

## SPINOZA'S *CONATUS* ARGUMENT

“*Unaquæque res, quantum in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur.*” So states Proposition 6 of Part 3 (3p6<sup>1</sup>) of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, a proposition that Edwin Curley’s standard English translation renders as: “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being.”<sup>2</sup> This doctrine of a universal *conatus* — striving or endeavor—for self-preservation is central to Spinoza’s philosophy in many different ways. Because he attributes this striving toward self-preservation to all organic and non-organic things alike, it provides his theory of natural science with a source of teleological explanation.<sup>3</sup> Because he construes all *desire* as the direction of this striving onto particular objects (3p9s), it provides his theory of human and animal psychology with a unified source of motivational power. Because he treats the activity of this striving as defining the scope of each thing’s natural right, it provides the starting-point for his political theory. Because he regards a person’s *virtue* as the power of this striving (4d8), by which the person produces effects through his or her own nature (4p18s), it provides his ethical theory with a fundamental category of moral assessment. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that just as we must understand Spinoza’s argument for the substance monism of 1p14 before we can understand the foundations of his metaphysics, so we must understand Spinoza’s argument for the *conatus* doctrine of 3p6 before we can understand the foundations of his natural, psychological, political, and moral philosophy.

Spinoza’s argument for the *conatus* doctrine stretches from 3p4d through 3p6d. It cites only two previous propositions of the *Ethics* and no empirical evidence whatsoever. While some readers have been sympathetic to its conclusion, many who have closely examined the argument itself have viewed it with serious misgivings. These misgivings

are understandable, for the argument appears to equivocate on a number of key terms. Indeed, Jonathan Bennett (1985, 231-246) has identified four apparent fallacies of equivocation in connection with the argument for the *conatus* doctrine—three in the steps leading up to its conclusion and another in the conclusion itself. Michael Della Rocca (1996, 194-206) has identified what appears to be a further equivocation in Spinoza’s treatment of the conclusion. The argument thus appears to be one of the most egregiously equivocal in all of early modern philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

In what follows, I will try to show that, contrary to appearances, Spinoza’s argument for the *conatus* doctrine does not commit any of these five fallacies of equivocation. The key to a better interpretation of his argument lies, I believe, in understanding the role played within his metaphysics by what I will call Spinoza’s “theory of inherence”—that is, his theory of what it is to be “in” something. In particular, it is essential to realize that he applies this theory not only to substances but also to what he calls “singular things” (*res singulares*), which he treats as finite and imperfect approximations to a Spinozistic substance. In section 1, I outline—in his own words—Spinoza’s twelve-step argument for the *conatus* doctrine. In section 2, I explain the five equivocations that he appears to commit in the course of the argument. In section 3, I set out some primary elements of his views concerning inherence, conception, causation, activity, essences, and singular things. In section 4, I use these primary elements to reinterpret the strategy and content of his argument. In section 5, I show how this reinterpretation resolves the five apparent equivocations. Finally, in section 6, I assess the plausibility and significance of the reinterpreted argument.

## 1. The *Conatus* Argument Outlined

*The Argument of 3p4d.* Spinoza's argument for the *conatus* doctrine begins with 3p4d, which seeks to establish that "nothing can be destroyed except by an external cause." Although he asserts that this proposition is self-evident—indeed, he later compares it to "the whole is greater than its parts" (4p17s)—he provides an argument for it nonetheless. This argument cites no previous definitions, axioms, or propositions of the *Ethics* but appeals instead to the nature of "the definition of a thing." The three-step argument is as follows:

- [1] The definition of a thing affirms, and does not deny, the thing's essence, *or*<sup>5</sup> it posits the thing's essence, and does not take it away.
- [2] While we attend only to the thing itself, and not to external causes, we shall not be able to find anything in it which can destroy it. (from [1])
- [3] 3p4—Nothing can be destroyed except through an external cause. (from [2])

*The Argument of 3p5d.* Spinoza's three-step argument in 3p5d appeals only to 3p4 (i.e., step [3]) plus an unargued premise concerning "agreement" or capacity to be "in the same subject at once":

- [4] If [things insofar as they can destroy one another] could agree with one another, or be in the same subject at once, then there could be something in the same subject which could destroy it.

[5] [That there could be something in the same subject which could destroy it] is absurd. (from [3]=3p4)

[6] 3p5—Things are of a contrary nature, that is, cannot be in the same subject, insofar as one can destroy the other. (from [4]-[5])

*The Argument of 3p6d.* The argument of 3p6d cites two propositions from Part 1 of the *Ethics*, plus 3p4 and 3p5 (i.e., steps [3] and [6]):

[7] 1p25c—Singular things are modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.

[8] 1p34—God's power is his essence itself.

[9] Singular things are modes that express, in a certain and determinate way, God's power, by which God is and acts. (from [7]–[8])

[10] No thing has anything in itself by which it can be destroyed, *or* which takes its existence away. (from [3]=3p4)

[11] [Each thing] is opposed to everything which can take its existence away. (from [6]=3p5)

[12] E3p6—Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being. (from [9]-[11])

## 2. Five Apparent Equivocations

The four apparent fallacies of equivocation that Bennett identifies involve four key phrases: “external cause” (“*causa externa*”) in step [3], “cannot be in the same subject” (“*in eodem subjecto esse nequeunt*”) in step [6], “is opposed to” (“*opponitur*”) in step [11], and “strives to persevere in its being” (“*in suo esse perseverare conatur*”) in step [12]. At each of these four steps in the argument, one interpretation of the key phrase in question seems required if the statement containing it is to draw even a semblance of support from the preceding steps cited as evidence for it, whereas a quite different interpretation of the phrase seems required if the statement is to provide even a semblance of support to the further claims for which it is cited as evidence. (In the case of the final conclusion, [12], these further claims are later propositions of the *Ethics*.) To make matters worse, the four equivocations that Bennett describes appear to constitute a cumulative series—that is, it seems that Spinoza must commit each equivocation that is earlier in the series if he is to reach even the starting point for any later one. The fifth apparent equivocation, identified by Della Rocca, involves the phrase that Curley translates as “as far as it can by its own power, strives” (“*quantum in se est ... conatur*”). Like the last of the four apparent equivocations identified by Bennett, it is located in step [12]. It is, however, entirely independent of them.

“*External Cause.*” According to [3] (i.e., 3p4), “nothing can be destroyed except through an external cause.” But what is an *external* cause? That is, to *what* is it external? The argument of 3p4d derives [3] entirely from [2], which in turn is derived entirely from [1]—that is, from the claim that the definition of a thing affirms or posits, and does not deny or take away, the “essence” of the thing. Since [3] is meant to be a consequence of

[1], it seems that an “external cause” must be one that is external to what we might call the thing’s *proper essence*—that is, to those states or qualities of a thing that are jointly sufficient and severally necessary for the thing’s identity as the particular thing that it is, and which would therefore be specified in an adequate Spinozistic definition of that thing.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, it appears that “attend[ing] only to the thing itself” in [2] means “attending to the thing’s proper essence” and that [3] itself means the following:

[3–proper essence] The set of states or qualities that are jointly sufficient and severally necessary for a thing’s individual identity cannot causally suffice for the thing’s non-existence.

Yet this interpretation does not seem to square with Spinoza’s own later uses of [3]. He derives two later steps entirely from [3]: step [5], which denies that anything can be destroyed by something that is “in the same subject”; and step [10], which asserts that nothing has anything “in” it by which it can be destroyed. These two steps do not seem to involve any restriction to qualities that are part of a thing’s essence. Whereas the “proper essence” reading of [3] is evidently compatible with a thing destroying itself through its *non-essential* qualities, [5] and [10] appear to rule out the possibility of a thing destroying itself through *any* of its qualities. This suggests that [3] should be interpreted instead as concerned with the *whole natures* of things:

[3–whole nature] The complete set of a thing’s non-relational states or qualities cannot causally suffice for the thing’s non-existence.<sup>7</sup>

As Della Rocca observes, this stronger reading of [3] seems obviously open to counterexamples—human suicide, for instance, or the self-exhaustion of a burning object

like a candle or the sun. Whether these are also counterexamples to the weaker (“proper essence”) reading is much less certain. Nevertheless, given Spinoza’s use of [3] later in the argument, it seems that Spinoza must be equivocating on the term “external cause” in [3], relying on the weaker (“proper essence”) reading to derive [3] from [1] and [2]—and also to help avoid obvious counterexamples—but relying on the stronger (“whole nature”) reading to derive [5] and [10] from [3].<sup>8</sup>

“*Cannot Be in the Same Subject.*” Step [6] (i.e., 3p5) states that “Things are of a contrary nature, that is, cannot be in the same subject insofar as one can destroy the other.” But what does it mean to say that two things “cannot be in the same subject?” Step [6] is derived in part from [5], which is derived, in turn, entirely from [3]; and step [3], as we have seen, can be interpreted as a claim about the whole natures of things. Accordingly, to say that two things “cannot be in the same subject” might plausibly mean that the *whole natures* of the two things are incompatible—or, in other words, that the whole nature of the first and the whole nature of the second could not be co-instantiated by the same thing at the same time. On the assumption that, for each non-relational quality, the whole nature of a thing includes either that quality or its negation, this is equivalent to saying that two things “cannot be in the same subject” if and only if they have *different* whole natures, and so *differ in at least some of their non-relational qualities*. This interpretation is seemingly reinforced by Spinoza’s use of the phrase “of a contrary nature” as an alternative to “cannot be in the same subject.” If this interpretation is correct, [6] would mean the following:

[6–whole nature] Insofar as one thing can destroy another, they must have different natures (i.e., differ in at least some non-relational states or qualities).<sup>9</sup>

Yet this interpretation seems inconsistent with Spinoza's own later use of [6]. Spinoza infers [11] ("each thing is opposed to everything which can take its existence away") directly from [6] and then infers [12] (that is, 3p6 itself, which ascribes to each thing an actual striving for self-preservation) partly from [11]. There appears to be no plausible inference from a mere *difference of whole nature* on the part of two things to their active *opposition* to one another. On the other hand, to say that two things "cannot be in the same subject" might instead be interpreted to mean that the two things *cannot co-exist as parts of the same whole*; and it is at least somewhat appealing to suppose that insofar as things can destroy each other, they will have difficulty co-existing as parts of the same whole and hence may in some ways act in opposition to one another. On this latter interpretation, then, [6] would mean:

[6—incompatible parts] Insofar as one thing can destroy another, they cannot co-exist as parts of a larger whole.

