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Negation & Acosmism: Hegel's Acosmist Reading of Spinoza

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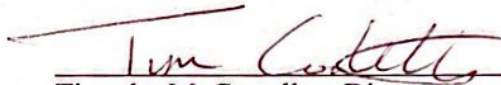
Negation & Acosmism: Hegel's Acosmist Reading of Spinoza

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts / Science in Department from
William & Mary

by

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Accepted for Honors



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Robert S. Leventhal

Negation & Acosmism

Hegel's Acosmist Reading of Spinoza

Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Why Is Acosmism a Problem?	2
Summary & Overview	7
Chapter 2. Foundations in Negation.....	12
Transcendent Negation in Spinoza.....	13
Immanent Negation in Hegel.....	17
Being, Nothing, Becoming.....	17
Being-there & Negation.....	23
Chapter 3. From Negation to Being	26
Spinoza & the Eleatics on Being.....	27
Nonbeing as a Being of Reason	32
Chapter 4. The Problem of Finitude.....	36
Spinoza's Substance Ontology	38
The Problem of Finitude.....	43
Chapter 5. Acosmism.....	51
Hegel's Acosmist Reading of Spinoza.....	52
Spinoza's (Hegelian) Restoration of the Cosmos	56
Spinoza's Ontology of Contrariety.....	58
The Hiding Place of Being-there	61
Bibliography.....	65

Abbreviations/Citations

Spinoza

Principles of Cartesian Philosophy

PxDy = Part x, Definition y

PxPy = Part x, Proposition y

CMxCy = *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Part x, Chapter y

d = demonstration

c = corollary

PxAy = Part x, Axiom y

PxLy = Part x, Lemma y

s = scholium

n = note

Ethics

ExDy = Part x, Definition y

ExPy = Part x, Proposition y

Expy = Part x, Postulate y

d = demonstration

c = corollary

ExAy = Part x, Axiom y

ExLy = Part x, Lemma y

s = scholium

e = explication

Correspondence

Epx = Letter x

Short Treatise

ST/page in Opera, Supplement

Hegel

Science of Logic

SL21.x = 2nd Edition, Book I, pagination at x

SL12.x = 1st Edition, Book III, pagination at x

SL11.x = 1st Edition, Book II, pagination at x

Encyclopedia Logic

Cited by paragraphing. I have used the following abbreviations.

EL = Encyclopedia Logic

a = Addition

History of Philosophy

18/(page in Werke, Band 18)

20/(page in Werke, Band 20)

Notes on Translation

I have frequently altered translations of, or retranslated, Hegel and Spinoza using the original German and Latin. Translations of Deleuze are my own.

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Negation & Acosmism

Hegel's Acosmist Reading of Spinoza

Chapter 1. Introduction

Spinoza is a crucial point in modern philosophy: either Spinozism or no philosophy at all.¹

When one begins to philosophize, one must be a Spinozist. The soul must bathe in the ether of the one substance in which all that one held for true is submerged.²

– G.W.F. Hegel

Hegel's relationship to Spinoza was far from simple. He consistently praises Spinoza for the speculative genius of his definitions and the principle that 'all determination is negation' and even regards him as something like the critical point and foundation of modern philosophy. Yet, in the *Science of Logic*, the foundation of his philosophical system, the number of criticisms of Spinoza is second only to that of Kant. Even more notable is that the decisive transition from the Doctrine of Essence to the Doctrine of Concept is portrayed as a grand refutation of Spinozism. Hegel proclaims, "The exposition ... of substance as leading to the *concept* is, therefore, *the one and only true refutation of Spinozism.*"³ Hegel's account of the nature of 'the concept', the core of his own system, comes directly out of not just *a* refutation of Spinoza but *the* one and only true one.

Hegel's own understanding of Spinoza, however, is distinctive. He embraces an *acosmist* interpretation of Spinoza, that is, an interpretation of Spinoza according to which Spinoza denies the existence of finite things: a denial of the world of differentiated, limited beings and types of being, a denial of the 'cosmos'. I will argue that this interpretation of Spinoza is best read as a critical reading, whose goal is not primarily to reproduce the spirit of the text so much as to render key principles and concepts in Spinozist philosophy as coherent as possible. Accordingly, Hegel's acosmist interpretation

¹ Hegel, 20/163-4.

² 20/165.

³ SL12.15. (Italics added.)

of Spinoza is largely motivated by a problem, I will argue, he identifies in Spinoza's metaphysics. This problem is what I call the *problem of finitude*. The problem of finitude is that Spinoza's metaphysics seems to entail that, even in principle, there cannot be any finite things, even though Spinoza consistently seems to accept that finite things exist. This latter part is what makes the problem of finitude 'problematic' in the first place. Though this problematic character of the problem of finitude is initially only interpretive, I think that an acosmist interpretation of Spinoza risks introducing serious internal difficulties into Spinozism, making it problematic for Spinoza on a second level beyond just figuring out interpretation. Since the importance of the issues I will discuss in the rest of this thesis is largely determined by this problem, I will devote the beginning of this introduction to explaining why Hegel's acosmist reading presents a serious problem for Spinozism. Then, I will proceed to an overview of the rest of the thesis.

Why Is Acosmism a Problem?

Spinoza's *Ethics* is divided into five parts. *Roughly*, Part I primarily discusses infinite being, and the rest of the *Ethics* primarily concerns finite being. This is not universally true; finite beings are discussed in Part I, and infinite beings are discussed in the rest of the text. Nevertheless, it is a decent heuristic.

Each part of the *Ethics* builds on the last, proceeding like a cumulative series of geometrical proofs where later results depend on the earlier ones. In Chapter 4, I will argue that the problem of finitude arises in Part I of the *Ethics* and the key doctrines and concepts on which it rests.

Now, what exactly is accomplished in the rest of the *Ethics*? As the name suggests, after the metaphysics there will be a Spinozist ethics, an ethics designed for finite beings like ourselves. This ethics is deeply informed by the philosophical psychology and the epistemology Spinoza defends after Part I: again, integral to both are finite beings like ourselves. We would like to know about *our*

knowledge in addition to, say, God's knowledge, and it is *our* affects which are under consideration in the philosophical psychology. These are all supposed to ground and inform a political philosophy. In the meantime, he provides an answer to the question of the mind-body and he proves many other metaphysical results of great importance for finite beings, human beings especially (e.g., conatus).

Combined with his geometrical method, these diverse philosophical topics are addressed in a rigorously connected way with a logically tight order of presentation. As a result, Spinoza is an extremely systematic thinker, and the full systematic force and truth of his later results depends on what happens in Part I. What would happen if, as Hegel suggests, Part I implies that Spinoza's metaphysical principles entail that he *must* be an acosmist? That is, what if Hegel has provided an argument, based only on Spinozist principles, which concludes that it would be *impossible* for a finite being to exist? For rest of this section, let us assume Hegel successfully provides such an argument.

Considered on its own, such an argument would present a serious threat to all the sections of the *Ethics* which treat finite beings as if they exist, discussing their properties, relation to infinite being, and so on. To the extent that these discussions depend on an assumption like 'Take some finite being, X', even if they were merely entertaining a hypothetical, they would be entertaining a possibility which is contradictory, according to the very principles Spinoza uses to discuss it. If Part I gives us everything we need to conclude that there is nothing finite, indeed that there *cannot be* anything finite, we can apply the same argument right after we have assumed that there is something finite, and we end up in a contradiction.

As a result, most of what happens after Part I, or more precisely everything that involves finitude in the *Ethics*, would be based on an assumption which implies a contradiction. It would in this sense be comparable to naïve set theory or something analogous. The principles on which naïve set theory was based allowed mathematicians to define a 'set of all sets which do not contain themselves'.

If this set contained itself, then there would be something in the set that does not have the property of everything in the set: a contradiction. But if it did not contain itself, then there would be some set which does not contain itself outside of the set of all sets that do not contain themselves: a contradiction. Mathematicians did systematic work with naïve set theory, but ultimately the principles they were using in creating that system were contradictory, and in traditional logic any claim (Q) can follow from a contradiction using the explosive argument: ‘P and not-P. Thus, P. So, P or Q. Yet, from the first claim, not-P. Therefore, Q.’ So, uncovering one is a serious threat to the value of that system’s results; the opposite conclusion could be quickly inferred.

In the case of mathematics, the principles on which mathematics depended had to be changed; new axiomatic systems were developed, and the results mathematicians obtained with the old system were largely left intact because most of the work done did not require the principles which generate the contradiction. In the case of Spinozism, the same holds. If some of Spinoza’s principles lead to contradictions, we will have to abandon them.

There are fundamentally two options to avoid the contradiction. If Hegel’s critical reading is correct, then a contradiction arises only once we assume the existence of finite things. There are two options, then: make the principles compatible with finite things or never assume finite things exist. The second option would mean embracing acosmism. On the face of it, however, that would mean abandoning most of Spinoza’s ethics, epistemology, political philosophy (in the *Ethics*, at least), and so forth because is based on a contradictory assumption.

Yet, Hegel does *not* perceive acosmism as problematic for Spinoza; he views it as Spinoza’s actual philosophical position. Of course, acosmism is still in tension with the discussion of finite things in the other parts of the *Ethics*, and so Hegel’s interpretation must somehow reconcile this tension. He does so by maintaining that Spinoza regards finite things as semblances which ‘seem’ to exist but

do not actually exist; claims about them describe what *seems* to be true but not what is actually true.⁴ In this way, the threatening character of acosmism for Spinoza's project is diffused by distinguishing apparent truth from actual truth and arguing that Spinoza's account of finite things is a perfectly systematic discussion of the former. Much could be said about this interpretation on an interpretive level,⁵ but I am more concerned with the philosophical merits of this reading.

On that level, an acosmist Spinoza faces serious problems wherever he discusses finitude. One way that Spinoza could give up his principles to avoid contradiction is not to abandon them absolutely, but to have two localized discourses: one where he accepts all the principles that lead to acosmism and one where he rejects some of them. In principle, this is what Hegel's interpretation would do: it would separate a realm of truth, in which acosmism is true, from a realm of semblance, in which some of the (true) principles that lead to acosmism are abandoned to discuss reality as it seems to be.

The problem with this interpretation, however, is that Spinoza's philosophy about finite things at least in part depends on, or is justified by, the principles in Part I of the *Ethics* which are supposed to create the problem of finitude, along with further results which are obtained using these principles.⁶ In other words, Spinoza does *not* separate these discourses; he continues appealing to propositions in Part I which use presuppositions he would have to reject to allow finite things to exist. Since those principles are still in use, at varying degrees of mediation, in his ethics, political philosophy, epistemology, and the like in the *Ethics*, they are by no means abstracted from the realm of seeming; they are still quite present and operative in it.

⁴ Hegel, SL21.85.

⁵ See Spinoza, E1P15s, where he seems to attribute finitude (in matter) to the imagination, not the intellect or reality; attention to the use of 'imagination' in Ep12 sometimes suggests a similar idea. For some evidence against the acosmist interpretation, evidence which I agree rules against it, see Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 79-83; "*Omnis determinatio est negatio*," 187-9.

⁶ For example, E1P21 alone, which I discuss at length in Chapter 4, is used to justify E1P28, E2P11, E2P30, E4P4, and E5P40, all of which primarily concern finite things. As you can imagine, the citations multiply as we consider the use of each of these propositions.

That fact would mean that the contradiction they entail (finite things exist and do not exist) would still be latent in this sphere of semblances, and Spinoza is not a philosopher ready to accept a contradiction. The only way the contradiction in Spinoza's discussion of finite things could be kept at bay would be to insist that we must not make the argument that results in acosmism. Once this is admitted, the justifying force of Spinoza's arguments is lost; they can no longer be viewed as deductive proofs from a true metaphysics to further consequences which the reader must accept. At best, they would amount to an insightful description of reality whose geometric presentation is mostly a stylistic choice because the deductive reasoning used in it could lead to any conclusion if we just choose to make the right arguments on Spinozist principles, arguments equally sound as those Spinoza does make. The decision to continue using the relevant doctrines of Part I would be little more than a contingent *choice*, a choice which could simply be refused to obtain a more consistent discourse. It seems to me, then, that the option of separating the finite and infinite into two separate discourses or realms, like appearance and reality, semblance and actuality, or the like, is untenable: not only would Spinoza not choose to just discuss a contradictory realm, any arguments he might make about it would hardly have any binding force to them.

Because the *Ethics'* discussion of finitude depends on its discussion of the infinite in this way, we will have to keep the discourses about the two unified. Our other option, then, is that we reject enough of the assumptions which generate the problem of finitude to avoid the problem in the first place. My arguments in this thesis will suggest that this would mean making substantial revisions to Spinoza's views on negation and being in particular, revisions which would move Spinoza closer to Hegel. Nevertheless, my aim here is not to pursue these lines of revision but instead to reconstruct the problem, building up to acosmism.

Summary & Overview

Concisely put, my thesis is this: Spinoza's views on negation are coupled with a view of being which, although Hegel misunderstands it to an extent, does make it impossible for there to be finite things after Spinoza's monism is introduced. Chapters 2 through 5 are dedicated to defending and giving meaning to this claim, but I will first summarize the whole so that it can be grasped, as it were, "in one glance"⁷ more easily.

