so, how?”

Affection is prior in nature, existentially fundamental. We find ourselves, originally, in states of affection (*status affectionis*) and come to understand that we exist and persist by, in, and through affective relations. The feeling of a body affected in many ways is the passive registration of the modification of the body and the dispositional states such modifications involve. To be affected is to become disposed in a certain way, to have a dispositional state-change according to the thing affecting and the thing being affected.

We feel *a certain body* to be affected in various ways. However axiomatic this is, it does not, for us, in a concrete situation of affection, involve an adequate understanding of the *corpus quoddam* involved in an affective event. On the contrary, since “that which constitutes the actual essence of the human mind, is nothing other than the idea of some actually existing single thing,” *IIp*11), we only have a confused, mutilated knowledge of the body. Why is this the case? It is on account of the body postulated as being, “composed of very many individual parts of

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different natures, each of which is extremely complex" (IIp13pos.1). The complexity of the body is, however, postulated precisely on account of the qualitative variety of states the body assumes by virtue of the modifications it undergoes through its multifarious affective relations. Since the object of the idea constituting the mind is the body, the mind will itself, consequently, or rather simultaneously, be composed of very many ideas in accordance with the very many states the body assumes (IIp15d).29 The certain body we feel affected is not simple, but multiple, complex, legion.30 The multiplicity of, “ideas of the affections of a body” (IIp13d) are not combined in, or synthesized by, a unified self-consciousness, but rather, being merely perceptions of a body as actually existing (IIp19d), remain multiple in the mind’s knowledge of itself through the object of its idea (IIp23). The mind knows itself to the degree it perceives affections of a certain body, but in its passivity of perceiving can only have a very fragmentary, mutilated knowledge of itself and, consequently, the body (IIp24d). In the scholium to IIp13 Spinoza maintains that,

29 In saying that the “object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body” (IIp13) Spinoza means the following: insofar as a mind exists, its existence is predicated on the idea it has of a definite and determinate object, but conversely, insofar as a definite and determinate object exists it has an idea coextensive with its definiteness and determinateness. Since bodies don’t have ideas, it is the mind that has the idea of the body and it is this idea that constitutes a particular mind.

30 In his *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza’s ‘Ethics’* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), Edwin Curley relates that “bodies vary enormously in their complexity: composite bodies of the first degree of complexity may be composed only of the simplest possible bodies; but the degrees of complexity range to infinity, and the human body is extremely complex. This gives it the capacity to affect other bodies in a wide variety of ways, but also the capacity to be affected by other bodies in a wide variety of ways. These various capacities of the human body to affect and be affected are rigorously correlated with the capacities of the human mind to know (...) what Spinoza wishes chiefly to emphasize is that the mind’s knowledge of other things – its knowledge of bodies other than its own in sense perception, its memory of the past, its knowledge of itself, its knowledge of the common properties of all material objects, even its knowledge of the essence of God – all of these depend on the fact that it first has knowledge of its own body (...) It is hard to see how any philosopher could give a greater priority to knowledge of the body than Spinoza has (...) If the mind’s knowledge of external bodies, and of itself, is inadequate and confused, this is fundamentally because its knowledge of the parts of its own body is inadequate and confused.” (p.77) This last point is paramount for with it, we do not yet have the capacity to formulate the adequate idea(s) of what a body is and, consequently, what it can do.
“no one can understand this union (i.e. of mind and body) adequately or distinctly unless he first gains adequate knowledge of the nature of our body.” In the scholium of IIIp2s Spinoza locates the adequate understanding of the body, both our own and others, in terms of capacities, and those according to “the laws of its own nature.” Now we can, and indeed do as a matter of course, affirm our body’s force of existing in the event of its being affected. The problem is that we do not know the capacities of our own body, those of others, nor our the capacities that result from our combination with them, when we merely feel a certain body affected (IIp24-31); indeed, we do not know the nature, or essence, of that certain body at all. It is not at all clear, then, how an adequate idea of the body can arise while the body is necessarily “subject to passive states (passionibus)” (IIIp1c). If we are to discover the power of activity that a certain body has (i.e. its conatus or actualem essentiam), it will be necessary to investigate just what passionibus involves.

We feel a certain body to be affected in various ways. The feeling of our being affected is the attending to the way in which our body has combined with another in a given encounter (IIp16). However, both the event of being affected (affectio) and the emotional response (affectus) to the affective event require that the body have a capacity for affection. Spinoza variously calls this capacity conatus, desire, or actual essence, but it amounts to the same thing: the ability of a thing to persist in its own being (IIIp6). The endeavor of anything to persist in its own being does not require that thing develop an adequate idea of its union with the whole of nature. At this level our actions, that is, our mental decisions in reaction to the affects we feel in the body, “are nothing more than the appetites themselves, varying therefore according
to the varying disposition of the body” (IIIp2s). Being affected in various ways involves the structural power or dispositional capacity to suffer affects and, reciprocally manifest effects in relation to them. That is, being affected involves the increase, decrease, or continued equilibrium of the body's power of activity (i.e. its potentia; IIId3, pos.1; IIIgen.def.). While the mind’s capacity to perceive “a great many things” varies “in proportion to the variety of states which its body can assume” (IIp14), the variety of states a body can assume depends on the dispositional structure of the whole body in relation to every other body (i.e. every other dispositional structure; IIp16). Now, the question as to whether a body itself is anything other than an alteration of the state of the whole universe (facies totius universalis) will have to be decided upon later. For now it is sufficient to be aware that a body is defined by its power or capacity for modification, and that insofar as it has, minimally, the power to suffer affects. While we do not yet have access to the adequate idea of its dispositional structure, we can yet affirm this conatus through the variety of ideas the mind forms in conjunction with the body's affective states. What further complicates our adequate understanding of ourselves, our capacity to act, is just what is involved in an affective event: external bodies. Within any affective encounter both the body affected and the affecting body are involved. While within an encounter we express, “the constitution of our own body more than the nature of external bodies” (IIp16c2), insofar as this expression is reactive, it remains the case that it is an inadequate expression of one’s actual essence. We are only partially expressive, partially causal, because the idea we form involves the power of our body in comparison to the affecting body (IVp5). And yet the event of
affection is eventful precisely because it necessarily involves the interpenetration of the dispositional capacities of the affected and affecting bodies (IIp28d).

We feel a body to be affected in various ways. The variety of states to which a body can be disposed is proportionate to both the disposition of the body and its relations with others (both internally and externally; IIp24d; IIp29s). The increase or decrease of a body’s power of activity involve a part or parts of the body, and consequently the whole body will in some way increase or decrease its power of activity. This increase or decrease only occurs insofar as the body’s power of activity is affected by, and compared with, the power of activity of external bodies (IIp16; IIp28d). The virtually infinite variety of states to which the body can transition is owing to, 1) the complex capacities of the body affected, 2) the complex capacities of the affecting bodies, 3) the perpetuity and reciprocity of dispositional state changes of every such capacity through spacetime. When Spinoza proposes that “there are as many kinds of pleasure, pain, desire and consequently of every emotion that is compounded of these or of every emotion that is derived from these as there are kinds of objects by which we are affected,” (IIIp56) implied is an infinite field of affective encounters. It is not hyperbolic for Spinoza to maintain, therefore, that our power is “very limited and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes” (IVapp.32). The body we feel to be affected is necessarily complicated by the affections of every other body and is, consequently, implicated in the affections every other body feels (IIIp56d). This is what makes the explication of the nature of
both our body and external bodies so fraught with the possibility of error. 31 We are ignorant of causes and only feel effects, a great variety of complex effects. The ideas of the affections of the body do not involve adequate ideas of the body precisely because these ideas do not "adequately express the nature of the body" (IIp29d).

Thus, while feeling is necessarily expressive, but it does not necessarily involve adequate expression.

*We feel* a certain body to be affected in various ways. By "emotion" Spinoza understands "the affections of the body by which the body's power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections" (IIIId3). The affirmation of the basic dispositional nature of the body, discovered in conjunction with the various external bodies affecting it and altering its states, simultaneously involves the formation of ideas in proportion to the variety of states the body assumes. 32 That is, the suffering of any affect necessarily involves at least an expression of the particular disposition of the body affected. When Spinoza proposes that, "any emotion of one individual differs from the emotion of another to the extent that the essence of the one individual differs from the essence

31 In his essay, "The Conatus and the Mutual Relationship Between Active and Passive Affects in Spinoza," Michael Schrijvers maintains that since, "the affections of the body always depend upon the nature of two bodies, namely the affected and the affecting bodies, the ideas of its (viz. the body's) affections imply thereby a confusion of the two bodies" (in *Ethica III: Desire and Affect: Spinoza as Psychologist*, p.64; brackets mine).

32 Although this will be treated more extensively in the following chapters, it is important to make a note on the term 'simultaneous' used here. Spinoza typically uses this term in an *ontological*, as opposed to a *temporal or spatial*, sense. For example, when Spinoza states, "mental decision on the one hand, and the appetite and physical state of the body on the other hand, are simultaneous in nature," he simply means that they are "one and the same thing" (IIIp2s). That is, while they are formally distinct, there does not exist a numerical distinction between body and mind any more than there exists a numerical distinction between God and God's acts (Ip38), or the attributes of substance (Ip10s). Simultaneity is a term Spinoza uses to explicate identity in distinction. Schelling makes use of this idea extensively in his later 'identity philosophy' and Deleuze does the same with his ontology of the virtual and the actual. For an excellent introduction to formal and real, real and numerical distinction, see Chapter 1 "Numerical and Real Distinction" in Deleuze's *Expressionism*, pp.27-40.
of the other,” (IIIp57) he is referring to the particularity of an actual essence as expressing a unique desire or complex relation of desires (cupiditates).

Consequently, no thing desires anything on account of its lacking something that ought to be present in it. Since “the conatus wherein each thing strives to persist in its being is nothing other than the actual essence of the thing itself,” (IIIp7) and since conatus is the same as desire, virtue or right (IVp17d;20d;25d;TTP16;TP2.2), the feeling of a certain body affected is nothing other than the activity of an actual essence “from any given affection of itself” (IIIdef.1). Feelings, and the actions attendant with them, are merely the ideas (i.e. and not the ideas of the ideas) of the affections of the body (I1p22d).

Insofar as “each man’s actions are shaped by his emotion” (IIIp2s) and emotions themselves are passively determined actions, or appetites, (appetitus) we perform for the sake of our own preservation (IIIp9s), it cannot be said that emotional responses are themselves either adequate or inadequate ideas.33 In the event of being affected (afficere), the body suffers a passive transition to a greater or lesser state of perfection (IIIp11s) and the mind will, so far as it is able within the parameters of the encounter, strive to increase or assist its power of acting through an emotional response. Within a painful encounter, the body’s capacity for activity passes to a decreased dispositional state and consequently determines an emotional

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33 See Ethics IIp11-13; Vp10s. In his book Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain (New York: Harcourt, 2003), Antonio Damasio catalogues the life-regulating functions of “the homeostasis machine” (30) that is the human body by way of nested levels of processes. On the bottom level are metabolic processes, reflexes and the immune system; the next level consists of pleasure and pain and their associated behaviors; atop that are drives, motivations and appetites; the penultimate level is occupied by emotions proper (joy, sorrow, grief, shame, etc.); the top tier is occupied by feelings (31-4). From the second tier onwards, the imagination is enlisted and utilized and, as far as existence goes, it is without error in its judgments. Error originates when the imagination subsumes essences into its images of existence, or causes into its images of effects.
response that will “exclude the existence” of the painful affect (IIIp13d). Within a pleasurable encounter, the body’s capacity for activity is increased and consequently determines an emotional response that will involve support for the existence of the pleasurable affect (IIIp12d). In any event, however, it is merely the passive transition to a higher or lower state of one’s capacity for activity that can be felt. Consequently, the knowledge of the nature of both the body affecting and the body affected is not involved or explicated because both are complicated or entangled with each other in the event of affection; i.e. neither expresses its particular nature fully, but only partially. Inasmuch as the “specific reality of emotion must indicate or express the state of the body or some part of it, which the body or some part of it possesses from the fact that its power of activity or force of existence (vis existendi) is increased or diminished, assisted or checked,” (IIIgen.def.exp.) the ideas of the mind are limited to the events of passive experiences. Confused, partial, mutilated, or fragmentary ideas correspond, or are parallel with the passivity of the body’s transitioning into or out of greater or lesser states of activity. While affect partially reveals what a body can do, it conceals just as much and consequently obscures the knowledge of a body’s true virtue or well-being (IVp18s-p20s). Human conatus requires conatus intelligendi in order to fully express its virtue. The question is how the latter comes about; how do we become active, adequate causes?

34 See Genevieve Lloyd, Part of Nature: Self-Knowledge in Spinoza’s Ethics (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1994), wherein the author maintains that, “self-awareness is generated out of the reflective awareness of the body … A mind knows itself only through being aware of bodily modifications, because it is in fact nothing but the idea of such modification … It follows that self-knowledge must share the inevitable confusion of bodily awareness. It can never be complete, for our bodies are part of nature and our minds cannot grasp all their interconnections. The mind has only fragmentary and inadequate understanding of body and hence only an inadequate understanding of itself” (p.20).
In, by, and through affectivity, the relations, dispositions and transitions it involves, we feel our power of activity. If virtue is nothing other than human power (IVd8), and is coextensive with an individuals right, desire or conatus to persist in being, what else is either required, or for that matter, possible, for (human) beings to continue in their existence? Indeed, why is the power to control desire and the attendant emotions a project at all? If perfection is one and the same with reality (IId6;IVpreface) what additional ‘something’ can we, in fact, hope to obtain in order to obtain that ‘something’ providing everlasting joy? For Spinoza, the problem is not that anything more is needed, but that less is required. An adequate idea demands a common notion, and a common notion is nothing other than the idea of a part and its agreement with every other, and consequently the whole (IIp38d). Although as a part of Nature we are passive in our reception of affects and determined to this or that state, it is not because we are part of Nature that the formulation of common notions is impeded. Rather, it is the erroneous ideas of affections that we passively form that provide the greatest challenge to an active understanding of reality. While for Spinoza, very much like Hume, reason may be instrumental to the directives of the passions in states of affection, Spinoza is not content to limit reason, or philosophy, in such wise. While it may be the case that “we do not endeavor, will, seek after or desire because we judge something to be good. On the contrary, we judge a thing to be good because we endeavor, will, seek after and desire it” (IIIp9s),

35 This is reminiscent of the German mystic Meister Eckhart’s teaching of gelassenheit or of the Tao Te Ching, 42 where Lao Tzu instructs that, “one gains by losing and loses by gaining.” As we will see, the loss through gain is nothing other than the compounding of image-ideas, which do nothing but alienate us from our power of activity; i.e. their multiplication necessarily involves a division of joy.

the problem is one of coming to know our power of activity \((potentia agendi)\) and what is to be done with it \((fortitudo, animositas, generositatis, or in a word, vera virtus)\). In other words, we have to “consider the desire for conservation as a desire for ‘more,’ without letting this ‘more’ impose a teleological structure on desire.”\(^{37}\) As we will see, this will involve the knowledge of our body, both in its parts and as a whole, and as a part of larger wholes \(ad infinitum\) with itself containing smaller parts \(ad infinitum\). But, as Edwin Curley rightly notes, “if the mind’s knowledge of external bodies, and of itself, is inadequate and confused, this is fundamentally because its knowledge of the parts of its own body is inadequate and confused,”\(^{38}\) how can we come to an adequate understanding of that which does not necessarily involve adequacy \((IIp24)\)? While the variety and complexity of affections is felt, one is only a partial cause of action and, in a state of confusion, one only enjoys partial knowledge of the whole body, and, consequently, its parts. While this state of the mind does not involve adequate ideas, it does not necessarily involve inadequate ideas either. What, then, constitutes an inadequate idea? What is the nature of error? What, in other words, keeps us from expressing our power of thinking and acting?

**On Error: Determination and Fragmentation**

Spinoza claims that passive states of the mind are dependent on inadequate ideas \((IIIp3)\), but upon what do inadequate ideas depend? It would seem that Spinoza has


\(^{38}\) Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p.77.
the order reversed. Insofar as “the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body – i.e. a definite and determinate mode of extension actually existing” (IIp13) and the ideas we have are “of the affections of this body” (IIp3d), it would seem that inadequate ideas depend on the mind’s passive receptivity of the body’s various modes of affection. The capacity of the mind to perceive varies proportionately “to the variety of states which its body can assume,” (IIp14) but knowledge of the variety of states a body assumes is not possibly adequate as long as the mind perceives the affections of the body (IIp19d; IIp24,25). Since the perceptions of bodily affections are a passive registration of the effects external bodies have on the body, they involve only the ideas of the body’s modification; i.e. an idea of the passionate states of the body. Thus, when Spinoza proposes that, “the ideas of the affections of the human body, in so far as they are related to the human mind, are not clear and distinct, but confused,” (IIp28) the reason is that the state of the mind is simultaneous with the state of the body. Insofar as the latter is determined to be and to act according to the “common order of nature” (IIp29c,s; i.e. affected in various ways), so too is the former determined to be and to act according to the same. If the “order and linking of things is one,” Spinoza is forced to also submit that “the order of the active and passive states of our body is simultaneous in Nature with the order of active and passive states of the mind,” (IIIp2s). The problem again is one of coming to an understanding of the single order and linking of things. If an active state of the mind or body is caused in the same way as the passive states of the mind or body, in what way can such activity constitute adequate knowledge of our body and the bodies affecting it? Active and passive
states, as the third part of the *Ethics* spends the bulk of its time expounding, are due to the passive transitions our body undergoes in relation to the bodies affecting it in various ways. Again, a passive state of the body (i.e. a state in which an individual thing’s capacity for activity is diminished) does not, in itself, involve inadequacy any more than an active state of the body (i.e. a state in which an individual thing’s capacity for activity is enhanced), in itself, involves adequacy (IIIp11s). In what, then, does inadequacy consist?

That we “can have only a very inadequate knowledge” of our bodies, of the bodies affecting it, and of our mind and its ideas of the affections of the body, is partly owing to the partiality of the body in its relation to all of the other parts of the whole of Nature. I say ‘partly’ because the fragmentary or mutilated ideas we have of the body in the events of affection are considered mutilated insofar as they are *ideas of relations*, and not insofar as they are ideas affirming the existence of a certain body. Now, the proof Spinoza provides for the proposition that “the ideas of the affections of the human body, in so far as they are related to the human mind, are not clear and distinct, but confused” is revelatory:

>The ideas of the affections of the human body involve the nature both of external bodies and of the human body itself, and must involve the nature not only of the human body but also of its parts. For affections are modes in which parts of the human body, and consequently the body as a whole, is affected. But an adequate knowledge of external bodies, as also of the component parts of the human body, is not in God in so far as he is considered as affected by the human mind… (IIp28d)

Our confusion, or mutilated knowledge, is, at least seemingly, owing to the privation of the understanding of the part-whole relations that hold between things.

“Whenever,” says Spinoza, “the human mind perceives things after the common
order of nature, it does not have an adequate knowledge of itself, nor of its body, nor of external bodies, but only a confused and fragmentary knowledge” (IIp29c). I take him to mean that we can only express our nature, and the nature of others, partially. The common order of nature mentioned by Spinoza here is the same common order of nature to which we are necessarily subject as a part of the whole of nature (IVp3-4s). Genevieve Lloyd comments that the “differences between bodies involve the play of contrary forces ... The corresponding truth about minds is that they are not ideas of self-contained material things but rather states of confused awareness of what is happening in the universe as a whole. Our ideas of other bodies involve the nature of our own bodies as well.”39 The emotional states to which we passively transition (IIIp11d) are productive of our ideas; be they of ourselves, other bodies, or the relations between them. So how is it possible that we could be expressive of less than the whole of our nature, and consequently the whole of Nature? It is by erecting and compounding image-ideas of things affecting us. As Spinoza writes, “In so far as the human mind imagines an external body, to that extent it does not have an adequate knowledge of it” (IIp26c). Image is opposed to idea, imagination to intellect (IIp49s).

The most succinct account of error comes in IIp17s, wherein Spinoza maintains that, “the imaginations of the mind, looked at in themselves, contain no error; i.e. the mind does not err from the fact that it imagines, but only insofar as it is considered to lack the idea which excludes the existence of those things which it imagines to be present to itself.” Now an “image” for Spinoza is an idea of a

modification of the human body that is present to the mind insofar as an external body affects a change in the body (Ilp17s; IVp9d,s). The origin of an image-idea is, therefore, located in the recollection of an affection of the body in the absence of the thing originally causing the modification (Ilp17d). In the subsequent proposition, Spinoza claims that the imagination, coupled with the memory, condition the mind’s linking of these image-ideas with each other (Ilp18s). This linking of image-ideas is due to the fortuitous run of circumstances (i.e. the common order of nature) and is an entirely passive affair. All that we are aware of, all of the ideas that we formulate at this level, are ideas of the affections of the body, and we consequently know only effects and not causes (Ilp25). “We are,” comments Deleuze, “in a condition such that we only take in ‘what happens’ to our body, ‘what happens’ to our mind.” It is important to be reminded that this, in itself, is not the cause of error. Again, the human mind, Spinoza maintains, “does not perceive any external body as actually existing except through ideas of the affections of its own body” (Ilp26). It is just the case that, “the idea of any affection of the human body does not involve adequate

40 So all images are ideas, but not all ideas are images.
42 Gilles Deleuze, Spinoza: Practical Philosophy translated by Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 19. In his Hegel or Spinoza Pierre Macherey is rather instructive on this point: “even in imaginary representation ... there must be something adequate, something true. In effect, if we, and the majority of humans, consider reality from an imaginary point of view, it is not because we really want to, through a behavior in which we bear the responsibility of judgment, but because we cannot do otherwise; thus we must take literally the idea that we are slaves to the imagination. In the life that this creates for us, free will is itself nothing more than a necessary illusion, from which we cannot escape. The imagination ignores causes that actually determine our activity, but it does not do away with them; in this sense, there is something in inadequate knowledge that is not purely subjective and which is itself true in its own way ... The sage is not one who decides voluntarily to reform his intellect for once and for all, to eliminate, once and for all, all the false ideas that can be found there, and in this way to suppress from his existence all the effects of the imaginary mode of knowledge ... on the contrary, the free man knows how to reckon with them, because he has grasped adequately the manner in which they are necessary.” (translated by Susan M. Ruddick. [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011], pp.68-9)
knowledge of the human body” (IIp27). We have knowledge, but it is only confused or fragmented because it is separated from knowledge of causes and/or essences. Where an adequate understanding involves irreducible relations, the imagination does the work of separating, abstracting and reducing (IIp40s1).

In itself an image-idea is not erroneous. It is mutilated, fragmentary knowledge (IIp29c), but it is not yet erroneous. Error occurs, rather, insofar as we do not at the same time as imagining, remembering, or in a word, habituating, remind ourselves that our images of affections and the connections of these ideas “do not exist in fact” (IIp17s). That is, although it is true that “after the common order of nature” (IIp29c) our tendency is to only conceive of existences without essences, this tendency only involves false ideas when they are applied to causes and/or essences. Indeed, insofar as “man is necessarily always subject to passive emotions, and that he follows the common order of Nature, and obeys it, and accommodates himself to it as far as the nature of things demands,” (IVp4c) the imagination is well-suited for making judgments often necessary for a thing’s endeavor to persist in its being: “the mind, as far as it can, endeavors to think of those things that increase or assist the body’s power of activity” (IIIp12). The problem, however, is that since images can only represent the effects of other bodies they cannot express the essence of the object of the idea of the mind (IIIp3s; IIIp10). The consequence is that the order and connection of ideas linked together by the

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43 Deleuze, e.g., maintains, “The only ideas we have under the natural conditions of our perception are the ideas that represent what happens to our body, the effect of another body on ours, that is, a mixing of both bodies … such ideas are images. Or rather images are the corporeal affections themselves (affectio)” From Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, 73.

44 E.g. ‘When the dog bites, when the bee stings, when I’m feeling sad, I simply remember my favourite things and then I don’t feel so bad.’
imagination cannot possibly have application to the order and connection of things (of which they are originally ideas of; I1p7). The imagination creates a rift between the subject and the objects it cognizes precisely by representing each as an independent, isolated entity (\textit{ens imaginationis}).

The passivity through which the body and mind form images indicates that the essential property of an inadequate idea is its inexpressiveness (I11p54d). This is not to say that an inadequate idea contains nothing positive, but only that it necessarily involves a deficient knowledge of the essence of the thing that has become expressed through the body’s having been modified (I1p35d; IVp1). Since bodies are modes expressing God’s essence “in a definite and determinate way” (IId1), and since bodies are the object of the ideas of the mind (I1p13), ideas will necessarily involve a positive element. In the same way that any finite thing is determined to exist and act according to its being so caused by another finite, determinate existence (Ip28), so too is the mind determined to form ideas according to the affections of its object (I1p17; I1p22). Although the body and mind are passive in the formation of ideas, the formation of such ideas is itself an activity of an actual essence, defined by its \textit{conatus} or capacity for activity. In the case of inadequate ideas, however, the mind is merely retaining traces (\textit{vestigia}) of the substantial modifications affecting it and is not actively expressing itself (i.e. its essence).

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\textsuperscript{45} See Chapter 9 “Inadequacy” in Gilles Deleuze’s \textit{Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza} translated by Martin Jaughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992). Deleuze maintains, e.g., \textit{“an inadequate idea is an inexpressive idea”} (145), and further explains that ‘inexpressive’ means that it involves only an \textit{indication} of things in relation to the modified states of our bodies and minds and not an \textit{explanation} of them (147).

\textsuperscript{46} See §6 in Chapter 3 “The Human Mind” in Michael Della Rocca’s \textit{Spinoza} for an account on Spinoza’s identity of will and belief. For Spinoza, “ideas as such are active and inherently have a tendency to prompt action.” (124).
Inadequate ideas can only respond, recognize, or, in a word, react; they are not positive, or actively affirmative. It is for this reason that Spinoza considers the passive states of the mind to have “something involving negation” (IIp3s; IIIp54d). Inadequate ideas can only delimit and define things generally in accord with the limitations or privations in conceiving things according to the effects of modes affecting the body (IIp40s1). They cannot, in themselves, accede to an active state of understanding precisely because they cannot form an adequate concept of the activities (i.e. essence or cause) of the object of the idea of the mind itself (IIp38; IIp39; IIIp2s).

Since inadequate ideas involve a mutilation of true or adequate knowledge (i.e. of causes and/or essences), the application of inadequate ideas to causes and/or essences will necessarily be erroneous (IIp35d,s). That is, the application of inadequate ideas to the essences and/or causes of things will either be “mere words without any corresponding idea” (IIp35s) or a host of confused ideas collected under a mere word (IIp40s). In either case, no real definitions of things will be possible and abstractions (entia rationis) will seek to compensate for this lack (Ip8s2). In relation to the problem of passivity with which we are concerned at present, Spinoza notes it as a fact that “man’s judgment is often governed solely by emotion, and that thing which he believes to make for pleasure or pain and which he therefore endeavors to promote or remove are often merely imaginary” (IIIp51s). Without a clear and distinct idea of our power of activity, our actions can only be considered passive reactions (passions), expressing only associations, abstractions, reductions and negations (IIIIdoE27ex;IIIId3; IIIp3s). The primary, or principal,
image-thought responsible for the appetite to this or that image-idea is none other than the belief that we are atomic units endowed with a libertarian freedom of the will (IIp35s;IIIp49s;p51s; I appendix; etc.). It is an idea involving the absence of the body *par excellence*, but its form follows the structure of error generally: a privation of knowledge through the confusion of effects for causes, existences for essences, ideas with images (IIp35d,s;IIp48s). While we hold to this error or falsity formally, we become ignorant of the true causes of anything and consequently “confuse everything.” (Ip8s2). To the degree that each body will “form universal images according to the conditioning of his body,” Spinoza takes it as a consequence that, “so many controversies have arisen among philosophers who have sought to explain natural phenomena through merely the images of these phenomena” (IIp40s1). It would seem, then, that insofar as we are necessarily part of nature, and, consequently, subjected to bodily modifications of which we can only form mutilated ideas, we are condemned to inadequacy. In a lecture on Spinoza, Deleuze asks the incisive question, “by means of what miracle could one move away from these actions of bodies that do not wait for us in order to exist, how could one rise to a knowledge (*connaissance*) of causes? For the moment we see clearly that all that is given to us is ideas of affection, ideas of mixture.”47 Since we are not warranted in relying on a miracle, we must ask again, from whence will our help come?

**Passive Transitions and Adequate Causation**

In Book III, Proposition 11 Spinoza provides us with a possible clue to the resolution of the problem of passivity and the problem of the inadequate, and consequently erroneous, ideas attendant with it. Here, Spinoza writes "Whatsoever increases or diminishes, assists or checks, the power of the activity of our body, the idea of the said thing increases or diminishes, assists or checks the power of thought of our mind." The scholium to this proposition is particularly instructive, for in it Spinoza defines pleasure and pain as “passive transitions” to greater or lesser states of “perfection.” Now, inasmuch as Spinoza considers perfection to be one and the same with reality (IVpreface), and, furthermore, inasmuch as the reality of things is defined by their capacity for activity (viz. conatus, desire, right, virtue, or actual essence), the passive transitions to greater or lesser states of perfection can only be understood in relation to that power whose capacities are either increased or diminished. The power of suffering, or the capacity to undergo passive transitions, is dependent on the power defining a thing’s force of existence (vis existentis).

