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Idealism in Spinoza's Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Ethics:
A Friendly and Judicious Revision to the Active/Passive Distinction as Solution to Spinoza's
Attribute and Parallelism Problems

By

Sean Butler

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2020

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Approval of the Dissertation Committee

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Abstract

Idealism in Spinoza's Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Ethics:
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By
Sean Butler

Claremont Graduate University: 2020

Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism admits of certain observed inconsistencies that have long troubled Spinoza scholars. The scholarship over the last one hundred and thirty years or so has offered three dominant interpretations of Spinoza's metaphysics as a result of the deficiencies with the doctrine of parallelism. These are 1) the subjective/objective distinction according to which the attribute of thought is understood as subjective and the attribute of extension is understood as objective, 2) materialism according to which the attribute of thought is claimed to depend on the attribute of extension, and 3) idealism according to which the attribute of extension is claimed to depend on the attribute of thought. A tension between materialism and idealism is addressed by each of these approaches. And the question of Spinozist idealism is of great concern to contemporary Spinoza scholarship. However, none of these interpretations succeed as they each fail to properly locate Spinoza's problems with parallelism in a deeper attribute problem. Interpretations 1 and 2 fail more severely for also clashing with other central themes of Spinoza's project such as his ethics which prioritizes thought at the expense of extension.

This dissertation observes that the interpretive trends in the literature not only do not succeed but cannot succeed as Spinoza's system admits of certain contradictions. Of primary

consideration, and beyond the problems with parallelism, conflation of attribute with substance and conflation of attribute with mode. It being the case that Spinoza's theory of attributes is deficient, I propose a revisionist approach to what I have termed Spinoza's "deep attribute problem" according to which the attributes are disassociated from the active/passive distinction. The active/passive distinction is shown to be instrumental in tying Spinoza's metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics together as well as being erroneously applied to the attributes. The proposed revision is that the attributes be disassociated from the active/passive distinction which is to be understood now in terms of a vertical and horizontal association. The vertical association identifies substance-mode relations and the horizontal association identifies mode-mode relations. An important consequence of this revision is that substance is recast as absolutely infinite intellectual substance. As such, Spinoza's revised system is ontological idealism and it is suggested but left for future research that the revision may entail an understanding of Spinoza's system too as modal existentialism and ethical mysticism.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Matthew Herriman and Brent Broadway, true friends who blessed my life and this world for too short a time. May the better part of your existence continue in eternity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family, friends, and professors for all of their support and guidance through my student career. Without the financial, psychological, emotional, and academic support provided by you, this dissertation would not have been possible.

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Chapter 1: Interpretive and Methodological Survey

In order to guide the reader through the complex material that is to follow, I begin this dissertation with the following albeit brief overview. The terms and arguments alluded to, rest assured, will be taken up in due course. The aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate that Spinoza's metaphysics is best understood as a form of idealism, what I call "ontological idealism". In order to make the case for Spinoza as an ontological idealist, two significant steps are necessary, which take place in due course from chapters one through three: 1) demonstrate that Spinoza's system requires revision due to the deep attribute problem; and 2) demonstrate that the coherence of Spinoza's system is best defended by recognizing that the passive/active distinction should not be applied to attributes. More specifically regarding the second step, I aim to show that Spinoza's unrevised system erroneously locates the attributes in *natura naturans* and, as such, conflates them with substance. If, on the other hand, we were to understand the attributes as *natura naturata*, we would make the converse error and make modes of the attributes. Only by recognizing that attributes are neither active nor passive, ontologically speaking, are we able to overcome Spinoza's deep attribute problem. As I will show, the active/passive distinction plays a large role in tying Spinoza's system together. It connects his metaphysics with his ethics by way of adequate ideas being active. It further connects his ethics in the identification of adequate ideas as the path to ultimate virtue. In identifying that the active/passive distinction applies properly to substance and modes, not to attributes, we find that Spinoza's system is greatly improved, and we are left with a coherent ontological idealism. In other words, if my argument is plausible, my solution allows for the

rescue of Spinoza's system from the incoherence of the deep attribute problem and resultant problems with parallelism.

Several philosophical themes are central to the argument of the dissertation. In Chapter One, I take on the themes of biases against idealism, the dialectical progression of Spinoza scholarship towards the contemporary question of idealism, and finally, the proposed interpretations of Spinoza's system and their shortcomings. In Chapter Two, I discuss the identification of significant issues with Spinoza's system (particularly with parallelism but also the nature of attributes), interpretive vs revisionist approaches to dealing with the problems of parallelism and attributes in Spinoza's system, and the extent and nature of the Cartesian landscape/background that informs Spinoza's system. In Chapter Three, I take up the themes of the priority of thought over extension in Spinoza's unrevised system, the impossibility of materialist interpretations, the positioning of Spinoza's ethics in his system (metaphysically and epistemically), and a discussion of the key to my proposed solution to be found in the proper application of active/passive distinction. By Chapter 4, the conclusion of this study, I will show how these various themes weave together into a coherent interpretation of Spinoza's system as one of ontological idealism.

In the present chapter, we begin with a selective review of the reception of Spinoza's philosophy and follow with a discussion of the methodology employed in my study, in order to clearly locate this project in the field. The selective survey of what I see as the most relevant and influential literature in Spinoza studies, will also trace the dialectical progression of Spinoza studies, focusing on their relation to the question of Spinozist idealism. It should be immediately noted that the surveys provided aim to establish the context and scope of the

dissertation and, as such, I will not be engaging these perspectives in depth in the current chapter; thorough critical commentary and the exposition of the relevant ideas that are included in this chapter are to be taken up in due course as the dissertation progresses toward the fulfillment of its aim.

1.1. Methodology: Philosophy, Historiography, and Idealism

Philosophical study, being a human enterprise, is prone to suffer the biases of its practitioners. I have in mind what I take to be a bias against idealism in contemporary philosophical practice, a bias that I will demonstrate has negatively impacted our understanding of Spinoza's metaphysics in that it has prevented us from seeing, or seeing fully, Spinoza's philosophical system for what it is—idealism. Thus, I ask my reader to consider the remarks that follow before engaging with the remainder of this dissertation project and to keep an open mind regarding the stated aim of the dissertation—rendering Spinoza's system ontological idealism by way of friendly and judicious revision.

As a philosopher, not just one who has been persuaded to join the idealism camp, I expect reasonable people to avoid obviously fallacious refutations of idealism, yet history disappoints. For example, Dr. Samuel Johnson claimed to have refuted Bishop Berkeley's idealism/immaterialism by kicking a rock stating, "I refute it thus!" Here is the account given to us by James Boswell, recounted in a paper by H. F. Hallett:

Boswell was setting out for Holland, and Dr. Johnson was to accompany him as far as Harwich. On the way they stopped at Colchester for a night, and in the morning visited the church. "After we came out of the church", the narrative runs, "we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that everything in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though

we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, 'I refute it thus'.¹

This demonstration is clearly a straw man in that Berkeley's position surely allows for the possibility of kicking rocks. The assumption that Johnson made is that idealism claims that things, items, objects, etc. are not real. However, this cannot be farther from the truth; idealism does not entail the unreality of things but rather claims that their reality is ideal. The pervasiveness of the charge that idealism denies the reality of things is perhaps most clear in the juxtaposition of idealism with realism: the very name of anti-idealist philosophy, "realism", is an appeal to the charge that idealism is on par with fiction, illusion, or hallucination, rather than a competing account to explain reality, or the actual world which we all inhabit. In fact, idealism is not anti-realism,² and treating it as such is to practice philosophy poorly or perhaps not at all (sophistry).

The golden era of philosophical idealisms is found in 19th and early 20th century Germany, to a lesser extent in Britain, and to an even lesser extent, in America. Defenders and contributors to German Idealism include Kant, Hegel, Jacobi, Fichte, and Schopenhauer. According to Guyer and Horstmann, it was Christian Wolff who first used "idealism" explicitly as

¹ Contrary to the perspective delivered here, H. F. Hallett claims that rejections of Dr. Johnson's rebuttal fail to do justice to the substantial philosophical objection in "Dr. Johnson's Refutation of Bishop Berkeley," *Mind* 56, no. 222 (Apr. 1947): 132–147.

² The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on idealism notes: "It is also remarkable that the term 'idealism', at least within philosophy, is often used in such a way that it gets its meaning through what is taken to be its opposite: as the meaningful use of the term 'outside' depends on a contrast with something considered to be inside, so the meaning of the term 'idealism' is often fixed by what is taken to be its opposite. Thus, an idealist is someone who is not a realist, not a materialist, not a dogmatist, not an empiricist, and so on." Paul Guyer and Rolf-Peter Horstmann, "Idealism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed February 25, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/idealism/>.

a classificatory term and he contrasts “idealism” with “materialism.” Wolf also contrasts “monism” with “dualism,” and “dogmatism” with “skepticism,” aligning idealism—monism—dogmatism in contrast to materialism—dualism—skepticism.³ This conceptualization was formative in the development of German Idealism, and in constructing the idealist tradition along idealist-monist-dogmatic lines. Nietzsche’s role in the German Idealist dialectic was more that of destroyer than supporter: “In sum: all philosophical idealism until now was something like an illness, except where, as in the case of Plato, it was the caution of an overabundant and dangerous health, the fear of over powerful senses, the shrewdness of a shrewd Socratic.”⁴

While the scope of German idealism is monumental, and Spinoza was interestingly influential for many German idealists,⁵ there is little to no benefit had by exploring it here, where the goal is to understand Spinoza’s philosophy. Spinoza’s influence on German idealism takes the form of ‘Spinoza awoke to important truths’ or ‘Spinoza’s account was ultimately incorrect’, not ‘Spinoza’s metaphysics must be refined, adopted, or engaged with directly’.⁶ By

³ Guyer and Horstmann.

⁴ Nietzsche, in section 372 of *The Gay Science*, entitled “Why we are not idealists.” (GS KSA 3. 623). trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann [The internal abbreviations follow the schema: GS = *Gay Science*; KSA = *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, edited by G. Colli and M. Montinari. Berlin: W. de Gruyter. Consulted secondary source: Nietzsche, Friedrich, 1882, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.]

⁵ Consider the following comments, first by Hegel and second by Don Garrett on the widespread praise of Spinoza: 1) “Spinoza constitutes such a crucial point for modern philosophy that we might say in effect that there is a choice between Spinozism and no philosophy at all (*du hast entweder den Spinozismus oder keine Philosophie*)” (quoted in Pierre Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, trans. Susan M. Ruddick [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011], 13); 2) “It is remarkable how many important philosophers of the past have come to think: ‘If my own philosophy were to be rejected, the only alternative would be Spinozism.’ As the chapters in the present collection illustrate, conclusions of roughly this form were reached in some way or another by Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Jacobi, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling” (quoted in Don Garrett, “A Reply on Spinoza’s Behalf,” in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. Eckart Förster and Yitzhak Y. Melamed [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 248).

⁶ Yitzhak Y. Melamed explores the influence Spinoza had on the German philosophy of negation in “‘*Omnis Determinatio est Negatio*’: Determination, Negation, and Self-Negation in Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel,” in Förster and Melamed, *Spinoza and German Idealism*, 175–196.

way of example, take Hegel's interpretation of Spinoza as having endorsed the claim that reality is negation and Fichte's refutation of Spinoza's account of consciousness. Whereas the German idealists were philosophical system builders unto themselves, and they share this attribute with Spinoza, our mission here is to interpret, explain, and refine Spinoza's system, not to merely praise or discard it.⁷

Defenders of idealistic conceptions in metaphysics in Britain during the height of German Idealism were T.H. Green and F. H. Bradley at Oxford and J. E. McTaggart at Cambridge, and in the United States the most prominent proponent of idealism mixed in with a healthy dose of pragmatism was Josiah Royce at Harvard.⁸ Critical reactions in Britain, in particular, in the hands of G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, and later the "New Realists" in America, were the death knell of Idealism in Anglo-American circles.⁹ It became known as the "revolt against idealism".¹⁰ The form of criticism taken against Idealism by the revolt was deemed as a return to commonsense, a demand for positive evidence and is embodied in the norms that define twentieth century analytic philosophy. This oversimplified brief summary of idealism and its

⁷ For a wide scope of Spinoza's relation to German idealism, see Förster and Melamed, eds., *Spinoza and German Idealism*. For an account on the relation of Spinoza to Hegel, particularly as it relates to French philosophy, see Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*.

⁸ For an interesting account of Peirce, James and Royce on Spinozist idealism in which pragmatism is strongly correlated to idealism in this period, see Shannon Dea, "A House at War Against Itself: Absolute Versus Pluralistic Idealism in Spinoza, Peirce, James and Royce," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 23, no. 4 (2015): 710–731.

⁹ Jeremy Dunham, Iain Grant, and Sean Watson, in the introduction to their *Idealism: The History of a Philosophy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), identify two primary errors in that feed into anti-idealist sentiments: "These are (a) that idealism is *anti-realist* in that it argues that reality, for idealism, is something essentially 'mind-dependent'; and (b) that idealism is *anti-naturalistic*, in so far as it disputes that matter is the basis of all existence" (3). These perspectives are shown to be in error: "Where idealists are concerned, however, to promote the fundamentality of mindedness, they do not have in mind some reality other than the one common to us all" (4), and, "In some senses, then, the claim that idealism is anti-science, is of a piece with the claim that it is anti-realist: philosophers committed to the mind-dependent existence of entities cannot maintain, it is held, the existence of a physical reality. We know of no idealist for whom this is true" (5).

¹⁰ For a more comprehensive history of idealism, see Guyer and Horstmann, "Idealism."

critics is meant to highlight some of what has contributed to the prevailing derisive treatments of idealism as a philosophical stance in contemporary philosophical discourse.

What is most striking about misrepresentations of idealism is their frequency and uncritical acceptance.¹¹ Simply put, there is a stigma against Idealism in contemporary philosophy. Idealism has become something of a bad word in many philosophical circles, something to be avoided, even made fun of.¹² This is unfortunate. Engaging in good philosophy means following the arguments wherever they may lead, not avoiding specters (“the danger of idealism”), constructing strawmen (“I refute it thus!”), or insisting on false dichotomies (idealism v. realism).¹³ While there are distinguished philosophers who are proponents of idealism, a defense of idealism is not the purpose of this dissertation.¹⁴ Rather, I aim to identify the presence of the aforementioned bias against idealism in Spinoza scholarship and overcome it.

I claim that there is an anti-idealism bias in contemporary philosophy that has negatively impacted Spinoza scholarship. To a large extent, we will have to wait and see just where specific instances of bias can be located and to what extent they impact the quality of scholarship. I will draw the reader’s attention to a few specific instances of bias shortly,

¹¹ Bill Nye (“The Science Guy”) is reported to have recently undertaken a similar refutation of idealism to that of Johnson’s. He is reported to have said, “if you drop a hammer on your foot, is it real or is it just your imagination? You can run tests a couple of times and I hope you come to agree that it is probably real.” Quoted in C. M. Barry, “‘I Refute Him Thus!’: Misunderstanding Berkeley,” *Irish Philosophy*, March 12, 2016, <http://www.irishphilosophy.com/2016/03/12/berkeleys-immaterialism/#fn-6975-1>.

¹² I needn’t look any further than personal experience to verify this claim which I hope any socially observant philosopher will acknowledge.

¹³ We will see that certain Spinoza scholars identify idealism as a danger to Spinoza’s system without qualification as to why this is a danger. For the most part this commentary pertains to Jonathan Bennett’s critique of Spinoza.

¹⁴ Thomas Nagel is a respected philosopher who advocates for idealism, albeit a softer form of idealism than I am advancing in this dissertation. See Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

instances that will become even more relevant as this examination unfolds, but, for now, I think it will serve my case to note that Spinoza scholarship is currently and has frequently encountered bias throughout its history.

1.2. Receptions of Spinoza's Philosophy & Idealism¹⁵

Perhaps the first observable impact of bias, albeit not from anti-idealism, on Spinoza scholarship is his excommunication from the Jewish community of Amsterdam. Stephen Nadler provides the fullest account of this ordeal of which I am aware in his book, *Spinoza: A Life*.

There Nadler provides the following declaration of the Jewish community against Spinoza:

The Lords of the *ma'amad*, having long known of the evil opinions and acts of Baruch de Spinoza, have endeavored by various means and promises, to turn him from his evil ways. But having failed to make him mend his wicked ways, and, on the contrary, daily receiving more and more serious information about the abominable heresies which he practiced and taught and about his monstrous deeds, and having for this numerous trustworthy witnesses who have deposed and born witness to this effect in the presence of the said Espinoza, they became convinced of the truth of this matter; and after all of this has been investigated in the presence of the honorable *chachamim*, they have decided, with their consent, that the said Espinoza should be excommunicated and expelled from the people of Israel. By decree of the angels and by the command of the holy men, we excommunicate, expel, curse and damn Baruch de Espinoza, with the consent of God, Blessed be He, and with the consent of the entire holy congregation, and in front of these holy scrolls with the 613 precepts which are written therein; cursing him with the excommunication with which Joshua banned Jericho and with the curse which Elisha cursed the boys and with all the castigations that are written in the Book of the Law. Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night; cursed be he when he lies down and cursed be he when he rises up. Cursed be he when he goes out and cursed be he when he comes in. The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven. And the Lord shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all

¹⁵ Pierre-François Moreau provides an excellent short account of Spinoza's impact through the 20th Century in his "Spinoza's Reception and Influence," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 408–433. There Moreau explores Spinoza's reception in the 17th Century, his early admirers, his relationship to Cabbalism, and German idealism (to name a few).

the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law. But you that cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day.¹⁶

While there is some speculation as to the precise causes of Spinoza's excommunication, so ferociously stated above, it is almost certainly Spinoza's break with various fundamental tenets of the Jewish religion in his philosophical pursuits that allowed for the charge to stick.¹⁷ Spinoza had strayed from the ideology of the Jewish community and was banished as a result. Nadler adds, "The document concludes with the warning that 'no one should communicate with him, neither in writing, nor accord him any favor nor stay with him under the same roof nor come within four cubits in his vicinity; nor shall he read any treatise composed or written by him.'"¹⁸ His ideas were supposed to be stamped out.

Another clear and notable bias that impacted Spinoza scholarship, one more properly (or improperly) philosophical, can be found in Pierre Bayle's famous *The Historical and Critical Dictionary* first published in 1697. Bayle's criticism is interesting, and worth mentioning here, because it opposes Spinoza in ideological terms but not those that oppose idealism but rather because of religious ideology. Bayle accuses Spinoza of being an atheist, calling his views on substance monism, "the most absurd and monstrous hypothesis that can be imagined, and the most contrary to the most evident notions of our mind,"¹⁹ and credits Spinoza's absurd conclusions to his inability to conceive of God properly: "I think it may be supposed that he run

¹⁶ Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 120.

¹⁷ Kenneth Seeskin observes that, "Spinoza's relation to medieval Jewish philosophy is controversial" and provides a well-developed account of Spinoza's relationship to his Jewish predecessors. Kenneth Seeskin, "From Maimonides to Spinoza: Three Versions of an Intellectual Transition," in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 45.

¹⁸ Nadler, *Spinoza*, 120–121.

¹⁹ Pierre Bayle, *The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr. Peter Bayle*, vol. 5 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 208.

into these absurdities, because he could not apprehend either that matter is eternal, and different from God, or that it has been produced out of nothing, or that an Infinite Mind, perfectly free, and the Creator of all things, could produce such a work as the world.”²⁰ Bayle’s charges are mirrored in nearly one hundred years of treatment of Spinoza in which being a Spinozist was an insult akin to the charge of atheism that actively silenced Spinoza scholarship until a resurgence in English philosophy in the 1880s.²¹ This was all due to an ideological fear of atheism. Anti-atheism biases such as these are now recognized as erroneous for they evaluate philosophical positions in terms of ideological commitment rather than pursuit of rational argumentation.²²

Hindsight being 20/20, virtually all respectable philosophers now view such historical biases as mistakes. They are right to do so. In light of such acknowledgments, though, it is all the more unacceptable to find ideological bias in contemporary philosophy, particularly in contemporary Spinoza studies. So, if the arguments point towards Spinozist idealism, then we

²⁰ Bayle, 212.

²¹ Steven Nadler, in his book *The Best of All Possible Worlds: A Story of Philosophers, God, and Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), dedicates a chapter to “The Specter of Spinoza,” in which Nadler discusses the contempt expressed against Spinoza by his contemporaries, most notable of which being Leibniz and a close second being Malebranche who decried Spinoza as an “unholy man” and “a monster” (217–240). It should be noted, however, that Leibniz’s expressed repulsion is perhaps more an indication of the widespread bias against Spinozism than an outright rejection of Spinoza by Leibniz. Leibniz did express great interest in Spinoza but could not be publicly known as an admirer. Rebecca Newberger Goldstein clarifies, “Spinoza remained throughout his life, and well into the eighteenth century, a thinker whom one could admire only in secret, hiding one’s sympathy just as his Marrano antecedents had concealed their wayward Jewishness. Open admiration could destroy even the most established of reputations, well into the eighteenth century’s so-called Age of Reason.” Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity* (New York: Nextbook, 2006), 8.

²² Alison Ross echoes my observations here: “The very fact that ‘Spinozism’ was shorthand not just for God-less pantheism, but also for the undeveloped or unacknowledged implications of German Idealism leads us to the inevitable conclusion that ‘Spinoza’ is not just a name, it also has a history as an instrument that is used in intellectual disputes; a way of signaling intellectual affinities and banishing opponents and pretenders.” Alison Ross, “Spinoza in Paris—The French Evaluation Machine. Knox Peden, Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavailles to Deleuze,” *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy* 23 (2015): 145.

should accept such conclusions, and if the arguments point all the way to ontological idealism,²³ then we should accept that too. I think they do and in the course of this dissertation I aim to demonstrate how and why.

There is a long history of drawing a connection between Spinoza and idealism. Spinoza's impact on German idealism has become a popular topic in recent years.²⁴ Although this issue is both complex and of great interest, it lies beyond the scope of this paper. Rather than undertaking a comprehensive survey of how idealism relates and has related to Spinoza's philosophy, a project that could fill volumes, I aim to focus on more recent developments in Spinoza scholarship that discuss the direct intersection between Spinoza, or his thought, and idealism.

My primary contention will be that more or less recent perspectives on Spinoza and his work that begin down the path of idealism do not go far enough and we must take Spinoza's system to be ontological idealism (albeit by revision). Ontological Idealism is the thesis that all things are ideal; that all things are ontologically and epistemically grounded in the intellect.²⁵ In

²³ By ontological idealism, I mean the claim that what is fundamentally real/ontic is grounded in cognition. I take this to be the strong idealism of Berkeley, the reason for concern expressed by Bennett, and what Melamed calls "reductive idealism." It bears stating, however, that less radical forms of idealism, e.g. the weak idealism of Nagel, are supported in this dissertation, making Spinoza's thought definitively idealism even though my reading (and revision) of Spinoza's system entails a substantially stronger, more radical, idealism.

²⁴ Again, see Förster and Melamed, eds., *Spinoza and German Idealism*.

²⁵ For the purposes of understanding what is meant by ontological idealism, I take the following terms to be synonymous: thought, idea, cognition, intellect. Though certain nuances may warrant distinction between these terms, no distinction will undermine their collective primacy in Spinoza's system and may thus be considered interchangeable, at least for the purposes of understanding what is meant by ontological idealism. Paul Guyer defines "Idealism" as follows:

Generally defined as something mental (the mind, spirit, reason, will) is the ultimate foundation of all reality, or even exhaustive of reality, and although the existence of something independent of the mind is conceded, everything that we can know about this mind-independent "reality" is held to be so permeated by the creative, formative, or constructive activities of the mind (of some kind or other) that all claims to knowledge must be considered, in some sense, to be a form of self-knowledge.

Spinozist terms: that substance is ideal and there is no being or knowing independent of ideal-substance. My goal, thus, requires of me that I demonstrate that Spinoza's system is idealism through and through – that there is no substantive import beyond or outside of the ideal. My approach to achieving this goal is somewhat historic and dialectical in that I will identify certain historic developments in Spinoza scholarship that have elevated the question of Spinozist idealism to its present form of quasi acceptance by certain strong voices in the field, such as Melamed and Della Rocca. From there I will undertake the project of sifting through possible explanations for the important issues that arise along the way and identify a contemporary need that remains: a need for a solution to issues that undermine Spinoza's project. This solution will require that we view Spinoza's system, if not Spinoza himself, as an ontological idealist.

In what follows, I will proceed along the above stated lines by first producing a survey of the relevant contemporary literature so that we may view the developments in Spinoza scholarship that have led us to the question of Spinozist idealism. This survey will identify how various scholars have viewed Spinoza's relation to idealism and we will see that most, if not all of them, to some extent, reject either "idealism" or "reductive idealism" (and thus ontological idealism) due, at least in part, to anti-idealist biases. The survey will begin with the perspectives of Frederick Pollock, then Jonathan Bennett's pivotal contribution and the numerous "dangers" that he has identified in Spinoza's works that have functioned as something like a springboard for more recent discussions on Spinozist idealism. I will then view the contemporary views of

Idealism in sense (1) may be called "metaphysical" or "ontological idealism", while idealism in sense (2) may be called "formal" or "epistemological idealism." Guyer and Horstmann, "Idealism."

Michael Della Rocca and Yitzhak Melamed, focusing on their perspectives as to whether or not, and to what extent, Spinoza is an idealist. Finally, I will present a collection of other, important but less central, perspectives on the issues that bear on our discussion. After disseminating the relevant aspects of the literature, I present, in Chapter 2, a thorough refutation of Spinoza's so-called doctrine of parallelism by demonstrating that Spinoza has a severe attribute problem that threatens the coherence of his entire philosophical system. I then, in Chapter 3, demonstrate the contemporary need for solutions to the rather weighty problems that arise from the failure of Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism, investigating three possible solutions and weighing their comparative value. After this, I provide an account of the benefits of accepting Spinoza's system as ontological idealism, particularly as regards the coherence of Spinoza's ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics and particularly as they relate to the active/passive distinction. I conclude, in Chapter 4, with a synthesis of what has been said in Chapters 1-3 and discuss two consequences of particular importance that result from my reading of Spinoza: modal existentialism and ethical mysticism which are left open for future research.

Because Spinoza's work is quite comprehensive, dynamic, and interlaced, Spinoza scholars have to be careful to remain focused on a well-defined and manageable goal. Goals of thoroughness and synthesis are sometimes the enemy of clarity and accuracy in that it is more efficient to solve problems one at a time rather than taking them all up at once.²⁶ This being the case, I offer the following guiding questions so that we might remain focused on the present

²⁶ Many scholars have written extensively about Spinoza's geometric method of demonstration, a method that entails an interlacing of virtually all significant arguments, claims, and comments in Spinoza's work. For example: Curley, Edwin (1992). *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics*.

purpose. Tangents will be taken when appropriate but these questions, delivered roughly in order of priority, identify the central progressions of this section:

- What criteria are involved in classifying a philosophical system as ontological idealism, and are these criteria met by Spinoza's system?
- What is the relationship between the attributes in Spinoza's system and to what extent is there a priority given to the attribute of thought?
- To what extent does Spinoza's system depend on or adhere to the principle of sufficient reason (PSR from now on) and does the PSR commit Spinoza to certain metaphysical claims such as monism or idealism?
- What are the implications of Spinoza's substance monism and panpsychism?
- How are the attributes and modes related to Substance and to what extent are they "real"?

1.2.1. Frederick Pollock

Speculation about the role of idealism in Spinoza's philosophy goes at least as far back as Hegel. However, despite Spinoza's significant influence on German idealism, the German idealists tended to draw only inspirations from Spinoza's work and did not intend to disseminate it, improve it, or adopt it. Although not a contemporary philosopher *per se*, I will begin my contemporary survey with Frederick Pollock's 1880 discussion in his book, *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy*.²⁷ I think it is appropriate to begin with Pollock for a few reasons. First, Pollock's work is among the first comprehensive accounts of Spinoza's life and philosophy that seeks to critically explain Spinozism rather than refute or alter it. Secondly, Pollock's insights are representative of a resurgence of Spinoza studies in English philosophy in the late 19th century according to which Spinoza's system was seen as running dangerously close to ontological idealism. The recent re-publication of Pollock's 1880 book is likely a result of its relevancy to

²⁷ Frederick Pollock, *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy* (London: Elibron Classics, 2005).

many of the ideas that emerge from this resurgence and that have remained relevant.²⁸ Finally, Pollock's direct discussion of idealism (and later mysticism) in Spinoza bear on the insights I develop in this dissertation.

Pollock's discussion of idealism in Spinoza arises subtly with a listing of definitions present in E1.²⁹ Those that are relevant to our interests are:

3. By *substance* I understand that which is in itself and is conceived by itself; that is, whose concept needs not the concept of another thing for it to be formed from.
4. By *attribute* I understand that which intellect perceives concerning Substance, as constituting the essence thereof.
5. By *mode* I understand the affections of Substance, or that which is in somewhat else, through which also it is conceived.³⁰

I say that this starting point is subtle because there is no immediate mention of idealism that is evident. However, Pollock harkens back to this list of definitions when discussing correspondences between Spinoza and Tschirnhausen in which Pollock recognizes, along with Tschirnhausen, the clear disproportionality between the attributes,

the modes of Thought are numerically equal to the modes of all the other Attributes together; in other words, Thought, instead of being co-equal with the infinity of other Attributes, is infinitely infinite, and has a pre-eminence which is nowhere explicitly accorded to it. But if we go back to the definition we find that this pre-eminence has all the while been implied. For Attribute is '*that which understanding perceives concerning substance as constituting the essence thereof.*' Thus the ground is cut from under the

²⁸ Newlands supports this conjecture when he states, "The weighty shadows of Kant and Hegel continued to shape interpretations of Spinoza through the 19th century. In this section, I will focus on Spinoza's reception in late 19th century Britain, which witnessed a mini-renaissance in Spinoza studies starting in the 1880s." Samuel Newlands, "More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza," *Philosophy Compass* 6, no. 2 (February 2011): 110.

²⁹ Reference to Spinoza's work are from Samuel Shirley, *Spinoza: Complete Works*, trans. Michael Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002). Abbreviated references to the *Ethics* are internal and will follow the following schema: E-(thics), A-(xiom), D-(efinition), P-(roposition), S-(cholium), C-(orollary), d-(emonstration), e-(xplanation), l(-emma), a-(ppendix), and p-(roof). Works by Spinoza are abbreviated as: TIE-*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, KV- *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, and Letter # for correspondences.

³⁰ Pollock, *Spinoza*

apparent equality of the Attributes; and, though the system escapes the snares of subjective idealism, it does not escape idealism altogether.³¹

Disproportionality between the attributes, particularly the two known to humans³²—thought and extension—is an observation that vexes Spinoza scholarship to this day and is a central theme of this paper. Why is disproportionality between the attributes important? Because it violates what is commonly referred to as the doctrine of parallelism, a central tenet in Spinoza’s thought according to which the internal structure of each attribute is identical to the structure of every other attribute.³³ With this observation (which is by no means unique to Pollock or Tschirnhausen), it appears that there is a priority given to thought over other attributes such as extension in Spinoza’s system which many would consider sufficient to identify Spinoza as some kind of idealist, perhaps even an ontological idealist.³⁴ Thus, Pollock claims that Spinoza’s system does not escape idealism altogether. What, though, does he mean when he says “the system escapes the snares of subjective idealism”?

³¹ Correspondence between Tschirnhaus and Spinoza began in October of 1674 (Letter 57) and continued until Spinoza’s death (Letter 83 marks their last correspondence just 7 months prior to Spinoza’s death). The correspondence that is being referred to in Pollock’s remarks is Letter 70 (written by G. H. Schuller on Tschirnhaus’ behalf) where the question of disproportionality between the attributes is raised. Unfortunately, Spinoza does not respond to this line of inquiry.

³² In E2A5 Spinoza identifies that the two attributes that are known to humans are thought and extension: “We do not feel or perceive any individual things except bodies and modes of thinking.”

³³ In E2P7 Spinoza delivers what has come to be known as his “doctrine of parallelism”: “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.”

³⁴ The challenge that is brought to Spinoza by Schuller on behalf of Tschirnhaus is found in Letter 70: “The second cause which has prevented me from following his explanation as set out is this, that in this way the attribute of Thought is given a much wider scope than the other attributes.” Clarification of this objection is found in a editorial footnote which states, “Tschirnhaus; claim that, in allowing both ideas of things (bodies) and ideas of ideas, Spinoza had violated the parallelism by making thought more extensive than extension, has been echoed by many commentators to the present day.” (note 262 p. 938). Indeed this issue is central to the project of this dissertation and is a highly motivating factor in my advocacy for Spinozist idealism broadly and Spinozist ontological idealism acutely.

Pollock identifies Berkeley's idealism as subjective idealism and has identified an interesting similarity between Berkeley and Spinoza that he is summarizing in the above quotation. Pollock states, in relation to the definitions listed above, "I cannot tell what existence means, if not the possibility of being known or perceived. This position, implicitly contained in Spinoza's definitions, was explicitly taken up, and, as I venture to think, in the main conclusively established, by Berkeley."³⁵ Again, Pollock's reading of Berkeley is one of subjective idealism. But, Pollock identifies what he takes to be an important difference between Berkeley's so-called subjective idealism and Spinoza's form of idealism. Whereas Berkeley is taken to be wholly subjectivist, Spinoza's system proclaims the existence of an objective reality via the attribute of extension.

According to Pollock's reading of Spinoza, the attribute of thought accounts for the subjective, inner, world, whereas the attribute of extension accounts for the objective, outer, world. While I find no textual support for such a position in Spinoza, there are interesting historical reasons Pollock might accept such a reading that are worthy of our attention just now because of my claim of bias in Spinoza scholarship.

Though the objective/subjective interpretation of Pollock and his contemporaries has long since been overcome in the literature—it is now widely recognized that Spinoza's system is not subjectivist—and though Pollock is wrong about idealism being essentially wedded to subjectivism, I will not press this claim. What is of interest to us here is: in what ways does Pollock see Spinoza's system succumbing to and failing to escape idealism?

³⁵ Pollock, *Spinoza*, 174.

Pollock seems to view Spinoza's system along the lines of Kantian idealism. That is, that there is a clear dominance and focus on thought, but just as Kant postulated the need for a substrate of appearances, Spinoza too posits an outer world of extension. Pollock states,

the world of Thought, and that alone, is subjective and objective at once. The intellect which perceives an Attribute as 'constituting the essence of Substance,' itself belongs to the Attribute of Thought. Thus, if we push analysis further, we find that Thought swallows up all the other Attributes; for all conceivable Attributes turn out to be objective aspects of Thought itself.³⁶

However, because Pollock understands the attribute of thought to be representative of internal human experience and the attribute of extension as representative of the external/material world of science, the attribute of thought has limits, beyond which lies the domain of extension.

The problem with Pollock's interpretation of Spinozist idealism is that he misreads the thought/extension distinction as a subjective/objective one: "The division of attributes, as far as human knowledge goes, is the ultimate division of experience into subjective and objective, or mental and material."³⁷ This misreading, we have seen, is interestingly, if erroneously, employed in his invocation of Berkeley. There is thought-being parallelism and attribute parallelism,³⁸ but no identifiable correlation between thought and subjectivity nor with extension and objectivity. In fact, any invocation of a subjective/objective distinction must be

³⁶ Pollock, 187.

³⁷ Pollock, 175.

³⁸ Many commentators have identified a dynamism to Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism, discerning between thought-being parallelism according to which there is a thing for every thought and attribute-attribute parallelism according to which there is a parallel structure of modes in each attribute. We have already seen Spinoza's parallelism as thought-being parallelism in E2P7. Attribute-attribute parallelism derives from E3P25 where Spinoza states, "mind and body are one and the same thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension. Hence it comes about that the order or linking of things is one, whether Nature be conceived under this or that attribute..."

related to another doctrine of Spinoza's, the bifurcation of Substance into *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.³⁹ This may appear to correlate *natura naturans* with subjectivity and *natura naturata* with objectivity but, in E1P30, and E1P33 Spinoza makes it clear that this is not the case—that all things exist out of necessity and that they can be no other way. What else can this entail but objectivity and a rejection of subjectivity?⁴⁰ More on this later. For now, we may see that Pollock is wrong to associate idealism with subjectivism as well as thought with subjectivism and extension with objectivism.