Because Hegel often discusses acosmism in connection with negation, even though I will argue the question primarily has to do with being and being-there (i.e., the kind of immediacy which is both being and nonbeing), I will begin by providing an account of Spinoza and Hegel's views on negation so that the requisite translation can be made in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. I argue Spinozist negation is strictly transcendent, whereas Hegel's basic definition of negation is an immanent one. That is, Spinoza locates something's negation *outside* or *beyond* its being, while Hegel holds that the basic concept of negation is *within* or *internal* to its being. While Spinoza's views of negation are largely introduced in definitions and clarifying remarks, Hegel's are justified by the initial arguments of the *Science of Logic*. I will provide my own account of these arguments in some detail in part because I want to show how the issues at stake are not just matters of defining things differently, disagreeing on basic principles, or anything of the sort and in part because Hegel's underlying views on being, nothing, and being-there are important through the entire thesis.

Indeed, Spinoza's views on negation reveal a more fundamental understanding of being: one unlike Hegel's, in that Spinoza maintains a strict separation of being and nonbeing. Hegel identifies this difference and interprets Spinoza's strict separation of a thing's being from its nonbeing as extirpating nonbeing from ontology altogether. In this, he holds that Spinozism involves an 'Eleatic'

⁷ Spinoza, E2P40s2.

conception of being, that is, an understanding of being which holds that there is a strict separation of being and nonbeing *and that* any introduction of nonbeing into ontology involves an error. I argue against Hegel's importation of this second part of the Eleatics into Spinoza; Spinoza *does* grant a place for nonbeing within a fully adequate ontology, understood as the *study* of being (not being itself). For Spinoza, nonbeing and negation are 'beings of reason', rational constructs without direct metaphysical correlates which can be used indirectly, but perfectly adequately, to speak of being. So, there is no 'negation' in reality, but negation describes something about the relationships and properties of real beings indirectly. This indirect condition requires that Spinoza find a way to ground what nonbeing and negation express in positive being.

This requirement is, I believe, at the heart of Hegel's *acosmist* reading of Spinoza, that is, his reading of Spinoza according to which Spinoza denies the existence of finite things. His acosmist reading of Spinoza could be seen as claiming, centrally, that Spinoza cannot provide a ground for negation or nonbeing. In order to understand why finding such a ground becomes so problematic, I first give an account of basic features of Spinoza's metaphysics, beyond what was required for the discussion of negation. In this vein, I introduce the Spinozist ontological framework of substance, attribute, and mode, and I reconstruct Spinoza's monism. I identify three distinct stages in the *Ethics* of the development of his monism, each establishing a distinct aspect of Spinoza's monistic being: he proves that *substance* must exist, then that substance must exist *as God*, and finally that this divine substance is *nature*. In the process, I highlight how elements of his ontological framework and proof of monism gradually introduce factors that finally result in the problem of finitude.

More precisely, the combination of Spinoza's monism and his underlying views of negation and being entail the problem of finitude. I argue that this problem of finitude appears most explicitly in E1P21 and E1P22, which I will argue acknowledge the central thrust of the problem: that the

monistic being would have to be itself and not be itself at once to have finite being immanent to itself. Together, these two propositions imply that no mode that follows directly from God or an infinite mode can be finite. In making the case that there is a (prima facie) problem of finitude in Spinoza, I heavily use Yitzhak Melamed's reconstruction of E1P21, but in the process I argue against one of his interpretive interjections, where he suggests that Spinoza invokes a strong 'same cause, same effect' principle. Instead, I argue, Spinoza's argument rests on his own transcendent view of negation and his strict separation of being and nonbeing, coupled with the immediate unity God's being (and all it contains) has with itself. The result is that these propositions end up being motivated by the very same considerations that create the problem of finitude.

Hegel never carefully draws the argument out of Spinoza's texts in introducing the problem of finitude, but I argue that he does correctly identify the problem in a key passage on Spinoza. He argues that God must always contain any proposed, possible reality, or else the absolutely infinite would be rendered finite. However, because Spinoza views negation as inherently transcendent, the negation which finitude implies would divide the immediate unity of substantial being which contains the finite's reality. This division would split the unity of substance's being and everything it contains into a diversity, into the difference between some reality and its negation. Substantial being is itself in *this* reality it contains, but it is not itself insofar as its being is *that* negation which it is not; substance would be and not be at once, and it would be its own negation. The finite would thus require rejecting the strict separation of being and nonbeing and the transcendent view of negation Spinoza endorses. So, this kind of division is impossible within his system; according to Hegel, uniting the finite with the infinite means submerging it into a unity without real difference.

So, on this Hegelian reading, Spinoza must either give up some of his principles or be an acosmist. Spinoza does attempt a solution to the problem of finitude, which involves mediate infinite

modes that produce finite modes. Where he introduces this terminology, however, Spinoza does not tell us how these mediating modes can introduce finitude, and I try to fill in the gaps.

Specifically, Spinoza's proof for E1P21 and E1P22 relies on an assumption of *finitude*. This assumption is stronger than the assumption that there is merely a multiplicity of distinct modes, and Spinoza's prohibition of being-there would not apply to two distinct modes. Since only infinite modes follow directly from God and only an infinite mode can follow directly from an infinite mode, the only option left to him to introduce finite modes comes indirectly, by the mediation of two or more infinite modes. I will argue this mediation occurs by an implicit *contrariety* they have with one another in certain respects; that is, the positive nature of certain modes has a function of excluding whatever is incompatible with them, so that they cannot inhere in a common subject of predication. This inability to exist as one and the same unit allows infinite modes to exclude one another in various respects, which renders possible modes insofar as they are excluded by other modes (i.e., finite modes).

This solution, however, does not avoid the underlying problem that the problem of finitude identifies. Since Spinoza argued that "whatever is, is in God", no reality could be beyond God's infinite being. So, to the extent that finite modes have some positive being which is beyond the positive being of whatever is excluded from them, both sides of this transcendence must be contained immediately in the being of God. The problem is, then, that God's being (as present in one mode), which is immediately unified and indivisible, will have to transcend or be immediately distinct from God's own being (as present in another mode). This immediate unity of two immediacies which are immediately distinct is precisely the *Hegelian* concept of *being-there*, and the unification of being and nonbeing it involves is something Spinoza explicitly rejected. The result is that substance is the negation of itself and that being-there is integral to its being: as expected, because Spinoza tries to ground finite things, he must give up some of the presuppositions which frame the problem of finitude and his thought in

general. I conclude, then, by siding with Hegel's critical acosmist reading of Spinoza, though the 'dialectical twist', if you like, is that Hegel did not discuss the moment Spinoza renounced some of his most anti-Hegelian principles in order to avoid acosmism and solve the problem of finitude, the moment Spinoza became most Hegelian.

Chapter 2. Foundations in Negation

Hegel credits Spinoza with the doctrine “*omnis determinatio est negatio*” (“all determination is negation”); anything with any determinacy whatsoever has that determinacy only so long as there is a kind of nonbeing (a negation) involved with its being (its reality). Since Spinoza’s mature and greatest work, the *Ethics*, is most explicit on negation, I will begin by examining Hegel and Spinoza’s respective views on negation, as Spinoza’s understanding of *omnis determinatio est negatio* is regarded by Hegel as a major source of his acosmism and monism.⁸ We find not only a difference in their views but that their views on the basic nature of *negation* are almost perfect inverses of one another. I will present both of their views as they present them. Spinoza’s views of negation are largely established in definitions and clarifying remarks, and from these various sources I argue negation is *transcendent* in Spinoza; negation is always contained in some possible being *beyond* something’s being. Negation will introduce us to Spinoza’s views on being, which are discussed further in Chapter 3.

Hegel’s views, by contrast, are justified by the initial arguments of the *Science of Logic* which begins with pure being, and I will go through these in some detail for several reasons. First, I will explicitly discuss the relationship between Hegel and Spinoza on being and nothing in the next chapter, and so Hegel’s views on this topic will be relevant there. Second, the logic of being, nonbeing, and the ways being and nonbeing can be united or separated is the basic source of the acosmist concern in Spinoza. Third, somewhat more tangentially, since Hegel’s view is arguably less intuitive, I think it is important that we see why he thinks he has demonstrated that his view is correct against Spinoza, so that we do not think the difference between them is simply a dispute on first principles. Nevertheless, what is his view? I will argue that Hegel’s basic understanding of negation is an *immanent* one, on which negation is *within* something’s being. The discussion of negation in Spinoza will serve

⁸ Hegel, SL21.101. Chapter 5 discusses Hegel’s claims here at length.

to introduce us to Spinoza's views on *being*, discussed further in Chapter 3, and our discussion of Hegel in this chapter will cover his views on being for this later discussion as well.

Transcendent Negation in Spinoza

Whereas Hegel is known for being a philosopher of negativity, Spinoza is known for quite the opposite. As Deleuze says, “[t]he philosophy of Spinoza is a philosophy of pure affirmation. Affirmation is the speculative principle on which the whole *Ethics* depends.”⁹ This fact is evident from the very beginning of the *Ethics*. The very first sentence of the text is the definition of a “cause of itself” (*causa sui*), as what cannot be conceived except as existing.¹⁰ The very first thought Spinoza asks us to think in the *Ethics* is the thought of something which, just in being conceived, cannot be denied or negated: its positive being is affirmed by its very nature.

Even so, alongside this theme of affirmation, there is a concurrent theme of negation which runs throughout Spinoza's corpus. The very next definition in the *Ethics* defines “finitude”. Again, later in the explication of the definition of God, Spinoza declares that “if something is absolutely infinite [(as God is by definition)], whatever expresses essence and involves no *negation* pertains to its essence.”¹¹ Even in the opening definitions of the *Ethics*, negation seems to be playing an important role in Spinoza's ontology. But what is this role? Coupled with other remarks, we will see that the definition of finitude is the definition of something with a negation, so that the meaning of negation can be inferred from this definition. We begin, therefore, with finitude.

“That thing is said to be finite in its own kind which can be limited by something else of the same nature.”¹² As is often the case in Spinoza's definitions, there are subtleties in this definition I

⁹ Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*, 51.

¹⁰ Spinoza, E1D1.

¹¹ E1D6e.

¹² E1D2.

would like to point out since they all inform what counts as a ‘negation’ of something else. First, Spinoza says “*can be limited*” (*terminari potest*), not ‘*is limited*’. So, in his explanation, Spinoza does not say that a body is finite because it *is* limited by another body, but only because it *can be*. It is sufficient to know that it is possible for there to be space with a volume of 30 cubic units to know that space with a volume of just 10 is finite; there is some possible space from which it is limited. This brings us to the second point. Spinoza says that the finite is limited by something “*of the same nature*”. This is the point of saying “a body is not limited by a thought nor a thought by a body”¹³ in his example. It makes sense to say a thought is finite because the ‘thinking’ it contains is not all the mental reality there can be, and likewise it makes sense to say that an extended thing is finite because it does not include all the extended reality there can be. But to say that this extended thing is, as an extended thing, finite because it is not a thought would not be quite right. No matter how much reality is taken into my idea of something, that idea will never exceed or include the extension of a body: likewise for extension exceeding an idea. Third, this limitation is limitation “*by something else*” (*alia*). This is decisive. Limitation always stems from something else, and we find out in the *Short Treatise* that, beyond that, it cannot be based in the positive being of the finite thing *at all*: “[t]o say that the nature of the thing required such limitation and that the thing therefore could not be otherwise is no reply: *for the nature of a thing can require nothing unless it exists.*”¹⁴ Only insofar as the nature of the thing exists, insofar as its being is present, can it require anything. The being of the finite thing cannot require the limiting term; this limiting term comes entirely and strictly from the outside. That is, limitation is necessarily *transcendent*, found in the reality of some other possible being outside or beyond the being of the finite thing.

I will argue that this ‘limiting term’ is the *negation* of the finite thing, and so it is worth asking what this ‘limitation’ involves. As these examples show, limitation cannot be conceived as an action

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Spinoza, ST/18. (Italics added.)

of one thing on another. A finite region of space was ‘limited’ simply because there could be space outside of it, and it is ‘limited by’ that possible space. Indeed, it seems that *terminare* (‘to limit’) keeps its close connection to *terminus* (‘end, boundary’); something is limited by whatever is ‘beyond the boundary’ beyond which its own being ‘has ended’ and another’s has begun. But Spinoza himself provides a gloss on his own definition later in the text; “being finite is really, in part, a negation, and being infinite is an absolute affirmation of the existence of some nature.”¹⁵ The infinite, which “cannot be limited by something of the same nature”, is pure affirmation. The finite is partial negation. The difference between the negation and no negation, then, is located in the potential limit found in something else of the same nature. The ‘negation’ introduced when we come to the finite must, therefore, be located in this introduced limiting term, the other possible being found beyond the finite thing’s own affirmative being. For Spinoza, then, something’s negation is found *beyond* its being in that possible being which it is limited from. I will describe this view as a *transcendent* view of negation: every negation is some possible being *beyond* the being of something finite. In reference to that finite thing, this possible being is its ‘negation’.

What counts as a thing’s negation, then, will inherit the properties of the limiting term. At least as far as the definition of negation is concerned, negations are *possibilities* which may or may not be actual. Likewise, these possibilities are always *outside, beyond, or external to* the being of the finite thing we are considering. Finally, negations must have something in common with what they negate.¹⁶

Here, the Spinozist understanding of *omnis determinatio est negatio* is most clearly introduced into the *Ethics*, though Letter 50’s “*determinatio negatio est*” is the most explicit source of Hegel’s phrase.¹⁷

¹⁵ E1P7s1.