Taken at face value, step [6] states that *things themselves* of a certain character cannot be "in the same subject" and not that the *whole natures* of such things cannot be. This (as Bennett observes) is a strong reason to prefer the second reading to the first. On the other hand (as Bennett also observes), the second reading, unlike the first, appears to make a claim that Spinoza himself cannot accept without restriction. For the scholium to lemma 7 following 2p13 states that all finite individuals are parts of the same "infinite individual"; yet, according to *Ethics* 4a1, any singular thing can be destroyed by another.<sup>10</sup> These conflicting considerations strengthen the appearance that Spinoza equivocates in [6] on the phrase "in the same subject," relying on the "whole nature"

reading in deriving [6] from [5] (which in turn is derived from [3]), but relying on the “incompatible parts” reading in deriving [11] from [6].

*“Is Opposed to.”* According to [11], “each thing is opposed to everything which can take its existence away.” But what does it mean to say that one thing is “opposed to” another? Since Spinoza infers [11] entirely from [6], [11] should make a claim that follows from [6]. If [6] is given the “incompatible parts” reading just discussed, then the following interpretation of [11]—which treats the “opposition” of two things as consisting in their inability to co-exist in a whole—satisfies this condition:

[11–incompatible parts] Nothing can co-exist in a whole with things that can destroy it or take its existence away.

On the other hand, however, Spinoza infers [12] from the conjunction of [11] with [9] and [10]; and [12] concerns an actual “striving” of each thing to persevere in being. Although things that have difficulty co-existing as parts of the same whole *may* act in opposition to one another in some cases, it does not appear that a reading of [11] simply in terms of the incompatibility of things as parts of a common whole warrants—even when combined with [9] and [10]—such a strong conclusion as [12]. The fact of a thing’s inability to co-exist in a whole with certain things—even if it is also granted that those things can destroy it—does not seem to *entail* that the first thing will have any ability to *exert itself against* them in a self-preserving way. The thing might instead simply disappear without resistance whenever it was faced with the threat of integration into a whole with such things—or so it seems.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Spinoza’s use of [11] in deriving [12] suggests that he interprets [11] to mean the following:

[11–exertion] Everything exerts itself against things that can destroy it.

In short, it appears that Spinoza equivocates on the phrase “opposed to” in [11], taking it to mean “cannot both be parts of the same whole” in inferring [11] from [6], but taking it to mean “exerts itself against” in inferring [12] from [11].<sup>12</sup>

“*Strives to Persevere in its Being.*” The conclusion of Spinoza’s argument, step [12], states that each thing “strives, as far as it can by its own power, to persevere in its being.” But what does Spinoza mean by saying that each thing “strives to persevere in its being?” After suggesting that Spinoza treats [3] as affirming that “if x does f, then the doing of f does not destroy x,” Bennett proposes that the remainder of Spinoza’s argument is meant to facilitate two key transitions: first from “does not destroy x” to “does not tend toward x’s destruction,” and then from “does not tend toward x’s destruction” to “tends toward x’s preservation.” If this proposal is correct, then Spinoza’s conclusion in [12] is a claim about *whatever actions a thing performs*: namely, that they all are or tend to be conducive to the thing’s continued existence. On this interpretation, [12] should be read as follows:

[12–non-teleological] If a thing strives (as far as it can by its own power) to perform an action, then that action preserves or tends to preserve the thing in its being.

Bennett calls readings of this kind “non-teleological” because they do not license inferences from the self-preserving tendency of an action to the likelihood of its being performed; rather, they only license inferences from the performance of an action to its self-preserving tendency.

On the other hand, throughout the later propositions of the *Ethics*, Spinoza does regularly use the self-preservation doctrine of [12] to support inferences from the self-preserving tendency of an action to the likelihood of its being performed. Indeed, Bennett counts eleven such uses in *Ethics* Part 3, beginning with 3p12d. This suggests that Spinoza's conclusion in [12] is meant instead as a claim about *whatever actions are conducive to a thing's continued existence*: namely, that the thing will or will tend to perform those actions. If this suggestion is correct, [12] should be read instead as follows:

[12–teleological] If an action preserves or tends to preserve a thing, then the thing strives (as far as it can by its own power) to perform that action.

Because readings of this kind do license inferences from the self-preserving tendency of an action to the likelihood of its being performed, Bennett calls them “teleological” readings.

Bennett cites one further consideration in favor of the “non-teleological” reading of [12]: its compatibility with the Appendix to *Ethics* Part 1, which Bennett takes to express Spinoza's rejection of all teleological prediction and explanation. However, Bennett also cites one further consideration in support of the “teleological” reading: the fact that the qualifying clause “as far as it can by its own power” has a natural syntactic place in the “teleological” reading of [12], but does not fit naturally into its “non-teleological” reading. Thus, it appears that Spinoza equivocates on the phrase “strives ... to persevere in being” in [12], understanding [12] non-teleologically in order to see it as a plausible inference from [3] (and in order to reconcile it with whatever anti-teleological tendencies, if any, he might have), but then understanding it teleologically when he applies it to human psychology and ethics.<sup>13</sup>

“*As Far as it Can by its Own Power, Strives.*” The claim of [12] that each thing “strives” to persevere in its being is modified by a restriction: “as far as it can by its own power” (*quantum in se est*). But what does this restriction on striving mean? Della Rocca surveys Descartes’s usage of both expressions in the treatment of physics in Part II of the *Principles of Philosophy*. Della Rocca argues that, for Descartes, the Latin phrases translated in the form “X strives to do Y” and “X, as far as it can by its own power, does Y” are synonymous, both meaning roughly “X is in a state such that, unless prevented by external causes, X will do Y.” (Of course neither expression, for Descartes, connotes conscious trying or deliberation on the part of the X in question.) Furthermore, Della Rocca cites evidence from Spinoza’s “*Descartes’s Principles of Philosophy*” that Spinoza also uses these expressions (at least in that work) in something like their Cartesian senses. The fact that Spinoza uses *both* expressions in [12] therefore suggests that that proposition means something like the following:

[12–double qualification] For each thing X, X’s state is such that, unless prevented by external causes, X’s state is such that, unless prevented by external causes, X will persevere in its being.

On this reading, a thing may sometimes continue to exist and yet cease tending to preserve itself, if it is caused to cease doing so by external causes.

On the other hand, Spinoza uses [12] (i.e., 3p6) to establish the immediately following proposition, 3p7, which states that a thing’s striving to persevere in its being is the “actual essence” of that thing. Since a thing presumably cannot exist even for a short time without its actual essence, however, this suggests that the addition of “insofar as it

can by its own power” to “strives” is a simple redundancy. If this suggestion is correct, then [12] might more plausibly be taken to mean something like the following:

[12–redundancy] For each thing X, X’s state is such that, unless prevented by external causes, X will persevere in its being.

Della Rocca notes that the “double qualification” reading more easily accommodates apparent counterexamples to [12], such as suicidal persons or burning candles, since these cases may be construed as involving individuals that *usually* strive for self-preservation but have been caused by external circumstances (such as financial reverses or a lighted match, respectively) to cease this striving. Della Rocca also notes, however, that Spinoza sometimes drops the qualifying phrase “*quantum in se est*” from later derivatives of [12] in the *Ethics* (e.g., 3p28 and 3p29); and this tendency can more easily be explained by the “redundancy” reading. Thus, it appears that Spinoza equivocates on the phrase translated as “as far as it can by its own power” when he adds it to “strives” in [12], regarding it as weakening the force of [12] when first formulating [12] and when considering potential counterexamples to that principle, but regarding it as an eliminable redundancy when deriving 3p7 from [12] and when citing [12] in other demonstrations.

### 3. Spinoza’s Metaphysics of Inherence

Can a fuller understanding of Spinoza’s metaphysics help to dispel this appearance of multiple equivocations? As we have already noted, the Latin phrase in [12] that Curley translates “as far as it can by its own power” is “*quantum in se est*.” A more literal translation of this phrase, however, would be “insofar as it is in itself.”<sup>14</sup> This rendering reveals, as the other does not, that Spinoza’s conclusion employs the term “in itself” (“*in*

se”). Spinoza introduces the notion of something being “in itself” at the very outset of the *Ethics*, in 1d3, when he defines “substance” as follows: “By substance I understand what is in itself [*in se*] and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed.”<sup>15</sup> He refers again to the underlying relation of “being in” something when he defines “mode” in 1d5: “By mode I understand the affections of a substance, *or* that which is in another through which it is also conceived.” The very first axiom of the *Ethics*, 1a1, also concerns this relation: “Whatever is, is either in itself or in another.”

There is at least some reason to think that this relation of *being in* plays a key role in Spinoza’s *conatus* argument of *Ethics* 3p4d-3p6d. In addition to the fact that its conclusion contains the same expression, “in itself” (“*in se*”) that Spinoza uses to define “substance,” it is noteworthy that all of the other seemingly equivocal propositions of Spinoza’s argument—[2], [6], and [11]—also involve, in one way or another, notions of internality and externality, inclusion and exclusion. Accordingly, we might hope to shed light on the meanings of those propositions by investigating some of the features of Spinoza’s crucial relation of *being in*.

For convenience, I will generally refer to this relation as “inherence.” I use this term quite neutrally, however, simply to designate the relation of *being in* that Spinoza introduces at the outset of the *Ethics*. In particular, I do *not* mean to imply by using this term that Spinoza is committed to any doctrine that postulates an unknowable underlying substratum.<sup>16</sup> The term “inherence” has at least one advantage over some of its obvious alternatives: it makes it clear that the particular sense of “in” at issue is not one of spatial containment or of the relation of parts to wholes. Because the English preposition “in” is

such a common word, with so many different senses, I will henceforth italicize those occurrences of it that are intended to bear the specific sense of Spinozistic inherence.

*Inherence and Predication.* Spinoza's definition of "mode" in 1d5 treats the claim that a mode is *in* something else as equivalent to the claim that it is the "affection" of that thing. Since the term "affection," as it is used in medieval and modern philosophy, generally refers to the qualities of things, 1d5 strongly suggests that the term "*in*" is meant to express Spinoza's version—however reconstructive or revisionary it may be—of a relation by which (whatever else may also be true of it) qualities can be said to be "*in*" the things whose qualities they are.<sup>17</sup> This suggestion is strongly supported by the fact that elsewhere in the *Ethics*, Spinoza uses the term "affection" quite straightforwardly to characterize the qualities or states of such ordinary things as human bodies or minds (2p13d, 2p17d, 2p19, 2p39d, 3d3, 3p52s, 3p59s, 4p8d, 5p1, among many other passages).