Pollock concludes his discussion of Spinozist idealism with the following statement in which he invokes the intentions of Spinoza:

We may now see that although nothing outside Extension and Thought can affect human knowledge or impeach its reality, the Infinite Attributes are not merely ornamental. Spinoza's purpose is to keep a clear course between materialism on the one hand and subjective idealism on the other. He makes extension and thought equally real, and co-ordinate not only with one another but with infinite other aspects of existence. Thus the system is obviously not materialism. It is no less remote from the subjective idealism which turns the universe into a phantom. It is proof even against the objections to which Berkeley's idealism is exposed.⁴¹

Pollock claims to understand the intentions Spinoza has for positing infinite attributes but immediately restricts the utility of infinite attributes to thought and extension, ignoring the

³⁹ Spinoza first discusses *natura naturata* and *natura naturans* in E1P29S where he states, "Before I go any further, I wish to explain at this point what we must understand by "*Natura naturans*" and "*Natura naturata*." I should perhaps say not "explain," but "remind the reader," for I consider that it is already clear from what has gone before that by "*Natura naturans*" we must understand that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, the attributes of substance that express eternal and infinite essence; or, God insofar as he is considered a free cause. By "*Natura naturata*" I understand all that follows from the necessity of God's nature, that is, from the necessity of each one of God's attributes; or all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God and can neither be nor be conceived without God." We will take up this bifurcation of substance as a bifurcation of activity and passivity later in the dissertation which might easily be confused with a subjectivity/objectivity distinction.

⁴⁰ This is perhaps most clear in E1P33p where Spinoza says, "All things have necessarily followed from the nature of God and have been determined to exist and to act in a definite way from the necessity of God's nature."

⁴¹ Pollock, *Spinoza*, 179.

mysterious 4th, 5th, etc.. So, according to Pollock, Spinoza is only slightly idealist in that he gives priority to the attribute of thought but avoids ontological idealism because of a bias that falsely identifies ontological idealism with subjective idealism and erroneously correlates the attribute of extension with the objective, material world, that is known to us via the natural sciences. That is, Pollock reasons that because Spinoza is not a subjectivist, his system cannot be understood as ontological idealism, Pollock having erroneously wedded subjectivism with idealism and objectivism with materialism—a strong and erroneous trend of his time but having no Spinozist foundation.⁴²

It will become clear over the course of this chapter that the points that Pollock raises continue to be relevant to contemporary Spinoza scholarship. Unfortunately, Pollock’s insights into the specific issue of the intersection of idealism with Spinoza’s metaphysics was colored by his ideological biases and framed in such a way as to serve his political/rhetorical interests rather than follow the line of reasoning all the way to the end, which, I maintain, leads to ontological idealism.⁴³ First, though, let us move forward with an account of the intersection between idealism and Spinoza’s metaphysics in more recent scholarship, beginning with Jonathan Bennett’s take on various the issues that are important to this dissertation.

⁴² An important observation of this dissertation that arises over and over is that Spinoza’s deep attribute problem and the resultant problems with parallelism (see Chapter 2) make it easy for scholars to project their own inclinations into Spinoza’s work.

⁴³ By claiming that Pollock has “ideological biases,” I do not intend an insult; I am simply identifying that Pollock’s views are skewed due to other ideological commitments – Pollock, and his contemporaries, misunderstand Berkeley’s idealism as subjectivism in their commitment to the realism of the project of natural science.

1.2.2. Jonathan Bennett's Concerns About the Potential for Spinozist Idealism

In recent years, the prospect of idealism in Spinoza has come into focus in the literature in part due to the work of Jonathan Bennett in his *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*. That Bennett's work has contributed to advances in the literature that discuss Spinoza in terms of idealism is somewhat ironic in that Bennett's reading of Spinoza, like Pollock's, attempts to construe Spinoza's thought as favoring the material over the ideal in part due to Bennett's own philosophical favoring of the natural sciences. Nevertheless, Bennett's engagement with Spinoza has raised many issues to a level deemed worthy of scholarly attention. Let us view those issues that pertain to the intersection of Spinoza and idealism.

First, it is important to recognize that Jonathan Bennett is extremely critical of Spinoza's philosophy. Bennett frequently criticizes Spinoza for a lack of due diligence, skill, insight, and success. For example, Bennett claims that, "Spinoza was not good at close, rigorous reasoning".⁴⁴ Also, "I do say that Spinoza's total naturalistic programme [sic] fails at both ends and in the middle; as though he undertook to build a sturdy mansion all out of wood, and achieved only a rickety shack using bricks as well as wood".⁴⁵ While Bennett's criticisms of Spinoza seem to range over his entire philosophy, Bennett does attribute genius to Spinoza and aims to salvage certain of Spinoza's insights, arguments, and claims: those that Bennett is able to reconcile with his own outlook. Let us now attempt to understand Bennett's positions regarding his interpretations of Spinoza—especially as it relates to idealism—noting that, due to the so-called general failures of Spinoza's reasoning, Bennett does not have any qualms

⁴⁴ Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), 28.

⁴⁵ Bennett, 38.

about altering, or ‘fixing’, Spinoza’s position where it is taken to be deficient—a frequent occurrence. We will thus look into 1) Bennett’s criticisms of Spinoza’s take on ideas, intellect, and the attribute of thought and 2) Bennett’s reasons for a materialist interpretation of Spinoza’s system (a dialectically contrasting view to the idealist sympathies of our 19th century British commentators).

Bennett challenges Spinoza’s conceptions of ideas, intellect, and the attribute of thought, throughout his work. We will look at three specific arguments or critiques by Bennett. First, Bennett argues that Spinoza’s discussion of ideas that are about, or have as their object, other ideas, threatens Spinoza’s parallelism. Second, Bennett rejects Spinoza’s position that there can be no causal interaction between the attributes. Third, Bennett criticizes Spinoza’s use of the language of thought in defining the attributes.

1.2.2.1. Bennett’s Critique #1: Ideas of Ideas Undermines Spinoza’s Parallelism

Bennett argues that Spinoza’s “doctrine of ideas of ideas”, Spinoza’s position that ideas can be about other ideas or have ideas as their object, causes serious problems for Spinoza’s system. Bennett warns: “The doctrine of ideas of ideas will ruin Spinoza’s system unless it squares with the parallelism of causal chains. Ideas of ideas must exhibit the same ‘order and connection’ as ideas which are not of ideas, or Spinoza is quite lost.”⁴⁶ The so-called “parallelism doctrine” is established at E2P7 and its scholium. E2P7 states: “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.” Spinoza’s parallelism

⁴⁶ Bennett, 185.

claims that the order and connection of ideas is identical with the order and connection of things (extended objects).⁴⁷ This would seemingly entail a 1-to-1 relationship between ideas and things. If ideas are such that they have extended things as their object, then this 1-to-1 relationship evidently holds. However, if we further allow for ideas to be such that they can have ideas as their object, then we add a level of ideas of ideas with no corresponding order and connection of things, evidently making a 1-to-1 relationship between the attributes of thought and extension impossible. Why does Spinoza's doctrine of ideas of ideas threaten Spinoza's system so totally? Because it threatens Spinoza's parallelism by bloating the attribute of thought: if the attribute of thought contains more modes than the attribute of extension, then it is hard to see how they could have parallel structures. So, without some reconciliation between Spinoza's "order and connection" claims and the doctrine of ideas of ideas, Spinoza's system is allegedly in big trouble.⁴⁸

Bennett does offer a solution to this problem that is worth mentioning before we move on.⁴⁹ Bennett suggests that ideas that have other ideas as their objects are intrinsically identical with the ideas that they are about: ideas that have things as their object. The problem with this proposed solution, a problem that Bennett is aware of, is that there are notable differences between an idea of a thing and an idea of that idea, particularly in how they come into being. However, Bennett correctly acknowledges that this solution is not available to Spinoza because

⁴⁷ We will see in Chapter 2 that Spinoza's use of the term "thing" [*res*] is ultimately problematic both betraying a bias against the reality of ideas (and thus against idealism) and is frequently observed to cause problems for his doctrine of parallelism in the distinction between thought-being parallelism and attribute parallelism (a topic primarily engaged with by Melamed below).

⁴⁸ I agree with Bennett's critique here but am ultimately able to locate the problem in Spinoza's theory of attributes and propose a solution; a solution that Bennett would likely disagree with due to his clear materialist outlook.

⁴⁹ See Bennett's discussion on page 186.

of Spinoza's commitment to causal histories being essential to the identities of modes. Bennett ultimately concludes that, "the theory is doomed".⁵⁰ As we shall see, scholars continue to wrestle with the issues Bennett has raised here. Ultimately, I will reject that Spinoza's theory is "doomed" and propose my own solution. However, this discussion is properly tabled for a later section. For now, let us look to Bennett's criticisms of the causal isolation that is supposed to hold between the attributes.

1.2.2.2. Bennett's Critique # 2: Causal Isolation of Attributes Not Reflected in Reality

One of Bennett's complaints about the coherence of Spinoza's system is Spinoza's claim that there can be no causal interaction between the attributes. Bennett's primary thrust comes from an appeal to common sense:

I say to you 'There's a spider on your sleeve', you then think there's a spider on your sleeve, and you look at your sleeve. Physical input, mental event, physical output; and there is enough of this in our experience, with enough pattern to it, to make it certain that it is not coincidental. It seems natural to suppose that in that transaction there are two causal connections: my impact on your eardrums causes a belief to be acquired, and that causes a movement of your eyes.⁵¹

Bennett, along with a great many others, is convinced that accounts such as this one entail causal interactions between minds and bodies. However, he acknowledges that Spinoza cannot accept such an account due to the non-interaction condition of his parallelism.⁵² Bennett thinks this is unfortunate for while we know via the natural sciences that physical events are caused only by physical events, there are no good reasons for claiming there is no causation from the

⁵⁰ Bennett, 187.

⁵¹ Bennett, 131–132.

⁵² Bennett is right to identify the isolation of the attributes from each other but fails to acknowledge that human knowledge is not wholly undermined by cross-attribute reasoning. I discuss this at greater length in Chapter 3.

physical to the mental.⁵³ In fact, as we will see shortly, Spinoza's posit of the mental is seen by Bennett to be more a redundancy than a sensical, internally coherent, domain of being.

Regarding the problems Bennett sees with causal isolation between the attributes, Bennett correctly notes that, "Spinoza thinks (i) that there is a mapping between the physical and mental realms, and (ii) that there is no causal relation between them."⁵⁴ However, Bennett immediately goes on to ask, "Might it be that (i) is right and (ii) is wrong?"⁵⁵ Spinoza's position is, of course, that both (i) and (ii) are right, which entails and, according to Bennett, explains the posit of panpsychism in Spinoza's system. However, that Spinoza claims that ideas are causally isolated from things, *and* represent them, entails that no explanation can possibly be made for the latter due to the former.⁵⁶ In fact, this leads Bennett to criticize Spinoza's philosophy of mind as un-parsimonious. He states, "it [positing identity between modes of different attributes] seems to imply that the whole truth about my mind is derivable from the whole truth about my body in conjunction with the mere further premiss [sic] that there is a mental realm,"⁵⁷ Ultimately, Bennett concludes that modes are more primary than attributes and have their existence in extension and their representation in thought.⁵⁸ I do not think that this successfully reconciles the issues he has raised but again I will leave my commentary to a later

⁵³ Bennett, 131–135.

⁵⁴ Bennett, 139.

⁵⁵ Bennett, 140.

⁵⁶ Bennett, 143.

⁵⁷ Bennett, 144.

⁵⁸ "I say that Nature really has extension and thought, which really are distinct from one another, but that they are not fully fundamental properties, although they must be perceived as such by any intellect." Bennett, 147. Also, see figure Bennett, 150.

section.⁵⁹ Now let us look at Bennett's perspectives on the alleged imbalance between the attributes.

1.2.2.3. Bennett's Critique # 3: Priority of Body/Extension Over Mind/Thought

We have already seen, in Bennett's discussion of the doctrine of ideas of ideas, that Bennett maintains that Spinoza's system suffers an inconsistency regarding his parallelism because of the potential overpopulation of the attribute of thought. We have also touched on Bennett's claims of dominance regarding the attribute of extension when he suggests that thought is a "mere further premiss [sic]". Let us now look deeper into Bennett's treatment of the attribute of extension. Specifically, let us see how Bennett views the attribute of extension as the explanation of the imbalance among the attributes.

Bennett posits imbalance in the attribute of extension in two places. Just prior to Bennett's discussion about the doctrine of ideas of ideas Bennett says,

As he [Spinoza] explains when introducing his theory of organisms, a grasp of people's minds requires an understanding of their bodies: "To determine what is the difference between the human mind and others, and how it surpasses them, we have to know the nature of the human body. In proportion as a body is more capable than others of doing or undergoing many things at once, so its mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once. And in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, so its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly. (2p13s at 97/3, quoted with omissions)" This is not mere parallelism, a *matching* of facts about the body with facts about the mind. What Spinoza says here is asymmetrical, with the body having primacy.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ In Chapter 3 I will address the issue of the infinity of the attributes. While it is possible that Spinoza's system be revised to eliminate the multiplicity of attributes, there is no great damage in their plurality. Further, their plurality is clearly important to Spinoza in that substance is absolutely infinite.

⁶⁰ Bennett, 126.

Because Spinoza claims that understanding qualities of minds requires understanding qualities of bodies, Bennett suggests that the body is given priority over the mind. Bennett is right that Spinoza, at times, explains thought in terms of extension. This tendency arises notably regarding ideas of ideas, as we have seen, when ideas are posited as representations of bodies or have bodies, “things”, as their objects. How can one claim causal independence, which entails explanatory independence as we will discover via Della Rocca and Melamed, if the explanation of thought appeals to the explanation of bodies? The answer to this question is simple: one cannot. Why? Explaining ideas requires an appeal outside of the attribute of thought to the attribute of extension. This would entail a privileged position of the attribute of extension. This, like the other criticisms offered by Bennett remains an issue in Spinoza scholarship. Also, like the other criticisms we have seen, my response must be tabled for a later section.⁶¹

Bennett takes up a materialist interpretation of Spinoza’s philosophy. This is perhaps most evident when he takes Spinoza’s materialist-metaphysics to undertake two goals: “What material substances are there?” and, “The facts about the world in its mental aspects clearly have something to do with the facts about it under its material aspects.”⁶² Interestingly, Bennett’s acceptance of those of Spinoza’s claims that imbalance the doctrine of parallelism in favor of materialism are not met with the criticisms that Bennett feels are appropriate to challenge an imbalance in favor of idealism.

⁶¹ For now, let it suffice to identify that the subordination of one attribute under another would make a mode of the subsisting attribute, a move that would essentially eliminate the attribute in question. In Chapter 3 we will see that this entails a rejection of parallelism.

⁶² Jonathan Bennett, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett, 62–63.

Bennett criticizes Spinoza's use of the language of thought in defining the attributes.

This issue has invited a great deal of commentary by scholars over the years. Bennett's take is perhaps most succinctly put here:

in [E1]d[D]4 Spinoza does not say that an attribute *is* an essence of a substance, but rather that it is what an intellect perceives 'as constituting an essence of a substance'. This is one of the most puzzling passages in the *Ethics*. It seems to define one of Spinoza's basic metaphysical concepts in epistemic terms, i.e., in terms of thought; that means that one of the attributes has a special place in the definition of 'attribute', which creates a lopsidedness in Spinoza's system which he does not mention, could not explain, and should not have tolerated.⁶³

According to Bennett, not only does Spinoza's doctrine of ideas of ideas entail a lopsidedness (or "disproportion" in Pollack's language) given to the attribute of thought, but so too does the definition of attribute. By way of a solution to this problem, Bennett takes the liberty to rephrase Spinoza's definition of attribute. Bennett prefers the following, inspired by Letter 9,

Spinoza means: 'I mean by "attribute" the same as I mean by "substance" except for a difference in logical form: we use the concept of substance to think of what has the attribute, and we use the concept of attribute to think of what the substance has; but it is the same conceptual content in each case.'⁶⁴

Though the view I discuss later will value Spinoza's use of the intellect in defining the attributes, Bennett's augmentation of the definition does follow a common line of thinking. If thought, perception, conception, etc., entails subjectivity, relativism, or unreality, then the complaint about Spinoza's wording in the definition of attribute seems appropriate. Does Bennett hold this view? I think he does. Bennett later states, "Someone who says that an F is 'what the intellect perceives as' a G must be invoking a distinction between appearance and

⁶³ Bennett, 62.

⁶⁴ Bennett, 63.

reality unless his use of ‘what intellect perceives’ is mere prolixity.”⁶⁵ So, it seems that Bennett’s wariness of Spinoza’s treatment of thought stems from his view of the ideal in general.

In summary, it is important that we note that Bennett’s complaints about Spinoza’s thought, that we have explored above in the three critiques, entail complaints about Spinoza’s parallelism. About Spinoza’s parallelism, Bennett states,

I have described Spinoza’s dualism as a fundamental aspect of his cast of mind, rather than as explicit doctrine. He has plenty of doctrine based on the view that thought and extension are basic and mutually irreducible ways of being; but that view itself is an undefended assumption. [...] his dualism is assumed rather than defended.⁶⁶

And quite simply, Bennett cannot see the sense in Spinoza’s parallelism, particularly because Bennett favors a materialist worldview. That is why, in Bennett’s own words,

The better reasons support first the thesis that there is only one extended substance and then the further conjecture that the extended substance is also thinking. In crediting Spinoza with this line of thought I am implying that his metaphysical thinking was grounded in the physical world, and there is plenty of evidence that it was. When I come to this treatment of the mind [...] it will be abundantly evident that for him the body calls the tune.”⁶⁷

So we see that Bennett investigates the question of Spinozist idealism from a place of bias.

Bennett is a materialist and as such is simultaneously critical of imbalance in Spinoza’s attributes that favor thought but unwilling to be critical of imbalance in Spinoza’s attributes that favor extension. I will address many of the issues raised by Bennett in future chapters of this dissertation and claim to have solutions to the problems raised in the interpretation of Spinoza as an ontological idealist. However, let us now turn to another major voice in the field,

⁶⁵ Bennett, 146.

⁶⁶ Bennett, 49.

⁶⁷ Bennett, 81.

that of Michael Della Rocca, who, we will see, has identified Spinoza as an idealist if not an ontological idealist.

1.2.3. Della Rocca on Spinoza's Idealism

Michael Della Rocca has contributed a great deal to Spinoza scholarship in a variety of ways. Interestingly, and what is most relevant to the project at hand, is Della Rocca's seemingly evolving views regarding Spinoza and idealism. Della Rocca's early work on Spinoza takes up many interesting controversies in Spinoza's work but makes no substantial contribution to the particular issue of idealism.⁶⁸ However, it appears as though the more Della Rocca has thrown himself into the prevalence in Spinoza's work of the PSR, and the more he has come to view Spinoza's philosophy as a strict monism, the more sympathetic he has become to Spinozist idealism. Here is a snapshot of that progression.

Della Rocca's 1996 book, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*, argues, in large part and contrary to idealism, that Spinoza's mind-body parallelism results from his "identity theory" according to which all of the infinite attributes are importantly, if not mysteriously, identical. In a paper, "Spinoza's Substance Monism", published in 2002, Della Rocca connects strict monism, or "existence monism" in Jonathan Schaffer's terminology, with adherence to the PSR, and the explanatory barrier.⁶⁹ He argues that Spinoza's strict adherence

⁶⁸ Della Rocca's 1996 article on psychology ignores explicit mention of the PSR, monism, and fails to recognize the imbalance in parallelism, taking parallelism at face value. See Michael Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 192–266.

⁶⁹ Della Rocca rightly identifies an explanatory barrier between attributes in Spinoza's system. An explanatory barrier follows from Spinoza's parallelism in that explanation is causation in Spinoza's system and since the doctrine of parallelism maintains that attributes are causally isolated (attribute-attribute parallelism), it follows that the attributes must also be conceptually or explanatorily distinct. Though John Morrison claims that this

to the PSR entails both strict monism and the existence of multiple attributes including thought and extension as well as entailing the explanatory barrier. In his 2008 book, *Spinoza*, Della Rocca explicitly addresses the potential for idealism but claims that Spinoza is not an idealist due to the explanatory barrier between the attributes, according to which there is thought-based explanation and there is extension-, or body-, based explanation and never the two shall meet.⁷⁰ In 2011, Samuel Newlands, in his article, “More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza”, makes clear that there are close ties between certain conclusions of Della Rocca and 19th Century British scholarship on Spinozist idealism such as that of Pollock that we have investigated above. Even more recently, Della Rocca has confessed his sympathy for idealist interpretations of Spinoza’s thought. Particularly, in his contribution to *Spinoza and German Idealism* (2012). Della Rocca has come to claim that Spinoza is in fact an idealist but in a limited way. Alongside Della Rocca’s development towards greater and greater focus on the PSR, monism, and reliance on the identity between the attributes, is a greater attention paid to many of those issues that are central to this paper such as the lopsidedness of the attributes in Spinoza’s system. We will thus look at three areas of Della Rocca’s work in greater detail: 1)

involves too strong an association of causality with explanation in “Restricting Spinoza’s Causal Axiom,” claiming that the “unrestricted interpretation” of E1A4 results in absurd consequences and argues instead for a “causally restricted interpretation”. My reading of Spinoza follows the unrestricted interpretation (which is the standard reading) and is integral to my suspicions about Spinozist mysticism that are discussed in Chapter 4. A quick rebuttal of Morrison’s position, however, is that the restricted interpretation focuses on transitive (i.e. historical) rather than ultimate (i.e. substance) causes and thus isolates modal identity from that of substance; such an isolation, we will see, betrays more than supports Spinoza’s system. See John Morrison, “Restricting Spinoza’s Causal Axiom,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 65, no. 258 (January 2015): 40–63.

⁷⁰ “Spinoza is, despite being an identity theorist, neither a physicalist nor an idealist. This is because of Spinoza’s strict explanatory barrier between the attributes which rules out any mental-physical dependence of the kind that both idealists and physicalists invoke. For Spinoza, neither the mental nor the physical are reducible to the other. Rather, they are two separate ways of explaining the same things.” Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 103.

Spinoza and the PSR; 2) Spinoza and monism; 3) Spinoza and idealism, and in what sense such a label might stick (and when it fails).

1.2.3.1. *Spinoza and the PSR*

Della Rocca's work on Spinoza and the PSR has had a great impact on Spinoza scholarship and is pervasive and encompassing. His most thorough investigation into the PSR in Spinoza comes to us in his book, *Spinoza* (2008). In the preface of this work Della Rocca claims, "I believe that I have found a key—in the shape of the Principle of Sufficient Reason—that will go a very long way toward making Spinoza's thought both more accessible and exciting."⁷¹ Della Rocca argues that Spinoza's use of the PSR is "twofold". He says,

Spinoza demands that we give an account of what causation is; we must be able to explain what it is for one thing to cause another. [...] This is the first use of the PSR [...] causation is explained in terms of the notion of explanation itself, it is made intelligible in terms of intelligibility itself [...] This double use of the PSR pervades Spinoza's philosophy.⁷²

That Spinoza demands explanation not just for causal interaction but for causality itself embodies what Della Rocca has called the "twofold" use of the PSR. This is why Della Rocca has repeatedly stated that the PSR represents Spinoza's rationalist commitment to intelligibility. Indeed, Della Rocca has adopted a phrasing of this commitment in Spinoza's philosophy: "For Spinoza, to be is to be intelligible."⁷³ The similarity to Berkeley's "to be is to be perceived" is

⁷¹ Della Rocca, ix.

⁷² Della Rocca, 8.

⁷³ Della Rocca, 9.

intentional on Della Rocca's part, although with a difference. According to Della Rocca, it is the PSR that drives Spinoza towards idealism.⁷⁴

What is most relevant to our immediate purpose is that Spinoza adheres strictly (though not always) to a very strong version of the PSR according to which reasons are required not only for metaphysical stipulation but also, and this is where the PSR gets strong, for denial. Thus, Della Rocca has argued for the interconnection of attribute parallelism, attribute identity, and the explanatory barrier roughly as follows: because an attribute is a coherent *way* of explaining the essence of substance, all explainability within an attribute is limited to that attribute. Also, because explainability within an attribute cannot provide reason for the non-existence of a second attribute, a second (third, etc.) attribute must exist. Now, since the PSR demands a strict monism, the multiplicity of attributes cannot entail the multiplying of substances and so the representation of the essence of substance via the attributes must entail that attributes are identical.

Now, we may come to find that Spinoza's system is not always successful in this two fold sense of intelligibility. However, there is an important insight here into what counts as a rationalist project: if Spinoza's system fails in any respect, we apply the criterion of intelligibility both as evaluation and in our efforts to mend what is broken. For example, we will come to see (in chapter 2) that Spinoza's parallelism cannot be maintained as it is stated; we will have to weigh possible solutions via this criterion. Let us now view how Della Rocca thinks that the PSR entails monism in Spinoza.

⁷⁴ I agree with Della Rocca's recognition of the PSR as a fundamentally ideal foundation for Spinoza's whole system but do not reproduce his arguments here.

1.2.3.2. Spinoza's Monism

Why does Della Rocca think that the PSR commits Spinoza to a strict monism? Well, because the PSR is nothing if not a demand for explainability which Della Rocca takes to mean a demand for grounding. Since all metaphysical posits require grounding, it follows that they must admit of some deep commonality either in mutual dependence, or “priority monism” in Schaffer’s terminology, or a strict identity—existence monism. Any attempt to argue against priority monism results in the multiplication of ontic existences and entails positing entities without reason, and this would be a violation of Ockham’s Razor, or the principle of parsimony. Since such lines of argument would violate the PSR, existence monism, such as Spinoza’s, Della Rocca reasons, is all that is left to us.⁷⁵

1.2.3.3. Categorizing Spinoza's Idealism

The closest that Della Rocca comes to endorsing ontological idealism to Spinoza is in a chapter from *Spinoza and German Idealism* entitled “Rationalism, idealism, monism, and beyond”.⁷⁶ There, Della Rocca identifies a progression to idealism that is driven by the PSR, a principle he rightly commits Spinoza to, though he ultimately claims that it goes “beyond” Spinoza.⁷⁷ In this chapter, Della Rocca construes rationalism as a commitment to the PSR,

⁷⁵ Michael Della Rocca, “Razing Structures to the Ground,” *Analytic Philosophy* 55, no. 3 (September 2014): 276–294.

⁷⁶ Chapter 1 in Förster and Melamed, eds., *Spinoza and German Idealism*.

⁷⁷ Della Rocca thinks that a total embracement of the PSR leads beyond Spinoza because it ultimately results in acosmism. It should be noted that one of the earliest dedicated students of Spinoza, Salomon Maimon understood Spinoza’s system as acosmism and interestingly thought that this was not a problem for Spinoza so long as we read him as an idealist (Charlie Huenemann, *Spinoza’s Radical Theology: The Metaphysics of the Infinite* [Stocksfield: Acumen, 2014], 103). I suspect that an idealist reading is not enough to resolve the issue of acosmism but that a mystical reading of Spinoza is.

understood here as the position that, “each thing is intelligible.”⁷⁸ Della Rocca understands this to entail that, “one does not and cannot explain a thing *brutely*, one must explain it *as such-and-such*.”⁷⁹ Resultantly, Della Rocca claims that, “to be is to be intelligible.”⁸⁰ That is, explainability entails intelligibility. This further entails a “coextensiveness of existence and intelligibility.”⁸¹ This is ultimately understood as a thought-being parallelism. Della Rocca worries that thought-being parallelism, “makes the threat of idealism that rationalism may face very acute, for if existence is being understood, then it might seem as if the existence of each thing is somehow a mental entity.”⁸² Notice the vocabulary of threat. Why is idealism a threat? Della Rocca is responding to Bennett’s claims about the dangers of idealism.⁸³ Della Rocca proceeds to dismiss various forms of idealism being *the* idealism of Spinoza, leaning on Spinoza’s attribute parallelism once more. However, Della Rocca concludes that “Spinoza *is* a certain kind of idealist.”⁸⁴ But what kind?

Della Rocca asks this very question and explores a few options: i. that only thinking things exist, ii. That extension is reducible to thought, iii. that the attribute of thought is dominant in Spinoza’s system due to its privileged access to all things.⁸⁵ Della Rocca rejects i and ii, citing attribute parallelism and specifically the explanatory barrier between the attributes as a reason for acknowledging extension *per se*. He reasons that explanation and

⁷⁸ Michael Della Rocca, “Rationalism, Idealism, Monism, and Beyond,” in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, eds. Förster and Melamed, 8.

⁷⁹ Della Rocca, 8.

⁸⁰ Della Rocca, 9.

⁸¹ Della Rocca, 10.

⁸² Della Rocca, 11.

⁸³ Unfortunately, Della Rocca does not explain the nature of the *threat*. I assume he is tacitly acknowledging the contemporary bias against idealism that is existent in the field.

⁸⁴ Della Rocca, 13.

⁸⁵ Della Rocca, 11–15.

intelligibility, while an operation of thought's special access to other attributes, excludes all thought-attribute appeals in its explainability, thus reifying extension in virtue of categorically eliminating appeals to thought in its intelligibility. Ultimately, Della Rocca acknowledges that Spinoza is an idealist but only in the limited sense of iii; Spinoza's system privileges thought over extension but not to the point of the ontological elimination of extension nor to the point of reduction of extension to thought. Importantly, Della Rocca's phrasing of his arrival at an idealist Spinoza tacitly acknowledges bias against idealism: "Spinoza *is* a certain kind of idealist. There, I've said it; I've come out of the closet."⁸⁶ Also importantly, it is Della Rocca's specific adherence to an alleged attribute parallelism and the subsequent explanatory barrier between the attributes in Spinoza that prevents him from seeing beyond a merely epistemic/explanatory idealism in Spinoza. If attribute parallelism can be shown to be mistaken, then it would remove the barrier preventing Della Rocca from embracing a more thorough going idealism in Spinoza: ontological idealism.

In chapter 2 of this dissertation I will take up a refutation of Spinoza's attribute parallelism which will clear the path for Della Rocca's reasoning towards idealism to embrace ontological idealism. Now, let us look at another strong voice in contemporary Spinoza scholarship, that of Melamed. Melamed has arrived at a similar conclusion regarding Spinozist idealism to that of Della Rocca: that Spinoza is an idealist but not an ontological idealist. Let us now turn to the relevant selections of Melamed's work.

1.2.4. Melamed on Spinoza's Idealism

⁸⁶ Della Rocca, 13.

Yitzhak Melamed is willing to classify Spinoza as an idealist and comes closest to seeing ontological idealism in his system than any other recent Spinoza scholar of which I am aware.⁸⁷ Melamed identifies Spinoza's system as idealism by clearly demonstrating the lopsidedness of the attributes in favor of thought, not just in comparison to extension but in relation to all other attributes. However, Melamed stops short of what he calls reductive idealism. In *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought*,⁸⁸ Melamed advances two theses that are directly relevant to the central aim of this dissertation.

Melamed's first thesis is stated here:

I argue that Spinoza had not one but two independent doctrines of parallelism: The one stipulates an isomorphism between the order of *ideas* in the attribute of thought, on the one hand, and the order of *things (res)* in the substance on the other. The other doctrine claims an isomorphism among the order of *modes* in the infinitely many attributes.⁸⁹

Melamed argues that all modes of thought are represented in parallel in all of the attributes and calls this ideas-things parallelism;⁹⁰ for every idea there is a being in extension, the 3rd attribute, the 4th attribute, etc., that parallels it.⁹¹ However, given Spinoza's doctrine of inter-attribute parallelism,⁹² modes of a third, non-thought and non-extension, attribute must also parallel extension. However, there is no idea of this mode of the third attribute's relationship with extension. This entails that there are different truth conditions for thought-being

⁸⁷ I take Melamed's language of "reductive idealism" as synonymous with my language of "ontological idealism."

⁸⁸ Yitzhak Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁸⁹ Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 139.

⁹⁰ Melamed defines ideas-things parallelism as, "The causal order of ideas corresponds to the causal order of things. In addition, ideas represent the things that parallel them." Melamed, 152.

⁹¹ Ideas-things parallelism entails that all non-thought modes are represented in the attribute of thought (see graphic on page 155 of *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought*).

⁹² Melamed defines inter-attribute parallelism as, "The causal order of things in each attribute corresponds to the causal order of things in each of the other attributes. In addition, parallel items are just different aspects of one and the same thing." Melamed, 152.

parallelism and inter-attribute parallelism. An interesting consequence of this discussion, one that will prove all the more relevant later in this dissertation, is that the idea of God cannot itself be God for the idea is a mere mode that belongs to the attribute of thought.

Melamed concisely outlines the potential dangers to Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism if one attribute involves a greater number than others but also recognizes the special place of the attribute of thought in Spinoza's system:

According to the inter-attributes parallelism, the causal order of ideas, or modes of thought, is equal to the causal order of modes in any other attribute. If any of the attributes were numerically richer than the rest, the one-to-one correspondence among the attributes would collapse. Yet, according to the ideas-things parallelism, the causal order of thought items is supposed to be equal to the causal order of things, which includes *all* the modes of *all* the infinitely many attributes. Hence thought appears to be infinitely richer than any other attribute.⁹³

The appeal to idealism seems clear. There is an imbalance between the attributes and the attribute of thought is given priority. However, Melamed takes Spinoza as rejecting a reduction to idealism. He states, "Spinoza advocated a rather unusual view that grants thought a clear priority over the other attributes while rejecting any idealist reduction."⁹⁴ How does Spinoza avoid reduction to idealism according to Melamed? Melamed asks and answers a version of this very question:

How can the attribute of thought be isomorphic with the whole substance, but also be just an attribute, having the same order of modes just like any other attribute? Spinoza's solution to the apparent conflict is rather simple. The order of ideas is indeed equal to the order of modes in any of the other attributes. However, the modes of thought, unlike the modes of any other attribute, are multifaceted, in fact, infinitely faceted. Each idea has infinitely many aspects, so that each aspect of the idea represents a parallel mode under another attribute.⁹⁵

⁹³ Melamed, 154.

⁹⁴ Melamed, 156.

⁹⁵ Melamed, 173–174.

While this is a brilliant attempt to solve the problem, I do not think it succeeds. By identifying any special quality to the modes of one attribute over another, the causal structure must shift, either violating the explanatory barrier between attributes or their parallel structures. If, as Della Rocca rightly argues, conceivability is coextensive with existence, a proposition that Melamed agrees with, then the multifacetedness of any mode of thought involves some conception and thus some extra 'beingness' or causal framework that is not present in modes of other attributes. Melamed anticipates this objection.

Let's see now how the multifaceted structure of ideas makes the two doctrines of parallelism compatible. According to the inter-attributes parallelism, the order of modes of thought must be equal to the order of modes in any other attribute. This demand is satisfied, because the order of modes of thought parallels the order of bodies. Now, the ideas-things parallelism stipulates that the order of cognitions must parallel the order of things, and indeed, there is a perfect correspondence between the order of the infinitely faceted ideas and the order of their objects: God and the finitely faceted modes. Each infinitely faceted thought unit picks an infinitely faceted object, and each idea aspect picks a mode under one attribute.⁹⁶

Melamed's picture appears successful from the top down but not from the bottom up. When we investigate the identity of any particular mode, any difference in quality comes with an explanation and the quality of being infinitely faceted entails a conceptual and thus causal framework that is not represented in parallel by other attributes where such a quality is not found regarding the self-same mode.

Melamed's second thesis is stated here: "I argue that the number and order of modes is the same in all attributes. Yet modes of thought, unlike modes of any other attribute, have an infinitely faceted internal structure, so that one and the same idea represents infinitely many

⁹⁶ Melamed, 174.

modes by having infinitely many facets (or aspects).⁹⁷ Melamed realizes that for inter-attribute parallelism to obtain, the number of modes of thought cannot be greater than that of any other attributes. However, it has been shown that there is an idea for every mode of every attribute. How can there be an equal number of modes of thought to that of, say, extension, when there is a mode of thought for every mode of extension but also a mode of thought for the 3rd, 4th, etc., attributes? Melamed stipulates that it is not that there are more modes of thought (one for a mode of extension, another for a mode of the 3rd attribute, etc.) but rather that modes of thought have a unique and dynamic internal structure. Thus, Melamed's position is that modes of thought are infinitely faceted—they have the internal quality of being parallel to the corresponding modes of every attribute. Spinoza is therefore an idealist, according to Melamed, but only in the sense that the attribute of thought is special due to its special quality of having infinitely faceted modes. Melamed maintains, however, contra ontological idealism, that "Spinoza could not embrace reductive idealism in spite of the preeminence he grants to the attribute of thought. I argue that Spinoza is a dualist—not a mind-body dualist, as he is commonly conceived to be—but rather a dualist of thought and being."⁹⁸ Melamed's position is thus that thought-being parallelism is successfully implemented in Spinoza's system because modes of thought parallel all modes of all other attributes through their special quality of being infinitely faceted, and inter-attribute-parallelism is successfully implemented because the causal structures of each attribute mirror the causal structures of each other attribute.

⁹⁷ Melamed, 140.

⁹⁸ Melamed, 140.