Correspondingly, pleasure is a (passive) transition “from a state of less perfection to a state of greater perfection,” and pain is a (passive) transition, “from a state of greater perfection to a state of less perfection,” (IIIDoE2,3). As we will come to see, the passage from a state of lesser perfection to a state of greater perfection necessarily involves the activation of the mind’s power to affirm its activity. In

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48 Valtteri Viljanen rightly maintains that, “finite individuals can be conceived as specifically determined centres of causal activity and power, individual essences operating as modifiers determining the way in which substance and its efficacy or total power is distributed.” (In Spinoza’s Geometry of Power. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. p.74). We will return to this topic in earnest in the following chapters.
order to do this, however, the mind needs to be internally determined to understand itself and the traces (vestigia) of the bodies affecting it externally (IIP29s). The question is whether or not the transition from being externally determined (i.e. according to the common order or “fortuitous run of circumstances”) to being internally determined involves a substantial conversion. That is, does the transition from passivity to activity involve a transformation?49

An external determination is, as we have seen, the body’s suffering affects from bodies outside the porous borders constituting it; affect involves the interpenetration and entanglement, or in a word, complication of bodies. As the mixing of bodies, affect simply involves perpetual modification and constant variation.50 Now, the determination of any body is considered external precisely because the (internal) affective state to which the body transitions is owing to the way in which it has been affected or modified. It is for this reason that Spinoza thinks, “we are active when something takes place, in us or externally to us, of which we are the adequate cause (…) we are passive when something takes place in us, or

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49 In *Physics* I.5b21, Aristotle asserts that, “If all this is true (i.e. “that something structured must come form something unstructured,” etc.; b8) then everything which comes into being comes from its opposite or from some intermediate between the two extremes, and everything which ceases to be turns into its opposite or into some intermediate between the two extremes.” The problem with such an account is that one would require an infinity of intermediaries in order for the change from X to Y to take place. In other words, there is nothing in either opposite necessitating or explicating the movement from the one opposite state to that of the other. This puts Spinoza in a position similar to Kierkegaard’s quandary over how we can possibly get out of our state of error. In his pseudonymously authored *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus outlines the problem thus: “The condition for understanding the Truth is like the capacity to inquire for it: the condition contains the unconditioned, and the question implies the answer … But one who gives the learner not only the Truth, but also the condition for understanding it, is more than teacher. All instruction depends upon the presence, in the last analysis, of the requisite condition; if this is lacking, no teacher can do anything. For otherwise he would find it necessary not only to transform the learner, but to recreate him before beginning to teach him. But this is something that no human being can do; if it is to be done, it must be done by God himself.” I am asking whether Spinoza’s account of how we come to have adequate ideas involves a ‘transformation’ or ‘recreation’ of the ‘learner’ and that through a miraculous or transcendent intervention. It obviously cannot, but it is not obvious how it does not.

50 See Gilles Deleuze, [http://deleuzelectures.blogspot.ca/2007/02/on-spinoza.html](http://deleuzelectures.blogspot.ca/2007/02/on-spinoza.html)
follows from our nature, of which we are only the partial cause” (IIId2). The first thing to note is that in the transition to either activity or passivity, our power of suffering affects is necessarily involved. That is, inasmuch as something exists in a definite and determinate way, “some effect must follow from it” (Ip36d). The effect that must follow from a definite and determinate thing (viz. a body) is nothing other than the particular way it is able to be affected and, in turn, affect other things. But does the actual essence of a thing involve its own individual, unique activity? The answer to this question would seem to hinge on what Spinoza understands by ‘adequate cause’ and ‘partial cause’ respectively. The former involves a clear and distinct perception of an effect through its cause, whereas the latter does not; i.e. the “effect cannot be understood through the said cause alone” (IIId1). Far from providing clarity on the conditions in which we can be said to be actually active, this seems to profoundly obscure matters.

The third definition of Part III provides us with a suitable starting point toward uncovering the nature of adequate causality. In defining the nature of emotion, Spinoza presents the reader with the following conditional: “if we can be the adequate cause of one of these affections, then by emotion I understand activity, otherwise passivity” (IIId3). I understand Spinoza’s conditional statement to be hypothetical; it is because we are defined by our capacity (i.e. to affect and be affected, modify and be modified; because “we feel a certain body affected in various ways”), or alternately, our desire or conatus, that we are necessarily the adequate cause of “one of these affections”. We are necessarily the adequate cause of the definite and determinate nature expressing “some effect”. As Edwin Curley rightly
notes, “whatever my relationship to my body is, these basic bodily sensations indicate that it is a relationship to my whole body, and not just some part of it.”

Now, in passive reaction to the fortuitous run of circumstances, we can only have confused ideas of the body affected and the affecting bodies. Within the common order of nature, multiple things will perpetually take place in us, or follow from us, of which we can only be considered the partial cause (IIIid2). However, that we feel a certain body affected and that we, consequently, desire to persist in being amidst our passive transitions to greater or lesser states of perfection, constitutes a clear and distinct perception of an effect of which only we could be considered the cause. The manner in which we are affected and affect other things indicates the certain way in which we are determined to affect and be affected, modify and be modified (IIIp7d).

What brings us to a clear and distinct perception of this, if not in whole

51 Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p.58. Curley mentions this in relation to Descartes, but explains it as the genesis of Spinoza’s preferred position. According to IVp60, it would seem that certain emotions, titillation or anguish for example, which involve an affection of a part of the body at the expense of other parts, and consequently the whole, would undermine the idea that the mind is aware of the whole body and not just a part. While a full analysis of the part-whole relation is yet to come, it is enough to presently decide the issue thus: within the throws of a partial emotion like titillation, an inversion of part and whole occurs through the fixation of the image of that which is affected in relation to what is doing the affecting. In this double image, the particular zone of affection occupies the force of the whole body and the whole body is motivated by the desire of a part masquerading as the whole itself. The addict thinks of nothing but the image of its desire, and while the desired image is only related to a part of the whole, the part is so magnified that the whole is employed for the sake of the part as if for the whole itself. Partial emotions effectively invert the dependence condition of part and whole; within the throws of fixation one makes the whole depend on the part and every other part is coopted into the desire of this specific zone of affection. I believe Schelling has something similar in mind when he maintains that, “as soon as he makes himself an object, the whole man no longer acts” (*Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, p.11).

52 We are not considered the adequate cause through our actions and the partial cause through our passions, rather we can only consider ourselves the adequate cause insofar as our nature (i.e. our capacity for activity) is clearly and distinctly expressed in an affective event which invariably and necessarily involve passions. Ollie Koistinen misses this point in his, “Bennett on Spinoza’s Philosophical Psychotherapy,” ([http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Mode/ModeKois.htm](http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Mode/ModeKois.htm))
then at least in part, just is the passive transition to greater states of perfection or joyful affections.53

Passive transitions are nothing other than the modifications of a body involving an emotional change of state. Since a body is nothing other than its desire to persist in being according to its affective capacities, Spinoza asserts that, “it is very important to note that it is one and the same appetite through which a man is said both to be active and to be passive” (Vp4s). What this means is that the state changes of a body modified in a definite and determinate way do not involve jerks or leaps, but smooth alterations on a continuum that conserves the proportion of motion and rest that defines a particular body as a distinct individual (i.e. a characteristic relation; Ilp13;IVp39ds).54 In other words, it is not required that, in becoming active, we obtain a power or capacity that we, as an actual essence, do not already have. Activity, or more precisely, the act of understanding, does not come to us through a metamorphosis or creatio ex nihilo. We cannot, consequently, think that when the mind strives to adequately understand its nature and the nature of the body as the object of its idea, that, “it endeavors to become a more adequate idea of body, transforming itself from a passive picture to an active articulation.”55 But if we do not require anything in addition to our nature, then it would seem that there is, in reality, no problem of passivity; there is no opposition to overcome and we

53 It is for this reason that Spinoza in Part V maintains that, “since there exists nothing from which some effect does not follow, and all that follows from an idea that is adequate in us is understood by us clearly and distinctly, it therefore follows that everyone has the power of clearly and distinctly understanding himself and his emotions, if not absolutely, then at least in part, and consequently of bringing it about that he should be less passive in respect of them” (Vp4s).
54 I have purposely not made mention of the ‘physical interlude’ at Ilp13 because as far as our analysis has come, we do not yet have the necessary adequate idea in hand in order to explicate the nature of bodies.
55 Genevieve Lloyd, Part of Nature, p.27.
will, as a matter of course, become intellectually active. While it may be tempting to
dismiss the problem in this way, it is not so easily removed. While it is in the power
of anyone to “clearly and distinctly understand himself and his emotions,” (Vp4s)
most bodies never actually act according to the laws of their own nature. It is much
easier to think according to images than it is to actually understand. While a
passive transition to a state of greater perfection seems to be a necessary condition
for us to clearly and distinctly perceive our power of thinking and activity, it is not,
in itself, sufficient.

When we are pleasuringly affected our power of activity increases according
to the present disposition, and that power increases according to the preceding, etc.
While pleasurable experiences arise passively (i.e. we are not the adequate cause of
them), the idea of this affection necessarily involves the mind’s regarding its own
power of activity in relation to the body affecting it. Since “the conatus of the mind,
that is, its power to think, is equal to and simultaneous in nature with the conatus of
the body, that is, its power to act,” (IIIp28d) the body’s transition to a greater state
of perfection through a pleasurable affection will involve the mind’s transition to a
state of greater perfection at the same time. The mind will, consequently, be
conscious of its power of thinking parallel to the body’s power of acting (IIIp53d).
Since the essence or conatus of mind is nothing other than its desire to “affirm its
power of activity,” (IIIp54) the mind will necessarily endeavor to think of that which
agrees with its power of activity. Now, as we saw, the mind has the propensity to
get things terribly wrong and most often forms images of those things it believes are
conducive to its, and consequently the body’s well-being (IIIp12ff). In this regard,
we are most often inexpressive, and only the partial cause of an effect. However deeply mired in error we become, no inadequate idea necessarily involves the negation of the power of activity we seek to affirm through such images (Ip40;IIIp58d).\textsuperscript{56} Within a passive transition to a state of greater joy, the perception of our internal capacities (viz. power of activity) becomes magnified and the ideas that are formed of these affections involve the mind’s power to act. In order to realize this, however, we need to let go of the ideas we have through being affected, while simultaneously clinging to the power being expressed in such events. Since this cannot itself involve an adequate activity of the mind without \textit{eo ipso} achieving what is to be had beforehand, the mind must yet be passive even in this endeavor. The whole trick is one of letting oneself be expressive at the same time as being affected and affecting.

The perception of the mind’s power of activity (i.e. thinking), obtained through a passive transition to a state of greater perfection, while involving an external affection (\textit{affectio}), also involves an internal affect (\textit{affectus}) at the same time. The perception of the mind’s power of activity is itself a pleasurable feeling (IIIp58). It is nothing other than the clear and distinct perception of an effect of which only we could possibly be the cause. It is the idea of an idea of affection. While it does not involve adequacy in itself, it nevertheless involves another passive

\textsuperscript{56} There would appear to be a ready counter-example to this proposition in the phenomena of suicide, or any other self-negating activities. The idea that the destruction of oneself, i.e. the desire to annihilate the very desire constitutive of oneself, while itself not possibly adequate, yet proceeds according to the endeavor of a being to do what it judges to be good. It just so happens, that in the case of suicide, one is completely dominated by external natures and, in the grip of sad passions is determined to act from an inadequate idea of what would be conducive to one’s wellbeing (see EIVp20ds;IVp23). Pascal seems to have something similar in mind when he maintains that ‘even those who hang themselves’ seek happiness (\textit{Pensées}, VII, §425).
affection, but this time *internal to* the affected individual (*lp29;IIIp58*). Since the mind will not possibly come to know itself outside of ideas of the affections of the body, it must come to know itself through these affections (*lp29d,c,s*). Passions, it must be said, are not possessed by a mind; a mind does not *have* passions in the way that one has legal title to a piece of property. The mind only *has* passions insofar as they are internally determined affections expressing a particular capacity for activity. When Spinoza proposes that, “Any emotion of one individual differs from the emotion of another to the extent that the essence of the one individual differs from the essence of the other,” (*IIIp57*) 57, he has in mind the desire that is coextensive with the actual essence or *conatus* of an individual. The sensation of pleasure is a passive affect, an emotion arising from the fortuitous run of circumstances; i.e. a certain affective relation has modified the body and caused a pleasurable emotion. It is pleasurable to us in the manner it is, and we are conscious of this feeling, due to more than a passive emotional *re-action*. Inasmuch as the pleasure derived from an external affect involves both the idea of the affecting body and the body affected, and since the idea of the latter involves a clear and distinct perception of the power being expressed (*conatus, etc*.), the emotion is active and no longer merely passive (*IIIp58d*). It is for this reason that Spinoza thinks that, “the

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57 The demonstration of this proposition is instructive:

“All emotions are related to desire, pleasure or pain, as is made clear by the definitions we have given them. Now desire is the very nature or essence of every single individual. Therefore the desire of each individual differs from the desire of another to the extent that the nature or essence of the one differs from the essence of the other. Again, pleasure and pain are passive emotions whereby each individual’s power, that is, his *conatus* to persist in his own being, is increased or diminished, assisted or checked. But by the *conatus* to persist in one’s own being, in so far as it is related to mind and body together, we understand appetite and desire. Therefore pleasure and pain is desire or appetite, in so far as it is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, by external causes; that is, it is each individual’s very nature. So each individual’s pleasure or pain differs from the pleasure or pain of another to the extent that the nature or essence of the one also differs from that of the other.”
more we are affected with pleasure, the more we pass to states of greater perfection; that is, the more we necessarily participate in the divine nature” (IVp45s;IVappendix31). However passively we react within an affective encounter, any emotion is yet an active expression of the body in which the emotion occurs. The whole problem of passivity turns on how passive we are inwardly; the affects or modifications we suffer, the passive transitions we undergo, are not up to us. All that is in our power is the ability to come to form an adequate idea in accord with the adequate cause we are.58

Adequate causality is only perceived clearly and distinctly to the extent to which one undergoes a passive transition to a state of greater perfection. Within this pleasurable state, the object of the idea of the mind experiences an increase in its power of activity. Simultaneously, the mind forms an idea of its power of activity by perceiving clearly and distinctly the effect that only it (i.e. the actual essence, *conatus*, etc.) could have caused. Understanding oneself, that is, having a clear and distinct perception of one’s power of activity, is necessarily a true idea (IIp40s; IIp43s). But what does a true idea express? Not, an image-idea of oneself; not, that is, an idea of something in-and-by-itself, independent and isolated, as if “some dumb thing like a picture on a tablet,” but the power of the mind, or “the very act of understanding” (IIp43s;IIp18s). While this act of understanding is owing to the

58 The Stoical elements are hard to ignore here. Diogenes Laertius relates that “‘to live according to virtue’ is equivalent to living according to experience of events which occur by nature …. For our natures are parts of the nature of the universe. Therefore the goal becomes ‘to live consistently with nature,’ i.e. according to one’s own nature and that of the universe” (From Diogenes Laertius, 7.84-85, in *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, 2nd Ed., translated by Brad Inwood and Lloyd P. Gerson [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997], p.191). Spinoza’s Stoicism is explored in depth by Firmin Debrander in his book *Spinoza and the Stoics: Power, Politics and the Passions* (New York: Continuum, 2007).
power acting peculiar to a particular body, the particularity of this power is understood to necessarily involve interrelation with every other part, and consequently the whole (TIE,41; EIIp37-39). The upshot of this is that in understanding our power of activity adequately, we at the same time come to the understanding that we are “part of the infinite intellect of God” (IIp43s). That is, the true or adequate idea of one’s actual essence, ironically, does not involve “the essence of any particular thing,” but is rather, “common to all things and is equally in the part as in the whole” (IIp37). 59 It is, then, to the curious status of common notions that we now turn.

**Aeque in Parte ac in Toto Est: Common Notions**

There is the conatus vivere and there is the ability to preserve it. Being does not necessarily involve being well, the endeavour of an actual essence does not automatically involve its being able to be well. Since we are not born free (i.e. guided by reason), we must yet learn how to become so (IVp68). 60 We must

59 Genevieve Lloyd makes an interesting comment that, “if bodily awareness is fragmentary and confused, it cannot yield any clear understanding of the borders between my body and external bodies (…) this lack of clear demarcation within our bodily awareness holds the key to understanding the mind’s true nature as part of wider wholes” (Part of Nature, p.23). In the following chapters on power and mereology we will come to see how an individual is both part of wider wholes and is itself a wider whole containing lesser wholes as parts simultaneously. All things are simultaneously parts and wholes according to their relative distribution within the infinite spectrum of larger and smaller environments.

60 This would be a reversal of Rousseau’s famous opening salvo of The Social Contract: “man is born free and everywhere he is in chains.” There may also be a connection with Rousseau’s philosophy of education expressed in Emile. The problem of passivity is intimately related to education. Aside from the fragmented knowledge obtained from ‘casual experience,’ Spinoza also lists symbols and their associations as a cause of inadequate ideas. From “having heard or read certain words we call things to mind and we form certain ideas of them similar to those through which we imagine things,” (IIp40s2). Aside from the passive reception of images and their associations, the moral categories of right and wrong are owing to the associations of pleasure and pain through our upbringing. Spinoza
enhance our *conatus intelligendi* to complement and bolster our *conatus vivere*.

Thus, while any thing is defined by its power of activity, and, consequently, its desire to seek whatever is advantageous to its dispositional structure, there is, as we have seen, the propensity to get things terribly wrong. However, now that we have established the basis of adequate causality through the inward feeling of one's own power of activity, we can begin to increase our power of understanding. Since the power of understanding is nothing other than the act of thinking, and since the actual act of thinking is coeval with the active emotions, what the power of understanding pursues is entirely in keeping with our nature and consequently Nature as a whole. Indeed, reason, thinks Spinoza, “demands nothing contrary to nature” (IVp18s). On the contrary, since virtue is nothing other than human power, and since that power is “nothing other than to act from the laws of one’s own nature,” (IVp18s) true virtue (*vera virtus*) originates from nowhere but the *conatus* itself. Bodies with the capacity to reason must enlist it rightly in order to be well, that is, act ‘from the laws of their own nature.’ But what does reason demand?

What constitutes an adequate idea?

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maintains, "by disapproving of wrong actions and frequently rebuking their children when they commit them, and contrariwise by approving and praising right actions, parents have caused the former to be associated with painful feelings and the latter with pleasurable feelings ... so each individual repents of a deed or exults in it according to his upbringing" (IIIDoE27 ex). While this is not the place to explore it, there is a whole positive philosophy of education in the *Ethics* waiting to be explicated. This, again, would be in keeping with Spinoza’s account of virtue and its mereological implications. Already in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza declares that the “knowledge of the union which the mind has with the whole of Nature,” is not a knowledge without interrelations, and consequently, not without the desire for all parts to attain to such knowledge. To that end, Spinoza thinks it follows that the establishment of a social order and, along with it, attention being paid to “moral philosophy and likewise the theory of the education of children” must take place *(TIE*14,15). This would, of necessity, be an education without indoctrination of any kind. See, e.g., Tapio Puolimatka, “Spinoza’s Theory of Teaching and Indoctrination,” in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol.33, Nos. 3&4 (2001): pp.397-410. See also, Daniel Hansson, “Unpacking Spinoza: Sustainability Education Outside the Cartesian Box,” in *Journal of Sustainability Education*, Vol.3 (March,2012).
Aequae in parte ac in toto est; that which is equally in the part as in the whole “can only be conceived adequately” (IIp38). What does this mean? The whole analysis up to this point comes to a head at proposition 39, Part II: “Of that which is common and proper to the human body and to some external bodies by which the human body is customarily affected, and which is equally in the part as well as in the whole of any of these bodies, the idea also in the mind will be adequate” (IIp39). Although the proposition directly before this one explicates the formula for an adequate idea more precisely, this proposition articulates the stage where our analysis last left off. It was, recall, through the passive transitions to a state of greater perfection to the point of feeling active emotions, and in the feeling of active emotions, that we come to understand ourselves as the adequate cause of an effect. The effect(s) of which we clearly and distinctly perceive ourselves to be the cause was shown to be none other than our power of activity in relation to the bodies affecting us. Now, while it is through a passive transition to a greater state of perfection, or simply, the feeling of pleasure, that we come to this inward determination, the inward determination is an activity that cannot be accorded to any of the bodies affecting us. And yet, this power of activity or “strength of mind” (fortitudo), while necessarily involving and explicating “the desire whereby every individual endeavors to preserve his own being according to the dictates of reason alone,” also simultaneously involves and implies, “the desire whereby every individual, according to the dictates of reason alone, endeavors to assist and make friends of them” (IIIp59s). These two active emotions of the mind are termed courage (animositas) and nobility (generositas), respectively. In relation to IIp39, it
becomes evident that, in keeping with our *conatus*, these active appetites seek out bodies whose affects will agree with the laws of their own nature. That is, right at the moment when our power of understanding is actually active, it *eo ipso* understands itself as a part of the whole of Nature and seeks to affirm itself in and through the very affective relations with every other part, and consequently the whole, through which it suffered and passively expressed inadequate, mutilated knowledge. Right, to be clear, at the moment when Descartes affirms its fundamentality, the *cogito* is, for Spinoza, dispersed, distributed “whole in the whole.”

Schelling seems to understand this intimately when, reflecting on the system of Spinoza, he declares that, “instead of descending into the depths of his self-consciousness and descrying the emergence thence of the two worlds in us – the ideal and the real – he passed himself by ... he lost himself forthwith in the idea of an infinite outside us.” The courage of thinking according to one’s own capacity for understanding *immediately* or *simultaneously* involves the nobility to seek out

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61 This phrase occurs in John Scotus Eriugena’s magisterial *Periphyseon*, IV.759a. The whole passage reads thus: “God is both above everything and in everything, since He, who alone truly is, is the Essence of everything (*essentia omnium*); and although He is whole in everything, He does not cease being whole outside (*extra*) of everything; whole in the world, whole around the world, whole in sensible creation; whole in intelligible creation, whole He makes the universe; whole He is made in the universe, whole in the whole of the universe, whole in its parts, because He Himself is both whole and part, and neither whole nor part. In the same way human nature is whole in itself in its world, in its universe, in its visible and invisible parts, whole in its whole, and whole in its parts, and its parts are whole in themselves, and whole in the whole.” To my mind it is especially with Eriugena that Spinoza has a philosophical precursor.

62 Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, translated by Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.27. As we will come to see in the next chapter, Schelling’s philosophy of powers or forces owes a great debt to Spinoza (though perhaps more to Leibniz; see pp.36-37 of the same volume). See also Osamu Ueno, “*Res Nobis Similis: Desire and the Double in Spinoza,*” in *Ethica III: Desire and Affect: Spinoza as Psychologist*, edited by Yirmiyahu Yovel (New York: Little Room Press, 1999): pp.81-111. Ueno somewhat more cryptically maintains that, “Against Descartes, Spinoza could have said, “Je pense où je ne suis pas, donc je suis où je ne pense pas [I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think].” In a word, in wanting and willing, the subject is not in the center of his own thinking: in reality, he is thinking somewhere other than in his consciousness.” (83)
the interrelations such an idea involves, both within and outside the body perpetually affected and affecting.

_Acque in parte ac in toto est_ is the formula for common notions. It is not accidentally mereological, nor is its mereological form an _entia rationis_ much less an _entia imaginationis_. Indeed, it would be quite the scandal if Spinoza's first articulation of an adequate idea owed its form to either of these forms of thought. Rather, in the same way that an idea is said to be “situated in the context of thought exactly as its object is in the context of reality” (_TIE_41;IIp7), so too is an adequate idea situated in a wider context. The difference, however, between an idea passively obtained through the body's having been affected, and an adequate idea of the body's being affected, is that the latter and not the former expresses the _effect_ of the affected body; i.e. by having an understanding of itself as an adequate cause and, thus, being “less passive” in respect to the affecting body (_Vp4s;Vp6d_). But if such expressivity is owing to the particularity of a nature from whom a certain effect must follow, how or why does this idea _not_ “constitute the essence of any one particular thing” (IIp37), namely, the _conatus_ with the adequate idea? Spinoza's demonstration of this proposition is instructive: if an adequate idea, either of ourselves or another, were common to all things at the same time as being particular to one thing, then the former would depend on the latter, but this is a contradiction, therefore _acque in parte ac in toto est_ (IIp37;cf.Ip24-29). What is

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common to all is proper to none. But, then just what is ‘that which is common to all things’ such that it is equally in the part as in the whole? To my mind it is not, properly speaking, a ‘what’ at all; this requires an explanation.

Before we can answer the preceding question, it is important to understand that a common notion is not an abstraction (entia rationis), but an agreement (concordia). What is common to all things is, then, that in, through, and by which all things agree “in certain respects” (Ilp38c;Ilp13Lemma2). But what are these “respects” in which things necessarily agree “equally in the part as in the whole”? It is nothing other than the way or ways in which individual powers or essences comport with each other. This, as a matter of course, puts common notions on a spectrum from least to most general, which, as we will see, is an infinite spectrum relative to mid-region beings such as we are. There is neither a greatest whole,

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64 John Scotus Eriugena, Periphyseon, 1.48. This is also reminiscent of Fragment 2 of Heraclitus which reads, “though the Logos is common, many live as if they had wisdom of their own” [http://www.heraclitusfragments.com/files/ge.html]
65 Many commentators miss this point but it must be insisted upon. Lloyd, e.g., thinks of common notions as ‘good universals’ where inadequate, image-ideas are ‘bad universals’ (Part of Nature, p.45); Edwin Curley thinks of them as the “common properties of all material objects” (Behind the Geometrical Method, p.77). I think Deleuze is more or less right to point out that a common notion is “the representation of a composition between two or more bodies, and a unity of this composition. Its meaning is more biological than mathematical; it expresses the relations of agreement or composition between existing bodies.” (From Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, p.54). It is surprising that a common notion could be confused for an abstraction because in the first scholium to the proposition immediately following the three propositions using the mereological formula for an adequate idea, Spinoza explicitly outlines what he understands to be the origin of abstractions or ‘transcendental terms’. It is only owing to the limitations of the capacity of the imagination to form, and simultaneously hold, distinct images of different natures that it confuses them and, consequently, combines them under one term that comprehends these diverse natures indistinctly. These terms, thinks Spinoza, “signify ideas confused in the highest degree” (Ilp40s1).
66 The term ‘mid-region being’ occurs in Sacksteder’s Simple Wholes, Complex Parts. The author describes the term thus: “Mid-region beings are so positioned that, Janus-like, they may look in either direction toward opposite extremes. That is, we are tempted to characterize them either as wholes in relation to included parts or as parts in relation to included wholes, dependent on their comparison to other items on the scale” (pp.39-3-4). This account is rather like Pascal’s placement of man between the two abysses of “the infinite and nothingness … For what is man in nature? A nothing compared to the infinite, an everything compared to the nothing, a midpoint between nothing and everything, infinitely removed from understanding the extremes: the end of things and
nor are there least parts. Within a passive transition to a state of greater perfection, we are able to form an idea of our power of activity in relation to an external body causing our transition to this pleasurable state. IIp39 has priority over IIp38 because the latter depends on the former for its formulation. A definite and determinate body, affected by others in an agreeable manner, offers the necessary condition for becoming determined inwardly. That is, to the extent that our power or nature agrees with the power or nature of an external body affecting us, what is in agreement is nothing other than our essences; i.e. our agreement is only positive (IVp30-32d). This inward determination at once indicates what is equally in the part as well as the whole of the affected body and, consequently, that which is equally in the part as well as the whole of all bodies within the whole of Nature (facies totius universalis).67

In proportion as the mind and body are more active, an individual endeavors to affirm more and more relations simultaneously (IIp13s;IVp38d). This endeavor of an actual essence is nothing other than a part of the whole of reality, in its

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67 Spinoza’s account of cheerfulness (hilaritas) and titillation (titillatio) are instructive here. The former involves an equal affection of all the parts of the body to the extent that each part maintains its proportion of motion-and-rest, whereas the latter involves an unequal affection of one or some of the parts to the degree that the body’s proportion of motion-and-rest is disrupted or confused. Melancholy and anguish are the corresponding painful emotions to these pleasures. The upshot of this is what is of particular interest at the moment. As the body’s parts are equally affected so that its proportion of motion-and-rest are retained (i.e. its actual essence is affirmed), it renders the body more capable of being affected in numerous ways and, consequently, affirming many relations simultaneously (IVp43d;IIp13s). This is why Spinoza proposes that “desire that arises from the pleasure or pain that is related to one or more, but not to all, parts of the body takes no account of the advantage of the whole of man” (IVp60). It is because such desire does not involve “our entire well-being” (IVp60s), i.e. because it does not arise from reason which involves the common notion, aequa in parte ac in toto est (IVp61).
individual particularity, affirming its actual agreement with other parts, and that insofar as it understands each to depend on the whole for its being. The *amor dei intellectualis*, or intuition *sub specie aeternitatis*, is nothing other than the formal reality of the idea that insofar as the whole necessarily agrees with all its parts, and insofar as every part is equally in the whole, a single part must be in agreement with every other and, consequently, the whole of which it is a part.68 The extension of a common notion from a particular agreement between locally related bodies to the universal agreement of all bodies globally is simultaneous. That is, once one has the idea of that which is equally in the part as in the whole, nothing further is required for thinking.69 There is no synthetic unity yet to be grasped, no sublation through negation; rather, one is ushered “very quickly” into the whole of Deus sive Natura. We think ourselves in distribution, we think through our effects, we think about what agrees with us. The moment a common notion occurs is a decisive moment precisely because with it the entire task of thinking is laid out in full. The problem of passivity does not, then, find a concluding solution through one’s becoming active; the problem always remains. Since the activity of understanding conceives

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68 This is precisely the meaning of “becoming who one is”. In his essay, “‘Becoming Who One Is’ in Spinoza and Nietzsche,” Brandon C. Look asks, “How does the claim that man is essentially part of nature relate to the idea that there is a dissonance between individual and world? Spinoza’s claim is simply that because man is part of nature, he cannot but be affected sometimes by things of which he is not the adequate cause, by things that are, as it were, outside of him. In Part V, we come to see that blessedness is the knowledge of how one is part of nature and how who one is has been determined by things of which one was not the adequate cause. In short, for Spinoza we come to love God in part because we recognize our place within the world and our determined nature within this world. And ultimately, *amor fati* is a consequence of Nietzsche’s belief in eternal return, just as *amor dei intellectualis* is a consequence of Spinoza’s belief that we are simply part of nature.” (in *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 50 (July 2001), pp. 327-38; p.336)

69 Pierre Macherey makes a concomitant statement when he maintains that, “following Spinoza, it is the Whole that is given first in an absolute beginning (...) Spinoza thinks of the process of knowledge in a non-evolutionary manner as a process without end: a process of self-determination of thought that permits one to know the real in totality, following a law of absolute causality, but without completely exhausting the determinations within it.” (from *Hegel or Spinoza*, p.75)
acque in parte ac in toto est, it remains a passive part of Nature while at the same time actively conceiving itself “independently of other parts” (IVp2d). This independent conception is, as we have seen, owing to the inward determination of the individual and not to a conception of the mind or body as independent of external minds or bodies. Atomism does not follow from independent conception. Rather, since “it is impossible for a man not to be part of Nature and not to undergo changes other than those which can be understood solely through his own nature and of which he is the adequate cause,” it follows that humans are, as all else, necessarily a part of the whole of Nature, and, consequently, in constant need of external bodies to persist in existence (IVapp.27). We are never removed from passive affections, never isolable in fact, and consequently, never ontologically independent. In becoming active we do not accede beyond passivity, we simply become more powerful, and consequently less passive, in relation to the power of bodies affecting us (IVp5).