¹⁶ Thus, as Martial Guérout insists, the attributes are incommensurable or, more precisely, do not belong to a common kind. Guérout, *Spinoza: Dieu*, 114. Since negations must be ‘of the same nature’ as what they negate, this means that the attributes cannot negate one another.

¹⁷ Ep50.

Anything finite must have some possibility beyond its being, in virtue of which it is limited. If the positive being of something cannot require its negation, does the fact that something is a negation penetrate into its positive being? In other words, is something's *not being* something else something inherent in its *being*? The answer for Spinoza is certainly not; "I cannot sufficiently wonder at the subtlety of mind of those who have sought, not without great harm to truth, something that is between being and nothing."¹⁸ Any such intermediary or synthesis between being and nothing (nonbeing) must be rejected; negation applies only when we are thinking of something's negation transcending something, one positive reality standing apart from some other positive reality in some way. The formula behind Spinozist negation could thus be put like this: insofar as something *is*, it *is*, and insofar as it is *not*, it is *not*. There is nothing in the middle, and there is no way to be both. Already, then, we find Spinoza with a distinctive understanding of being much in line with Deleuze's claim that Spinoza's philosophy is a "philosophy of pure affirmation".

I will discuss Spinoza's views on being in more depth in Chapter 3. For now, it suffices to think about how this illuminates negation. Extended things are the easiest way to illustrate the relationship between being and nonbeing as they are used in Spinozist negation. A rock, for example, occupies a definite region of space in which *it is*, and outside of that space *it is not*. Now, that space outside of the rock has being just as well as the region the rock occupies does; if you do not want to grant that space itself is real, it is at least the region of some possible (or actual) air, objects, locus of physical properties, and so forth. But the being of this outside region is beyond or outside of the being of the rock. It is, to that extent, the rock's negation, meanwhile the region the rock occupies purely affirms the rock's being, without an admixture of negation.

¹⁸ Spinoza, CM1C3.

Immanent Negation in Hegel

As Robert Stern argues, Hegel's own tendency to associate himself with Spinoza using *omnis determinatio est negatio* has led many interpreters to miss the key differences between the Spinozist and Hegelian understandings of the doctrine.¹⁹ These key differences are largely informed, as I will discuss further in Chapter 5, by Hegel's own appreciation of Spinoza's transcendent view of negation and the views of being that underlie it. The fundamental break with Spinoza, for Hegel at least, lies not so much in his formula for negation itself; though space prevents me from pursuing it here, I think Hegel does accept transcendent negation as a derivative concept of negation from his own. To the contrary, the fundamental break with Spinoza happens in the first chapter of the *Logic* on being. Specifically, in the transition from becoming to being-there especially, Hegel argues against the strict separation of being and nonbeing that Spinoza accepts.

In order to prepare for this discussion of being, which will take place to an extent here and further in Chapter 3, I will provide a detailed account of the opening sections of Hegel's *Logic*, running from pure being to the first form of negation. The main functional role of providing this detailed account, besides just examining the strength of Hegel's arguments, is that the details of his account of the relation between being and nonbeing will be important later, and these details are articulated and justified in this part of the *Logic*. So, my account will serve as background for those later discussions.

Being, Nothing, Becoming

Hegel complains that “[t]he whole Spinozist philosophy is contained in these definitions; but they are universal determinations and, on the whole, formal. What is defective is that he begins with definitions.”²⁰ Spinoza ought not merely to set down definitions as given concepts (of finitude, of

¹⁹ Stern, “Determination is negation,” 30-31.

²⁰ Hegel, 20/172.

negation, etc.), but he ought to have somehow *derived* these concepts. To avoid all “assurances without scientific validity”²¹ in articulating basic logical and ontological categories, Hegel cannot assume anything at the beginning which could in any way be denied or avoided. Philosophy must begin *absolutely*, that is, without making itself relative to concepts, axioms, definitions, principles, and the like which can be denied, thought in a different way, or simply called into doubt because they rest on distinctions and concepts whose validity remains ungrounded. To begin philosophy absolutely, one must give up *every* determinate presupposition; logic demands “total *presuppositionlessness*.”²² It must begin with something totally indeterminate which presupposes no prior mediation: *pure being*,²³ pure immediacy as such, the bare ‘that’, ‘this’, or ‘is’ itself, which is an aspect of any act of thinking and in anything which ‘is’ or can ‘be’ at all.

Pure being is not *a* being. It is immediately itself, but it is not related to itself, insofar as this relation would introduce additional conceptual complexity to it that we cannot presuppose. Pure being has no relation whatsoever. We cannot presuppose that it is ‘being that is not...’ because this extra clause would amount to an additional presupposition, introducing extra content or specificity than could be minimally presupposed. Pure being can be described as the ‘indeterminate immediate’, though this is not so much a definition as an external description of pure being. Instead, its perfect expression is an incomplete sentence: “*Being, pure being* – without further determination.”²⁴

The entire categorial apparatus developed in the *Logic* is supposed to be derived from pure being alone. Hegel characterizes the kind of derivation at issue here as an “*immanent deduction*,”²⁵ which begins with one category (e.g., pure being) and, *using only what it is and contains*, proves that it ‘cannot be

²¹ SL21.80.

²² EL§78.

²³ SL21.55.

²⁴ SL21.68.

²⁵ SL12.16.

itself without...’, to put it generally.²⁶ An examination of this surplus (whatever is in the ‘...’) then ensues, resulting in a systematically integrated chain of categories that comprises the *Logic*.

At the beginning, all we have to make a transition to the next link in this chain is pure being. So how is this done? Pure being has no difference within it, and it is not (yet anyway) different from anything else. It is not *a* being, has no quality, and is just a totally empty ‘is’. As such an indeterminate emptiness, “[t]here is *nothing* to be intuited in it, if one can speak here of intuiting.”²⁷ Pure being has no particular significance at all. It is rather a pure absence: *pure nothing*.

The transition from pure being to nothing is difficult to state. Often, certain formulations of this argument are more persuasive than others, though the basic idea is the same: being is so lacking in any determinacy or determinability that it is not anything at all, that is, nothing. Formulations aside, as it is stated in the text of the *Logic*, the transition is missing a step or a couple steps. Hegel directly moves from the observation that pure being is “pure indeterminacy and emptiness” to the fact that there is nothing in it, that it is nothing. If we merely read this directly, the problem with this observation is that it seems totally external.²⁸ The “emptiness” of pure being seems to be introduced as if it is new and derived, but empty of what? Where does this notion of emptiness, if it differs from being at all, even come from? This question can only be answered using pure being, or else something new would be introduced into the argument externally, violating the immanence of the derivation. The argument in the *Encyclopedia* does not offer us an explanation here, since there Hegel seems to use the external idea that pure being is an “abstraction” in order to move to nothing.²⁹

²⁶ See Pippin, *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows*, 78-81. Pippin describes this similarly, in terms of an operator of ‘would not be fully intelligible without...’.

²⁷ Hegel, SL21.69.

²⁸ F.W.J. Schelling criticized the argument on this basis. Memorably, he declared the transition is just motivated by the fact that thinking “cannot be satisfied with that meager diet of pure being.” Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 138.

²⁹ Hegel, EL§87.

If we want to read this charitably, then, the interpretive question should not stop at objecting to this introduction of emptiness but rather at explaining *what Hegel must mean by emptiness*. My answer to this question agrees substantially with Richard Dien Winfield's interpretation of the transition from being to nothing, which emphasizes the fact that we must appeal to pure being alone in making the transition into nothing.³⁰ Since we have only being to work with, Winfield argues, nothing cannot be anything other than pure being. Yet, precisely because pure being has no specifiable content and is not related to itself, nothing cannot be connected to or differentiated from being on the basis of anything: it falls outside of it altogether.

In substantial agreement with Winfield, I would reconstruct Hegel's line of thought as follows. Being simply is; that is all there is to it. But being *is*, that is, it is the being that being is. This just consists in thinking one and the same immediacy, the only thought we have at our disposal. But now a twist occurs. Being asserts itself ('is' itself), or I think being. Then, the being that being is asserts itself (or 'is' itself), or I think the being that being is. But when I turn to this immediacy 'the being that being is', the immediacy of 'being' pure and simple that I began with *has vanished*. That is, that immediacy is no longer, and a new one has asserted itself in its place: we begin with *this*, and then we think the very same *this*, but '*this*' and '*this*' still stand apart from each other as distinct immediacies. This second immediacy, although it just is the being that being is, is just as much the vanishedness of pure being: where *this* one is, *this* one is not. This immediacy which asserts itself as the absence of pure being is *pure nothing*. This argument only requires thinking through pure being's own immediacy.

The emptiness of being, then, should be understood as nothing other than 'the being that being is', which you might also think of as the 'immediacy of immediacy' or the '*this this*' of '*this*'. Some evidence that this is what Hegel was thinking is that Hegel emphasizes that being "has passed over",

³⁰ Winfield, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, 51-3.

not passes over”³¹ and that being “*immediately* vanishes into nothing.”³² One and the same immediacy which being is, just in being at all, has already vanished into something immediately distinct from the being we started with. This brings us to the second category in the *Logic*.

“*Nothing, pure nothing*; it is simple equality with itself, complete emptiness, complete absence of determination and content, lack of all distinction within.”³³ The only difference between being and nothing is that, whenever being is thought, nothing is not, and whenever nothing is thought, being is not. But contained in the thought of neither being nor nothing is the thought of ‘not being its counterpart’. Or, insofar as one is, the other is not. Following Stephen Houlgate, I call this an *immediate distinction*,³⁴ the difference between ‘this’ and ‘this’, each having its own immediacy standing outside the other. The structure of being and nothing’s immediate distinction has a striking similarity to the Spinozist formula for negation: insofar as something *is*, it *is*, and insofar as it is *not*, it is *not*.

But on all accounts, pure nothing has the same logical characteristics as being. Indeed, since nothing is, on my account (and Winfield’s),³⁵ ‘the being that being is’, it literally *is* being. That is, the two are one and the same immediacy. Nothing *is*, or nothing is itself simply an indeterminate immediacy, and this immediacy is just pure being. “Nothing is therefore the same determination or rather absence of determination, and thus altogether the same as what pure *being* is.”³⁶

Hegel thus declares, “*Pure being and pure nothing are therefore the same.*”³⁷ By the immanent logic of being and nothing, each propels itself into the other; being passes over into nothing, nothing into being. One is present (being, nothing), but the other appears because of it (nothing, being). With that

³¹ Hegel, SL21.69.

³² Ibid. (Italics modified. Note that, in this and the previous quote, Hegel is speaking of both being and nothing.)

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic*, 265. (Houlgate uses the term ‘immediate difference’ for this.)

³⁵ Winfield, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, 52.

³⁶ Hegel, SL21.69.

³⁷ Ibid.

appearance, the original term has vanished; all we have is *this*, whatever immediacy is at hand. The other term vanishes as a term which stands outside the one at hand.

Now, we have the vanishing of each into its opposite. Conceiving of ‘pure being’ or ‘pure nothing’ on their own without this mutual vanishing can only be regarded as an abstraction from what these categories involve. What they involve is this mutual vanishing: neither can be itself without its counterpart. Because they have lost their self-sufficiency in this way, they are *moments* (in Hegel’s vocabulary), whose subsistence can only be located in a broader context, process, or structure. The two terms *sublate themselves* in showing how they reduce themselves to moments by their own immanent logic. The truth we are left with is just this movement of being into nothing and nothing into being: “*becoming*, a movement in which the two are [immediately] distinguished, but by a distinction which has just as much immediately dissolved itself.”³⁸

This last clause already indicates the development that will push us beyond becoming. Pure being and pure nothing are supposed to be immediacies, totally isolated unto themselves. *But this is precisely what they are not insofar as they are grasped as moments of becoming.* Each is bound up with the other in a way that *immediately unites them in ‘this’ becoming.* As a result, being and nothing are explicitly joined in one unity with the term they are supposed to stand altogether apart from. Their immediate distinction has collapsed in this respect, but it was that immediate distinction which let each ‘vanish’ into the other. Vanishing itself is no longer possible; what we are left with is an immediate unity of being-and-nothing. As Hegel puts it, “Their vanishing is therefore the vanishing of becoming, or the vanishing of the vanishing itself. Becoming is a ceaseless unrest that collapses into a quiescent result.”³⁹ This ‘quiescent result’ that is being-and-nothing is what Hegel calls “*being-there*”⁴⁰ (*Dasein*).

³⁸ SL21.70.

³⁹ SL21.93.

⁴⁰ SL21.94.

Being-there & Negation

This is where the fundamental break with Spinoza lies. Spinoza's view of being and nothing maintains a strict separation of the two, and this separation is expressed in his views on negation, where there can never be an immediate unity between something's nonbeing and its being. In Hegel, being-there is precisely the immediate unity of the two, and Hegel takes himself to have conducted an a priori derivation of the truth of this category. If his argument is right, this concept is not just a fiction but is involved in thinking anything which can 'be' at all. I will explore this general difference between Hegel and Spinoza on being in Chapter 3, but let us first consider the explicit contrast with Hegel's views on *negation*, found in the chapter on being-there.