In addition to what has been said above, let us consider the sort of objection Della Rocca might raise to Melamed's solution, namely, that it clashes with parsimony. What need is there for the content already reified in thought to be given status in any other attribute? Spinoza insists on a difference between infinite and absolutely infinite, but Spinoza waffles on this issue. The attributes are in some sense independent of modes, but in another sense, relative to modes: on the one hand, the attributes are real as they are conceived of as representative of the essence of substance by the infinite intellect, on the other hand, the limitedness of human beings is said to be because we 'exist' in only two attributes, whereas God is constituted by infinite attributes, apparently locating the attributes in modes. This problem is apparently overlooked by Melamed. Moreover, it is fair to ask what is gained in Spinoza's system by representing all things in the attribute of thought and then positing their external to thought existence? This clearly entails redundancy, especially when we consider that conceivability is what constitutes existence. Here I think is where Melamed goes wrong.

Melamed, we have seen, posits a thought-being parallelism in Spinoza alongside inter-attribute parallelism. Thought-being parallelism, however, betrays a bias against idealism: that thoughts do not actually exist, are anti-real, or merely illusory. Thought/ideas, are real, do exist, and importantly, constitute existence for Spinoza. That is, conception *is* existence, not merely paralleled by existence as is maintained by Melamed. Melamed's attempt to bifurcate substance into thought and being is precisely the kind of brute bifurcation that Della Rocca warns against in his PSR-key to understanding Spinoza's system: unexplained/brute bifurcation violates the PSR and Spinoza is thus committed to reject it.

In sum, Melamed fails to sufficiently honor the explainability thesis, the thesis that explanation *is* causation for Spinoza, and so continued discussion about multiple attributes commits him to cross attribute causation which is expressly forbidden by Spinoza (and a central problem that I will take up in Chapter 2 of this dissertation). To state this more precisely, for a mode of thought to have a quality that is lacking in the modes of non-thought attributes requires an explanation for this variance and since explanation is causation for Spinoza, there must also be a different causal structure; Melamed's interpretation entails that there be explanations (and therefore causes) in the attribute of thought that are not paralleled in the other attributes. Thus, Melamed, like Della Rocca, resists ontological idealism in favor of attribute parallelism, but he does so at the expense of the PSR.

1.2.5. Other Relevant Trends in Spinoza Scholarship

We have hitherto taken time to delineate the views of certain Spinoza scholars whose works have a great impact on the project undertaken in this dissertation. As with all critical reviews of the literature, we have had to be selective with regards to the specific scholars discussed and with regards to their views. Beyond the contents investigated thus far, there are several other voices in the field that are worthy of some attention, even if reasonable constraints prevent us from diving into them deeply. Thus, we will now survey several other relevant perspectives.

I have selected the following authors due to their significant impact on the field of Spinoza studies and their relevancy to the argument of this dissertation. The content that follows groups scholars into categories (that occasionally overlap) that are intended to capture

their approaches and/or conclusions about Spinoza. First, we will look at scholars who have directly addressed the issue of Spinozist idealism. These are: J. Clark Murray, Samuel Newlands, and Gilles Deleuze. Secondly, we will look at scholars who argue against Spinozist idealism, in favor of materialism. These are: Edwin Curley and Michael LeBuffe. Thirdly, we will touch upon the scholarship of dualists, focusing on Olli Koistinen and Valtteri Viljanen. Finally, we will look at scholars who deal with Spinoza's ethics, particularly selected works by Don Garrett and Andrew Youpa.

1.2.5.1. *Direct Encounters with Spinozist Idealism*

There are three works that deal directly with the question of Spinoza's idealism that it is prudent to discuss here. The first, by J. Clark Murray, comes to us by way of his paper, "The Idealism of Spinoza."⁹⁹ We will also look at two works by Samuel Newlands. They are: "More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza" and "Thinking, Conceiving, and Idealism in Spinoza."¹⁰⁰ Finally, we will view Deleuze's thoughts on the issues in his two books *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*¹⁰¹ and *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*,¹⁰² though less directly. Let us view each of their treatments of the pertinent issues.

⁹⁹ J. Clark Murray, "The Idealism of Spinoza," *Philosophical Review*, 5, no. 5 (September 1896): 473–489.

¹⁰⁰ Newlands, "More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza," and Samuel Newlands, "Thinking, Conceiving, and Idealism in Spinoza," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 94, no. 1 (2012): 31–52, <https://doi.org/10.1515/agph-2012-0002>.

¹⁰¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988).

¹⁰² Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992).

Murray's article on idealism is perhaps the most concise treatment of the issue of Spinozist idealism. Murray identifies the problems of 1) the bloated attribute of thought,¹⁰³ 2) the role of thought in the definition of the attributes,¹⁰⁴ and 3) the intimate relation between thought and causality.¹⁰⁵ He concludes, "it does seem as if there could be no consistent interpretation of Spinoza's great work, except as an exposition of the doctrine that the universe, under all its varied phases, is essentially an evolution of intelligence."¹⁰⁶ Further, Murray articulates the connection between Spinoza's idealism and mysticism. While a fuller treatment of this account is properly taken up in Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation, let us simply note that the role of knowledge, knowledge properly belonging to the attribute of thought, is central to Spinoza's ethical theory and, regarding the blessed, "Man is thus, in fact, elevated into something more than the likeness of filial relation to God. He is described as assimilated to God in language such as can be paralleled only in the excesses of the literature of Mysticism."¹⁰⁷ Murray's reading of Spinoza as idealist and mystic is similar enough to my own that one might frame the work I am undertaking in this dissertation as a more precise and fuller treatment of the issues Murray raised in 1896. However my project differs significantly from

¹⁰³ "Thought is conscious of itself, but it is conscious of extension as well. Inferentially we may add that thought must be conscious of all the attributes of substance. The modes of extension, as well as of other attributes, whatever these may be, are thus made modes of thought; and the whole infinitude of attributes in all their infinite modes are ultimately interpreted in terms of the one attribute of thought ... it is by relation to rational thought that substance, with its infinite attributes, receives an intelligible unity." Murray, "The Idealism of Spinoza," 480.

¹⁰⁴ "All through these definitions, therefore, it is evident that their critical vindication is founded on their being necessary concepts of intellect, insuperable conditions of intelligibility. But not only do the foundations of Spinoza's system thus assume the idealistic point of view; we are raised to the same point of view at almost every step in the erection of the super-structure." Murray, 479.

¹⁰⁵ "... all attributes are ultimately interpretable in terms of thought; and this fact determines Spinoza's conception of causality. It makes the process of causation a process of thought." Murray, 481.

¹⁰⁶ Murray, 473–474.

¹⁰⁷ Murray, 487.

Murray's in that I advocate that a coherent Spinozist idealism is ontological idealism and is possible only by way of revision.

Newlands' articles vary in their flavor. In "More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza," Newlands is not concerned with advocating for or against Spinozist idealism but rather identifies certain voices who have claimed that Spinoza is an idealist. Newlands identifies a resurgence of idealist readings in Spinoza scholarship in late 19th century England in which it was commonplace to view Spinoza as tending towards idealism. These authors include Pollock and Murray. Newlands credits Edwin Curley for the recent (late 20th century) resurgence in Spinoza scholarship but also with the mood of materialism that has dominated more recent writings on Spinoza.¹⁰⁸ The view of Spinoza as materialist has enjoyed wide support. However, as we have seen, Della Rocca has recently challenged this by claiming that Spinoza's system is idealist in so far as Spinoza's system gives priority to thought. Newlands concludes his article with a challenge:

Where does this leave us? I hope it shows concretely that previous generations of interpretations can still reward study, even if they were produced in different intellectual contexts than our own. But even more, I hope Spinoza's contemporary readers sense a philosophical challenge in the air. Many will want to resist the bleak idealist conclusion that Spinoza's metaphysics harbors an irresolvable tension.¹⁰⁹

I agree with Newlands that early idealist readings remain relevant today even if they involve some erroneous perspectives. However, I take issue with Newlands', unnecessary

¹⁰⁸ It should be noted that Curley's work has been important in anglo-american Spinoza scholarship for the past 40 years or so. Susan James traces the work of Louis Althusser in France and Antonio Negri in Italy, who give a different Marxist-materialist reading, that I will not discuss here. See Susan James, "Spinoza and Materialism," in *Current Continental Theory and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Stephen Daniel and Hartley Daniel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 100–113.

¹⁰⁹ Newlands, "More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza," 117.

characterization of idealism as “bleak”. While he is right to identify a *prima facie* dualism, and thus non-idealism, in Spinoza’s work, I take the term “bleak” as further evidence of a contemporary bias against idealism.

In “Thinking, Conceiving, and Idealism in Spinoza”, Newlands argues against idealist readings of Spinoza, claiming that, “conceptual relations are attribute-neutral for Spinoza; mental relations comprise a proper subset of conceptual relations.”¹¹⁰ His reasoning is that most of us mistakenly equivocate mental with conceptual. However, Newlands observes that,

Spinoza defines his basic ontological categories of substance and modes in terms of conceptual relations. He explains causation, or at least self-causation, in terms of conceptual dependence. Even the “in” relation, that most vexing form of dependence in Spinoza’s system, has at least a conceptual condition attached to it: things are in that through which they are conceived.¹¹¹

However, Newlands disagrees with interpretations of the above stated phenomenon as indicative of idealism, “Spinoza’s repeated appeals to conceptual relations do not produce the kind of Thought-heavy, idealist-friendly lopsidedness that worried Bennett.”¹¹² Central to

Newlands argument, however, is the reality of parallelism, which he nicely articulates:

[...] suppose Spinoza believed that the attribute of thought was the most fundamental attribute. Pretty clearly that would violate *attribute parity*. Suppose further that the way in which Spinoza privileged Thought was by making relations between ideas underlie and constitute the relations between other, non-thinking modes. This would violate *attribute parallelism*, since all cross-attribute relations would in fact be intra-Thought relations. It would also violate *attribute independence*, since features of one attribute, say Extension, would be partly explained and constituted by features of another attribute, Thought, rendering Extension dependent on Thought for its complete characterization.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Newlands, “Thinking, Conceiving, and Idealism in Spinoza,” 31.

¹¹¹ Newlands, 33.

¹¹² Newlands, 33.

¹¹³ Newlands, 36.

[...] Therefore, on the basis of these passages in Part Two of the *Ethics*, I conclude that Spinoza rejects mentalism. The alternatives are either to read him as blatantly violating his attribute doctrines in the very places in which he most develops and relies on them, or else to heavy-handedly push aside his clear and frequent textual appeals to the conceptual. Neither option is very attractive, especially when there is a non-mentalist alternative.¹¹⁴

However, Newlands' alternative categorically eliminates all human knowledge that extends beyond one's own mind by making it alien to the attribute of thought under which humans cognize, thus making extension absolutely alien and, perhaps worse, locates all knowledge of God and God's thought beyond all speculation.¹¹⁵ This includes the philosophical thoughts of Spinoza, indeed everyone, as one would not be able to have an internal-to-thought idea/mode of God whose mind stands fundamentally apart from the domain of human thought. This would make Spinoza's system both relativist and subjectivist in that cognition is relative to humanity and unable to touch the objective conceptions of God/substance. The categorically preclusion of most of Spinoza's claims about substance (or any of our claims for that matter) from being objectively true follows. Further, I cannot accept a subjectivist reading of Spinoza as he so evidently aims to establish what must be true for all of us and the sort of knowledge that we can be secure in; it is clear that Spinoza's project is not one of subjectivism.

Gilles Deleuze has a unique picture of Spinoza's project in general but identifies the priority given to thought in three "privileges". He states,

These privileges of the attribute of thought are based on the complex status of the idea of God or the infinite intellect. The idea of God objectively comprehends substance and the attributes, but must be formed as a mode under the attribute of thought. [...] But

¹¹⁴ Newlands, 43.

¹¹⁵ Charlie Huenemann, in his book *Spinoza's Radical Theology*, correctly identifies that Spinoza's (philosophical-) theology entails the capacity of the human mind to form an adequate idea of God. Huenemann also correctly notes that the adequate ideation of the divine extends the human person beyond the level of persons. Newland's critique of mentalism precludes such possibilities and thus must be rejected.

these privileges do not disrupt the parallelism; on the contrary, they are integral part of it. For the ontological parallelism is founded on the equality of all the attributes as forms of essences and forces of existence. The epistemological parallelism is founded on an entirely different equality, that of two powers, the formal power of existing and the objective power of thinking. [...] The final formula of parallelism is therefore: one and the same *modification* is expressed by one mode under each attribute, each mode forming an *individual* together with the idea that represents it under the attribute of thought.¹¹⁶

However, elsewhere Deleuze disagrees. In *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, Deleuze says, “each attribute is equal to the others, none is superior or inferior.”¹¹⁷ Here we see a tension in Deleuze’s interpretation of Spinoza—an issue that is central to this dissertation: the attributes must run in parallel and one cannot be favored over the others, yet the attribute of thought *is* favored over all of the other attributes.¹¹⁸ Ultimately Deleuze, similarly to the German Idealists, uses Spinoza as a platform for his own philosophical developments on various philosophical issues. Because his work aims elsewhere than Spinoza, we will not investigate Deleuze further. He has been included here for his illuminating treatment of the conflicts in Spinoza’s doctrine of parallelism and the priority of thought.

It should now be clear that there is wide recognition of the problems with Spinoza’s parallelism and a clear favoring of the attribute of thought over and above the other attributes. Many scholars touch on the issue but fail to resolve it. Others attempt a resolution but fall short. What we have heretofore ignored, however, are those scholars that deny that the imbalance in the attributes favors the attribute of thought. Many scholars recognize that there

¹¹⁶ Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 89–90.

¹¹⁷ Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 185.

¹¹⁸ Scholars are regularly tempted to honor Spinoza by holding to his parallelism and thus claiming that all the attributes are equal (Spinoza *does* say this) but also to honor Spinoza’s discussions on the attribute of thought in which it is clear that thought is given privilege over the other attributes.

are issues with Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism but claim that the dominant attribute is extension. Let us now look to Edwin Curley and Michael LeBuffe as examples of a materialist reading of Spinoza.

1.2.5.2. Materialist Interpretations

The focus of this paper thus far has been on interpretations of Spinoza's system that claim that Spinoza favors thought over extension. So far, Bennett has been the only voice that directly opposes these conclusions. If one were to take from what has been said that reading Spinoza as an idealist is the norm, they would be sorely mistaken for materialist readings have largely dominated the discourse in that last forty years or so. We have seen that Samuel Newlands credits Edwin Curley for a 20th century resurgence in Spinoza's thought that involves a materialist interpretation of Spinoza's system. More recently, Michael LeBuffe has sided with Curley's materialist interpretation. Thus, we will now view the case for materialism made by Curley and LeBuffe.

Curley recognizes the issues with Spinoza's parallelism that we have thoroughly outlined through the work of various Spinoza scholars. Instead of recognizing the bloat in Spinoza's attribute of thought as indicative of idealism, Curley reads a strong dependence of thought on extension in Spinoza's work; while the lopsidedness of the attributes drives Curley to deny dualism in Spinoza, he concludes that Spinoza is a materialist rather than an idealist. He states,

It is true that some of the general propositions Spinoza enunciates early in Part II have a dualistic ring to them [...] But if we follow out the details of Spinoza's treatment of the mind, as it develops in the course of Part II, I do not see how we can characterize it as anything but a materialistic program. To understand the mind, we must understand the

body, without which the mind could not function or even exist. In spite of all the parallelistic talk, the order of understanding never proceeds from mind to body.¹¹⁹

Curley (as with Bennett when he argues for materialism) is referring to Spinoza's discussion of ideas and their objects.¹²⁰ If ideas are always ideas of some object and the object of an idea is the body with which it is associated, then regardless of how many modes of thought there are in existence, they all depend on their object in extension. Curley's claim is thus that the causal interactions of bodies determines the causal interactions of ideas, making modes of thought explainable by modes of extension. Curley's picture of thought and extension is that thoughts supervene on bodies: changes in bodies entail changes in thoughts, not the other way around. If Curley is right, then Spinoza's system is certainly more materialist than idealist in that there would be a clear priority given to the attribute of extension over thought. However, two controversial conclusions would follow: 1) a violation of the explanatory barrier between the attributes, and 2) that modes of extension, bodies, count as reasons (which seems odd in that reasoning is classically associated with thought). Let me now comment on 1, leaving 2 for our discussion of Michael LeBuffe, as he has taken up this very issue in his recent book: *Spinoza on Reason*.

1: A materialist reading entails a violation of the explanatory barrier between the attributes.

¹¹⁹ Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 78.

¹²⁰ E2P11 states, "That which constitutes the actual being of the human mind is basically nothing else but the idea of an individual actually existing thing." Notice that Spinoza uses the language of thing here as a way to reference the object of an idea—its corresponding mode in extension. I will later offer criticism of Spinoza's use of the term "thing" to refer to modes of extension as his understanding of an "actually existing thing" seems to preclude actual existence to modes of thought which is highly problematic for certain aspects of his system that are central to the project of this dissertation.

If any attribute is explainable through another attribute, then that attribute would apparently lose its status as an attribute in that Spinoza takes attributes to be conceived through themselves, not through others; if thought is explained by extension, then thought cannot itself be an attribute. Curley's position would thus entail the elimination of the attribute of thought, reducing thought to the attribute of extension. While the severe problems with Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism might necessitate a strong revision such as the reduction of one attribute to another (we will investigate this option in Chapter 2), Spinoza's system would be so radically changed by a reduction of thought to extension that it would become largely unrecognizable and, as such, I cannot accept Curley's materialist reading of Spinoza. Why would Spinoza's system be so damaged by a reduction of thought to extension? Beyond the obvious alteration to Spinoza's dualistic talk, the role that thought plays in the definition of substance and the attributes would require elimination, for there is no conceivable appeal to extension in this role played by thought. Such elimination would have serious consequences for the sort of conceivability that is involved in the PSR, for example. Further, and perhaps more severely, a reduction of thought to extension would eliminate Spinoza's ethical project. While a thorough identification of how Spinoza's ethics favors thought over extension must wait for Chapter 3, I will simply note here that Spinoza's part of the mind that survives the destruction of the body in blessedness¹²¹ is rendered senseless under Curley's reductive materialism and thus Spinoza's ethical project is threatened.

2: A materialist reading entails that modes of extension, bodies, count as reasons.

¹²¹ Spinoza has controversially stated that the mind can survive the body. In E5P23 he states, "The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed along with body, but something of it remains, which is eternal."

Reasons appear, at face value, to be a phenomenon of thought. LeBuffe disagrees and offers us a perspective on how modes of extension can count as reasons.¹²² While directly acknowledging the bloatedness of the attribute of thought in Spinoza's system, crediting Della Rocca's observance of idealism in this regard, LeBuffe nonetheless maintains that Curley is right to reduce thought to extension. In advocating for this conclusion, LeBuffe directly takes up the issue of modes of extension counting as reasons despite the apparent location of reasons in thought. LeBuffe states,

to be a reason is *not* just to be a thought. It is just to be an explanation that can be grasped by thought, and explanations may be there even independently of their being grasped. [...] If, however, what makes something a good explanation does not have to do with the nature of thought itself, then thought will be merely parasitic on something else. The reason is what is grasped. The thought is essentially what does the grasping. If reasons are what matters, then, it is not clear that thought so construed really matters.¹²³

LeBuffe reasons that we invoke physical phenomena as explanations for other physical phenomena all the time; that we understand these explanations does not entail that our understanding constitutes the explanation itself. But what of the PSR? What of Spinoza's equation of 'to be' with 'being conceivable'? LeBuffe addresses this very point:

Thought is also something that thought can understand; indeed the PSR requires that every idea, just like every existing thing, have an explanation. Here, however, is how thoughts differ from other modes: thoughts are always of something. For finite beings, at least, it is difficult to conceive of any idea, no matter how complex, that is not ultimately grounded in an object outside of the mode of thought. There may be ideas of ideas, ideas of ideas of ideas, and so on. The last idea in any of these chains, however, will have to be an idea of something. [...] An explanation of an explanation of my body, for example, will depend just as much on an account of the nature of body as the first explanation does. If this is correct, then any idea will be distinctive as an explanation in virtue of the nonthoughtful mode that, directly or remotely, is its object.¹²⁴

¹²² Michael LeBuffe, *Spinoza on Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹²³ LeBuffe, 38.

¹²⁴ LeBuffe, 55.

It is clear that LeBuffe takes the attribute of thought to be reducible to the attribute of extension and takes the bloatedness of the attribute of thought to entail only a trivial idealism that is semantically couched in a materialist metaphysics.

LeBuffe's reasoning is strong. Understanding "reasons" analogically through physical explanations of physical phenomenon resonates strongly in the modern mind, given its appreciation for the natural sciences. Indeed, the methodological naturalism of the natural sciences seems to validate the identification of "reasons" with physical phenomenon merely observed or recognized by thought. While I take issue with a materialist construal of the natural sciences and the metaphysical construal of naturalism, any sufficient objection I could produce at this juncture would take us too far afield from the topic of this dissertation. Instead, I will counter that thought is essential to Spinoza's project whereas extension is not. LeBuffe, like Curley, (and apparently all materialist positions that hinge their reasoning on modes of extension as objects of thought) fails to recognize that ideation extends beyond being ideation of modes of extension and into the very nature of substance and attribute. They further fail to recognize the dangers of staking their claim on a ground where Spinoza is mistakenly violating his own principle of parallelism – specifically the explanatory barrier. So, while there is a strong case for materialism in so far as thought derives from extension, Spinoza's system utilizes thought in domains beyond mere representation of extended objects—into the most fundamental aspects of his metaphysics and ethics (as well as we shall see in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively) and Spinoza's ethics is a domain where extended substance matters very little but, instead, requires thought for its cohesion and intelligibility.

Both idealist and materialist interpretations of Spinoza's work identify problems with Spinoza's parallelism and seek to raise one attribute to a higher status than the other(s) as a resolution. Let us not make the mistake of declaring these two interpretations as the only options lest we run the risk of false dichotomy. Let us now look to the third option, the dualist interpretations of Spinoza's system.

1.2.5.3. Dualist Interpretations

Another opposing interpretive viewpoint to the one that I am advancing in this dissertation comes to us from dualist interpretations of Spinoza's system. It has been mentioned already that the dualist interpretation is *prima facie* correct in that Spinoza does claim that the attributes of thought and extension both exist and frequently discusses modes of thought and modes of extension. In this short section, we will view a selection of insights that come to us from Viljanen and Koistinen who are chosen as examples of dualist interpreters of Spinoza.

Olli Koistinen is a notable Spinoza scholar who accepts dualism. Koistinen accepts the argument from the materialists that places the objects of ideas in other attributes but does not limit this to the attribute of extension. Koistinen states, "ideas do not have their own objects but acquire their objects from other attributes."¹²⁵ Koistinen further recognizes that there is a danger of cross attribute explanation: "this way of treating the issue breaks the conceptual barrier between different attributes."¹²⁶ Instead of recognizing this as a deep problem for

¹²⁵ Olli Koistinen, "Spinoza on Action," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. Olli Koistinen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 168.

¹²⁶ Koistinen, 168.

parallelism, however, Koistinen concludes, “ontological independence of ideas from their objects is nowhere required by Spinoza.”¹²⁷ Koistinen, as with all other dualist interpreters of which I am aware, takes Spinoza at his word regarding multiple attributes and struggles to make sense of Spinoza’s system without recognizing the great depth of the metaphysical consequences of the problems that are present for Spinoza’s parallelism by cross-attribute reasoning; the only reason I can see for Koistinen, and other dualists, accepting parallelism despite cross-attribute reasoning is that he has not fully flushed out what constitutes reasoning in Spinoza’s system—reasoning is causality and causality across attributes is a violation of parallelism.

Viljanen is aware of the same problems with attributes that have concerned many of the authors we have discussed. Viljanen observes, “the only entities in Spinoza’s ontology classifiable as *things* are substances and modes.”¹²⁸ And also,

Spinoza does not hesitate to claim – solely on grounds of Id3 [E1D3] and Id4 [E1D4] – not only that attributes are conceived through themselves but that ‘each being must be conceived under some attribute’ (E1P10S). This means, obviously, that any substance must be conceived under some attribute. But would all this not give conceptual priority to attributes over substances, thus conflicting with the conceptually preeminent and independent position just assigned to substances?¹²⁹

This takes Viljanen to the question of Spinozist idealism. He ponders,

how are we to understand the claim that one substance may have many attributes, each truly predicable of a substance, and each constituting the essence of the substance? One approach to this problem is to take attributes to be ways in which an intellect can know a substance, which introduces an element of subjectivity to attributes. [...] However, emphasizing the subjective element pertaining to attributes risks, I think, making Spinoza too much of an idealist.”¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Koistinen, 169.

¹²⁸ Valtteri Viljanen, “Spinoza’s Ontology,” in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza’s Ethics*, ed. Koistinen, 59.

¹²⁹ Viljanen, 62.

¹³⁰ Viljanen, 64.

This is further evidence of dismissal due to bias. We never hear “risks too much of a materialist”. In any case, Viljanen is making the same mistake that Pollock made: erroneously wedding idealism to subjectivism. Viljanen ultimately sides with dualism, but this fails to recognize the severity of the problem. It is my position, as will become clear in chapter 2, that Spinoza has a serious attribute problem and that his parallelism is broken. Dualists appear to lack an appreciation for the depth of these issues.

Dualist readings of Spinoza vary greatly with regards to making sense of the problems with parallelism, but all of them take Spinoza at face value when he posits multiple independent attributes and seek resolution from this starting point. This is not improper. However, I do not view the role of analyst regarding Spinoza’s work as that of reading the mind of Spinoza. Nor do I view the role of analyst regarding Spinoza’s work as attempting to creatively reconcile inconsistent views of his system. Instead, and what I will take up throughout the remainder of this dissertation, I will recognize and demonstrate the flaws in Spinoza’s system, and, identify what options are available for us to fix these flaws. That is to say, I reject the dualist readings of Spinoza because I favor the a-historic, rationalist, project over the historic one, and the PSR over the contingencies of context and the interpretative complexities of textual evidence that might provide windows into Spinoza’s mind or intentions.

Up to this juncture we have looked almost exclusively at the metaphysical aspects of Spinoza’s work, only alluding to the content that it is now prudent to discuss: Spinoza’s ethical project. While it is common for scholars to take up some subfield of Spinoza’s system (e.g. metaphysics or epistemology), Spinoza’s work was not meant to be restricted to philosophical sub-categories. Spinoza’s project was clearly trans-categorical and aimed to draw together

various sub-categories within the field of philosophy—primarily metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

1.2.5.4. Interpretations Emphasizing Ethics as the Main Project

Up to this point we have been entertaining various metaphysical perspectives and their relevance regarding the argument of this dissertation. It is important, however, to acknowledge that Spinoza's project was not just metaphysical but equally, if not more so, ethical in nature. Interestingly, metaphysical inquiries into Spinoza's system are, generally speaking, the only ones that directly take up the question of Spinozist idealism. This is unfortunate, for Spinoza's ethical project is not only integral to his metaphysics, something that is regularly overlooked in the literature, but also provides just as many, if not more, reasons and motivations for concluding that Spinoza's system is ontological idealism. Due to the lack of attention to the issue of idealism in ethical inquiries into Spinoza's work, we are without examples of the direct connections to which I've just alluded. Instead, we must, at least for now, content ourselves with tangential but related accounts. Particularly, we will now view the perspectives of Garrett, and Youpa whose works provide an ethical lens into Spinoza's *Ethics*.

Garrett acknowledges the peculiar role of mind in Spinoza's ethical theory: "The eternity of the mind in Spinoza is a topic that defies easy categorization."¹³¹ Indeed, virtually all accounts of Spinoza's ethics are compelled to take up this problem but rarely, if ever, is it imagined among ethical treatments of Spinoza's system that this is a cause to categorize

¹³¹ Don Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Garrett, 282.

Spinoza's system as idealism, let alone ontological idealism. I suspect this is due both to the division of philosophy into sub-fields, but perhaps more so to the commonly held contention that metaphysics and ethics struggle in terms of total reconciliation (which is what I take to be a fundamental drive of Spinoza's philosophical project—reconciling fact and value). Thus, those that involve themselves in an ethical project relative to Spinoza's work do not conceive of themselves as undertaking a metaphysical project. However, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, Spinoza's system entails a fundamental identity between ethics and metaphysics.

Andrew Youpa argues along with the intelligibility thesis. Youpa claims, "rational belief and action are necessary and sufficient for genuine existence."¹³² However, Youpa maintains psychophysical reality in Spinoza's system. This is odd considering his unequivocal reinforcement of the intelligibility thesis reiterated here in his discussion on Spinoza and the good:

understanding constitutes perseverance in being, or constitutes a type of perseverance. To know is to be [...] what underlies his [Spinoza's] thinking about the good is, it seems, the Parmenidean principle that to be is to be intelligible or, less ambiguously, to be is to be knowable. Something is knowable in case, and to the extent that, its existence follows from its essence."¹³³

Youpa, however, does not take up the question of Spinozist idealism, relegating perhaps the most relevant insight into the question to a footnote where he states,

The absence of any explicit reference to the body's *summum bonum* and his turn exclusively to the mind in the latter half of Part 5 might seem to be evidence that there are significant asymmetries between thought and extension and, as a consequence, that the parallelism doctrine ultimately breaks down. Though an adequate discussion of this

¹³² Andrew Youpa, "Spinoza's Theory of the Good," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. Koistinen, 255.

¹³³ Youpa, 246–247.

issue is beyond the scope of this essay, I believe that parallelism is at work in Spinoza's theory of the good.¹³⁴

Youpa, thus, treads the expected path that follows from the categorization of approaches to engagement with Spinoza's philosophy; because Youpa's paper is ethical, a proper investigation into the merits of parallelism are not appropriate to address. I do not claim that Youpa has done anything improper here. Rather, it is important to acknowledge that the relation between Spinoza's ethics and metaphysics remains in need of a thorough treatment. One that the project of this dissertation provides.

While a more comprehensive account of Spinoza's ethical thought will be taken up in Chapter 3, it is important at this point to at least acknowledge that Spinoza's project is ethical. Materialist readings of Spinoza, we will see, are unable to make sense of Spinoza's ethical project and thus, we have a strong reason to reject materialistic readings. Dualist readings of Spinoza are not metaphysically sound, and thus, we have a strong reason to reject them also. Ethical readings are insufficient, and while this does not entail that they should be rejected, they are in need of reconciliation with Spinoza's metaphysics. In the chapters that follow, I will make the metaphysical case for Spinozist idealism more acutely and provide strong reasons for its superiority over dualist and materialist readings. In chapter 3 I will make it clear that idealism is the only clear path to understanding Spinoza's ethics and how it relates to his metaphysics.

¹³⁴ Youpa, 247.

1.3. Conclusions

We have explored numerous works that deal both directly and tangentially with the issue of Spinozist idealism. We might classify these thinkers into two groups: those who conclude that Spinoza was at least some kind of idealist (Pollock and contemporaries, Della Rocca, and Melamed), and those who reject or fight against such tendencies (Bennett, Newlands, Garrett, Deleuze). Those that deny and resist idealism in Spinoza typically fall into two categories: 1) those that interpret Spinoza as a materialist, and 2) those that interpret Spinoza as a mind-body dualist. The materialist readings of Spinoza typically cite the relationship of dependence between ideas and their objects in extension to privilege extension over thought and importantly betray parallelism in the process. After all, if thought depends on extension but extension doesn't depend on thought, then there is an imbalance in the attributes, but more so my problem with them is that they ignore or dismiss the clear role thought has to play in the definition of the attributes and regarding non-attribute or attribute independent ideas. The idealists acknowledge the clear privileging of thought over extension but attempt to limit the scope of Spinoza's idealism with appeals to parallelism.

The above critical review helps us to identify the central place of Spinoza's parallelism, and the various issues surrounding it, in the investigation into the question of Spinozist idealism. Those that reject or resist any kind of idealism consistently invoke parallelism as a grounds for rejection. Those that allow for some amount of idealism in Spinoza tend to temper it by appealing to parallelism. Indeed, if parallelism is indeed a steadfast and necessary/integral part of Spinoza's philosophy, then it is tempting to conclude that Spinoza cannot be an idealist. I will demonstrate that this is not the case. Spinoza's idealism is far from steadfast. In fact, it is

broken. However, as we will see in Chapter 2, parallelism is not so much the problem as a symptom. Spinoza's system has a deeper problem: one of attributes. The bottom line is that Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism suffers from deep issues and cannot be *prima facie* what Spinoza has offered it as. This will pave the way for my reading of Spinoza's system as ontological idealism.

Chapter 2: Exploring the Influences and Guiding Questions that Motivate Spinoza's Metaphysics

As this dissertation deals directly, deeply, and almost exclusively with Spinoza's philosophical system, it is appropriate that we provide an account of the context in which it arose and the philosophical questions that motivated his work. Thus, we begin this chapter with a discussion of the relevant aspects of the philosophical landscape in the 17th century in order to understand the philosophical problems and questions that motivated Spinoza's thought. We will then proceed with a problematization of various aspects of Spinoza's metaphysics of substance building on the critiques that arose in Chapter 1 and with the express intention of identifying a deep problem with Spinoza's theory of attributes that remains in need of correction. Chapter 3 will then take up the task of developing possible solutions to Spinoza's attribute problem and exploring their economy.

2.1. The Context and Landscape from which Spinoza's System Emerged

Spinoza's philosophical project admits of two primary domains of influence: 1) his early life and education in the Jewish community of Amsterdam, and 2) his study of philosophy focusing on the work of René Descartes. While the former of these influences is likely to inform

future projects,¹ we will focus on the influence of Cartesian philosophy as it is the clear progenitor of the central questions that motivate Spinoza's metaphysical thought.²

Although Spinoza was influenced by thinkers such as Maimonides, the greatest philosophical influence on Spinoza was Descartes.³ So much so was Descartes an influence that Spinoza was recognized as an expert on Cartesian philosophy in his time. Spinoza's first publication was his *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae Pars I & II*, a work published for the benefit of Spinoza's students that communicated Cartesian metaphysics and epistemology in geometric form. While in this work, and elsewhere, Spinoza is clear to caution his readers that he does not agree with all of Descartes's philosophical positions, he clearly accepts a great deal of Descartes's philosophy and even where he disagrees, Spinoza utilizes Descartes' framework, particularly his substance-mode ontology.

Where does Spinoza part with Descartes? When Henry Oldenburg asked Spinoza this very question,⁴ Spinoza responded only that, "The first and most important error is this, that they have gone far astray from knowledge of the first cause and origin of all things. Secondly, they have failed to understand the true nature of the human mind. Thirdly, they have never grasped the true cause of error."⁵ Despite these complaints, there is a great deal of room for Spinoza to agree with Descartes and a great deal of Cartesian vocabulary that is taken up by

¹ This project, as will become evident later in the dissertation, will eventually lead to the question of mysticism, an issue that is informed by Spinoza's Jewish intellectual upbringing.

² Spinoza's Jewish heritage and the context of his community and early education will arise occasionally but not with sufficient weight to warrant an in-depth treatment here.

³ For a thorough account of Maimonides's influence see Seeskin, "From Maimonides to Spinoza." For an excellent treatment of Descartes's influence, see for example, T. Schmaltz, "Spinoza and Descartes," in *Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Della Rocca, 63–83.

⁴ Letter 1

⁵ Letter 2

Spinoza. Let us now look to those Cartesian developments that impacted and guided Spinoza's thought.

It is widely recognized that Descartes revolutionized Western thought, offering valuable insight not only into philosophical issues but also natural philosophy and mathematics. Here we will discuss a very small number of these contributions, focusing only on those that are both relevant to Spinoza's thought and those that impact this dissertation. As such, we will limit ourselves to the following topics: 1) God, substance, and attributes; 2) the relation between mind and body; 3) clear and distinct ideas; and 4) human freedom. I will now provide a brief sketch of Descartes' positions on the issues identified above.

Gary Hatfield has identified six central questions that motivated Descartes's philosophical thought:

His metaphysics sought to answer these philosophical questions: How does the human mind acquire knowledge? What is the mark of truth? What is the actual nature of reality? How are our experiences related to our bodies and brains? Is there a benevolent God, and if so, how can we reconcile his existence with the facts of illness, error, and immoral actions?⁶

Similarly, these questions can be seen motivating Spinoza's thought. So, what are Descartes's answers to these questions?

Descartes developed his philosophy in sharp contrast to the norms and assumptions of scholastic thought. Whereas scholasticism of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century generally maintained a theologically reinforced empiricism as the foundation of knowledge, Descartes employed a methodological skepticism to arrive at a rational and intellectual

⁶ Gary Hatfield, "René Descartes," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed January 27, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/descartes/>.

foundation of knowledge.⁷ According to Descartes, the intellectual grasp of the necessary connection between *my thinking* and *my existence* provides an indubitable foundation for knowledge and paves the way for establishing a general rule for truth. Perhaps Descartes's most famous contribution to philosophy is his position on clear and distinct ideas. Descartes maintained that certainty is attainable, and that skepticism is thus defeated due to the mind's capacity to form clear and distinct ideas. Clear and distinct ideas ground the human capacity to reliably know God, self, matter and the natural world. By way of clear and distinct ideas, Descartes arrived at numerous conclusions that are relevant to this dissertation. Let us review them now.