**Conclusion**

There is a tiny worm living in the blood. It is situated in its place, observes what is around it, interacts with the things constantly affecting it, regards each thing as a whole and regards itself in the same way. It does not know how these apparent wholes interact with each other, nor how it interacts with them; i.e. there is no clear idea of the “mutual adaptation” and “reciprocal relation” (Ep32) that must occur for
any of these things to be and be conceived.\footnote{The worm in the blood is, to my mind, one and the same with the subjectivity found in Humean empiricism.} What will enable this tiny worm “living in the blood as we are living in our part of the universe,” to obtain the idea that itself, the things affecting and modifying it, and reciprocally, the things it affects and modifies, are parts of a larger whole? What needs to occur for the worm to understand that even the blood in which it is situated is itself but a part and, further, that the blood within its body is a whole including other worms in the same way that it is included in the blood? It is only “if we imagine that there are no causes external to the blood which would communicate new motions to the blood, nor any space external to the blood, nor any other bodies to which the particles of the blood could transfer their motions ... the blood would always have to be regarded as a whole, not a part” (Ep32). The problem is not simply that there “are many other causes which do in fact modify the laws of the nature of the blood and are reciprocally modified by the blood,” but rather the inability to understand this is precipitated by the image-ideas the worm (i.e. individual humans) forms through its inattention to the way its nature adapts to the others “so that they are in the closest possible agreement” (Ep32). As we saw, it is through the passive transition to a greater state of perfection and, in that transition, a further passive transition to a state of inward determination that the worm is able to begin to understand its nature through the modifications constituting it. Within this inward determination it obtains a clear and distinct perception of some affect following from it adequately, and forms a common notion. The common notion is that, “all bodies are surrounded by others and are reciprocally determined to exist and to act in a fixed and
determinate way, the same ratio of motion to rest being preserved in them taken all together, that is, in the universe as a whole. Hence it follows,” thinks Spinoza, “that every body, in so far as it exists as modified in a definite way, must be considered as a part of the whole universe and must agree with the whole and cohere with other parts” (Ep32). It is to the nature of this whole that we now turn, understanding that our investigation will involve a nature “not limited, but absolutely infinite, its parts modified by the nature of this infinite potency in infinite ways and are compelled to undergo infinite variations” (Ep32).
II

Power-Based Ontology and Dispositional Causality

This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made. But it always was, is, and will be: an ever-living Fire, with measures of it kindling, and measures going out. – Heraclitus, DK, B 30

What Is There?

It was the business of the first chapter to establish grounds for thinking of Spinoza’s philosophy in mereological terms, but just what those mereological terms are remains to be seen. Indeed, in the last chapter we concluded with the statement that the whole of Nature was “not limited, but absolutely infinite, its parts modified by the nature of this infinite potency in infinite ways and compelled to undergo infinite variations” (Ep32). What does this mean? What is this absolute and unlimited ‘infinite potency’? What sense can be made of an infinite whole, and what sense for that matter, can be made of a potestative whole? In what sense does such a whole, absolutely and infinitely powerful, have parts and in what would the nature of parthood consist on such an account? Now, we left off affirming that an adequate idea was one where the power of thinking expressed the common notion aeque in parte ac in toto est, and furthermore, that such an expression necessarily involved
some sort of mereological agreement of the essences of all things. However, at present it is not at all clear just what the nature of whole and part themselves are, nor just how whole and part relate. However, it appears that if we are going to get clear on the mereology of Spinoza’s philosophy, we will have to get clear on the ontology first. That is, we will have to determine what there is before we can apprehend what depends on what. Spinoza is clear enough that all that exists is substance and its modes, but what we will have to determine is the essence of this existence. According to the passage just quoted, Spinoza indicates that substance is an ‘infinite potency’, but it is difficult to understand just what this means, let alone how this infinite potency, in its simplicity, somehow involves infinite modal variation.

The present chapter will, therefore, be dedicated to developing Spinoza’s ontology and the causality it involves in terms of power. I will argue that since, with respect to natura naturans, Spinoza considers its absolute and infinite existence in terms of power (potentia), he is obliged to also consider the activity coextensive with such existence in terms of power (potestas). Given the powerful essence of natura naturans, the modes (or natura naturata), whose essence and existence depend on the former, repeat the essence of natura naturans as its internal differentiations. That is, modal essences are formally defined by their causal power, and their actual essence is just this intrinsic dispositionality manifested through affective relations with every other.
Spinoza’s ontology admits of a single category: power.\(^{71}\) This category, however, involves a non-numerical distinction that allows there to be many mutable things (viz. powers, modes) depending on one immutable thing (viz. Power, substance). It is, as we have already intimated, the distinction between formal and actual essence, or what is the same thing, between potentia and potestas (i.e. in this context, the power to exist and the power to act respectively). So, for example, the formal essence of God is the absolutely infinite power to exist, but this formal essence necessarily involves the actual essence of the absolutely infinite power to act. There is the essential power, and there is this essence in operation. The two are simultaneous: there is no priority in nature or time between them. The absolutely infinite power to act, being itself the active actuality of the formal essence of natura naturans, itself effects formal essences, which themselves simultaneously involve actual essences. The infinite immediate modes have a formal essence whose actual essence involves effecting the infinite mediate modes, whose formal essence involves the actual essence of effecting finite modes, whose formal essence involves an actual essence of affecting, and being affected by others. Spinoza’s ontology is meant to be able to hold the infinity of modal diversity within the absolute infinity of substance.\(^{72}\) Establishing just how this is intended to work will largely be the business of the present chapter.

\(^{71}\) Given my assertion that power is the only ontological category with which Spinoza operates, I understand it to be ‘attribute neutral’.

\(^{72}\) This is reminiscent of Nicholas of Cusa’s allusion to an Absolute Maximum containing a Minimum within it. E.g., Cusanus maintains, “the Maximum is the Absolute One, which is all things. And all things are in the Maximum; and since nothing is opposed to it, the Minimum likewise coincides with it, and hence the Maximum is also in all things. And because it is absolute, it is actually every possible being; it contracts nothing from things all of which are from it” (On Learned Ignorance, I.2). The
Now, it is one thing to submit such things in a cursory fashion, and another to explain them by providing sufficient reasons. Yet, in order to provide a structured explanation, an explanatory structure must be given. The chapter will therefore progress as follows. We will begin by questioning Spinoza’s formulation that *to be able to exist is power* by briefly relating his monism to Parmenides’. This will lead to an explication of Spinoza’s positive theology, namely his affirmation that God is an absolutely infinite power to exist and an absolutely infinite power to act. In order to explain this formulation, I will first explain *absolutely infinite* and then the *absolutely infinite power of existence*, followed by the *absolutely infinite power to act*. Once this has been accomplished, the chapter will move to a discussion of the causal power of substance immanently causing modes to themselves *be* causal powers, both in terms of essence and existence. The chapter will conclude with the problem of identity, which will be taken up in the next chapter dealing explicitly with mereology.

*Posse Existere Potentia Est*

If existence itself has an essence, then for Spinoza that essence is power. Both in relation to that whose essence involves existence necessarily, and to that whose essence does not, to be is to be powerful. In other words, either in itself or through another (*Id3;Id5*), to exist is one and the same as power. Thus, when Spinoza maintains as self-evident that, “*posse existere potentia est*” (the ability to exist is power; *Ip11s*), he is making a dual claim that the essence of any existing thing is question for Cusanus, as with Spinoza, is how the ‘Maximum’ (substance) involves the ‘Minimum’ (modes) without ‘opposition’ (ontological separation).
defined both *formally* by its power to be (*potentia*) and *actually* by its power to do (*potestas*). But why does Spinoza think this is self-evident? That is, what is the necessary connection between, or rather the identity of, being and power? That Spinoza does affirm the identity of being and power seems beyond question. In relation to God or Nature, whose essence necessarily involves existence, Spinoza thinks there is an “absolutely infinite power to exist,” from which, in and through itself, “*infinita res infinitis multis modis*” follow (Ip16;c2). In relation to modifications or affections of substance, the identity of being and power is repeated, albeit differently. Inasmuch as they exist as definite and determinate expressions of the absolutely infinite power of God or Nature, the power or disposition to do *x* just is the actual essence of a mode whose formal essence consists in having the power to exist (Ip36d;IIIp7d).\(^\text{73}\) Presently, the question is whether or not Spinoza is entitled to a power-based ontology and, if so, how it operates.

While Spinoza’s is not an Eleatic monism,\(^\text{74}\) he does nevertheless appear to affirm the Parmenidean position on the absoluteness of being. Parmenides maintains that, “It never was nor will be, since it is now, all together one, continuous. For what birth will you seek for it? How and whence did it grow? I shall not allow you to say nor to think from not being: for it is not to be said nor thought that it is not [...] it must either be completely or not at all. [...] For if it came into

\[^{73}\text{While this will be explained more fully, by formal essence I understand the causal powers intrinsic to an individual thing and by actual essence I understand the active actuality of a formal essence in reciprocal affective relations with other essences/individuals.}\]

\[^{74}\text{See in this regard Yitzhak Melamed’s “Why Spinoza is not an Eleatic Monist (Or Why Diversity Exists),” in *Spinoza on Monism*, edited by Philip Goff (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp.206-22. Melamed maintains, e.g., “when *natura naturans* flows into *natura naturata* it refracts further into another infinity which Spinoza stresses in the double infinity of the expression *infinita infinitis modis* (Ip16)” (209).}\]
being, it is not."\(^{75}\) This appears to be similar to the proof Spinoza provides for Ip7, namely, “substance cannot be produced by anything else and is therefore self-caused (\textit{causa sui}); that is, its essence necessarily involves existence; that is, existence belongs to its nature.” But is Spinoza’s \textit{causa sui} substance the same as Parmenides’ uncaused being? It may be useful to be reminded of a problem that dates back to the inception of philosophy in order to approach an answer to this question.

The journey from “\textit{muthos} to \textit{logos}”\(^{76}\) begins in Miletus where three philosophers warranted the appellation “philosopher” by inquiring into the nature of things in a way different than their more mythologically inclined predecessors. Their inquiry was concerned with uncovering a unifying principle whereby they could explain both why and how diverse and multiple things both are and come to be. Whereas his other compatriots sought this \textit{arche}\(^{77}\) by reducing all material things to one of the elements (viz. water for Thales, air for Anaximenes), Anaximander, apparently recognizing the antinomies inherent in such reductions,\(^{78}\)

\(^{75}\) (Parmenides, Fr. 8, as quoted in Simplicius \textit{in Phys.} 78, 5; 145, 5 in \textit{The Presocratic Philosophers.}, 249-50)


\(^{77}\) For a helpful introduction to the gravity of the introduction of the concept of \textit{arche}, see Lloyd P. Gerson’s \textit{God and Greek Philosophy: Studies in the Early History of Natural Theology} (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 5-14. Gerson explains \textit{arche} as “a principle of any orderly arrangement” (5), that was later enlisted as “starting points for explanation” (6) of such arrangements. The \textit{arche} must be different than that which it orders or else it explains nothing. Gerson is right to point out that this difference involved in considering \textit{arche} as explanation, need not apply when considering it as cause (7).

\(^{78}\) It is said of Anaximander, “evidently when he sees the four elements changing into one another, he does not deem it right to make any one of these the underlying substance” (Simp., \textit{loc. cit.} Recorded in Milton C. Nahm (ed.), \textit{Selections from Early Greek Philosophy} (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p.40. Francis Collingwood argues that Anaximander rightly sought after an \textit{arche} beyond the material elements because the reduction of the many to the one necessarily required some third conception (a force or energy or principle of individuation) to account for just how all things came to be from one element and returned to such an element upon exiting being. Anaximander’s \textit{apeiron}
alleges the *arche* to be located in an unbounded, indeterminate *apeiron* nature.\(^79\)

Simplicius relates that, in contradistinction to his fellow cosmologists, Anaximander asserts that this *arche* is, “neither water nor any of the other so-called elements, but some other *apeiron* nature, from which come into being all the heavens and the worlds in them.”\(^80\) Precisely because Anaximander associates this *arche* with no thing in particular he is forced to posit an eternal being or force whereby that which comes to be, becomes in the way it does by virtue of what always is in the same way.\(^81\) That is, in order to explain the cause of the realm of becoming and multiplicity he required an unconditioned condition.\(^82\) If beings can neither be nor be accounted for in themselves, then they must be in another and depend on it.\(^83\)

The conceptual separation of an unconditioned necessary being, unified and eternally selfsame, on the one hand, from the conditioned emergent becoming,

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\(^79\) The term *apeiron* can be translated to mean ‘infinite’, ‘unlimited’, ‘unbounded’, or ‘indefinite’.

\(^80\) From Simplicius, *Phys.* 24, 13; DK 12A9, as quoted in *Presocratic Philosophers*, p.107.

\(^81\) See Paul Seligman’s *The Apeiron of Anaximander: a Study in the Origin and Function of Metaphysical Ideas* (London: Athlone Press, 1962), wherein he argues that *apeiron*, privileged in the history of philosophy as being the first metaphysical concept, was a necessary creation insofar as it fulfilled “a fundamental need”. He further declares that this concept, “is not uncommitted speculation, but the response to a problem which requires this kind of ‘solution’ and may bear no other.” (p.7)

\(^82\) The authors of *Presocratic Philosophers* submit that the term *apeiron* as “not formally identified as fire, air, water or earth” would have been “expressed in terms of all inclusiveness and divine immortality.” (110).

\(^83\) See, e.g., Leibniz “On the Ultimate Origination of Things,” wherein the author maintains that, “since the reason for an existing thing must come from something that actually exists, it follows that there must exist some one entity of metaphysical necessity,” (in *Philosophical Essays*, p.150). Now, monism does not posit an ontological separation between that which absolutely exists and those things that do not exist absolutely. The resultant complaint is that monism is an acosmic theory and is not, consequently, entitled to other such existents at all. Jonathan Schaffer thinks, however, that rather than being a metaphysical position that only one thing exists, monism essentially and originally holds the position that the whole is prior to the parts depending on it for their existence. See e.g. “Monism: The Priority of the Whole,” *Philosophical Review*, Vol.119, No.1 (2010):31-76.
multiple and varied on the other, while allegedly solving one problem, inherited others. The one with which we are presently concerned is that which is associated with Parmenides’ ontological monism, and potentially Spinoza’s as well. Lloyd P. Gerson explains it thus: “A true arche must be undivided. Once, however, the arche is identified with being itself ... showing how it explains anything about the multiple and changing seems an impossible task.”

So, if Spinoza is intent on holding that all things that come to be are and are conceived in and through that which necessarily exists (Ip18d;Ip34d), is his project an equally impossible endeavour? I am inclined to think not, but the reason why hinges, I believe, precisely on the alleged identity between being and power.

Now, Parmenides thought there was no sense in differentiating between being and becoming, or rather, that the latter is reducible to non-being with the absolute affirmation of the former. With simplicity and inimitable force he declares, “there is (that which is) and it is impossible for it not to be.”

If we inquire into that which is by asking, “how is it?,” are we able to approach a reason for the impossibility of being’s non-existence? According to Parmenides’ exclusive disjunction, if an enquiry into being is made, the fundamental desideratum is whether or not being is being, or simply is. As a matter of course, Parmenides thinks it absurd to think the contrary to what must be fundamentally affirmed of

84 See also L.P. Gerson, God and Greek Philosophy, p. 26
85 From the fragments of Parmenides quoted in Selections from Early Greek Philosophy, p.92.
86 Heidegger’s question “how does it stand with being?” comes to mind here (Introduction to Metaphysics, I.25, p.30).
87 According to Néstor-Luise Cordero the existence of beings is predicated on the original meaning of eînai, so that “it is clearly the present tense that respects Parmenides’ thesis the best.” In By Being, It Is (Las Vegas: Parmenides Press, 2004), p. 62. The present-being of beings is eternally present because ‘now’ is the only way in which being can be; i.e. beings are because Being is eternally one and the same.
being; namely, “that it is (...) that it is not’ he adds almost gratuitously, ‘you could not know.”

Being is being. This simple identity statement establishes an impenetrable ontological limit while simultaneously introducing a fundamental dichotomy: there is no longer the change of coming to be or the alteration of becoming, there is being or there is nothing. Becoming, motion, alteration, and multiplicity are, it seems, entirely annihilated within one and simple Being.

In his book *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* Nietzsche comments,

> Now (these are) the consequences of Being: that which is true is in the eternal present; we may not say of it, It Was or It Will Be. The concept of time has nothing to do with it. Being cannot have come to be; if so, whence [would it come], From Not-Being? But this is nothing and can produce nothing. From Being? This would be nothing other than self-creation. (...) we may not say of Being that it does not exist. Being is indivisible, because no second thing exists that could divide it; all of space is filled by it alone. It is immovable, for whither would it move if it fills all space, if it is not of the one same sort through and through and is undivided?

Being is one and the same as itself eternally. As eternally self-same, being cannot change, since the only possibility of change available to it is non-being, and this is precisely what being neither is, nor can be. What is, is not nothing, and nothing

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88 Simplicius in *Phys. 116, 28* (lines 3-8) as quoted in *Presocratic Philosophers.*, 245.
89 Cordero maintains, “the absolutization of the concept of being is achieved by the negation of the contradictory concept of not-being” (By Being, It Is, p. 64). Spinoza’s concept of being is not achieved through negation, but the throu ght affirmation of the absolutely infinite power of existing that defines *Deus sive Natura*’s essence. Negation involves limitation and is, consequently, an inadequate idea in relation to substance (and its modifications). Hegel’s mistaking Spinoza’s *omnes negatio est determinatio* for the force of Being’s movement and self-differentiation is to have missed Spinoza’s wholly positive ontology. For an extended treatment on this point see Macherey, *Omnes Negatio Est Determinatio,* in his Hegel or Spinoza (pp.113-213).
90 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers,* p. 85.
91 In his Physics, Aristotle levels his criticism of the Eleatic ontology by submitting, “to enquire whether being is single and unchanging is no part of an enquiry into nature” (1.2, 185b25). He later goes on to say of Parmenides that he could not appreciate the different senses in which the term being is used (1.3, 185a20), namely that it is equivocal (a22), and that, “if what just is being is not an attribute of anything, but other things are attributed to it, why does just being mean being rather than non-being?” (186b4). It seems to me that Spinoza would agree with the latter statement, but would disagree with the former. The whole problem centres on the nature of change; i.e. does it
other than being *can be*. If it is impossible for anything other than being to be, how can Parmenides, or Spinoza, or indeed any other monist for that matter, account for any thing *other* than that which absolutely is? Perhaps, by simply asking, “what is that which is?”92 we will come to see that Spinoza’s answer to this question grants him the latitude to affirm both absolute being (as self-same unity) and contingent becoming (as differentiated multiplicity). That is, for Spinoza, becoming, difference, and multiplicity turn out not to be otherwise than being, sameness and unity. The question is whether being is, “equal to itself on every side, (and) lies uniformly within its limits,”93 or if being is disparate, processive, and unlimited;94 or, in a word, whether absolute being is essentially an unlimited (*apeiron*) and eternal “potency-in-act.”95 Being has no other because it is absolutely and infinitely powerful, and as such, involves infinite modifications undergoing infinite variations.

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93 *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Parmenides (Fr.8, 5-21, Simplicius in Phys. 78, 5; 145, 5), p. 249.
94 Within the current Presocratic setting, Spinoza would appear to align more with Heraclitus, Anaximander, and Anaxagoras (and possibly Empedocles). For Heraclitus, we have the identification of being, not with itself, but with a roiling, eternally varying principle of becoming. Fragment 30 encapsulates this identity nicely: “This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made. But it always was, is, and will be: an ever-living Fire, with measures of it kindling, and measures going out.” In his *On Generation and Corruption*, Aristotle holds that for Anaxagoras coming to be and passing away are one and the same with alteration, “For those who say that the universe is one something (i.e. those who generate all things out of one thing) are bound to assert that coming-to-be is ‘alteration’, and whatever ‘comes-to-be’ in the proper sense is ‘being altered’” (1.1,314b10). If Spinozism is to avoid the static, undifferentiated being of Eleatic monism, the absolute cannot be *idem ipsum* but must involve *aliorum*. The establishment of a *virtual mereology* is intended to square this merely apparent opposition.
Absolutely Infinite

Now the *arche* for Spinoza appears to be an *apeiron* nature like that of Anaximander, but with a decidedly nuanced understanding of what an infinite nature must involve in order to warrant the appellation. For Spinoza, the absolutely infinite is endowed with an unlimited ability to exist and an unqualified power to act coextensive with this existence. In order to understand Spinoza’s associating the power of being and acting with infinity it will be useful to first give a brief exposition of Spinoza’s understanding of the infinite. To my mind, the best way to introduce Spinoza’s thinking about infinity is to situate it within the context of his understanding of error, with which we dealt extensively in the first chapter. With this in mind, we can begin to see Spinoza’s reasons for affirming an actual infinite and, consequently, identifying the actual infinite with both power and the whole of Nature. After proffering the thesis that “it is nonsense, bordering on insanity, to hold that extended Substance is composed of parts or bodies really distinct from one another,” (Ep12) Spinoza offers the following account as to why the mind is prone to such errors, and then lists the primary images that follow from this tendency:

If you ask why we have such a strong natural tendency to divide extended Substance, I answer that we conceive quantity in two ways: abstractly, or superficially, as we have it in the imagination with the help of the senses; or as substance apprehended solely by means of the intellect. If we have regard to quantity as it exists in the imagination (and this is what we most frequently and readily do), it is found to be divisible, finite, composed of parts, and multiplex. But if we have regard to it as it is in the intellect and apprehend the thing as it is in itself (and this is very difficult), then it is found to be infinite, indivisible, and one alone ... Further, from the fact that we are able to limit Duration and Quantity as we please, conceiving Quantity in abstraction from Substance and ignoring the efflux of Duration from things eternal, there arise Time and Measure: Time to limit Duration, and Measure to limit Quantity in such wise that we are thereby enabled to form images of them as best we may. Again, from the fact that we separate the Affections of Substance from Substance itself, and arrange them
in classes so that we can form images of them as best we may, there arises Number, whereby we limit them. (Ep12; see also Ip15s).

From the preceding examination it is clear that Spinoza is linking his account of imagined or inadequate ideas to his discussion of the infinite. Because the objects of its ideas are limited to effects, the imagination exchanges this limitation for the adequate idea of things. The application of confused and fragmentary ideas to extended Substance subjects the essences and/or causes of things to their existences and/or effects, and consequently confuses this subjection for the explication of things themselves (Ilp18s). Just as the idea of final causality inverts the whole order of Nature (IAppendix), the general characteristic of an erroneous idea is its propensity to confuse effects for causes. The effect of a body affecting our own produces an impression, and the impression of the effect produces an image; the image is then erroneously taken to be the idea of the thing and, as idea, is given the status of a cause (viz. of the image produced in us). In this state of confusion the imagination extends itself beyond its passivity in a pantomime of activity.\textsuperscript{96} That is, it forgets to exclude the existence of the thing imagined to be present (Ilp17s) and exchanges this forgotten exclusion for an inclusion of the essence of a thing according to its image. Since images are negative identities (i.e. as not being this or that impression, or as negating differences of similar impressions), things are conceived as independent of each other, and their relations are conceived to be

\textsuperscript{96} Gueroult calls images masquerading as concepts “intruders, who, fraudulently introduced into the intellect have done nothing but precipitate and consummate the ruin of our knowledge” (in “Spinoza’s Letter on the Infinite,” 198).
external, *partes extra partes*. The connections of images in the memory thereafter stabilizes the association of affects and effectively guarantees their reproducibility in and through the symbols that come to stand for them (e.g., time, measure, and number being the most general).

Spinoza insists that the employment of certain modes of the imagination in the field of the infinite perpetrates “the grossest absurdities” (Ep12), but why? In order to understand this insistence, it is essential that we appreciate Spinoza’s linking of abstract ideas with images, images with inadequacy, and inadequacy with falsehood and error. Images inherently limit adequate thought; they explicate nothing and consequently separate everything into the limits or boundaries they impose on things. It is for this reason that Martial Gueroult, in commenting on the 12th Letter, regards time, measure and number as “having nothing to do with the understanding.” They are, consequently, given by him the threefold status of

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97 See, e.g., Ep.50 wherein Spinoza maintains that, “God can only improperly be called one or single (...) since the existence of God is his very essence, and since we can form no universal idea of his essence, it is certain that he who calls God one or single has no true idea of God, or is speaking of him very improperly.” This is immediately followed by the infamous *omni determinatio est negatio*. Determinations are imagined limitations imposed on extended substance in the form of figures (of which number is a species) and, “does not pertain to the thing in regard to its being; (but) on the contrary it is its non-being.” Spinoza concludes then that, “since figure is nothing but determination, and determination is negation, figure can be nothing other than negation”.

98 Bergson gives a concomitant evaluation between the cinematographic thought of analysis and the mobile thought of intuition in his *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York: MacMillan, 1955). He is worth quoting at length in this regard:

> Out of variability we can make as many variations, qualities, and modifications as we please, since these are so many static views, taken by analysis, of the mobility given in intuition. But these modifications, put end to end, will produce nothing which resembles variability, since they are not parts of it, but elements, which is quite a different thing ... They are not parts of the movement, they are so many snapshots of it; they are, one might say, only supposed stopping-places. The moving body is never really in any of the points (p.42)

products of the imagination, nothings of knowledge, and aids to the imagination.\textsuperscript{100}

That Spinoza qualifies the notions of time, measure, and number by their activities of limiting and separating gives credence to this reading. The infinite, truly understood as unlimited, unbounded, immeasurable, and innumerable, cannot be apprehended by means of the imagination and its attendant abstractions. This is why Spinoza, in a letter to Jelles, insists that God is not one in number but is, rather, unique (\textit{unicum}; Ep50). Time is an image of duration in terms of units (IIIp18s1,2), measure pictures extended substance as bounded, delimited and divisible, and number abstracts units from real quantity and collects them under a common class.\textsuperscript{101}

It is for this reason that, upon declaring the failures to apprehend the true nature of the infinite, Spinoza begins his exposition in the 12\textsuperscript{th} Letter by quickly moving the discussion to a brief exposition of Substance, Modes, Eternity, and Duration. Without establishing such ontological moorings, the concept of the infinite will be carried by the imagination alone and will, consequently, apply its abstractions to images of effects. While a more robust explication of these ontological categories will occur in the subsequent sections, it is time now to move toward explicating Spinoza’s purportedly adequate account of the infinite itself. The adequacy of this account will contribute to our later investigation into Spinoza’s argument against the divisibility of extended substance as it is presented in Ip15s.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{100} See Deleuze’s entry “Abstractions” in the glossary of \textit{Spinoza: Practical Philosophy} (44-8).
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{101} See again Bergson whose describes the same problem as follows: “We place ourselves as a rule in immobility, in which we find a point of support for practical purposes, and with this immobility we try to reconstruct motion. We only obtain in this way a clumsy imitation, a counterfeit of real movement, but this imitation is more useful in life than the intuition of the thing itself would be.” (in \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics}, p.44). See also Deleuze, \textit{Expressionism}, p.203.
This will, consequently, ground the virtual mereological theory I am hoping to establish, so it is quite important that this is given due consideration.

Immediately after his opening salutations to Meyer, Spinoza’s letter on the infinite begins with the following salvo:

The question of the infinite has been universally found to be very difficult, indeed, insoluble, through failure to distinguish between that which must be infinite by its very nature or by virtue of its definition, and that which is unlimited not by virtue of its essence but by virtue of its cause. Then again, there is the failure to distinguish between that which is called infinite because it is unlimited, and that whose parts cannot be equated or explicated by any number, although we may know its maximum and minimum ... They would clearly have understood what kind of infinite cannot be divided into, or possess any, parts, and what kind can be so divided without contradiction. They would have understood what kind of infinite can be considered, without contradiction, as greater than another infinite, and what kind cannot be so conceived. (Ep12)

Now, that which is essentially infinite is substance, *natura naturans* or *Deus sive Natura* itself, while that which is infinite by virtue of its cause is *natura naturata*, the immediate and mediate infinite modes; i.e. motion-and-rest and absolutely infinite intellect, and the *facies totius universalis* (Ep64;Ilp13). This is in keeping with Spinoza’s distinction between *absolute infinitum* and *infinitum in suo genere* (Id6ex). We will see that this distinction involves a dependence relation upon which the whole theory of virtual mereology rests. At the moment, it is sufficient to submit that these distinctions repeat the distinction between formal and actual essence mentioned previously. I understand the other distinctions in the concept of infinity then to apply to the fundamental distinction between *absolute infinitum* and *infinitum in suo genere*. So, for example, the absolutely infinite is unlimited, while the mediate infinite mode of the *facies totius universalis* is known through maximum and minimum, while remaining numerically inexplicable. While the absolutely
infinite cannot be *really* or *actually* divided into parts (Ip12-15s; KV, I.ii), that which is infinite in kind, e.g. motion-and-rest, can be *modally* divided without contradiction (Ip15s; Ep12). Whatever the case, at the moment it is necessary to say something about the nature of the absolutely infinite, and we appear to have all that we need in order to do so.

The label “absolutely infinite” is properly accorded to God or Nature alone (Id6), because all of the connotations of infinity apply without qualification to it (viz. innumerable, unbounded, immeasurable, immense, limitless, and inexhaustible). That God or Nature eternally expresses infinite essence merely affirms that the power of existing is *limitlessly* enjoyed (Ep12; Id8). It is, therefore, determined to exist “solely from the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself alone” (Id7). Now, that existing is infinitely, or limitlessly, enjoyed by God or Nature, and that this existence is itself identified with God or Nature’s determination to act in and through Itself implies that only God or Nature *can* enjoy this power. There cannot be more than one infinitely infinite existence without confusing this infinity with that which is infinite in its kind. This is essentially the distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* (Ip29s).