Of course, the relation between affections and the things or subjects of which they are affections is widely supposed to be expressed in language by grammatical predication. However, we should not assume that Spinoza would take linguistic predicative norms as an entirely reliable guide to what is *in* what. It is evident that for Spinoza not everything that is *in* something else must also be predicated of it. For one thing, he holds that ordinary entities such as human minds and human bodies are modes of, and hence *in*, the one substance, God; but he does not insist or even recommend that we revise our mode of speech so as to predicate them of "God". Furthermore, he clearly holds that every substance is *in* itself; but he does not require that substances should be directly predicated of themselves.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, Spinoza need not hold that everything that may properly be

grammatically predicated of something is thereby necessarily *in* it. Like some scholastic and early modern philosophers, he may instead hold that many relational qualities are not really “in” the subjects of which they are grammatically predicated but are instead either “in” the other relatum or in neither. (One particularly well-known example of such a philosopher is Locke, who expresses one aspect of his theory of primary and secondary qualities by saying that “Light, Heat, Whiteness, or Coldness” are not “really in bodies” [*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Locke 1975): II.viii.17], even though he frequently predicates these qualities of bodies.<sup>19</sup>) More generally, Spinoza regards common language as governed more by the imagination than by the intellect,<sup>20</sup> so it would not be surprising if he thought that the linguistic relation of predication did not precisely correspond to the metaphysical relation of inherence.

*Conception, Causation, and Action.* Inherence, for Spinoza, is intimately related to such matters as conception, causation, and action. According to 1d3, a substance is not only *in* itself but is also “conceived through itself”; and a mode, according to 1d5 is *in* another “through which it is also conceived.” In 1p4d, Spinoza infers from these two definitions plus 1a1 (“whatever is, is either *in* itself or *in* another”) that everything existing is either a substance or a mode. As his willingness to make this inference shows, Spinoza holds that whatever is *in* something is also conceived through it. That is, he holds what we may call the *Inherence Implies Conception Doctrine*:

Inherence Implies Conception Doctrine—If Y is *in* X, then Y is conceived through X. (from the use of 1d3, 1d5, and 1a1 in 1p4d)<sup>21</sup>

*Ethics* 1a4 states: “The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause.” Spinoza takes this to mean that things must be conceived *entirely* through their causes. For example, at 3d1 he identifies being the *adequate cause* of a thing with being an *adequate source of conception* (i.e., a source of clear and distinct perception) of it: “I call that cause adequate whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it.” Spinoza thinks of conceiving something adequately not as merely forming some image of it, but as understanding *why* it is as it is—that is, as understanding what causes it to be as it is. Thus, for Spinoza, 1a4 entails the *Conception Implies Causation Doctrine*:

Conception Implies Causation Doctrine—If Y is conceived through X, then Y is caused by X. (from 1a4)<sup>22</sup>

Spinoza defines “activity” in terms of adequate causation in 3d3: “I say that we act when something happens ... of which we are the adequate cause.” Hence, Spinoza also maintains the *Action as Adequate Causation Doctrine*:

Action as Adequate Causation Doctrine—A thing acts insofar as it is the adequate cause of an effect. (from 3d3)

Furthermore, the Inherence Implies Conception Doctrine and the Conception Implies Causation Doctrine together entail the *Inherence Implies Causation Doctrine*:

Inherence Implies Causation Doctrine—If Y is *in* X, then Y is caused by X. (from the Inherence Implies Conception Doctrine and the Conception Implies Causation Doctrine)

This latter doctrine, when applied to the definitions of “mode” and “substance,” entails both that every mode is caused by the substance that it is *in* and that every substance is self-caused—both doctrines that Spinoza clearly accepts.<sup>23</sup>

*Essences, Properties, and Accidents.* Spinoza follows the scholastic tradition in distinguishing three classes of qualities that a thing can have: (i) those that constitute the *essence* of the thing; (ii) those that are *properties* of the thing; and (iii) those that are sometimes called the mere *accidents* of a thing. The *essence* of a thing consists of those qualities in virtue of which it is the thing that it is; and it is for this reason that an adequate *definition*, for Spinoza, is one that captures the *essence* of the thing. As long as a thing’s essence persists, the thing will continue to exist; but nothing can exist without its essential qualities, since if it lost any of them, it would cease to exist. *Ethics* 2d2 states that “to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited, and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away ....” As this shows, Spinoza accepts the *Existence as Realized Essence Doctrine* that is implicit in the very conception of a thing’s essence:

Existence as Realized Essence Doctrine—X exists if and only if the essence of X is realized. (2d2)

*Ethics* 2d2 continues by adding that to the essence of any thing belongs “that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing.” This strongly implies that Spinoza also accepts the *Conception Through Essence Doctrine*:

Conception Through Essence Doctrine—Whatever is conceived through X is conceived through the essence of X. (2d2)

The *properties* of a thing, according to the traditional distinction, are qualities that do not belong strictly to its essence but which follow from it. Hence, a thing also cannot exist without one of its properties; for it could lose a property only by losing the essence from which that property followed, and thereby ceasing to exist.<sup>24</sup> Mere *accidents*, unlike properties, are qualities that do not follow from the essence of the thing alone. Hence, the accidents of a thing may change without the thing ceasing to exist.<sup>25</sup>

Spinoza clearly applies this distinction to the case of God. *Ethics* 1d4 states that “by attribute, I understand what the intellect perceives of substance, as constituting its essence”; and 1d6 states that “by God I understand a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinite number of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.” These definitions show that Spinoza accepts the *Attributes as Divine Essence Doctrine*:

Attributes as Divine Essence Doctrine—God’s attributes constitute his essence.  
(from 1d4 and 1d6)

Furthermore, in 1p16d, Spinoza writes:

The intellect infers from the given definition of any thing *a number of properties that really do follow necessarily from it (i.e., from the very essence of the thing)* [emphasis added]; and ... it infers more properties the more the definition of the thing expresses reality, i.e., the more reality the essence of the defined thing involves. But since the divine nature has absolutely infinite attributes ... there

must follow infinitely many things in infinite modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect).

Here Spinoza clearly implies that all of God's modes are properties (*"proprietates"*),<sup>26</sup> rather than accidents, of God. This is, of course, just what we should expect. For since nothing can be or be conceived except through God (1p15), while everything follows from the necessity of God's essence, it follows that none of God's affections or qualities can be accidental to him and that whatever qualities do not constitute his essence are instead properties of him.

*Singular Things and Inherence.* In the *Ethics*, Spinoza ascribes affections and an essence not only to God but also to what he calls "singular things." He defines the term "singular thing" in 2d7: "By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing." Thus, singular things can be "individuals" or combinations of individuals that act together to produce common effects.<sup>27</sup> Individuals, considered as extended things, are constituted by a communication of motion among extended parts in a "certain fixed manner" (definition following 2p13s) so as to maintain the "same ratio [or pattern] of motion and rest" (lemma 5 following 2p13).<sup>28</sup>

There are several reasons to think that Spinoza regards singular things as finite approximations to substance, finite approximations that therefore exemplify his theory of inherence to various degrees.<sup>29</sup> First, as we have already seen, he claims in [12] (3p6) that each singular thing is to some extent *in se—in* itself—using the same phrase that is so central to his definition of substance. Second, he writes of singular things, as well as of

substances, as being “subjects” (e.g., 3p5, 5a1, Letter 23) and as having affections that are “*in*” them (e.g., 2p13d, 2p22d, 2p38d, 2p39s, 3p52s). Third, he writes of singular things as having “essences” (e.g., 2p8, 2p10ds, 2p37d, 2p40d, 2p44c2d, 2p45d, 4pref, 4d3, 4p4d, 5p36s), and he even writes of some singular things as having “more essence” than others (e.g., *Short Treatise* I.ii and II.xxvi and Letter 19 [C I]). Fourth, Spinoza’s argument for 3p6 begins in 3p4d with a claim about definitions and essences—which at least suggests that the argument concerns subjects with essences and the kinds of qualities that are *in* them—and then employs a number of steps that appear to concern what can and cannot be *in* a thing. Finally, when his argument for [12] is *not* interpreted as concerning the partial inherence of singular things *in* themselves, the argument appears to be radically invalid at nearly every turn; when the argument *is* interpreted as concerning the partial inherence of singular things *in* themselves, however, the argument appears—as I hope to show—in a new and much more promising light.

There are, nevertheless, two *prima facie* reasons to question whether singular things *can* fall within the scope of Spinoza’s theory of inherence. The first reason is this. By the Inherence Implies Causation Doctrine, whatever is *in* itself is self-caused; but according to 1d1, whatever is self-caused has an essence involving existence and hence, by 1d8, has an existence that is eternal. Yet singular things, by definition (2d7), have only a determinate, not an eternal, existence.

This objection is not as weighty as it might appear. For in fact, it is common for Spinoza to hold that finite things can have, in *varying degrees*, characteristics that only an infinite substance possesses *absolutely*. At 1d7, for example, he states: “That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by

itself alone.” Understood in an absolute way, this Spinozistic freedom applies only to God, for only God’s existence follows necessarily from its own nature and is never determined by anything else. Yet despite this doctrine, the ethical theory of *Ethics* Part 4 culminates in Spinoza’s account of the “free man,” describing what the free man does “insofar as he is free”—that is, insofar as he *approaches* the condition in which his behavior is determined from his own nature alone. The freedom of human beings is thus a finite approximation to the infinite and absolute freedom that belongs only to God.<sup>30</sup>

In a similar way, only God can be absolutely *in* itself. Nevertheless, a straightforward reading of 3p6 implies that singular things can be *in* themselves to limited but varying degrees. If singular things *can* indeed be *in* themselves to limited but varying degrees, then the application of Spinoza’s Inherence Implies Conception and Inherence Implies Causation Doctrines will entail that singular things can *also* be conceptually and causally self-sufficient (i.e., conceptually and causally self-contained) to limited but varying degrees. These further consequences are surely correct on Spinoza’s view: the more of what is true about a thing follows from its *essence*—that is, the more it has *properties* and the less it has qualities that are mere *accidents*—the more conceptually and causally self-sufficient it will be. *Ethics* 2d2 suggests that having an essence is the defining characteristic of *things* generally; and Spinoza indicates in Letter 19 that some things have “more essence” than others, in proportion to their degrees of perfection. (Absolute perfection, of course, like absolute freedom, belongs only to God.) Singular things, then, simply by being things and having essences (or, we might say, some degree of essence), are what we might call “quasi-substances”—that is, finite approximations, of greater or lesser degree, to a genuine substance. One might usefully compare this Spinozistic view

of singular things as quasi-substances with the Cartesian doctrine of substances. In Descartes's view, only God is a "substance" in the fullest sense of the term—a sense that crucially includes complete causal independence of existence—but there is nevertheless a different and lesser sense in which minds and extended things are also "substances" and have a lesser kind of conceptual and causal independence of existence.