For Descartes, God is an infinite intellectual substance that creates two finite substances, mind and body. Hatfield explains,

The main metaphysical results that describe the nature of reality assert the existence of three substances, each characterized by an essence. The first and primary substance is God, whose essence is perfection. In fact, God is the only true substance, that is, the only being that is capable of existing on its own. The other two substances, mind and matter, are created by God and can only exist through his ongoing act of preservation or conservation, called God's "concurrence".⁸

The import of Descartes's position on God as infinite substance and the creation of mind and body as finite substances will become clear as we move forward. One can view Descartes's progression from God to the created substances here:

Next I examined attentively what I was. I saw that while I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world and no place for me to be in, I could not for all that pretend that I did not exist. I saw on the contrary that from the mere fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed quite evidently and certainly that I

⁷ Interestingly, Descartes's rejection of empiricism is simultaneously a rejection of idealism, which, I will establish later, is an unfortunate and negative side effect to an otherwise productive movement in the evolution of intellectual thought in history.

⁸ Hatfield, "René Descartes."

existed; whereas if I had merely ceased thinking, even if everything else I had ever imagined had been true, I should have had no reason to believe that I existed. From this I knew I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think, and which does not require any place, or depend on any material thing, in order to exist. (CSMI: V2.)⁹

Descartes arrives at his clear and distinct ideas of self, God, and later body through an epistemic process of analysis. In order to solidify the foundation of clear and distinct perception for certain knowledge, Descartes further argues that God is not a deceiver and thus guarantees the validity of clear and distinct knowledge.¹⁰

Descartes's three substance-mode ontology leads to what is called the mind-body problem. While there is some controversy about what exactly Descartes's position is on this issue, it is generally accepted that Descartes is a mind-body dualist. That is, Descartes claims that there is a mind-substance and a body-substance that are essentially distinct from one another. That is, for Descartes, there are two finite substances – mind and body – that each exist independently of the other. Importantly, Descartes understood the essential nature of body as extension and the essential nature of mind as thought. Also of import, the active aspect of extended substances is motion while the passive aspect are its extended modes (size and shape) and the active aspect of mental substances is the will whereas the passive aspect is the intellect.¹¹

⁹ All references to Descartes's writings in English translation are to René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vols. 1–3, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–1991).

¹⁰ In the Sixth set of Objections to the *Meditations*, Pierre Gassendi first raised the issue of the “Cartesian Circle”: Descartes's proof of the reliability of clear and distinct perceptions takes as its premise God's existence as a non-deceiver. Descartes's proofs of God's existence presuppose the reliability of clear and distinct perceptions.

¹¹ Relevantly, Spinoza maintains an active/passive distinction that is quite similar to that of Descartes. We will see later in this chapter as well as in Chapter 3 just how the active/passive distinction operates in Spinoza's system.

Descartes' work on the self/soul is also extremely influential. Descartes located the identity of the soul both in the mind as the seat of consciousness and in the problematic mind-body union. Human minds are, for Descartes, embodied. Moreover, Descartes took the human condition to be one in which the capacity for freedom is realizable. Descartes located human freedom in the interaction of the intellect and the will,

Next, when I look more closely at myself and inquire into the nature of my errors (for these are the only evidence of some imperfection in me), I notice that they depend on two concurrent causes, namely on the faculty of knowledge which is in me, and on the faculty of choice or freedom of the will; (CSMII: 39)

Descartes maintained that the will is the seat of the human capacity to choose and that the intellect serves simultaneously to heighten not diminish it: "Neither divine grace nor natural knowledge ever diminishes freedom; on the contrary, they increase and strengthen it." (ibid.)

Somewhat paradoxically, the indifference of the will results from obscurity and confusion by the intellect and constitutes the lowest grade of freedom. Whereas, a great inclination of the will results from clarity and distinctness of the intellect, the highest grade of freedom.

Accordingly, I am at my freest when the great light of the intellect shows me that I must exist and it is followed by a great inclination of the will to assert this truth. We will see that this view contrasts importantly with Spinoza's view of human freedom.¹²

What of God's attributes? Descartes's view of attributes is that there are only two finite attributes: one for each finite substance, i.e., extension (matter) and thought (mind). An attribute is the distinctive property of a substance that is the foundation of all its other

¹² In contrast to Descartes's assertion of freewill, Spinoza's view of human freedom is that of a hard determinist: 'Humans believe themselves to be free only because they are aware of their volitions' however, everything follows from substance out of necessity. So beyond hard determinism, Spinoza is a necessitarian also; however, as we will see later in this chapter and in Chapter 4, this is problematic for Spinoza.

properties, or in Cartesian terms, modes.¹³ God, unlike the finite substances of mind and body, has only multiple attributes and no modes.¹⁴

There remain several issues of intersection between Descartes and Spinoza. Perhaps the most prominent of these pertain to error and the foundation for the natural sciences. However, these issues being only tangentially related to the aim of this dissertation, I have chosen to exclude discussion of them.

The Cartesian landscape outlined above is the primary context that sets the stage for the motivations of Spinoza's metaphysical project of interest here. Spinoza was widely recognized for his knowledge of Cartesian philosophy but is quick to communicate his divergence from Descartes's system. Nonetheless, Spinoza's philosophical pursuits aim at many of the issues taken up by Descartes. Spinoza is interested in the certitude of knowledge, the question of human freedom, the nature of God, minds, and bodies, and an absolutely incontrovertible epistemology as the ground of knowledge. Spinoza thus aims to answer these questions:

- What is the nature of mind and body and how do they relate to each other?
- What is the nature of substance and God and to what extent can substance and God be known?

¹³ In Part 1, Article 53 of Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy*, he defines attribute as: "To each substance there belongs one principal attribute; in the case of mind, this is thought, and in the case of body it is extension. A substance may indeed be known through any attribute at all; but each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred. Thus, extension in length, breadth and depth constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance." Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, 1:210.

¹⁴ See *Principles*, Part 1, Article 56, "Hence we do not, strictly speaking, say that there are modes or qualities in God, but simply attributes, since in the case of God any variation is unintelligible." Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, 1:211.

- What is the foundation of knowing and what role does it play in the human quest for happiness?
- To what extent can human beings be said to be free?
- What is the relation between human beings and nature?

As one must understand questions in order to arrive at their answers, we are now prepared to engage Spinoza's philosophical system directly. In what follows, I will identify a deep deficiency in Spinoza's system, one that impedes his ability to resolve the issues that motivate his philosophy. Specifically, I argue that Spinoza fails to develop a coherent theory of attributes. Let us now attend to the deficiencies in Spinoza's theory of attributes and identify how they impact the question of Spinozist idealism.

2.2. Spinoza's Attribute Problem

It should be clear from the survey of the literature in Chapter 1 that there are certain issues with Spinoza's philosophical system that have motivated scholars to advance various interpretations of Spinoza's metaphysics. A central focus of these issues that are most relevant to this dissertation have been advanced thus far in terms of Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism. In this section, I start by showing that Spinoza himself succumbed to an anti-idealism bias, namely, by conceiving of the human mind as fundamentally unreal. My exploration of Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism that follows reveals that the issues that arise in Spinoza's parallelism extend much deeper than is commonly observed. In short, I argue that Spinoza's metaphysical system

suffers from a “deep attribute problem.” The aim of this sequence is to establish definitively that Spinoza’s system is in need of revision, albeit a friendly one, that I take up in Chapter 3.

2.2.1. Spinoza’s Bias Against Idealism and His Ambiguous Use of “Thing”

Spinoza’s philosophical thought is haunted, as it were, by the bias that is identified in Chapter 1. That is, Spinoza conceives of thought, at least human thought, as lacking in reality. It is not altogether clear whether or not, or to what extent, Spinoza is aware of the problems that arise from positing the unreality of thought. We can observe, however, that Spinoza’s early works, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (TIE) and the *Short Treatise* (KV), present a confused conception of the reality of thought and, though Spinoza refined some of these issues in his most developed work, the *Ethics*, the initial bias against the reality of thought remains a problem for Spinoza’s system: it undermines the coherence of Spinoza’s doctrine of parallelism specifically and his theory of attributes more broadly. In the present section, I identify and investigate Spinoza’s anti-idealism bias focusing on his ambiguous use of the term “thing” in his early works and go on, in sections that follow, to identify the lasting repercussions to his more developed system.

In Spinoza’s earliest work, the TIE, he clearly states his intentions regarding certain threads in the contemporary Cartesian landscape that are, according to him, in need of development. Chief among these is what has come to be called the mind-body problem.¹⁵

¹⁵ It is important for the overall project of this dissertation to note that Spinoza’s first, and primary, philosophical concern is that of the mind and its relation to God/nature. In the TIE, Spinoza explains that his rationalist methodology requires of him that he investigate the mind, thought, and the nature of ideas (particularly clear and distinct ideas). Indeed, the end to which Spinoza writes is, “the knowledge of the union which the mind has with

Spinoza attempts to solve Descartes's mind-body problem by establishing a dual-aspect theory rooted in substance monism. Spinoza posits multiple aspects, or attributes, of a single substance—God/Nature. These posits are clearly maintained throughout Spinoza's philosophical writings despite some variation as Spinoza's thought develops. While Spinoza's attempt to inform this problem is both brilliant and novel, his reasoning admits of a bias against the reality of (human) thought that renders his solution ineffective, a bias that continues to cause him problems throughout his philosophical development in identifiable ways. He is haunted, as it were, first by an erroneous assumption about the natures of mind and body. Specifically, Spinoza takes human thought to be unreal (at least in part) and the human body to be fundamentally real.¹⁶ Yet, by his own assumptions, mind and body ought to be equally rooted in the same substance, namely God. Let us now view the bias in Spinoza's early works.

Spinoza's early philosophical developments, it has been noted above, deal with the mind. It is here that we see the first indication of a bias in Spinoza that is similar to that identified in contemporary philosophy in chapter 1. Spinoza claims, "an idea is situated in the context of thought exactly as its object in the context of reality."¹⁷ Here we see the first indication of thought-extension parallelism, but this is not what concerns me at this juncture. What is illuminating about this statement is the implication that the object of thought is in reality whereas thought itself is not—it is merely analogously situated not in reality but rather

the whole of Nature," (TIE 13). We will take up the significance of Spinoza's priority of the mind in the next chapter where I will argue for Spinozist idealism and the implications of union in Chapter four.

¹⁶ One can see why Pollock and his contemporaries are tempted to interpret Spinoza's system according to a subjective/objective association of the attributes. This interpretive approach will prove deficient in Chapter 3.

¹⁷ TIE 41

in thought.¹⁸ I maintain that this indicates an initial discrepancy between thought and thing.¹⁹ I take as evidence for my claim that Spinoza's analysis is into the way in which thoughts can be erroneous (whereas, of course, "things" cannot). We will see this issue arise in Spinoza's mature thought in the context of thought-being parallelism; Spinoza problematically views the role of thought as real only in the context of its relation to its object.

This initial bias against the reality of thought motivates a persistent problem in Spinoza's system. A second clear encounter with this bias in the TIE is found in Spinoza's discussion of the relationship between perceptions (thoughts) and their objects: "Every perception has for its object either a thing considered as existing or solely the essence of a thing."²⁰ Here we see a clear statement about the capacity of thought to be involved with the unreal—mere essence—of its object. "Thing", here, is the object of thought and may or may not be real. The context of this discussion is Spinoza's attempt to explain error. However, as a consequence of his approach to the problem of error, Spinoza is admitting that the status of certain thoughts, perceptions in this case, is non-real.

A third place where we may see that Spinoza casts the mind towards the unreal is presented via his explanation as to why many people erroneously think themselves free. Spinoza states, "the soul can by its unaided power create sensations or ideas which are not ideas of things."²¹ People erroneously conclude from the capacity of thought to be unreal

¹⁸ Margaret D. Wilson conceives of the thought-being parallelism in E2P7 as a thought-reality parallelism. Wilson, "Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge," 97.

¹⁹ It is interesting to observe the parallel here with the contrasting of idealism with realism that was criticized in Chapter 1.

²⁰ TIE 52

²¹ TIE 60

(produce fictions) that they are both free and creative (like God). However, Spinoza claims that the aim of the mind—to be happy—is to cultivate clear and distinct perceptions which drive the mind away from its tendency towards unreality towards the reality of nature. Clear and distinct ideas are true ideas and, as such, may rise to the level of reality. However, clear and distinct ideas are, importantly, contrasted with erroneous ideas—thoughts that do not rise to the level of reality because they do not agree with their objects.

The TIE is presented as a guide to happiness and seeks to establish that this happiness is in the mind's movement from the unreal to the real. We will take up this line of thought to a greater extent in Chapter Four. For now, let us look to another of Spinoza's early works: *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* (KV) to see the persistence of this bias.

In the KV, we see the bias in the explicit correlation of existence with the attribute of extension. Embedded in Spinoza's proof of the identity of God and substance, Spinoza states,

Because although, as we have already seen, one substance cannot produce another, and if a substance does not exist it is impossible for it to begin to exist we see, nevertheless, that in no substance, when considered separately, is there any necessity to be real, since existence does not pertain to its separate essence. So it must necessarily follow that Nature, which results from no causes, and which we nevertheless know to exist, must necessarily be a perfect being to which existence belongs.

From all that we have so far said it is evident, then, that we posit extension as an attribute of God.²²

Spinoza's association of existence with extension, and not with thought, compels him to posit extension as an attribute of substance. I will make further use of this mistake—creating an imbalance of the attributes—in the following sections. For now, let us simply identify that Spinoza's view of "real object" is an extended thing.

²² I KV II.

A second place in the KV where Spinoza discloses his bias comes to us (once again) in the context of denying free will, Spinoza states,

Possibly this will not satisfy some who are accustomed to keep their understanding busy with things of Reason more than with Particular things which really exist in Nature; and, through doing so, they come to regard a thing of Reason not as such, but as a real thing. For, because man has now this, now that volition, he forms in his soul a general mode which he calls Will, just as from this man and that man he also forms the idea of man; and because he does not adequately distinguish the real things from the things of Reason, he comes to regard the things of Reason as things which really exist in Nature, and so he regards himself as a cause of some things.²³

Once again, just as was seen in the TIE, Spinoza claims that the error of free will involves a confusion between unreal things, or things of reason, and real things, or really existing things in nature. Spinoza's "things which really exist in Nature" are extended objects. Thoughts, once again, are cast as unreal while their objects, extended objects in nature, are real. It is thus observable in his early writings that Spinoza harbors a bias against thought; he discounts the reality of thought.

One final position that Spinoza advances in the KV is worthy of our attention. Spinoza's bias against the reality of ideas affects the reality of the human soul:²⁴

Now we have said that the Soul is an Idea which is in the thinking thing, arising from the reality of a thing which exists in Nature. Whence it follows that according to the duration and change of the thing, so must also be the duration and change of the Soul. We remarked, at the same time, that the Soul can become united either *with the body* of which it is the Idea, or *with God*, without whom it can neither be, nor be known.²⁵

Once again Spinoza's discussion of reality applies differentially to the object of the idea that is the soul—the body. However, my reason for identifying this specific passage is not merely to

²³ II KV XVI

²⁴ It is worthy of note that in later works Spinoza drops the language of "soul," instead speaking only of "mind."

²⁵ II KV XXIII

produce further textual evidence for my claim about Spinoza's anti-idealism bias regarding the reality of ideas vs things/extended objects, but to identify specifically how this bias relates to the mind/soul's relation to extension and God for it is here that the effect of this bias is most clearly destructive to Spinoza's parallelism. Spinoza, it will be shown, is unable to maintain his claim to the identity of attributes in substance while preserving a difference of reality and relation to substance as God.

I have claimed that Spinoza's bias remains a problem throughout his writings. As such, it behooves us to view the issue as it presents itself in Spinoza's penultimate work, the *Ethics*. While the *Ethics* is more refined and complete than his earlier works, Spinoza's bias against the reality of ideas continues to haunt his doctrine of parallelism specifically and his theory of attributes more broadly.

We have seen that Spinoza's bias occasionally presents itself by way of an ambiguous use of "thing" [*res*]. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza uses "thing" in at least two different ways. Sometimes Spinoza uses the term broadly to mean anything that can be affirmed such as substance and the things that follow from the nature of substance: modes.²⁶ A second use of the term is "being" only in so far as it applies to extended modes. This use is evident in Spinoza's "thought-being parallelism" according to which whatever the infinite intellect can conceive is actualized in reality as a thing, notably excluding (at least some) thought-objects from the meaning of the term. This ambiguity entails that ideas both are and are not "things". The full weight of this issue will not be immediately felt by us and thus appears a minor complaint in the face of the

²⁶ Importantly, modes of extension appear to always be real whereas certain modes of thought are erroneous.

previous identification of bias. However, Spinoza's ambiguous treatment of the term "thing" significantly impacts his system and creates avenues, or in-roads, for his bias to create problems with his doctrine parallelism to which we will now turn our attention.

2.3. Problems with Spinoza's Parallelism

The consequences of Spinoza's anti-idealism bias are particularly relevant to this dissertation insofar as they apply to Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism. Put simply: if Spinoza's parallelism is coherent – if it functions well in his system – then Spinoza's views on the reality of thought do not betray a haunting bias and my claims regarding Spinozist idealism violate Spinoza's well-reasoned philosophical system. However, if I can demonstrate (as I claim to do below) that Spinoza's parallelism is incoherent, then some revision to Spinoza's system is warranted according to which its problems can be remedied. Below, I demonstrate that Spinoza's parallelism is incoherent due to Spinoza's anti-idealism bias. I leave discussion on how to fix Spinoza's system in the face of a broken parallelism to Chapter 3.

2.3.1. What is Parallelism and What is it Meant to Address/Solve?

Spinoza's philosophical system was meant to address, even solve, certain philosophical problems that were prominent in the 17th century. The primary issue that Spinoza's parallelism is meant to address is problems arising from substance dualism. Spinoza recognized problems with the Cartesian explanation of mind-body interaction (or the lack thereof) in the human being. Let us first look to the Cartesian landscape that Spinoza was critical of and outline some

of the problems that Spinoza took up. Then we discuss Spinoza's parallelism and explore its capacity to inform the Cartesian issues.

With the rise of the mechanical philosophy in Europe by latter half of the Seventeenth Century, it was widely accepted that:

- 1) human beings have both minds and bodies that intermingle;
- 2) that bodies are mechanistic – that the behavior of bodies is explainable only in terms of interactions with other bodies;
- 3) the essence of a human being is as a thinking thing.

Numerous philosophical problems arose from the acceptance of these three posits such as the problem of mind-body interaction and the possibility of the co-existence of causally distinct entities (mind and body) in the same person. Descartes's solution was that God, as infinite intellectual substance, grounded two distinct finite substances – mind and body. Moreover, Descartes claimed that the human mind and the human body are united in the particular human being via a complex interaction. Thus, the Cartesian perspective on the mind body problem entails that mind/intellect is a distinct substance from body/matter, and that their mutual presence and dependence in the individual is due to a complex, causally distinct, intermingling. Contemporaries of Descartes such as Pierre Gassendi,²⁷ Thomas Hobbes,²⁸ Antoine Arnauld,²⁹ and Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia³⁰ objected on a number of points to

²⁷ See the Fifth Set of Objections, *Meditations on First Philosophy, Objections and Replies*.

²⁸ See the Third Set of Objections.

²⁹ See the Fourth Set of Objections.

³⁰ For a complete account of Descartes's correspondence with Princess Elizabeth, see Jonathan Bennett, "Correspondence between Descartes and Princess Elisabeth" (2017), accessed July 18, 2019, https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1643_1.pdf.

Descartes's dualism and causal interactionism. Each in different ways expressed skepticism concerning the legitimacy of clear and distinct perception in establishing the real distinction of mind and body, as well as skepticism concerning how two substances that share no modes in common can be said to be united and to interact in the human being. These problems of real distinction, union, and interaction are the essential issues arising from Descartes's mind-body dualism and interaction.

Spinoza rejected Descartes's claim that mind and body are distinct substances that intermingle in the human being.³¹ However, Spinoza agreed with Descartes that mind and body are causally distinct from one another, just not as separate substances. As we saw earlier in this chapter, instead of accepting Descartes's three substance system – infinite intellectual substance (God), finite mind, and finite body – Spinoza posits a single, infinite substance. Spinoza also rejects and revises the Cartesian notion of attribute and locates thought and extension in the same infinite substance, rejecting the Cartesian position that they are attributes that inhere in separate substances. Finally, Spinoza retains the causal separation of thought (mind) and extension (body) but explains their mutual presence in the individual not through intertwining but through identity: thought and extension are two attributes inhering in the same substance. While their causality/explainability are categorically distinct from one another, their being is indistinguishable – two aspects/perspectives of the same fundamental existent. Thus, for every expression of the attribute thought, there is a corresponding

³¹ Andreas Schmidt is by no means alone when he identifies an ambiguous treatment of substance in Descartes that Spinoza improves upon—makes coherent and “univocal.” (Andreas Schmidt, “Substance Monism and Identity Theory in Spinoza,” in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. Koistinen: 79–98.) However, it will be shown below that Spinoza's concept of substance also suffers from ambiguity. Indeed, I will argue that the ambiguity generates contradictions in Spinoza's system requiring that we revise the system if we are to make it coherent.

expression of the attribute of body, while both inhere in the same infinite substance. Infinite substance viewed through the attribute of thought *is the same thing* as that which is viewed through the attribute of extension. Thought and extension are two different expressions of one and the same thing—substance. This is an overview of Spinoza’s parallelism. Let us now view it in greater detail.

Spinoza’s system, it is uncontroversial to say, is a substance monism. There is one fundamental infinite substance: God. This substance is absolutely infinite and thus expresses its nature in an infinity of ways. These expressions of substance are attributes, which themselves complete representations of the essence of substance. There is an infinity of attributes but those of concern to humans, those that humans have access to, are twofold: thought (mind) and extension (body). Because each attribute is a complete representation of the essence of substance, each attribute is complete in its explanation of substance and thus causally comprehensive. In other words, an attribute provides a complete causal account of substance. The causal distinction between the attributes follows from their completeness: extension provides a complete account of the essence of substance and thought provides a complete account of the essence of substance. This leaves no room for thought to inform extension nor extension to inform thought. They each, in parallel, provide a complete account of substance and thus Spinoza’s position on attributes and their relation has come to be known as parallelism.

Spinoza’s system accepts the Cartesian view that mind and body are distinct (but not really distinct) and the perspective 2, above, that bodies are mechanistic and explainable only in terms of other bodies. To see how Spinoza’s system broadly, and his parallelism specifically,

address 1 and 3, above, and overcome the deficiencies of Descartes's solution, let us now look to the individual.

For Spinoza, all individuals, indeed all things, are modes of substance. That is, things are modifications (modes) of substance, or substance expressed in a particular way.³² All individuals are thus modes of substance that when considered under the attribute of thought are thinking things, or minds, and when considered under the attribute of extension are extended things, or bodies. In this way, Spinoza maintains both 1 and 3 above. An individual's identity is constituted by mind but also by body: an individual has a mind and a body. Importantly, these are the same thing ontologically for Spinoza. A person *is* a mind and *is* a body. A person is a mind when considered under the attribute of thought and a person is a body when considered under the attribute of extension. This is Spinoza's explanation of how mind and body coexist in the individual.

Parallelism is not merely a theory applicable to individuals and the mind-body problem. Spinoza's theory of parallelism is intimately connected with his theory of attributes. As such, parallelism is something of a misnomer—it suggests that the modes of the attributes of thought and extension run in parallel whereas a complete account entails that parallelism is true of all attributes, including the ones humans cannot conceive. However, since thought and extension are the only attributes accessible to human knowers, we can, as Spinoza does in E2P7, view parallelism through the narrow view of the attributes of mind and body.

³² Spinoza's definition of body differs significantly from that of idea—the complement of body is mind and ideas are formed by minds; what is formed by bodies? There is a lacking parallel structure here. Of course individuals' minds are ideas in God's mind, but so are bodies.

Spinoza's revision of Descartes's solution to the mind/body problem is both brilliant and unique but is not without shortcomings. At least three central issues emerge from Spinoza's parallelism—all resulting from Spinoza's anti-idealism bias, or so I argue. It is to these that we now turn.

2.3.2. Central Issues with the Doctrine of Parallelism

We have already encountered numerous problems with Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism in the context of scholarly interpretations. Here we will take some time to develop an understanding of the problems that are most relevant to this dissertation and identify how they relate to the issue of Spinozist idealism. Specifically, we will outline three central issues with Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism that indicate that it is at least *prima facie* problematic and possibly constitutes an irresolvable internal inconsistency, i.e., *aporia*. Ultimately, I argue that we will be forced to acknowledge that Spinoza's parallelism is broken and that the only way to salvage his system is through friendly revision.

Virtually all commentators agree that Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism entails that the attributes run in parallel to one another without convergence – they are said to have an identical order and connection. However, I maintain that Spinoza's attributes do not and cannot maintain an identical order and connection, in large part due to the bias against idealism that we explored above.

The central issues with Spinoza's parallelism explored below are: 1) the external-to-attribute dependence of modes, 2) the conflict between thought-being parallelism and

attribute parallelism, and 3) Spinoza's cross-attribute reasoning as a violation of the conceptual barrier between the attributes.

2.3.2.1. Central Issue 1: External-to-Attribute Dependence of Modes

As noted above, Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism identifies an isomorphic structure of modes within each of the attributes, including thought and extension. However, this is not the only parallelism that is at work in Spinoza's system. In addition to attribute parallelism, Spinoza's system admits of a thought-being parallelism as well.³³ E2P7 is the most commonly cited evidence of Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism in the *Ethics*. It reads, "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things." Importantly, and due to Spinoza's ambiguous use of "thing" as discussed above, there are two possible (indeed I will later argue that both are actual) meanings of parallelism as stated here: First, if we take Spinoza's use of "thing" here to mean extended objects—and I think we have strong reasons to accept this meaning—then we have a parallelism between thought and extension; secondly, if we take Spinoza's use of "thing" here to mean mode—and I think we have strong reasons to accept this meaning as well—then we have a parallelism between thinking and being. Let us now take up each of these interpretations.

The generally accepted interpretation of Spinoza's parallelism in E2P7 is that Spinoza means "extended object" by "thing". That is, E2P7 is widely taken to entail that the structure/function/causality of modes of thought are mirrored in modes of extension. This is

³³ Melamed makes a strong case for this in Chapter 5 of his *Spinoza's Metaphysics*. My interpretation agrees with much of what Melamed says there but departs in significant ways regarding the nature of thought in thought-being parallelism. This issue will be taken up in detail in Chapter 3.

attribute parallelism. We have good reasons for accepting attribute parallelism from E2P7. Attribute parallelism coheres with Spinoza's ontology of substance in that modes are modifications, properties if you will, of substance that are expressed now under this attribute, now under that attribute, etc. Because modes are essentially substance determined in a particular way, and attributes are domains in which modes attain recognition, any mode of substance, along with its relations to all other modes, should find parallel expression in each attribute. Attribute parallelism is thus a legitimate, indeed accurate, interpretation of Spinoza's parallelism in E2P7.

More controversially, I maintain, along with Melamed, that there is a second parallelism at work here: thought-being parallelism. If we take Spinoza to mean "mode" by "thing" in E2P7, we find that there is a thought, not only for every extended mode but for every mode—even modes of thought. We have good reasons for accepting thought-being parallelism from E2P7. Thought-being parallelism coheres with Spinoza's doctrine of ideas of ideas. Thought-being parallelism sheds light on why conception plays such a fundamental role in the constitution of every element in Spinoza's metaphysical system.³⁴ We also gain insight into the special role of thought in Spinoza's ethics.³⁵ Because Spinoza's thought-being parallelism coheres with his system, this is a legitimate, and again accurate, interpretation of Spinoza's parallelism in E2P7.

³⁴ The relationship of thought to the foundations of the essential elements of Spinoza's metaphysics will be taken up as a significant reason to interpret Spinoza's system as idealism in Chapter 3.

³⁵ In Chapter 3 I will demonstrate the deficiency of interpretations of Spinoza's system that cannot account for his ethics and demonstrate that my friendly revision is economic in its ability to account for Spinoza's ethics.

Due to the legitimacy of each of the above parallelisms, we seemingly cannot eliminate one without undermining various other doctrines that are clearly maintained by Spinoza. Perhaps worse though is that these two doctrines of parallelism are in conflict with one another.

Spinoza's discussion of the attribute of thought, as it relates to thought-being parallelism, has been observed to present an apparent lopsidedness of the attributes that conflicts with his claims about a symmetry present in attribute parallelism.³⁶ We find further evidence of this ambiguous treatment of thought in E2P3 where Spinoza claims, "In God there is necessarily the idea both of his essence and of everything that necessarily follows from his essence." We can observe the same thought-being consequence here as that in E2P7: there is a thought-everything parallelism.³⁷

The direct consequences of the simultaneous truth of both kinds of parallelism can be identified by the following two claims that follow from Spinoza's double parallelism:

1) thought and extension are isomorphic attributes and the order and connection of their respective modes are identical;

and

2) thought has infinitely more modes than extension.

Spinoza's attribute parallelism is essential to Spinoza's project in that it is predicated on the principle of identity—there is a single substance (God) whose essence is expressed fully (and thus equally) by each of its attributes. This is clearly stated in E2P7S: "thinking substance

³⁶ For example, recall Bennett's criticism of Spinoza's doctrine of ideas of ideas in Chapter 1.

³⁷ There exists an idea in God for/of every existent/mode.

and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that. So too, a mode of extension and the *idea* of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two ways.” However, it is clear from our literary review in Chapter 1 that this natural consequence of attribute parallelism cannot hold if there exist far more modes of thought than modes of any other attribute.

We may recall that the problem just stated is what we have seen in Bennett and Melamed. Bennett has called the inflated number of modes in the attribute of thought due thought-being parallelism “the doctrine of ideas of ideas.” Bennett recognizes that there is no sufficient solution to this problem given to us by Spinoza and thus takes the liberty of a materialist interpretation of Spinoza’s system. Melamed, on the other hand, as we have seen, claims to have a solution to this precise problem. Because the doctrine of ideas of ideas only follows from thought-being parallelism, if ideas and things are distinct from one another (and E2P7 has explained that this is not the case) there is an issue. That is, if the so-called inflation of the attribute of thought can be re-identified as a dynamic internal structure of each mode of thought, then the problem is avoided. Unfortunately, this does not solve the problem of coherence as E2P7 and E2P7S identify a relation of identity between the modes of each attribute and, as such, an internal dynamism in the modes of thought cannot differ from its representation in other attributes and retain the coherence of attribute parallelism. If attribute parallelism is maintained, we would expect to see a 1 to 1 correlation of all properties of modes across attributes yet what Melamed provides us is the presence of wholly unique properties of modes considered under the attribute of thought.

Spinoza thus has a coherence problem between two contradictory/incompatible versions of parallelism: attribute parallelism cannot coexist in harmony with his thought-being parallelism. We see clear (further) evidence of this incoherence in later propositions in the *Ethics*: in E2P20-E2P22 Spinoza makes certain claims that contradict attribute parallelism.

Let us now view the problematic propositions so that we may observe the conflict directly.

E2P20: There is also in God the idea of knowledge of the human mind, and this follows in God and is related to God in the same way as the idea or knowledge of the human body.

Proof: Thought is an attribute of God, and so the idea of both Thought and its affections—and consequently of the human mind as well—must necessarily be in God. [...] Therefore, the idea or knowledge of the mind follows in God and is related to God in the same way as the idea or knowledge of the body.

E2P21: This idea of the mind is united to the mind in the same way as the mind is united to the body.

Proof: That the mind is united to the body we have shown from the fact that the body is the object of the mind, and so by the same reasoning the idea of the mind must be united to its object—that is, to the mind itself—in the same way as the mind is united to the body.

E2P22: “The human mind perceives not only the affections of the body but also the ideas of these affections.

Proof: The ideas of ideas of affections follow in God and are related to God in the same way as ideas of affections [...]

From these three propositions we see that Spinoza clearly intends that the mind contain both ideas of bodies (which are the objects of these ideas) and ideas of ideas (which are the objects of these ideas). We are left with the following inconsistent claims:

- 1) There is a body (mode of extension) for every idea (mode of thought). (E2P7)
- 2) There exist ideas that have bodies (modes of extension) as their objects. (E2P21)
- 3) There exist ideas that have ideas (modes of thought) as their objects. (E2P22)

The unresolved conflict between these two kinds of parallelism is that 2 entails that there be more modes of thought than modes of extension and, as such, contradicts 3. In other words, it

violates Spinoza's claim of substance-identity between the attributes i.e. by making them discernable. For example, an extended mode, say an apple, has a corresponding mode in thought, the idea of the apple; however, the idea of the apple is an object of a further thought and so on *ad infinitum* and these thoughts of thoughts, having thoughts as their objects, have no corresponding mode of body—there is no extended apple of, or about, the apple. Spinoza has inflated the attribute of thought beyond the attribute of extension (indeed all the other attributes) making attribute parallelism impossible to maintain. We can only conclude from this conflict between thought-being parallelism and attribute parallelism that there is a deep problem with Spinoza's parallelism.

2.3.2.2. Central Issue 2: The Conflict Between Thought-Being Parallelism and Attribute Parallelism

One of the most recurring controversies discussed regarding Spinoza's system is the relationship between the attribute of thought and the attribute of extension. While Spinoza clearly indicates that his attribute parallelism entails that the modes of each attribute are identical with each other and are merely the same mode expressed under different attributes (as we have seen in E2P7), he nonetheless identifies relations between the attributes.³⁸ For example, the idea of a table is evaluable in terms of truth/falsity depending on the extended table which it takes as its object. Materialist interpreters take relations of dependence such as this to indicate that thought is dependent on extension. Idealist interpreters, on the other

³⁸ That there is any discussion to be had at all about inter-attribute relations is a problem that is to be taken up in the next section.

hand, identify a priority of thought in the constitution of extended objects despite such relations. We now view each of these interpretations on cross-attribute dependence in turn.

There are two primary perspectives on the relations between the attributes that are relevant to this dissertation: materialist perspectives and idealist perspectives. Materialist interpreters claim that modes of thought are dependent on modes of extension. Idealist interpreters, on the other hand, maintain that modes of extension are dependent on thought. In what follows we will explore both of these options. However, it behooves us to note that if either of these positions is correct—if modes of thought depend on modes of extension or *vice versa*, then Spinoza has a serious problem with his doctrine of parallelism: modes of an attribute do not run in parallel but are explained across attributes.³⁹ Let us now view the argument for external-to-attribute dependence of modes in both directions.

Materialists frequently cite E2P11 as a justification for the dependence of modes of thought on modes of extension, concluding a more dominant role of extension in Spinoza's system as a result. E2P11 states, "That which constitutes the actual being of the human mind is basically nothing else but the idea of an individual actually existing thing." In Chapter 3 I will argue the fallaciousness of interpreting this passage (and others like it) as materialism. For now, let us flesh out the reasoning behind interpreting passages such as these as indicative of materialism.

³⁹ A third option might be that modes exist independently of the attributes. If this is the case, the relationship between the attributes that is attribute parallelism remains problematic. However, this cannot be the case, as this would entail that the attributes represent modes that exist independently of any attribute and Spinoza clearly maintains that modes can only be expressed under an attribute. Further, attributes would then become an alienating mechanism in Spinoza's system, providing appearances at the expense of the things in themselves. Whereas Kant may be reasonably interpreted along these lines, there is no room in Spinoza's system for noumenal existences.

We have already noted that there are two interpretations of “actually existing thing” and found that both meanings are apparently (and problematically) endorsed by Spinoza. One of the complications for maintaining both positions is the seeming dependence of thought on extension. If modes of thought are nothing more than representations of modes of extension, we are presented with some odd consequences. Consider, for example, what Spinoza says in E2P12: “if the object of the idea constituting the human mind is a body, nothing can happen in that body without its being perceived by the mind.” Commentators have repeatedly criticized this claim.⁴⁰ One may simply reflect on the states of their internal organs to see that such a claim is doubtful (I may know the state of my stomach when hungry, but nobody is similarly aware of the status of their liver, appendix, etc.). Despite such consequences, however, materialist interpreters are able to provide substantial textual support for their position. Spinoza further indicates a dependence of thought on extension in E2P13: “The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body—i.e. a definite mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else.” These statements, and others like them, provide materialists with the ammunition they need to claim that the attribute of thought is dependent on the attribute of extension.

Curley provides what I take to be the most effective summation of this position when he states:

It is true that some of the general propositions Spinoza enunciates early in Part II have a dualistic ring to them [...] But if we follow out the details of Spinoza’s treatment of the mind, as it develops in the course of Part II, I do not see how we can characterize it as anything but a materialistic program. To understand the mind, we must understand the

⁴⁰ Michael LeBuffe discusses the problems and potential solutions (all of which fail in my view) regarding this issue in his “Theories about Consciousness in Spinoza’s Ethics,” *Philosophical Review* 119, no. 4 (2010): 531–563, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-2010-013>.

body, without which the mind could not function or even exist. In spite of all the parallelistic talk, the order of understanding never proceeds from mind to body.⁴¹

Despite Spinoza's clear endorsement of parallelism, there is a materialism at work that undermines it. I take up a refutation of this and other materialist interpreters in the next chapter. For now, it is clear that Curley, along with all other materialist interpreters of which I am aware, take Spinoza's parallelism to insufficiently represent his system.