"Being-there proceeds from becoming. It is the simple unity of being and nothing. On account of this simplicity, it has the form of an *immediate*."⁴¹ Being-there is the *immediate* unity of being and nothing, and so being-there initially *is*, or is available as 'being'. *Being-there* is therefore initially 'the being that is being and nothing'. The nonbeing in being-there is called *determinacy*, and so being-there is 'determinate being', unlike pure being. But being-there is an immediacy which is being *and nothing*. In just immediately being itself, being-there just as much *is* as it *is not*. Thus, being-there is immediately also 'the nonbeing that is being and nothing', which Hegel calls *quality*.⁴²

Negation first appears with quality. How is quality distinguished from being-there? Quality is, as it were, the being-there of being-there: it is not just a unity of being and nonbeing, but it is a unity of being and nonbeing whose given content is already a unity of being and nonbeing. Quality is nonbeing that is *being and nothing*, and so it is nonbeing that is *being-there*. But being-there is primarily *being*, and so quality is a unity of being and nonbeing at a second order: it is the *nonbeing* that is *being-*

⁴¹ SL21.97.

⁴² SL21.98.

there. This yields two new moments of quality: negation and reality. *Negation* is quality insofar as it is the determinacy, or quality insofar as it is nonbeing. *Reality* is quality insofar as it is being.⁴³

We are very far from Spinoza. Unsurprisingly, because Hegel's view of negation follows from the general structure of being-there, negation is *immanent* to something's being insofar as it *is there* at all. To recall our example of the rock from Spinoza, whereas Spinoza would say that the rock's negation strictly falls outside of the rock's being, Hegel would say that this could only be true in a derivative sense. The primary meaning of negation is not the negation something has in what is beyond its being; the primary meaning of negation is the negation *that something's own being is*. At the level of abstraction we are at, Hegel can only say that the rock is there and has a qualitative existence. This qualitative existence would include things like its being in space, its color, density, and the like. Each of these can only be what it is while also not being what it is not. For the rock to be here in space, it must not be there; for it to have this color, it must not have that one. Hegel's account shows that the proper way to interpret this is, initially, to say that spatial position, color, and the like have a negative dimension just as much as a positive one. They all have a given determinate content distinct from other given contents: colors, positions, and so on need to be viewed as various combinations of 'affirmations and negations' (ises and is-nots). Those combinations have an immediate being as qualities which themselves are forms of nonbeing just as much as they are of being. This spatial region where the rock exists is equally a nonbeing (of all other spatial regions, for example) as it is positively this region itself. To put it concisely, Hegel's rock has negation within its own being, but Spinoza's rock has its negation only in what is external to it.

This contrast between Hegel and Spinoza has further consequences downstream in the *Ethics* and the *Logic* which create further differences between the two philosophers. Hegel's view of negation

⁴³ Ibid.

allows him to develop a notion of negation of negation or self-negation which Melamed, for example, thinks is the source of most of the differences between Hegel and Spinoza.⁴⁴ In my view, however, the category of being-there is sufficient for making all the points Hegel does, and I suppose I will put this on display in the final chapters of this study.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ For the rest of this thesis, I use ‘self-negation’ only in a Spinozist way: that is, a self-negation would be something which is somehow the transcendent negation of itself. Hegel’s concept of self-negation is considerably different.

⁴⁵ I would like to note, however, that the contrast between Hegel and Spinoza is not an either-or. Although space prevents me from pursuing this here, I think it can be shown that immanent negation and self-negation in Hegel underlie transcendent negation. When we abstract from these two concepts, we obtain Spinoza’s strictly transcendent view of negation, which does not allow any immanent negation.

Chapter 3. From Negation to Being

Spinoza's understanding of being and nothing will be crucial for the problem of finitude and the threat of acosmism in the last two chapters, and it has already surfaced in our discussion of his views on negation, which served to introduce these issues and will later serve to help translate between Hegel's discussions of Spinoza (which usually frame things in terms of negation) and my own. But part of Hegel's interpretation of Spinoza is the claim that Spinoza has an *Eleatic* understanding of being, an understanding of being which maintains a strict separation of being and nonbeing, which we have already seen, but also maintains that the introduction of nonbeing into ontology involves an error. We could defend acosmism, as Friedrich Jacobi did around Hegel's own time, using such an understanding of being: anything finite must 'not be' to some extent, a limitation in virtue of which it can be finite at all, and so finite things are "*non-entia*", nonbeings which do not and indeed cannot exist,⁴⁶ since nonbeing is not and is never united with being. A misunderstanding of Spinoza's views on being like this one, therefore, could be crucial to making the judgment that he is an acosmist.

However, I will argue against Hegel's 'Eleatic' interpretation of Spinoza on being because Spinoza would reject the error claim essential to the Eleatic understanding of being. For Spinoza, nonbeing and negation are not by nature erroneous or false concepts when applied to reality; they are 'beings of reason', thoughts or concepts which adequately explain relations among real beings but which are not themselves directly reflected in reality. The threat of acosmism becomes the threat that Spinoza cannot provide a *positive ground in real being* for negation and nonbeing, and the challenge to find such a ground frames Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Hegel's acosmist reading, then, will only be successful if it locates a reason to think finding such a ground is *impossible* given Spinoza's principles.

⁴⁶ Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel*, 219-20.

In Chapter 4, I show where such a reason emerges; in Chapter 5, I argue that Hegel identified it correctly as well.

Spinoza & the Eleatics on Being

In Chapter 2, we saw that the fundamental break between Spinoza and Hegel lies in the moment that the transition from becoming to being-there is made, the moment at which the strict separation of being and nonbeing is eradicated. Spinoza can follow Hegel all the way to becoming, but the unification of being and nothing in being-there is strictly forbidden in Spinoza's thinking.

The earliest and most explicit insistence on the strict separation of being and nonbeing in the history of philosophy is undoubtedly Parmenides, the main figure in the Eleatic School. For that reason, it is unsurprising that Hegel often repeats the claim that Spinoza has an *Eleatic* understanding of being in line with Parmenides.⁴⁷ For Parmenides, being is, and nonbeing is not; being never is not, and nonbeing never is. This much agrees with Spinoza and the separation of being and nothing in general. However, Parmenides adds a crucial element: "I shall not let thee say nor think that it came from what is not; *for it can neither be thought nor uttered that what is not is.*"⁴⁸ Thinking nothing is not thinking anything, not even a real thought. Whenever nonbeing, a 'not', or a negation is involved in your thinking, you are acting like you are thinking about some content, but in truth there is nothing to be had there: a void which *is* only so long as it is available as *being* (not nothing). No idea involving nothingness can be adequate because every such idea involves this constitutive error, and Hegel clearly understands this about the Eleatic understanding of being: in the *History of Philosophy*, he says of Parmenides that "[h]olding nothing for something true is the 'way of error' ... the error is to conflate [being and nothing], to give them the same worth."⁴⁹ The Eleatic understanding of being holds that

⁴⁷ Hegel, SL21.71, SL21.148, 20/165.

⁴⁸ Parmenides, *On Nature*, section VIII, verses 7-9. (Italics added.)

⁴⁹ Hegel, 18/288.

thinking of any nothingness at all involves this erroneous conflation with being. Adequate, true thinking extirpates the whole category of nothing.

The result is that the Eleatics came to reject any kind of change or diversity: any instance where it is possible to say one thing ‘is not’, or where it ‘is not’ something else. These things have to be interpreted as ‘semblances’ which *seem* to be but which, we know rationally, do not really exist. As far as ultimate reality is concerned, they became, in Hegel’s language, *acosmists*, denying finite things with change, multiplicity, and difference. Hegel explicitly endorses an interpretation of Spinoza which maintains this Eleatic conclusion:

Parmenides has to make do with semblance and opinion [to discuss anything determinate in his cosmology], *the opposite of being and truth: likewise in Spinoza, with attributes, modes, extension, movement, understanding, will, and the rest.*⁵⁰

Anything involving any differentiation and determinacy whatsoever is mere semblance and opinion, opposed to truth. But is Hegel correct about this? Karolina Hübner argues Hegel’s interpretation of Spinoza on finitude and negation misses Spinoza’s distinction between “ideality” (‘beings of reason’) and “illusion or error”.⁵¹ I will defend a version of her thesis, arguing negation and nothing are beings of reason.⁵² Against Hegel, this means that nonbeing has a legitimate place in ontology, even though there is no real negativity in reality itself for Spinoza.

In his early *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Spinoza explicitly and rigorously defines various forms of being. The second of the two relevant definitions here makes clear that Spinoza does *not* have an Eleatic understanding of being. The relevant definitions are these:

⁵⁰ Hegel, SL21.85.

⁵¹ Hübner, “Spinoza on Negation, Mind-Dependence, and the Reality of the Finite,” 17-21.

⁵² My main disagreement with Hübner is that she frequently equates beings of reason with mind-dependence. E.g., Hübner, “Spinoza on Negation, Mind-Dependence, and the Reality of the Finite,” 232-3. I do not think this way of putting it is quite right, since beings of reason describe mind-independent real being adequately (though indirectly).

- (1) *Real being*, or *being* as such, is “all that which, when clearly and distinctly perceived, we find to exist necessarily or at least possibly.”⁵³
- (2) A *being of reason* is “nothing but a mode of thinking which serves to more easily retain, explain, and imagine things that are understood.”⁵⁴

Real beings are forms of being that exist in the world, but beings of reason are ideas whose content does not exist in the world but only exists as an idea that serves us in thinking about the world. Spinoza adds the important qualification that these beings of reason can have multiple sources, including the intellect. This is hardly surprising, since they serve to retain, explain, and imagine things *that are understood*, that is, not ones that are misunderstood.

What are examples of beings of reason? Here is one account he gives. Real beings often share features or characteristics in common, and we can discover or derive things about beings that have this or that characteristic. We provide the characteristic with a name, like ‘red’, and then proceed to label beings which have the characteristic by this name. This helps facilitate retention of whatever we already understand about these characteristics as they were found in another thing. We thus come to think in terms of groupings or universals, such as “genus, species, etc.” which Spinoza regards as beings of reason.⁵⁵ Universals are not terms that are actually ‘out there’; they are terms we introduce to explain relationships amongst what is ‘out there’. All beings of reason have this in common: they take real beings, relate them, and then express these relations in categories of their own. Our conceptions of beings of reason are *not* ideas of real beings themselves but terms introduced ‘in

⁵³ Spinoza, CM1C1. Spinoza uses *ens* here, not *esse*. He never explicitly distinguishes the terms, though he seems to use *esse* for characteristics of being, while he uses *ens* for ‘what can be’. So, he speaks of the ‘being (*esse*) of potency’ and the ‘being (*esse*) of essence’ in CM1C2, which denote not ‘what can be’ but characteristics or ontological structure of ‘what can be’.

⁵⁴ CM1C1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

between' real beings. Beings of reason cannot, then, ever themselves be real beings. Spinoza's other examples of categories of this sort include numbers, privations, and *negations*.

In effect, understanding that negation and, with it, nonbeing are beings of reasons will mean understanding, first, why they are *not* real beings and, second, why they are nevertheless helpful in thinking *about* real being. This first requirement means that we must get a clearer understanding of what exactly real being is, and the main text of the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* will be particularly helpful for this aim. There, Spinoza reconstructs three of Descartes's arguments for God's existence. The third argues that the facts that we exist and that we have an idea of God imply that God exists. But Spinoza finds the axioms on which Descartes's proof depends unsatisfactory and ambiguous.⁵⁶ So, he intervenes and provides replacements of his own. One of these, stating a being is more or less perfect (or real) to the extent that it is more or less necessary, is what we are interested in.⁵⁷

Existence is contained in the idea or concept of everything (P1A6). ... Because *we cannot affirm any existence of nothing* (see P1P4s), in proportion as we in thought subtract from its perfection and therefore *conceive it as participating more and more in nothing, to that extent we also negate the possibility of its existence*. So, if we conceive its degrees of perfection to be reduced indefinitely to naught or zero, it will contain no existence, or absolutely impossible existence. But, on the other hand, if we increase its degrees of perfection indefinitely, we shall conceive it as involving the utmost existence, and therefore most necessary existence.⁵⁸

Spinoza here understands necessity and possibility in terms of increases and decreases of real being. The more being something *lacks* (the more we "subtract from its perfection"), the more real being there is which is not immanent to the being of the thing at hand. We see, implicitly at least, transcendent negation reemerge in the way Spinoza uses "to negate" and we see its underlying principle, the separation of being and nothing, reaffirmed explicitly. The more reality something lacks, the more we "negate" its possibility: we more and more affirm some real being *beyond* its being, that

⁵⁶ P1P7s.

⁵⁷ Note that, in the *Principles* as in the *Ethics*, Spinoza says that 'perfection' just means 'reality' or 'being'. Further, to be clear, Spinoza uses 'existence' in a broad sense, so that properties, modes, substances, etc. 'exist' and 'are real' if it is actually true 'that they are', regardless of their precise ontological or categorial status.