Because Spinozistic singular things are only finite *approximations* to a substance, and hence are not *completely in* themselves, they will not be *completely* conceptually and causally self-sufficient. Hence, they—unlike God—will have merely accidental qualities as well as properties. However, applying Spinoza's Conception Implies Causation and Inherence Implies Conception Doctrines entails that the *accidental* qualities of a thing are only *partially* or *to some extent in* the things of which they are predicated. That is, because each accidental quality is only partly the result of the nature of the thing and partly the result of external causes, it is to some extent or degree *not* conceived through the subject of which it is typically predicated, and so it is to some extent or degree *not in* that subject.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, to allow that singular things are even partly *in* themselves seems to raise a further problem. For each singular thing is a mode of God; but by 1d3, each mode of God must already be completely *in* God. How then can a singular thing *also* be partly *in* itself?

This objection, too, is easily overcome. It is not that singular things are partly *in* themselves *instead* of being wholly *in* God. Rather, a singular thing's being to some extent *in* itself is just one specific *way* of being *in* God. Compare the parallel case of

power. All power is entirely God's power, on Spinoza's view, but this does not entail that singular things cannot have any power at all; rather, it entails that whatever power singular things have is at the same time *also* (a share of) God's power, power that God expresses *through* singular things (4d4) that are themselves finite modes of God. Similarly, everything is *in* (and conceived through) God, for Spinoza, but this does not entail that nothing is to any extent *in* (or conceived through) singular things; rather, it entails that whatever is to any extent *in* a singular thing is *in* God as well, *in* God *through* being *in* one of his finite modes. This serves to explain not only how Spinoza can regard singular things as being partly *in* themselves, but also how he can regard what he calls the *affections* of singular things as being *in* those singular things even though everything is (by 1p15) *in* God. For affections of singular things are not *in* singular things instead of being *in* God, but rather are *in* God *through* being *in* singular things that are themselves *in* God. This fact, in turn, provides at least one reason why Spinoza need not require that everything be *predicated* of God, even though every affection is, in his view, an affection of God. Because singular things themselves have essences (and hence are at least partly *in* themselves), some of God's affections exist as affections of singular things, and hence those affections may quite properly be predicated of those singular things rather than of God.

#### **4. The Strategy of the *Conatus* Argument**

We are now in a position to reconstruct the strategy and content of Spinoza's argument for his *conatus* doctrine by applying his theory of inherence and related

doctrines to singular things. Let us reconsider the arguments of 3p4d, 3p5d, and 3p6d in order.

*The Argument of 3p4d Reinterpreted.* Step [1], the initial step of 3p4d, makes two complementary claims about the definition of a thing. The first of these claims is that the definition “affirms” or “posits” the essence of the thing—that is, that the definition of a thing expresses or explains a thing’s essence, so that the satisfaction of that definition is the realization of the essence. The second claim is that the definition “does not deny” or “does not take away” the essence of the thing—that is, that the definition does not express anything incompatible with the realization of the essence, so that the satisfaction of a definition does not in any way prevent or destroy the realization of the essence. Thus, we may interpret step [1] as follows:

[1'] The satisfaction of the definition of a thing is the realization of that thing’s essence and is not the realization of anything incompatible with [i.e., that would prevent or destroy] the realization of that thing’s essence.

Step [2] states that “while we attend only to the thing itself, and not to external causes, we shall not be able to find anything in it which can destroy it”; thus, [2] asserts the impossibility of something causing the destruction of what it is *in*. This claim can easily be derived from [1'] by employing several Spinozistic doctrines that we have already considered. By the Existence as Realized Essence Doctrine (2d2) a thing exists if and only if its essence is realized; hence, we may infer from [1'] that:

- [i] The essence of X cannot destroy X. (from [1'] and the Existence as Realized Essence Doctrine)

Now consider any Y that is *in* a thing X. By the Inherence Implies Conception Doctrine, this Y is also *conceived through* X; hence, by the Conception Through Essence Doctrine, this Y is also *conceived through the essence* of X; and finally, by the Conception Implies Causation Doctrine, this Y is *caused by the essence* of X. Thus,

- [ii] If some Y is *in* X, then Y is *caused* by X's essence. (from the Inherence Implies Conception Doctrine, the Conception Through Essence Doctrine, and the Conception Implies Causation Doctrine)

That is, whatever is *in* a thing X is caused by X's own essence; hence, it follows that:

- [iii] If Y is *in* X and Y destroys X, then the essence of X is the (ultimate) cause of X's destruction. (from [ii])

From [i] and [iii], it follows that if Y is *in* X, then Y cannot destroy X. But this is equivalent to the following reformulation of [2']:

- [2'] Whatever is *in* something cannot destroy it. (from [i] and [iii])

From [2'], 3p4 ("nothing can be destroyed except through an external cause") follows immediately, understood as the claim that

- [3'] 3p4—Whatever can destroy a thing is not *in* it. (from [2'])

*The Argument of 3p5d Reinterpreted.* Spinoza's theory of inherence can also help us to reconstruct the argument of 3p5d. The initial claim of this argument, step [4], concerns

a variable relationship—which Spinoza characteristically expresses by the phrase “insofar as”—between things’ abilities to destroy each other and their abilities to be “in the same subject at once.” This should not be surprising, since we have already seen that he treats a number of central notions, including inherence, as matters of degree. Step [4] may be paraphrased in terms of inherence as follows:

[4'] If two things insofar as they can destroy each other could be *in* the same subject at once, then something could destroy a thing that it was *in*.

Spinoza does not argue for this premise, and so one might suppose it to be self-evident. Yet it appears to be a rather mismatched conditional: its antecedent is a proposition to the effect that *two* things that can, to some extent, destroy each other cannot, to that extent, exist *in* a subject; whereas its consequent concerns the ability of some *one* thing to destroy the thing that it is *in*. How can he suppose the connection between two such different propositions to be self-evident?

When applied explicitly to *degrees* of inherence, the same set of doctrines that entail [ii] also entail the following:

[iv] Whatever is to some extent *in* a thing is to that extent caused by that thing’s essence. (from the Inherence Implies Conception Doctrine, the Conception Through Essence Doctrine, and the Conception Implies Causation Doctrine)

Now, *suppose* for the sake of argument that

[v] Some Y and Z could to some extent destroy each other [i.e., had some power to destroy each other] and could nevertheless to that same extent be *in* the same subject X. (Assumption)

By [iv], Y is, to the extent in question, caused by X's essence; and to the extent that Y is caused by X's essence, Y can be destroyed only by destroying X's essence. It therefore follows from [iv] and the supposition of [v] that

[vi] Z could to some extent be *in* X and destroy the essence of X. (from [iv] and [v])

But according to the Existence as Realized Essence Doctrine of 2d2, the existence of a thing is the realization of its essence; hence, it follows that

[vii] Z could to some extent destroy a thing X that it was *in*. (from [vi] and the Existence As Realized Essence Doctrine)

By conditional proof, then, Spinoza can infer the content of [4]:

[4'] If two things insofar as they can destroy each other could be *in* the same subject at once, then something could (to some extent) destroy a thing that it was *in*. (from [v]-[vii], by conditional proof)

From 3p4 it immediately follows directly that

[5'] Nothing can (to any extent) destroy a thing that it is *in*. (from [3'])

Thus, by modus tollens, Spinoza infers the falsehood of the antecedent of [4'], leaving us with the conclusion that

[6'] 3p5—Two things insofar as they can destroy each other cannot be *in* the same subject at once. (from [4'] and [5'])

This is a simple paraphrase of 3p5, which reads: “things are of a contrary nature, that is, cannot be in the same subject, insofar as one can destroy the other.”

*The Argument of 3p6d Reinterpreted.* As we have seen, Spinoza begins 3p6d by citing two propositions from *Ethics* Part 1. The first of these propositions, 1p25c, states that

[7'] 1p25c—Singular things are modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.

The second proposition is 1p24, which states that

[8'] 1p34—God’s power is his essence itself.

The intermediate conclusion that Spinoza draws from these two premises does not follow without the connecting assumption that God’s attributes constitute his essence. But this assumption is simply the Essence as Divine Attributes Doctrine, which we have already seen to be implied by 1d4 and 1d6. Hence, Spinoza can legitimately conclude that

[9'] Singular things express God’s power, by which he is and acts. (from [7'], [8'], and the Attributes as Divine Essence Doctrine)

At the very least, this result shows how to reconcile singular things’ having whatever finite power they may possess with the doctrine that all power is divine power; for any share of power possessed by singular things would simply be a particular expression of God’s infinite power. In fact, given his practice elsewhere, it seems likely that Spinoza

would be willing to go further, interpreting [9]—and the conjunction of 1p25c and 1p34, from which it is derived—as entailing that each singular thing does *have* some power. (See, for example, 1p36d, where he derives the claim that each existing determinate thing has some effects from 1p25c, 1p34, and 1p16; and see also 3p7d, where he derives from 1p36 the claim that, from the given essence of each thing, some things necessarily follow.) However, such a further entailment, while potentially helpful (as we shall see shortly), is not absolutely essential to the argument.

If singular things at least *can* have causal power, how would that power be directed? According to the Inherence Implies Causation Doctrine, whatever is *in* a thing is also caused by that thing. Hence, to the extent that something is *in itself*, it must also be, to that same extent, *cause of itself*. Since singular things cannot originally bring themselves into existence, they can be causes of themselves only to the extent that they exert power to cause their own *continuation* in existence. Thus, the more *in* itself a singular thing is, the greater the power for continued existence it will exert. This is, of course, just what the *conatus* doctrine of 3p6 states: “Each thing, insofar as it is *in* itself, strives to persevere in its being” (italics added).

The obvious next question is: Are singular things to any extent *in* themselves? Simply from the claim that each singular thing exerts some power for continued existence insofar as it is *in* itself, it does not follow that any singular things really are to any extent *in* themselves. Of course, the mere existence of some singular things that were *not* at all *in* themselves would not refute a claim about what singular things do to whatever extent they *are in* themselves; the existence of such singular things would simply limit the scope—and, hence, the general interest—of the *conatus* doctrine of 3p6. In fact, however,

Spinoza can offer several reasons for thinking that all singular things are *in* themselves to at least some extent. First, every substance is *in* itself (1d3). Hence, if being a singular thing is modeled on (i.e., constitutes an approximation to) being a substance, then whatever was not *in* itself to *any* extent would not be a singular thing at all. Second, since continuing to exist is a prerequisite for exerting any causal power, the very fact that each singular thing exerts some causal power—as implied by 1p36 and, perhaps, by [9'] itself—arguably requires that each singular thing exert some causal power for continuation in existence.<sup>32</sup> Finally, at least *some* properties are caused by *every* essence (by 1p16d); and the production of a singular thing's properties by its essence is itself a causal contribution to the existence of the complete singular thing. In fact, since a thing cannot be the *adequate* cause of either its own accidents or the accidents of another, it follows by the Action as Adequate Causation Doctrine that a singular thing can *fully* act *only* by producing (through its essence) the existence of its own properties and the continued realization of its own essence (see 3p7d).