According to materialist interpreters, there is a dependence relation of thought on extension. They are able to provide ample textual support for this claim. In doing so, they recognize the illegitimacy of Spinoza's parallelism. Idealist interpreters also recognize the illegitimacy of Spinoza's parallelism. However, they view the lopsidedness of the attributes as favoring the attribute of thought over the attribute of extension.

Idealists who maintain that modes of extension are dependent on modes of thought also manage to provide substantial textual evidence for their position.⁴² Among the more commonly cited textual evidence for interpreting Spinoza as privileging thought over extension are the definitions of book one of the *Ethics*. Here is a sampling of relevant definitions:

E1D1: By that which is self-caused I mean that whose essence involves existence; or that whose nature can be conceived only as existing.

E1D3: By substance I mean that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed.

E1D4: By attribute I mean that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence.

⁴¹ Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 78; LeBuffe, *Spinoza on Reason*, 14.

⁴² The simple fact that there is substantial textual support for both thought-extension and extension-thought dependence should clearly indicate that Spinoza's parallelism is in need of revision.

Idealist commentators identify the role of thought in the very definitions of the most fundamental metaphysical posits out of which Spinoza's system emerges; thought is a backbone of the system. Take, for example, the role of the intellect in the definition of attribute. Even if thoughts depend on their objects which are modes of extension, the very being of extension depends on thought. This seems to suggest that thought is more fundamental to Spinoza's system than extension.

Beyond the definitions, idealist interpreters are able to view Spinoza's two parallelisms—thought-being parallelism and attribute parallelism—and identify the former as broadly impactful; if there is not an idea, then there is not a "thing". Della Rocca has, by way of broader argumentation, come to identify this as the explainability thesis: to be is to be explainable.⁴³

Regardless as to whether thought is more fundamental than extension or *vice versa*, there is one thing that both of these approaches agrees on. Namely, that Spinoza's attribute parallelism fails. So long as a dependence relation is considered at all, the modes of one attribute extend (at least conceptually) beyond the attribute under which they are being considered. Since this clearly violates E2P6, we observe a contradiction in Spinoza's thought that results from cross-attribute dependence relations and may thus conclude once again that Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism is broken and in need of revision.

⁴³ For the ubiquity of the PSR in Spinoza see Della Rocca, *Spinoza*. For the explainability thesis and its relation to the PSR specifically, see Michael Della Rocca, "A Rationalist Manifesto: Spinoza and the Principle of Sufficient Reason," *Philosophical Topics* 31 (2003): 75–93.

2.3.2.3. Central Issue 3: Spinoza's Cross-Attribute Reasoning

That Spinoza's parallelism is untenable, I now take as demonstrated. Thought-being parallelism conflicts with attribute parallelism. Spinoza also subordinates thought to extension and extension to thought. There remains, however, a further issue that, when brought to light, helps us to see that Spinoza's parallelism is not merely untenable but consistently violated—it never truly gets off the ground and is never given a consistent treatment by Spinoza. The violation of which I speak is Spinoza's reasoning across the attributes.

Spinoza explicitly warns us not to reason across the attributes. We find this caution in several places in the ethics. Here are a couple of instances where Spinoza prohibits cross attribute reasoning:

E1D2: A thing is said to be finite in its own kind when it can be limited by another thing of the same nature. For example, a body is said to be finite because we can always conceive of another body greater than it. So, too, a thought is limited by another thought. But body is not limited by thought, nor thought by body.

E2P6: The modes of any attribute have God for their cause only insofar as he is considered under that attribute, and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute.

He goes on to explain in the proof: "Each attribute is conceived though itself independently of any other. Therefore, the modes of any attribute involve the conception of their own attribute, and not that of any other."

The prohibition against cross-attribute reasoning has come to be known as the "explanatory barrier".⁴⁴ The explanatory barrier requires that interaction between attributes,

⁴⁴ The language of "explanatory barrier" is not always used to identify the isolation of the attributes from one another but is nonetheless widely recognized. For example, Jon Miller is clearly bearing the explanatory barrier out when he rightly observes, "Because of the independence of thought and extension, Spinoza cannot invoke words and ideas belonging to one attribute when explaining phenomena in terms of the other. Because all explanations must proceed solely in terms of one attribute, it follows that each attribute must possess sufficient conceptual

by way of both causation and explanation (which are essentially the same thing), is improper and fallacious. Spinoza's metaphysical system claims that each attribute is a full and complete representation of substance. That is, each and every attribute provides a complete account of the essence of substance. As such, accounts of substance that involve a violation of the explanatory barrier are prohibited and can only result in confusion. However, Spinoza himself reasons across the attributes, which has caused a great deal of confusion in the secondary literature. Let us view two cases in which this transgression occurs as they are central to this dissertation: explaining thought via extension and explaining modes in terms of thought.

Spinoza's account of ideas repeatedly appeals to the attribute of extension. As early as E1A6 Spinoza is setting up the conceptual evaluation of ideas by appeal to the attribute of extension. E1A6 states, "A true idea must agree with that of which it is the idea." Now, I say Spinoza is "setting up" an instance of cross—attribute reasoning because it is not until E2P11 that the cross-attribute reasoning begins, a reasoning that is completed in its violation of the explanatory barrier in E2P13. E2P11 states, "That which constitutes the actual being of the human mind is basically nothing else but the idea of an individual actually existing thing." This is a clear instance of thought-being parallelism which is discussed above. That Spinoza means extended thing by "actually existing thing" (recall Spinoza's ambiguous use of the term "thing") becomes clear in E2P13 which states, "The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body—i.e., a definite mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else." These three

resources to satisfy the explanatory demands being placed on it." Jon Miller, "Spinoza and the Stoics on Substance Monism," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. Koistinen, 108.

passages together function to explain thoughts and minds, each modes of thought, in terms of their objects, modes of extension.

Further examples of Spinoza's explaining thought in terms of bodies are abundant; the above transgression is not an isolated instance. I do not intend to provide a complete account here. However, I think it is important that we identify that much of Spinoza's work on human emotion transgresses the explanatory barrier as well. For example, E3D6 states, "Love is pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause." Since the objects of ideas are extended modes, love, as an experience (and therefore mental phenomenon—mode of thought), is explained by the causal activity of bodies.

I will not go on to identify the numerous instances where Spinoza explains thought in terms of extension. However, it is worth identifying these instances as motivating the materialist readings of Spinoza. Idealist readings, on the other hand, tend to focus instead on Spinoza's breaching of the explanatory barrier in his explanation of modes in terms of thought. However, in the interest of clarity, it is imperative that we recognize thought-being parallelism as a conceptual foundationalism for things that are given the ontic status of "being". Regardless of any idea-object relationship that may support a materialist reading of Spinoza's parallelism, idealists recognize that both the idea and the object rely on thought per Spinoza's thought-being parallelism. This is a clear use of the attribute of thought to explain modes of any attribute, including non-thought modes such as those under the attribute of extension.

The human ability to understand substance entails exploration via an attribute at the expense of alternative attributes. This is to say: understanding substance happens fully and completely through a single attribute. This seemingly entails that understanding substance

cannot, but confusedly, entail more than one attribute. So what is the conceivable utility to discussing substance by way of more than one attribute?

The above question appears to have only two possible responses: 1) the involvement of multiple attributes in the explanation of substance informs the nature of substance, or 2) the utility of the appeal to multiple substances is redundant. Neither of these options offer any utility in the understanding of the true metaphysic that Spinoza is attempting to convey. My claim is that the discussion of multiple attributes is itself fallacious and betrays a confusion in Spinoza's system. Specifically, I maintain that Spinoza's cross-attribute reasoning incoherently follows from his ambiguous treatment of reality as it pertains to the modes of variant attributes.

Each of the above central issues is, in my view, sufficient to undermine Spinoza's parallelism. If I am right, then philosophical solutions to the problems with Spinoza's parallelism require that these issues be overcome. Spinoza's parallelism is broken; none of the views expressed in Chapter 1, we have seen, provide a way out for Spinoza's system. In Chapter 3 I will undertake a solution of my own. However, we should note that it is not surprising that scholars have had a difficult time justifying their solutions to the problems now identified as the problem runs deeper than parallelism—Spinoza's navigation of these issues cannot overcome the issues in that it is precisely Spinoza's mistakes that produce them. The rejection of certain Cartesian positions has taken Spinoza down a unique path with its own pitfalls. In an attempt to solve Cartesian problems, Spinoza has awoken new ones. The further problems that Spinoza suffers lie with his theory of attributes and their relation to substance. It is to that which we now turn.

2.4. Spinoza's Deep Attribute Problem⁴⁵

No solution to Spinoza's parallelism problems can arise without first identifying their source. Here I argue that Spinoza's parallelism is untenable for a deeper reason: Spinoza's theory of attributes is underdeveloped and thus erroneous. In what follows, I argue that Spinoza fails to differentiate the categories of substance and attribute and thus the attributes from one another. Only once we have identified this root cause of Spinoza's problems with parallelism will we be able to identify the conditions that need meeting in order to present a solution.

2.4.1. Spinoza's Conflation of Substance and Attribute

It is generally accepted that Spinoza's system is a substance monism that is expressed in an infinite number of attributes. While this thread is generally right, the distinction between substance and attribute is not always clear. In fact, there are good reasons for conceiving of the attributes as substance(s) themselves.⁴⁶ Here I argue that Spinoza's category of attribute is insufficiently differentiated from substance.

Consider the following line of reasoning: if the attributes are truly self-sufficient and truly complete in their representation of the essence of substance, then nothing can possibly be

⁴⁵ Noa Shein identifies three approaches to Spinoza's theory of attributes in the literature: 1) that there are only two attributes, 2) that there are more than two attributes, and 3) that attributes come in pairs. While there is some case to be made for 1 and 3, 2 is the more credible reading in my view and the view from which I write. However, I do not expect that a favoring of 1 or 3 will undermine any of my core criticisms nor with it undermine my solution in the next chapter. Noa Shein, "Spinoza's Theory of Attributes," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed June 16, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/spinoza-attributes/>.

⁴⁶ In letters 1 and 2 Spinoza is challenged by Henry Oldenburg to justify the distinction of the attributes thought and extension and Spinoza reiterates his position in the *Ethics* that there cannot be two substances. This is, of course, an insufficient treatment of the issue and does not resolve the conflict.

gained from an exploration of multiple attributes. Shouldn't an account of substance from the perspective of a single attribute be sufficient? Not only ought the exposition of substance via a single attribute be sufficient, it ought to be total/complete. The inclusion of a second, third, etc. attribute in the explanation of substance suggests, at a minimum, that the account of substance explored via the single attribute is insufficient and therefore not a complete representation of substance.

Let us consult the following textual evidence in order that we might see the manner in which attribute is conflated with substance.

E1D3: By substance I mean that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed.

E1P10: Each attribute of one substance must be conceived through itself.

E1P8: Every substance is necessarily infinite.

E1P11: God, or substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists.

E1P20: God's existence and his essence are one and the same.

E1D4: By attribute I mean that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence.⁴⁷

From these we may easily identify a couple of deep commonalities between the categories of substance and attribute. These are 1) they are self-conceived, and 2) they are infinite. More importantly, though, it appears that if a) god's existence *is* god's essence, and b) attributes constitute the essence of substance, then it follows that c) attributes are equivalent to God. With the further recognition that God is substance, we see rather clearly that substance is

⁴⁷ It has been suggested by Haserot that a more accurate translation here is "By attribute I mean that which the intellect perceives of substance *as if* constituting its essence." See Haserot, "Spinoza's Definition of Attribute" (1953) 503. This translation attempts to overcome the conflation I am critiquing here. However, insofar as the intellect is capable of adequate (true) knowledge, the addition of "as if" does not delegitimize the truth of an attribute constituting the essence of substance.

conflated with attribute: attributes constitute the essence of substance which *is* the existence of substance.

The above provides us with good reason for identifying an attribute with substance. However, Spinoza also differentiates attribute from substance. E1P11, already listed, distinguishes them by identifying the attributes as infinite in number whereas E1P14p identifies God as one. We also see Spinoza give distinct roles to different attributes. We have already seen a few of these above (e.g. modes of extension are the objects of modes of thought). However, the most substantial differentiation between the roles played by the different attributes lies in Spinoza's ethics.

Spinoza's ethics clearly favors thought over extension. One of the most controversial propositions in the *Ethics*, E5P23, states, "The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed along with body, but something of it remains, which is eternal." The ethical project that follows this differentiation between thought and extension follows the attribute of thought, leaving any relevance of the attribute of extension behind. As such, it cannot be the case that both thought and extension completely represent the essence of substance (i.e. account for everything in nature) if thought plays a greater explanatory role in Spinoza's system than extension. In the next chapter I use this issue to justify the classification of Spinoza's system as idealism. For now, let us simply identify that Spinoza's imbalance between the attributes appears to justify the differentiation of the categories of attribute and substance but only does so fallaciously. There remains a conflation between attribute and the attribute of thought in Spinoza's system, a conflation that allows Spinoza to undertake lines of reasoning that are integral to his system such as the role of conception in the constitutions of his fundamental ontic categories.

It is my contention that the conflation of attribute with substance in Spinoza's system is not simply another indication of an erroneous doctrine of parallelism but does significant work in Spinoza's system in that it allows him to elevate thought beyond the level of attribute to the level of substance. Indeed, in view of E5P23 above, the role of thought in the constitution of the basic ontic categories of Spinoza's system, and the capacity for (at least in part) the eternal existence of the mind by way of the ethical category of blessedness, we see thought taking up deep functions integral to those played by substance itself. While it is true that there is a parallelism problem in the denial of these roles to the attribute of extension, it is by way of the conflation of attribute with substance that conception, the infinite intellect, and the mapping of the human mind to that of God, become possible. Thus, we see that Spinoza's problems with parallelism extend beyond parallelism to his theory of attributes; Spinoza has a deep attribute problem.

2.4.2. Spinoza's Conflation of the Attributes with Each Other

We have already seen that Spinoza reasons across the attributes despite the clear prohibition against doing so. Here I argue that Spinoza's cross attribute reasoning derives from a conflation of the attributes with one another. Specifically, I claim that the attributes are both distinct and identical in Spinoza's system, allowing for both the prohibition and realization of cross-attribute reasoning, dependence, and conceivability.

Spinoza's ontology is composed of only two categories: substance and mode. That is, if a thing exists, it is either substance or a mode of substance. The attributes are not ontic but rather ways of conceiving of substance and its modifications. Thus, the attributes do not, or at

least should not, impact what exists in Spinoza's ontology. It is precisely because substance and its modes are not (or ought not be) impacted by the infinite ways in by which they can be conceived, that the attributes are said to run in parallel with each other. Consider the following example.

Suppose there is a world composed of only an illuminated chess board. This world contains the game of chess (the totality) and each of its particular expressions (the board and pieces). Now suppose that we shift the illumination from say white to red light. The illumination in both cases is what allows one to conceive of the world and its constituent parts; the shift in illumination does not fundamentally change the world but rather is a way in which it is conceived—as white tinted or red tinted. Regardless of the color illuminating the chess board, all of the pieces will have the same relations to each other and to the whole. In this same way, whether substance and its modes be conceived under the attribute of thought or the attribute of extension, the modes themselves, their relations with each other, and their relations to substance, ought to be the same. As such, it ought not matter whether we explain the relation of a red pawn to a white queen or associate the red pawn with its white instantiation. After all, they are the same pawn and the relations between modes should remain regardless of the light shown on them. When taken to its logical end, the claim here is that there is no *real* difference between the attributes (illuminations) and claims like “A’s mind is nothing but the idea that is the body of A and so A’s mind depends on A’s body” seem untroubling. However, we have seen Spinoza cross-attribute reasoning in this manner and determined that this constitutes an inconsistency in his system.

The deep attribute problem here is the simultaneous identity and distinction of the attributes.⁴⁸ By way of the conflation of the attributes, we might accept cross-attribute reasoning. However, if the attributes are not different from one another, then there are not actually multiple attributes in Spinoza's system but one; if thought is not distinct from extension, then thought *is* extension.⁴⁹ But thought is not extension according to Spinoza and thus we again see that there are deep problems with Spinoza's theory of attributes and we ought not expect a coherent doctrine of parallelism when the theory of attributes on which it depends is incoherent.

2.5. The Consequences of Spinoza's Attribute Problem

We have seen the incoherence of Spinoza's theory of attributes in the simultaneous distinction and conflation of the attributes both with each other and with substance. Spinoza tries to solve the mind-body problem with his attribute parallelism, which ought (but does not) entail that there be no real difference between the attributes, and he tries to construct a comprehensive epistemology with his thought-being parallelism. The incompatibility of Spinoza's two doctrines of parallelism is discussed in detail above. However, I claim that the

⁴⁸ Melamed has observed that Spinoza's definitions of attribute and substance evolve considerably, even switching their meaning between early versions of the *Ethics* and the final product (Yitzhak Melamed, "Spinoza's Deification of Existence," *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* 6 [2012], 90–91). This observation helps to explain how Spinoza came to identify and distinguish the two concepts.

⁴⁹ Haserot and others have discussed whether or not the attributes are real at length; the consensus is that they must be really distinct or at least are intended to be so—how could a clear and distinct idea in God be anything but accurate? Here we see that this does not help the coherence of Spinoza's system. See for example Francis Haserot, "Spinoza's Definition of Attribute," *The Philosophical Review* 62, no. 4 (October 1953): 499–513.

problems that exist with Spinoza's parallelism extend beyond parallelism to the (deeper) level of the attributes themselves.

What I have been calling "Spinoza's deep attribute problem" disrupts his entire philosophical system (metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics) and calls into question an extraordinary number of his claims/conclusions. A consequence of Spinoza's geometric method is that when a load bearing element of the system proves deficient, it undermines virtually every other element of the system. I do not intent to discuss the entirety of the issues that arise from Spinoza's deep attribute problem. Instead, I now identify how Spinoza's deep attribute problem impacts his positions regarding ethics, human freedom, the problem of the one and the many, the mind-body problem, and the knowability of God/nature.

We have identified four possible relationships between the attributes and between the attributes and substance. These are 1) the attributes are identical with each other, 2) the attributes are distinct from one another, 3) the attributes are identical with substance, and 4) the attributes are distinct from substance. Spinoza's deep attribute problem lies in the varied acceptance and rejection of each of these options at different times. That is, because Spinoza sometimes claims each of these options as his position regarding the attributes, ambiguity is communicated to the rest of his system. Let us use these 4 claims to now show how the above stated issues are each impacted by Spinoza's deep attribute problem.

Spinoza's positions on ethics and human freedom are intertwined by way of blessedness, a state of freedom that stands as the fundamental ethical goal in Spinoza's system. However, virtually all commentators on Spinoza's ethics identify a fundamental problem that stems from what I call Spinoza's deep attribute problem. Human freedom and the ethical

journey of the individual human being draws from, focuses on, and concerns itself with the mind at the expense of the body. Commentators frequently complain that Spinoza's foundational metaphysical work favors the identity of the attributes and the resultant parallelism between them (though we have seen that this is not exactly the case) but ultimately discards the identity and parallelism of the attributes when he develops his ethics. The most frequent evidence cited for this confusion is E5P23 where Spinoza claims that "The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed along with body, but something of it remains, which is eternal. We also see a tension between the determined self and the state of blessedness. A perfect mind is a blessed mind that maps itself onto the adequate ideas of god that are expressed under the attribute of thought enabling the blessed individual to survive in infinity; a feat that is seemingly only possible if the attributes are conflated with substance. On the other hand, blessedness seems an impossible achievement if the attributes stand apart from substance, for then true perfection could not occur.

Regarding the problem of the one and the many, we may cite the long-standing controversy of acosmism in Spinoza's system. Acosmism has been a controversial interpretation of Spinoza's system from the get go and has been recently revived by Della Rocca.⁵⁰ If the attributes and all that is conceived under them are conflated with substance, then the identity of every individual thing is called into question—the real identity of modes is vacuous, unreal insofar as it is a diversity and real only in its unity—which would entail a fundamental unreality of distinct existences. If the attributes are the same and the modes subsumed under them

⁵⁰ See chapter 1 of Della Rocca, "Rationalism, Idealism, Monism, and Beyond."

comprise a fundamental unity, then the reality of the world consists only in substance monism (the one) and diversity (the many) cannot correctly describe reality. However, if the attributes are not conflated with substance but are distinct from it then Spinoza's monism is called into question since being would not be exclusive to substance but would apply to a multiplicity of distinct domains.⁵¹ Without a clear theory of attributes, there can be no satisfactory selection between these two options.

The mind/body problem is perhaps the clearest place where an insufficient theory of attributes is shown to impact Spinoza's conclusions to metaphysical problems of his day. It is generally agreed upon that Spinoza's solution to the mind-body problem is the establishment of identity of mind with body and body with mind. This interpretation relies on the conflation of the attributes with one another and we have seen that this is problematic. If, on the other hand, the attributes are in fact distinct then a strict identity relation between mind and body becomes impossible due to the identifiably different characteristics of mind and body. In either case Spinoza's system would remain vexed by the problems of parallelism noted above.

Finally, Spinoza's attribute problem impacts his epistemology. If the attributes are indistinct from one another then Spinoza's discussion of thought having body as its object is impotent which seemingly affects Spinoza's dedication to the natural sciences (validating knowledge of nature). If, on the other hand, the attributes are distinct, there appears to be a gap, an untraversable space, separating thought from body which would entail a fundamental ignorance of body on the part of mind. If the attributes are conflated with substance,

⁵¹ Della Rocca applies Jonathan Schaffer's work on various kinds of monism in "Razing Structures to the Ground" and makes a strong case for Spinoza's substance monism as existence (not metaphysical) monism.

knowledge of body might become possible but certainly not by way of modes of the attribute of thought reaching out to modes of the attribute of extension; modes of thought would be at best indirectly related to modes of extension by way of substance in something like occasionalism.⁵²

The scholarly literature has proven deficient in solving many the above stated issues as they emerge from Spinoza's deep attribute problem. Instead of identifying the root of the problem regarding Spinoza's parallelism, ethics, etc., commentators tend to address only the direct issue with which they are engaged. We have seen this in detail regarding the problems that scholars have attended to regarding Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism. The direct approach has proven deficient in that no direct solution is possible without first identifying the more fundamental problem of Spinoza's theory of attributes. As such, our investigation into Spinozist idealism begins with parallelism but penetrates into the whole of Spinoza's system. In the subsequent chapter, we will see that a relatively minor and surprisingly friendly revision to Spinoza's use of the active/passive distinction will allow for a drastic increase in the coherence of his system and will identify Spinoza's system as coherent only when considered as idealism.

⁵² Nadler observes in *The Best of All Possible Worlds*, Chapter 8, that Malebranche was frequently accused of Spinozism due to his influential occasionalism as solution to the mind-body problem.

Chapter 3: An Assessment of Solutions to the Attribute Problem and a Case for Ontological Idealism

3.1. Introduction: Three Kinds of Solutions

Thus far, this dissertation has presented a bleak picture of the consistency and coherence of Spinoza's philosophical system. The deep criticisms of Spinoza's system offered in Chapter 2 suggest that Spinoza's system suffers inconsistencies at the deepest levels. I have even gone so far as to suggest that direct solutions to controversial positions of Spinoza's cannot be resolved due to the incoherence of the system generally. However, the purpose of this dissertation is not to undermine Spinoza's system but rather to identify the necessary revision(s) to Spinoza's system in order to defend and rescue it—and rescue it we shall. The main argument of this dissertation is that there is a form of idealism, the terms of which remain to be fleshed out, which offers the most economic and judicious reading of Spinoza. This chapter makes a progressive case for ontological (as distinct from subjective) idealism. The chapter begins with a recap of attempted solutions to Spinoza's parallelism along with demonstrations of their insufficiency. Next, it is established that, despite the deep flaws in Spinoza's system, idealism is the predominant position put forward by Spinoza's system, albeit problematically. Lastly, I advocate a friendly revision to Spinoza's system that clearly identifies his system as ontological idealism and shores up his system against the threats to its coherence.

The problems that arose in Chapter 2 have elicited numerous and varied solutions to problems with the doctrine of parallelism. The aim of Sections 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 is twofold. First, I synthesize the attempted solutions explored in chapter one and organize them into one of

three general types of problematic solutions: 1) Thought and Extension as Subjectivity and Objectivity: solutions of this type argue in various ways that the attributes of thought and extension differ insofar as thought is subjective substance and extension is objective substance; 2) Materialism: solutions of this type argue in various ways that the attributes of thought and extension differ insofar as modes of thought depend on modes of extension; and 3) Idealism: solutions of this type argue in various ways that the attributes of thought and extension differ insofar as priority is given to thought. Secondly, I argue that solution types 1 and 2 are shown to be worthy of dismissal due to the damage they do to Spinoza's system in general while solution 3 fails only due to the problems with Spinoza's system identified in Chapter Two. If successful, my argument paves the way to showing that Spinoza's attribute problem remains in need of some remedy other than the solutions of subjectivity/objectivity, materialism, and non-revisionist idealism that are put forward in the literature. The specifics of the revision are provided in section 3.5.

3.2. First Solution: Thought and Extension as Subjectivity and Objectivity

In Chapter One we assessed the approaches of Pollack and his contemporaries to Spinoza's attribute problem and noted specific deficiencies. Here I classify Pollack's solution as a species of the subjectivity/objectivity solution, the motivations for accepting such an interpretation, and then identify precisely why any solution of this kind is deficient.

What I am calling the subjective/objective distinction of attributes is an attempt to interpret Spinoza's system in such a way as to accommodate both parallelism and the apparent individuality (the unique qualities) of the attributes while honoring Spinoza's metaphysics,

epistemology, and ethics. The subjective/objective distinction applied to the attributes basically identifies the attribute of thought with subjectivity and the attribute of extension with objectivity.

3.2.1. Motivations for Accepting the Subjective/Objective Distinction of Attributes

The subjective/objective distinction of attributes is tempting because it agrees with common intuitions about mind-body interaction and also appears, at least at first glance, to overcome certain of Spinoza's problems with parallelism. If the attribute of thought is cast as the subjective face of substance and the attribute of extension is cast as the objective face of substance, then we receive from Spinoza systematized reinforcement of commonsense intuitions about the mind's striving to comprehend the material world in which it finds itself. Further, the subjective/objective distinction appears to reconcile Spinoza's metaphysics and epistemology with his ethics. It is important to expand on these motivations but I will ultimately demonstrate that the subjective/objective distinction applied to the attributes is insufficient as an explanation of Spinoza's system.

The subjective/objective distinction agrees with much of our commonsense intuitions in the modern and contemporary periods. The internal experiences had by individual persons are generally agreed to be observably capable of manipulation and distortion and essentially dependent on the subject. Persons who seek to know the world augment their subjective experiences and seek to draw the contents of their minds closer in line to the world of external objectivity in which they find themselves. One's mind, under this view, is subjective, capable of error, seeks to organize itself to bring about a harmony with the objective world, and brings

value to a cold world of fact. In the face of the deficiencies with Spinoza's parallelism and theory of attributes, an interpretation of his system that brings it in line with common intuitions is tempting.

The subjective/objective distinction of the attributes is also tempting because it accommodates Spinoza's ethics—it has been mentioned that the majority of metaphysical approaches to the study of Spinoza's work ignores or dismisses Spinoza's ethics. Since any interpretation of Spinoza's work that dismisses his ethics challenges the coherence of his system as a whole, the subjective/objective distinction of the attributes is a tempting solution in that it appears capable of explaining how fact and value are reconciled for Spinoza—the world of value is the subjective world and the world of fact is the objective world.

3.2.2. Reasons for Rejecting of the Objective/Subjective Solution

The subjective/objective distinction applied to the attributes is only seemingly a reasonable interpretation of Spinoza's system. Here I identify three specific deficiencies with this approach that provide strong reasons for the dismissal of solutions of this type. The deficiencies that are explored below are 1) the distinction overlooks Spinoza's active/passive distinction, 2) the distinction entails a rejection of Spinoza's parallelism, and 3) the distinction introduces subjectivity into a strictly objective system. While each of these deficiencies provide strong reasons for the dismissal of interpretations of this type, the strongest reason for the rejection of this type of solution lies with 3—any solution of this type destructively introduces subjectivity to a strictly objective system.

The subjective/objective distinction of the attributes appears to create a space in which Spinoza's system can integrate fact with value, rendering his ethics compatible with his metaphysics and epistemology. However, this kind of solution fails to accommodate the mechanism already in place in Spinoza's system—namely, the active/passive distinction.

The subjective/objective distinction associates the attribute of thought with subjectivity and the attribute of extension with objectivity. These associations might be thought to provide a framework according to which fact and value might be reconciled. Because facts are essentially objective and values are commonly viewed as subjective, the subjective/objective distinction allows for the reconciliation of fact and value by way of the reconciliation between the objective (external) world and the subjective (internal) world. When a subjective mind effectively orders itself in such a way as to map onto the objective world, mind and body run in parallel and the value aspect of the mind is brought into a one to one correlation with the material, objective, world. According to this picture, the role of thought (the ethical prescription) is that one actively endeavors, or strives, towards reconciliation with the world of body. Importantly, this resembles the kind of dependence relationship across the attributes that materialist interpreters endorse. The implication for Spinoza's ethical theory is that the activity of the (subjective) mind is driven to, and depends on, its passive object, (objective) body, in order to achieve a state of truth and thus a state of virtue.

Unfortunately for the subjective/objective solution, the claim that the subjective mind is driven to objective body aligns activity with the subjectivity of the mind and passivity with the objectivity of the body. This entails that the striving operation of the mind (*conatus*) is an activity that aims to reconcile itself with a static, and thus passive, objective, and material

world. As such, the subjective/objective distinction conflicts with Spinoza's ethical theory: it turns it on its head by drawing the mind and body together (seeking reconciliation between mind and body) whereas Spinoza's ethical theory clearly disassociates the mind from the body. Rather than utilizing a subjective/objective distinction to achieve virtue, which would entail a striving for passivity, Spinoza uses an active/passive distinction to achieve virtue by way of activity—a turning away from body.¹ Take, for example, Spinoza's claim in E5P36p states,

This, the mind's love, must be related to the active nature of the mind, and is therefore an activity whereby the mind regards itself, accompanied by the idea of God as cause; that is, an activity whereby God, insofar as he can be explicated through the human mind, regards himself, accompanied by the idea of himself. And therefore this love of God is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself.

And again in E5P42p, "Blessedness consists in love toward God, a love that arises from the third kind of knowledge, and so this love must be related to the mind insofar as the mind is active; and therefore it is virtue itself." For Spinoza, the mind is reconciled with truth not by way of mapping itself onto the material world but by way of actively ordering thought towards God and thus achieving a state of love. This is the primary prescription of Spinoza's ethical theory. Whereas the subjective/objective distinction entails that the mind strives towards a reconciliation with a passive world, Spinoza's ethics claims that passivity is bad and that one should turn away from the objective world and towards a kind of existential authenticity in order to achieve virtue.

So, while the subjective/objective distinction can be thought to create a space in which fact and value can be reconciled, such a system cannot be said to be Spinozist as it conflicts

¹ Olli Koistinen, in the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*, rightly observes, "It is the central aim of his ethics to show us how to become as active as possible." Olli Koistinen, "Introduction," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. Koistinen, 13.

with Spinoza's the ethical mechanism already in place in Spinoza's system that explains blessedness. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to state that Spinoza's normative ethics is a condemnation of passivity and thus a condemnation of the subjective/objective distinction. Virtue itself arises from the maximally active mind, not the mind that has come to amass knowledge of bodies, not in a subjectivity that seeks its affirmation through adherence to body.

In section 3.4 we will see that the active/passive distinction is instrumental to my friendly revision of Spinoza's system and in chapter 4 we will further discuss the relevance of the active/passive distinction to Spinoza's ethics. For now, let us identify that the subjective/objective distinction as it is applied to the attributes is a deficient interpretation of Spinoza's system as it radically transforms the system into something that cannot be said to be recognizably Spinozist.

Another reason to reject the subjective/objective distinction of the attributes is that while it claims to integrate the unique qualities of the attributes with Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism, in fact, this distinction of the attributes is a rejection of Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism. Insofar as the attributes are conceptualizing schemes that order and make comprehensible substance and its modes, there should not be any substantial difference between the attributes. Essentially, the subjective/objective distinction imbues modes with properties, depending on the attribute with which it is associated, that render any parallel order and connection between the attributes impossible. If modes of thought are given subjective properties and modes of extension objective properties then it stands to reason that either 1) there is no meaningful difference between a subjective and an objective property in which case the distinction is meaningless, or 2) there are substantive differences between

modes represented under different attributes. Recall that in E2P7S Spinoza claims that “...thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that. So, too, a mode of Extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two ways...” Modal identity cannot change depending on the attribute under which the mode is expressed. If the mind is subjective and the body is objective, then the mind is differentiated from the body. This clearly undermines the very reason for Spinoza’s parallelism—that modes are expressed in each of the attributes but are nonetheless the self-same mode. Thus, the subjective/objective distinction is either meaningless, or it entails a rejection of Spinoza’s parallelism. If we view parallelism as a central doctrine that is indispensable to Spinoza’s system (and I think we should), then the subjective/objective distinction can be dismissed as it fails to rescue Spinoza’s doctrine of parallelism, its very *raison d’être*. To rescue Spinoza’s parallelism, a revision of Spinoza’s theory of attributes is required and the subjective/objective distinction is insufficient to do the job.

While the above problems with the subjective/objective distinction of the attributes are damaging, the strongest motivation for the dismissal of the subjective/objective distinction of the attributes is that it introduces subjectivity into an objective system. The bottom line is that Spinoza would not tolerate any characterization of substance as subjective such that any attribute that is identified with subjectivity (thought) cannot be an expression of the essence of substance and hence not an attribute. Identifying the attribute of thought as subjective is tantamount to a contradiction in Spinoza’s system.

There are at least two clear lines of reasoning that one might use to demonstrate that Spinoza’s system is a rejection of subjectivity. One might look to the definition of and roles

played by the attributes and identify them as true/objective representations of the nature/essence of substance. This line of reasoning, however, utilizes Spinoza's theory of attributes to reject an attempted solution to the problems that lie with Spinoza's theory of attributes. As such, this criticism risks circularity in the context of the project of this dissertation which has problematized Spinoza's theory of attributes. The second line of reasoning, the one that is explored here, identifies Spinoza's system as necessitarian and thus exclusively objective. Once Spinoza's system has been identified as exclusively objective, it will be clear that the subjective/objective distinction of the attributes is deserving of rejection as a solution to Spinoza's attribute problem.

Spinoza's metaphysical system is necessitarian. There is a great abundance of textual evidence that supports this widely accepted classification of Spinoza's metaphysics. Perhaps the most clear instances of Spinoza communicating the essential necessitarianism of his system is in E1P11 and E1P16 which state, "God, or substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists," and "From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinite things in infinite ways (that is, everything that can come within the scope of infinite intellect)." Spinoza's God exists necessarily and all that follows from or expresses the essence of God follows from God necessarily. This clearly includes the attribute of thought in the explicit reference to the attributes generally in E1P11 and the infinite intellect specifically in E1P16. To claim that the attribute of thought is subjective while the attribute of extension is objective is to contest the necessity of God, the necessity of the infinite attributes of God, and the necessity of the modes that follow from God. Such a challenge cuts to the very heart of Spinoza's project and, as such, should be dismissed; any

system that utilizes a subjective/objective association of the attributes cannot be said to be recognizably Spinozist.

The three strong criticisms above render the subjective/objective distinction of the attributes an inappropriate kind of solution to Spinoza's attribute problem. Interestingly, the failure of interpreting Spinoza's system in this way appears to have paved the way (historically) for materialist interpretations. If the problems with Spinoza's system cannot be fixed through the introduction of subjectivity into the system due to the system's essential objectivity, perhaps the objectivity of extension should be viewed as more fundamental to Spinoza's system than thought. However, as will now be demonstrated, materialist interpretations too should be dismissed as a viable solution to Spinoza's attribute problem. It is to this we now turn.

3.3. Second Solution: Materialism and the Dependence of Thought on Extension

In Chapter 1 we focused on Bennett as an interpreter of importance who represents a materialist approach to Spinoza's attribute problem but also identified Curley and LeBuffe as significant proponents of materialist solutions to Spinoza's attribute problem. In Chapter 1 we noted that these scholars identify Spinoza's attribute problem through specific issues with parallelism that are addressed in Chapter 2. While specific deficiencies in the interpretations of these scholars are offered in Chapter 1, Spinoza's attribute problem appears to challenge us to take a side on whether or not Spinoza's system leans towards materialism or idealism. In this section, I identify temptations that might drive one to take up a materialist interpretation despite certain inconsistencies that it might entail regarding the coherence of Spinoza's system.