⁵⁸ P1L1d.

is, we more and more understand that it is possible for *something else* to exist and not it. Conversely, the more real being there is in something, the less it is possible to negate its existence by providing some alternative possibility, eventually making it completely necessary when no reality is lacking. In this sense, beings are more or less necessary to the extent they approximate absolute necessity, which lacks no perfection and so cannot be negated or denied.⁵⁹

Now the difficulty of expressing how determinate perfections relate to real being correctly is significant. Real being is not a genus or species. Spinoza not only rejects that these have any real being, but real being is the ‘is’ *presupposed* in every determinate kind of being or single being. The being we would be trying to define would already be given, and the specifications of type, entity, and the like would simply add extra onto being, which is what we are trying to define. In the same way, because of this priority of being, being cannot be thought of as an aggregate or collection, since any specified members of the collection would already immanently presuppose what the collection supposedly is: real being. Yet, no single being can be beyond real being because any ‘existence’ it could have *already is* real being. Because real being is simultaneously prior to yet inclusive of the being of any specific thing or determination, everything which can be (every possible perfection) is enfolded or contained within real being, but not as already defined. I take it that this is why Spinoza uses *existence*, not *essence*, (i.e., ‘*that-it-is*’, not ‘*what-it-is*’) to define real being, along with an indefinite “all that” (*omne*).⁶⁰ Real being can be conceived, then, as an ontological category of possible existence, that-ness, *immediacy*, which would belong to anything whatsoever if it were to and could exist. In this respect, Spinoza connects nicely to Hegel’s beginning with being, pure and simple, as immediacy.

⁵⁹ ‘To negate’ and ‘to deny’ are the same word in Latin: *negare*.

⁶⁰ I do not make too much of the “necessarily or at least possibly” in the definition of real being. I take the mention of necessity in addition to possibility to foreshadow Spinoza’s necessitarianism, instead of indicating that he means to rule out contingent possibilities by definition. It is just that, for Spinoza, a ‘contingent possibility’ is a contradiction. See, for example, E1P29.

Spinoza's intervention on modality gives us not only a launching point to understand real being by its relation to determinate perfections, but it also gives us a path to coming to understand his views on nonbeing or nothing, which will be crucial to see whether he has an Eleatic understanding of being or not. With the reappearance of negations in possibility, we can understand finite being as being whose reality is somehow enfolded within absolutely infinite and necessary existence, real being which cannot but be present in whatever exists. The finite has some negation in the perfections enfolded within being, while the infinite would be being which has no transcendent negation. This notion of negation that distinguishes possibility from necessity, of course, fits nicely with our own discussion of negation in the previous chapter, where I showed how a transcendent negation is not necessarily actual but could also just be possible. But the last chapter also showed that negation is a launching point for a deeper investigation into Spinoza's understanding of being and nonbeing; let us use what we have learned about real being to see if we cannot figure out what Spinoza's precise views on nonbeing are, beyond what we saw in Chapter 2. The conclusion of that investigation will reveal that Spinoza does *not*, in fact, have an Eleatic understanding of being.

Nonbeing as a Being of Reason

What is at stake, then, is whether Spinoza gives us a reason to think that nonbeing, negation, and nothing have sufficient rational credentials to be used in ontology, that is, that they can be used to study real being without making an error. Once again, Spinoza's views on negation will turn out to be quite helpful in figuring out what his underlying or coincident view of nonbeing is.

Later in the text, Spinoza equates "finite and imperfect" with "participating in nothing",⁶¹ a phrase he uses in the passage we have been analyzing on modality. To understand what he means by nothing here, let us take two of Spinoza's comments elsewhere as our clues. Arguing against the phrase

⁶¹ Spinoza, CM2C3.

creatio ex nihilo ('creation from nothing'), he says, "there is no doubt that they have not considered 'nothing' as the negation of all reality but have imagined or pictured it as something real."⁶² The implication is that the true way of conceiving nothing is as the negation of all reality, that is, of being as such, and this is an alternative to the erroneous way of conceiving it that conflates of being and nonbeing. Consequently, Spinoza *explicitly rejects* the notion essential to the Eleatic understanding of being: he rejects the idea that we necessarily make the error of treating nothing as being if we think of it at all, the idea that being by nature gets tangled up in this error.

So, if we are not just supposed to dismiss nothing, what are we supposed to do with it? Are we then supposed to consider being (reality, real being) and nothing as related by a negation? No, "there is no relationship between something and nothing."⁶³ Nothing is the negation *of all being as such*, and so it must be a concept whose conceptual content (if it has any) is entirely external to whatever content is characterized by being or is included or contained in the concept of being. Attempting to relate the two would be attempting to make a *relatum* of the absence of any *relatum* (nothing, nonbeing); the two have no relation. Being is simply this, nothing that, and there 'is' nothing in either or both which relates them to one another, except insofar as we have positive *ideas* of being and nothing that we can reflect upon.

Spinoza nicely reproduces Hegel's idea of an immediate distinction between being and nothing here: *this* and *that* category, each entirely external to the other without any mediation or relation that binds them. Spinoza approaches Hegel even closer; he defends the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit* in Cartesian terms in the *Principles*. He argues the rejection of *ex nihilo nihil fit* would allow us to think 'being' united with 'nothing', which would imply that I could think the self-evident 'I am' as an 'I am

⁶² CM2C10. (Italics added.)

⁶³ P1P7s.

not'.⁶⁴ My being would logically pass over into nothing, perhaps awaiting its unification in being-there. But Spinoza rejects this the moment 'I am not' contradicts 'I am'.

Nothing, then, is no less than the idea of that which is external to real being. As such, whenever a being lacks a perfection, we can say it "participates more and more in nothing" in the same way as we say that things have increases in reality. It contains more imperfections, lacks of reality, all of which are contained in nothing. But this whole concept of a 'lack of reality' is based on, first, one real being which has some positive reality, for which there is some other possible real being which contains an alternative reality not contained in the first. In their relation to one another, we can see that the second 'lacks' some reality the first has, and this notion of a 'lack' (i.e., 'negation') is introduced by us as a rational construct that allows us to explain relationships between real beings. When negation is taken in its general form, not as the negation of some determinate reality but as the negation of being as such, it is nothing: nothing is that which falls outside of real being, that which lacks real being. Since negation is regarded as a being of reason by Spinoza, there is no *prima facie* reason why 'nothing' (as the negation of being as such, rather than some determinate reality) would not be also. Inasmuch as this idea of nothing might be helpful in explaining negation, conducting proofs, or rephrasing results, nothing too must be a being of reason.

Spinoza does clearly think these concepts are useful. Just in the *Principles*, Spinoza heavily uses the concept of nothing in *ex nihilo nihil fit* to defend the principle of sufficient reason.⁶⁵ Beyond the uses of negation I have already mentioned, Spinoza also seems to use his ontological concept of negation in the *Ethics* to ground the 'will', as the faculty of affirming or denying (negating).⁶⁶ He seems to do the same when discussing passive affects.⁶⁷ Negation and concepts derivative from it (like

⁶⁴ P1P4s.

⁶⁵ P1P4s, P1A11.

⁶⁶ E2P49d, E2P49s.

⁶⁷ E3P3s.

‘destruction’ and ‘determinate’) feature prominently in the cluster of propositions that prove the ‘conatus’.⁶⁸ Throughout the *Ethics* and Spinoza’s work in general, negation and nothing are used to *facilitate* our quest for adequate ideas and true knowledge. Negation and nothing, then, *must not inherently involve falsity, inadequacy, or error*. They are beings of reason with rational credentials, so long as they are not treated as real beings themselves.

Against Hegel, therefore, I think we must maintain that Spinoza does *not* have an Eleatic understanding of being. He not only rejects the supposed ‘error’ essential to this understanding of being, he does not even accept that nonbeing’s introduction to ontology is erroneous at all. Negation clearly captures *a relation between real beings*: namely, the relation of ‘lacking’ discussed just a moment ago. Nothing is a natural generalization that this relation suggests, and it too (more indirectly) can be used to speak of relations in real being.

The challenge that maintaining negation and nonbeing are beings of reason presents, which will lurk throughout Chapter 4, is this: negation and nothing can appear *only in relations within real being*. Real being must, therefore, somehow *ground* any nonbeing that can legitimately appear in ontology. Since a ‘partial negation’ defines finitude, this means that the very possibility of any finite being will depend on grounding this partial negation in positive being. That issue, we will see, generates a veritable ‘problem of finitude’ when we introduce Spinoza’s monism. Ultimately, there are not multiple real beings which we can relate to one another straightaway. Multiplicity, difference, and so forth must somehow be grounded in a unified substantial being which is prior to and contains them.

⁶⁸ E3P4d, E3P5d, E3P6d.

Chapter 4. The Problem of Finitude

I take it that the fact that Spinoza must somehow *ground* these appearances of nonbeing *in a purely positive being*, real being strictly separated from nonbeing, is at the heart of Hegel's 'acosmist' reading of Spinoza, that is, his reading according to which Spinoza denies (or must deny) the existence of finite things. Spinoza would be an 'acosmist' in the sense that the cosmos, the world of finite things with limits and differences, would not exist.

Acosmism only comes to the surface, however, after Spinoza's monism is in place: in the wake of a uniform, positive substantial reality that underlies all things, it becomes quite difficult to see how any sort of *transcendence* could be established for negation. How can we go from a uniform *this* to which all things are immanent to a myriad realm of *thises* and *thats* which transcend one another, having reality external to one another?

There are three basic components to Spinoza's monism which make the question of acosmism so problematic. *First*, Spinoza argues that substance necessarily exists, so that its incompatibility with finite things would make finite things impossible. *Second*, substance has an absolutely infinite reality which contains the reality of finite things as "certain and determinate" modifications of its own being. *Third*, substance is prior to these finite things, so that finite beings cannot be introduced before or in conjunction with substance; Spinoza must show how substance can ground their introduction into ontology. I will call these three components the *necessity element*, the *containment element*, and the *priority element* of Spinoza's substance ontology respectively. I will argue these three elements, when combined with Spinoza's monism and views on being, create the problem of finitude.

So, in this chapter, I reconstruct Spinoza's substance ontology with an eye to each of these elements to show how it gives rise to what I call '*the problem of finitude*' in the Spinozist system. I introduce the Spinozist ontological framework of substance, attributes, and modes, which is essential

to grasping the containment element. Using this framework, Spinoza's proofs proceed in three distinct stages, each of which represents a major development in 'substance' within the *Ethics*. The ontological landscape Spinoza sets out at the *Ethics*' beginning establishes the priority element and introduces the containment element. After that, Spinoza first proves substance must exist, establishing the necessity element in the process. Then, he proves that substance exists as God, an absolutely infinite being. Finally, he proves God is nature, as everything is immanent to substantial being. These last two steps complete the containment element, and with their completion Spinoza's substance monism is in place.

When combined with Spinoza's insistence that positive being cannot be united with nonbeing, Spinoza's monism creates the problem of finitude. The problem of finitude is that, although Spinoza everywhere seems to accept that finite things exist, his metaphysics nevertheless also seems to entail that finite things *are not even possible*, let alone that they do not exist. This problem is the source, I take it, of Hegel's charge that Spinoza failed to demonstrate the transition from God to finite being, to being with negation.⁶⁹ In essence, it seems that Spinoza must accept that the being of substance insofar as present in a finite mode must transcend itself or negate itself in virtue of what limits it. Yet, this would mean that substance's being must simultaneously be itself and its own nonbeing, a Hegelian notion of being-there we already saw that Spinoza rejects. We are forced to confront not the question 'If finite things exist, how do they relate to God?' but 'How could finite things possibly exist at all?'⁷⁰ It seems that Spinoza's rejection of being-there rules out a positive answer to the latter. In this chapter, I only present the problem, inspired by Hegel's philosophy and remarks about Spinoza. In Chapter 5, I argue Hegel successfully identifies this problem, provide Spinoza's answer, and defend Hegel's

⁶⁹ Hegel, SL11.376-8.

⁷⁰ Melamed has in various places responded to some of Hegel's arguments suggesting Spinoza must be an acosmist. His solutions, however, still seem to me not to address Hegel's central worry. They only work *if we assume* finite modes are possible, at which point it is comparatively easy to describe in general terms how they must relate to God in Spinoza. But Hegel is challenging this very assumption. See Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 48-54, 72; "Acosmism or Weak Individuals?," 82-3; "Why Spinoza is not an Eleatic Monist," 213-6.

critical acosmist reading by arguing that Spinoza's solution can only successfully solve the problem of finitude insofar as Spinoza abandons his own rejection of being-there.

Spinoza's Substance Ontology

The *Short Treatise* gives us an intermediate link to move from Spinoza's views on being to his later substance ontology; in that book, he defines God as a being of which all possible attributes are predicated in their infinitely perfect form (very similar to E1D6). Then, he motivates the definition by linking it to the traditional 'most perfect being' definition:

The reason is this: since *nothing* can have no attributes, the *all* must have all attributes; ... [likewise,] something has attributes because it is something. Hence, it is more something the more attributes it must have, and consequently God, being the most perfect, ... must also have infinite, perfect, and all attributes.⁷¹

The reasoning here echoes his earlier intervention on modality; something is 'more real' the more possible perfections of being are in its being. God's modality seems to correspond to infinite being which had, as we saw, absolute necessity: there are no limits, no alternatives, to God's being available within real being. So, one might read the beginning of the *Ethics* as the demonstration that real being cannot be just being qua being but must be the being of God. The *Ethics* does not, then, begin with God; as Deleuze puts it, the *Ethics* aims "to elevate itself as quickly as possible to the idea of God, without falling into an infinite regress, without making God a remote cause."⁷² In making that ascent, Spinoza proves his own famous 'trinitarian' God: substance = God = nature.

The opening definitions of the *Ethics* set out the ontological landscape for this proof. That landscape is carved by three central concepts: substance, attribute, mode. Their definitions are these:

D3: By substance, I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another, from which it must be formed.

⁷¹ Spinoza, ST/16.

⁷² Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*, 277.

D4: By attribute, I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence.