We can now see that the primary work of 3p6d is accomplished by the Inherence Implies Causation Doctrine. Step [9] provides additional support to 3p6 chiefly by showing the compatibility of that conclusion with the doctrine that all power is God's power. This kind of additional support is especially important for Spinoza; for he holds, quite generally, that it is always better to show *how* something is true than merely to show *that* it is true.<sup>33</sup> Like step [9], steps [10] and [11]—derived from 3p4d and 3p5d, respectively—contribute to the argument by demonstrating more fully *how* the *conatus* doctrine is true.

Step [10] states that “no thing has anything in itself by which it can be destroyed, *or* which takes its existence away.” When understood as a claim about inherence, this step may be rendered as a simple reformulation of [3], just as Spinoza suggests:

[10'] Nothing can be destroyed by something that is *in* it. (from [3'])

If a thing could exert power for its own destruction, it would do so through its own essence and hence through something that was *in* it. Such power would be in conflict with the power for self-preservation that, by the Inherence Implies Causation Doctrine, it must exert insofar as it is *in* itself. Step [10] guarantees that no such internally-originating obstruction to or cancellation of a thing’s *conatus* for self-preservation can occur; hence, it serves to confirm the *conatus* doctrine of 3p6. Furthermore, since a thing cannot exert any power to destroy itself, but does (insofar as it is *in* itself) exert power to preserve itself, each thing (insofar as it is *in* itself) has some positive tendency—which we might call “existential inertia”—to continue in existence. This existential inertia can be understood partly through the thing’s tendency to preserve itself and partly through its lacking anything *in* it that could destroy it or oppose this tendency. To at least this extent, then, the thing’s continuing in existence can be understood or conceived through its own nature; and it follows, by the Conception Implies Causation Doctrine, that the thing’s continuing in existence is, at least to some extent, *caused* by its own nature. Spinozistic “individuals,” whose existence is constituted by a certain fixed pattern of motion or rest—i.e., a fixed pattern of motion and rest that tends to persist and maintain itself—illustrate very neatly how such self-causing existential inertia can occur.

Step [11] states that each thing “is opposed to everything which can take its existence away.” Since [11] is itself derived entirely from [6], which explains contrariety in terms of the inability to be *in* the same subject, we may rephrase [11] as

[11'] Each thing is opposed to—i.e., cannot be *in* the same subject with—  
whatever can destroy it (insofar as that thing can destroy it). (from  
[6'])

Whenever there exists *one* of two things that cannot (to some extent) exist *in* the same subject, the non-existence (or tendency not to exist) of the other can always be understood or conceived (to some extent) through the fact that the existence of the first thing excludes the second from existing *in* that subject. Hence, by the Conception Implies Causation doctrine, the existence of the one *causes* the non-existence of the other. In fact, Spinoza often remarks (e.g., in 1p11d) that just as each existing thing must have a cause through which its existence can be understood, so too the non-existence of each thing that fails to exist must have a cause through which it can be understood; and such a cause usually lies in the existence of other things that exclude the first thing from existence.<sup>34</sup>

This tendency of a thing to prevent or destroy something whose existence *in* the same subject is to some extent incompatible with its own existence serves to confirm and explain the *conatus* doctrine in two different ways, depending on whether the “incompatible things” that cannot be *in* the same subject are affections that cannot be *in* the same singular thing or are themselves singular things that cannot both be affections *in* God. In the first case, either the essence or a property of a singular thing tends to prevent or destroy another affection of the singular thing that would be to some extent incompatible with that essence or property and hence also with the continued existence of

the singular thing. In the second case, one singular thing tends to prevent or destroy another singular thing that would be an incompatible affection of the one absolute subject, God. In the first case, the exclusion from existence of an affection that could destroy a singular thing can be understood at least partly through the nature of the singular thing. In the second case, the exclusion from existence of another singular thing that could destroy the first singular thing can be understood at least partly through the nature of the first singular thing. In both cases, however, since the exclusion from existence of something dangerous to a singular thing can be understood or conceived through the nature of that singular thing, the singular thing is (by the Conception Implies Causation Doctrine) also to at least some extent the cause of that exclusion. The singular thing is therefore, to that extent, the cause of its own continued existence.

In steps [9'], [10'], and [11'], respectively, Spinoza explains (i) how a singular thing can, as a mode of God, exert power, (ii) how a singular thing's own inertial persistence in being can be at least partially conceived through and hence caused by the thing itself, and (iii) how a singular thing's exclusion from existence of affections and of other singular things that are dangerous to it allows its own continued existence to be conceived through and hence caused by itself. Thus, he can conclude confidently, just as the Inherence Implies Causation Doctrine requires, that

[12'] 3p6—Each thing, insofar as it is *in* itself, strives to persevere in its being. (from [9'], [10'], [11'], the Inherence Implies Causation Doctrine, and the Conception Implies Causation Doctrine)

## 5. Five Equivocations Resolved

In section 2, we raised questions concerning the interpretation of each of the five key phrases involved in the apparent equivocations in Spinoza's *conatus* argument.

Interpreting that argument as concerning Spinozistic inherence allows us to answer those questions and, in each case, to combine the chief advantages of each of the earlier readings of the seemingly equivocal steps while avoiding their disadvantages.

*“External Causes.”* Step [3] states that “nothing can be destroyed except through an external cause.” We can now see what Spinoza means by a cause that is “external” to a thing: he means a cause that is not *in* the thing. This interpretation represents a middle path between the “narrow essence” and “whole nature” readings that Bennett suggests. For what is *in* a thing need not include everything that is predicated of it, and what is *in* a thing can also be a matter of variable degree. What is *in* a thing is more than just the thing's proper essence, since it also includes the thing's properties and, to greater or lesser extents, its mere accidents; yet what is *in* a thing is also less than its “whole nature,” since it need not include everything that is predicated of the thing, and it includes the thing's accidents not completely but *only* to various degrees. Thus, although a human body may be described as “infected,” or a human mind as “depressed,” it does not follow that these qualities are, or are fully, *in* the things of which they are predicated. On the contrary, what is *fully in* a thing is only what follows entirely from its essence—namely, its essence and its properties—rather than from its accidents.

This interpretation retains the two advantage of the “proper essence” reading of [3]. First, it makes [3] properly derivable from the content of [1], which concerns essences in

the sense in which definitions express or describe essences. Second, it can accommodate such cases as suicidal persons and self-exhausting objects, which can be construed as being destroyed through causes that are not, or are not fully, *in* them. At the same time, this interpretation also maintains the primary advantage of the “whole nature” reading: it blocks—as the later uses of [3] in the argument must be able to do—the possibility that a thing could *destroy itself* in a way that did *not* involve its essence. For although a thing may certainly be destroyed partly through a quality that is accidental to it, and so does not follow entirely from its essence, to the *extent* that such a quality can destroy the thing, it is also not *in* that thing; and hence the thing is destroyed not by itself or through its own power but rather by and through the power of whatever external cause has produced that accidental quality.

“*Cannot Be in the Same Subject.*” Step [6] states that “two things insofar as they can destroy each other cannot be *in* the same subject at once.” What does it mean to say that two things “cannot be in the same subject?” On the present interpretation, it means simply that they cannot be affections *in* the same thing (e.g., *in* the same substance or the same singular thing). The resulting reading of [6] retains the two main advantages attributed to the “whole nature” reading of [6]. First, it allows [6] to be plausibly derived (via [5]) from [3] (which, on the present interpretation also concerns the relation of inherence in a subject). Second, because it does not construe “being in the same subject” in terms of being parts of the same whole, it is not open to the counterexample of mutually dangerous things existing as parts of the “infinite individual.”<sup>35</sup> At the same time, it also has both of the advantages attributed to the “incompatible parts” reading of [6]. First, it allows for a natural inferential path—as described in the previous section—to

the active causal exertion for self-preservation described in [12]. Second, in keeping with the phrasing of Spinoza's text, it makes [6] a claim about the "things" themselves (i.e., about particular affections either of substance or of singular things) that cannot exist "in the same subject," rather than a claim about those things' *natures* being "in the same subject."

"*Opposition.*" Spinoza's [11] states that each thing "*is opposed to everything which can take its existence away.*" What does it mean for one thing to be "opposed to" another? On the present interpretation, one thing is "opposed" to another to the extent that it cannot be *in* the same thing with another. As is suggested by the fact that Spinoza infers [11] directly from [6], the phrase "opposed to" is equivalent to "cannot exist in the same subject with"; both refer to the incompatibility of two things inhering in the same subject. However, "opposed to" more aptly expresses the conception of "degree" or "extent" that is already explicit in [6]. Furthermore—like "contrary" which also occurs in [6]—it more strongly suggests the causal use that Spinoza intends to make of the concept. That is, it suggests that when the non-existence of one thing in a subject is explained by its having been excluded from existence by something that is incompatible with it, the non-existence of the first is conceived through, and hence caused by, the second.<sup>36</sup> This interpretation has the chief advantage previously cited for the "incompatible parts" reading of [11], since it sustains the derivability of [11] from [6]. Yet it also has the chief advantage of the "exertion" reading of [11], since it allows for the derivation of a claim about active exertion in [12].