I further identify what is entailed by any materialist interpretation and demonstrate why one should reject this kind of solution.

3.3.1. Motivations for Accepting Spinozist Materialism

There are strong temptations to interpret Spinoza's system as materialism. Let us focus on two: 1) Spinoza's epistemic and scientific project of knowing nature lends itself to the contemporary dominant perspective of the natural sciences as essentially indicative of materialism, and 2) Spinoza calls the reality of human thought into question while presenting material nature as steadfast and authentically representing the infinite modifications that arise from the nature of substance.

We have seen that one of Spinoza's central philosophical motivations is to develop a metaphysics and epistemology that uplift and adhere to the natural sciences. Insofar as the natural sciences deal exclusively with material existence (matter and energy), which is the dominant view from the 20th century on, and insofar as the material world is virtually universally recognized as being objective, we would expect to be compelled in the direction of favoring materialism over idealism when challenged to pick a side as we are by the deficiencies of Spinoza's system (i.e. his deep attribute problem).

The second motivation for favoring a materialist reading of Spinoza has to do with the subjective and erroneous nature of human thought. In Chapter 2 I identify the skewed treatment of thought as erroneous but extension as steadfast as a bias against the reality of human thought that presents itself in Spinoza's earliest works. Suppose, though, that my identification of Spinoza's positions does not indicate a bias but rather represents his overall

view as favoring materialism over idealism. After all, if human thought is generally in error save its true representation of its object, an extended (material) object, then authentic thought is not only dependent on extended objects but impotent beyond its phenomenal mapping of material reality. These observations appear to entail that Spinoza's system prioritizes extension over thought.

3.3.2. Reasons for Rejecting Materialist Solutions

All materialist solutions to Spinoza's attribute problem elevate the attribute of extension over the attribute of thought. Whether this elevation is integrated into a scientific perspective,² a perspective that recognizes the deficiencies of the human mind, or any other reason, we can delineate materialist solutions by identifying them as having the above stated priority in common. In what follows, I provide two reasons, each sufficient, for the rejection of interpreting Spinoza's system as materialism. These are 1) materialism undermines Spinoza's epistemology of innate ideation to the point of rejection and 2) materialism undermines Spinoza's ethics to the point of elimination. Both of the reasons for the rejection of Spinozist materialism sufficiently identify an unacceptable level of violence that is done to Spinoza's system broadly. That is, the damage done to Spinoza's system by favoring a materialist

² Though I will not discuss the deficiencies of explaining minds via scientific materialism as this is more a contemporary issue than an Early Modern one, it is informative to note that the contemporary materialist's reliance on scientific explanations of minds are wildly deficient. John R. Searle makes a compelling case for this deficiency in his book *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992). Arriving at minds from an investigation into matter is highly unscientific. While Searle argues that the separation of minds from bodies is a root cause of our modern confusion, being philosophically deficient, I will maintain that bodies are explainable in terms of minds (at least for Spinoza), noting that there is no such explanatory mechanism to explain minds in terms of bodies.

interpretation is akin to the rejection of Spinoza's system and thus cannot be thought to rightly represent it.

Let's start with the first problem with the Materialist Solution, namely, that it undermines the objectivity of Spinoza's epistemology. While it is true, as we have noted above, that Spinoza's epistemology includes the claims that "A true idea must agree with that of which it is the idea" (E1A6) and "The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body—i.e., a definite mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else." (E2P13), Spinoza's epistemology is only partially represented by these statements. It is not my aim to present a complete account of Spinoza's epistemology but I identify three specific claims made by Spinoza. These are 1) the height of knowledge for Spinoza is not true knowledge of nature (the second kind of knowledge which involves common notions [E2P38] not observed phenomenon) but intuitive knowledge (the third kind of knowledge), 2) knowledge of the external world is a worthy pursuit but is unreliable as it is only rarely (and always controversially) arrives at truth, a bar that if not met involves the imagination and thus also error, and 3) the quality of adequacy is an evaluation of the idea itself and, as such, does not involve an appeal to extension—ideas are adequate in and of themselves.

There are numerous places where Spinoza indicates that his epistemology is a hierarchy. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the first kind of knowledge, knowledge that involves imaginative speculation about external objects. As we climb the hierarchy we next move to the second kind of knowledge, knowledge of things based on universal notions, and arrive at the pinnacle of knowledge, knowledge of the third kind. Of this hierarchy, Spinoza says, "Knowledge of the first kind is the only cause of falsity; knowledge of the second and third kind

is necessarily true.” (E2P41) Whereas knowledge of the second kind is adequate knowledge and is about nature—involving the common notions in the identification of the properties of things—it is only by virtue of the common notions and their foundation in God that they qualify as adequate. Spinoza explains,

As to the last question, how can a man know that he has an idea which corresponds to that of which it is an idea, I have just shown, with abundant clarity, that this arises from the fact that he does have an idea that corresponds to that of which it is an idea; that is, truth is its own standard. Furthermore, the human mind, insofar as it perceives things truly, is part of the infinite intellect of God, and thus it is as inevitable that the clear and distinct ideas of the mind are true as that God’s ideas are true.” (E2P43S)

So while the common notions relate to the ideas of God and are thus adequate, the second kind of knowledge remains less preferable to the third.³ Regarding the third kind of knowledge, Spinoza states, “The highest conatus of the mind and its highest virtue is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge.” (E5P25) So we see that the height of knowledge for Spinoza is neither the erroneous knowledge of nature had by interaction (the first kind of knowledge), nor is it the knowledge of nature by way of common notions (the second kind of knowledge). For Spinoza, the height of knowledge is intuitive knowledge (the third kind of knowledge) which is the authentic representation of God’s ideas in the human mind.

We have just identified the deficiency of the first kind of knowledge and the less than supreme adequacy of the second kind of knowledge. Let us now unpack these categories in terms of knowing nature so that we may see that knowledge of the external world by way of

³ Olli Koistinen takes Spinoza’s epistemology to be radically new: “It is my view that Spinoza made a fresh start in the endeavor to understand the mind and its relation to body. The basic question for him was not how this or that mental event is related to this or that physical event. Instead his main objective in the beginning of Part II of the *Ethics* where the relation between mind and body is in focus is to explain the possibility of understanding in general.” Olli Koistinen, “Spinoza on Mind,” in *Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Della Rocca, 274.

empirical investigation is flawed. First, we have seen that true/adequate knowledge is true/adequate by virtue of being God's ideas but why does Spinoza claim that the empirical process is flawed? The answer to this question lies in second claim about Spinoza's system that clashes with materialism: knowledge of the external world is a worthy pursuit but is unreliable as it only rarely (and always controversially) arrives at truth, a bar that if not met involves the imagination and thus also error.

Recall that Spinoza's system takes up Descartes clear and distinct ideation as the foundation for his epistemology. However, Spinoza's project is not just metaphysical and epistemic but also ethical (whereas Descartes's philosophy is notably lacking in ethics). Further, Spinoza's God is not an external, willful, guarantor of perceptions but rather the substance monism in which human existence and ideation is grounded.⁴ As such, Spinoza's epistemic project identifies adequate ideation in virtue of one's alignment with the ideation of God, not in the discovery of a world created.

As a result of adequate ideation arising from within and the (at least supposed) alienation of the attributes from one another is Spinoza arrives at a critique of empiricism rather than an endorsement. Consider, for example, E2P14: "The human mind is capable of perceiving a great many things, and this capacity will vary in proportion to the variety of states which its body can assume." Here we see that adequate or erroneous perception is not in virtue of the empirical process employed but lies with the constitution of the individual person. Spinoza identifies the role of the alienation of the attributes from one another in E2P19: "The

⁴ For a connection between Spinoza's monism and contemporary metaphysics, see Samuel Newlands, "Spinoza's Relevance to Contemporary Metaphysics," in *Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Della Rocca, 601–626.

human mind has no knowledge of the body, nor does it know it to exist, except through ideas of the affections by which the body is affected.” Because adequate knowledge arises from within the individual and the attributes are alienated from one another, we see that it is only through the bodies interactions that the empirical process works. The real problem for empiricism, however, becomes clear in E2P24 and E2P25 which state, “The human mind does not involve an adequate knowledge of the component parts of the human body.” And, “The idea of any affection of the human body does not involve an adequate knowledge of an external body.” Because the mind is the thought attribute modal expression of the body, the mind cannot extend beyond the body and does not sufficiently penetrate into the specifics of bodies interacting with external bodies. As such, ideation that derives from empiricism cannot rise to the level of adequate ideation.⁵

True knowledge is adequate ideation and adequate ideation does entail the aligning of a thought with its object. However, the alignment of thought to its object is not derivative of empirical scientific pursuits which, we have seen, lie quite low on the epistemic totem pole. Rather, the quality of an idea is an evaluation of the idea itself;⁶ adequate ideas are not evaluated comparatively (i.e. in comparison to the mode it is about) but internally (i.e. in its own quality). This is the third claim made above.

⁵ Additional (though not exhaustive) textual evidence:

E2P26: The human mind does not perceive any external body as actually existing except through the ideas of affections of its own body.

E2P27: The idea of any affection of the human body does not involve adequate knowledge of the human body.

E2P30: We can have only a very inadequate knowledge of the duration of our body.

E2P31: We can have only a very inadequate knowledge of the duration of particular things external to us.

⁶ Koistinen says, “truth is in God’s intellect,” (Koistinen, “Spinoza on Mind,” 281). However, I disagree with Koistinen when he retreats from the actual/real/modal existence of ideas to be a subject-object relation, (Koistinen, 287).

Spinoza makes the case for the internal evaluation or identification of adequate ideas in two places. In E2D4 Spinoza claims that, “By an adequate idea I mean an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself without relation to its object, has all the properties, that is, intrinsic characteristics, of a true idea.” In E2P43S Spinoza clearly reiterates this:

If a true idea is distinguished from a false one only inasmuch as it is said to correspond with that of which it is an idea, then a true idea has no more reality or perfection than a false one and consequently neither is a man who has true ideas superior to one who has only false ideas.

Again, we see that Spinoza’s project is wholistic in that it weds his metaphysics of substance/God with his ethics of human valuation by way of his epistemology.⁷ Ideas have to be intrinsically identifiable as adequate because they are modes that follow from the essence of God and their expression in the attribute of thought is alienated from their expression in the attribute of extension even if they are problematically identified as taking up the mode of extension as their object.⁸

The above clearly indicates both that Spinoza’s epistemology entails much more than a materialist interpretation can allow for and that an endorsement of Spinozist materialism is a rejection of Spinoza’s greater epistemology. The endorsement of Spinozist materialism thus renders Spinoza’s epistemology unrecognizable and, as such, cannot be accepted as a legitimate interpretation of Spinoza’s system.

⁷ E2D4 is referenced by Spinoza in E4P62 and E5P17 the first of which reinforces the idea that adequate ideation exists apart from perception of external objects, the second of which identifies the association of adequate ideas with God’s ideas.

⁸ For a thorough exploration of Spinoza’s epistemology as it relates to science, see Eric Schleisser, “Spinoza and the Philosophy of Science: Mathematics, Motion, and Being,” in *Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Della Rocca, 155–189. There, Schleisser reinforces what has been said above regarding Spinoza’s view of empirical knowledge.

Let us now turn to the second problem with the Materialist Solution, namely, that it undermines Spinoza's ethics in that Spinoza's ethical theory is quite clearly an ethics of mind over and above the body. While E5P23—"The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed along with body, but something of it remains, which is eternal."—is one of the most controversial propositions in Spinoza's *Ethics*, it is not controversial in the context of Spinoza's ethical theory but with regard to his parallelism. Further, E5P23 is but one of the many claims made by Spinoza that clearly indicate that Spinoza's ethical theory tracks the attribute of thought rather than the attribute of extension. We have also seen that Spinoza's epistemology links his metaphysics to his ethics by way of the third kind of knowledge. Here we will see that the reliance of Spinoza's ethics on the mind is significantly greater in scope.

The relationship that exists between Spinoza's metaphysics and epistemology makes for a unique theory of knowledge that may seem somewhat mysterious outside of the context of its association with Spinoza's ethical theory as well. We have already seen that Spinoza's epistemology causes trouble for materialist interpretations in its connection to Spinoza's ethics (and beyond). This being the case, it should come as no surprise that Spinoza's ethics is anti-materialist—that is to say Spinoza's ethics makes a materialist metaphysics impossible. Why? Because Spinoza's ethics is about the cultivation of the mind and the mind's relation to God. This project is clearly stated in E5P14 which states, "The mind can bring it about that all the affections of the body—i.e. images of things—be related to the idea of God." In achieving this association of ideation with God, one ensures that one's ideas are adequate. The cultivation of strictly adequate ideas results in ultimate contentment. In E5P27 Spinoza claims, "From this third kind of knowledge there arises the highest possible contentment of mind." And in case

there is any doubt that adequate ideation and the third kind of knowledge, that is instrumental in Spinoza's ethics, can be related to a materialist interpretation, Spinoza gives us E5P31: "The third kind of knowledge depends on the mind as its formal cause insofar as the mind is eternal." So we see in no uncertain terms that Spinoza's ethical use of his epistemology follows the mind, not the body.

From the epistemic foundation of Spinoza's ethics it is a short journey to the ultimate ethical end, what Spinoza calls the intellectual love of God, or blessedness. Spinoza describes this as eternal in E5P33 (the body is durational) and in E5P33S he states, "If pleasure consists in the transition to a state of greater perfection, blessedness must surely consist in this, that the mind is endowed with perfection itself." So, in his penultimate work, the *Ethics*, Spinoza's derivation of an ethics from a metaphysics depends precisely on the final achievement of the mind over and above the body. This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in E5P34 which states, "It is only while the body endures that the mind is subject to passive emotions." The body thus acts as an anchor or drag on the ethical project of each individual. The body secures the mind to a passive existence whereas the eternity of the mind is capable of an active love of God. In E5P36 Spinoza makes this clear:

The mind's intellectual love toward God is the love of God wherewith God loves himself not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explicated through the essence of the human mind considered under a form of eternity. That is, the mind's intellectual love toward God is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself.

To sum up, Spinoza's entire ethical project derives from the security of the truth of adequate ideas due to their metaphysical grounding in God—they are God's ideas. One's ethical goal is to become blessed/virtuous which is done through the cultivation of adequate

ideas, the increase of the activity of the mind, and the orientation of one's intellect towards God. In Spinoza's ethics, the body falls away while the mind achieves eternal existence (to a greater or lesser degree). If we interpret Spinoza's system as materialism, we eliminate his ethics all together.

So, one can clearly see that Spinoza's ethical project rejects materialism in its clear favoring of thought. As such, a materialist interpretation of Spinoza's metaphysics entails the rejection of Spinoza's ethics. The violence done to Spinoza's system by rejecting his ethics is akin to a dismissal of Spinoza's project and once again we can identify the deficiency of a materialist solution.

I maintain that both of the above critiques demonstrate that materialist interpretations of Spinoza's system must be rejected. Even if I am wrong about one of the criticisms presented, that each one of them is sufficient for the dismissal of Spinozist materialism does sufficient violence to Spinoza's system renders any materialist solution to Spinoza's attribute problem unrecognizably Spinozist. So, if materialism is not an option for interpreting Spinoza's system in the face of his attribute problem, what of the alternative? What of Spinozist idealism? It is to this question that we now turn.

3.4. Third Solution: Idealism and The Priority of Thought over Extension

The two solution types explored above are to be rejected because they clash with, even contradict, the content of Spinoza's work to an unacceptable degree and, as such, are found to be unfriendly interpretations of Spinoza's system. So what of the third type of solution? What of idealism as a type of solution to Spinoza's attribute problem? Whereas the

subjective/objective distinction and the materialist readings of Spinoza fail due to their unfriendliness to Spinoza's system, a solution from idealism remains plausible as it has the capacity to be in general agreement with Spinoza's system. I will show that due to Spinoza's deep attribute problem and the resultant problems with parallelism only a revisionist-idealist solution can succeed. While the contributions of the idealist thinkers heretofore explored have produced valuable contributions towards understanding Spinoza's system as idealist, their proposed solutions are unable to succeed due to Spinoza's deep attribute problem requiring some revision.⁹

3.4.1. Motivations for Accepting Spinozist Idealism

The topic of Spinozist idealism is presently controversial. As shown in Chapter One, there are at least two highly regarded Spinoza scholars, Michael Della Rocca and Yitzak Melamed, who have come to recognize Spinoza's system as idealism. We might also recall that Spinozist idealism is acknowledged as a possibility, though not accepted as a meaningful actuality, by other presently active scholars in the field such as Michael LeBuffe and Samuel Newlands. Having already presented these positions as well as critiques of these positions in Chapter One, here I will simply identify the three commonly referenced motivations for classifying Spinoza's system as idealism. These are 1) Bloat: the attribute of thought is infinitely more dynamic than the attribute of extension, 2) Primacy: the attribute of thought plays a

⁹ Importantly, though idealist solutions ultimately fail to overcome the problems inherent in Spinoza's thought, they nonetheless better represent the overall character of Spinoza's system, a system that does give priority to thought in numerous, identifiable ways.

foundational role in Spinoza's metaphysics, and 3) Value: the attribute of thought dominates Spinoza's ethical theory.

Bloat refers to the widely acknowledged consequence of what Bennett has termed "Spinoza's doctrine of ideas of ideas", what motivates Melamed to posit infinite facets inherent in modes of thought, and what leads LeBuffe to acknowledge the identification of Spinoza's system as idealism (even if the description is meaningless as LeBuffe maintains). Essentially, the bloat in Spinoza's system identifies a consequence of Spinoza's claims (in E2P7 and E2P21-22) that there is a mode of thought for every mode of extension *and* a mode of thought for every thought. While bloat is usually brought up as a problem in/with Spinoza's system (or at least our interpretation of it), it is acknowledged by, or at least worrisome to, Spinoza scholars because the number of modes of the attribute of thought are orders of infinity greater than the number of modes of the attribute of extension (or any other attribute for that matter). For example, there is a mode of extension that is my chair. This mode in extension, Spinoza claims by way of his parallelism, has a corresponding mode in thought. However, there is an additional mode of thought that parallels the idea of the chair, an additional mode of thought that parallels the idea that is the idea of the idea of the chair, and so on *ad infinitum*. While we have considered this as a problem for Spinoza's parallelism, it is also a motivation for idealism. If the attribute of thought is infinitely more complex than any other attribute, then perhaps Spinoza's system should be understood as idealism.

Primacy refers to the presence of thought in the definition of substance, attribute, and mode. Particularly Spinoza's use of "intellect" and "conception" in the constitution of these fundamental metaphysical posits. In E1D3, E1D4, and E1D5 we find the definitions of substance,

attribute, and mode. In each of these definitions there is a clear indication of thought playing a foundational role in the fundamental categories of Spinoza's metaphysics. Of particular concern for us is the occurrence of thought in the constitution of the attribute of extension. E1D4 defines the attributes as, "By attribute I mean that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence." Thus, the attribute of extension is founded on the intellect's perception of substance as extended. If the ordering of modes under the attribute of extension has a prior and fundamental reliance, or dependence, on the attribute of thought, then thought can be identified as given priority or as more primitive than extension.

The primacy of thought has also been a point of criticism regarding Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism in that it creates a lopsidedness to the role and function of the attributes which are supposed to be equal in every respect. After all, how can two attributes exist in parallel yet fulfill significantly different roles? They cannot. Both of these problems with parallelism motivate the identification of Spinoza's system as idealism in that thought is given a wider and more foundational scope than the other attributes and is thus given preference over the other attributes in its constitutive role in each attribute.

Value refers to the widely acknowledged elevated role of thought in Spinoza's ethical theory. For example, one of the more controversial propositions in the ethics, which we have already seen but is proper to reproduce here, is E5P23 where Spinoza identifies the continuation of mind despite the death/destruction of the body.¹⁰ Here Spinoza clearly yields a greater status to mind than body. However, this is but one instance (that has gained a lot of

¹⁰ E5P23 reads, "The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed along with body, but something of it remains, which is eternal."

attention due to its conflict with parallelism) of the domination of thought in Spinoza's ethical theory. We have seen that Spinoza's ethics essentially tracks mind exclusively. Below (and above to a lesser extent) we see, in our discussion of the active/passive distinction, that Spinoza's ethics is an ethics of thought, even a condemnation of body in that bodies anchor the mind to passivity and thus impede the attainment of the ethical ideal—blessedness or the intellectual love of God. The controversy of the clear priority of mind in Spinoza's ethics ranges from an outright rejection of Spinoza's ethics as nonsense (as with Bennett), to an acknowledgement of the Spinoza's ethics as problematically related to his metaphysics (as with Garrett).¹¹

Importantly, bloat, primacy, and value, each identify reasons to classify Spinoza's system as idealism *and* reasons to put forward various interpretive solutions to the problems that arise from them. In the next section, I identify the precise contradictions in Spinoza's system that feed this controversy and conclude that non-revisionist idealist solutions too fail because they do not revise a system that suffers from certain contradictory claims. Importantly, however, the elimination of these contradictions by way of the revisions presented in section 3.5 ultimately function as an idealist solution.

¹¹ Garrett, in his work on Spinoza's ethics (see "Spinoza's Ethical Theory") identifies that work on Spinoza's ethical theory should be taken up independent of the metaphysical and epistemological concerns (269n7). Garrett does, however, attempt such a task in his "Spinoza on the Essence of the Human Body and the Part of the Mind That Is Eternal" but fails to identify the timelessness of eternity and Spinoza's claim that the body is destroyed despite the mind continuing in existence (Don Garrett, "Spinoza and the Essence of the Human Body and the Part of the Mind That Is Eternal," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. Koistinen, 284–302). Barbone too alludes to the potential impact of Spinoza's parallelism on his ethics in suggesting the greatest good of the mind is not necessarily the greatest good there is as there are other attributes to account for but does not pursue the connection (Steven Barbone, "Virtue and Sociality in Spinoza," *Iyyun, The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 42 [July 1993]: 383–395).

3.4.2. Without Revision, Idealism Too Fails

Idealism, broadly construed, simply identifies the philosophical privileging of thought over and above alternatives such as body. Because Spinoza's system favors thought along the lines of bloat, primacy, and value, one is free to classify the system as idealism (indeed, I maintain that it is idealism). However, the controversy primarily lies in the scope and meaningfulness of this classification.

Melamed tracks bloat and presents an intriguing but fundamentally flawed theory of infinite facets in an attempt to rescue Spinoza's parallelism. In contrast, LeBuffe acknowledges the legitimacy of the classification of idealism due to bloat but claims that this favoring of thought is nonetheless subordinate to extension, making Spinoza's system more meaningfully identified as materialism. While Della Rocca tracks the primacy of thought (via the PSR), he claims that doing so leads one "beyond Spinoza". In another vein, Newlands argues against the legitimacy of Spinozist idealism, castigating its proponents as suffering from the error of mentalism—we have seen that Newlands' anti-mentalism too fails. Lastly, there is recognition of Spinoza's ethics as fundamentally ideal. For example, Neal Grossman identifies the dominant role of thought in Spinoza's ethics but instead of addressing the relevance of thought's dominant role in the ethics pertaining to the metaphysics, Grossman pursues an avenue of therapeutic application—he treats Spinoza's *Ethics* as a guide to living.¹²

How can contemporary Spinoza scholars diverge so radically on the issue of Spinozist idealism when it is clear that there are, at least at times, issues of bloat, primacy, and value

¹² See Neal Grossman, *The Spirit of Spinoza: Healing the Mind* (Princeton, NJ: ICRL Press, 2003).

each favoring thought in Spinoza's system? The answer to these questions is now ready to hand—the contemporary debate attempts to interpret Spinoza's system when what is needed is a revision. Due to the depth and scope of Spinoza's attribute problem, not just the problems with parallelism that stem from it, any attempt to satisfy the controversy that remains unwilling to revise Spinoza's system will be met with resistance and alternatives, equally legitimate (or illegitimate due to the contradictions present in the system), will abound. Idealism cannot rescue Spinoza's system without revision lest we succumb to the contradictions outlined in Chapter Two. I go on, in section 3.5, to propose a revision to Spinoza's system that minorly alters his theory of attributes and active/passive distinction which allows for a highly economical, friendly, and judicious revision that rescues Spinoza's system from the charge of incoherence and identifies the system as ontological idealism.

Spinoza's deep attribute problem compels revision. The attributes cannot be distinct from and identical to substance. The attributes cannot be parallel structures and contain different numbers of modes. The attributes cannot equally represent the essence of substance and yet one depends on the other. The attributes cannot be explanatorily distinct and work together. Without a revision that rescues Spinoza's system from these contradictions, all solutions fail.

3.5. A Friendly and Judicious Revision

Revision is necessary if we are to rescue Spinoza's system from the contradictions that haunt his system. In this section I put forth and advocate for a revision to Spinoza's system. The revision that I propose is friendly and judicious. It is friendly in that it honors Spinoza's most

fundamental metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical claims and honors their overall character. My solution is judicious because, in seeking to overcome the errors in Spinoza's system, it produces numerous benefits for the system with very little alteration. The revision that I propose will overcome Spinoza's deep attribute problem, salvage Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism, and reconcile Spinoza's ethics with his metaphysics and epistemology. All of this is accomplished by a surprisingly simple and elegant revision to Spinoza's theory of attributes along the lines of the active/passive distinction. Specifically, I propose that we reorient the relationship between the active/passive distinction and the attributes into "vertical" and "horizontal" associations. What is meant by vertical is the association of modes with substance, an association that accounts for modal activity and blessedness; thus the vertical association is understood as *natura naturans*. What is meant by horizontal is the association of modes with each other under the attributes, an association that accounts for modal passivity and parallel expression between attributes; thus the horizontal association is understood as *natura naturata*. Importantly, the vertical/horizontal schema compels an identification of substance as infinite intellectual substance, an explanation of which is forthcoming. As such, the revision entails that Spinoza's system is ontological idealism. The implications of this revision for Spinoza's system are delineated in Chapter 4.

3.5.1. What is the Active/Passive Distinction?

As previously mentioned, Spinoza uses an active/passive distinction in his system, primarily as a ground for his ethical theory.¹³ In particular, for Spinoza it is ethically important that a person be active rather than passive.¹⁴ However, the active/passive distinction is first developed as a metaphysical distinction in Spinoza's system and second as an epistemic one, all the while remaining fundamentally ethical in function and purpose.¹⁵ In what follows, I provide an overview of the active/passive distinction. In doing so, we will see that the active/passive distinction plays an integrative role between Spinoza's metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

The active/passive distinction is operative in Spinoza's *Ethics* as early as E1D1 where Spinoza identifies self-causation in the nature of substance.¹⁶ The first occurrence of the term "activity" comes shortly after in E1D7 where it is identified with freedom. However, Spinoza first makes the active/passive distinction explicit in E1P29S which states,

Before I go any further, I wish to explain at this point what we must understand by "*Natura naturans*" and "*Natura naturata*." I should perhaps say not "explain," but "remind the reader," for I consider that it is already clear from what has gone before that by "*Natura naturans*" we must understand that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, the attributes of substance that express eternal and infinite essence; or, God insofar as he is considered a free cause. By "*Natura naturata*" I

¹³ Garrett maintains that Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine is most fundamental to his ethical theory (Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory"). My view (to be explained in what follows) rather holds that the active/passive distinction is more central to Spinoza's ethical theory and better ties it to his metaphysics and epistemology.

¹⁴ For a thorough discussion on how Spinoza's active/passive distinction relates to personal identity, see Michael Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Garrett, 192–266.

¹⁵ Andrea Sangiacomo and Ohad Nachtomy identify an evolution of Spinoza's thought on activity between the *Short Treatise* and the *Ethics* in "Spinoza's Rethinking of Activity: From the *Short Treatise* to the *Ethics*," in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 56, no. 1 (March 2018): 101–126. There Sangiacomo and Nachtomy identify that activity comes to play a greater role in the Spinoza's later thought. Specifically that "God's immanent causation and Spinoza's account of activity as adequate causation do not always go together in Spinoza's thought." I will soon demonstrate that Spinoza comes to lean heavily on the role of activity in the *Ethics*.

¹⁶ Importantly, causation is an activity, even a free activity, however, any causal efficacy had by modes is rendered impotent in the face of substance as cause. Many interesting things can be said about Spinoza's take on causation. Causation is activity but God is the only true cause, lower order causes might be thought of as active but only insofar as their secondary affect which, strictly speaking, is a claim of identity, not activity.

understand all that follows from the necessity of God's nature, that is, from the necessity of each one of God's attributes; or all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God and can neither be nor be conceived without God.

Spinoza's reverse implementation of the *Natura naturata/Natura naturans* distinction is commonly interpreted as most relevant to the nature of substance as *causa sui*. That substance is self-caused entails that it is conceptually bifurcated into an active, generative, agent of creation and a passive, emanative, created object. That is to say that nature itself can be regarded as active or passive; it is active when identified as cause and passive when identified as effect.

Immediately following the delineation of the active/passive distinction, we see in E1P30 and E1P31 the groundwork for Spinoza's ethical theory. In E1P30, Spinoza exclusively couples the activity of the intellect with comprehension of God. In E1P31, the God-focused activity of the intellect is explicitly related to *Natura naturans*. As such, the metaphysics of thought, specifically active thought, drives cognition towards God, a comprehension of which results in an intellectual love of God and thus the attainment of virtue. The mechanism that is the active/passive distinction is thus presented metaphysically in E1P30-1 but, as we shall see, is integral to Spinoza's epistemology and to the development of Spinoza's ethical theory.

Importantly, one should also observe that the active/passive distinction here relates to God, the attributes, and to modes. When God is a free cause or the attributes are expressing God's nature, this is *natura naturans* but the objects of creation are *natura naturata*.¹⁷

¹⁷ Here we see evidence of Spinoza's deep attribute problem. The attributes are raised to the level of substance in their association with activity (an association I will reverse in my revision) yet if they do not follow from substance they are either conflated with substance or unreal.

However, God's nature as activity itself is determined in E1P34p which states, "From the sole necessity of God's essence it follows that God is self-caused and the cause of all things. Therefore, God's power, whereby he and all things are and act, is his very essence." Here again we see creating/created in parallel with active/passive however this time the distinction is a bit more global. That is, God as infinite substance is established as a monism despite the bifurcations heretofore identified and activity is identified as constituting God's essence, *not* passivity, a quality only possessed by modes and only to a degree.¹⁸ The extent to which modes are active is relative to their ground in substance, their ground in existence itself. In E1P36 Spinoza states, "Nothing exists from whose nature an effect does not follow." Thus everything in Spinoza's system is also active to some degree. However, this is only to a degree. This is made clear in the appendix. Spinoza clearly expresses in E1a his intention that E1 be humbling to humans—who are mere modes but nonetheless have a path to blessedness in the surrender to God (which is the cultivation of rational thought and thus an awareness of the deductions of E1). The connection between the metaphysics of E1 and Spinoza's ethical vision is stated at the start of E2.¹⁹

In the introduction to E2 Spinoza identifies that the utility of the metaphysical developments in E1 is that they aid in the achievement of blessedness. Blessedness is the highest form of human happiness, and the ultimate expression of activity. Thus, activity of human affect is instrumental in achieving this goal. In the explication to E2D3 Spinoza states, "I

¹⁸ That modes are passive have led some to claim that blessedness is unachievable in Spinoza's system. My revision resolves this controversy, as is shown in Ch. 4.

¹⁹ We should be mindful that throughout this line of deduction that Spinoza's treatment of the attributes as complete representations of the essence of substance allows him to proceed with the active/passive distinction in relation to substance by way of the attributes as if they are equivalent; substance and attribute are conflated.

say “conception” rather than “perception” because the term perception seems to indicate that the Mind is passive to its object whereas conception seems to express an activity of the Mind.”²⁰ The clarificatory remark about the activity of the mind is important for Spinoza’s promise of a path to blessedness.²¹ Ironically, E2 presents itself as an exploration of the origins of the mind and it is in E2 that Spinoza’s doctrine of parallelism is put forward yet E2 focuses more on the body than the mind, and primarily on the body as passive mechanism. Now, we have seen that materialist interpreters take the relation of mind to body put forward in E2 as one in which the mind, at least insofar as it relates to the body, is passive. However, E2 also marks the beginning of Spinoza’s epistemology, an epistemology that connects adequate knowledge to God, thus identifying a connection of the mind to God vis-à-vis activity while also establishing a passive relation to body. How we are to understand this remains open, but regardless, we begin to see the role that Spinoza’s epistemology plays in connecting his metaphysics with his ethics.

Spinoza makes it clear that God is the cause of adequate ideas, and body is the cause of confused ideas. We see that this is the case in E2P32: “All ideas are true insofar as they are related to God.” We see this again in E2P43S: “[...] the human mind, insofar as it perceives things truly, is part of the infinite intellect of God, and thus it is as inevitable that the clear and distinct ideas of the mind are true as that God’s ideas are true.” To this we might add “active”. In fact, it is due to the participation in the activity of God that one’s ideas are adequate and

²⁰ Note that the body is always passive as we noted with the subjectivity/objectivity distinction above.

²¹ E2 Begins with a promise: that those things that follow from God will be explained, “but only those things that can lead us as it were by the hand to the knowledge of the human mind and its utmost blessedness.”

thus guaranteed to be true. Spinoza's epistemology is thus derived from and rooted in his metaphysics.

Analogously, passive modes (inadequate or confused ideas) ultimately come to be condemned epistemically as flawed knowledge. It is in the second layer of thought, in the ideas of ideas that the mind comes to grasp adequate knowledge. The highest level of adequacy is achieved in intuition (intuitive knowledge), which is the mind's access to God via active thought—activity. As such, Spinoza moves from the metaphysics of substance monism, absolutely infinite substance, and the active/passive distinction, through his epistemology of adequate ideation and the activity of intuitive knowledge to, as we shall soon see, the ethics grounded in the intellectual love of God. So it is worth repeating here: Spinoza's epistemology, particularly as it is found in E2, disassociates activity from body and passive knowledge by its placement of adequacy in the activity of the mind. This is a significant strike against the materialist interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy.

E2 ends by once again identifying that all of the work of the *Ethics* drives at an ethical project. This is perhaps most clear in E2P49S where Spinoza identifies the “practical advantages” of E1 and E2 as,

1. It teaches that we act only by God's will, and that we share in the divine nature, and all the more as our actions become more perfect and as we understand God more and more. Therefore, this doctrine, apart from giving us complete tranquility of mind, has the further advantage of teaching us wherein lies our greatest happiness or blessedness, namely, in the knowledge of God alone, as a result of which we are induced only to such actions as are urged on us by love and piety. Hence we clearly understand how far astray from the true estimation of virtue are those who, failing to understand that virtue itself and the service of God are happiness itself and utmost freedom, expect God to bestow on them the highest rewards in return for their virtue and meritorious actions as if in return for the basest slavery.

2. It teaches us what attitude we should adopt regarding fortune, or the things that are not in our power, that is, the things that do not follow from our nature; namely, to expect and to endure with patience both faces of fortune. For all things follow from God's eternal decree by the same necessity as it follows from the essence of a triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles.

3. This doctrine assist us in our social relations, in that it teaches us to hate no one, despise no one, ridicule no one, be angry with no one, envy no one. Then again, it teaches us that each should be content with what he has and should help his neighbor, not from womanish pity, or favor, or superstition, but from the guidance of reason as occasion and circumstance require. This I shall demonstrate in Part IV.

4. Finally, this doctrine is also of no small advantage to the commonwealth, in that it teaches the manner in which citizens should be governed and led; namely, not so as to be slaves, but so as to do freely what is best.

The picture here is clear. Spinoza explicitly draws together (in 1 and 2) the metaphysics of God and self with virtue (both God and virtue being exclusively active), and rational epistemology with ethical prescription (in 2-4). While details of Spinoza's metaphysics-epistemology-ethics connection continue to develop through the *Ethics*, Spinoza clearly expresses these interactions in book 2.

The active/passive distinction plays a major role in Spinoza's discussion of human emotion in E3. However, since it would be counterproductive to dive deep into Spinoza's theory of emotions, a subject that would take us too far afield from our task to be productive, let us simply identify the role the active/passive distinction plays in E3 towards building an ethics from the metaphysics and epistemology of E1 and E2.

Importantly, the increased use of the passive/active distinction in E3 arises in relation to what can be identified as the primary hinderance to the attainment of virtue—the emotions. The overall message of E3 is that one must conquer the emotions by understanding them, that one's ethical advancement hinges on one's ability to overcome the passivity of the emotions

and become active through rational understanding. In E2, Spinoza's epistemology of adequate ideation establishes the center of activity while material causation, particularly from outside the individual, causes passivity. It is by way of knowledge—the application of rationality to the emotions—that allows for the possibility of dramatic growth towards ultimate virtue. This, as we have seen, comes at the expense of the body, not because of it. The metaphysics of activity in E1 lays the foundation for the application of epistemology in E2 which, we are repeatedly told, is all for the purpose of establishing an ethics. Understanding the emotions enables one to become active and thus able to become virtuous. This connection is explicitly stated in

Spinoza's General Definition of Emotions in E3:

The emotion called a passive experience is a confused idea whereby the mind affirms a greater or less force of existence of its body, or part of its body, than was previously the case, and by the occurrence of which the mind is determined to think one thing rather than another.