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102 I understand the use of the term ‘parts’ here to involve numerically distinct, or proper, parts and not the powerful parts that *natura naturata* necessarily involves as the actual activity of the absolutely infinite power to exist and act. This will be defended more explicitly as the chapter progresses.

An infinity in its kind is part of the absolutely infinite power of existence, and cannot exist outside of this whole.\textsuperscript{104} The proof of this proposition is found in Ip4d and Ip5d, wherein Spinoza, enlisting the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, attests that were there to be two absolutely infinite entities there would be nothing to distinguish them save their attributes or affections. But the attributes or affections of that which is absolutely infinite could not possibly be distinct between two substances without the substances themselves involving different natures (Ip6d; Ip7d). Since the only candidates for differentiating between substances would be that which is ‘infinite in its kind’, in order for there to be another substance distinguishable through its attributes and affections, it would have to either be a substance with unlimited attributes and affections or a limited substance (Ip8d). In the former case, the one absolutely infinite would be indistinguishable from the other, and so no numerical difference could be expressed. In the latter case, a limited absolutely infinite substance is contradictory. Thus Spinoza concludes that “to be infinite is the unqualified affirmation of the existence of some nature” (Ip8s1); i.e. God or Nature (natura naturans). Since things exist that could not have come to exist by virtue of their own power (virtus, potestas), Spinoza is content to affirm that there must be an unlimited power of existence in and through which things enjoy existence for a time (Ip11d3). We must now say more about the

\textsuperscript{104} This mereological relation will be explained further in the subsequent section dealing with Spinoza’s argument against the divisibility of corporeal substance. For now, it will be sufficient to indicate that Spinoza in no way thinks of Deus sive Natura or the absolute infinite as an integral whole composed of proper parts. See, e.g., §2.1-2.3 in Andrew Arlig’s "Medieval Mereology" in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
absolutely infinite power to exist by investigating Spinoza’s claim that the ability to exist is power.

**Absolutely Infinite Power to Exist**

When Spinoza maintains *posse existere potentia est* what does he mean? If we consider the demonstration to Ip7 we may obtain a clue toward uncovering the reason behind Spinoza’s identifying being with power. The proposition maintains that “Existence belongs to the nature of substance,” to which one may (rightly) wish to ask, ‘what is the nature of substance that existence necessarily belongs to it?’

The demonstration includes two features that are of particular significance. Spinoza maintains that, “Substance cannot be produced by anything else and is therefore self-caused.” First, we must ask after the *non potest produci ab alio* nature of substance. Why is it that substance *cannot* be produced by anything else? The term *producii*, in this context, certainly means ‘create’ or ‘bring into existence’. If substance were a thing whose coming-into-being depended on another, it would not, properly speaking, *be* substance. This is not simply a semantic or definitional quibble; there *must* be something whose “essence necessarily involves existence” (Ip7d) because were there no such thing, nothing could possibly be. But is this counterfactual claim merely an intellectual intuition or is there a sufficient reason for Spinoza’s thinking this is so?

The impossibility of substance being produced by something other is not primarily a restriction of modality, but of ability (i.e. the impossibility is predicated on the inability and not *vice versa*). Thus, when Spinoza uses *non potest* he quite
literally means that no external thing is able, or has the power, to produce substance (Ip6c; Ip8s2; Ip11s). It is this inability that makes *ab alio* production of substance an impossibility. But, correlatively, this inability is predicated on the necessary affirmation of the positive ability or power of substance to be, both *absolutely* and *infinitely*: absolute because substance is not qualified by anything other, and infinite because substance is not limited by anything external to it (Ep12). The *formal essence* of substance is located in its *internal efficient causal* power to exist in-and-of itself (Ep.60). Thus, the inability of anything other to cause substance to be at once links substance with causal power, while at the same time leaving only two options available for conceiving of causality in relation to substance; namely: *non causa* or *causa sui*. Now, clearly Spinoza thinks the latter is appropriate for the definition of substance, but why?

That which is uncaused exists *simpliciter* and, as such, neither requires nor countenances an explanation or formal cause for its being.¹⁰⁵ This is the facticity of being in the Parmenidean tradition. With his arguments for the existence of God, Nature or substance, Spinoza seems to be rejecting the brute facticity involved in the identity of being with itself, opting instead for the identity of being with power through a causal account. If being is productive, it must be more than simply ‘that which is’ or that which simply exists, uncaused; it must be *causa sui*, powerful (*potentia*) and productive (*potestas*). What Spinoza must establish, then, is the essential productivity of being. He does this by proving that the absolute exists by

¹⁰⁵ While this will be expanded upon, I more or less agree with Karolina Hübner who maintains that “Spinozistic substance has a formal-causal relation to its own existence as well as to all its modes or propría” (in On the Significance of Formal Causes in Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” forthcoming in the *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie;* pp.20-1).
virtue of its own causal power. It is in this way that the essence of existence cannot itself be existence, but power.  

If being were not identified with power there would be nothing in the concept of being per se that would prohibit the weakness of being able to not exist (Ip11d3:s). That is, being, uncaused and identical to itself, admits of the ability to have not been precisely because non-being lies outside of it, external to it. It would not have sufficient power to be and would not, consequently, have a sufficient reason to be rather than not (Ip8s2;Ip11d;IId2). In a word, uncaused being does not have a formal cause determining its necessary existence. It is for this reason that non-being, on the Eleatic account, paradoxically enjoys some kind of existence because it negatively qualifies being id ipsum, and consequently constitutes an external limitation on it. Simply because being could not have come to be from non-being does not mean that being must, of necessity, be. The impossibility of non-being does not necessarily follow from the identification of being id ipsum because it still admits of the question, ‘why being rather than non-being?’; a question that presumes that being is in the modality of mere possibility. While Spinoza indeed makes the Parmenidean affirmation of the being of being, the source of this

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106 In her essay “Spinoza on Causation and Power,” Francesca di Poppa maintains that, “the essence of God is such that it is the efficient internal cause of God’s existence” (in The Southern Journal of Philosophy, Vol.51, No.3 (Sept. 2013):297-319; p.316). See also the entry “Power” in Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, wherein Deleuze maintains, “Divine power is twofold: an absolute power of existing, which entails a power of producing all things; an absolute power of thinking, hence of self-comprehension, which entails the power of comprehending all that is produced” (p.98).  
107 This has the consequence that nothing either completely ceases to be, nor completely generates ex nihilo. There is no substantial change, no coming to be or passing away simpliciter, in Spinoza’s philosophy (e.g., Spinoza would certainly reject Aristotle’s assertion that “substance alone comes to be tout court” (Physics,190b1).
affirmation is not to be found in being itself, but in the essential nature of an 
*absolute* and *infinite* power through which its existence is necessary.\(^{108}\)

Non-being can only be impossible if being is essentially powerful. This is why the *Ethics* begins with “*per causum sui.*” If Spinoza thought it was enough to define substance as that which absolutely exists of necessity, without defining this necessity in terms of the causal power necessary for it to be, *Deus sive Natura* (or *natura naturans*) could just as easily have not been. Leibniz’s question, which Heidegger echoes, (i.e. “why is there something rather than nothing”\(^{109}\)), is a false dichotomy for Spinoza, precisely because of the equation of being with power.

Spinoza does not, consequently, think it worthwhile to provide an argument for the possibility of God precisely because the actuality of God cannot possibly be doubted if being and power are necessarily identical.\(^{110}\) Indeed, if Spinoza thought establishing the possibility of an absolutely infinite entity were necessary, the first

\(^{108}\) While submitting that the necessary existence of substance is located in its absolutely infinite power to be, the sufficiency of this reason is yet grounded in a conceptual relation in keeping with an explanation according to the principle of sufficient reason (PSR). I agree, therefore, with Francesca Di Poppa’s assessments of the position of the PSR in her essay, “Spinoza on Causation and Power,” (*The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.51, No.3 (Sept. 2013):297-319). I think she is right to say, e.g. “ultimately, for Spinoza, causal relations, understood as the determined productivity of an impersonal, irrepres

\(^{109}\) In Leibniz, “Principles of Nature and Grace Based on Reason.” In his *Introduction to Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Yale University Press, 2000) Heidegger’s “first of all questions” l.1(1) seeks the ground from which beings come to be l.2(3). The question, “why are there beings at all instead of nothing?” does not, as he puts it, “seek causes for beings, causes of the same kind and on the same level as beings themselves. This why-question does not just skim the surface, but presses into the domains that lie ‘at the ground,’ even pressing into the ultimate, the limit” l.3 (3). Heidegger thinks that the nothing as the limit of being itself is the ground of being, but for Spinoza, this ground is only possibly an unlimited power of existing that makes the question of being’s alternative only hypothetical (i.e. owing to the imagined being of the negative).

\(^{110}\) In her book *Kant and Spinoza: Transcendental Idealism and Immanence from Jacobi to Deleuze* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), Beth Lord rightly maintains that, “If substance exists, it necessarily and eternally exists as the activity of bringing about its being. It is both the power to cause its actuality and the actual effect of its own causal power (…) The activity, or power, of substance is its very essence: to be is to act. Substance is the power of self-actualization.” (p.13)
proof he offers in Ip11 could hardly be considered worthy of the title. Thus, when Spinoza maintains that “If you deny this, conceive, if you can, that God does not exist. Therefore his essence does not involve existence” (Ip11d1), his argument hinges on ability and power. Spinoza is effectively challenging the denier of the existence of God the ability to do so truly (i.e. with an adequate idea of God111). The prospective denier of God’s existence is attempting to claim, not merely that God or Nature does not necessarily exist, but that God “or substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence,” does not, of necessity, exist. One is not able to deny existence to such an essence without eo ipso negating existence per se. To deny existence to the infinitely and absolutely powerful Deus sive Natura is to deny existence tout court. But since the very ability to deny, or believe that one is denying, the existence of God is predicated on the ability to be, it is absurd to deny existence to God or Nature in and through whom things both are and come to be (Ip24-25). This is why Spinoza later makes the reductio argument “either nothing exists or an absolutely infinite Entity necessarily exists” (Ip11d3): Deus sive Natura or substance only admits of an “unqualified affirmation” of its existence (Ip8s1), precisely because such existence is, in essence, an absolutely infinite power of existing.112 Negation, or negativity, in relation to being is, then, only possibly an erroneous image-idea; i.e. the prefix non- enjoys existence only per

111 That is, not as some entity, external to the (created) world with anthropomorphic propría attached to it (Ip8s2; Ip17s; Ip33s2; IAppendix; etc.).
112 Spinoza is likely drawing from Descartes here. In his reply to Caterus’ line of questioning regarding the meaning of God’s deriving its existence ‘from itself’, Descartes maintains that “God derives his existence from himself, or has no cause apart from himself ... isn’t merely the negative fact that there is no other cause of God – but comes from the real immensity of his power.” (Objections to the Meditations and Descartes’s Replies, trans. Jonathan Bennett, http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/descartes1642.pdf, p.8)
imaginationis, and not formaliter. The idea of God must contain as much formal reality as it does objective reality.\(^{113}\)

The whole notion of identifying being and power comes to a head in the scholium to Ip11 wherein Spinoza maintains that “since the ability to exist is power, it follows that the greater degree of reality that belongs to the nature of a thing, the greater amount of energy (virium) it has from itself to exist. So an absolutely infinite Entity, or God, will have from himself absolutely infinite power to exist, and therefore exists absolutely.”\(^{114}\) In order for an absolutely infinite Entity to exist it must, for Spinoza, have the absolutely infinite power to exist. Now, Spinoza appears to think that, were the absolutely infinite power to exist not identical with the essence of an absolutely infinite Entity, nothing would be able to (posse) exist. But why couldn’t anything exist? The third proof of Ip11 is again instructive. Spinoza reasons that “if what now necessarily exists is nothing but finite entities, then finite entities are more potent than an absolutely infinite Entity – which is absurd, (as is self-evident).” By presupposing the existence of that whose existence he is meant to prove, Spinoza seems to be begging the question here, but I take him, rather, to be making a point about the ‘degree of reality’ of a thing and the correlative ‘amount of

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\(^{113}\) See, e.g. Deleuze, Expressionism, p.86-9, wherein the author argues that since “the power of thinking is no greater than the power of existing and acting,” (p.87) then the idea of God, as it exists objectively in the power of thinking, must exist formally.

\(^{114}\) The similarities with Nicholas of Cusa are too apparent to ignore. In On Learned Ignorance, the former maintains, “the Maximum is the Absolute One, which is all things. And all things are in the Maximum; and since nothing is opposed to it, the Minimum likewise coincides with it, and hence the Maximum is also in all things” (I.2); and again, “since the absolutely Maximum is all that which can be, it is altogether actual” (I.4); and yet again, “For Absolute Maximality could not be actually all possible things unless it were infinite and were the boundary of all things and were unable to be bounded by any of these” (I.4); and finally, “Nothing could exist if the unqualifiedly Maximum did not exist” (I.6). The maximum/minimum distinction in the absence of opposition is enlisted by Spinoza to much the same effect it is in Cusa’s work. There is no opposition, no negation of that which enjoys absolute and infinite power of existence. This point will be revisited in detail when we outline a Spinozistic mereology of powers.
energy (virium)’ required for the thing to be. If all that existed were finite entities, e.g. myself, this chair, a molecule, the solar system, a quark, etc., then such things would, of necessity, be able to (posse) exist of themselves; i.e. in and through their own power of activity (potestas). Spinoza thinks this is absurd because no finite entity, per finitum, enjoys existence in and through itself precisely because such existence is always necessarily qualified by another such entity (i.e. causally; Id5;la1;Ip28). To say that a finite entity has the power (potentia) to exist in itself is not to have a conception of a finite entity, but of an infinite one;\footnote{Spinoza maintains something similar when he states that "if someone were to say that he has a clear and distinct – that is true – idea of substance and that he nevertheless doubts whether such a substance exists, this would surely be just the same as if he were to declare that he has a true idea but nevertheless suspects that it may be false" (Ip8s2).} but if an infinite entity, then one whose power (potentia) to exist is equal to its degree of reality (viz. absolute and infinite). Thus, when Spinoza maintains that “God’s power is his very essence” (Ip34), he does so on the grounds that “from the sole necessity of God’s essence it follows that God is self-caused” (Ip34d).

God’s power of existence is considered absolute infinitum, then, because “whatever expresses essence and does not involve any negation belongs to its essence” (Id6ex). Nothing can annul or negate the existence of Deus sive Natura for there is nothing possibly outside it, or external to it. There is nothing limiting, nothing conditioning, nothing subjecting, and nothing qualifying the absolutely infinite ‘potency-in-act’. Non-being has no place in Spinoza’s pure, positive ontology because the formal essence of an absolutely infinite entity has the absolutely infinite power to be. Causa-sui does not, therefore, involve an external efficient cause, but rather an internal efficient cause that is identical to the formal causality of the being
in question. God is the cause-of-Itself insofar as the power of existing defines Its nature absolutely and infinitely.\textsuperscript{116} It is, however, also for this reason that nothing possible is not actual, and, furthermore, that nothing actual is impotent (Ip35;Ip36d). Everything that has the power (\textit{potentia}) to exist, necessarily involves the power to act (\textit{potestas}); the formal essence of any existence involves a corresponding actual essence. In itself or through another, an effect, or effects, \textit{must} follow from a given \textit{res} (Ip36). An absolutely infinite power to exist \textit{must} act in a way coeval with such an essence; this requires that infinite effects must follow freely from the infinite cause of itself (Ip16d;Ip20d).

\textbf{Absolutely Infinite Power to Act}

In Ip25s Spinoza maintains that, “in the same way that God is said to be self-caused, God must also be said to be the cause of all things (\textit{quo Deus dicitur causa sui, etiam omnium rerum causa dicendus est}).” It is not immediately obvious why \textit{causa sui} and \textit{omnium rerum causa} are identified, so Spinoza qualifies this proposition in the corollary by adding that, “particular things are nothing but affections of the attributes of God; that is, modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way.” Now, whatever we may think about Spinoza’s theory of modes, at present we are concerned with asking whether he is \textit{ontologically} entitled to them. We certainly need to ask, first, why is there an

\textsuperscript{116} See e.g. Hübner, “On the Significance of Formal Causes in Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” wherein the author maintains that Spinoza’s basic notion of causality is owing to the Cartesian notion of formal causality. The latter is, according to Hübner, “both existence-bestowing and inferential” (p.18) and translates for Spinoza into the following definition of causality: ‘to ‘cause’ is for an essence the property (or set of properties) necessary and sufficient for the actual existence and conception of a thing and identical to a causal ‘power’.” (p.19).
infinite variety of things at all?; and second, what is the ontological status of such modes or affections? However, ontologically speaking, both of these questions essentially reduce to this one: how is self-causality per se other-causing? This just is the problem of the identifying *causa sui* and *omnium rerum causa*. The problem appears to be the following: if substance, or *natura naturans*, is distinctly conceivable in-itself and, furthermore, if its nature is eternally immutable, what is the connection between it and the modes, or *natura naturata*, that are alleged to depend on it for both their essence and existence?\[117\]

In Ip16 Spinoza proposes that *infinita res infinitis multis modis* follow from the necessity of the divine nature and he proves this proposition by referring to the true definition of a thing and the properties inherent in the thing so conceived. Spinoza maintains that since “divine nature possesses absolutely infinite attributes, of which each also expresses infinite essence in its own kind, then there must necessarily follow from the necessity of the divine nature an infinity of things in infinite ways” (Ip16d). The three corollaries then proceed to affirm three forms of causality belonging necessarily to God: 1) “God is the efficient cause of all things;” 2) “God is the cause through himself, not per accidens;” 3) “God is absolutely the first

\[117\] In his essay, "Why Spinoza is not an Eleatic Monist (or Why Diversity Exists)," Yitzhak Melamed gives a succinct account of this problem: “Even if we consider the infinite attributes as constituting a real diversity (rather than diversity of conceptions of one and the same res), it seems that when *natura naturans* flows into *natura naturata* it refracts further into another infinity which Spinoza stresses in the double infinity of ‘*infinita infinitis modis*. It seems that with each attribute the flow from *natura naturans* into *natura naturata* involves refraction from unity and indivisibility into a plenitude of radical plurality and divisibility. But what is the reason for this further refraction? If in the realm of *natura naturans* each attribute is strictly indivisible, why does the flow to *natura naturata* bring about any further diversity? What justifies the emergence of the many from the indivisible one?” (209-10). Deleuze asks a similar question in his *Expressionism*: “Spinoza never confuses the essence of a mode with an essence of substance: my power remains my own essence, God’s power remains his own essence, while my power is at the same time part of the power of God. How can this be so? How can a distinction of essences be reconciled with a participation of powers?” (p.92).
cause.” While each of these notions of causality involve a distinct conception of God’s activity, the present interest is in what all three of these causal statements declare about the essential nature of God or natura naturans. It is, I believe, in the first corollary to Ip17 that Spinoza gives a succinct reason for efficient, first, and per se causality belonging necessarily to God. Furthermore, this reason provides the necessary clue to uncovering the identity of causa sui and omnium rerum causa. To wit, Spinoza states that, “there is no cause, except the perfection of God’s nature, which either extrinsically or intrinsically moves God to act.” It is on account of the formal essence, or the formal causa-sui nature, of God, that God’s essence is actually active in infinita res infinitis multis modis.

When Spinoza alludes to there being no cause outside of the perfection of God’s nature, the nature to which he is referring could only be the absolutely infinite power of existing.\(^{118}\) It is not surprising then that the following corollary names God as the only free cause. Now, freedom on Spinoza’s account is not, as is well known, conceived in terms of a voluntaristic will by which God does whatsoever It pleases.\(^{119}\) Rather, freedom is accorded to a thing whose determination to action is

\(^{118}\) Stuart Hampshire maintains that, “Spinoza’s denial that an act of creation by a transcendent creator is logically possible could be translated as a denial of the possibility of energy entering into a system from outside” in Spinoza and Spinozism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p.63.

\(^{119}\) Spinoza is adamantly against such a view and repeatedly expresses his opposition to the confusion of an image-idea of God with that of a true one. While many areas could be cited, Ilp3s is the most succinct; it is worth repeating here: By God’s power the common people understand free-will and God’s right over all things that are, which things are therefore commonly considered contingent. They say that God has power to destroy everything and bring it to nothing. Furthermore, they frequently compare God’s power with that of kings. (...) God acts by the same necessity whereby he understands himself; that is, just as it follows from the necessity of the divine nature that God understands himself, by that same necessity it also follows that God acts infinitely in infinite ways... God’s power is nothing but God’s essence in action, and so it is as impossible for us to conceive that God does not act as that God does not exist. Furthermore, if one wished to pursue the matter, I could easily show here that the power that common people assign to God is not only a human power (which shows that they conceive God
determined *solis suae naturae legibus* (solely by the laws of its own nature; Id7).

Given that the existence of God was determined to essentially be power (*potentia*),
the power to act (*potestas*) *must* be simultaneous, coextensive, or identical with this
very *potentia*. Thus, when Spinoza maintains that, “it is as impossible for us to
conceive that God does not act as that God does not exist,” this impossibility is
predicated first on the identity of (God’s) being with power, and second, on this
power being “nothing but God’s essence in action” (Ilp3s). The impossibility is,
again, conditioned on *ability*. As the activity of an eternally actual power of existing,
*omnium rerum causa* is simply what *causa sui* substance necessarily involves in-and-
through-itself.\(^{120}\) The formal essence of God, determined as the absolutely infinite
power to exist, simultaneously involves an actual essence, determined as the
absolutely infinite power to act. If this were not the case, then one would have a
conception of an absolutely infinite power of existing that, at the same time,
involved an inability or impotency. This is why Spinoza thinks that theologians,
both ancient and contemporary, who think of God’s causality as a *causa transiens* by
means of an act of free will, negate God’s power to both be and act (Ip17s).\(^ {121}\)

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\(^{120}\) In his essay “Substance and Its Modes,” H.F. Hallett maintains that, “modes derive their existence from the creative action that is *substance*; substance realizes itself in the creation of modes, for there is no action without deed.” (in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Marjorie Greene [New York: Anchor, 1973], pp.131-63; p.134).

\(^{121}\) “For,’ thinks Spinoza, ‘they are obliged to admit that God understands an infinite number of creatable things which nevertheless he can never create.” More fundamental though is the irrevocable ontological separation such a notion of God’s activity involves. E.g., in his book, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), John Cooper gives a succinct statement of the orthodox position at which Spinoza aims his criticisms: “God is in himself maximal Being – absolutely self-sufficient, eternal, immutable, omnipotent, omniscient, completely active, and most excellent in every way. Although he does not need the world, God
Rather, insofar as its very existence is active, the active actuality of this power (viz. 
natura naturans) could involve nothing other than actually causing the essence and 
existence of all possible things (Ip25). It is for this reason that Spinoza maintains in 
Ip17s that “from God’s supreme power or infinite nature an infinity of things in 
infinite ways – that is, everything – has necessarily followed or is always following 
from that same necessity.” If the essence of any existence is power, such an essence 
must actually involve the operation of this power (potentia), and since this 
operation is nothing other than what it actually can do (potestas), the ability to 
cause an effect must follow from the essence of any existent (Ip36). In the case of 
absolutely infinite substance, its activity will necessarily involve causing infinite 
things in infinite ways (Ip16;1p17d).

Spinoza is clearly against the traditional theological doctrine of creatio ex 
nihilo that was originally championed by Philo of Alexandria in the Jewish tradition 
and Iraneaus in the Christian tradition.\(^{122}\) At least one of the reasons for his

eternally and freely chooses to create it from nothing and sustain it through time ... God in himself is 
utterly transcendent, all-determining, and changeless. The world is not part of his nature or 
existence.” That such a position admits of what Karl Barth calls the ‘riddle of creation’ (namely, "how 
can there be something along side God, of which He has no need?") is just the type of erroneous 

\(^{122}\) The latter gives voice to the orthodox position: "God the Creator, who made the heaven and the 
earth, and all things that are therein and to demonstrate that there is nothing either above Him or 
after Him; nor that, influenced by any one, but of His own free will, He created all things, since He is 
the only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, the only Father, alone containing all things, and Himself 
commanding all things into existence” (in Against Heresies, II.1, 
http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.iii.ii.html) For more on the ancient origins of the doctrine 
of creatio ex nihilo see Gerhard May’s incomparable Creatio Ex Nihilo: the Doctrine of ‘Creation Out of 
Nothing’ in Early Christian Thought (London: T&T Clark, 2004). The classical articulation of the 
doctrine: "God is unoriginate, eternal, needs nothing, is self-sufficient, and confers existence on 
everything that is ... God embraces everything and grants existence to all things." (p.165); "God 
through himself, created the cosmos.” To be explicit, one is in the position of claiming that God has 
the infinite power to cause all things, while at the same time maintaining that God need not exercise 
this power. This is to deny that “God’s omnipotence has from eternity to eternity been actual and will 
remain for eternity in the same actuality” (Ip17s), which is to both affirm and deny at the same time 
that God has the power to create.
opposition has already been marshaled: the doctrine supposes God to exist in-and-by-itself, self-sufficient, in need of nothing, and yet somehow able to both create and relate to things ontologically other than or outside Him, by virtue of a voluntary act of will (Ip15s;Ip17s). Earlier, we noted that Spinoza’s affirmation of \textit{causa immanens} is directly opposed to the \textit{causa transiens} championed by the orthodox doctrine of \textit{creatio ex nihilo}, and we are now in a position to see why. In a word, the former negates or denies the omnipotence of God or Nature and the latter posits or affirms it. Yet with this affirmation, Spinoza seems to have negated the possibility of there being other things for God to cause at all. Now, enough has already been written on refuting Spinoza’s alleged acosmism,\footnote{Acosmism essentially holds that insofar as God or Nature an absolutely real being, and is indivisible and eternal, modes are merely ideal or phenomenal; i.e. the reality of a diversity of modes is reducible to the undifferentiated unity of God or Nature, and so they are not actually real. See Melamed, “Why Spinoza is Not an Eleatic Monist (or Why Diversity Exists)” p.214; see also Hübner, “On the Significance of Formal Causes in Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” p.31.} but I think the question comes down to whether or not Spinoza is opposed to the idea of \textit{creatio} altogether. I do not think he is. Inasmuch as God’s activity only follows \textit{solis suae naturae legibus} (i.e. from the laws of its own nature alone), \textit{creatio} must be \textit{ex Deo}. Things or modes are nothing but the power of God’s activity in active actuality (Ip34d;Ip36d).

We have already seen that Spinoza’s monism is not static and unvarying but dynamic and mobile, and hence could quite easily adopt a notion of \textit{creatio} in a vein similar to that of John Scotus Eriugena. Insofar as the latter maintains that God’s creating out of nothing could only mean God’s creating out of nothing other than Godself, \textit{creatio ex nihilo} is, to Eriugena, one and the same as \textit{creatio ex Deo}.\footnote{Eriugena writes, e.g. “T: I did not say that God moves outside Himself, but from Himself, in Himself, towards Himself ... He is the beginning of everything; and through Him they are borne toward Him by natural motion in order to stand in Him unchangeably and eternally, since He is the...”}
not submitting that Spinoza wishes to preserve the doctrine through the same apophatic means enlisted by Eriugena, but I would submit that Spinoza’s notion of production \((\text{productio})\) involves a conclusion similar to that of Eriugena’s \(\text{creatio ex Deo}\). God does not voluntarily decide to create precisely because creation or production, or the causing to be of things, is God’s essential and eternal activity.\(^{125}\) Thus for Spinoza, to say that God brings about “everything that is within the bound of his power” \((\text{Ip}17\text{s})\) is to give metaphysical affirmation to an idea akin to divine self-creation.\(^{126}\) Spinoza’s corresponding refusal to attribute to God transitive causality \((\text{Ip}18)\), and his subsequent affirmation of God’s free and immanent causality, necessarily involve an affirmation of the admittedly strange notion that

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End and Resting Place of all things. Beyond Him they aspire to nothing; in Him they find the beginning and end of their motion. God is then called “Runner”, not because He runs outside Himself (for He, who fills everything, always stands unchangeably in Himself); but because He makes everything take a course from non-existence to existence ... the motion of the Divine Nature must be understood simply as the resolve of the Divine Will to create what is to be made. Therefore Divine Nature, which is simply Divine Will, is said to be made in all things; for in It being and will are not two different things, but one and the same in creating everything which, it seemed, ought to be made ... It therefore creates all things which It brings about from nothing in order that they may pass from non-being to being; and It is created because nothing has being essentially except Itself, for It is the essence of all things.” \((\text{I.12})\)

\(^{125}\) Francesca di Poppa maintains “Spinoza’s God does not choose to create: ‘creation’ is a necessary consequence of his nature. His nature, then, must be productive power and activity” (in “Spinoza on Causation and Power,” p.314).

\(^{126}\) Plotinus maintains that “he does not act without willing and his activities are what we might call his substance, his will and his substance will be the same thing.” \((\text{Ennead, VI.8,10})\). Eriugena makes a concomitant appeal: “(Teacher) Do you think that God had being before He made all things? (Student) Yes. (T) Then making was accidental to Him; for whatever is not coeternal and coessential with Him is either outside Him or accidental to Him. (S) I should not believe that anything is beyond Him and outside Him; for everything is in Him and nothing is outside Him; and I should not rashly grant that anything is accidental to Him. Otherwise He is not simple, but a compound of essence and accidents.” \((\text{Periphyseon 1.71})\). See also, Joseph Brackens, \textit{The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); esp. Chptr. 3 “The One and the Many Revisited” wherein he hinges such a discussion on the concepts of otherness and sameness in dialectical union. God is not Creator “in reference to a world of creatures” \((\text{p. 78})\), but since creating is nothing other than God, God creates nothing other than out of Godself. The simplicity of God is just the infinite ways in which God differentially proceeds in time and place.
“God is the cause of the things that are in him” (Ip18d). And yet, the fact that God or Nature involves the power to cause the essence and existence of things, does not, in itself, explicate the ontological status of modes or affections. While it is evident that God does not cause any effects outside Itself (causa transiens), it is still not clear how causa immanens involves diverse things (i.e. modes, affections, or things whose essence does not involve existence). I think the solution to these problems lies in the dispositional account of the causality that is necessarily attributed to God. In a word, insofar as natura naturans is an absolutely infinite power to exist, and furthermore, inasmuch as this absolutely infinite power of existence necessarily involves the power to act freely (i.e. solis suae naturae legibus), every effect of this Cause (viz. natura naturata) will, by virtue of the principal of proportionate causality, itself be a causal power. Unlike the causal power of natura naturans, however, natura naturata causal dispositions will be interdependent on every other. The manifestation of each modal disposition will, consequently, occur in relation to every other. This requires further explanation and the following section will seek to provide it.