D5: By mode, I understand the affections [or states] of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived.⁷³

A complete discussion of these definitions would take us too far afield. But I think the alternative formulation in E1D3 provides us with the understanding we need for our discussion. Substances are those beings whose essence, whose concept, is possible without introducing or presupposing an essence or concept from which they are formed. Conversely, modes are not possible without introducing or presupposing an essence or concept from which they are formed. The ontology Spinoza is providing is consequently going to be exhaustive; it divides being along a tautological disjunction ('possible without...' or 'not possible without...'). The most difficult definition to grasp, in my view, is that of the attributes, and yet understanding the attributes is crucial to understanding the containment element of Spinoza's monism: why is the being of finite things (finite modes) somehow contained in or drawn from the being of substance?

"Attributes", I take it, are descendants of Cartesian "principal properties". Descartes says that there is "one *principal property* of every substance, *which constitutes its nature or essence, and upon which all others* [(properties of that substance)] *depend*."⁷⁴ Principal properties are those in terms of which all further properties of that substance are formulated and on which they are therefore dependent. In Spinoza, two attributes are discussed at length: thought and extension. If we follow Descartes, the idea behind these two attributes is that there is no property, definition, or the like of, say, a corporeal body which does not already include, directly or indirectly, 'being extended'. Spinoza explains a body's 'extension' in exactly this way in the *Principles* by saying bodies are subjects of extension whose further properties 'presuppose' extension.⁷⁵ The subject of predication is only possible granting extension,

⁷³ Spinoza, E1D3-5.

⁷⁴ Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, Article 53. (Italics added.)

⁷⁵ Spinoza, P1D7.

and all its predicates (motion, volume, mass, etc.) all either explicitly include extension in their definitions or are only physically meaningful if we assume extension, in terms of which their contents are formulated ('from which they are formed', to echo E1D3). 'Thought' has the same function as extension for ideas, minds, emotions, and the like in the realm of the mental. So, attributes are those essences in terms of which all further properties of a substance are defined.

Aside from the similarity of their definitions, one might object that this interpretation of attributes is specious insofar as Spinoza omits the second part of Descartes's definition, and it is not obvious why Spinoza would try to capture this idea by referring to the "essence of substance". Even so, I think Deleuze gives us the resources for answering this objection. Deleuze argues that one of Spinoza's central criticisms of traditional theology is that it defines God by *propria*,⁷⁶ properties which God necessarily possesses but which do not define the essence of a real being (a possible 'what-it-is'); it defines a being by things which must be true *of it* but fails to ever tell us *what* a being with those properties would be. I think that Spinoza's reason for defining the attribute in terms of substance is much the same here. The attribute necessarily satisfies the requirements of the Cartesian principal property, but Spinoza does not want to define an *essence* in terms of *its properties*. Descartes explicitly does this when he defines principal properties as those on which all further properties of a substance depend. The essence of the real being defined is stated as if its properties, which are supposed to be posterior to that being (its states, relations, etc. dependent on it), could somehow be given prior to the being on which they depend.

To avoid this impossibility, Spinoza goes straight to essences of real beings alone, distinguishing 'what can be' only as formed from something else and 'what can be' independently of any other reality. The essence of any mode is formed from the essence of substance (the attribute);

⁷⁶ Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*, 45-6.

they are formulated in terms of it and what it contains. In this sense, all further properties (modes, inherent in the substance's essence) depend on the attribute constituting the substance's essence. This is, of course, precisely the function of Cartesian principal properties, introduced without defining what is prior with what is posterior.

Once we see this is what Spinoza is doing, we already see that the priority element of his ontology is established, and the containment element has been introduced. Substance's being contains the being of modes insofar as modes are simply different ways of contorting substance's being to obtain some reality formed out of it and which is nothing beyond it, that is, some reality immanent to it and *contained* in it. The rigorous dependence of modes' being on substance's (or the attribute's) here also explains why the latter must be *prior* to the former, so that I can never introduce a mode at an earlier or identical logical order as I introduce substance (or an attribute).

We can now ask the following question: how would a substance exist?⁷⁷ One need only think about the definition of substance: to be what it is, the essence of substance does not require any other essences (existing or not) which would go into forming it. That is, it is possible for substance to exist without any other essence.⁷⁸ Spinoza accepts the principle of sufficient reason,⁷⁹ and so we must ask, 'In the possible case that substance does exist, why does it exist?' The cause cannot be anything other than substance, since we supposed that it can exist as what it is without anything else. In this possibility, substance can only exist *simply because of itself*. So, substance is, as Spinoza says, the cause of itself.⁸⁰ Since this argument did not depend on any particular kind of substance, we may conclude that substances necessarily exist. We thus have the necessity element of Spinoza's ontology.

⁷⁷ My explanation follows the thrust of Spinoza's demonstration in E1P7 but changes the doctrines on which it depends.

⁷⁸ To drop the "would go into forming it" clause from the previous sentence, we probably need E1A5.

⁷⁹ Spinoza, E1P7s2.

⁸⁰ E1P7d.

The necessity element of Spinoza's ontology only becomes problematic once we see that it is not just the necessity that some possible substance exists, all possible substances exist, or the like. Its problematic character emerges when we see that the substance which exists is necessarily also the only substance which can exist. Which substance, so it will turn out, is the only possible one? It is God, Spinoza answers. God is defined as "an absolutely infinite being, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence."⁸¹ God is a being which is not limited, lacks no perfection of real being.

Though there are other proofs that God alone is possible in the *Ethics*, I will reconstruct the one in E1P7s2, which I find the most convincing one that is relatively easy to isolate from the rest of the text. Spinoza observes that the essence of a thing does not define a certain number of individuals but just defines what it is to be a certain kind of individual. So, a definition of 'triangle' does not define, say, 20 triangles existing in nature. If it did, we would still be able to ask how many 'twenties of triangles' there are in nature. No, a definition only expresses an essence which is indifferent to its number of realizations. So, if *a certain number* of individuals of a given nature exists, then there must be a cause for their existence *external to their essence*. But there can be no such external cause for substance, since it by nature exists and so must already exist prior to its being caused to exist, which is impossible. Therefore, if I suppose two substances existing of the same attribute, there would have to be a cause for why these two exist and not more or less. But this cannot be so; "the existence of a number of substances cannot follow"⁸² from its definition any more than the 20 triangles can follow from the definition of a triangle. Thus, no substance of a certain attribute is numerically determinable at all; as Spinoza himself admits, we only improperly call a substance 'one'.⁸³

⁸¹ E1D6.

⁸² E1P7s2.

⁸³ Ep50.

Hence, it is impossible for there to be two substances of any attribute. *But God has all possible attributes*, that is, God's essence has no negation in a possible attribute beyond it. What warrants our assumption that it is even consistent to attribute all possible attributes to substance? Attributes are completely conceptually independent; each is formulated on its own, independently and separately from any other attribute. Everything that does or can pertain to an attribute must be formulated in terms of that original, isolated reality. So, nothing could be derived from one which would even be formulated in the same terms as anything derived from the other. There is, then, no possibility of a contradiction between the attributes. God is just as possible as any possible attribute.

But God's possibility implies all other substances must be impossible, since there cannot be two substances of the same attribute. God not only exists because God is a substance, but God is the only substance which can exist. *Substance is God*. Correlatively, every possible attribute exists, attributed to God. The two we know of, as I said before, are thought and extension. So, what is the result? "*Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be nor be conceived without God.*"⁸⁴ Everything that exists is either in God as in another (a mode) or is in God as in itself (substance). *God is nature*. This completes the containment element of Spinoza's metaphysics; every finite thing must be a mode of God, and thus (as we saw when discussing the attribute) immanent to God and contained in divine being.

The Problem of Finitude

Stated in terms of the three elements of Spinoza's metaphysics I have pointed out, the problem of finitude could be stated quite concisely. The necessity element, when combined with monism, guarantees that the only possible way to ground negation, finitude, and nonbeing is by doing so using substance's being. The priority element forces us to find this ground in substance prior to the introduction of finite modes, and the containment element tells us that, once we have finite modes (if

⁸⁴ E1P15.

we can get them), they must remain immanent to substantial being. The central issue is this, then: the only way for negation to obtain between modes is for transcendence to obtain within God's own being, that is, *for God's being* as modified by these finite things which it contains *to be immediately itself in both modes and yet also not to be itself* insofar as each mode stands apart from the other. This form of being which simultaneously is and is not, however, is being-there, a concept Spinoza rejects in maintaining a strict separation of being and nonbeing. Since Spinoza rejects being-there, the only way to avoid contradiction would be to deny that finite things exist.

I take it that this is what Hegel means when he argues that Spinoza provides no "proof" of the transition from the infinite into the finite.⁸⁵ What ought to be shown is how finitude *could* follow from God's absolute infinity; yet, in Hegel's view, Spinoza only ever begins by assuming finite things and collapsing them into infinite substance. I will examine Hegel's reading more closely in the next chapter. For now, I would like to show that the problem of finitude is not just an issue that is externally introduced by reflecting on the elements of Spinoza's ontology in the way we have been doing. Instead, the problem of finitude also emerges internally in Spinoza's *Ethics*.

The difficulties for the possibility of finitude stem most directly from E1P21 and E1P22. Together, these propositions state, first, that God cannot directly produce finite modes and, second, that infinite modes cannot directly produce finite modes. The result seems to be that God produces infinite modes, which can only produce infinite modes, which can only produce infinite modes, and so on indefinitely. Since God, as the being on which everything depends for its essence and existence, is the cause of all things in this way, it seems that God can produce only infinite things immediately and more infinite things by some process of mediation.

⁸⁵ Hegel, 20/179.

Looking at these propositions in detail will reveal not only where the problem of finitude is most directly confronted by Spinoza, but it will also allow us to see in the next chapter what options are available to Spinoza if he wants to solve the problem of finitude. Melamed reconstructs the argument in E1P21 very nicely in his book *Spinoza's Metaphysics*,⁸⁶ though I will argue against an interpretive intervention Melamed makes in his reconstruction. His argument follows Spinoza's own very closely (to the letter even), but here is his formulation. Suppose a mode m necessarily follows directly from some attribute A . Now, suppose that m is finite. Then, m can be limited by another mode of the same nature (minimally, the same attribute). Call this other mode n . Now, elsewhere Spinoza argues that whatever is possible through God's nature must be actual, and so this possible limitation is an actual limitation.⁸⁷ That is, n follows from A and limits m . So, m and n both follow from A . Spinoza infers from this that neither m nor n follow necessarily from A . Here, Melamed offers an explanation which is the most (perhaps the only) contestable part of his reconstruction: he infers that Spinoza uses a strong version of a 'same cause, same effect' principle here. Namely, m and n have precisely the same cause, and any difference in effects must be due to a difference in the cause. But there is no difference in the cause. So, this contradicts the supposition that m necessarily follows directly from A . Hence, m cannot be finite.

Replace A in the proof above with 'an infinite mode' and you have E1P22. Melamed uses his close reading of E1P21 to show that infinite modes are *unique* by order of derivation. If his version of the proof is correct, then there can only be one infinite mode which follows from a given attribute, then only one infinite mode which follows from that one, and so on indefinitely. To me, there seems to be absolutely no way for finite modes to be produced in this setup. There would then only be a

⁸⁶ Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 117-8.

⁸⁷ Melamed omits this step in his reconstruction, but it is necessary since the definition of the finite involves possible, not actual, limitation.

single chain of modes under each attribute following from God, and E1P21 and E1P22 guarantee that every mode in this chain will be infinite.

Fortunately for Spinoza, I think that Spinoza would have *rejected* Melamed's explanation of the necessity claim in this proof, and so I will defend an alternative interpretation. Even if I accept that causes and effects correspond strictly to one another, that does not imply that the cause produces only *one* effect. The positive pole of a magnet *simultaneously* attracts a negative pole of one magnet and repels the positive pole of another. A cause can be of such a nature as to produce multiple distinct effects, and the cause's essence does not have to differ to cause each effect. This is not merely my own view; Spinoza explicitly accepts this. Spinoza's contemporary Tschirnhaus observed that he could usually only infer one property (presumably, the defining one) from mathematical definitions, and he asks how Spinoza thinks many things can be derived from, for example, just the nature of extension. Spinoza answers,

As to what you say in addition that from the definition of each thing considered in itself we can deduce *only one property*, this may be true in the case of the very simple things, or in the case of beings of reason (under which I also include figures), *but not in the case of real beings*.⁸⁸

If some property (mode) follows from the definition of an existing thing (a real being), then some essence exists because of the thing defined. This causation in mathematics is usually very restricted due to the abstractness of the definitions involved. But in real beings, which are not abstracted down to one or a couple essential traits, *many* effects of these sorts follow *at once* from a thing's essence.

Multiplicity of effects alone, then, is not enough to give us the necessity claim. There must therefore be something more contained in the assumption of the *finitude* of effects than there is contained in the assumption of a *multiplicity* of effects, even though Melamed's version of the argument appealed only to the multiplicity of effects. What does finitude introduce that multiplicity does not?

⁸⁸ Spinoza, Ep83. (Italics added.)

Our discussion of finitude makes this clear: *negation*. Just as a being can have a multiplicity of properties all of *whose being is one and the same, immediately united* in the being of the thing which has those properties, so too can this be true of infinite modes. The ‘being red’ and the ‘being solid’ in some rock, say, are, to be sure, *two distinct* properties, but they are both inseparably united in the being of the rock. The rock’s ‘*this*’, if you like, has both immanent to it. Thus, the *transcendence* of two kinds of reality gives us more than multiplicity. Finitude introduces this transcendence, so that these two kinds of reality (the two modes) are also external to one another, beyond one another.