And is made clearer in the explication:

I say in the first place that an emotion, or passivity of the mind, is a "confused idea." For we have demonstrated that the mind is passive only to the extent that it has inadequate or confused ideas. Next, I say "whereby the mind affirms a greater or less force of existence of its body or part of its body than was previously the case." For all ideas that we have of bodies indicate the actual physical state of our own body rather than the nature of the external body. Now the idea that constitutes 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 is increased or diminished, assisted or checked [...]

Invoking parallelism in his account of the passive nature of the emotions, Spinoza clearly indicates that the body is the cause of the passivity of the mind in the mind's formulation of confused ideas. Activity is thus achievable through the cultivation of rational thought, despite the passive affects of the body on the mind.

It is in E4 that Spinoza follows through on his claim that the affects of the emotions are a form of bondage. The first lines of E4p make this clear and remind us of the ethical implications:

I assign the term “bondage” to man’s lack of power to control and check the emotions. For a man at the mercy of his emotions is not his own master but is subject to fortune, in whose power he so lies that he is often compelled, although he sees the better course, to pursue the worse. In this Part I have set myself the task of demonstrating why this is so, and also what is good and what is bad in emotions. But before I begin, I should like to make a few preliminary observations on perfection and imperfection, and on good and bad.

These observations are 1) good and bad are mere modes of thought, 2) reality and perfection are the same thing, 3) some modes have more (or less) reality than others. E4 thus progresses along the lines of identifying the explicit gains in reality/power/activity that can be had in overcoming the passivity of the emotions.

While explicit reference to the active/passive distinction is at times replaced with the language of power and virtue, it remains clear that the freedom that is possible to attain, the increase in power that one can achieve, results from the cultivation of activity and the overcoming of the passivity of the emotions. For example, E4P2 states, “We are passive insofar as we are a part of Nature which cannot be conceived independently of other parts.” This is a call back to the *natura naturans/natura naturata* distinction. When considered as a created mode, we are victim to the emotions in that we are influenced by things outside of ourselves.

The key is to consider ourselves through our own nature. This is made clear in E4P18S:

[...] since virtue is nothing other than to act from the laws of one’s own nature, and since nobody endeavors to preserve his own being except from the laws of his own nature, it follows firstly that the basis of virtue is the very conatus to preserve one’s own being, and that happiness consists in a man’s being able to preserve his own being.

Spinoza's position is that the mind is capable of thinking from a place of reflection on one's own existence and one's ground in God by way of conatus. The mechanism that links this ethical achievement to the metaphysics and epistemology lies in the relationship between the knowing of the mind and the being of the mind in God (God always being active).

In E4P28 Spinoza identifies the orientation of the mind towards God as the highest good: "The mind's highest good is the knowledge of God, and the mind's highest virtue is to know God." Once again, we see a relationship between Spinoza's metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. The good that can be achieved, the ethical prescription, is to cultivate adequate ideas by ordering one's mind towards God. Due to the metaphysics of God's activity and the necessary adequacy of God's ideas, one can achieve a greater security in one's being by cultivating that part of the mind that is adequate as these ideas are God's ideas. Spinoza is clear that this constitutes blessedness as is stated in E4a4

blessedness is nothing other than that self-contentment that arises from the intuitive knowledge of God. Now to perfect the intellect is also nothing other than to understand God and the attributes and actions of God that follow from the necessity of his nature. Therefore for the man who is guided by reason, the final goal, that is, the highest Desire whereby he strives to control all the others, is that by which he is brought to an adequate conception of himself and of all things that can fall within the scope of his understanding.

What humans call good finds its home in the joy that arises from harmonizing oneself with reality, a feat achieved through a maneuver of the mind in which one's mind becomes active in virtue of sharing in the mind of God.²² Spinoza's specific position on the extent to which the

²² Harmony with God is harmony with the whole of nature E4a32.

mind (or intellect) can achieve power and activity is left to E5 where Spinoza identifies the achievement as freedom.

In E5, the intellect is the path to the good, to God, and to perfect being. Again we see the language of active/passive replaced at times with power, virtue, and now freedom, all of which now denoting the same thing: higher, powerful, active, virtuous, perfect existence. The mechanism for achieving this state of perfection/blessedness is codified in E5P3 which states, “A passive emotion ceases to be a passive emotion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it.” The metaphysical-epistemological connection is found in the proof: “A passive emotion is a confused idea. So if we form a clear and distinct idea of the emotion, this idea is distinguishable only in concept from the emotion insofar as the latter is related only to mind; and so the emotion will cease to be passive.” And again in E5P14, “The mind can bring it about that all the affections of the body—i.e. images of things—be related to the idea of God.” It is in E5P23 that Spinoza finally comes to disassociate the mind from the body clearly, claiming that the mind survives the body, as we have already seen.

So why is the body discarded prior to reaching the ultimate ethical vision? Due to the special capacity of the mind to transform passivity into activity, a process that is one order higher than the experience of being embedded in a causal nexus of interacting modes. While a body is determined by the laws of nature to participate in mechanistic causal interactions, the mind is able to align itself with God, indeed, to become God (at least in part) by understanding itself. We have seen this called Spinoza’s theory of ideas of ideas.²³ This (at least partial)

²³ At times Spinoza still holds on to body. For example, in E5P39 Spinoza claims, “He whose body is capable of the greatest amount of activity has a mind whose greatest part is eternal.” This, however, is confused as Spinoza’s

merging with God is most clearly given in E5P36 where Spinoza identifies that the mind of the virtuous person is not distinct from the mind of God and that their common ground is blessedness, or the intellectual love of God:

The mind's intellectual love toward God is the love of God wherewith God loves himself not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explicated through the essence of the human mind considered under a form of eternity. That is, the mind's intellectual love toward God is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself.

Being is being good, and since the mind has the power of active determination through the development of ideas of ideas of one's modal state of affairs, one is able to achieve a (or something like a) union with God.²⁴

So, Spinoza's metaphysical development of the active/passive distinction lays the groundwork for his ethical theory by way of his epistemology. God is wholly active. The active ideas of the human mind are categorically identified with the ideas of God and are thus true and direct one's knowledge towards God. The highest virtue posited in Spinoza's ethical theory is knowledge of God—an idealistic ordering of thought. These three elements entail a reconciliation of fact and value. The metaphysical framework is ethically realized via epistemology. However, the role of the active/passive distinction in Spinoza's theory of attributes contributes to his attribute problem in that it is simultaneously, and problematically, present in substance abstractly and in each of the attributes representing the essence of substance.

epistemic project identifies activity with adequacy which has no clear connection to bodily activity—it does not seem consistent for Spinoza to identify athleticism as the mechanism for blessedness.

²⁴ That there is some amount of shared identity between the blessed and God is not controversial. However, I suggest that this identity is greater than is commonly accepted and worthy of recognition as mysticism.

The relationship between the active/passive distinction and the attributes is one in which the active/passive distinction applies equally to substance and the attributes because the attributes are complete representations of substance. That the attributes are complete representations of the essence of substance is shown to be problematic in Chapter 2. In the next section, I propose a revision to Spinoza's active/passive distinction, particularly as it relates to the attributes—I disassociate the attributes from the active/passive distinction. We will see that such a revision is capable of rescuing Spinoza's system from the contradictions identified in Chapter two but only if substance is understood as infinite intellectual substance, which entails that Spinoza's system be understood as ontological idealism.

3.5.2. Solution: A Reorientation of the Active/Passive Distinction

We have seen that Spinoza's active/passive distinction entails a distinction between the attributes of thought and extension in that thought is capable, by way of its ability to transform passivity into activity, of achieving freedom/power/etc. This distinction between attributes has been criticized at length in Chapter 2. There it is made clear that Spinoza's parallelism and his theory of attributes result in contradiction. It is in Spinoza's ethical theory that these flaws reveal themselves most poignantly in that the body is discarded and the mind identified as having the capacity to transform one to states of greater perfection (to become free from bondage). So, is Spinoza's system, the whole system (metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics) salvageable? I argue that it is, but only by way of revision and only if substance is ideal.

While one might imagine a great number of possible revisions that salvage Spinoza's system from the identified contradictions, here I seek a friendly and judicious revision. As such,

the revision that I propose is to eliminate the application of Spinoza's active/passive distinction to the attributes. Spinoza, we have seen, problematically holds that the attributes exist in parallel with one another, each fully representing the essence of substance. We see further that this drives Spinoza to maintain that the attributes of thought and extension are passive and active (though it is clear that the activity of thought far outperforms that of extension). In what follows, I argue that Spinoza's system can be remedied if: 1) we disassociate the attributes altogether from the active/passive distinction; this entails that 2) we understand activity in a "vertical" sense as a direct relation between substance and mode, free from the intermediary role of attribute and we understand passivity in a "horizontal" sense, as a parallel organization of passive modes conceptually organized into attributes; and 3) we identify substance as absolutely infinite intellectual substance, which is thoroughly active. By "vertical" and "horizontal" senses I mean the metaphysical direction of the application of the active-passive distinction. The active-passive distinction applied from Substance to Mode is vertical in that modes are substance expressing itself in a determinate way and are active. The active-passive distinction applied from mode to mode (organized into attributes) is horizontal in that modes depend on their causal (structural) relations to each other for their existence and in this relation are always passive. This is an idealist solution because substance itself must, as a result of the revision to the active-passive distinction, be understood in terms of intellect, though not thought *qua* attribute. In Chapter 4 I discuss the economy of this revision and its impact on Spinoza's system at large particularly relating to ethics.

Why must we disassociate the attributes from the active/passive distinction? We can arrive at an answer to this question rather quickly by reasoning through two cases: if

active/passive applies to attributes then either the attributes are active, or the attributes are passive. Once we identify both cases as deficient, it will be clear that the attributes are neither and must be disassociated from the distinction altogether.

First, let us suppose that the attributes are active, which is Spinoza's position. If the attributes are active then they are associated with *natura naturans*, or the generative aspect of nature (substance/God). This would entail precisely the conflation of attribute with substance that is identified in Chapter 2 as a deep problem for Spinoza's system. If the attributes are active, they are infinite, conceived through themselves, and the cause of the existence of modes. However, this is exactly the function of substance. So, the attributes cannot be active because this would entail a conflation with substance. Perhaps worse, though, the attributes cannot be active for they are numerous and the conflation with substance would entail that substance be both strictly singular and infinite in number, a manifest contradiction. Thus, we must conclude that the attributes are not active.

If the attributes cannot be active without resulting in a contradiction, perhaps they are passive. Let us now assume that this is the case. If the attributes are passive then they are associated with *natura naturata*, or the created aspect of nature. However, if this is the case, then the attributes are modal. Two unacceptable consequences follow from a conflation of attribute with mode. First, if the attributes are modes, then they are themselves embedded in the causal nexus of nature and as such act as relative cause and effect. Here we again see that the attributes representation of the essence of substance entails that they cannot be acted on. The second problem is that an attribute as mode would have to be itself organized under an attribute. Such an association succumbs to Russel's paradox (e.g. the attribute of thought is

within and without the set of modes that belong to the attribute of thought) and thus can be eliminated from consideration. We must conclude that the attributes are not passive.

In both of the above cases we arrive at unacceptable conclusions. If the attributes are active, then they are conflated with substance and a contradiction results. If the attributes are passive, then they are conflated with modes and a contradiction results. In order to avoid these contradictions, we must disassociate the attributes from the active/passive distinction.²⁵

However, such a disassociation is a revision to Spinoza's system and requires that we clarify the impact of this revision on the active/passive distinction. It is worth noting that Descartes's metaphysics, which Spinoza at least in part adopts against the Scholastic metaphysics, is a substance-mode ontology. What this means is that what exists is *substance* and its way of existing which is to say its *mode of being*. According to Descartes, an attribute is the means by which substance is known, it is not a thing itself.²⁶ So, for Descartes at least, substances and modes exist, whereas attributes are ways of conceiving substance.

Such a solution is available to Spinoza. In E1P15p, Spinoza claims that "nothing exists except substance and modes." The attributes, now being divorced from the active/passive distinction, function only to organize modes and contribute to the absoluteness of substance in their infinite number (a divergence from Descartes). Indeed, one might be tempted to do away

²⁵ It is commonly maintained that Spinoza's attributes are identical with substance and thus essential while modes are properties of substance and thus accidental (e.g. Schmidt, "Substance Monism and Identity Theory in Spinoza"). This is clearly not the case. While it is true that Spinoza identifies only substance and modes as existing (E1P15p), attributes, we have now seen, cannot be said to be identical to substance.

²⁶ See Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, Part 1, Principle 53: "Each substance has one principal attribute; (1) for mind it is the attribute of thought, (2) for body it is extension. A substance can be known through any attribute at all; but each substance has one principal property that constitutes its nature and essence, all its other properties being special cases of that." Of course, differences arise from Descartes dualism v. Spinoza's monism, but the role of the attribute as a *means* of knowing substance is common.

with the attributes all together. This, however, would be less friendly a revision to Spinoza's system. What would Spinoza's system look like without attributes? There would be no attribute problem but also no substance comprised of infinite attributes and no parallelism; this is a bit like killing the patient to cure the disease. One might also be tempted to reduce the attributes to one or subordinate the infinite attributes to the attribute of thought. These options each seem possible, if unfriendly, but are properly taken up elsewhere as it is not my intention to survey and weigh the advantages of competing theories of attributes but rather to honor as closely as possible Spinoza's original vision. Any such extreme revisions would require significant advocacy and, as such, would require a new layer of argumentation that would lead beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, let us now turn to what I have named the vertical association of modal activity, and then to the horizontal association of modal passivity.

With the disassociation of the attributes from the active/passive distinction we find that we have disrupted the role of activity in Spinoza's system and thus must continue our revision into this domain. Recall that activity primarily functions in Spinoza's system as a process of thought. Importantly, one central process is the transformation of inadequate (passive) ideas into adequate (active) ideas. Recall too that this is problematic for Spinoza's system in that the addition of modes of thought that are not reflected in parallel in the other attributes. The end of this ethical process is blessedness—a reconciliation with God that is sometimes expressed by Spinoza as submission to God but carries the stronger flavor of union (at least to a degree) of one's thoughts with those of God. Once that activity is disassociated from the attributes, we can no longer identify the process of transforming passive modes into active modes with the

attribute of thought (this is how we overcome bloat). Instead, I propose that we conceive of activity as a vertical relation, namely an association of mode with substance.

What is meant by a vertical association and how does the application of this schema affect the role of activity in Spinoza's system? What is meant by vertical is the association of modes with substance without any intermediary (i.e. the attributes). That is, an association that accounts for the activity of modes in virtue of their existence being, at bottom, substance. This places modal activity in the domain of *natura naturans*. The reason we must conceive of activity along these lines is that Spinoza's ethics would be lost without a retention of modal association with substance—without the possibility of blessedness—and the involvement of the attributes along these lines results in the contradictions identified above.

With the attributes disassociated from the active/passive distinction, and activity recast as a vertical relation that links modes directly to substance as the source of their being, via the active intellect, we are still left with the task of dealing with passivity. Recall that modes are passive in Spinoza's system when they are affected by (or are the effects of) external causes. This entails that modes are passive insofar as they are explicable in terms of the causal nexus in which they are embedded. Insofar as this is the case, the proposed revision does not impact Spinoza's system. However, because activity is now a vertical relation, the conception of modes as causes (rather than effects) must be recast as passive in this regard despite Spinoza's claims that modes are active in their causal efficacy. This problem is shown to be resolvable once we understand how the revision impacts the horizontal relations of modes.

The case for recasting the horizontal "activity" of modes as passive, and thus horizontal, is easy to make, given our understanding of causation, and fits well with Spinoza's hard

determinism/necessitarianism. This will entail that inter-modal causation be considered passive (as structuralism). According to both contemporary conceptions of causal associations in nature and Spinoza's hard determinism/necessitarianism, there is no uncaused event in the world. That is, all modes are themselves caused by external events and are thus limited by external factors. Thus the identification with structuralism. The accounting of passive identity in Spinoza's system is precisely this: an individual mode exists relative to its causal circumstance only insofar as it is explicable through appeal to factors external to its identity. Passive modal identity is thus a structuralist account of modal identity in that nothing ultimately arises that is new and distinct in the existence of a mode (when considered passive) because its passivity is precisely its participation in the causal structures with which it is associated. This is why modes are associated with *natura naturata*. The only aspect of modal existence that is unique and not caused by external factors must consider substance as its cause which would be a vertical, not horizontal account.

Now one might be inclined to reject the passivity of horizontal modal identity because of the causal activity of modes in their interrelation. However, when considering modes as active, one is associating the mode vertically, identifying it as having generative power with regards to the causal nexus with which it is associated; this is a consideration of mode as participating in the generative aspect of substance, not considering it in passive relation to the causal structures which, if we were to view it horizontally, would define its existence. Thus, the consideration of modes as organized by, or embedded in, a causal nexus requires organization under an attribute and are in this regard horizontal and passive. When activity is attributed to a

mode, its relation to other modes as cause for their existence is not an attribute specific consideration but a substance-mode relationship that is paralleled in all of the attributes.²⁷

A consequence of this revision is that we must reconceive substance as infinite intellectual substance, lest we bifurcate thought (and succumb to the Newlands criticism) or alienate modal existence from substance (eliminate the union that is blessedness).²⁸ Recall that Spinoza's prescribed ethical path is one of transformation from inadequate (passive) ideation to adequate (active) ideation. This transformation is necessary because God cannot have inadequate ideas and it is precisely due to the presence of God's (active) ideas in the human mind that one can be said to be blessed. With the elimination of the replication of thoughts in Spinoza's doctrine of ideas of ideas that comes with the disassociation of the attributes from the active-passive distinction, we nonetheless require that God's thoughts be identified with the thoughts of the blessed human. As such, substance must be conceived of as intellectual substance—though not horizontal—and thus alienated from the attributes. This is why the proposed solution is ontological idealism.²⁹

²⁷ The vertical/horizontal association functions very much like the eternal/durational relation (eternal being analogous to vertical and durational analogous to horizontal) which H. F. Hallett identifies as the most "fundamentally determinative" aspect of Spinoza's system, claiming, "for Spinoza, eternity is the reality of duration, and therefore the very stuff of the Real," (H. F. Hallett, "Spinoza's Conception of Eternity," *Mind* 37, no. 147 [July 1928], 303). In fact, Hallett identifies many of the same themes that I do in relation to intuitive knowledge, a criticism of those who fail to address Spinoza's ethical theory, and the active/passive distinction. However, Hallett is unable to assist Spinoza's system with the eternal/durational relation because without revision, the prioritization of eternity over duration makes modes into fictions and thus leads to acosmism—a distortion of Spinoza's ontology.

²⁸ A. W. Moore, in his book *The Infinite* (New York: Routledge, 2001), argues that Spinoza's conception of the infinite was flawed (that virtually all historical conceptions of the infinite are flawed). Moore identifies a distinction between the mathematical infinite and the metaphysical infinite and views Spinoza's claims about the infinity of God and the infinity of space and time within the attributes as an acknowledgment or reformulation of this distinction. While I suspect this distinction is reconcilable in Spinoza's system by way of Spinozist mysticism, we shall see in chapter four that this topic is put off to future research.

²⁹ Salvation, for Spinoza, is a shared identity of one's thought with the being of substance/God. Substance/God, must be ideal in order for this to occur.

By way of illustration, consider again our chess board illuminated with an overhead lamp. However, let us reorient the symbolism to that of horizontal identity and vertical activity. We will consider two states: 1) when the lamp hangs high above the chess board, illuminating the whole board as well as all of the pieces, and 2) when the lamp is very close to the board, illuminating only a very small portion of the board (it is a small lamp), only a pawn and its adjacent spaces. Further, let us consider the illumination constitutive of one's structural position in the causal nexus of the game. In terms of this illustration, the horizontal scope of one's awareness, or structural identity, is limited proportional to one's activity. When one's vertical association is limited, one's horizontal association is also limited. The mechanism by which a mode expands horizontally is by way of virtue—by way of cultivating one's intellect so as to align with the divine intellect. This vertical movement is activity. As activity increases, the lamp rises, illuminating ever more of the board. The pawn who can, in state 1, only see the square in front of it, is ignorant, unfree, and limited. If the pawn can increase its activity, it comes to see itself as part of a complex game; the pawn needs to see the relations of the whole board to know what its true role, its true nature, is and its integral function to the game as a whole. The upper limit of the expansion of a pawn's virtue is nothing short of the whole of existence *sub specie aeternitatis*, or substance itself. Again, this being—being itself—being an intellectual relation, the revision is ontological idealism.

3.5.3. How the Proposed Revision Solves Spinoza's Deep Attribute Problem

We have seen, in Chapter 2, that Spinoza's theory of attributes is deeply flawed, as is his doctrine of parallelism. The attributes need to be differentiated from substance as well as, if we

are to honor Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism, be organized so as not to have any meaningful (real) difference (no bloat, cross attribute dependence, or change in modal character). The above revision to the active/passive distinction accomplishes these tasks with surprisingly little revision to Spinoza's system overall, all the while honoring the intensions and character of the system at large. As such, the revision is both friendly and judicious. Below, I take up the task of answering the following questions: 1) How does the proposed revision solve Spinoza's deep attribute problem? and, 2) how does the proposed revision solve Spinoza's problems with parallelism?

Disassociating the attributes from the active/passive distinction differentiates the attributes from substance (now absolutely infinite intellectual substance) and thus avoids the attribute-substance conflation identified in Chapter Two. We have seen that the *causa sui* nature of substance entails that substance has the capacity to be viewed as active creator or passive creation in Spinoza's *natura naturans/natura naturata* distinction. According to the proposed revision, the vertical, *natura naturans*, association of mode with substance is always active because when so conceived, they are participating in substance in its creative conception. On the other hand, the horizontal, *natura naturata*, association of modes with attribute (and with one another) is always passive because when so conceived, they are participating in substance in its created conception. However, in claiming that the attributes each fully represent the essence of substance, Spinoza maintains that the attributes themselves are active. This cannot be correct as we have seen that a full representation of the essence of substance conflates the attributes with substance and results in contradiction. We have also seen that the active/passive distinction does not function in parallel fashion between the

attributes in Spinoza's unrevised system (thought being capable of greater activity than extension). When we disassociate the attributes from the active/passive distinction, we resolve the conflation with substance by limiting the attributes representation of the nature of substance to its passive/created/modal existence. Disassociating the attributes from the active/passive distinction also prevents an imbalance between attributes as no one attribute, nor the modes considered under any attribute, can be capable of activity and thus no one attribute can be said to be more active than another. This is also why we must revise Spinoza's understanding of substance to absolutely infinite and intellectual—the intellectual connection between divine conceivability and modal/horizontal being is preserved but not subordinated to an attribute (which would be a horizontal, not vertical, relation).

Now, one might immediately object that the role of activity just outlined entails at least that thought be active, else we do violence to Spinoza's ethics, making the proposed revision unfriendly and non-judicious. However, and it is important that we remember that the presence of activity in Spinoza's ethical theory undermines his system, an account of activity can still be had—activity, being derivative of active substance, is no longer identified through minds or bodies and their varying capacities, but rooted in the being of modes, their foundation for existence: absolutely infinite intellectual substance.³⁰ This reclassification of substance is necessary for the preservation of Spinoza's ethics because the identity of substance's thoughts with those of the blessed is central. Authentic thought is adequate thought and acts as a lynchpin between the vertical and horizontal.

³⁰ We will take this up once again in Chapter 4 under the identification modal existentialism.

The conflation of the attributes with substance is but one side of Spinoza's deep attribute problem, the other being the conflation of the attributes with each other. The conflation of the attributes with each other, however, is only problematic in their inexplicable multiplicity, in their imbalance/lopsidedness. So long as a contradiction does not arise from the posit of multiple attributes, Spinoza is free to maintain their multiplicity. One might complain that the multiplicity of attributes is redundant. I am sympathetic to such a complaint.³¹ However, Spinoza maintains that an important difference between attribute and substance is that substance is absolutely infinite in that it expresses both infinite modes and infinite attributes whereas an individual attribute is merely infinite (not absolutely infinite). As such, though Spinoza's system may be more elegant with the elimination of infinite attributes, such a revision would have a greater impact on Spinoza's system and thus be less friendly than the one presented here. So, though it may be preferable to eliminate the presence of multiple attributes, there is no contradiction to be had by multiple attributes running in parallel and there is no strict redundancy so long as we identify a unique character, a qualitative difference, between the attributes such as body and mind or object and image.

Disassociating the attributes from the active/passive distinction also salvages Spinoza's parallelism by eliminating the meaningful (impactful) differences between the attributes. This frees Spinoza to maintain the causal separation between attributes. Importantly, as noted above, this is not a conflation of attributes with each other. In disassociating the attributes from the active/passive distinction, we disassociate activity from the attributes, relocating it in the

³¹ It is important that we refrain from taking too many liberties with any system to which we apply a revisionist methodology. While I would rather not see the redundancy that is present between the attributes, we should accept it as it is friendly to Spinoza.

root existence of modes in substance and thus categorically relocate the impactful differences between the attributes. Once we eliminate the variance of activity between the attributes, we can see that there is no more bloat, cross attribute dependence, or cross attribute reasoning (unless problematically done by human minds—e.g. emotions, problematic dependence relations). As such, the only difference between the attributes is their organizational quality of being presented as thoughts or bodies (or the 3rd, 4th, ect. Attribute quality which is unknown to us).

Disassociating the attributes from the active/passive distinction rescues Spinoza's system from the cross-attribute dependence identified in Chapter 2 (see central issue #1). Because the attributes, according to the proposed revision, are an ordering of the created world (*natura naturata*), they are free to run in parallel and we are enabled to honor the explanatory barrier that is violated by Spinoza's unrevised system. While we are free to casually claim things like "my thought of the table is about the body before me that is a table,"³² thoughts do not take up objects in any materially relevant way³³ and, as such, cannot be said to be dependent on their objects.³⁴ Nor can bodies be said to be dependent on thoughts as any account of body creation is either explained in a body to body relation or (and more properly)

³² The difference between casual claims and precise claims is perhaps best understood in Berkeleian terms. Berkeley famously differentiates vulgar speech from learned speech in order to identify precisely when and where we must be critical of the language we use. The claim here is that speaking across attributes is fine in the vulgar sense and coherent so long as we learnedly honor the explanatory barrier between the attributes—a task that can occur only with revision such as the one advocated for.

³³ Goldstein expresses this when she observes, "From the point of view of truth itself, the view that Spinoza dubs "the Infinite Intellect of God," those differences that loom so large in human affairs are not represented at all. These differences emerge only in our limited points of view—finite, all too finite." Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza*, 15.

³⁴ Recall too that the establishment of dependence between thought and extension is meant to explain certain violations of parallelism. Once these problems are eliminated, there is no more motivation for establishing a dependence relation (at least not between attributes).

explained by the creative power that is exclusive to absolutely infinite intellectual substance (thus conceived as a vertical relation). So, according to the proposed revision, attributes do not violate the explanatory barrier and so there is no more cross-attribute dependence. The thought-being parallelism of E2P7 is not a cross attribute dependence but rather a dependence of the attributes on substance as absolutely infinite intellectual substance whose conceptions found/create the attributes and the modes. With universal dependence on substance, it follows that there is no need for thoughts or bodies as objects of thoughts (at least not thought *qua* attribute even if thought *qua* substance). The generative nature of the (absolutely) infinite intellect is rendered the active aspect of modes in virtue of their foundation in substance. The dependence that is apparent in thought-being parallelism is now a dependence of mode on substance not mode on mode. After all, if a mode of thought was the generator of a mode in extension, these being the very same mode, then modes would be *causa sui*, and therefore substances.

Continuing, if the attributes are disassociated from the active/passive distinction, Spinoza's system also no longer suffers the problem of bloat addressed in Chapter 2 (see central issue #2). Recall that Spinoza's system suffers an imbalance between the attributes in terms of number of modes. However, once the attributes are made passive, Spinoza's doctrine of ideas of ideas no longer fills the role of enabling thought *qua* attribute to reach God via activity had by a second (and third, fourth, etc.) layer of ideas, or modes of thought. Instead, the activity of God is realized by modes in virtue of their proximate participation in substance *qua* existence/authenticity of thought. As such, the mistake of Spinoza's doctrine of ideas of ideas is the replication of passive ideas to make them active, thus increasing the number of

ideas. According to my revision, ideas are made active by way of their grounding in absolutely infinite intellectual substance, an aspect that is intrinsic to all existing things. This is a bit like Melamed's infinite aspects but notably different in that the revision neuters the capacity for modal activity to be represented relative to the attributes. So, because ideas of ideas are not new ideas (nor new aspects, nor new qualities) but the identification of the true nature of an idea as active in virtue of its existence in/as substance, Spinoza's parallelism is no longer violated yet the privileged position of thought is maintained.

With the disassociation of the attributes from the active/passive distinction, there is no more cross attribute reasoning (central issue #3) because veridicality is no longer cross-attribute dependent. "Thing" now means "mode" unequivocally and the generative intellect is now identified exclusively with substance. The metaphysical landscape, as it pertains to the disassociation of the attributes from the active/passive distinction, entails that thought and extension—indeed all of the attributes—are mere conceptualizing schemes and do not have the capacity to act (or be acted on); the attributes as an organization of passive modes eliminates any activity one attribute might wield against another.

But what of the cross-attribute relations that pervade Spinoza's theory of human emotion? Importantly, human beings can still err by way of emotional reasoning, reasoning that blurs the boundary between the attributes. As such, humans confuse themselves and harbor inadequate ideas not because cross-attribute reasoning is sound but precisely because

reasoning across the attributes is an unsound violation of the explanatory barrier between the attributes.³⁵

Another reason that cross attribute relations are avoided is that each attribute is fully coherent independently of any other attribute (which is generally regarded as Spinoza's intention). In the case of thought and extension we see the world phenomenally mapped by ideas and the extended world of objects that are paralleled by the mapping. *Sub specie aeternitatis* there is no real/impactful/quantitative difference. That what I am calling "mapping" is the perfect alignment of thought and extension (and any other attribute). Recall the illuminated chess board—the board and all its pieces are present *sub specie aeternitatis*. The errors that are produced from reasoning across the attributes are attributable to those imperfect modes, such as humans, who reason across the attributes and suffer the (emotional) consequences for doing so.

Now, one might worry that the proposed solution here is a bifurcation of thought along the lines of Newland's concerns about mentalism and thus succumb to the criticisms levied against Newlands in Ch. 1. This is not the case. Whereas Newlands' solution entails that there exist thoughts that are external to the attribute of thought and thus alienating human minds from that of God, my revision places all thoughts in the domain of the attribute of thought but regards them as passive when so conceived. The work that is done by Newland's extra-thought ideas (by the upper level of his bifurcation) is, according to the proposed revision, not a thought

³⁵ Diane Steinberg explores Spinoza's epistemology as it relates to human ideation of external and material things in her work "Knowledge in Spinoza's *Ethics*," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. Koistinen, 140–166.

qua attribute but a relation of activity between absolutely infinite intellectual substance and mode.

One might also worry that this is an internalizing of the infinite aspects of thought along the lines of Melamed's infinite aspects solution. This too is not the case as Melamed internalizes the infinite aspects of thought in modes conceived under the attribute of thought, problematically placing them in the domain of *natura naturata*. According the proposed revision, the thought-being parallelism is a relation between substance and mode, not the modes of thought to modes of other attributes.

3.5.4. The Solution is Ontological Idealism

The limited scope of the proposed revision, the limited fallout of the proposed revision, and the coherence of the proposed revision with other claims made by Spinoza (both major and minor) indicate that the revision is both friendly and judicious. The benefits of the solution explored in this chapter are sufficient for accepting my reading of Spinoza's system as a possible option and is superior to the interpretations in the literature as each either conflict a great deal with Spinoza's system (making them unfriendly) or succumb to the contradictions that have been shown to be present in the unrevised system. One further virtue to my take on Spinoza's system as ontological idealism has been indicated in the discussion about Spinoza's ethical theory as an ethics of mind/thought. However, the extent to which Spinoza's ethics can now be understood as integral to his metaphysics and epistemology has been discussed at length. As such, I commit the rest of this chapter to a discussion on how and why my revision portrays Spinoza's system as ontological idealism; it should now be clear that the revision

offered is an idealist solution.³⁶ I have frequently made this claim. Specifically I have identified that a) idealist readings are the only interpretations of Spinoza's system that do not conflict with major themes in Spinoza's system, b) Spinoza's ethics is only comprehensible as an ethics of thought, and c) activity pertains to adequacy and consequently to the vertical association between substance and mode that constitutes the system at large. However, as this is a primary aim of this dissertation—to establish Spinoza's system as idealism, albeit by way of revision—it is important that we identify precisely how and why this is the case.

We have seen that activity now pertains only to substance in its relation to modes. This should not be surprising in its friendliness to Spinoza's system for virtually all that Spinoza has to say about the primacy of substance entails that substance is active, not passive, and that all other things, modes conceived under some attribute, depend on substance and are thus conceived through something else. What may be surprising, however, is that this solution is ontological idealism. We have seen that Spinoza seems to harbor a bias against idealism and the reality of ideas; perhaps Spinoza's resistance to, or bias against, idealism contributed to the problems with his system and to his oversight of the productivity in associating modes to substance by way of a vertical association, all this perhaps leading him to distort the rational coherence of his system regarding the attributes and the active/passive distinction. However, I am not in the business of reading the mind of Spinoza. The plain truth is that the system Spinoza delivered suffers inconsistencies and the proposed solution and the consequential

³⁶ I stand with Della Rocca on the importance of the PSR to Spinoza's system, revised or not. As such, the very center of Spinoza's metaphysics, substance, is constituted by intelligibility. Della Rocca has identified Spinoza's reliance on intelligibility as, "the heart and soul of rationalism." Michael Della Rocca, "Introduction," in *Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Della Rocca, 3.

ontological idealism solves those problems in a highly economic fashion. Let us now explain how and why the system is ontological idealism.

The disassociation of the attributes from the active/passive distinction requires that substance be ideal. No explanations remain that appeal to the attribute of thought in its idealism of the coherence of Spinoza's ethics with his metaphysics and epistemology remains available that appeals to the attribute of thought, i.e., no other forms of idealism but mine preserve what has been preserved. The attribute of thought, now being a mere conceptualizing schema, and in order for Spinoza's parallelism to be preserved, 1) cannot imbue its modes with internal aspects that are not present in the other attributes (Melamed's solution), 2) cannot be characterized in unique fashion in order to relate it to other attributes (Pollack's solution), 3) cannot be bifurcated into divine thought and human thought (Newlands' solution), and 4) cannot take up a special role relating to human ethical behavior. Instead, we must conceive of thought as the ontic foundation of Spinoza's metaphysics. Della Rocca was right that "to be is to be intelligible". This is because intelligibility *is* being. Only by way of this identification of substance, as not only absolutely infinite, but also intellectual are we able to arrive at a coherent Spinozist system that honors his doctrine of parallelism, conserves the priority given to thought, and reconciles his metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Thus, according to my revision, substance must be understood as absolutely infinite intellectual substance. Let me now clarify.

Once substance is identified as absolutely infinite intellectual substance, the system is clearly ontological idealism as the fundamental ontological category is ideal, all other things, e.g. extension, being dependent on thought-substance. But why must we identify substance as

intellectual in nature, is not it sufficient to reorient the active/passive distinction? It is not. Substance itself cannot be divided and thus can have only one nature.³⁷ Spinoza has described this nature as being, power, and activity itself but not explicitly as thought. Thought is the only other place where being, power, and activity, are joined. In Spinoza's unrevised system this has led some, we have seen, to identify Spinoza's system as idealism.³⁸ However, that substance itself must be ideal is necessitated by the dominant role of thought in the ethics. For the thoughts of the blessed to be the thoughts of God entails that the being of substance be cognitive.³⁹ On the other hand, substance is only extended relative to the attributes. As such, if we were to revise the active/passive distinction without identifying substance as fundamentally intellectual, we would fail to honor Spinoza's ethical theory. Further, appeals to the fact that thought qua attribute do not apply to the thought that is instrumental in founding the central concepts of Spinoza's system; that thought, in so far as it is an attribute, does not account for all of the instances of thought in Spinoza's system. Thought, for Spinoza, is now understood as two-fold. First, there is generative thought such as the thought that is found in the definition of substance, the attributes, modes, etc. This is the thought of thought-being parallelism and

³⁷ Johannes Haag, in "Fichte on the Consciousness of Spinoza's God," explores Fichte's criticism of Spinoza, particularly that of Spinoza's failure to distinguish between "pure and empirical consciousness" (Johannes Haag, "Fichte on the Consciousness of Spinoza's God," in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. Förster and Melamed, 100). My vertical/horizontal schema informs this issue in that the individual consciousness is linked vertically to the consciousness of God but has a horizontal, this-worldly, expression as human, modal, consciousness. There is a second interesting Fichte-Spinoza controversy that my position informs, that of freedom. By way of the vertical/horizontal distinction, we can see the freedom of humans is rooted in God's wholly arbitrary nature (the mystical connection). For more on this connection, see Allen Wood, "Fichte on Freedom: The Spinozistic Background," in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. Förster and Melamed, 121–135.