127 See in this regard Yitzhak Melamed’s “Why Spinoza is not an Eleatic Monist (Or Why Diversity Exists),” in Spinoza on Monism, edited by Philip Goff (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 206-22. Melamed maintains, e.g. “when natura naturans flows into natura naturata it refracts further into another infinity which Spinoza stresses in the double infinity of the expression infinita infinitis modis (Ip16)” (209). See also KV, Lii “if God were not able to create all that could be created, then it would conflict with his omnipotence”. See also, Hampshire who maintains that, “the essential identity of the Creator and his Creation, so far from being mystical and anti-scientific in intention, leads logically to the conclusion that every single thing in the Universe belongs to, or falls within, a single, intelligible, causal system” (Spinoza and Spinozism, p.47).

128 See, e.g., Viljanen, who thinks that “According to Spinoza’s model, causation has fundamentally to do with the fact that as things are what they are – that is, as they have the kind of essences they do – certain properties follow or flow from those essences. And since there is only one substance, God-or-Nature that is also a real thing, indeed ens realissimum, it is understandable that everything turns out to be what it is and the way it is because God’s essential causal activity results in real effects, or ‘infinitely many things in infinite modes’.” (in Spinoza’s Geometry of Power, pp.45-6). See also Stuart
Definite and Determinate: Modifications as Dispositions

Just what is immanent causality? Perhaps we ought to revisit the notion of *causa transiens* in order to understand its converse. Transitive causality connotes the impermanent production of effects outside of, or external to, the cause; it involves separation of cause and effect either ontologically or temporally. As we have seen, Spinoza cannot have anything either be or be conceived outside of substance. If *per impossible* something were to exist outside of, or external to *natura naturans*, the hypothetical existence of such a thing or things would be *independent of* that on which they ostensibly must depend for their existence. Independent existence, however, is essentially only accorded to *natura naturans* and not to *natura naturata*. Things are rather *in* God (Ip15); but what does this mean? Why must things depend on substance for their essence and existence, and what is the nature of this dependence relation? To be clear, I think Wolfson is right when he maintains that by immanent, or internal, causality, Spinoza “does not mean only a cause which inheres in the effect, but also a cause in which the effect inheres. The essential characteristic of an internal cause therefore is that it is inseparable from its effect.”129 The problem is understanding how a dependent, inseparable effect is,

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129 Wolfson, *Philosophy of Spinoza*, p.321. Ep.73 is also instructive here. Spinoza qualifies his difference with the received Christian notion of God’s relation to Nature through transitive causality by stating that “I maintain that God is the immanent cause, as the phrase is, of all things, and not the transitive cause. All things, I say, are in God and move in God (...) as to the view of certain people that the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* rests on an identification of God with Nature (by the latter of which they understand a kind of mass or corporeal matter) they are quite mistaken.”
nevertheless, distinct both essentially and existentially from its cause (Ip24; KV.I.ii).

How does natura naturata depend on natura naturans?

In the first chapter it was discovered that the actual essence of anything is defined by its capacity for activity, and further, that this capacity was determined according to its ability to affect other things and be affected by them. That is, inasmuch as an individual thing is defined by its actual power of activity, its individuality appeared to be intrinsically powerful and, as such, it warranted being formally defined by what it actually can do. Thus, when Spinoza qualifies IIIp7 by stating that “from the given essence of a thing certain things will necessarily follow,” it is significant that he cites Ip36 in support of this claim. The conatus or power of existing and acting of things is an expression of “God’s nature or essence in a definite and determinate way” (Ip36d); it is fully positive, and if posited cannot (non aptus) annul itself (IIIp4d; IId2). Given Spinoza’s statement, then, that “whatever exists expresses God’s power,’ it follows that in the same way that activity is coextensive with God’s existence, so too will “some effect necessarily follow” from being a definite and determinate expression of God’s (powerful) nature. The conatus doctrine of IIIp7 appears to be the modal explication of what Spinoza maintains in Ip34d: “God’s power whereby he and all things are and act, is his very essence” (cf.KV,I.ii). Insofar as this is the case, Spinoza is clear that things could not have been caused in any other way than they have, in actuality, been caused (Ip21d; Ip33d-s2), without entirely negating the causal power through which they have necessarily been produced. And yet, while the essence of things are
immanently caused to be through the essentially active nature of *natura naturans*, the essence of such things does not involve existence (Ip24). Why not?

When we ask ‘why not?’ it is important to get clear on just what is being asked. The problem is already apparent in the definitions of substance and modes in Part I. The former is, of course, “that which is in itself and is conceived through itself,” and the latter, “that which is in something else and is conceived through something else.” What we are asking after, then, is how it is possible for there to be “something else” in which a mode can be. If there is nothing external to substance, what is this ‘something else’ in which modes exist? I think Ip21 can provide us with the necessary clue to resolving this difficulty. In it Spinoza proposes that, “all things that follow from the absolute nature of any attribute of God must have existed always, and as infinite; that is, through the said attribute they are eternal and infinite.” While the demonstration of this proposition is incredibly convoluted, it appears to establish the essence and existence of the infinite immediate modes in-and-through which their definite and determinate modifications come to be and pass away.  

This proposition essentially establishes a real, albeit non-numerical, distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, and, in so doing,
maintains the integrity of the ontological simplicity of substance. But then, are we saying that the simplicity of God is nothing other than the complexity of things? Non-numerical distinction establishes a positive identity in difference of God and the modes that follow from such an absolutely infinite power to exist and act. This identity in difference is made explicit in the scholium to the notoriously difficult Ip28. It is worth quoting at length:

Since some things have been produced directly by God (those things, in fact, which necessarily follow from his absolute nature) and others through the medium of these primary things (which other things nevertheless cannot be or be conceived without God), it follows, firstly, that God is absolutely the proximate cause of things directly produced by him. (...) It follows, secondly, that God cannot properly be said to be the remote cause of individual things ... For by 'remote cause' we understand a cause which is in no way conjoined to its effect. But all things that are, are in God, and depend on God in such a way that they can neither be nor be conceived without him.

The things directly produced by God are the infinite immediate modes and the others through the medium of these could be nothing other than the infinite mediate mode whose own modification involves finite modes. If an analogy is permitted here, modification could be likened to the process of crystallization within various

131 Beth Lord, e.g., writes that, “Spinoza’s God is a being that encompasses all beings and causes all effects. God exists as both substance and modes, as both cause and effects. Yet the difference between God as substance and God as modes is maintained as the difference between the activity of being and the actualized beings that follow from it.” (in Kant and Spinozism, p.14) So, when, e.g., Melamed refers to the refracted infinity of the modifications of (absolutely infinite) substance (see note 56), I think this refraction necessarily involves an ontological application of the doctrine of parallelism. Absolute infinitum and infinitum in suo genere are simultaneous in nature in the same way that the attributes of substance are (Ip10s).

132 See, e.g., Deleuze, Expressionism in Philosophy wherein the author concludes his treatment of numerical and real distinction by stating that, “real distinction excludes division.” (p.38) This applies directly to the attributes but is repeated throughout the Ethics. Thus, the identity statement that Spinoza makes in Ip34 that, “God’s power is his very essence” just means that God’s self-causation and causing all things are one and the same, albeit distinct. There is, consequently, “no division of being” in Spinoza’s philosophy (p.65).
regions of a uniform solution.\textsuperscript{133} Whatever the case, the important notion included in this scholium is the allusion to \textit{proximate causality}. The absolutely infinite power of God determines things to exist and act in a definite and determinate way, but is not identical to the individuals that come to be in It (Ip28d).\textsuperscript{134} That is, to the question of whether or not God is identical to the infinity of things that come to be and pass away through the modifications of the infinite modes, the answer is negative. All things are in God, “as the parts are in the whole,”\textsuperscript{135} but God is not (possibly) in all things (Ip15;Ip17d;Ip24-25). God is the immanent cause of everything, while at the same time being the proximate cause of things, i.e. concrete individuals or actual essences. The formal essence of God involves all the infinite things comprehended by an infinite intellect, including the ideas of the affections of God’s actual essence (or essence-in-action; Ip21-23). God proximately causes the actual existence of things in duration \textit{at the same time} as being the direct cause of the formal essence of the same things contained in God’s infinite idea of Itself (Ilp8c). In either event, one and the same thing is affirmed: “whatever exists, expresses God’s power, which is the cause of all things, in a definite and determinate

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{133}] See in this regard Gilbert Simondon’s “The Genesis of the Individual,” where the author attempts to understand the process of individuation (as opposed to \textit{a principle} of individuation) with specific reference to the process of crystallization (In \textit{Incorporations}, edited by Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter [New York: Zone, 1992], pp.297-319).
\item[\textsuperscript{134}] This is consistent with the conceptual division in the \textit{Short Treatise}, first between \textit{natura naturans} and \textit{natura naturata}, and second within \textit{natura naturata} as follows: “The \textit{Natura naturata} we shall divide into two, a general, and a particular. The \textit{general} consists of all the modes which depend immediately on God ... the \textit{particular} consists of all particular things which are produced by the general mode.” (KV.viii)
\item[\textsuperscript{135}] Wolfson, \textit{Philosophy of Spinoza}, p. 323-4. Wolfson goes on to say that, “With the totality of modes or what Spinoza calls the \textit{facies totius universi} God is not identical; He is identical only with himself. With reference to the totality of modes God is therefore called an immanent cause, but with reference to himself He is called \textit{causa sui} ...” (p.325)
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The essence of modal existence, whether formal or actual, infinite or finite, is power. It is simply that *natura naturata* is powerful *in* and *through* the whole of *natura naturans* and not (possibly) independent of it or, consequently, each other. But, are we any closer to an explanation of why or how they are so dependent? If a mode is essentially powerful, how is this primitive or intrinsic disposition simultaneously derived from, and dependent on, another?

When Spinoza maintains that “the essence of things produced by God does not involve existence,” he simply means that with respect to what follows from *causa-sui* substance, there is no possible repetition or duplication of self-causality without involving a plurality of substances (Ip4-6). The same arguments that are intended to prove the singularity of substance provide the basis for the denial of existence following from the essence of modes. With respect to the infinite modifications of substance, the power to exist and act is always determined by another immanently caused substantial modification (Ip28). Thus, when Spinoza maintains that, “particular things are nothing but affections of the attributes of God; that is, modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way,” (Ip25c) the definiteness and determinateness of these modes is nothing other than the power of each in mutual and reciprocal affective relations.

While we will have to forego an investigation into these relations for now, at the moment there is, admittedly, a certain lack of clarity regarding the definiteness and

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136 In the *Political Treatise* Spinoza also explicitly maintains that “The same power that they need in order to begin to exist, they also need in order to continue to exist. Hence it follows that the power of natural things by which they exist, and consequently by which they act, can be no other than the eternal power of God.” (PT, II.2)
determinateness of modes. As an affection of substance, a mode appears to be distinguished by its particular ability or capacity to have an effect (Ip4;Ip36d). But how does the ability to have an effect determine the particularity of a thing?

A thing in itself is defined by what it can do. The power to exist and act is the essence of any thing (res). The formal essence, or esse essentiae, of a mode is just its intrinsic capacity to affect and be affected; i.e. its existence is essentially defined as this power to act; i.e. to have an effect of which it is the adequate cause (IIId1;III4d;III7d;IIld2). The actual essence, or esse existentiae, of a mode is just the activity of this same definite and determinate mode in definite and determinate relations with other particular modes; i.e. it is the manifestation of its capacities or dispositions in constantly varying affective encounters with other modes (Ip21; Ip24-28; IIp45s; IIIpos.1; IIIp7).137

Now, in order to get clear on the nature of modes in Spinoza, it may prove helpful to explore the nature of monads in Leibniz. Why I think this is so will become evident in what follows.138 While Spinoza certainly does not develop a

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137 See Viljanen, *Spinoza’s Geometry of Power*, wherein the author maintains that “The eternal and infinite systems of essences, together with the determinations specified by them, are thus converted into and correspond to the spatiotemporal existence of the actual world ... actual finite existence has its peculiar character: in it, limitations are not mere determinations but oppositions and agreements that take place between striving entities. But here the main point concerning actual existence is that any actual thing's temporal path, forged from a specific set of affections, is decreed from, and thus conceivable under the aspect of, eternity” (p.32). While I would not adopt the terminology of ‘conversion’ as Viljanen does, I take this to be more or less consistent with the present exposition.

138 This may seem to run contrary to Deleuze's appropriate warning to “not give Spinoza’s particular essences a Leibnizian interpretation. Particular essences are not microcosms. They are not all contained in each, but all are comprised in the production of each. A modal essence is a pars intensitiva and not a pars totalis” (in *Expressionism*, p.198). While I agree with Deleuze here, and while I am, furthermore, not asserting that modal essences share all of the attributes or properties of a Leibnizian monad (they are not, e.g. 'windowless'), I do however think that Leibniz’s characterization of monads in terms of active and passive force is precisely what Spinoza has in mind with his modal essences. Since Leibniz gives a more robust articulation of this view, I am enlisting it to parse my particular reading of Spinoza.

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dynamic physics nearly to the extent that Leibniz does in his work, I do not think I would be remiss in maintaining that the dynamic metaphysics Leibniz develops with respect to active and passive force, each involving primitive and derivative modes, owes a debt to Spinoza. In his Specimen Dynamicum, for example, I take Leibniz to be referring to Spinoza when he qualifies active force as that, “which might not inappropriately be called power [virtus], as some do.”\textsuperscript{139} Again, in his “A New System of Nature,” Leibniz describes the nature of his metaphysical development away from the mechanical and corpuscularian philosophy by first stating that, “I perceived that considering extended mass alone was not sufficient, and that it was necessary, in addition, to make use of the notion of force, which is very intelligible, despite the fact that it belongs in the domain of metaphysics.”\textsuperscript{140} This admission is strikingly similar to Spinoza’s response to Tschirnhaus’ question regarding whether or not Extension was sufficient to account for material variation. Spinoza, in response, maintains that, “with regard to your question as to whether the variety of things can be demonstrated \textit{a priori} from the conception of Extension, I think I have already made it quite clear that this is impossible. (...) it must necessarily be explicated through an attribute which \textit{expresses eternal and infinite essence}.” (Ep.83;mine). As we have shown, this could only refer to the absolute and infinite power to be and act that defines \textit{natura naturans}. When Leibniz maintains the existence of “formal atoms,” or what he later came to call monads, he thinks he is, at least to a certain extent, reviving the notion of substantial forms, but with an explicit declaration of their

\textsuperscript{140} Leibniz, “A New System of Nature and Communication of Substances, and of the Union of the Soul and Body (1695),” in \textit{Philosophical Essays}, p.139.
essence: “their nature,’ he maintains, ‘consists in force.”¹⁴¹ I do not think Spinoza has anything less in mind with his notion of modal essences, both in their formal and actual aspects just outlined.¹⁴²

The formal essence of finite modes for Spinoza are, accordingly, quite like how Leibniz continues to describe his formal atoms; namely as, “primitive forces, which contain not only act or the completion of possibility, but also an original activity.”¹⁴³ What is more, when Leibniz maintains that, “the simplicity of substance does not prevent a multiplicity of modifications, which must be found together in this same simple substance, and which must consist in the variety of its relations to external things,”¹⁴⁴ we could quite rightly expect Spinoza to agree with such an explication in relation to his preferred notion of substance. The difference is that Leibniz does not appear to think that modifications of a single, unique substance (natura naturans) are enough to establish a principle of unity necessary for the individuation and identity of particular things.¹⁴⁵ Whatever the case, the point presently at issue is the fundamental quiddity, or intrinsic nature, of things or modes. I think that for both Leibniz and Spinoza a thing is essentially nothing other

¹⁴¹ Ibid.
¹⁴² See, again, Viljanen who maintains that “Given that by ‘power’ Spinoza refers to the intrinsic causal activity of things, and that things are what they are and the way they are because everything there is follows, with geometrical necessity, from God’s essence – whereby is constituted an intelligible, strictly determined, and eternal world – the following picture emerges. Each thing has its definition, just as geometrical objects do, from which certain properties can be inferred; in God’s case these properties equal everything possible. But unlike geometrical objects that are mere beings of reason (entia rationis), God is a real thing, indeed the most real thing there is (ens realissimum) ... precisely at this point (...) the notion of power steps in: the realization of this necessary system of entities requires power. In other words, because God is a real being endowed with causal power, God himself and all of his properties (i.e. modifications) come to be realized.” (Spinoza’s Geometry of Power, p.62)
¹⁴⁴ Leibniz, “Principles of Nature and Grace Based on Reason,” in Philosophical Essays, p.207.
¹⁴⁵ And he may be right. The next section on mereology and identity will seek to investigate whether Spinoza’s modes have the requisite unity to be the conatus they are alleged to be.
than a power, *conatus*, or force of existing, whose intrinsic nature or formal essence is consequently defined by its internal capacity to have an effect, and whose actual essence involves both this and the coextensive capacity to suffer affects of other such particulars. Modes are powers that are powerful in and through an absolutely infinite Power. They are, then, for Spinoza, rightly understood as *parts* of the absolutely infinite power that is God (IVp4d); i.e. they are regions of God's infinitely extended body, particular thoughts of God's infinitely understanding mind.

So, the *actual essence* of anything is the active actuality (or *vis existens*) of the *formal essence* of that same mode. All concrete encounters, then, involve actual essences in affective relations. In any given encounter the power of activity of one concrete modification impinges on that of another and each manifests whatever properties (*propria*) it formally involves in the event of their actual encounter. Any thing just is its power of activity and this power is necessarily manifested in various ways according to its affective relations (IIIId3,pos.1;IIIp7d; IIIgen.def.). Since the durational existence of any modal essence is owing to its interdependence on every other (Ip28d), the actual essence of any durational existence will, *eo ipso*, manifest its power of activity in relation to every other and, *vice versa*, they in relation to it.

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147 Deleuze, e.g., maintains that, “God’s power divides and explicates itself in each attribute according to the essences comprised in that attribute. Thus the part-whole relation tends to merge with the mode-attribute, modification-substance relation. Finite things are parts of the divine power because they are modes of God’s attributes” (*Expressionism*, p.92). Bennett’s ‘field metaphysic’ is also present here (see, Jonathan Bennett’s “Spinoza’s Vacuum Argument,” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1980): 391-9. This will receive a more robust treatment in the following chapter.

148 Valtteri Viljanen rightly maintains that, “finite individuals can be conceived as specifically determined centres of causal activity and power, individual essences operating as modifiers determining the way in which substance and its efficacy or total power is distributed.” (In *Spinoza’s Geometry of Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. p.74). We will return to this topic in earnest in the following chapter.
Insofar as the essence of any existent is to have an effect, and since this effect is nothing other than its ability to affect, and be affected by, other such existents, Spinoza’s just is a dispositional account of causality. Given that *Deus sive Natura* absolutely and infinitely exists and acts, there is no possibility of anything existing that does not actually have the ability to be (*potentia*), and if the ability, then the capacity to act (*potestas*), or have an effect. This was the whole problem of passivity detailed in the first chapter. This problem was given a solution in the form of common notions whose formula was *acque in parte ac in toto est*: that which is equally in the part as in the whole. We are now, finally, in a position to see just what this is: the power to exist and act *in* an absolute and infinite power to exist and act. The power of the whole of nature is distributed equally to all of its parts, making parts infinite modifications of the absolutely infinite power of *Deus sive Natura* (IVp4d; Ep32).

**Conclusion**

A concrete individual thing, or an actual essence, necessarily involves its internal or intrinsic *conatus* or *virtus* in relation to every other, and, consequently, the whole of

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149 John Heil, e.g., submits that, “In general, a power or disposition requires for its manifestation, a suite of reciprocal disposition partners. *How* a disposition manifests itself depends both on its nature and on the nature of its reciprocal disposition partners.” (in “Powerful Qualities,” in *The Metaphysics of Powers: Their Grounding and Manifestation* [New York: Routledge, 2012]:58-72; p.69). In the same volume, Neil Williams in his chapter “Puzzling Powers: the Problem of Fit,” (pp.84-105) gives an account of the necessary reciprocity of causal powers manifesting themselves in mutual relation to each other: “producing manifestations requires the *co-operation* of two or more powers, where these powers complement one another” (87)

150 John Heil again gives a succinct, and fairly uncontroversial dispositional thesis that, “A physical object is constituted by its ability to affect and be affected by other physical objects (in *Powerful Qualities*,” p.62). While I do not doubt that Spinoza enlists other causal concepts, I submit that a dispositional account is fundamental.
Nature of which each is but a part. However succinct a formula this may be, it is not without serious difficulties. Indeed, the whole ontological edifice just constructed is on unstable ground if we cannot get a good deal clearer on the individuation of modes with respect to their relations, and consequently, the whole in which they exist and act. It is not clear, for example, how modes can be distinct while at the same time being inseparable from each other. That is, we must ask how modal powers are intrinsic while at the same time being extrinsically dependent on other modes ad infinitum for their definite and determinate expression of God’s power. Additionally, it is not clear how modes are, in actuality, individuated particulars if they are necessarily part of an infinite whole. How, in other words, do modes retain their individuality if they are, at the same time, parts of larger wholes all the way up to the facies totalis universalis? And it remains to be seen just what sense can be made of such an infinite and potestative. Could it be that to say that particular powers are powerful in and through the absolutely infinite Power expressing them constitutes, in the final analysis, just the sort of unilluminating jargon one would wish to avoid in giving an ontological explanation of what there is? Seeing that this is not the case will require us to turn in earnest to a rigorous investigation of the mereological theory Spinoza’s ontology must involve.

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151 See again Viljanen, who maintains that, “Because finite things enter into relationships of interdetermination with each other, they all are under the influence of external causes – whose fundamental manner of operation is respectively determined by their individual essences. These interactions always determine, at least partly, the way a finite thing behaves. In other words, two cases must be distinguished: that in which a thing causes something in virtue of its essence alone, and that in which the thing’s essence is only a partial cause of the resulting effect (which means that something happens that is a joint product of two or more disparate things’ essences).” (Spinoza’s Geometry of Powers, p.49)
Although such a statement can only be preliminary at this point, the kernel of this theory can be stated thus: *Deus sive Natura* is a unique particular that is neither composed out of nor divisible into proper parts. It is neither the sum of its parts, nor is it something other than its parts. It is itself an absolutely infinite power to exist and act, expressing itself in different ways in different regions of itself; i.e. it is a virtual or potestative whole. Its parts are, therefore, themselves powers that are inseparable from the whole on which they depend and in which they inhere. These powers are, consequently, only distinguishable or individuated within the whole of Nature by their capacities or functions in active and reciprocal relation to every other such part. Insofar as only substance and modes exist, and inasmuch as the essence and existence of both are defined in terms of power (viz. power to exist and power to act), Spinoza’s metaphysics effectively involves a hybrid of what contemporary metaphysicians term priority monism and existence pluralism on the one hand, and power holism on the other.\(^{152}\) The term ‘virtual mereology’ is intended to capture this metaphysical hybridization.

\(^{152}\) *Priority Monism*: the most comprehensive thing is more basic than any of its proper parts. *Existence Monism*: there is only one concrete thing. *Priority Pluralism*: the proper parts of the whole cosmos are more basic than the cosmos. *Existence Pluralism*: there are many concrete things. *Weak Priority Monism*: there is exactly one, basic concrete thing (no thing is ontologically prior to it). *Weak Priority Pluralism*: there are several such basic things. *Strong Priority Monism*: every concrete thing in Nature is a proper part of it and the whole is prior to each of its proper parts (integral whole, potential division). *Strong Priority Pluralism*: every concrete thing in Nature is a proper part of it and the proper parts are prior to the whole they compose (integral whole, actual division). See, e.g. Jonathan Schaffer, “Monism: The Priority of the Whole,” *Philosophical Review*, Vol.119, No.1 (2010):31-76 and Ghislain Guigon, “Spinoza on Composition and Priority,” in *Spinoza on Monism*. 
III

The Metaphysics of Mixture: A Theory of Virtual Mereology

God is both above everything and in everything, since He, who alone truly is, is the Essence of everything (essentia omnium); and although He is whole in everything, He does not cease being whole outside of everything; whole in the world, whole around the world, whole in sensible creation; whole in intelligible creation, whole He makes the universe; whole He is made in the universe, whole in the whole of the universe, whole in its parts, because He Himself is both whole and part, and neither whole nor part.
– John Scotus Eriugena, Periphyseon, IV.759

Part of the Infinite Power of Deus sive Natura

Spinoza frequently reminds his readers that we are but a part of Nature and determined to undergo its motions just like any other part. As established in the last chapter, Spinoza also thinks that the essence of any existence is its power to exist and act. What can we make of both of these commitments taken together? A particularly notable expression that combines both power and parthood occurs at IVp4d: “the power whereby each single thing, and consequently man, preserves its own being is the very power of God, or Nature ... the power of man in so far as it is explicated through his actual essence is part of the infinite power of God, or Nature.”
I think that modes can be considered parts of the whole of substance. That is, I am willing to take Spinoza literally when he maintains that an individual thing, “in so far as it exists as modified in a definite way, must be considered as a part of the whole universe and must agree with the whole and cohere with other parts ... (and the whole) is not limited, but absolutely infinite, its parts modified by the nature of this infinite potency in infinite ways and are compelled to undergo infinite variations” (Ep32; brackets mine). What does this mean? The difficulty is ascertaining what meronymic relation exists between this whole and its parts. If, for example, Viljanen is right to maintain that, “if a substance consisted of (substantial) parts, it would be ontologically dependent on those parts, and therefore would no longer be substance,” then what sort of parts and what sort of relations could substance involve? If modes cannot be considered really distinct parts constitutive of substance, how can they be considered constituents of substance at all?

It goes without saying that on Spinoza’s account it is not immediately obvious how there can exist distinct, durational-existent individuals if such things are, at the same time, intended to causally depend on the one, perfectly positive substance. This is just the worry of many of the German Idealist commentators.

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153 I realize this is a controversial claim. H.F. Hallett, e.g., thought that, “the notion, sometimes entertained, that Spinoza’s substance is a totum of which its modes are the parts, is too jejune to merit refutation” (135). Somewhat puzzlingly, he then goes on to use mereological language indiscriminately when he, e.g., maintains that substance’s “infinite 'parts' are not mere sectors of the ‘whole’, but exist only with their relations” (144). In, “Substance and Its Modes,” in Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by Marjorie Grene (New York: Anchor, 1973): 131-63. I ask the reader to judge for herself whether or not what follows constitutes a plausible account as to how modes can be considered parts of the whole of substance.

Thus when Hegel, for example, thinks of Spinoza’s system as involving ‘acosmism’, he qualifies this complaint by stating that,

the defect of the content is that the form is not known as immanent in it, and therefore only approaches it as an outer and subjective form. As intuitively accepted by Spinoza without a previous mediation by dialectic, Substance, as the universal negative power, is as it were a dark shapeless abyss which engulfs all definite content as radically null, and produces from itself nothing that has a positive subsistence of its own.¹⁵⁵

Hegel is not unaware that Spinoza thinks of substance in purely positive terms. However, he thinks that with the absolute affirmation of the necessary being of substance, Spinoza is not entitled to the ‘definite content’ and ‘positive subsistence’ of concrete particulars. And if Spinoza is not entitled to such things, then rather than being a positive power causing such things to be, Spinoza’s substance is a ‘negative power’ engulfing all positive content. As we argued in the last chapter, Spinoza is ontologically entitled to individual things insofar as they are understood as modifications of the absolute infinite power of existence that defines substance.

The Idealist’s complaint remains, however, so long as we are unable to give a positive account of the concrete existence of actual essences in their concrete individuality. In other words, it is not yet clear how finite modes are, in actuality, individuated particulars if they are, at the same time, affirmed to be necessarily part of an infinite, potestative whole (viz. natura naturans).

This problem is, I believe, similar to Aristotle’s problem of the ontological status of a mixture and its constituent parts.¹⁵⁶ According to Aristotle, if the parts of

¹⁵⁵ Hegel, Encyclopedia, §151
¹⁵⁶ See On Generation and Corruption, I.10:
For, according to some thinkers, it is impossible for one thing to be combined with another. They argue that (i) if both the ‘combined’ constituents persist unaltered, they are no more ‘combined’ now than they were before, but are in the same condition: while (ii) if one has been destroyed, the
a mixture exist as individuated particulars they will not, in actuality, have been combined into the whole, but will, rather, retain their separate existence. In this case, there will not exist a mixture (or whole) at all, but rather a heap of indivisible and disjoint autonomous parts juxtaposed one to another. On the other hand, if the parts of a mixture homogeneously combine, they will cease to be individual existents in the event of their total fusion. In this case, no whole (or mixture) will yet exist on account of the parts ceasing to be in the process of intermingling and there will, rather, exist a single, unified, undifferentiated particular.157

The late-Medieval philosopher Siger of Brabant relates a similar problem by asking whether the whole is the same as its parts or different from them. If, on the one hand, we consider the whole to be substantially the same as its parts then there will be no substantial difference between any of the parts of the whole. However, if there is no substantial difference between part and whole, then the parts cannot be or be conceived as distinct entities. But if the parts cannot be or be conceived distinctly, there will, by virtue of the identity of indiscernibles, be nothing differentiating them from either each other or from the whole of which they are, ostensibly, the parts. Finally, if this is the case, then there will be no whole

constituents have not been ‘combined’--on the contrary, one constituent is and the other is not, whereas ‘combination’ demands uniformity of condition in them both: and on the same principle (iii) even if both the combining constituents have been destroyed as the result of their coalescence, they cannot ‘have been combined’ since they have no being at all.