"*Strives to Persevere in its Being.*" Step [12] states that "each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being." But what does it mean to say that

each thing “strives to persevere in its being?” Is this claim *teleological*—that is, does it license inferences from the self-preserving tendency of an action to (the likelihood of) its performance? On the present interpretation, the answer is “yes,” with a crucial qualification—namely, that the singular thing in question must be *sufficiently in itself* to *have* such an action within its behavioral repertoire under the specific circumstances in question.<sup>37</sup>

As one might expect, this interpretation of [12] enjoys the two advantages that Bennett cites for his “teleological” reading. First, it supports Spinoza’s later teleological uses of 3p6. In addition, it provides a natural syntactic place for the qualifying phrase “*quantum in se est*,” now translated as “insofar as it is *in* itself.” At the same time, it maintains both of the advantages that Bennett proposes for his non-teleological reading. First, it is the conclusion of the most plausible interpretation—within the context of Spinoza’s philosophy—for the argument of 3p4d-3p6d. Furthermore, because Spinoza in fact opposes only *divine* teleology and not all teleology within nature, it is also entirely compatible with Spinoza’s anti-teleological remarks in the Appendix to *Ethics* Part 1.<sup>38</sup>

“*As Far as it Can by its Own Power, Strives.*” Finally, what does it mean to add the restriction “*quantum in se est*” (“insofar as it is *in* itself”) to “*conatur*” (“strives”)? On the present interpretation, Spinoza’s use of the phrase “*quantum in se est*” is not meant to suggest, as the “double qualification” reading requires, that there may be circumstances in which a thing altogether loses its striving to persevere in being. Yet neither is his use of the phrase superfluous, as the “redundancy” reading requires. Rather, the phrase describes and restricts the *extent* to which a thing always strives—and hence exerts causal power—to persevere in its being: namely a thing strives to do so to whatever extent it is

*in* itself. This extent will, of course, be greater the more essence and power a thing has—that is, the more it approximates to being a substance. However, a thing’s own power is only one of *two* variable features of any given situation. This is because the power of the external causes (each exerting power to preserve *itself*) that are arrayed against a thing can also vary, independently of a thing’s own causal power. Thus, Spinoza cannot say that each thing *does* persevere in its existence to the extent that it is *in* itself, but only that its own *power or striving* to do so varies with the extent to which it is *in* itself.

This interpretation of [12] has both of the advantages of the “double qualification” reading. First, it accounts for Spinoza’s usage of both “*conatur*” and “*quantum in se est*.” Second, it avoids counterexamples such as suicides and self-consuming objects, which can now be construed as cases of things destroyed by “external” causes than as things that have ceased striving, while still in existence, to persevere in their being. At the same time, this reading also preserves the advantages of the “redundancy” reading. First, it supports the requirement of 4p7 that a thing never lose its striving to persevere in being so long as it continues to exist. Second, because the specification of the *degree or extent* to which a thing strives to persevere is not always needed for Spinoza’s later purposes, it can explain why the phrase “*quantum in se est*” is not always included in later derivatives of 3p6.

## **5. The Significance of Spinoza’s *Conatus* Argument**

If what I have argued is correct, Spinoza’s *conatus* argument depends essentially on his treatment of singular things as what we might call “quasi-substances”—that is, as finite approximations to a genuine substance. One key aspect of this treatment is the

application to singular things of the same theory of inherence that Spinoza applies to substance itself. As the one absolute substance, God is absolutely *in* itself. God therefore absolutely causes and eternally preserves himself, encountering no opposition to his existence, with an infinite divine power that flows from his own essence alone. Because nothing is external to God, he has an infinite essence and infinitely many properties but no mere accidents. Each singular thing, at the same time that it is necessarily *in* God, is also *in* itself to the limited extent that it *approximates* to substantiality. Although it has a limited duration in existence and is originally produced by things other than itself, it strives against the external opposition of other singular things to cause its own continued existence with a share of the divine power, a share of divine power that is proportional to the amount of essence it possesses. Because it is affected by external things, it has not only a share of essence and properties, but also mere accidents.

*The Conatus Argument in its Seventeenth Century Context.* The application of his theory of inherence to singular things plays an important role in Spinoza's metaphysics. Because some modes of God are singular things that have, like substance itself, essences and causal powers, Spinoza can describe how God's attributes are expressed in local variation—and hence in greater perfection—by the instantiation a variety of finite essences, each of which employs a share of the divine power to constitute one of infinitely many foci of causal activity within God's infinite attributes. In offering this conception, Spinoza provides a theory of metaphysical individuation for finite things that does not depend (as Descartes's theory of individuation evidently does depend) on differences of *substance* in order to allow individuation.<sup>39</sup> For Spinoza, an individual or singular thing exists to the extent that there is instantiated a definite essence or nature that

can serve as a locus of causal activity. Where there is such an essence, there are properties that follow (both causally and logically) from that essence, and hence we can speak of a “subject” *in* which affections exist.

Spinoza’s application of his theory of inherence to singular things also plays a crucial role in his epistemology. Early modern science involves a transition from a conception of scientific knowledge as the understanding of the *essences of things* to a conception of scientific knowledge as the understanding of *natural laws*. Spinoza’s conception of singular things as quasi-substances makes room for *both* of these conceptions, each at two different levels. For while he takes the ultimate object of knowledge to be the divine essence, this essence—consisting of the infinitely many divine attributes, of which we grasp only extension and thought—is itself to be understood by understanding the most general laws of physics and the most general laws of psychology. In treating singular things as quasi-substances—that is, as quasi-independent centers of inherence—he is able to treat them as quasi-independent objects of conception ( i.e., of explanation and understanding) and as quasi-independent centers of causal activity as well. In order for singular things to approximate to being conceptually self-contained, they must have their own essences through which their own properties can be understood. Thus, the instantiation of various finite essences permits the existence of various special sciences concerned with understanding those essences. The understanding of the essences of particular things and of particular kinds of things, in turn, involves understanding what Spinoza sometimes calls “the laws of [things’] own natures,” which are the subjects of more specialized disciplines. These laws explain the behavior of individuals and species—although they must, of course, be understood ultimately as applications of the

more general laws governing thought and extension. Since teleology, in the form of a striving to persevere in being, is an aspect of all such laws of singular things, it becomes possible to give teleological explanations for the behavior of all singular things, including human beings.

Finally, Spinoza's application of the theory of inherence to singular things allows him to develop a substantive psychology, politics, and ethics. From Descartes's conception of individuation by substance, nothing whatever appears to follow about the behavioral tendencies of individual things. For although Descartes offers a milder correlate of the *conatus* doctrine (at *Principles of Philosophy* II.3): "Each and every thing, in so far as it can, always continues in the same state ... nothing can by its own nature tend towards its ... own destruction" (Descartes 1985), he must derive this principle from the volitional constancy of God. Spinoza, in contrast, derives a universal striving for self-preservation directly from Spinozistic premises—most of which Descartes would accept in milder forms—concerning inherence and its bearing on essence, conception, causation, and action.<sup>40</sup> With this universal teleological striving for self-preservation established, Spinoza can appeal to it as a central motivating force in psychology and political theory. Even more important for his ultimate purposes, he can proceed to argue for ethical doctrines on the basis of the self-preserving tendencies of certain actions and virtues with the assurance that such arguments will be internally motivating for those who read and understand them.

*The Conatus Argument and Contemporary Philosophy.* If the interpretation I have provided is correct, Spinoza's *conatus* argument does not, as it first appears, rely on multiple fallacies of equivocation; rather, it is a valid demonstration from Spinozistic

premises about inherence, conception, causation, and related matters. But although Spinoza's *conatus* argument appears to be valid when supplemented with premises from his theories of causation, conception, action, essence, and inherence, these are very strong premises that reflect his deep commitment to a rigorous Principle of Sufficient Reason, to a conception of things as causing their own properties through their essences, and to a closely related conception of causation as identical with or parallel to logical consequence. As such, the premises are unlikely to be acceptable as they stand. Thus, it appears that we can defend the validity of Spinoza's argument, as supplemented, but not its soundness.

Nevertheless, the general approach to substantiality or "thinghood" that Spinoza's argument represents is an attractive one, deserving of serious consideration. According to this approach, the individuation of singular things is not a matter of distinguishing different underlying substances or substrata. Rather, substantiality or thinghood is a function of manifesting a nature suitable for playing a substantive role in explanations—that is, having a nature from which things follow causally and through which they can therefore be understood. For Spinoza, the universe itself satisfies the criteria for substantiality in the highest degree, but various local expressions of the nature of the universe satisfy them to varying degrees. The causal activity most relevant to substantiality is the causal self-maintenance or self-preservation of a distinctive pattern of physical operation. Because substantiality is conceptually related to causal self-maintenance or self-preservation, on Spinoza's account, substantiality itself provides a potential basis for teleological explanation; and the higher the degree of substantiality, the greater the range of application for teleological explanation. Because substantiality is

conceptually related to teleology, with self-preservation as a natural “goal” or “drive” shared by all natural things, there is a basis already present in the most rudimentary of natural things for what may emerge as *desire* in systems with more sophisticated sensory and other representational systems. In drawing the distinction between those representation-processing systems in which the representations mean nothing to the system itself (such as a standard computer) and those in which the representations do mean something to the system itself, therefore, appeal may be made to specific relations in which those representations stand to the basic drive of self-preservation.<sup>41</sup> Any attempt to explain the origins of intentionality as emergent in nature is Spinozistic in spirit, if not in letter; Spinoza’s proposal that substantiality is intrinsically related to self-preservation is one possible contribution to that project.<sup>42</sup>

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## FOOTNOTES

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1 References to elements of Spinoza's *Ethics* follow the standard format explained in Bennett 1985: the initial number indicates the Part of the *Ethics*; "pref" represents "Preface"; "a" represents "axiom"; "p" represents "Proposition"; "s" represents "scholium" ("note" in some English translations); "c" represents "Corollary"; and "d" represents either "Definition" or "Demonstration," depending on whether it immediately follows a *Part* number or a *Proposition* number.

2 C I; all translations from Spinoza's works are taken from this source unless otherwise indicated.

3 For defense of this interpretation of 3p6 as licensing a kind of teleological explanation, see Garrett (1999).

4 It would surpass, for example, Locke's argument for the existence of God in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* IV.x (Locke 1975), which appears to commit three distinct fallacies of equivocation within a span of fourteen steps.

5 In accordance with Curley's useful convention, "*or*" in italics is the translation of "*sive*," a term which has the sense of "in other words" rather than the sense of disjunction; it generally indicates the use of two equivalent expressions.

6 Each thing has, of course, many different qualities and so belongs to many different classes of things. It is important to note that we are concerned here with definitions capturing the essence of a *particular* thing—that is, with what a thing must have to be the same particular thing—and not merely with the conditions for retaining a

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certain quality or membership in a certain class. Spinoza offers an example of a “change” that he regards as incompatible with a particular thing’s maintaining its identity as such in preface to *Ethics* Part 4: “... a horse is destroyed as much if it is changed into a man as if it is changed into an insect.” See also 4p39s, concerning personal identity. For Spinoza’s theory of definitions, see *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* §§94-97 in G or C I.