³⁸ I agree with Della Rocca that a strong adherence to the PSR, or rationalism in general, ultimately leads to idealism in that conceivability is the foundation of any further posit. This entails an extreme priority of the mind as I see no non-mental way of construing conceivability.

³⁹ This is a strong form of idealism—the very being of substance is thought. Newberger Goldstein touches on this when she observes, "logic alone *is* the very fabric of reality" (Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza*, 48). Substance is reason and reason is thought. It is simply not possible for reason to be material, only ideal.

resembles Descartes' infinite intellectual substance from which mind and body are derived. This bifurcation tracks Spinoza's identification of Substance as *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. Second, there is thought *qua* the attribute of thought. The epistemic relation of thought to extension is thus unaffected. Also, the thought of thought that tracks thought-being parallelism is unaffected. Spinozist substance thus resembles Descartes' infinite intellectual substance, the attributes the created substances of mind and body.

The Cartesian contribution here cannot be understated. Nicholas Jolley, in *The Light of the Soul: Theories of Ideas in Leibniz, Malebranche, and Descartes*, identifies the intense relationship between Cartesian ideas and thought when he observes,

From the fact that Descartes uses the term 'idea' to denote objective realities, it does not follow that these objective realities are ontologically distinct from mental events. It would similarly be a mistake to suppose that Spinoza's talk of minds and bodies means that he is committed to an ontology of substantial dualism.⁴⁰

Whereas Descartes claims to successfully arrive at the existence of a distinct, bodily substance, Spinoza is right to criticize the posit of separate substances and thus I take Descartes to be in error in positing bodies as independent of thought. After all, Cartesian substances do depend on God (if only on God) to exist and God is an intellectual substance. As such, Descartes too should be an idealist. This claim, however, is controversial and is rightly taken up elsewhere.

Had Spinoza not gone on to produce his own bifurcation of substance into the attributes of thought and extension, Spinoza too would be an idealist and very much of the Cartesian sort. In positing extension as an attribute, Spinoza makes a similar move to Descartes and likewise, is not typically associated with idealism. However, Spinoza also errs in his demonstration of the

⁴⁰ Nicholas Jolley, *The Light of the Soul: Theories of Ideas in Leibniz, Malebranche, and Descartes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 17–18.

existence of extended substance and falls into a similar, but meaningfully different, trap as that of Descartes. Namely, the deep attribute problem that this dissertation has discussed at great length.

Beyond the metaphysical idealism brought by a Cartesian conception of substance as infinite intellectual substance, Descartes' epistemological contribution to philosophy—that of clear and distinct conception—has been observed as instrumental in the development of early modern idealism. Dunham, Grant, and Watson have observed and critiqued the views of Burnyeat and Hibbs who discuss the extent to which the grounding of philosophy in the subject (the *cogito*) made idealism possible. They claim that

...what is important in Descartes' philosophy is not only the subjectivist move that made the phenomenalist position conceivable but also the fact that he introduced the *motivation* for defending such a view by advancing a fully developed mechanistic theory of the extended world that attempted to explain every aspect of physical nature. However, Descartes' theory of extension can in no way account for consciousness or life, while at the same time his fully developed theory of thinking substance *can* account for extension without the postulation of a separate substance.⁴¹

They also argue that,

When Descartes made the important philosophical step towards phenomenal idealism, he did so by taking Platonic idealism and changing its central domain of operation. Rather than using the "Ideas" in order to explain the cosmological production of physical reality, he used them in order to explain the phenomenological production of our experienced reality. "Ideas" for Descartes are Platonic in the sense that they are the innate archetypes common to all rational beings. There can be no doubt that Descartes made an important and novel move, but in order to make this move he used an idealist structure that he borrowed from Plato. Descartes then developed a new and interesting *form* of idealism rather than being the first to make idealism possible.⁴²

⁴¹ Dunham, Grant, and Watson, *Idealism*, 35.

⁴² Dunham, Grant, and Watson, 35–36.

Spinoza's use of Descartes epistemology, though in the form of adequate ideas instead of clear and distinct ideas, carries the same implications for Spinoza's system, that knowing, that "Ideas", grounds the project of philosophy in such a way as to constitute the metaphysical posits offered. It is with the rejection of multiple substances that draws Spinoza's system back into a Cartesian intellectual substance as ontological ground.

Spinoza is right to reject multiple substances. There cannot be multiple substances interacting. As such, the generative thought substance, like the substance of Descartes, creates the world schematized into mind and body or thought and extension but as attributes not substances. This picture is ontological idealism because the attribute schematization and modal expressions of substance depend on substance as intellect. From this it follows that Spinoza's whole system is ontically grounded in the ideal. This move is required if we are to accommodate Spinoza's ethics of mind.

3.6. Conclusions

Given the benefits to Spinoza's system outlined heretofore, one should take the proposed revision seriously. However, prudence demands that we accept revisions cautiously. If the revision impacts the system too dramatically, it gives reason for its rejection. So, to what extent is Spinoza's system altered if we accept the proposed revision? Importantly, and in no small way due to Spinoza's geometric method, an alteration to Spinoza's active/passive distinction forces changes in other regards; alterations to such an interconnected system run the risk of being contagious. For example, the disassociation of the attributes from the active/passive distinction compels changes in Spinoza's claims about the attributes themselves.

Specifically, Spinoza's claims about attributes being complete representations of the nature of Substance is altered. Substance is only fully understood when viewed as both *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. The attributes only provide a picture of substance viewed as consequence and thus cannot fully represent the essence of Substance.⁴³ Substance is thus beyond attribute. Another example of further alterations that result from the revision is the ethical process involved in blessedness (the doctrine of ideas of ideas is no longer). However, these alterations, and others, are shown to be surprisingly few in number and well aligned with Spinoza's doctrines. There remain some important questions and implications to be addressed but these are not prudently taken up in great depth but rather left for future research. Now, in Chapter 4, I will take stock of all that has been said and identify the two primary implications of my revision that must be left to future research: modal existentialism and ethical mysticism.

⁴³ Later we will see that this is central to my inclinations about Spinoza's system being mysticism. To borrow a concept from Ibn 'Arabi: we must see the world through two eyes – as fundamentally active and singular, and as fundamentally passive and plural.

Chapter 4: Taking Stock and Identifying Avenues for Future Research

The aim of this dissertation has been to demonstrate that Spinoza's metaphysics is best understood as ontological idealism. Two significant steps have been shown to be necessary in achieving this end: 1) demonstrating that Spinoza's system requires revision due to the deep attribute problem; and 2) demonstrating that the coherence of Spinoza's system is best rescued by way of a revision of the relationship between the attributes and the proper scope of application of the active/passive distinction. In this chapter, I provide a synthesis of the philosophical themes that have been central to achieving the above goals. My intent is to draw the thematic threads together to show how they cohere once grounded on the foundation of ontological idealism. Following this summary/synthesis is a discussion of two important avenues for future research that appear to follow from the revisionist project of this dissertation: Spinozist existentialism and Spinozist mysticism.

4.1. Putting It All Together

The philosophical themes with which this dissertation has been concerned are numerous and will be summarized in turn. These themes are: biases against idealism, the dialectical progression of Spinoza scholarship towards the contemporary question of idealism, proposed interpretations of Spinoza's system and their shortcomings, the identification of significant issues with Spinoza's system (particularly with parallelism but also the nature of attributes), interpretive vs revisionist approaches to dealing with the problems of parallelism and attributes in Spinoza's system, the priority of thought over extension in Spinoza's system,

the impossibility of materialist interpretations, positioning Spinoza's ethics in his system (metaphysically and epistemically), the active/passive distinction, and the extent and nature of the Cartesian landscape/background of Spinoza's system. I will here show how these various themes weave together into a coherent interpretation of Spinoza's system as one of ontological idealism

The theme of bias arises in three different contexts: a contemporary bias against idealism, Spinoza's bias against idealism, and the historical bias against Spinoza's work. Of these, the first two make valuable contributions to our understanding along the lines of the aim of this dissertation. The third provides us with a sense of irony and some puzzles regarding the reception of Spinoza's thought. Let's take each of these in turn.

The twentieth century saw the rise and dominance of Anglo-American analytic philosophy, with Moore and Russell at the forefront of battling the idealism of the 19th century. In contemporary debates, anti-idealists are found in many quarters, such as supporters of E.H. Carr, who argue that idealism leads to many ills in international relations,¹ and the materialist JJ Smart, who charges that an idealist has the tendency to mix metaphysics with epistemology to the detriment of objectivity.² Identifying an anti-idealism bias in contemporary philosophical thought, we come to see two related things more clearly: first, that despite the growing inclination to identify Spinoza's system as some kind of idealism, there is an uphill battle, and secondly, idealist interpretations require a greater dynamism, a greater body of evidence, to be

¹ Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, (London: Macmillan, 1940).

² J. Smart, "Realism v. Idealism," *Philosophy* 61, no. 237 (1986): 295–312 (1986), <https://doi:10.1017/S0031819100051287>.

persuasive. Both of these effects are presumably under-championed due to the institutional philosophical resistance to idealism in general. Once identified, the philosophical community, being now aware of their potential blind spots, is better able to remove them and weigh the evidence for Spinozist idealism without the hinderance of bias.

The second theme of bias, Spinoza's own bias against idealism, gains us insight into why Spinoza repeatedly, and erroneously, balanced the clear priority of ideas (idealism) in his system with inconsistent errors such as cross attribute reasoning and dependence involved in the relation between the attributes of thought and extension. Spinoza's ambiguous use of "thing" indicates that while his system entails that thoughts are modes, Spinoza nonetheless struggles to identify thoughts as real in comparison to bodies.³ That is, Spinoza is not clear on the reality of thought. On the one hand, thoughts are as real as any mode. On the other hand, thoughts are less than real, and struggle to be real by adhering to the body they take as their object. Spinoza's aim, to take on Descartes' mind-body problem, never escapes this initial tension which taints his doctrine of parallelism by way of the deep attribute problem. The system elevates ideas; the bias incoherently subordinates them to bodies.

There is a deep irony in the anti-idealism bias held by Spinoza but also a lesson to be learned. Spinoza's system appears to be corrupted by bias in its construction. Had Spinoza been welcoming to the dominant role of thought in his system, e.g., by casting substance as absolutely infinite intellectual substance, it would have been more coherent. Instead, Spinoza's

³ Interestingly, Melamed supposes that the central role parallelism plays in Spinoza's system is what disinclines Spinoza to idealism (Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics* 195). However, I have identified an anti-idealist bias that is longstanding in Spinoza's work which suggests rather that certain erroneous developments in Spinoza's system are motivated by this bias rather than the bias forming from a commitment to an inconsistent theory of parallelism.

system is merely translucent or partially clear which invites misinterpretation of his system. We find this to be the case in the initial condemnation of Spinoza's system as atheistic. However, as interpretations arise from different trends in philosophy, e.g., with materialist interpretations arising from a period of materialist popularity, the perspective of Spinoza's system too shifts. The dialectical oscillation of interpretations of Spinoza's work suggests both that Spinoza's system fails to adequately delineate itself (due to the forms of incoherence explored in this dissertation) and that interpretation fails to provide us with an objective system, falling instead into the trends favored by the interpreters.

The dialectical progression, in its contemporary vector, is aiming towards the contemporary question of idealism. We noted Spinoza's influence on German idealism and the British conflation of idealism with subjectivism. Whereas the German idealists took Spinoza in a direction of their own (a lineage beyond the scope of this dissertation), the British conflation set the groundwork for a materialist interpretation of Spinoza's work in its ultimate dismissal of Spinozist idealism resulting from the association of idealism with subjectivism and the recognition of objectivity in Spinoza's system. While continental philosophy took its own direction, analytic thought came to favor materialism. It is no small thing that materialist interpretations of Spinoza resulted from the popularity of materialism in philosophy generally. As materialist interpretations of Spinoza's thought have become increasingly shown to be troubled—they fail to grasp the big picture of Spinoza's project, the fundamental role of thought, and fail to account for Spinoza's ethical theory—the pendulum is now beginning to swing in the other direction and many scholars find themselves compelled to square off with the question of Spinozist idealism. However, as the dialectic shifts in the direction of idealism,

this cannot be the final resting place until revision is accepted; no solution can overcome the problems popularly recognized that are demonstrably present in Spinoza's system (i.e. regarding Spinoza's theory of attributes and doctrine of parallelism) without adopting a revisionist approach to these problems.

We explored numerous non-revisionist interpretations of Spinoza's system that attempt to identify an objective Spinozism and saw that each suffer their own shortcomings. While certain of these interpretations are more aligned with Spinoza's system than others, the ultimate point to take away is that Spinoza's system needs revision. Interpretations that favor a subjective/objective approach or a materialist approach to the attributes undermine Spinoza's ethics and parallelism. Spinoza's ethics is an ethics of thought and both of these interpretive strategies portray thought as seeking the objective reality of bodies instead of harmonizing one's thoughts with those of God. These approaches also undermine the doctrine of parallelism by characterizing the attributes differently. Unique solutions, such as that of Newlands, also fail to overcome, or sufficiently address, the identifiable problems with Spinoza's system such as the ability of the virtuous to reconcile themselves with the thought of God. Such idealist interpretations also undermine the doctrine of parallelism but are better at capturing the overall character of Spinoza's system, at least in their ability to deal with Spinoza's views on thought. Thought-being parallelism, for example, demands consideration that other interpretations are unable to provide. The interpretive elevation of thought, however, is yet another rejection of parallelism along the same lines as the interpretive strategies mentioned above. As none of these approaches accept revision, they are all limited in their ability to bring

sense to a flawed system. Spinoza's system is flawed and, as such, requires a revisionist strategy, not an interpretive one.

Spinoza's system is flawed in that it suffers from incongruities stemming from what I have called the "deep attribute problem". Spinoza's deep attribute problem is an ambiguity that results in either a conflation of attribute with substance or attributes with each other. In the first instance, we see a contradiction in substance being both one and many. In the second instance we find numerous problems with Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism, problems that result from the deep attribute problem.

The problems with parallelism that are explored in this dissertation are: 1) cross-attribute dependence in which Spinoza claims there are dependence relations between the attributes despite also claiming that they are fundamentally identical, a tension that has provided ammunition to both materialist and idealist interpretations of Spinoza's work (e.g. the claim that thoughts depend extended objects for their veridicality); 2) the conflict between thought-being parallelism and attribute parallelism in which idea-thing parallelism imposes an imbalance between the attributes, a lopsidedness or imbalance, as well as giving priority to thought in so far as it alone has resultant access to each other attribute; and 3) across-attributes reasoning in which Spinoza explains thought in terms of extension and vice versa, which is prohibited by the explanatory barrier between the attributes. These errors in Spinoza's system impact the coherence of his metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, and threatens to undermine their integral role in the overall character and aim of the system. Philosophical analysis entails telling hard truths and while most scholars endeavor to rescue Spinoza's system

on its own terms, the hard truth is that the system is deeply flawed but not irreparably. We must first acknowledge that Spinoza's system is deficient before we can recue it.

In the face of the deficiencies with Spinoza's theory of attributes and doctrine of parallelism, we see that all interpretive solutions must fail. They must fail because Spinoza's system, unrevised, leads to contradictions. I have made the significant claim that all non-revisionist interpretations must fall back into the original shortcomings of the system and that a friendly and judicious revision is required if we are to recognize a coherent Spinozism. Interpretations will vary and continue to vie with one another for superiority but so long as there are contradictions embedded in the original system, any interpretation will prove insufficient. Although my proposed revision is a bold and controversial, so long as we can draw a coherent system from Spinoza's philosophical contributions, we must take action to eliminate its deep internal conflicts. As such, Spinoza scholarship should aim at an economical revision rather than a mere interpretation.

The proposed revision is idealism because with or without revision, there is a clear priority of thought in Spinoza's system. As such, the idealist interpretations are, by and large, better solutions than their competitors. Not only is there a natural priority of thought inherent in the principle of sufficient reason (PSR) as a foundation, but also, and here I agree with Della Rocca, the attribute of thought plays a foundational role in Spinoza's metaphysics (e.g. in the definition of attribute), epistemology, and ethics—which has been shown to be an ethics of mind at the expense of the body. As any revision should honor the overall character of the system which it aims to assist, the path to idealism, even ontological idealism, is preferred to all others. Perfection is ideal, virtue is ideal, being is ideal, causality is ideal, and conception

grounds the entire system. This is nothing other than the priority given to thought at root in a metaphysical sense, an observation that continues to grow in its acceptance among Spinoza scholars. As idealism better captures the character of Spinoza's system, our revision to Spinoza's system must too be idealism if it is to be friendly and judicious.

Materialist interpretations, on the other hand, are particularly incompatible with the overall character of Spinoza's system. Beyond succumbing to the problems inherent in Spinoza's system, a flaw that all interpretive approaches suffer, materialist interpretations threaten the greatest affront to Spinoza's system. Materialism undermines Spinoza's parallelism, disregards the ideal quality of the PSR and the role of thought in the constitution of the fundamental ontic categories of the system, and eviscerates Spinoza's ethical theory. Materialist solutions at best reduce Spinoza's ethics to mere description. Materialist solutions are implausible interpretively, and in their failure to honor Spinoza's overall project should be rejected as candidates for a revisionist approach.

A driving force in the consideration of revisionist approaches is the integral role of Spinoza's ethical theory in his overall system. Spinoza's ethics is generally recognized as having a questionable status in proportion to his epistemology and metaphysics, especially regarding the literature pertaining to the question of Spinozist idealism which generally focuses on Spinoza's metaphysics. That this is unfortunate is a primary theme of this dissertation, especially considering that Spinoza's ethics is so clearly inclined towards idealism. That the most comprehensive account of Spinoza's system is titled *Ethics* ought, if anything, entail a subordination of Spinoza's metaphysics and epistemology to his ethics rather than the other way around. At the very least, one should question any interpretation or characterization of

Spinoza's philosophy that is dismissive of his ethics. It has also been observed as unfortunate that those who focus on Spinoza's ethics do so without sufficiently addressing the metaphysical issues that haunt his system. Since Spinoza's ethical theory is meant to follow from his metaphysics and epistemology, a thorough investigation into Spinoza's ethics should include an explanation as to how. Perhaps the most important of the economic advantages wrought by my revision is the integration of Spinoza's ethics with his metaphysics and epistemology.

The key to my revision involves Spinoza's active/passive distinction especially as regards its relationship to the attributes. Specifically, I have argued that the attributes cannot be subsumed under the distinction and that divorcing the attributes from association with the active/passive distinction allows for the rescue of Spinoza's system from the deep attribute problem and resultant problems with parallelism. Spinoza's unrevised system locates the attributes in *natura naturans* and, as such, conflates them with substance. If, on the other hand, we were to understand the attributes as *natura naturata*, we would make modes of the attributes. Only upon divorcing this association altogether are we able to overcome Spinoza's deep attribute problem. The active/passive distinction plays a large role in tying Spinoza's system together. It connects his metaphysics with his ethics by way of adequate ideas being active. It further connects his ethics in the identification of adequate ideas as the path to ultimate virtue. In identifying that the active/passive distinction applies properly to substance and modes, not to attributes, we find that Spinoza's system is greatly improved, and we are left with a coherent ontological idealism.

The Cartesian background to both the development of Spinoza's thought and to the character of my revision tracks certain controversial interpretations of Descartes' philosophy as

idealism⁴ and provides us with a framework according to which we can clearly see that Spinoza's system, now revised, is ontological idealism. Spinoza's system is ontological idealism because substance is re-cast as infinite intellectual substance. This characterization of substance is necessary due to the idealism of Spinoza's ethics and the ideal ontological foundations of the system in general (e.g. the generative role of conception in thought-being parallelism). Certain Descartes scholars have observed a similar tendency of dependence in Descartes' thought and acknowledge that the dependence of both thought substance and extended substance on God as infinite intellectual substance entails a form of reductive idealism. This lesson translated into Spinoza's system yields ontological idealism. As such, the Cartesian framework provides insight into both the landscape from which Spinoza's system emerged and a clue as to the character of Spinoza's system revised.

Spinoza's system already lends itself to idealism given the priority of thought. Once Spinoza's system is revised, it is clearly ontological idealism. Importantly there are further consequences to this revision that extend beyond the scope of this dissertation but are nonetheless worth mentioning as avenues for future research. The two most interesting and substantial consequences of the proposed revision are Spinoza's system as both modal existentialism and ethical mysticism. In the next section I provide a preliminary description of what is meant by these classifications along with some enticing analogies. However, a full accounting of what Spinozist existentialism or mysticism would entail must be put off for future research.

⁴ See Thomas Lennon, Alan Nelson, Lawrence Nolan et. Al.

4.2. Implications for Further Study: Modal Existentialism and Ethical Mysticism

Upon revision, Spinoza's system is clearly ontological idealism as substance is now ideal and all things reduce to substance. However, it has been noted that while substance is ideal, modes are still passively organized under attributes and only one of these is thought. Prior to the revision it was through the attribute of thought that a mode could become active and only through thought that the ethical ideal of blessedness could occur. However, this created deep problems for Spinoza's theory of attributes and doctrine of parallelism. In Chapter 3 we identified the capacity for humans to reason across attributes but identified this reasoning as necessarily inadequate or confused. This seems to leave us with a leftover issue. How do modes realize their blessedness (a process of thought) when they are only passively ordered into attributes and all but one of the attributes are alienated from thought's vertical association with substance (e.g. extension)?

By identifying substance as ontologically ideal, we preserve the capacity of modes to partake in thought (qua substance) regardless of the attribute under which they are ordered. However, this no longer occurs by way of cross-attribute reasoning. Instead, modes reach the ideality essential to blessedness by way of their direct relation to substance. I call this modal existentialism because it is an actualization of the mode in its authentic being as substance. Authentic modes are adequate as they bridge the gap between attribute and substance, identify their innate vertical association rather than their horizontal association; they elevate the lamp above the chessboard. Interestingly, the realization of the authentic being of a mode as substance entails something of a transformation both in relation to its horizontal relations and in its relation to substance.

The realization of authenticity or the becoming of a mode entails a growth of the identify of that mode horizontally (on the mode to mode level) to include the structure of which it is apart. As a mode comes to be more understood, its location in the causal structure in which it is embedded expands, drawing into its identity other proximate modes. This is perfectly aligned with Spinoza's position on modal identity in that modes do not enjoy separate existence but embedded existence and the authenticity of a mode includes nothing short of the entire structure with which it arises as knowledge of an effect requires knowledge of a cause which requires knowledge of that cause's cause, etc. *ad infinitum*.

To understand this we might take another approach. If we were to select a mode at random and come to learn more and more about it, we would come to know more and more of the structure in which it is passively embedded; its identity shifts/grows to include those causes of which it is the effect and those effects which are understood through it. The logical end to such an investigation is the expansion of the identity of the arbitrarily selected mode to include the entire structure of which it is apart. This transformation is both a horizontal expansion and clearly identifies the vertical association with substance that becomes ever more proximate. This is Spinoza's modal existentialism and ethical mysticism. Consider the following close analogy of Indra's net to this process in Spinoza's system.

Francis Harold Cook describes the metaphor of Indra's net from the perspective of the Huayan school:

Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each "eye" of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like

stars in the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected *all* the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring.⁵

The identity of Spinoza's modes extends outward as they become more proximate to God in the same way that the jewels in Indra's net draw more and more of their infinite embeddedness into their identity.⁶ The image of Indra's net is meant to convey the Buddhist concepts of interconnectedness and co-dependent arising but also clearly indicate a fundamental unity of being.⁷ In Spinozist terms, the passive modes are the jewels, their causal connections the net in horizontal association but viewed through their own existence, the entirety of existence is shown to be the true root of being.⁸ To correlate this image to that of our illuminated chess board, we add that the focusing in on any gem is the elevation of the

⁵ Francis Harold Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 2. Miri Albahari utilizes Hindu thought (Advaita Vedanta) to arrive at the conclusion of mysticism from anti-perspectival ontological idealism, further suggesting mystical correlations with ontological idealism. Miri Albahari, "Perennial Idealism: A Mystical Solution to the Mind-Body Problem," *Philosophers' Imprint* 19, no. 44 (2019): 1–37.

⁶ For an interesting take on the identity of God as a thinking thing and the requisite internalization of all non-God minds to his identity, see Alan Donagan, "Spinoza's Theology," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Garrett, 343–382. There Donagan's view of Spinoza's God is similar to what we might imagine of a supremely active mode—an identity consisting of the entirety of all horizontal relations.

⁷ In *Betraying Spinoza*, Goldstein identifies this unity here, "To become rational, believing only what we have good grounds for believing, is to transform the self so substantially as to change its very identity. His astounding conclusion: to the extent that we are rational, we, all of us, partake in the same identity" (68). Throughout chapter 3 of her book she outlines the Jewish intellectual history of rational mysticism that links with Kabbalah, Maimonides, and more. However, Goldstein claims that Spinoza's system is not mysticism (92). I suspect this has to do with a conflation of the term with its religious connotations; I see no reason why Spinoza cannot be a rational, even a Cartesian, mystic.

⁸ That all modes are interconnected is clearly maintained by Spinoza. More importantly, however, unity appears to be prior to multiplicity in Spinoza's system. While Spinoza places a limit on the unification of human beings *qua* rational animal, there is no clear mechanism in the system to impede the expansion of one's identity to the whole of nature. This, of course, would be a mystical union with God. After all, why would we draw the identity line not at person but species and why not mammal, living thing, or the logical end: being?

lamp that increases a mode's proximation with substance. This is the active vertical association that I identify as existential.

To make clear the mystical connection, we can look to the Sufi mystical philosopher Ibn Arabi who, very much like Spinoza, advocates for a fundamental unity of existence rooted in God but acknowledges a plurality of the world.⁹ Ibn Arabi's mystical solution is to see the world with "two eyes". One eye is to recognize the plurality and interconnectedness of individual things (the horizontal association) while the other is supposed to see only God as truly existing (the vertical association).¹⁰ The similarity between Ibn Arabi's mystical philosophy and Spinoza's substance bifurcated into *natura naturans* and *natura natruata* is clear. However, due to my revision, the mystical union of plurality with unity reaches a greater level of explainability that neither Ibn Arabi nor Spinoza's unrevised system are able to provide.

While mysticism is something of a bad word in philosophy, it is only justifiably cast aside due to the clear contradictions that are frequently embraced by mystical thinkers. Once Spinoza's system is revised to shore it up against the incoherence identified in this dissertation,

⁹ Relevant to historical intellectual trends, we might note the mutual influences on Ibn' Arabi and Spinoza. Particularly, that of Averroes who was a strong influence on Maimonides who in turn influenced Spinoza's thought. While there is no clear Kabbalistic influence that we can attribute for the presence of Spinozist mysticism, the philosophical roots of Jewish mysticism in the Kabbalah speculative tradition have a similar ancestry to both Islamic Sufi mysticism and Spinoza's thought. For an account of these historical influences on Spinoza, readers are directed to the work of Warren Zev Harvey. See especially Warren Zev Harvey, "Idel on Spinoza," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 6, no. 18 (2007): 88–94; Warren Zev Harvey, "Gersonides and Spinoza on Conatus," *Aleph* 12, no. 2 (2012): 273–297; and Warren Zev Harvey, "A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, no. 2 (1981): 151–172.

¹⁰ Leszek Kolakowski also sees the two eyes dynamic in Spinoza's thought: "one directing its escapist gaze towards the all-encompassing power of the Absolute, the other concentrating it on the world of finite things, observed with the dispassionate rationalism of the scientist. One eye belongs to the apostle of deductive reasoning, the follower of Euclid, the rationalist who attempted, and failed, to construct his metaphysics on Euclidean principles; the other belongs to the mystic." L. Kolakowski, *The Two Eyes of Spinoza* (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2004), 13.

we can see a coherent mysticism begin to emerge.¹¹ This is what Paul Kristeller has called “Spinoza’s rational mysticism”. I’ll not go into Kristeller’s arguments here but will add one meaningful point to the case for Spinoza as rational mystic: one cannot have monism without mysticism.¹² In order for the plurality of the world to be recognized under any monistic metaphysics, there must be a fundamental unity with the one.¹³ That this is mysticism is made all the more clear with this one is identified as God as occurs in Spinoza’s system.

It should be noted, however, that Spinoza does suggest that there is a limit to the progression of unity with God and Spinoza does explicitly reject that man can become anything other than man. There is some controversy here in the literature. I will only say that the logical end of the root of identify of any mode in substance topic is, I expect, capable of reconciling the ultimate union of the mystic with the limited identification of man. In fact, I suspect that it is

¹¹ This is not to say that Spinoza’s unrevised system is not inclined to mysticism. As Koistinen rightly observes, “I am identical with God insofar as he constitutes my mind ... What I would like to claim is that we, as subjects of thought, are more tightly connected to God than just being ideas that he has,” and, “any subject is, in a sense, identical to God. God’s mental striving is infinite and my mental striving is a part of God’s infinite striving. When I think something, this means, for Spinoza, that it is God qua a certain force thinking this something.. Thus, I am identical with *God acting qua a certain force*” (Koistinen, “Spinoza on Action,” 169–170, 185). Melamed puts it a different way when he asks and answers, “What is? Spinoza has an astonishingly brief answer to this question: God. All that is, is just God (and his qualities)” (Melamed, “Spinoza’s Deification of Existence,” 84). Here we see a more substance-centric statement of what exists as after all, all things do depend on God for their existence; the being of any thing is ultimately the being of God. It seems that a divine monism such as Spinoza’s is compelled towards this mystical truth.

¹² Any metaphysical system that treats the world as a fundamental unity (any monism) must either deny the reality of multiplicity/plurality or identify the multiplicity/plurality as dependent on the one. Jonathan Schaffer has identified these options as priority monism according to which all pluralities are metaphysically dependent on some ground and existence monism according to which only one thing exists. See Jonathan Schaffer, “Monism: The Priority of the Whole,” *Philosophical Review* 119 no.1 (2010): 31–76. In either case, there is a reduction of plurality to unity and an existential oneness which is mystical. Indeed, Spinoza’s system appears to be one of emanation and return: there is a reality to created modes but only insofar as they depend on substance and endeavor to return to their source. Jonathan Schaffer, “Monism: The Priority of the Whole,” *Philosophical Review* 119, no. 1 (2010): 31–76.

¹³ Huenemann rightly identifies the relationship between the one and the many and the ultimate unity in God as “divine emanation” and though Huenemann fails to identify this feature as mystical, he tacitly endorses the connection when he rightly identifies that, “each thing *is* existence.” Huenemann, *Spinoza’s Radical Theology*, 77–80.

precisely by way of this mysticism that Spinoza's ethics is sensical given the central doctrines of his metaphysics and epistemology. However, while a thorough accounting of this controversial claim takes us too far afield from the aim of this dissertation, let us leave this topic open as an avenue for future research made enticing by my revision.¹⁴

4.3. Concluding Analogy¹⁵

There is, I hope, a way to convey all of the complexity of what has been said here regarding the big picture of what is meant by the ontological idealism of Spinoza's revised system and the role that Spinoza's ethics has played in its formation. Let me now complete this dissertation by piggybacking on one of the greatest philosophical illuminations in the history of philosophy, that of Plato's allegory of the cave. Found in "Book VII" of Plato's *Republic*, the allegory of the cave begins,

Imagine human beings living in an underground, cavelike dwelling, with an entrance a long way up, which is both open to the light and as wide as the cave itself. They've been there since childhood, fixed in the same place, with their necks and legs fettered, able to see only in front of them, because their bonds prevent them from turning their heads around. Light is provided by a fire burning far above and behind them. Also behind them, but on higher ground, there is a path stretching between them and the fire. Imagine that along this path a low wall has been built, like the screen in front of puppeteers above which they show their puppets. ... Then also imagine that there are people along the wall, carrying all kinds of artifacts that project above it—statues of people and other animals, made out of stone, wood, and every material. And, as you'd expect, some of the carriers are talking, and some are silent.¹⁶

¹⁴ Other, less important, Avenues for future research are: Does the PSR entail monism or acosmism? What are the attributes exactly given that only substance and modes exist yet the attributes are in some sense real? Human transcendent identity. The compatibility of freedom with determinism by way of existentialism.

¹⁵ One should be careful to observe the loose parallels between the idealisms of Plato and Spinoza without disregarding the fact that Plato's idealism differs significantly from that of Spinoza's.

¹⁶ Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1132.

This initial setup is meant, by Plato, to convey an analogy about human ignorance: for the most part, human beings and human societies organize their existence around a world of shadows, at best vaguely reflective of truth. They are, as it were, unsophisticated, brutish, and ignorant—living in ignorance of the nature of the world. Spinoza's brute is similarly ignorant. For Spinoza, the brute is one who is maximally passive. Entailed in the brute's passivity is a confusion about oneself and the world. Spinoza's brute is also governed by the passions like a buoy on the waves, rising and falling with the tide of causal interaction.

We might imagine, leaning again on Plato's allegory, Spinoza's brute easily manipulated by the puppeteers who participate in the manipulation of the shadows on the wall of the cave, excited and saddened by the manipulations. The religion of the brute is acceptance of institutional authorities, the political adherence to a system of base pleasures and pains administered at the hands of the puppeteers and the quasi real reality presented to them. While the brute thinks himself free, he is manipulated and rationally unreflective. There is, however, a glimmer of reason within each person. Insofar as a person exists, they are rational—they are existence itself modified by circumstance. If one attends to this existential spark, one's existence, power, rationality, freedom, and virtue increase. With sufficient attention, one might break free of the chains that bind them to the cave and begin to view the world and their circumstance differently.

For Spinoza, there are strong forces that keep a person bound to ignorance. Habit, political threat (e.g. of excommunication), ideology, causal interactions with other modes, each account for external causes that condition one's identity. Or according to Plato's allegory,

When one of them was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his head, walk, and look up toward the light, he'd be pained and dazzled and unable to see the things whose shadows he'd seen before. What do you think he'd say, if we told him that what he'd seen before was inconsequential, but that now—because he is a bit closer to the things that are and is turned towards things that are more—he sees more correctly? Or, to put it another way, if we pointed to each of the things passing by, asked him what each of them is, and compelled him to answer, don't you think he'd be at a loss and that he'd believe that the things he saw earlier were truer than the ones he was now being shown?¹⁷

For Spinoza this haze might best be understood in terms of the passions. On first reflection—in the initial stages of attending to one's rational existence/authenticity—one must confront their passions. One is both a thinking thing and an extended thing, the intermingling of the two yielding great forces that compel judgement and behavior, that entice one to brutishness.

The inherent rationality born in each existing thing also inheres in the human being. If one embraces this rationality, it, according to Spinoza, grows. This internal force, not Socrates or some savior, drags one from the cave and turns one toward the light of existence. The principle of reason now guides the individual from brutishness through a path of deduction of what must be the case given only existence.

One might employ a geometric method to organize the truths of reason and discover that existence is necessary/self-caused, that it is one, that it is timeless, that all things, shadow and self alike, are modalities of this absolutely infinite substance organized into rationally distinct schemas/attributes. This schematization would, of course, require causal and conceptual isolation (parallelism). By way of one's introspection, one's cultivation of

¹⁷ Plato, 1133.

(existential) authenticity, one's investigation into the contents of their own mind, one comes to see the world for what it is. The brute becomes the blessed. Or, as Plato would have it,

It isn't surprising that the ones who get to this point are unwilling to occupy themselves with human affairs and that their souls are always pressing upwards, eager to spend their time above, ... the power to learn is present in everyone's soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body. This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming into being without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the good.¹⁸

Of course, Plato views the good in terms of his theory of forms. However, for Spinoza, this transformation is more substantial. As one comes to know one's place in the world, one's identity expands and one's activity increases—one aligns, or harmonizes, one's mind with that of God. This is not a mere knowing but a knowing as participating in the divine substance that is nature. This is the perfection of virtue that Spinoza calls blessedness. I can think of no better way to conclude my study of idealism in Spinoza's metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics than with those final words of the *Ethics*. The road to blessedness is difficult but,

If the road I have pointed out as leading to this goal seems very difficult, yet it can be found. Indeed, what is so rarely discovered is bound to be hard. For if salvation were ready to hand and could be discovered without great toil, how could it be that it is almost universally neglected? All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare. (E5P42S)

¹⁸ Plato, 1135.

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