157 In his “Spinoza’s Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” (in Individuation in Early Modern Philosophy, edited by Jorge Gracia and Kenneth Barber [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994]: 73-101) Don Garrett expresses the problem in similar terms:

if at the ultimate level there is no qualitative diversity other than differences of such motion and rest by which bodies can be distinguished, then it seems that the extended world must be entirely homogeneous at any single moment, so that there cannot be any synchronic variety at all. And it will be difficult to conceive of mere motion and rest as producing any distinction of bodies – or, indeed, of any real motion as having actually taken place – through time either, since the extended world will always remain an entirely homogeneous and seemingly undifferentiated whole from one moment to another.” (p.78)
composed of parts at all, but merely one discrete, partless entity. On the other hand, if the whole is conceived to be other than its parts, then the parts of the whole will be substantially distinct and numerically identical entities.\textsuperscript{158} But, if this is the case, then the parts of the whole will themselves be substantial unities, and the whole that they ostensibly form will fail to be a single, unified entity, but will rather be an aggregate of many discrete and disparate entities.\textsuperscript{159} In the final analysis, the whole fails to be a whole if it has parts, but cannot be a whole without parts.

One response to this problem is to affirm the non-existence of a composite whole entirely, and to instead affirm a plurality of indivisible substances. With this affirmation there would not seem to exist any mereological relations whatsoever that could actually come to form a whole, but only aggregates of indivisibles whose $x$ - \textit{wise} arrangements constitute an individual.\textsuperscript{160} Since the only possible real individuals are discrete indivisible substances, there are neither parts nor wholes possible with respect to these ontologically basic entities. It is only their contiguous

\textsuperscript{158} Numerical identity involves the absolute or total qualitative self-sameness of a thing. Numerical identity also involves numerical distinction; i.e. things are, on this account, distinguished one from the other by their being numerically identical with themselves. Since only one thing (\textit{unicum}) can be considered numerically identical (Substance) on Spinoza's account, no mode of substance (the qualitative affections of substance) could be numerically distinct without itself being a substance. Numerical identity cannot be ascribed to modes without modes being really distinct from substance, but if really distinct, then substantially individuated. But this is not possible without introducing substance pluralism, and since substance pluralism is absurd (on Spinoza's account, which we will elucidate shortly), no thing is numerically identical with itself, but is only relatively identical (i.e. an identity relative to other modifications). See Deleuze, \textit{Expressionism} pp. 30-37.


\textsuperscript{160} This is known as mereological nihilism. With respect to the question of special composition (i.e. what are the jointly necessary and sufficient conditions needed to constitute an individual?), mereological nihilism answers with 'there aren't any'. Rather, there are discrete particles whose collocations form individuals for a time. See, e.g., Theodore Sider, "Against Parthood," \textit{Oxford Studies in Metaphysics} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also Ned Markosian, "Restricted Composition," in \textit{Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics}, edited by Theodore Sider, et al (New York: Blackwell, 2008).
collocation that appears to form an individual thing for a time. But this formation, while involving a kind of relation, is not really constitutive of an individual because the aggregation of atoms cannot involve their actual combination. But why not? Because combination involves the merging of distinct qualities into a whole, and since distinct qualities are, for the atomist, numerically identical with the atomic individual, no atom could really relate to, or interact with, another through combination without annihilating itself in the process. The difficulty with atomism, and the mereological nihilism it involves, is that the concept of arrangement or aggregation involves a real interactive relation, but the ontology of discrete corpuscles or atoms cannot involve such real, interactive relations without involving the annihilation of the discrete entities intended to constitute the ontologically basic ‘stuff’ of reality. Thus, mereological nihilism would also have to involve ontological nihilism, which is an absurdity (Ip11; either nothing exists or an absolutely infinite power exists, but things exist, therefore, etc.). If there is to be real relationality, that is, interactive and interdependent relationality, it must, in some sense, involve some kind of mereological composition.

Early Modern corpuscularian and mechanical philosophers seemed to ignore this ontologico-mereological obstacle by conceiving of matter-in-motion according to mathematical-mechanical principles of interaction. The problem with the mechanical philosophy was not that it did not enjoy some successes in applying its

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161 This qualification is submitted in light of Leibniz’s insistence, contra Hume, that ontologically distinct substances, or monads, still really relate to every other one through the simultaneous perspectives each has on the other. See, for example, Monadology §§ 7-8, 11-15.

162 E.g. Galileo thought of material nature as being populated by infinitely small atoms held together by infinitely small vacua (see The Assayer, §§196-201).
mathematical principles to the stuff of reality, but that the stuff of reality could not, in principle, both be corpuscularian and follow mechanical laws in actuality at the same time. A sufficient ontological explanation as to why things are able to interact with each other if those things are, at the same time, taken to be discrete, indivisible atoms, is not easily provided. But why not? In a word, there is nothing in such things so defined that would determine that their ostensible relationality ought to be construed in terms of mathematico-mechanical principles. More fundamentally, there is nothing in an atom that would permit, let alone determine, that it constitutes a part-of-x, since, as the likes of Abelard rightly noted, “this constitution (i.e. of a complex individual) only occurs if the parts are appropriately brought together.”\textsuperscript{163} It is just this appropriate bringing together that is lacking in a substance-pluralist ontology. Thus, in many respects it is largely Hume who followed the logic of atomism to both its mental and material conclusion: there is but the experience of the constant conjunction of disparate elements (both spatially and temporally) and we proceed to construct laws that supervene on them based on an extension of the imagination.

Since substance pluralism is not, at least for Spinoza, an option, we will have to look elsewhere to find his solution to the mereological quandary his substance monism faced. It happens that another response to this problem can, I believe, be found through a universal extension of the Medieval concept of a virtual whole and its parts.\textsuperscript{164} By a “virtual whole,” I understand a unique, particular power that is


\textsuperscript{164} For a very helpful introduction to Medieval theories of meronymic relations, see Andrew Arlig’s Stanford Encyclopedia article “Medieval Mereology”. Arlig explains virtual or potential wholes as
neither composed out of nor actually divisible into proper parts. It is neither the
sum of its parts, nor is it something other than its parts. It is, rather, a *totally
blended* mixture whose parts are distinct properties (*propria*) of the whole. While
the concept of a virtual whole was, for many Medievalists, reserved for particular souls
or substances, in relation to Spinoza’s substance monism the concept of a virtual
whole can be extended to the whole of reality. Though this whole is substantially
indivisible, or indivisible *per se*, it is yet modally divisible into distinct parts. Insofar
as the whole of substance is properly considered virtual or potestative, its
modifications, or modal divisions, will themselves be powers engaged in mutually
interdependent relations. If, furthermore, we consider these powers-in-relation as
regional intensifications of extended substance, they can then also be considered to
constitute adjectival states of the whole of reality (i.e. modifications of infinite
substance)\(^{167}\).

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165 Total blending is a Stoic concept most fully articulated by Chrysippus who maintains that,
“mixtures are total and not a matter of being surrounded or being juxtaposed. For a bit of wine
thrown into the sea is for a certain time extended through it reciprocally” (in Diogenes
In his *Physics of the Stoics*, Sambursky comments that with total blending, “a complete interpenetration
of all the components takes place, and any volume of the mixture, down to the smallest parts, is
jointly occupied by all the components in the same proportion, each component preserving its own
properties under any circumstances, irrespective of the ratio of its share of the mixture” (London:
Routledge, 1959, p.15).

166 See, e.g., Aquinas, *ST*, I.75-89.

167 See Viljanen, “Field Metaphysics, Power and Individuation in Spinoza” where the author maintains
that, “not having substantially distinct parts does not prevent substance from having modally distinct
If only a substance and its modes exist (Ip15d), and if modes are nothing but definite and determinate expressions of the power of substance (Ip36d), then modes can be conceived as powerful parts inhering in the whole of substance ontologically prior to them (Ip1). Spinoza's substance is itself a power expressing itself in (infinitely) many ways through different regions of itself. Its parts are, therefore, themselves powers that are inseparable from the whole within which they act and are only distinguishable within it by their capacities to act in relation to every other such part. Again, when Spinoza maintains that "the power whereby each single thing, and consequently man, preserves its own being is the very power of God, or Nature ... the power of man in so far as it is explicated through his actual essence is part of the infinite power of God, or Nature" (IVp4d), I do not think that mereological terminology could be considered a mere entia rationis. Rather, I understand him to mean that individual things are real parts of the virtual whole that is God or Nature (Ip18d; Ip34d; IIIp7d; IVp24d).168

Though Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena were among the first, many later Medieval scholars also enlisted the threefold division of essence (essentia), power (virtus) and operation (operatio) by which a thing could be said to both be and be conceived.169 With some caution, I think Spinoza could be said to enlist a similar parts. But what does it mean to be ‘modally distinguished,’ or ‘an affection of substance’? This question can be answered by the field metaphysical account: the regions of the whole space can become many different kinds of qualities in such a way that statements about material bodies can be reduced to statements about space. More exactly, each particular body must be associated with a spatio-temporally continuous string of place-times” (398-9); bodies are then considered, "adjectival to regions of space” (399). This will be further explained in what follows.

168 To allay any worries, I am not asserting that the power of Deus sive Natura is itself virtual (i.e. not fully actual), but am simply adapting the Latin term ‘virtus’ (power) to the eternal potency-in-act that defines God’s essence.

169 See, e.g., Periphyseon, I.48, Aquinas ST, 1.77.1.
tripartite conceptual division with respect to his power-based monism. The division quite happily accords with the three senses of infinity Spinoza develops in Letter 12: there is that which is absolutely infinite, or infinite "by its very nature"; there is that which is infinite "by virtue of its cause"; and there is that infinite which, though involving certain relational limitations, “cannot be explicated by any number, although we may know its maximum and minimum” (Ep12). There are, consequently, three distinct senses of ‘whole’ and ‘part’ that can be understood within this conceptual division of the infinite corresponding as it does to the division of essence, power, and operation. First, there is the virtual whole that is the essential power of existence necessarily belonging to the absolute infinite. This whole is understood as ontologically prior to its parts, where parts are understood as modes or affections. Second, there is the virtual whole that is the absolutely infinite power of activity whose infinite modifications are understood through their cause. This whole is understood as the infinite process of substantial modification and is identical with its parts. And finally, there is the virtual whole that is the facies totius universalis, which is equivalent to the infinite understood in terms of maximum and minimum. Inasmuch as this whole involves the results or effects of the infinite process of substantial modification, it is posterior to the powerful parts (i.e. conatûs) that constitute it. The parts of the ‘face of the whole universe’ are individual things or durational existents. In the same way that essence, power and operation are formally distinct while remaining ontologically inseparable, all three senses of a virtual whole outlined are, to enlist a phrase Spinoza enlists in relation to the attributes, ‘simultaneous in nature’ (Ip10d;IIIp28d).
In order to explain the proposed theory of virtual mereology, the chapter will be divided according to the threefold conceptual division of essence, power and operation. The first section will seek to provide the ground for thinking of substance and its modifications in mereological terms by investigating the issue of division with respect to substance and modes. The next section will provide an explanation of the process of individuation. In the final section the principles of the former two sections will be enlisted to develop a framework for explaining the mixture of bodies.

**Substantial Indivisibility and Modal Division**

There are, thinks Spinoza, three main errors committed by those who wish to understand the whole of Nature and the parts within it. The first is to consider extended substance as finitely divisible and, consequently, composed out of constituent, least parts (Ip15s;Ep12).\(^{170}\) The second, akin to the first, is to conceive of the parts of Nature as separate, indivisible, and independent entities that are prior to the whole of Nature and somehow able to relate to each other in order to constitute it (TP,2/6). The third is to conceive of the whole of Nature as one would an artifact designed for some end and consequently endowed with an order coincident with such a design (Iappendix;IVpreface;Ep32). If Spinoza continually reminds his readers that human beings, like all other things, are but “part of the whole of Nature whose order we follow” (IV.App.32), and if there is a real and not merely ideal or heuristic mereology in Spinoza’s metaphysical framework, it will

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\(^{170}\) Least parts would here be understood as discrete, atomic entities.
take some work to avoid these errors and uncover just what it is.\(^{171}\) It will be helpful to consider the first error in order to become acquainted with Spinoza’s thinking on the matter.

It is important to begin by noting that, on Spinoza’s account, God or Nature is infinitely extended.\(^{172}\) That is, at the same time that God is a thinking thing, God is an extended thing (\(\text{Ip10s;}\text{Ilp1;}\text{Ilp2}\)). However theologically radical this must have sounded to his contemporaries, it involved an equally radical metaphysical consequence: matter does not need anything external or additional to activate it; by virtue of being an attribute of infinite essence (viz. absolute infinite power), extension is \textit{per se} active.\(^{173}\) Extension for Spinoza could not, consequently, be

\(^{171}\) This appears to be Ghislain Guigon’s preferred position. In his “Spinoza on Composition and Priority” he maintains that, “Spinoza holds that Nature is mereologically simple because it is absolutely infinite and prior to any other concrete being. Since he denies mereological complexity to Nature, he maintains that talk of parts and whole are beings of reason, so that neither “part” nor “whole” has a real definition. Still he allows himself to introduce stipulative definitions of composite individuals in such a way that, according to his doctrine, composition occurs in the concrete modes of Nature. However, applying these stipulative definitions to an infinite being results in a kind of composition that is merely of reason: a kind of composition that does not occur but that we can conceive of as if it occurred for theoretical reasons, \textit{i.e.} to help us to understand more easily difficult issues.” (in \textit{Spinoza on Monism}, edited by Philip Goff [New York: Palgrave, 2012], p. 205)

\(^{172}\) Plotinus, e.g., critically appraises the Stoic account of material substance thusly, “those who postulate that the only things that exist are bodies and that substance consists in them say that matter is one and that it underlies the elements and that matter itself is substance. All other things are, as it were, modifications of matter and even the elements are matter in a state. Moreover, they dare to bring matter into the realm of the gods. And finally, they say that their god himself is this matter in a certain state …” (\textit{Ennead} 2.4.1). Many of Spinoza’s detractors sounded a similar alarm (e.g. Bayle’s \textit{Historical Critical Dictionary} entry on “Spinoza”).

\(^{173}\) This idea is akin to the Stoic theory of \textit{pneuma} in relation to material composition, where the latter, from Chalcidius’ consideration of the theory from Zeno, is understood as follows:

Then Zeno said that this substance itself is finite and that only this substance is common to all things which exist, but that it is divisible and changeable in every place. Its parts change but do not perish in such a way that they turn into nothing from being existents. But he thinks that there is no form or shape or quality which is proper to the foundation of the matter of all things (…), but that nevertheless this matter is always joined with and inseparably bonded to some quality. And since it is as birthless as it is deathless because it neither comes into being from the non-existent nor turns into nothing, it does not lack an eternal spirit (\textit{pneuma}) and liveliness which will move it in a rational manner, sometimes all of it, sometimes a proportional part of it, and which the cause of such frequent and powerful changes in the universe. – in \textit{Comm. On Plato’s Timaeus} c. 292 (SVF 1.88)
conceived as the mere occupation of space, or as a passive, inert, and undifferentiated mass. Rather, it should be conceived as a field of infinitely varying forces of the one, absolutely powerful substance. Now, since every attribute expresses the infinite essence of God, and since this infinite essence just is the power to exist and act, every modification of either thought or extension will express this power (Ip16d;Ip11d). And yet, while God’s power of activity is equally present everywhere (Ip34d;IVp4d), this activity is unequally distributed (IVax.1). Infinite effects follow from an infinite cause, but because the cause is immanens and not transiens, the effects cannot be ontologically separable from the cause (Ip16d;Ip34-36). But if affections are inseparable parts of the whole of substance, and if substance cannot be divided, how can substance’s modifications be parts without being actual divisions?

The three propositions leading up to the argument against the divisibility of infinite extended substance all propound the same idea being defended in the scholium to Ip15. Namely, since substance involves nothing finite per se, and since

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174 This is affirmed in the Jewish Hymn of Unity: “The Holy One, blessed be he, is the place of the world, though the world is not His place.” (Gen. Rabbah 68:9). See also Carlos Fraenkel, “Hasdai Crescas on God as the Place of the world and Spinoza’s Notion of God as ‘Res Extens,’” in Aleph, No.9.1 (2009): pp.77-111. Aristotle also maintains that the, “universe as a whole is not anywhere” (Phys.IV.5,2 12b14).

175 Boethius, e.g., maintains that, “If God is always, he is also now ... if God is everywhere, he is also here.” (Boethius, De topicis differentiis, II.189b)

176 See, e.g. Guerolt, “Spinoza’s Letter on the Infinite,” wherein the author maintains that “the nature of extension remains complete, that is, identically what it is, in the least of its particles, it is necessarily present with the indivisibility proper to it, in every part of the different bodies” (p.195). These ideas will be further developed in what follows.

177 In his “On the Divine Simplicity,” I take Aquinas to be equivocating on the relation between God and creatures when he maintains in one place that since God’s existence is not other than his substance and that this involves a common effect “produced by the power of some higher cause whose proper effect it is,” (Art.2) but in another maintains that existence is not equally predicated of God and creatures because “there can be nothing in common to God and creatures but a name.” (Art.7). It is because existence is not predicated of anything, but is rather an ability things have either through themselves or another, that it is univocal to both substance and modes (God and creatures).
finitude partly involves negation, absolute infinity, as the “unqualified affirmation of the existence” (Ip8s1) of substance, could not be divisible into what is limited without annihilating substance entirely. This appears evident from the real definition of God or Nature as alone necessarily involving an absolute infinite essence. However, Spinoza seems impelled to give more than a definitional argument for proving the indivisibility of absolutely infinite substance. For indeed, if the whole of Nature just is an infinite compound or total mixture of modes or ‘parts,’ how is it that it is not, at the same time, divisible into them (Ilp13Lemma7s)? As we will come to see, the key for Spinoza is to deny that the whole of Nature is composed out of proper, divisible or separable parts at all. On the contrary, for Spinoza, the whole of Nature is properly understood as a virtual whole, and not as either a universal or integral whole. The upshot is that although

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178 Elsewhere Spinoza maintains that, “extension, being a substance, one cannot say of it that it has parts, since it can neither diminish nor increase, and no parts thereof can be understood apart, because by its nature it must be infinite. And that it must be such, follows from this, namely, because if it were not such, but consisted of parts, then it would not be infinite by its nature, as it is said to be” (KV,1.ii). Gueroult concomitantly explains that, “any limitation, partition, or division would destroy its nature,’ and that such thinking is owing to the imagination ‘transforming modes of infinite substance into really separate substance ... as many finite substances as it perceives modes” (“Spinoza's Letter on the Infinite,” p.190 and 192 respectively). How these assertions square with our position that there is a real mereology inherent in Spinoza's system will be explained in what follows.

179 In other words, how can the absolute infinite (natura naturans) involve infinite diversity (natura naturata) while maintaining indivisibility? See Melamed, “Why Spinoza is not an Eleatic Monist,” p.215.

180 See, again, Andrew Arlig's "Medieval Mereology." Whereas an integral whole is a collection or composition of separable things, and a universal whole is an abstract denomination or general term (genera) under which other individuals fall (species), a virtual whole is a unique particular whose parts are inseparable from it, yet distinguished by the different powers or functions it is able to perform (§2.1-2.3). For the reasons adduced above, Spinoza's absolutely infinite substance whose power is expressed infinitely through infinite capacities, seems to me to fit nicely into the concept of a virtual whole. I am not at all aware of whether or not Spinoza had access to Boethius' On Division or if he was intentionally invoking such a concept in his apparent denial of the other two.
substance cannot involve *actual division* into really distinct parts constituting it, it can involve *potential division* into modally distinct parts inhering in it.\(^\text{181}\)

Were it possible, the actual division of substance would involve a transformation of substance into separate parts that either would or would not retain the original essence of substance (Ip13d). The former option would result in the formation of several independent substances from the one, whereas the latter option would result in the dissolution of substance into finite, discrete parts.\(^\text{182}\) If substance is conceived as absolutely infinite, neither of these consequences can be admitted without annihilating original substance entirely. But why is this so? No substance could be so considered if its existence was causally dependent on something else. For Spinoza, in order to warrant the appellation ‘substance’, an entity must involve the absolute and infinite power to exist (Ip11d). Now, if substance were actually divisible, it would be posterior to the parts constituting it, and would therefore be compounded out of a plurality of indivisible substances. But a dependent substance is not substance. Since the one substance would, on this account, be dependent on the composition of other substances, it could not be

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\(^{181}\) Early Modern philosophers distinguished between actual parts and potential parts. Actual parts are distinct, independent existences of the whole virtue constitute. They, thus, exist prior to any act of division, and their existence is necessarily atomistic, *partes extra partes*. Potential parts, by contrast, do not enjoy separate, independent existence prior to the act of division. On the contrary, potential parts are modalities, or properties of the whole according to the ways in which it is able to be divided (i.e. internally distinguished). On this account, infinite Substance is *potentially divisible* into all of its *actual* modulations (its infinite affections) while at the same time not being *actually divided* into any of them. See, e.g., Thomas Holden’s “Infinite Divisibility and Actual Parts in Hume’s Treatise,” in *Hume Studies*, Volume XXVIII, Number 1 (April, 2002) 3-26.

\(^{182}\) The divisibility of substance into other substances seems to require, first, the transformation of modes into substantial unities via the limitations of the imagination, and second, the conception that there are as many separate substances as there are modes. This appears to be what animates, e.g., Leibniz’s substance pluralism. Spinoza could, I think, affirm Leibniz’s monads as dynamic forces in relation, but would insist that they could either not be substances because they would have to be modally divisible, or really indivisible and so not substantially many. See Gueroult, “Spinoza’s Letter on the Infinite,” pp. 192-3.
substance at all if it were so composed. What is more, each of the substances composing the one substance would themselves have to be composed of other substances; but then they could not be substances themselves if they were dependent in such wise, and so on ad infinitum. The fundamental point is that if substance were actually divisible, it would be devoid of the power by which it formally is and acts (Ip12d; Ip13d).183

Importantly, Spinoza also submits that a plurality of infinite indivisible substances ostensibly composed so as to form the one substance “would have nothing in common with the whole” (Ip12d). The idea is not that there must be such commonality for the many substances to form the one substance, but rather that the privation of any possible commonality of modes within the one, unique substance (viz. an absolutely infinite potency-in-act) would involve the conception of substance without its modifications. That Spinoza thinks this is absurd goes without saying. He submits that the conception of parts having nothing in common with the whole on which they depend and in which they inhere would involve a conception that the “whole could both exist and be conceived without its parts, which everyone will admit to be absurd” (Ip12d). Now, just why this is absurd, and what Spinoza has in mind with his notion of commonality will be explicated further on. For now, we must investigate the other alternative of the actual division of substance.

If substance were to be actually divided into a plurality of finite individuals, that is, things that do not “retain the nature of substance” (Ip12d), then such a

183 It is worth noting that Spinoza uses a similar argument for the impossibility of vesting the sovereign power of the state in one or more of its citizens; i.e. without eo ipso annihilating that in and through which the polity is made possible in the first place. See, e.g., PT, III.3.
division, thinks Spinoza, would constitute the annihilation of substance *tout court*. The reason Spinoza gives is rather simple: the actual division of substance into finite parts would mean that “it would lose the nature of substance” (Ip12d). But why would this be the case? In order for a substance to warrant the appellation, it must “be in itself and conceived through itself” (Id3). That is, it pertains to the essence of substance to exist and to act *causa-sui*; i.e. its *formal* essence involves the absolutely infinite power to exist (Ip8d;Ip11d). If substance were to somehow be divided into finite parts, then “that without which the thing could neither be nor be conceived” (i.e. its absolutely infinite power to exist and act) would be “annulled.” Substance would be completely annihilated because it would somehow be dependent on an existence whose essence it is to depend on substance. Therefore, I think that Viljanen is correct in his assessment that, “substantial power is a fundamental unity, and consequently, in ontological terms it is not correct to refer to finite entities without relating them to the whole substantial power, without seeing them as parts of one power.”\(^\text{184}\) The absurdity of the actual division of the original substance into substantial parts, whether finite or infinite, is, in the final analysis, located in the impossibility of there being actual parts of substance at all. But then what concept of parthood, if any, can substance involve at all?

\[\text{Ontologically independent, or really distinct, modal existence cannot possibly be an adequately conceived idea. It requires that we apprehend modes only through the existence they express in relation to us (i.e. in the imagination) “and not to Nature’s order” (Ep12) through which they are infinitely distributed in an infinity of} \]

interdependent relations. An actually divided entity, for Spinoza therefore appears tantamount to finitude, finitude to limitation, and limitation to annihilation. It is, furthermore, designated as involving arbitrariness, ignorance, and caprice (Ep12; Ip15s). From the preceding treatment of error, it appears evident that the passive connection of images in the memory necessarily precedes the idea of the actual division of substance. Indeed, in his letter to Oldenburg, Spinoza admits that insofar as modifications are “different from one another, to that extent each one forms in our mind a separate idea and is therefore considered a whole, not a part” (Ep32; IVp2). The error, then, is to consider a part or modification of infinite substance as an indivisible whole in itself. Such a conception accords merely with our passive affection by individual things, and with the corresponding image-idea that such individuals are really distinct (i.e. ontologically separate). The image-ideas of these discrete, separate substances are then thought to constitute the aggregated whole of reality. It is then thought that corporeal substance is itself inert, passive, finitely composed, and divisible into as many discrete parts as compose it, and that it requires a transcendent power to unite these parts in compositional relations.  

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185 See Spinoza’s metaphor of the worm in the blood for a further treatment of the error to conceive of parts as wholes in themselves (Ep32).

186 Aristotle cannot conceive of substance in terms of infinity for these very reasons. Were it infinite, it would have to be infinitely divisible in the same way a given magnitude is, but then it would be a plurality and not an indivisible unity. If it is indivisible, thinks Aristotle, “it is not infinite” (Physics III.5a13). Spinoza affirms precisely what Aristotle denies of the infinite, namely: “it is evidently impossible for the infinite to exist in actuality and to have substantial existence as well. The point is that if the infinite is a substance and not a predicate of some underlying subject, then the infinite is nothing but what it is to be infinite, and in that case (assuming that it has parts) any part of it you take will be infinite” (Physics III.5a20-4). Spinoza appears to affirm just this, and hence denies what Aristotle says immediately after, namely: “So either it will be indivisible or it will be divisible into infinites. But one and the same thing cannot consist of a plurality of infinites. (...) It follows, therefore, that the infinite must be indivisible and must have no parts. But this is out of the question for any actual infinite, since any actual infinite is bound to be a quantity” (Physics III.5a24-8). Spinoza, not thinking of the absolute infinite as a unit to begin with, affirms that it is indivisible and
But the image of separate, independent things does not imply the metaphysical conclusion that such things are essentially real.\textsuperscript{187}

The reason why Spinoza is so critical of those who would deny the divine nature, or the absolute infinite corporeality, is that they are unable to explain the real relation between God and matter. When Spinoza submits that those who think that, “corporeal or extended substance is set completely apart from the divine nature” have, as a result, “no idea from what divine power it could have been created” he is essentially proffering the same thesis as Ip12 and Ip13; that is, that “no substance can be produced or created by anything else” (Ip15s). Matter cannot possibly be one substance and God another. Indeed, if there is a material nature, then for Spinoza God is not really related to it at all, but simply is material, is extended. Enlisting imagination requires that one think of extension as involving limitations according to various perceived boundaries. Limitations cannot, consequently, be aptly predicated of God, a being absolutely infinite and impassible.\textsuperscript{188} The conception of division as implying limitations relies, therefore, involves infinities in kind. They are distinguishable parts only insofar as their activity is concerned and not because they constitute a separate substance that is a whole itself, one that is either divisible into or composed out of proper parts.

\textsuperscript{187} Spinoza’s metaphor of the worm in the blood in Letter 32 and his criticism of time, measure, and number as aids to the imagination in Letter 12 are essentially commenting on the same point. We are able to delimit corporeal substance as we please when we are considering it from perspectives of scale and distance, or in terms of isolation and independence. However useful such activities may be is immaterial to the metaphysical point Spinoza wishes to make; namely, that nothing can either be or be conceived apart from anything, and certainly not from that in and through which existence is enjoyed (IId2; IIp7s; IVp2; IVp4).

\textsuperscript{188} This is precisely Bayle’s problem in his entry on Spinoza. Bayle is dominated by a symbol standing for extension, namely, that it is as such divisible into separate, discrete parts, that it is possible and inert, etc. Bayle thus maintains, “if it is absurd to make God extended because this would divest him of his simplicity and make him consist of an infinite number of parts, what will we say when we consider that this is reducing him to the condition of matter, the lowest of all beings, and the one that almost all the ancient philosophers placed immediately above nonbeing?” (Note N in “Spinoza,” from the \textit{Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections}, translated by Richard H. Popkin [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991], 307).
on the mistake of conceiving of really existing modes as separable, discrete magnitudes whose parts are somehow integrally related to each other (Ep12). The problem, according to Spinoza, is the erroneous insistence that “infinite quantity is measurable and is made up of finite parts” (*quantitas infinita supponatur sed quod quantitatem infinitam measurabilem et ex partibus finitis conflari supponunt;* Ip15s, mine; Ep12). Should we conceive of extension as divisible into various limits and bounds, however, we will carry the division all the way to substance or the absolutely infinite (Ip15s). Again, in this event, thinks Spinoza, we will attempt to affirm that there are separate and varied substances, and that at least one of these substances involves a division into finite parts. In the first instance, one will then be required to explain the creation of another substance via transitive causality, and subsequently, to demonstrate how two (or more) ontologically separate entities relate to one another (Ip15s). In the second instance, one will be required to demonstrate how and why anything is the way it is and not some other way. That is, “why all the parts may be so fitted together as to leave no vacuum?” (Ip15s).\(^{189}\)

However, since the supposition “that material substance is composed of parts” requires that one conceive of the parts as “distinct in reality” (Ip15s), it will be

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\(^{189}\) See Jonathan Bennett’s “Spinoza’s Vacuum Argument,” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1980): 391-9. I take it that the principle of sufficient reason as it appears in Spinoza differs from that of Leibniz by the way the question “how/why is something this way and not some other way” is answered. It seems to me that Spinoza would think that there is something in the question that rings false insofar as it imaginatively introduces the negativity of possibility (Ip33s1; IVd4). His PSR, therefore, is interested in understanding the essences of things as immanently caused. His vacuum argument appears to accomplish as much in my estimation. Leibniz appears to take the question at face value and is interested in considering final causes as coincident with the efficient causes that cause things to be the way they are (see, e.g. *Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason* [1714]). The answer to the question ‘why’?, for Leibniz, requires a final cause because the sufficient reason for anything being the way it is, is thought to be owing to the purposes of God, “because God always intends the best and most perfect” (*Discourse on Metaphysics* §19). The answer to the question ‘why?’ for Spinoza demands no recourse to value and purpose, for whatever exists is necessary in the same way that the absolute infinite enjoyment of existence itself is.
impossible to give an adequate explanation of their existence, their essence, and the reciprocal relation and mutual adaptation of one to another (Ep32).