7 In formulating both of these readings of [3], I follow Bennett’s phraseology closely, although I have supplied the terms “proper essence” and “whole nature.” In explanation of the apparent equivocation in [3], Bennett suggests that Spinoza sometimes uses the term “essence” to refer to the jointly sufficient and severally necessary conditions for a thing’s identity but at other times uses it to refer instead to the complete set of a thing’s non-relational states. Such a practice would make it easy for Spinoza to equivocate on the phrase “external cause” by equivocating between two senses of “external to a thing’s essence.” As I read Spinoza, however, he never uses the term “essence” in the latter way. Della Rocca also describes the apparent equivocation on the term “external cause,” but without mentioning Bennett’s explanation for it in terms of an equivocation on “essence.”

8 Alan Donagan (1988) seeks, in effect, to defend Spinoza from Bennett’s charge that [3] equivocates on the term “external cause.” Following Matheron (1969), Donagan interprets Spinoza as identifying essence with function, so that an “external cause” is one that does not follow from the “functional definition” of the thing—i.e., from a definition that expresses the thing’s *proper functions*. Hence, Donagan interprets [3] as follows:

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[3–Donagan] Self-destruction can neither be among the functions by reference to which a complex body’s essence is defined, nor can it follow from those functions. (Donagan 1988, 150)

Donagan holds that this univocal reading of [3] should be accepted as expressing Spinoza’s meaning on the grounds that it does not invalidate any of the arguments in which Spinoza uses it. In fact, however, it appears that Spinoza’s very first use of [3]—namely, as the sole support of [5]—is invalidated by this interpretation. For [5] denies that “there could be something in the same subject which could destroy it”; yet Donagan does nothing to rule out the possibility of something destructive being “in a subject” without “following from its proper functions.” On the contrary, Donagan himself characterizes Seneca’s suicide as a case in which Seneca *destroyed himself* even though his self-destruction was not “functional” (150). It thus appears that Donagan’s defense of [3] against the charge of equivocation is not entirely successful. (Another difficulty with Donagan’s reading of [3] is that it arbitrarily limits the scope of [3] to *complex bodies*, thereby excluding both minds and simple bodies, even though Spinoza’s *conatus* doctrine is clearly offered as a claim about all singular things. Presumably, Donagan excludes simple bodies because he doubts whether they have proper functions.)

Henry Allison (1987) also replies briefly to Bennett’s charge that [3] equivocates on the meaning of “external cause.” According to Allison, “external causes” for Spinoza are causes that are external to “idealized” things or “things as they are in themselves—that is, as they are apart from their relations to other things in the order of nature” (132). As a univocal reading of [3], therefore, he proposes:

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[3–Allison] [I]nsofar as we consider only the thing itself [that is, the thing as it is apart from its relations to other things in the order of nature], thereby ignoring external causes, it is impossible to find anything that could destroy it. (Allison 1987: 131)

The reference to “things as they are apart from their relations to other things” is reminiscent of Bennett’s “whole nature” reading of [2], which concerns all “non-relational properties.” Allison, however, has something far narrower in mind. For whereas Bennett’s “whole nature” reading excludes only qualities that *consist* in having a relation to something else, Allison means to exclude all qualities that *result* from relations with something else. He makes this point explicit when he invokes the distinction between (i) “essential” or “intrinsic” qualities constituting the nature of the thing considered “as it is in itself” and (ii) “accidental” or “extrinsic” qualities, which “pertain to it only by virtue of its relations to other things in the order of nature,” citing “duration” as a prime example of the latter kind of quality (Allison 1987, 133). In fact, Allison’s reading of [3] is much closer to Bennett’s “proper essence” reading than it is to Bennett’s “whole nature” reading—although it is not identical with either of them.

Unlike Bennett, however, Allison seeks to interpret the later steps in Spinoza’s argument as being consistently dictated by a narrow interpretation of “external cause.” Thus, Allison construes [3] as only ruling out destruction of a thing by a “non-essential” or “non-intrinsic” cause, and he construes “in the same subject” in [5] and [6] to mean only “contained in the same *essence*.” Accordingly, he freely grants that “it is [a thing’s]

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inherent nature, or essence, not the actually existing thing, that is supposed to exclude all contrary properties” (Allison 1987, 133).

A difficulty arises for this interpretation, however, when Spinoza infers his final conclusion [12] from [9]-[11]. Allison takes [9], derived from [7] (i.e., 1p25c) and [8] (i.e., 1p34), to entail that each thing acts. Allison then remarks that “since things act, and since (by the preceding propositions) they cannot act in ways that are contrary to their nature—that is, which tend to their self-destruction—Spinoza concludes that “*each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being*” (Allison 1987: 133). Yet on Allison’s interpretation, these preceding propositions (that is, [10] and [11]) establish only that a thing’s nature or essence excludes contrary properties *from the thing’s essence* (i.e., from “the same subject” on Allison’s interpretation of that phrase), not from the thing considered as a whole. (Allison’s use of the phrase “the thing itself” to refer only to a thing’s essence may easily contribute to confusion about this.) It may be that a thing’s *essence* cannot act in ways that tend to the thing’s self-destruction; but Allison offers no reason on Spinoza’s behalf for what he takes to be Spinoza’s conclusion that a *thing* cannot destroy itself even through its non-essential qualities. As long as it is still left open that things may destroy themselves through their non-essential qualities, it appears that things *can* sometimes fail to strive as far as they can for self-preservation and can instead exert some power toward self-destruction. Thus, it appears that Allison banishes the equivocation between whole natures and more narrowly conceived essences in [3] only to force it to reappear at the final step of the argument.

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9 Of course, it would still be a substantial inference from the claim that a thing cannot be destroyed by a state or quality actually existing within its *own* whole nature ([3–whole nature]) to the claim that it cannot be destroyed by something *else* having the same whole nature ([6–whole nature]). However, Bennett defends this inference—at least in the context of Spinoza’s philosophy—by appealing to Spinoza’s later discussion of “different,” “contrary,” and “agreeing” natures in *Ethics* 4pp29-34. It would also appear to be an open question whether two things could ever have the same “whole nature” in every respect if things are also to have individual essences.

10 For this reason, Bennett amends the reading we have formulated as [6–incompatible parts] by artificially restricting its scope to wholes that are not “much bigger” than the things in question.

11 Garber (1994) develops a similar objection, which he traces to Leibniz.

12 In addition to his defense of Spinoza against the charge of equivocating in step [3] (see note 8), Allison also offers a defense of Spinoza against the charge of equivocating in step [11]. Whereas Bennett sees [11] as equivocating between what I have called the “incompatible parts” and “exertion” readings, Allison takes [11] simply to restate [6], with [6] understood as a claim about the exclusion of qualities incompatible with a thing’s existence from that thing’s nature. Although Allison does not provide an explicit reformulation of [11], the following would perhaps be a fair rendering of his reading:

[11–Allison] Each thing is opposed to—i.e., cannot have in its essence—any quality which can take its existence away.

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He suggests that Spinoza can nevertheless use [11] to derive [12] because a thing's formal exclusion from its essence of whatever is incompatible with its existence (as described in [6] and [11]) can become a kind of activity, since, "insofar as a thing acts, this opposition to whatever tends to destroy it is expressed as an actual resistance; and ... for a thing to act in such a way as to resist whatever tends to destroy it is to act in a self-maintaining way" (Allison 1987, 134).

However, from the proposition that "things act" and the proposition that they are "opposed to [i.e., incompatible with] whatever can destroy them," it does not follow that they ever act *by* resisting what can destroy them. For it may be that all of the actions of things take an entirely different form. Furthermore, even if it is granted that opposition does sometimes take the form of actual resistance, it would still appear to follow only that things *sometimes* do things that tend to preserve them in existence, and not that they actually resist "whatever tends to destroy them" (emphasis added). The latter claim follows only if opposition is *equated* with resistance—i.e., if all incompatibility results in actual resistance to whatever is incompatible. Even if opposition to (i.e., incompatibility with) something *can* be manifested or expressed in actual resistance, Spinoza would apparently be guilty of equivocation in treating such opposition as *equivalent* to actual resistance or exertion.

13 Curley appears to endorse Bennett's objection that [11] involves a fallacy of equivocation on the term "opposed to" (Curley 1988, 165n27), and he grants that "Spinoza is rather casual about proving the conatus doctrine" (Curley 1988, 113).

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Nevertheless, Curley does defend a univocal reading of [12]. He formulates this reading as follows:

[12–Curley] Each thing ... to the extent that it is not prevented from doing so by something external to it, will do what would maintain it in existence in its present state, i.e., if doing X would maintain a thing in existence, then it will do X, if it is not interfered with. (Curley 1988, 108)

This reading is (as Curley emphasizes) a “teleological” one in Bennett’s sense, because it licenses inferences from the self-preserving character of actions to their tendency to be performed. However, Curley argues that his own version of [12] can be derived directly from [3] (i.e., 3p4), thus blunting one of Bennett’s primary arguments in favor of the non-teleological reading of [12]—namely, that Spinoza has a short and plausible argument from [3] to [12] on its non-teleological version, but no similarly plausible argument for a teleological version of [12]. Here is Curley’s argument:

P4 says that if a thing is destroyed, it must be destroyed by an external cause. P6 says that each particular thing will do, to the extent that it is not prevented from doing so by something external to it, what would maintain it in existence in its present state. To imagine P6 false, we would have to imagine that, without any external interference, a thing does what will not maintain it in existence in its present state, i.e., something that would destroy it. And it does seem that this would violate P4. (Curley 1988, 109)

This proposed derivation of [12] (3p6) from [3] (3p4) equates a thing’s self-destruction with its “doing [without external interference] what will not maintain it in

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existence”—where “doing what will not maintain it in existence” must (in order to warrant the inference from [3] to [12–Curley]) include any failure to do anything that *would* maintain it in existence. This equation may be questioned, however. Suppose, for example that among the hundreds of species of edible plants flourishing within walking distance, only a single species, growing in one small spot five miles away, contains a vitamin necessary to sustain Jones’s life. Unaware of this obscure fact, Jones eats only nearby plants instead. In eating the nearby plants rather than the unknown vitamin-containing one, Jones has failed to do what would preserve his being, and it appears that he has done so without any external interference. Yet it is highly doubtful that, in not somehow choosing the correct plant to eat, Jones could properly be said to have engaged in “self-destruction.” More generally, it seems that [12] on Curley’s reading *could not* follow from [3], since his version of [12] entails that each thing always *does act* whenever there is *any* action that will preserve the thing in existence at a time when it is not interfered with; whereas [3], as a mere prohibition on self-destruction, seems on its face to have no such entailment. Of course, Curley’s willingness to derive [12] from [3] suggests that he does interpret [3] as having such an entailment, but it is difficult to see why it should have. For he treats [3] as being derived entirely from the very mild doctrine that the definition of a thing includes nothing that entails its non-existence (Curley 1988, 111). It therefore appears that Curley’s teleological version of [12] cannot be derived from a defensible reading of [3] and hence that his defense of [12] against the charge of equivocation is not entirely successful.