This idea that the being of modes must be understood as immediately united through the being of substance is not just introduced by me either. The same idea is found in Ep12, an early letter which Spinoza continued to circulate throughout his life,⁸⁹ where Spinoza distinguishes two kinds of infinity and explains that the infinity of modes consists precisely in their unity with substance:

The question concerning the infinite has seemed most difficult, or rather insoluble, to all because they did not distinguish between *what must be infinite by its nature*, or in virtue of its definition, and *what has no bounds [fines] not indeed in virtue of its essence but in virtue of its cause*.⁹⁰

The first kind of infinity belongs to substance, while the second kind is the infinity of modes. Spinoza then explains that “we can, at will, determine the existence and duration of modes and conceive them as greater or less, and divide them into parts, when ... we are considering their essence alone *and not the order of nature*.”⁹¹ Multiple distinguishable modes are only finite, only transcend one another, when separated from the “order of nature”: the kind of immediate unity of multiplicity that I discussed in the case of a rock just a moment ago. Here the containment element of Spinoza’s metaphysics reemerges; modes of God must be grasped as states or modifications of all that God’s being contains,

⁸⁹ Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 24.

⁹⁰ Spinoza, Ep12. (Italics added.)

⁹¹ Ibid.

just as the rock's 'being red' and 'being solid' are distinguishable states or modifications of its overall reality. This multiplicity of infinite modes is initially united in substantial being without transcendence.

But we cannot stop there: Spinoza proves in E1P13 that substance is indivisible. The argument for that claim is quite simple: suppose substance were divisible. Then, either the divided parts of substance are substances or they are not. If they are still substances, then there would be multiple substances, which is impossible. If they are not substances, then what would be left of substance's being after division would be no substance: just *this* part and *that* part. That is, substance would cease to exist. But substance necessarily exists. Thus, substance is indivisible. The result is that *we cannot divide this or that aspect of what is contained in substance from the rest of substantial being*. This is the more Spinozist way of arriving at and phrasing the 'immediate unity of multiplicity'. The "order of nature", in part at least, indicates this sense in which all things are united as one and the same being in substance. According to their immanence to the order of nature, all things are infinite; their being *is* the being of God. This is the point of E1P21: supposing the contrary, that something finite follows directly from God or, per E1P22, from an infinite mode, is supposing that separation or transcendence obtains within infinite being. If that were the case, one and the same being, *this*, would simultaneously be itself *and not be itself* insofar as it transcends itself (would be *that*, not *this*). But this is *precisely* being-there: one and the same immediacy is present, but once as the vanishedness of being, once as its original affirmation. This distinction between the two, however, has collapsed in one immediacy. Because Spinoza rejects being-there, this possibility is ruled out before E1P13 begins; dividing substance to yield a nonsubstance cannot yield one and the same *this* which is also a *that* (a not-*this*). It must yield separate beings, a *this* and a *that*, which destroy the underlying unity of substance.

Since we are dealing with finite beings contained in divine being, we can rephrase this in terms of negation: *to suppose that a mode that follows from God is finite is to suppose that God's being, to some extent,*

negates God's own being. Yet, in Spinoza, such a self-negating structure is forbidden. He can only get the unity of the finite and infinite by referring the finite back to its cause and identifying its unity with infinite being. But because, as we saw before, he is unwilling to unite nonbeing with being or allow being to immanently require nonbeing, negation must begin and end as transcendent negation. No self-negation can occur because negation can only emerge by external determination (the limiting term beyond the being of the finite's being), and there is nothing external to God.

So, returning to the reconstruction of the proof, God (or an infinite mode) *cannot* produce both *m* and *n*, and so whichever one is supposed to exist must exist contingently, somehow coming into existence without God and with an alternative in its negation, in some other nonactual possibility. Contradictions abound: we already saw everything which must (essential and existential) have its origin in God. Beyond that, he argues everything that exists exists necessarily,⁹² and so this result would contradict that fact alone, even if Spinoza had not stipulated it at the start of the proof.

The difference between these versions of the proof is subtle; it does not change anything except the justification of the necessity claim in the proof. This difference, however, is crucial. There are two elements to it which I consider the most important:

- (1) On my interpretation, the basic idea of the *problem of finitude* is introduced directly into the *Ethics*. That is, Spinoza explicitly recognizes that grounding finitude positively in infinite substantial being is impossible given his other principles.
- (2) On my interpretation (unlike Melamed's), Spinoza is *not* committed to an ordered sequence of unique infinite modes. All my reading requires is that infinite modes do not transcend one another, inasmuch as they are all immediately united with substantial being.

⁹² E1P29.

Both points carry over to E1P22; the only difference would be that the infinite being which cannot serve as the positive ground of finitude is the being of *a mode* of God, rather than the being of *God*.

So, Spinoza notices the self-negation (which is problematic since it introduces being-there) in bringing the finite out of the infinite; E1P21 and E1P22 depend on this realization, and together they explicitly prohibit introducing finitude out of God's being or out of the being of a mode produced by God. It seems that little room is left for finitude.

The specter of acosmism, then, looms large. If I cannot say *X is not Y*, everything collapses into an indeterminate mass of being. I could not say red is not green, inasmuch as this involves one's reality being external to the other; I could not say I am not you, or this table, or anything of the sort. The cosmos requires separations like these. Negation may be a being of reason, but it still needs to be grounded in real being. It seems, however, that we have reason to believe not just that Spinoza does not provide this ground but that he *cannot* do so. A coherent Spinozism, then, would have to be *acosmism*. Is this Hegel's reading? Is it Spinoza's view? I answer those questions in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. Acosmism

In the previous chapter, I drew out the problem of finitude from a broadly Hegelian perspective but not strictly by interpreting Hegel's own explanation of his interpretation of Spinoza. I will begin by showing how Hegel's own acosmist reading identifies the crucial junctures in Spinoza's thinking that generate the threat of acosmism. I have found it best to place my own arguments and interpretation before Hegel's because Hegel does not go into much detail in defending or explaining his interpretation, and so I think what exactly his interpretation and arguments mean and what their merits are is most easily seen only after I have independently explained the problem and its origins.

Since Spinoza perceives the problem, it should not be surprising to learn that he does offer a solution to it:

[C]ertain things had to be produced by God immediately, namely, those which follow necessarily from his absolute nature, and others (which nevertheless can neither be nor be conceived without God) had to be produced by the mediation of these first things.⁹³

So, somehow finitude is produced not from God but by 'mediate modes' which serve as mediating links between God and finite modes. But we have already seen that nothing finite can follow from infinite modes. What exactly this mediation involves is not a straightforward thing to answer.

So, the second goal of this chapter is to provide an account of Spinoza's proposed solution. Given, from the last chapter, that there is a multiplicity of infinite modes which are immediately united, I argue an ontology of *contrariety* accomplishes the kind of mediation required to obtain finite modes; infinite modes have, within their positive being, a power to exclude what is incompatible with them, and latent incompatibilities between infinite modes ground the possibility of finitude for Spinoza. There thus comes to be a distinction of two realms of modes: one where modes are infinite with implicit contrarities with one another, *excluding* one another but not yet excluded, and one with finite

⁹³ E1P28s.

modes produced by two or more infinite modes which have been excluded from one another. This distinction is reflected in a less famous subdivision of “*Natura naturata*” in Spinoza’s famous distinction between *Natura naturata* and *Natura naturans*. *Natura naturata* is distinguished into *particular* and *universal* *Natura naturata*. The latter is produced being insofar as it is active, excluding, and infinite; the former is produced being that has been made finite by implicit contrarities in these infinite modes.

While Spinoza’s solution would solve the problem of finitude independently of his views about being, it introduces finitude only by simultaneously *violating* his views on being. Since finite modes produced by this mediating process are no less immediately united with God than infinite modes, their being is still essentially ‘in’ and ‘formed from’ all that is contained in substantial being. The mediating distance, then, removes the immediate threat, but since infinite modes’ being is immanent to, or nothing that transcends, the being of God, they can separate from and negate one another only at the cost of substance separating and negating *itself*. This introduces a unity of being and nonbeing that is strictly prohibited in Spinoza’s thinking. So, I conclude, Spinoza’s solution to the problem of finitude is not entirely successful; it avoids acosmism only by abandoning his views on being, bringing him closer to Hegel, the philosopher of negativity rather than, as Deleuze said, one whose philosophy is a “philosophy of pure affirmation”.

Hegel’s Acosmist Reading of Spinoza

On one level, Hegel’s acosmist reading serves more than just a critical-interpretive function; Vittorio Hösle points out that it might have the more positive function of rescuing Spinoza from the charge of atheism championed by Hegel’s contemporaries.⁹⁴ Hegel introduces the term ‘acosmism’ in his *History of Philosophy* while *defending* Spinoza against precisely this charge. He says, assuming something exists, one can either deny the infinite and accept the finite (“atheism”), accept both

⁹⁴ Hösle, “Hegel und Spinoza,” 69.

(“amicable compromise”), or accept the infinite and deny the finite (“acosmism”). “The opposite of what all those who accuse Spinoza of atheism say is true; in Spinoza, there is too much God.”⁹⁵ Beyond this, Hegel hardly mentions acosmism in his account of Spinoza in the *History of Philosophy*. His most developed justification of his acosmist reading, then, is actually found in the *Logic*.

The first thing we established in making our way to the problem of finitude was that Spinoza has a strictly transcendent view of negation, along with the strict separation of being and nonbeing it encodes. Despite Hegel’s consistent and enthusiastic endorsement of *omnis determinatio est negatio* for his own purposes and ideas, Stern has already pointed out that Hegel clearly distinguishes his own understanding of this formula from Spinoza’s.⁹⁶ Hegel says, “That determinacy is negation posited as affirmative is Spinoza’s proposition: *omnis determinatio est negatio*, a proposition of infinite importance. *Only, negation as such is a formless abstraction [for Spinoza].*”⁹⁷ Spinoza was so close, if only he did not view negation as such as a “formless abstraction”. We have already seen more in detail what Hegel could mean by this: negation as such is an *abstraction* for Spinoza since it abstracts the logic of immanent negation and being-there which the concept of negation presupposes. It is *formless* since a negation is just whatever transcends the term negated; it does not matter what the ‘form’ its beyond takes, so long as it just is some given reality beyond it.

In this same passage where he notes the difference between his own understanding of *omnis determinatio est negatio* and Spinoza’s, Hegel provides a lengthy explanation of his acosmist reading, which I will take part by part. First, he explains Spinoza’s monism:

The oneness of Spinoza’s substance, or that there is only one substance, is the necessary consequence of this proposition that determinacy is negation. Spinoza had of necessity to posit *thought* and *being* or extension ... as one in this unity, for as determinate realities the two are negations whose infinity is their unity; ... since substance is the total void of internal determinacy, [the

⁹⁵ Hegel, 20/163.

⁹⁶ Stern, “Determination is negation,” 33-6.

⁹⁷ SL21.101. (Italics added.)

attributes] are not even moments; the attributes, like modes, are distinctions made by an external intellect [*Verstand*].⁹⁸

Hegel's idea is effectively this one: Spinoza's concept of absolute infinity, an affirmation which has no negation, implies the uniqueness of substance simply because any reality that is supposed to be external to it cannot be, since any basic form of reality (attribute) or anything derived from it (mode) must be enfolded into the absolutely infinite. So, Hegel claims, Spinoza accepts that there are all these diverse possible attributes, which seem like they are distinct from one another, only to show that, because absolute infinity can have nothing outside itself, these must be taken into one and the same being: God. It turns out that the separation of the attributes is just one made by the intellect externally. They are just multiple aspects of one and the same being, and they do not negate one another. All that is mental (e.g., the mind) is physical (e.g., the body), and vice versa.

Now, I do not think that even an acosmist Spinoza must accept that the distinction of attributes and infinite modes is made externally by the intellect. For Hegel, multiplicity is sufficient for immediate distinction. After all, *this* term is *this* one, and *that* one is *that* one. We would be within our rights, he would say, to apply the notion of immediate distinction here, and so the separation of these two kinds of reality would have to be denied as mere semblance. Even if that is correct conceptually, Spinoza must reject the claim that multiplicity entails immediate distinction because it very quickly results in the introduction of being-there into ontology: think only of the 'being red' and the 'being solid' of the rock. These two forms of being are distinct; their reality does not perfectly correspond to one another. This one is *this*; that one is *that*. They contain different affirmations and negations. These two realities are then immediately distinct, but they are immanent to one and the same immediacy in the rock. Being and nonbeing are immediately united within it, which means this simple example of something's relation to its qualities would already imply being-there. Since Spinoza rejects being-there,

⁹⁸ Ibid.

he would have to reject this analysis. So, as an interpretation of him, Hegel is not right to suggest that Spinoza must say that difference is introduced only by an external intellect in at least the cases of attributes and infinite modes.

With finite modes, however, this is a different story, one closer to Hegel's own explanation. Finite modes, to be finite, depend on their negations' transcendence over themselves; yet, when their being is recognized as some modification of the being of substance, it suddenly is impossible for anything to transcend them at all because that modification is *immediately united* with whatever supposedly transcended it; they are not *this* and *that*, but moments of the very same *this*. So, Hegel thinks, what Spinoza is doing is introducing each finite mode and then absorbing it into absolutely infinite being because nothing can stand outside of it. Once the finite is absorbed into the infinite, it vanishes precisely because the very transcendent negation that defines the finite becomes impossible (unless we accept being-there so that infinite being can negate itself).