Spinoza appears to be thinking that a really existent independent, discrete entity could not exist as a part of the whole of reality without involving a contradiction. Quite simply, such an entity must be conceived as independent while at the same time being conceived in relation to other such independent entities. Not only would there be no sufficient reason for the thing to be when and where it is, it could not be really related to anything else. Without this sufficient reason there is nothing possibly in the thing itself determining that it exist rather than not, nor that it be related to anything else. But why is this problematic? When Spinoza inquires, “why could one part not be annihilated while the others remain joined together as before?” (Ip15s) he is essentially pushing against the possibility of there existing a definite and determinate (finite) existence that follows from nothing but itself (Ip29d). If this possibility were to be admitted, then the creation and annihilation of something finite would somehow both be owing to itself and also involve no relation to anything else. It would, consequently, either be the cause of itself or have nothing as its cause. But what is finite (i.e. what we previously called a contingent or existent modification) cannot be the cause of itself, and nothing (nihil) cannot cause anything to be (Ip11d3). What is more, and this is the crux of the matter, if really distinct parts composed the stuff of reality, one would be forced to posit an external or transcendent force whereby such atomic entities enjoyed their
existence and their relations to other such existents. This has the unhappy consequence of depriving “corporeal Substance, which we cannot conceive as other than existing, of its Affections, and that Substance should not possess the nature which it does possess” (Ep12). But why is this the case?

The reduction of “the motions of matter” (Ep12) to finite, numerically distinct parts is absolutely repugnant to Spinoza’s ontology of infinity or, what is the same, his infinite ontology. The affirmation of the actual division of matter into independent parts essentially affirms “that things which by their own nature do not necessarily exist are not determined by a thing that necessarily exists by its own nature.” (Ep12). This is not a case of contrary assertion, but of metaphysical impossibility. The impossibility stems not only from Spinoza’s insistence that an actual infinite necessarily exists and that it necessarily involves “infinite things in infinite ways” (Ep12; Ip16), but also from what must logically follow from this affirmation. Namely, as Francesca Di Poppa rightly maintains, it is that “modes causally depend on the one infinite self-sustaining process. At the same time, they are in God because God’s power only exists as these structured, determined, finite powers or processes.”

Spinoza is forced to admit the indivisibility of corporeal substance, not because he cannot conceive of divisibility, but because it (viz. actual division) cannot possibly be adequate to the nature of reality without annihilating reality entirely. His response to the previous question (i.e. ‘why could one part not be annihilated ...?’) would simply be that the coming to be and passing away of

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190 This is Descartes’ second argument for the existence of God based on the identity of God’s creating and conserving everything every moment. (See, e.g. Meditations IV.)
things is nothing other than the alteration of the infinity of relations in the regions of infinite extension. The annihilation of a part in this sense would constitute nothing other than a different distribution of the infinite relations of extension, itself actually precipitated by a durational existent, which itself was brought about by another, ad infinitum (Ilp13l7s; Ip28ds). In the final analysis, while modifications of substance come to be and pass away, the substance in which they inhere, and upon which they depend as parts, can neither come to be nor pass away without failing to be absolute and infinite.

The modifications of material substance can be taken as modally distinct, modally divisible, but never distinct in reality, never actually divisible (i.e. numerically distinct or ontologically separable). As modally distinct, modifications, as affections of infinite substance, or degrees of the infinite power of existence (i.e. the virtual whole that is God or Nature), are distinguishable by what they are able to do; this is why Spinoza submits that “bodies are distinguished from one another in respect of motion and rest, quickness and slowness, and not in respect of substance” (Ilp13l3d; etc.). It is for this reason that Spinoza can say with perfect coherence, “water qua water, comes into existence and goes out of existence; but qua substance

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192 See Jonathan Bennett, “Spinoza’s Vacuum Argument,” wherein he maintains that, “bodies should be understood in terms of—to put it in shorthand—thickenings of regions of space. Spinoza sees the extended world as a single item, perhaps called Space, that is qualitatively varied from region to region: some regions at given times qualify as bodies, other as empty space. It is a single thing rather than an assemblage of regions” (p. 396). See also Bennett, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics” §4 (66-9) in The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza.

193 Viljanen rightly maintains that, “the destruction of a finite individual does not amount to the annihilation of a certain region of extended substance, but only to spatial alteration.” (in “Field Metaphysic, Power and Individuation in Spinoza,” p. 400)

194 Thus, whether or not Spinoza is enlisting a Cartesian physics of forces (mv) is moot, insofar as the metaphysical point stands regardless of whether or not mv constitutes an adequate measure of force. Indeed, I am inclined to think that Spinoza could quite readily assimilate Leibniz’s improved theory of relational forces into his metaphysical system (see, especially the latter’s On Body and Force, Against the Cartesians, 1702).
it does not come into existence nor go out of existence.” (Ip15s). This point is further clarified in Letter 32, wherein the interpenetration of parts is understood to be virtually identical to the whole itself. While denying the possibility of actually knowing “the agreement of each part with the whole,” Spinoza submits that the agreement itself must be considered to follow from the ontological status of substance as the infinite power of existence. As we will come to see, the agreement of the parts of Nature is not explained by virtue of being well-ordered or beautiful. Since these notions are mere relics of the imagination they would have to be lumped in with the error of actual division (Ep32; IV preface). Rather, the agreement of parts is due entirely to their nature as powers inhering in, and expressive of, the absolutely infinite power of *Deus sive Natura* (Ep32). Thus, after enlisting the worm in the blood metaphor, Spinoza maintains that, “all bodies are surrounded by others and are reciprocally determined to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate way, the same ratio of motion to rest being preserved in them taken all together, that is, in the universe as a whole” (Ep32). Since, for Spinoza, each part is inseparable from the whole upon which it both depends and within which it inheres, and since each part is a power of activity participating in the whole power of activity that is substance, the mereological relation best suited to this position is that of a virtual

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195 The reason for Spinoza’s epistemic humility here is interesting. Spinoza maintains that the infinite power of existing pertains to Thought and Extension infinitely as the absolute infinite’s limitless activity of thinking and extending. The human body and mind are that same power of extending and thinking, not as the whole power itself, but as modicums or modifications of it (Ep32). Thus, when one forms an adequate idea, one is expressing the whole infinite power, not as the whole itself through itself, but as the modification of it in and through which it is (Vp4s).

196 This is similar to Eriugena’s conception that the place any body occupies is itself another body *ad infinitum*. He maintains, e.g., that “bodies are in bodies, smaller ones in larger, grosser in more subtle, light in lighter, pure in purer (...) all of these are seen to be not places, but parts of the world circumscribed by their own places” (*Periphyseon*, I.35; I.38).
whole and its parts. An infinite virtual whole is limitlessly powerful. A virtual whole exists as acting, and since its activity is absolutely infinite, the infinite variations or modifications of this whole will involve modally distinct powers in reciprocal relation (Ip34-5; Ip17c2; Ep32).

It is to these relations, and to the individuals they form through their communication and constant variation, that we now turn.

**Variation, Communication, and Individuation**

For Spinoza, there is the virtual or potestative whole that substance essentially is, and then there is the virtual whole that is the effecting power and operation of this substance in and through its infinite modifications. This is the basic distinction between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. The former is considered virtual insofar as its *virtus* or power is essentially absolute and infinite, while the latter is considered virtual in two respects: 1) as a complex of individual dispositions or powers of activity (*virtus*) that are determined by another *ad infinitum*, and 2) as almost, or nearly a unified whole, but not quite. For the sake of simplicity, I will use the term *potestative whole* to refer to the first, ontologically basic sense of the concept of virtual whole (*Natura naturans*), and *virtual whole* to refer to the

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197 In connection to this, see Aquinas, *ST*, Ia, Q77, A1, ad.1-3, wherein Thomas first denies that power is the essence of soul because "power and act divide being and every kind of being, we must refer a power and its act to the same genus. Wherefore the Divine power which is the principle of His operation is the Divine Essence itself." Thus considered, "the soul by its very essence is an act" with a host of operations proper to it that are inseparable from it (ad.3). However, it is not an act by the essence of its own power, but acts according to its capacities it has from the Divine Essence (ad.1-2). Were Spinoza directly interacting with this text, I would imagine that he would deny that 'power and act divide being' (*viz. actually*). Instead, Spinoza would appear to affirm that 'the Divine power which is the principle of His operation is the Divine Essence itself' but would insist that this just involves an infinity of powers acting in infinite ways. Thus 'souls' would not have the capacity to act from being given a substantial essence that operates as intended by the hand of God, but would just be the infinitely various capacities of God according to God's infinite operations of modification.
collection of powerful parts following from the first (Natura naturata). This latter is what Spinoza also considers the facies totius universalis: namely, an infinite mediate mode of substance whose existence is the effect of the infinite interactions of the infinite immediate mode of extension, motus et quietus. That is, the facies totius universalis is the effect of the power of activity in operation of that whose essence is to exist. While motion-and-rest may be an indexical concept for Spinoza (KV, IX note, Ep.60), if modes are as we have considered them to be, namely powers or dispositions inhering in the absolutely infinite power of substance, then motus et quietus should be primarily, or ontologically, understood as the infinitely varying regional intensifications of indivisible substance.\footnote{See, e.g. Deleuze who maintains that, “each finite being must be said to express the absolute, according to the intensive quantity that constitutes its essence, according, that is, to the degree of its power. Individualization is, in Spinoza, neither qualitative nor extrinsic, but quantitative and intrinsic, intensive” (in Expressionism, p.195). See also Viljanen who maintains that, “motion and rest refers to the fact that the spatio-temporal field undergoes changes ceaselessly, for the substantial power is continually redistributed between regions of space.” (in “Field Metaphysic...”, p.402). See also Don Garrett, “Spinoza’s Theory of Metaphysical Individualization,” p.80. And see, as a matter of course, Bennett, “Spinoza’s Vacuum Argument.”} The intensifications of ‘regions at times’ that defines the activity of motion-and-rest of infinitely extended substance results in both the power quanta that are the corpora simplissima and the increasingly larger individuals resulting from their own interactions of motion-and-rest. And it is individual things, durational existents, or, what is the same, actual essences, that compose this whole. But just what constitutes an individual thing for Spinoza, and what differentiates one individual thing from another?

For Spinoza, the individuation of finite modes is, I believe, the particular, durational result of the infinite process of modification defining the power of activity of the potestative whole that is substance (Ip28). An individual thing is,
however, never a separate existence, never independent; rather, it necessarily
inheres in the whole of substance, on which its existence and essence depends. Individual things are actual essences whose emergence and persistence are
contingent upon a causal process whose principle is reciprocal relation and mutual
adaptation (Ep32;Ip28;IVp4d). But of what? The simple answer is the infinite
immediate modes of extended substance, motion-and-rest. Infinite immediate
modes in ceaseless interdependent interaction have the effect of forming individual
things, or finite modes, that maintain their form (forma) for an indefinite time (IId5;
Ilp30d). It is for this reason that Spinoza is able to hold that what follows from an
infinite attribute of substance is itself eternal and infinite (Ip21), while
simultaneously submitting that, “particular things are contingent and perishable”
(IIlp31c;Ip17s). A particular or individual thing, being the result or effect of the
ininitely varying modifications of infinite immediate modes (e.g. motion-and-rest),
involves a form (forma) that is unvarying for an indefinite duration (Ilp13Lemma3d;
Ilp24d). Since extended substance is not actually divisible, but is rather an
internally differentiated field of power, each individual thing could only become so,

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199 Gilbert Simondon, e.g., articulates a similar theory of individuation. His thesis is that individuation
is not owing to a principle determining when an individual can be said to exist, but to a process of a
whole system in which “the individual is to be understood as having a relative reality, occupying only
a certain phase of the whole being in question – a phase that therefore carries the implication of a
preceding pre-individual state, and that, even after individuation, does not exist in isolation, since
individuation does not exhaust in the Single act of its appearance all the potentials embedded in the
pre-individual state. (from “The Genesis of the Individual,” in Incorporations, edited by Jonathan
Crary and Sanford Kwinter [New York: Zone, 1992], pp.297-319; p.300).

200 In his essay, “Spinoza on Duration, Time and Eternity,” David Savan remarks that, “the distinctive
structure of any given natural entity as it is given, adapted to a given place and time, modified by
actual relations to other existing things, is the actual essence. The formal essence is that same
structure as it follows from the total order of nature considered apart from local variations and
actions. It is the formal essence, not the actual or given essence, that is eternal and is known in
scientia intuitiva.” (in Spinoza: The Enduring Questions, edited by Graeme Hunter [Toronto: University
of Toronto Press, 1994], p.6).
and be understood as such, as an intensification of a local region of the whole, global field.\footnote{201 See again Viljanen who maintains that, “Since modally distinguished parts constitute differing amounts of God’s power, I suggest that under the attribute of extension we are dealing with differences in power distribution in the spatial field: finite entities are, field metaphysically speaking, constituted by differences in the intensity or strength of spatial power. These\textit{ distributive differences in intensity} form relatively stable \textit{spatial patterns or formations}, i.e. modes of extension. This is what it means for them to be parts of substantial power. There is no region without power, since that would equal total annihilation of extension, but there are drastic differences in the intensity of power between spatial regions, and out of these differences finite things are constituted.” (in “Field Metaphysic,” pp. 402-3) See also Deleuze, \textit{Expressionism}, pp. 90-93.} The intensification of a region of infinite extension is tantamount to a concentration of forces (\textit{viz. corpora simplissima}) in mutual and reciprocal communication (IIp13Lemma3). That is, an individual thing is a definite and determinate part of God’s absolutely infinite activity by virtue of having a communication of parts that are “the simultaneous cause of one effect” (IId7). This simultaneous cause of one effect involves an ontological simultaneity as well. A finite mode, individual thing or, what is the same, a \textit{conatus, virtus}, or power of activity, is ‘simultaneous in nature’ (\textit{simul sit natura}; IIIp2s) with the whole power that is \textit{Deus sive Natura}.\footnote{202 With respect to Wolfson’s question of whether Spinoza’s, “God is absolutely identical with the aggregate totality of particular things or whether He does in some way transcend it” (\textit{The Philosophy of Spinoza}, p.299) we can respond that while God is not identical with the ‘aggregate totality of particular things’ (i.e. God is \textit{modally distinct from} individual things as the power in and through which they operate), God is identical to the processes through which individual things come to be and persist for an indefinite duration. Individual things, consequently, do not form an aggregate totality at all, but are intensive processes of an infinite, continuous substance; i.e. substance under the aspect of extension. This will be explained more thoroughly in what follows.} Thus, the whole collection of individual things (\textit{natura naturata}) is identical to the infinite activity of substance (\textit{natura naturans}). This requires a great deal more explanation.

For Spinoza, a finite, individual thing is a compound, a composite. A composition or compound is commonly understood as a whole depending on its parts to be the thing that it is. Thus Peter Abelard, one of the earliest thinkers
exploring mereological composition, considers an individual thing to be a whole object whose parts constitute it in such a way that “the destruction of no matter what part necessarily entails the destruction of the whole also, in such a way that we admit that all parts are principal parts.”

Now it is through an “unvarying relation of movement among themselves,” thinks Spinoza, that “bodies are said to be united with one another and all together form one body or individual thing” (IIp13L3D). It is this union, owing to the simultaneous cause, or ratio, that an individual thing is said to be distinguished from other such things (ibid). The ratio, or pattern of motion-and-rest, by which a complex body maintains its virtual unity is due to the certain communication of motion among its parts (IIp13L3d). This certe quodam ratione communicent just is the homeostatic relation that interdependent parts hold toward one another to form a durational existent; i.e. an actual essence defined by its particular power of activity (IIp45s;IIp7d). So a definite and determinate power of activity has a form (forma) by virtue of a communicated ratio with other individual things (forma), each of which are definite and determinate powers of activity having a form (forma) by virtue of a ratio, and so on ad infinitum. Now, there are at least two problems with this account. First, on the strength of the previous section, it does not appear that Spinoza is entitled to a theory of individuation through composition. If the whole (of Nature) must be prior to the parts (viz. powers) inhering in it, how can individual things be composed if there are

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204 Garrett maintains that “Given the existence of simplest bodies, Spinoza’s individuals will just be, as the Definition states – composites of such simple bodies, composites that maintain a fixed ratio of this same force of motion and rest among their parts, even as their particular component parts change.” (in “Spinoza’s Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” p.82)
no actual, least or principle parts (viz. *atoma*) to form them? Second, if Spinoza is entitled to composition, how can an individual thing (i.e. an intrinsic power of activity that is the definite and determinate cause of some effect) exist if it is infinitely composed? Since the answer to each of these quandaries lies, I believe, in an exposition of the status of both *corpora simplissima* and the strange notion of *simultaneous cause*, I will address both through an explanation of these puzzling concepts.

Although there are parts or modifications of substance, bodies are not, on Spinoza's account, substances and are neither distinguished, nor distinguishable, “in respect of substance” (IIp13L1). Why not? It is for the same reason that substance is not divisible into actual parts. Rather than revisiting this topic, I want to highlight the modal distinction Spinoza’s claim involves. In I1p15s, Spinoza maintains that, “there are no distinct parts in it (viz. matter conceived as substance) except insofar as we conceive matter as modified in various ways. Then its parts are distinct, not really but only modally.” Now, we *conceive* matter as modified in various ways is due both to our perception of external bodies affecting our own (IIp13d), and to the adequate idea we arrive at when, conceiving our own power of activity, we understand things distinctly (IIp13s;IIp38). The distinct understanding of something is nothing other than the apprehension of the essence of the thing whereby it is and is conceivable; i.e. what we understand when we *conceive* matter as modified just is the conception of the force or power of existence which involves the power to be the cause of some effect. The same thing we adequately affirm of ourselves (viz. that we are the adequate cause of some effect; IIId1;IIIp1) we equally
conceive of other things in relation to us (IIp37-9). Now, when Spinoza maintains that, “there pertains to the essence of a thing that which, when granted, the thing necessarily is posited” (IIId2), he could mean nothing other than, “the force by which each (thing) persists in existing” (IIp45s). The “certain manner” in which each individual thing comes to be is due to the infinite causal series of other particular things (Ip28;Ip45s;IVp29d), but since the actual essence of anything just is the formal essence-in-act of the particular thing, the actuality of really existent particulars cannot be in doubt. The upshot of this is that the definite and determinate existence of any body caused by another _ad infinitum_ (Ip28d;IIId1) is one and the same as the definite and determinate expression of God’s power (Ip34d). The distinction of bodies “in respect of motion and rest, quickness and slowness” is primarily, or ontologically, a distinction of things according to their powers of activity. A thing is a definite and determinate expression of the absolutely infinite power of _Deus sive Natura_ through the limitations of interacting forces, and it is this that makes a body modally distinct. But, so what? How does this solve the twin problems of individuation via composition and infinite composition?

With respect to indivisible material substance, being modally distinct is one and the same as being a virtual part. A virtual part of the potestative whole of substance is an intensity, a degree of power; i.e. it is a “power quantum” or an “intensive quantity.”205 If the whole is an infinite power to exist and act, and if the whole is prior to its parts, then the parts inhering in it will be individual powers

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205 I think Viljanen is correct to think that “simplest bodies are, ontologically speaking, rudimentary intensifications of spatial power, or extended power _quantum_, that invariably change place” (“Field Metaphysic,” p.406).
inhering in the whole on which they depend for their essence and existence. This is, again, the meaning of Spinoza’s assertion that modes of extended substance are definite and determinate expressions of God’s power (Ip34d). But by virtue of what are they identifiable as individuals? Although the simplest bodies are definite and determinate minima, they are not numerically identical atoma. However definite and determinate it may be, intensive quantity is not representable by number. As we saw, the actual indivisibility of substance precludes atomism or separable substances, but involves a modal division into as many powers as the modification of absolutely infinite substance necessarily involves. These modal divisions are powers of activity, and the region over which their activity ranges is indeterminate, their zone of affection indefinite. The reason for this is the total blending of all the parts of the substantial mixture. Every part is complicated with every other.

Number identifies a precise unit of quantity by means of an imagined unity of a thing perceived as a separate existence (Ep12;Ilp40s1). But the intensive quantity of a virtual minima (viz. corpora simplissima) is the force or quantity of motion peculiar to a region of extended substance, and it is this that defines the actual essence of a mode.206 Since each quantity of motion defining a particular thing is determined to have the quantity of motion it has for a duration by another, and that

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206 Don Garrett, for example, maintains that Spinoza’s “use of the term ‘motion and rest’ for them (viz. simplest bodies) is thus coherently related to his other uses of that term to designate the ‘local motion’ and ‘local rest’ of particular bodies. For what Spinoza calls the ‘local’ motion or rest of the simplest bodies will be both the consequence of, and a measure of, the force or quantity of motion (and correlative quantity of rest) that belongs to them and, indeed, constitutes them” (in “Spinoza’s Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” p.81; brackets mine). See also William Sacksteder, “Simple Wholes and Complex Parts: Limiting Principles in Spinoza,” in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research Vol. XLI, No.3 (March 1985):393-406. The author maintains that “Both part and whole indicate modes of interconnection, and these are, respectively, harmonious or antagonistic. (...)Things are several. Claims to unity for either part or whole are spurious” (p.398).
by another, and so on, *ad infinitum* (Ilp13L3d;IVp29d), it is not possible for an actual essence to be a definite and determinate power of God (Ip34,36) and be its own, numerically distinct entity. Yet while any individual thing is caused by another, and related to every other, it is still the thing it is by virtue of its own *conatus* or *virtus*, its own peculiar ‘force of existence’ (IIIp7d). It simply has a *relative* identity and is only possibly *relationally* autonomous. If this is correct, I believe Deleuze is right to ask, “on what condition do we attribute to a finite being, which does not exist through itself, a *power of existing and acting* identical to its essence?”207 How, in other words, are *coactus* and *conatus* simultaneous? The answer, I believe, lies in Spinoza’s use of the concept ‘simultaneous cause’ in his definition of a particular thing (IId7).

It is not the simplest bodies themselves that constitute a body, but their simultaneous communication. That is, since *corpora simplissima* are not *atoma* or actual, least parts of Nature, but are rather ‘power quanta,’ it is the differential relations of forces in their active and passive affections that constitute an individual (i.e. its *dominant form*, or nature defined by its capacity for activity) and not simply the parts themselves. Although Abelard holds a destructivist208 view of the

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207 Deleuze, *Expressionism*, p.90.
208 A destructivist account of composition holds that an individual *this* is constituted by all of the parts taken together in such a way that the destruction of the smallest particle is the destruction of the whole. So, e.g., Abelard asserts:

*But we do not say that if this stone-fragment is removed then a house does not abide in the remaining parts, but only that that house which was made up from that pebble and the rest of the parts does not remain: that particular house was made up of parts, and was referred to as 'this house' in terms of the composition of all those parts. But when the substance of this house, which is based on all the stuff pertaining to it, does not remain, then the house in question also necessarily perishes substantially. No longer will one be able to say, 'This house is', of the house that previously was, that is, the collection of this stone-fragment and the rest of the parts together; this can now only be said concerning the collection of the rest of the parts, a collection*
composition of an individual, he nevertheless would appear to anticipate the kind of position Spinoza seems to hold. Abelard maintains that

Now there are other names which signify many things taken together, but not merely on the basis of multiplicity, nor yet on the basis of aggregation, but rather because of the imposition of a fixed unified structure on things, whether that structure be the product of nature, as is that which shapes those human members which taken all together are said to be a man, or whether it be artificial, such as that which pervades a house. Indeed, mere multiplicity is not enough to give us a genuine house. For if walls and roof just lie about, gathered together in one place on the foundations, they are not hence said to be a house unless such components of the house acquire their structure.²⁰⁹

Spinoza seems to agree that an x-wise arrangement is necessary to compose an individual thing, and has something definite in mind regarding in just what this x-wise arrangement lies. When Spinoza declares that the parts of a (human) body “can be separated from the human body without impairing in any way its nature and specific reality (forma), and can establish a quite different relation of motion with other bodies,” he seems to be submitting that what is constitutive of an individual is the simultaneous communicative relation of bodies, and not the bodies themselves (IId7;Ilp13L3Def). Since corpora simplissima are common to all and proper to none, they are not possibly the essence of any one particular body, but of all bodies equally (IId1;Ilp13L2).²¹⁰ It is, however, their particular communicative relations

²¹⁰ Robert Boyle seems to hold a similar position, but with a fundamental difference. On the one hand he submits that with the generation of one individual nothing "substantial produced, but that those parts of matter that did indeed before pre-exist, but were either scattered or shared among other bodies, or at least otherwise disposed of, are now brought together and disposed after the manner requisite to entitle the body that results from them to a new denomination, and make it appertain to such a determinate species of natural bodies, so that no new 'substance' is in generation 'produced', but only that which was 'pre-existent' obtains a new 'modification' or manner of existence." (Robert Boyle, Selected Philosophical Papers, edited by M.A. Stewart. [Manchester: Manchester University
that provide the essential condition for the constitution and preservation of an
individual (IIp24d). These zones of communicative relationality are identical with
the regional intensifications at times of infinite extended substance. But just what is
the essence of these individual-forming relations?

In IIp24 Spinoza proposes that, “the human mind does not involve an
adequate knowledge of the component parts of the human body,” and reasons that
this is due to the fact that “the component parts of the human body do not pertain to
the essence of the body itself.” This declaration is not without a caveat, the
importance of which cannot be underestimated. The component parts of the body
do not pertain to the body’s essence, thinks Spinoza, “save in so far as they preserve
an unvarying relation of motion and rest with one another, and not in so far as they
can be considered as individual things apart from their relation to the human
body.” Not only does this eschew Abelard’s rather extreme deconstructivist identity
thesis, but it also improves upon his somewhat indistinct idea that composition
requires that parts be ‘appropriately’ brought together. The upshot of Spinoza’s

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211 Modal essences cannot be adequately conceived as substantially distinct, separate entities without
introducing substance pluralism (Ip12-13). David Savan rightly notes that, “essences have no
separate existence” (in “Spinoza on Duration, Time and Eternity,” p.5).
212 It is interesting to note that since Abelard holds that “the destruction of no matter what part
necessarily entails the destruction of the whole also, in such a way that we admit that all parts are
principal parts” (AD 552.6.14), he seems compelled to reach the conclusion that
Our last resource is to yield to it (i.e. the truth of non-identity over time owing to the
destruction of principal parts), and boldly assert that these different related objects are in
effect the same, however interrupted and variable. In order to justify ourselves this
absurdity, we often feign some new and unintelligible principle, that connects the objects
together, and prevents their interruption or variation. Thus we feign the continued existence
of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption; and run into the notion of a
caveat is then, I believe, the following: while it is impossible for any individual thing to be composed out of actually distinct least parts, it is necessary that an individual thing be compounded of parts whose powers in relation constitute a simultaneous cause. Since a simultaneous cause involves many things concurring in one act (IId7), it follows that any part of an individual thing is itself an individual thing composed out of other individual things concurring in one act, the parts of which are themselves individual things, and so on, ad infinitum. Now when Spinoza declares that the ‘very complex’ parts of the body can be separated “without impairing in any way its nature and specific reality (forma), and can establish a quite different relation of motion with other bodies,” he is proffering the thesis that it is not the integral composition of indivisible, least parts that constitutes an individual, but the simultaneous confluence of virtual parts (viz. corpora simplissima) whose unwavering communication of motions grants a thing its peculiar power of activity for

'soul', and 'self', and 'substance', to disguise the variation. – quoted in Medieval Mereology, p.113 (brackets mine)

From our present historical vantage point it is difficult not to, albeit anachronistically, recognize the Humeanism in this position. If atomism, or least parts, then no causal connections are present to really relate these diverse terms into an individual thing. We merely call something the same individual by virtue of habit.

213 “All bodies,’ Spinoza maintains, 'are surrounded by others and are reciprocally determined to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate way, the same ratio of motion and rest being preserved in them taken all together, that is, in the universe as a whole” (Ep32). Sacksteder can be seen to offer a helpful commentary here:

But there is no limit to the series thus begun. And its advance increases complexity. No lesser part is simply what it is. Rather, proper conception of it must be supplemented with notice of connections with other parts, with possible further subdivisions, and with whatever more simple conception makes both intelligible. Neither one isolated part nor any set of parts can ever be least. As division proceeds, members are increasingly complex, both in aspects internal to themselves and in mingling with others. No least part in this sense can ever work in independence. For it itself is never simple.” (404) a further step of synthesis in search of a greater whole more complex may always be undertaken. But there is no limit to the series thus begun. And its advance complicates. Any greater whole exhausts by comprehending further discrete items. Proper conception of it so transforms ingredients that division among its parts cites laws and natures governing their adjustment and mutual causation. No organic whole or set of seeming atoms can ever be greatest. Its unity is rather increasingly simple, both in being what it is and in conceiving interdependence in regulated ways. Any greatest whole in this sense depends on some prior unity. For in itself it is always complex.” – in “Simple Wholes and Complex Parts,” pp.404-5.

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a duration (Ilp13L7;IVp39d). The maxim *corruptio unius est generatio alterius, et e contra* remains true, but since it is the communication of virtual parts intensifying a region of extended substance at a given time through affective interrelations that constitutes an individual thing, the destruction and transference of parts will not necessarily constitute the destruction of the whole characteristic relation of an individual.\(^{214}\) While the whole power in which these parts inhere is common to all and proper to none (Ilp37d), its regional intensifications are uncommonly or unequally distributed. It is this unequal distribution that causes the virtual parts of substance to “communicate their motions to one another in a certain fixed proportion” (IVp39d) and it is this ‘fixed proportion’, pattern or *ratio*, that is the simultaneous cause of an individual thing. And this *ratio* does not simply correspond with the actual essence of a thing, but is identical to it (Ilp57ds;IVp39d). In principle, then, whenever a certain *ratio* is present, so too is there an individual identical with such a *ratio*. And an infinite complex of *ratios* is sempiternally present.