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14 The phrase is translated in this more literal way by R.H.M. Elwes (Spinoza 1909), by W. H. White and A. H. Stirling (Spinoza 1927), and by Samuel Shirley (Spinoza 1982).

15 When Curley translates Spinoza's use of "*quantum in se est*" in [12] (3p6) as "so far as it can by its own power," he observes that it could have been translated instead as "insofar as it is in itself," thereby highlighting the fact that it contains the same phrase—"*in se*"—that occurs in Spinoza's definition of "substance." Curley rejects this translation on the grounds "it is unclear whether *quantum in se est* should be regarded as an occurrence of the technical phrase used in the definition of substance" (C I, 498-99). It is this decision to treat "*in se*" non-technically in 3p6 that leads Curley to avoid using "in" altogether in his translation of that proposition. This is, of course, a reasonable decision in the absence of reasons to the contrary. I am arguing in the present work that closer examination of the argument of 3pp4-6 provides good reasons to regard "*quantum in se est*" as an occurrence of the technical phrase.

16 Whatever the nature of the distinction between substance and its affections may be, the postulation of anything unknowable or inconceivable seems incompatible with Spinoza's philosophical outlook in general and with 1a2 in particular.

17 Curley and Bennett differ over how much Spinoza has reconstructed this relation. According to Curley (1969), the relation of *being in* is almost exclusively causal for Spinoza, with few of the usual thing/quality implications remaining. According to Bennett (1984 and 1996), a "field metaphysic" allows Spinoza to retain the sense that affections are "adjectival" on substance. We need not seek to resolve this dispute fully for

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present purposes, since the only aspects of the inherence relation to which I appeal are those identified, from Spinoza's text, in what follows. I do, however, agree with Bennett that Spinoza's concept of inherence retains a great deal of the traditional subject/quality relation and that the field metaphysic helps to explain this. My primary worry about Bennett's way of characterizing Spinoza's view on this matter concerns the description of affections as being "adjectival" on things, a characterization that seems to me to be too linguistic to match Spinoza's primary metaphysical concerns.

18 Although Spinoza would surely allow us to say that "God is God," this statement presumably employs the "is" of identity, not the "is" of predication. Curley (1985) (XXXX: C I?) emphasizes passages that suggest an identity between God and his attributes; and Michael Della Rocca has pointed out to me that, in light of these passages, one might construe predicating an attribute of God as, in effect, predicating a substance of itself. Whatever one might think of this interpretation of attribute predication, however—and it is one that Della Rocca himself does not specifically endorse—it remains true that Spinoza does not seek to violate standard rules of grammar by directly predicating *God* of God, even though Spinoza is sure that, as a substance, God is *in* itself.

19 Some representative examples of such predications occur in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Locke 1975) I.iii.22; I. viii.16; I.viii.23; II.xxv.1; II.xxxi.2; and III.vi.4.

20 For a rather extreme statement of this point, see Savan (1973).

21 It is clear that, in this context, Spinoza also accepts the converse claim that "if Y is conceived through X, then Y is *in* X." This converse claim applies, however, only in

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cases where Y is *completely* conceived through X. For although a finite mode may be partly conceived through the other finite modes that are partial causes of it, but it does not follow that it is *in* those finite modes. Rather, it is *in* the substance through which it—as well as the finite modes that help to cause it—may be *completely* conceived.

22 Spinoza also regards 1a4 as licensing the converse claim that “if Y is caused by X, then Y is conceived through X.” Della Rocca (1996b, 11) provides passages showing conclusively that Spinoza regards 1a4 as a biconditional.

23 As this latter consequence shows, Spinozistic causes need not precede their effects. The Inherence Implies Causation Doctrine does not entail that things temporally precede either themselves or their affections.

24 The usual Latin term for this technical notion of *property* is “*proprium*”; however, Spinoza also often uses the term “*proprietas*” interchangeably with “*proprium*” for this purpose. See, for example, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* §95 (G II, 34-35). In his glossary to Spinoza’s *Collected Works* (C I, 652), Curley briefly discusses Spinoza’s use of these two Latin terms. As Curley notes, Paul Eisenberg holds that Spinoza uses the terms interchangeably to express the technical notion of *property* throughout the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. Curley himself neither accepts nor rejects Eisenberg’s claim, but he does assert that Spinoza at least sometimes uses “*proprietas*” to express a broader, non-technical sense of “property” in other works. Spinoza does clearly follow Descartes’s non-technical use of “*proprietas*” in *Descartes’s Principles of Philosophy*—as one might expect—but it is not clear to me that any of Spinoza’s uses of that term in the *Ethics* are truly non-technical. In

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any event, there are a number of passages in the *Ethics*—such as Part 3, Definition of the Affects, 6 explication—in which “*proprietas*” *must* be understood technically, as a synonym for “*proprium*.”

25 Influenced by Descartes’s usage, Spinoza’s early usage usually treats “mode” and “accident” as interchangeable terms. This usage obscures the distinction in question, since modes can be either *properties* or mere accidents. The specific sense of “accident” as involving qualities that do not follow from the essence of a thing appears in the *Ethics* chiefly in the distinction between something being a cause “through itself” (i.e., through its nature or *essence*) and its being an “accidental” cause (i.e., through its accidents).

26 It is clear that “*proprietas*” is being used here in the technical scholastic sense that makes it equivalent to “*proprium*” (see note 24), because it is only in this technical sense that “properties” *follow from the definition* of the thing whose properties they are.

27 Singular things, as “finite things” that have “a determinate existence,” presumably also include what Spinoza (in the discussion following 2p13s) calls “simplest bodies.” These are not technically “individuals,” because individuals are by definition complex bodies composed of smaller bodies as parts.

Presumably a tribe or state composed of like-minded human beings would be an example of a group of individuals operating together to produce common effects through the activity of the group as a whole. (See 4p18s, where Spinoza speaks of individual human beings joining to form another individual.)

28 For one account of “ratios of patterns and rest” and their role in Spinozistic individuation, see Garrett (1994); for another treatment, see Matheron (1969).

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29 Naess (1975) also proposes treating singular things as being partly in themselves. He maintains in addition, however, that “that which is completely in itself does not exist, and that which exists is not completely in itself” (p. 18). Charles Jarrett called this reference to my attention.

30 For further discussion of this example, see Garrett (1990) and (1996).

31 It may, of course, seem odd to say that an accident is not entirely *in* the subject of which it is predicated; but we have already seen that Spinoza need not regard rules of predication as completely mirroring the truth about inherence. In any case, it would sound no more odd for Spinoza to say this than it would be for him to say—as he undoubtedly would—that a person’s intentional but passion-influenced behaviors are not fully the person’s own *actions*, since “action” means “that of which the person is the adequate cause.”

One might reasonably ask whether, if an accident is not entirely *in* the singular thing of which it is predicated, it must then be partly *in* the other singular things that contribute to its causation. Spinoza’s view seems to be that whatever is completely caused by X must be completely *in* X, but that we need not accept as a general principle that whatever is only *partly* caused by X is *partly* in X. That is, what Spinoza calls “immanent causation” implies inherence, but what he called “transient causation” does not.

32 Descartes’s doctrine that each finite thing would immediately go out of existence if it were not continually conserved—i.e., re-created—at each moment by God suggests that finite things have in themselves no power for continuation in existence. This Cartesian doctrine of continual divine re-creation is one source of pressure for reading

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occasionalism into Descartes's metaphysics; for it is hard to see how things can really possess causal powers to affect other things if they lack any causal power of their own to remain in existence long enough to exert any power.

33 This is at least one of the main ways in which Spinoza's "third kind" of cognition (*scientia intuitiva*) (2p40s) is superior to his "second kind" of cognition (*ratio*).

34 The only exception to this is a contradictory thing—such as a chimera—which is (through its contradictory essence) the cause of its own non-existence.

35 It may seem, however, that a parallel problem arises in applying 3p5d and its conclusion [6] to singular things considered as affections of God. For how can we treat singular things as having *any* ability to "destroy one another" when they are all fully *in* God? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to recognize that *degrees* of ability of one thing to destroy another are rightfully applicable to the affections of a finite, quasi-substance, but not to affections *considered as* affections of God. This is because a *finite* subject can have powers (including powers of destruction) whose exercise is "contingent" in the sense that whether the powers are exercised or not depends not simply on the subject whose powers they are, but also on the nature of *external* circumstances. That is, from the nature of the finite subject alone, nothing follows about whether or when its powers are actually exercised. The *extent* to which one affection can destroy another is therefore a function of the ease with which it can *combine with* external circumstances to produce destruction. For God, in contrast, there *are* no external circumstances, so that whatever it is possible for God to do through any of his affections, God necessarily does; the distinction between the modalities of necessity, actuality, and possibility collapses

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(Bennett 1985 and Garrett 1991). One affection of God can therefore exclude another from existence in either of two ways: (i) pre-emptively, by preventing it from coming into existence at all, or (ii) by destroying it *as soon as* it becomes capable (through some alteration either of it or of the other affection) of destroying the other. These exhaust the alternatives, for there are no unexercised capabilities, and hence no *degrees* of ability to destroy, from the standpoint of the divine subject. In neither of these two cases will two affections of God that *can* destroy one another co-exist *in* the subject God for any period of time.

36 Spinoza explains this conception of “contrary” qualities and individuals in 4pp29-35, where he indicates that things can *only* be harmed by what is contrary to them, and also that two contrary things must nevertheless fall under the same attribute, since contrariety involves some limitation within the same nature of one by the other.

37 It does not, in contrast, entail the content of Bennett’s non-teleological reading of [12], namely, that all of the activity of each thing strives for, or tend towards, self-preservation. However, Spinoza does *also hold* this further doctrine. For he states in 3p7d that “the power of each thing, or the striving by which it (either alone or with others) *does anything, or strives to do anything* [is] the power or striving by which it strives to persevere in its being” (emphasis added). He derives this claim not from [12] (i.e., 3p6) alone, however, but only after the addition of 1p29, which states that “things are able to produce *nothing but* what follows necessarily from their determinate nature” (emphasis added)—i.e., from their essence.

38 See Garrett (1999).

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39 See Garrett (1994).

40 There is an interesting similar contrast in epistemology: Whereas Descartes can validate the principle that “whatever is perceived clearly and distinctly is true” only on the basis of considerations of divine volitional goodness, Spinoza seeks to validate it directly from the nature of truth, without appeal to divine volition.

41 Dretske (1985 and 1988) explains this distinction, partly by appeal to sensory systems and natural drives.

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