Each part of an individual thing is “extremely complex” (Ilpost.1) precisely because it is itself an individual thing whose power of activity is owing to its own complex communication of parts, each of which is an individual thing, etc. Rather than posing a problem for the formation of actual individuals, this provides the

\(^{214}\) Hans Jonas maintains a similar line of thought when he asserts that, “The living organism exists as a constant exchange of its own constituents and has its permanence and identity only in the continuity of this process, and not in any persistence of its material parts.” Consequently, “the degree of complexity, is not variety of mechanical performance by a self-contained automaton, but range and variety of reciprocal *communication* with things, or the manner of being part of the whole while yet being something apart from the whole” (in “Spinoza and the Theory of Organism,” in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Marjorie Grene [New York: Anchor, 1973],p.265 and 266 respectively).
ground of their reality. That is, the parts of an individual thing can be distinctly conceived as individual things in the same way that any individual thing can be conceived as itself a part of another individual thing. Since parthood is one and the same as being a power of activity, the particularity of a part is found in its distinctive disposition. If this weren’t the case, the parts of a body could not have “different natures,” (Ilpost.1) and could not, consequently, be parts at all. The upshot is that each part of an individual thing is itself an individual thing, or a virtual whole itself, while at the same time being part of another virtual whole ad infinitum. For Spinoza, this mereological transitivity is wedded to the notion that the universe is itself an infinite individual.

Since substantial distinction between modes is impossible, the individuality of anything is due not to its being numerically identical with itself, but to its certain

216 I.e. as Abelard maintains, “necessarily all the parts of the parts are themselves parts of the whole” (AD 422.6.30). Thus, while it is true that A is part of B and B is part of C, then A is part of C, the actual infinity of reality involves neither a first or last term, nor a determinate starting and ending point, but only an indefinite minimum and maximum.

217 See David Savan, “Spinoza on Duration, Time and Eternity,” wherein the author notes that, “the whole universe, natura naturata, considered as an infinite individual, endures without limit and comprises the durations of its finite parts” (p.7).
relation to every other part of the milieu in which it is formed. That God necessarily
has the idea of “every individual component part,” (Ilp15d) both in respect of
essence and (durational) existence (Ilp8c), is then nothing other than the infinite
idea that God must have of Itself as a potestative whole \textit{in operation}. And since the
unity and simplicity of substance is just the unity and simplicity of a unique
\textit{(unicum)} process, its self-comprehension could be nothing other than the infinitely
complex and diverse virtual parts in mutual interaction that it necessarily involves.
It is, then, by virtue of the body being a definite and determinate part of extended
substance that the human mind is at once a “part of the infinite intellect of God”
(Ilp11c). Given that the definite and determinate existence of a body “is composed
of a great number of very composite individual parts” (Ilp15d), our adequate
knowledge of the object of our idea will necessarily have to be that which can be
conceived “equally in the part as in the whole” (Ilp38); i.e. our active understanding
will have to comprehend the power of the whole of substance in which everything
functions as a part.

The alteration of the whole of substance is located in the interdependent
modifications of its parts. Since this eternal process of modification involves the
ceaseless interaction of finite modes, what Aristotle says of Anaxagoras’ theory,
namely that, “every part is just as much a mixture as the whole universe is,”\textsuperscript{218}
equally applies to Spinoza’s dynamic monism. That is, I think it is right to conceive
of Spinoza’s extended substance as a totally blended mixture in a sense similar to

\textsuperscript{218} Aristotle, \textit{Physics} III.4.
that of the Stoics. The \textit{facies totius universalis} is, then, the maximum of this virtual mixture of individuals, and the \textit{corpora simplissima} the minimum. Spinoza is worth quoting at length here:

We thus see how a composite individual can be affected in many ways and yet preserve its nature. Now hitherto we have conceived an individual thing composed solely of bodies distinguished from one another only by motion-and-rest and speed of movement; that is, an individual thing composed of simplest bodies. If we now conceive another individual thing composed of several individual things of different natures, we shall find that this can be affected in many other ways while still preserving its nature. For since each one of its parts is composed of several bodies, each single part can therefore, without any change in its nature, move with varying degrees of speed and consequently communicate its own motion to other parts with varying degrees of speed. Now if we go on to conceive a third kind of individual thing composed of this second kind, we shall find that it can be affected in many ways without any change in its form. If we thus continue to infinity, we shall readily conceive the whole of Nature as one individual whose parts – that is, all the constituent bodies – vary in infinite ways without any change in the individual as a whole. – IIP13L7s

No individual thing can possibly be conceived \textit{separately} or \textit{apart from} the whole of which they are a virtual part; conversely, no individual thing can possibly be conceived without the parts by which it is itself a virtual whole. The internal milieu constitutive of any individual always involves an external milieu in which it is placed. This is in fact quite Cartesian of Spinoza. According to Descartes, any body that can be differentiated from another will be distinguished according to both its

\footnote{Simondon can be seen as providing a helpful gloss on this explanation: Individuation, then, is a relative phenomenon, like an alteration in the structure of a physical system. There is a certain level of potential that remains, meaning that further individuations are still possible. The pre-individual nature, which remains associated with the individual, is a source of future metastable states from which new individuations could eventuate. According to this hypothesis, it would be possible to consider every genuine relation as having the status of a being, and as undergoing development within a new individuation. A relation does not spring up between two terms that are already separate individuals, rather, it is an aspect of the internal resonance of a stem of individuation. It forms a part of a wider system. The living being, which is simultaneously more and less than a unity, possesses an internal problematic and is capable of being an element in a problematic that has a wider scope than itself. As far as the individual is concerned, participation here means to be in an element in a much larger process of individuation means of the inheritance of pre-individual reality that the individual contains that is, due to the potentials it has retained. – “The Genesis of the Individual,” p.306}
**internal place** and its **external place.**\(^{220}\) Internal place is the size, breadth, and depth of a portion of extension that is coextensive with the body’s position in space.\(^{221}\) External place is the position a body occupies relative to other bodies.\(^{222}\) Thus, the internal place of anything simultaneously involves being in an external place relative to other portions of extension. Insofar as anything is, it must be in a place, but its place is both the limits of its own surfaces and the milieux of the surfaces of every other body in which it is located. If to be an individual body is to be in place, and any place is another body, then bodies are in bodies *ad infinitum*. This is why both Spinoza and Descartes are loath to affirm the existence of either a vacuum or atoms (*Elp15s; PPlI.20*); any (modal/potential) division of extension will have to involve a division of an internal place, but since any internal place always involves external placement at the same time, no division could involve either a division into nothing, or into something indivisible.\(^{223}\) Place is, then, a boundary, but it is a porous or permeable boundary. Thus, the powerful structure of any individual requires interaction with the milieu through which it comes to be and persist over time.

Now, if we revisit Spinoza’s declaration that the component parts of a (human) body cannot be adequately understood apart from the whole of which they are a part (*Ilp24d*), we can see how this is consistent with his global understanding of the part-whole relation (*Ilp13dL7; Ep32*). That individual things are constituted


\(^{221}\) This is akin to what Aristotle refers to as ‘immediate place’ in his *Physics* IV.4: “it is immediately ‘in’ the inner surface of the surrounding body, and this surface is neither a part of what is in it nor yet greater than its extension, but equal to it; for the extremities of things which touch or are coincident”

\(^{222}\) Descartes, *Principles*, II.13.

\(^{223}\) Ibid., II.16,20.
or composed of parts to form virtual wholes does not mean that the potestative whole of substance is not ontologically prior to the powerful parts inhering in it. Rather, the composition of individual things is the operative effect of this eternal, immanent cause; i.e. the infinite immediate modes of (extended) substance result in regional intensifications whose definite and determinate nature is owing to their being relatively composed for a duration. It is the simultaneous communication of parts both internal and external to an individual that make it actual (Ilp13L3Def;Ilp24d). This is why Spinoza is content neither with Descartes’ structural and quantitative account of differentiation and individuation, nor with his thinking of motion purely in terms of locomotion and transference. For example, Descartes maintains that since “the universe contains the very same matter all through … all the different properties that we vividly perceive in it come down to its being divisible into parts that move, so that it can have all the different states that we perceive as derivable from the movement of parts.”224 While this is not far from Spinoza’s own position, by affirming what Descartes denies of motion, namely, “that motion in my account is the transfer [of bodies in locomotion through secondary place (my gloss)] not the force or action that causes the transfer,”225 Spinoza ontologically distances himself sufficiently from Cartesian physics. For Spinoza, motion-and-rest as the reciprocal transfer of places within the plenum of bodies is not enough to give globally uniform extension its local differentiations. This was the dissatisfaction Spinoza expresses to Tschirnhaus in Letter 83. Bodies, distinguished

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224 Ibid., II.23.
225 Ibid., II.25.
by motion-and-rest, must have a principle of force peculiar to them (i.e. a particular conatus) in order to be distinct individuals in affective relations.\textsuperscript{226} It is when the parts of the body “maintain a different proportion of motion-and-rest to one another” (IVp39s), that one individual can be said to cease to be and another to come into being. This would seem to involve something along the lines of what Aristotle called “unqualified coming to be.”\textsuperscript{227} However, since for Spinoza all coming to be is qualified (Ip28;IVp29d), and, furthermore, involves the reciprocal alteration of the whole universe, this is not for him a possible explanation of the temporal emergence of an individual. The corollary to IIp8 may provide an answer.

In it Spinoza maintains that God has knowledge of the essences of things insofar as they “are comprehended in the attributes of God but also in so far as they are said to have duration, their ideas will involve the existence through which they are said to have duration.” It is this ‘existence through which they are said to have duration’ that may provide the clue necessary for resolving our present quandary.

Eternity means absolute existence (Id8). All Spinoza seems to intend by the term is that it qualifies a thing that does not derive its being from a cause external to it (Ip11d). An eternal being is not, consequently, explicable in terms of time precisely because it is not conceived in terms of generation and corruption.\textsuperscript{228}

\textsuperscript{226} I.e. for motion and rest to even be considered modes of a body (Principles, II.27), requires that the body to which such transfers of place are predicated be capable of reciprocal transfer; i.e. the body must have a principle of activity proper to it and this is just what Spinoza has in mind with his idea of a forma being coincident with a conatus or virtus. This appears to be an anticipation of Leibniz’s notion of nissus or vis viva.

\textsuperscript{227} Aristotle, On Generation and Corruption, I.1.

\textsuperscript{228} Savan submits that Spinoza rejected three theories of eternity: 1) eternity as ceaseless duration or everlasting, sempiternal existence; 2) eternity as Platonic timelessness (see e.g., Timaeus I.25-28) or Boethian eternal now or tota simul (see e.g., Consolation of Philosophy 5.6); 3) eternity as timeless,
Although eternity cannot be explicated through temporality and tensed terms, this
does not entail that temporality is, for Spinoza, unreal. Now, if time is understood in
terms of conventional units by which duration is divided and measured, Spinoza
does consider it to be unreal (viz. an *entia imaginationis*; Ep12;IIIp18d). But insofar
as the reality of individuals as durational existents seems to require a temporal
asymmetry for their coming to be and passing away, the activity of eternal existence
must involve temporality even though it is itself not explicable in temporal terms
(Id8ex.). To have a duration specific to the mixture of forces that constitute an
individual is to be a *phase* of the eternal process of modification.229 As a
simultaneous communication of parts, any individual will have a temporal duration
relative to other individuals similarly composed that will involve the individuals
causally prior to it, as well as the individuals posterior to it, for which it will itself act
as cause. Since the parts of any individuals are themselves individuals by virtue of a
simultaneous communication of parts, the picture that emerges is of a relativity of
simultaneous communications *ad infinitum*. Because all individuals are
distinguished according to their relative speeds, the time of any individual will
correspond to the processes of its own particular *conatus* and not a measured unit
(Ep12). The spatial and temporal relationality of any individual is, then, relative to
the spatiotemporal distance it has with respect to its internal and external milieux.
This can be quite short, i.e. virtually instantaneous, or quite long, virtually eons

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229 In his essay “Spinoza and the Theory of Organism,” Hans Jonas maintains that an individual thing,
“as a modal determination it represents just one phase in the eternal unfolding of infinite substance
and is thus never a terminal product in which the creative activity would come to rest ... the modal
wholes continuing their conative life in the shift of their own parts and interchange with the larger
whole, are productive as much as produced, or, as much *natura naturans as natura naturata*” (p.270).
away. But, as a phase of the infinitely varying process of substantial modification, the temporal position any durational existent occupies will always be an interstice between earlier and later. As a definite and determinate phase of the whole infinite process of modification, the durational existence of an individual is also definite, albeit liminal (IIp30d;IIIp8).230

The individuals that have caused other individuals to be will recede indefinitely into the past while at the same time prefiguring an indefinite future of other individuals that will come to be. That is, in the same way that any individual contains other individuals and is contained in other individuals, so too is that individual temporally prefigured by prior individuals and so too does it prefigure posterior individuals. Now, while there is a real coming to be and passing away of an individual, since the individual is a regional intensification of extended substance, its ending, like its beginning, involves no “fissures or discontinuities,”231 but rather an alteration of that region of enduring extended substance (viz. the certain communicative relation of power quanta). Its duration as a distinct individual then merely requires that it “be associated with a spatio-temporally continuous string of place-times.”232 While this certainly requires that the coming to be and passing away of individuals is successive, the succession of one individual following another does not involve the one’s substantial coming to be any more than the others’ total annihilation. Again, corruptio unius est generatio alterius, et e

230 It would seem that the definiteness and determinateness of an extended ‘expression’ of natura naturans would also involve a temporal definiteness and determinateness. Spinoza simply thinks that the concept of an existing definite and determinate modification does not essentially involve definite and determinate temporal limitations. I.e. the temporal limitations of an actual essence (i.e. the time when its ratio dissolves) are contingent on the external encounters and not the thing itself.
231 In “Spinoza on Duration, Time and Eternity,” p.16.
contra. All of this is to say that the alteration of the virtual parts of the whole universe merely involves the alteration of regions of extension whose temporality is understood in terms of the relative delays of individual affective relations. It is for this reason that I think David Savan is right to suggest that "for Spinoza it is not time as passage that is significant, but time as presence,"233 where presence is understood as the state in which a particular part of the whole is in (viz. existing as an actual essence or conatus). The individual that ceases to be remains in its effects as a sort of palimpsest, and the individual that comes to be contains its whole infinite causal history and anticipates a continuous future. Cessation and emergence are, then, never complete, but processive; i.e. “beginning and end merge seamlessly with other existing modes, forming a nexus in which each mode determines and is determined by the others.”234 Spinoza’s plenum physics necessarily involves a continuum of activity according to this “dense nexus of interactions,”235 and it is, in the final analysis, in this way that something can be said to come to have existence in duration.

Conclusion

Spinoza’s virtual mereology, as outlined here, constitutes an answer to the mereological quandary with which this chapter began. For Spinoza, the parts of the whole of Nature do not compose substance in terms of a total collection of finite,
discrete members of an integral whole, but are, rather, capacities or dispositions of the infinite power that is \textit{natura naturans} (IIp13s; IIp13I7s; Ep12).\textsuperscript{236} There exists, then, an infinity of interdependent relations in and through which infinite modal essences depend for their coming to be and passing away as actual essences whose finite existence or duration is contingent on the whole system of causes (Ip28d;IIp13I1-7). The whole power of substance can, consequently, no more be or be conceived without its parts than the parts could be or be conceived without the whole power in which they inhere (Ip12d;IIp10cds). Parts cannot be or be conceived without the whole because it is on the whole that they ontologically depend, but the whole cannot be or be conceived without the parts, not on account of dependence, but on account of the consequence of its formal essence involving infinite modification or, what is the same thing, modal division.\textsuperscript{237} Parts, on this account, are, then, nothing other than the interpenetrating relations of powers of that which is infinite in its kind (or through its cause;Id6ex), the whole of which just is the unlimited power of existing itself.\textsuperscript{238} The whole (i.e. absolute infinite) is

\textsuperscript{236} See Mason, \textit{The God of Spinoza}, wherein he proposes that “The infinity of nature is ‘made up’ of parts in that sense (viz. imaginative sense): nature understood ‘modally’ is divisible. The same nature understood as substance or cause is not divisible. The corporeal (and mental) contents of nature do make it up. But they are not ‘made of nature’, in the sense that nature, substance or God is some sort of material that constitutes objects.” (34) At present I am only interested in indivisible substance.

\textsuperscript{237} See again Gueroult, who maintains that a mode’s “division does not in reality contradict its nature, and moreover, its divisibility is not excluded from it by the nature of substance. On the contrary, the latter requires that the mode be interiorly divisible to infinity, but at the same time it requires that it never be rendered finite by an ultimate limit which would restrict its immensity” (“Letter on the Infinite,” p.189).

\textsuperscript{238} In an article relating the mereological commitments of the medieval Buddhist author Fazang to those of Spinoza (among others), Nicholas Jones relates that the Fazang is allegedly committed to the following thesis. Since all things are empty of independent existence, there exists a mutual identity amongst things as constitutive of everything’s particular existence, the absence of which would result in the annihilation of everything. This appears quite close to the view I am ascribing to Spinoza. See Nicholas Jones, “Fazang: Hermeneutics, Causality, and Mereology” (\url{http://www.uah.edu/njones/Fazang.pdf}).
distributed equally through all of its parts, and, reciprocally, every part is in the whole insofar as each part depends on every other to be and act (IIp13l2d; IIp13l3; IIp13ax1; IIp38d; IIp39). As we saw, this results in the generation and corruption of individuals whose minimum were conceived as corpora simplissima and whose maximum was conceived as the facies totius universalis. Again, were a modification of substance to be a separate, independent and indivisible existent (atoma), not only would it have to be considered the cause of its own existence (Ip11d3), it would have to contain an additional principle relating it to every other such part (Ip12d). But since no such principle is necessarily in such a thing, it would have to be established by the imagination of a quasi-Humean subject recording the seemingly constant conjunction of disparate phenomena. That this is not possibly adequate on Spinoza’s account is, at this point, rather unremarkable, but that it coincides with the mereological formula of an adequate idea found in IIp38 is significant. That which both is, and is conceivable, depends on and inheres in the whole power of Nature (Ip34d;IIp13l7s;IVp4d).

239 Substance or being/existence is everywhere the same, but every here where substance is distributed, expresses substance differently by its activity. The unlimited enjoyment of being is not an eminent entity transitively causing lower beings to be, but a neutral affirmation of being itself immanently causing beings to be in infinite ways through itself as absolutely infinite. For further treatment of this topic, see Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (38-42) and “The Twenty-Fifth Series of Univocity,” in *The Logic of Sense*, (177-80).
Conclusion

As we have seen, for Spinoza the communication of virtual parts just is the active and passive affections of actual essences. To be a virtual part of substance is to have a distinct nature, and to have a distinct nature just is to have a capacity for activity that involves both the power to suffer affects and the power to be the cause of some effect (i.e. to affect another thing; Illp7d, etc.). Since the infinite immediate mode of extended substance is equal to all and proper to none, all bodies must, of necessity, agree in certain respects (IIp13dL2; Ep32). The respect in which bodies agree is located in their “reciprocal relation” and “mutual adaptation” to one another (Ep32). This is the essence of the simultaneous communicative relation that establishes and preserves the ratio of motion-and-rest of any individual thing. Thus when Spinoza maintains that, “I consider things as parts of a whole to the extent that their natures adapt themselves to one another,” (Ep32) the adaptation of one part to another requires that each part enjoy a reciprocal relation to the other within the whole in which they each equally inhere. In the same way, then, that the virtual parts adapt themselves to each other to form an individual thing, so too does an individual thing adapt itself to others to form a yet greater whole. Since this reciprocity is not designated as the fit of mechanical parts for the sake of the whole machine, the harmony of Nature’s parts cannot be considered pre-established. Rather, the agreement of parts is owing to a mutual adaptation of powers of activity; i.e. the affective encounters of modes that necessarily involve active and passive forces in correlated exchanges of dominance and submission.
If there is an inherent reciprocity built into the mereological relations following from Spinoza’s ontology, what does this reciprocity involve? A clue can be found in Letter 32. In it Spinoza maintains that the “nature of the universe ... is not limited, but is absolutely infinite, its parts are modified by the nature of this infinite potency in infinite ways and are compelled to undergo infinite variations” (Ep32). This is a statement of the mutual interdependence and interpenetration of the power of each process of modification in relation to every other in the whole dynamic, totally blended, system.240 The infinite power of existing is itself neither created nor destroyed, neither creatable nor destructible, but eternally persists in its infinite modifications. This is the essential meaning of the total blending that substance, as a virtual whole, must involve. The infinite modifications of substance repeat the structure of the whole in their constitutive relations from top (maximum) to bottom (minimum; IIp13L7). It is a necessity therefore that, “the same ratio of motion and rest being preserved in them taken together” (Ep32) is the unchanging dynamism of the potestative whole that is Deus sive Natura.241 The order and

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240 The identity of a whole and its parts is made manifest in the earliest expression of monism with Parmenides’ affirmation of the being of being in Fragment 8: “nor is it divisible, since it is all alike; nor is there any more or less of it in one place which might prevent it from holding together, but all is full of what it is.” Anaxagoras may be lurking here as well, as Aristotle records that, ”Anaxagoras said that every part is just as much a mixture as the whole universe is” (Physics III.4). Also, Boethius’ understanding of the topic of a whole in relation to time and place seems instructive in relation to the foregoing; he maintains, ”If God is always, he is also now ... if God is everywhere, he is also here.” (Boethius, De topicis differentiis, II.189b)

241 In their essay, “The Influence of Spinoza’s Concept of Infinity on Cantor’s Set Theory,” Paulo Bissotti and Christian Tapp assert that “From an extensional point of view, God coincides with the totality of existing beings, both physical and mental. But from an intensional point of view, God is a whole which cannot be reduced to the sum of the single beings He extensionally comprises. The whole natura has a life of its own and this life is superstructured to the single lives of its parts.” And also, “attribute of God is like an ‘organism’ which arises out of its ‘parts’ but is yet not reducible to its ‘parts’ for it precedes or supervenes what it contains.” (In Studies in History and Philosophy of Science 40 (2009): 25-35; p.26 and 28 resp.). Since Nature, as a whole, is nothing other than its own dynamic relations, it is neither reducible to any one of its parts nor something more than them. Nature is actually infinite, and this can mean nothing other than its eternal capacity to relate to itself in an
connection of things is a consequence of the dynamic process of individuation
effected by the immanent causality of \textit{natura naturans} and is not owing to a
fittingness transcendentally designed.\footnote{242 It is for this reason that we are both
“constrained to obey” the laws of Nature, conforming “in almost an infinite number
of ways to them,” and actively seek out external relations that will assist and foster
our own particular \textit{conatus} (IVapp.6,7).

The active force of an individual is found in its capacity to be the cause of
some effect and this active force simultaneously involves a passive force, i.e. the
power to suffer affects (IIpos.3,6;IVp38-39). Given the durational existence of an
individual, active and passive force is always actually active for the duration of the
\textit{forma} defining the specific \textit{conatus} of that individual. The active actuality of active
and passive force of an individual, insofar as it is owing to the communication of its
complex of parts, will, of necessity, involve a comparison of its powers with that of
the other individuals with which it is interdependently related. That is, any
individual will, by virtue of existing for a duration, exercise the capacities defining
its individuality in relation to every other (viz. \textit{conatus}; IIIp7d). The result of these
real or actual relations is the manifestation of dispositions according to their mixing.

The whole system of encounters of individuals will, consequently, be mutually

\textit{infinity of ways}; i.e. according to the phase-states of modified and modifying substance. Thus, to be a
part of Nature is to become a certain state of the whole whose “manner of relation, i.e. of the causal
communication with the environment in acting and suffering depends on the given \textit{form of
determination}, i.e. on the kind of body involved” (Hans Jonas, “Spinoza and the Theory of Organism,”
p.266). Individuality is necessarily interdependent and interactive.

\footnote{I.e. if modes are parts of an infinite potestative whole in which they inhere, the reciprocity of the
manifestations of their dispositions will, of necessity, be included. While we may not have
knowledge of these “infinite other laws” (TTP, 16), the fittingness of things is nothing to be sought in
addition to the order and connection of things (IIp7) precisely because such order must involve an
equal distribution of substantial power whole through part (IIp37d). For more on this issue, see Neil
E. Williams’ chapter, “Puzzling Powers: The Problem of Fit,” in \textit{The Metaphysics of Powers: Their
Grounding and Manifestation} (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp.84-105.}
adaptive through the comparison of each individual’s respective force of activity, and will constantly vary or modify according to these affective encounters (IIp16d; IVp5). Here the term ‘compare’ means to have a specified relationship of one thing to another in terms of the nature or quality of each. Since the quality of each individual thing is defined by its power of activity (potestas or virtu), or its dispositions to manifest certain of its properties in relation to other like individuals or powers, the comparison of powers constitutes the mixtures of the facies universis totalis or the “common order of nature” (IIp30d; IVp1Vd). At the level of durational existents, mixtures of individuals are events that will either assist or check an individual’s power of existence (IVp38-39; IVpos.6,7,9).

Thus, although we are necessarily a part of Nature and will, of necessity, mutually adapt to every other such part, these adaptations are not necessarily agreeable to each compounded individual involved (IVp39). It is for this reason that Spinoza advises that we take great care in organizing our encounters and “arrange and associate rightly the affections of the body” (Vp10s), so that we will not suffer bad effects to the point where our ratio of motion-and-rest transition to a point of total dissolution (viz. the disruption of that certain communicative ratio; IVp39d,s). In order to do that, we need, as a matter of course, to come to an idea of that which is acque in parte ac in toto est, but we also must come to be active in our affections as a consequence of this idea. The result is a fortitudo of mind that has the power to simultaneously affirm as many relations as the power of its body permits (IIp13s; IIp14; IIIp59s; IVp38d;). The consequence of this is that while not everything will
be in agreement with us, we will, by virtue of our “participation in the divine nature” (IVp45s), be agreeable to virtually all things.

There is, then, a passive love that is desiring of that which has happened to affect us pleausurably, and there is an active love that is desiring of the well-being of every other as oneself (nobilitas; IV46). The former is possessive, jealous, ephemeral, and always accompanied with hatred toward that which could, in some way or other, destroy the object loved (IIIp31-50;IIIdef.6). Now, when Spinoza, for example, proposes that, “the good which every man who pursues virtue aims at for himself he will also desire for the rest of mankind,” he certainly does not think that the desire for another’s good is in any way accidental to the individual’s desire for his own virtue. But why not? How is this desire for every other’s good, how is this nobility, essential to individual virtue? In other words, why is it that “when every man is most devoted to seeking his own advantage that men are of most advantage to one another”? The answer Spinoza himself gives is instructive, and with our virtual mereological theory now in place, we are in a position to see why.

So why does Spinoza think that, “the highest good of those who pursue virtue is common to all, and all can equally enjoy it,” (IVp36)? As we have already seen, virtue is one and the same as an individual’s power (IVp20d). Indeed, the essence of anything just is its power to be (potentia) and its power to do (potestas); i.e. any individual thing is nothing other than its desire, conatus, or virtus to persist in being the thing it is. It is for this reason that Spinoza maintains that, “whatever is

243 “The more every man seeks his own advantage and endeavors to preserve himself, the more he is endowed with virtue, or (and this is the same thing) the greater the power with which he endowed for acting according to the laws of his own nature; that is, for living by the guidance of reason. But it is when men live by the guidance of reason that they agree most in nature. Therefore ...” (IVp35c2).
conducive to the preservation of the proportion of motion-and-rest, which the parts of the human body maintain towards one another, is good” (IVp39). Insofar as the essence of any existence is its particular power, and inasmuch as this power is owing to the complexity of parts in communication, it is a de jure necessity that each part strive to maintain the ratio both with respect to itself, and with respect to every other such individual on which it relies for its own existence (IVp38-39;IVapp.27). Without such mutual and reciprocal communication of parts, the whole body will suffer evil; i.e. the complex body will undergo a state-change to the degree that its forma or ratio will cease to strive in the same way and the individual will cease to be (IVp39ds;IVapp.6,7). It is precisely this same communicable relation that must exist for the virtuous (socio-political) organization of individuals. It is not accidental that Spinoza gives virtually the same metaphysical propaedeutic to his political theorizing across all three of his mature works. Chapter 16 of the Theologico-
Political Treatise, Chapter 3 of the Political Treatise, and the second scholium to Ethics IVp37 all give the same metaphysical foreground to establish what is theoretically necessary for socio-political organization: individual powers must be mutually adapted to each other, reciprocally related to each other, or, in a word, communicate their motions to each other in such a way that the whole body (politic) maintains its ratio. In his Political Treatise, for example, Spinoza maintains that,

If a commonwealth grants to anyone the right, and consequently the power (potestatem), to live just as he pleases, (...) thereby the commonwealth surrenders its own right and transfers it to him to whom it gives such power (potestatem). If it gives this power (potestatem) to two or more men, allowing each to live just as he pleases, thereby it has divided the sovereignty; and if, finally, it gives this power (potestatem) to every one of the citizens, it has thereby destroyed itself, ceasing to be a commonwealth, and everything reverts back to a natural state. (PT, III.3)
In the same way that a commonwealth is *eo ipso* annihilated when its power is divided and allocated to a part or parts (viz. a citizen or subject), so too would the universe or *natura naturans* be annihilated were it to be *really* divided into atomic individuals. This is not, however, to say that the universe as a whole obeys the laws governing a rationally or virtuously ordered polity. Indeed, Spinoza explicitly holds that “Nature’s bounds are not set by the laws of human reason which aim only at man’s true interest and his preservation’ but is rather governed, ‘by infinite other laws which have regard to the eternal order of the whole of Nature, of which man is but a particle” (TPT,16). And yet, the laws of human reason are not mere fabrications or flights of fancy, but are wholly consistent with the *conatus* or power of human being. While Spinoza maintains that we are largely ignorant of the order of the whole of nature (*TP*II.22; *EIV*app.32), what we can know is sufficient for determining the rational order through which we ought to live. In order to do this, Spinoza’s ethico-political theory largely relies, I believe, on a repetition of the virtual mereological theory we have argued is central to his metaphysical project. While I wish to maintain that Spinoza grounds his political theory in this prior metaphysical explication of the order of the whole of nature and the reciprocal coherence of its parts, a more robust explication of such a theory will have to be postponed at present.
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