Now, that is Hegel parsed heavily in terms from this text and not his own. But if we can regard my translation as a hypothesis, then that hypothesis receives nice confirmation in the second main part of the passage at issue:

Also the substantiality of individuals cannot hold its own before that of substance. The individual refers to itself by setting limits to every other. But these limits are therefore also limits of itself; they are reference to the other. The individual's being-there is not in the individual. ... [D]eterminacy asserts itself essentially as negation, dragging it into the same negative movement of the understanding that makes everything vanish into the abstract unity of substance.⁹⁹

Hegel inverts the order of activity, making the finite limit its other rather than be limited by its other, but the point is salvageable. The finite is finite only in having a negation beyond it; each individual 'limits' or 'is limited' by the other, and it cannot be finite without this reference.¹⁰⁰ But precisely because

⁹⁹ Ibid. (Italics added.)

¹⁰⁰ Melamed suggests that perhaps Hegel identified how 'weak' individuation is in Spinoza; things are not individuated absolutely but by various negotiable metrics. Melamed, "Acosmism or Weak Individuals," 83-9; *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 72-

all reality is immanent to one and the same being, substantial being, there is no ground of this transcendence in real being. While it seems that things negate one another and are finite, therefore, this semblance is only a semblance. In truth, no reference to a transcendent other can be made. Everything vanishes into the abstract unity of substance, the only real being.

The acosmist argument Hegel produces on Spinozist principles, I think we are warranted to conclude, is much the same one that emerges in the problem of finitude: the immediate selfsameness of substantial being comes into conflict with the transcendence of finite beings over one another. So, I think we can credit Hegel with identifying the problem of finitude and noticing how, without modifying Spinoza's antecedent commitments at least, it precipitates into *acosmism*.

Spinoza's (Hegelian) Restoration of the Cosmos

Spinoza, however, has an objection to be made against the claim that a coherent Spinozism is acosmism. His reply depends on the difference between Melamed's interpretation of E1P21 and my own. Namely, on Melamed's uniqueness reading, modes are unique by position in the causal sequence by which they are produced. The result would be something like this:

$$S \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow M_n \rightarrow \dots$$

Since each term is prior to the next, I think Spinoza would reject that any interaction which would produce something new could happen between these modes.¹⁰¹ The first mode is infinite by E1P21, and the rest are infinite by repeated application of E1P22. So, everything God produces is infinite.

But there is a way out. When we allow the multiplicity of modes at the same logical-causal order, we can obtain sequences like this:

9. But this passage suggests that Hegel's discussion of individuality has little to do with the criteria for individuation and much to do with the way beings which can be individuated can exist apart from one another at all.

¹⁰¹ See, e.g., Spinoza, E1A3-4.

$$S \rightarrow \begin{array}{l} M_1^1 \\ M_1^2 \end{array} \rightarrow \begin{array}{l} M_2^1 \\ M_2^2 \end{array} \rightarrow M_3$$

That is, the two propositions do not rule out that some kind of interaction between infinite modes could produce a finite mode, which means the third mode in the sequence above could be finite. A *multiplicity* of mediate infinite modes, then, is the only option Spinoza has left for introducing finite things. Indeed, we can see that Hegel saw the issues at stake here even more sharply when we see that he seems to have recognized this also:

For Spinoza, the infinite is not setting a limit and passing beyond it, sensuous infinity, but rather it is absolute infinity, the positive *which has an absolute multiplicity here present within itself*.¹⁰²

Spinoza has no difficulties introducing multiplicity. What he has difficulties introducing is negation and realities that stand outside one another within that unified multiplicity: finitude, the cosmos. How does Spinoza attempt to go from the united, positive multiplicity contained in substantial being to finite beings which exist, in some respect, beyond or apart from one another?

This final section will be divided in two, answering this question and evaluating Spinoza's solution to it. To answer the first, I pick up on Spinoza's discussion of contrariety in Part III of the *Ethics* to argue that he has a little-discussed ontology of contrariety which serves as the kind of interaction or relationship between infinite modes capable of mediately producing finite modes.¹⁰³ Implicit incompatibilities contained in the positive being of distinct modes are capable of grounding finite beings. Spinoza uses this logic of contrariety among infinite modes to ground finite being, distinguishing two 'faces' of *Natura naturata* (produced nature): produced nature as infinite modes prior to the action of contraries and produced nature as finite posterior to their interaction. In the second part, I argue that nevertheless Spinoza's solution implies that being-there is present in his ontology

¹⁰² Hegel, 20/186. (Italics added.)

¹⁰³ See Wrinkler, "The Problem of Generation and Destruction in Spinoza's System," for a dedicated discussion of contrariety as an important metaphysical principle in Spinoza.

since the being of finite modes still remains immediately united to the being of substance. As a result, his solution will turn out to be unsatisfactory insofar as it requires giving up key elements of his thought, avoiding the problem of finitude but not answering it because of this evasion.

Spinoza's Ontology of Contrariety

The interaction that infinite modes engage in here cannot just be any interaction. It must be one that grounds a kind of exclusion of one's being from another's, introducing one's transcendence over the other. This exclusion must somehow not presuppose the negation at issue but, instead, must originally produce it from within purely positive being. We would then want to suggest that perhaps there is some power of *exclusivity* inherent in positive being, by which one infinite mode can, without presupposing its negation or containing it immanently, exclude the being of other infinite modes which it 'can limit'. I will argue that an ontology of contrariety fills precisely this role. This ontology of contrariety or opposition is introduced primarily in the three propositions which are used to prove the conatus (E3P4-6), the principle by which each being, insofar as it is in itself, strives to persevere in its being.

The first proposition introduces a prohibition of self-negation (negation understood in the Spinozist sense) as the ontological bedrock of contrariety: “[n]o thing can be destroyed except through an external cause.”¹⁰⁴ This is “evident through itself”, Spinoza tells us, but he continues to provide an explanation. He says that the definition of a thing affirms and does not negate the existence contained in the essence defined. The nonexistence of the thing can never be contained in its own essence, and therefore it must come from an external source: namely, an external cause of that nonexistence. It seems to me that this is nothing but a reiteration of Spinoza's view of negation. Something's negation always transcends it in the being of something else; insofar as it does not exist (in some place, time,

¹⁰⁴ Spinoza, E3P4.

other being, position in the causal order, etc.), that transcendent being is the reason for this (i.e., is the cause). “Destruction” in this proposition thus simply means nonexistence that is contrasted with existence. Notice that this argument does not assume that the ‘thing’ is finite.

The second proposition uses this foundation to introduce contrariety: “[*A*]hings are of a contrary nature, that is, cannot be in the same subject, insofar as one can destroy the other.”¹⁰⁵ Though this interpretation has been disputed (most notably by Edwin Curley)¹⁰⁶, I hold that Spinoza views the substance-mode relation as a relation of inherence, but space prevents me from defending that view here.¹⁰⁷ As a result, this proposition will inform us about substance-mode inherence (i.e., a mode’s inherence in substance) as much as mode-mode inherence (e.g., the inherence of a property in a body).

So, Spinoza defines contrariety as “being unable to inhere in the same subject”. When multiple things inhere in the same subject, their existence is immediately united, integrated into the unified existence of the subject in the same way as the rock’s color and shape in our previous example. If two things were contrary and could still inhere in the same subject, therefore, the existence of that subject would, in some respect, be capable of ‘destroying’ (negating), in some respect, the existence of the subject. But by E3P4, this is impossible. E3P5 follows.

This introduces a way that a kind of separation can occur within what inheres in one and the same being, to the extent that its contents “can destroy one another”. This is easiest to see in the case of extension. An extended thing can ‘be extended in region X’ and ‘be extended in region Y’, where X and Y are distinct, so long as it is not wholly extended entirely in those regions. We can, in effect, divide up the extension that one reality contains and obtain several other distinct extended regions,

¹⁰⁵ E3P5.

¹⁰⁶ Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 11-21.

¹⁰⁷ See Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 17-40, for thorough interpretive arguments against Curley’s reading and some of the concerns that might make it appealing.

each with being that transcends the other(s). My arms are immediately united with my entire body's being as *this* very body, as one and the same entity. But when considered on their own, they are realities that stand outside one another; one is here, the other not here. Importantly, however, this did not require us to grant negation or transcendence ahead of time: it only required us to grant the intrinsic characteristics of positive beings, including each's logic of contrariety.

Schematically put, on my interpretation, there are three steps in the 'mediation' mediate modes accomplish. We have already seen the first two:

- (1) First, there is a unified immediacy containing a multiplicity (without negation). For example, the body with various extended parts, functions, and the like.
- (2) Second, this primary reality produces possibilities of finite beings. That is, each term in this multiplicity contains certain properties which are *possibly* contrary, though they are not *already* contrary. For example, we saw that extended parts of the body *can* stand outside each other, even though they are immediately united as long as we are considering the whole body.

But there is a third element of the structure which remains to be detailed:

- (3) Third, these possibilities produced in (2) are actualized.

So far, contrariety is consigned to the realm of *possibilities*, not actuality, and so more can be done to show that this is how actually *existing* finite modes could follow from God. Let us ask, therefore, how does the third step occur?

E3P6 answers this by showing that this possibility is necessarily *actual*: “[*e*]ach thing, insofar as it is in itself [*quantum in se est*], strives to persevere in its being.”¹⁰⁸ Or, each thing has a conatus.¹⁰⁹ In the first

¹⁰⁸ E3P6.

¹⁰⁹ The interpretation of this proposition is contentious. I can only give a very brief account of these propositions, their purpose, and their relationships to one another, but for longer sympathetic treatments see Garrett, *Necessity and Nature in Spinoza's Philosophy*, 352-380, and Viljanen, *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*, 83-104.

instance, this is just the result of the previous two propositions. Insofar as something is ‘in itself’ (i.e., has positive being of its own), it cannot negate or destroy itself but can only affirm itself. The only thing Spinoza needs to add, as he does using E1P25c and E1P34, is that modes are necessarily affirmed as a part of God’s active potency, by which everything possible is being actualized.

So, at the first level, the multiplicity of finite modes is such that those modes contain positively within themselves a power by which they *can* exclude one another, and this makes possible, by implication, a second order of possible modes which would be excluded, limited: finite modes. At this second level, the potency of God further entails that they *must* exclude one another, so that these possible finite things are *actual* finite things. That completes an account of the mechanics of the “mediation” mediate modes are supposed to accomplish.

The Hiding Place of Being-there

Admittedly, using contrariety specifically as the kind of interaction that grounds finitude is the most speculative part of my interpretation of Spinoza because Spinoza himself never makes this connection, despite having recognized the problem. Nevertheless, the issue I will identify with his solution has little to do with the specifics of how Spinoza tries to explain the mediation between finite and infinite modes. I argue that the attempt to solve the problem of finitude by finding a ground for negation in positive being is doomed to failure not because such a solution is impossible but because it is only possible by introducing a notion of being-there. Spinoza seems to sidestep being-there by introducing negation only in reference to modes’ being rather than substance’s, but I argue this only pushes an implicit introduction of being-there into the background.

To my mind, the reasoning behind the problem of finitude is unavoidable, at least once the key elements of the interpretation of Spinoza I have defended are accepted. After all, the problem involves showing that certain elements of Spinoza’s philosophy, elements he has not challenged

explicitly in answering the problem, lead to a contradiction or incoherence in his thinking about finite things. It would thus be quite surprising if Spinoza were able to avoid this acosmist conclusion.

What is *not* surprising, however, is that he would attempt to ground finite being in substance instead of just endorsing acosmism because, I think, he would agree with my reasoning in the introduction that acosmism is a serious problem for the *Ethics* due to its structure and content. Unless there were a misstep in our reasoning somewhere, which I do not think there is, we should expect Spinoza's solution to *violate* some of the presuppositions of Spinozist thinking somewhere, and this is precisely what I think happens. But Spinoza is quite sophisticated in attempting to avoid this violation of his own principles. Indeed, he shifts it into the background, creating a 'hiding place' for being-there in his philosophy.

Whether we accept the details of my interpretation or not, Spinoza's solution clearly attempts to separate two 'frames of reference', as it were. There is the frame of infinite things, God and infinite modes, and there is the frame of the unending causal chains of and connections between finite things: two orders he calls universal and particular *Natura naturata* respectively in the *Short Treatise*,¹¹⁰ renewing the distinction in the *Ethics* by arguing that the finite is always caused by another finite.¹¹¹ On my reading, this separation of the two frames happens in that finitude is made *possible* by infinite modes, but it only becomes actual with numerous exclusive finite things acting on one another. This allows a system of nature where things act externally on one another, produce one another, and the like, but the two orders are not continuous. One is separated as a whole realm of possibilities produced by the other, so that this new possibility can be actualized *alongside* (rather than *within*) the infinite modes, avoiding a self-negation. On a less specific reading, one will have to at least recognize that Spinoza does consistently treat the finite and infinite orders separately, and he tries to separate them by

¹¹⁰ Spinoza, ST/80.

¹¹¹ E1P22 and E1P28 describe these distinct causal orders.

avoiding a discussion of their direct connection with one another. They are separated by mediating links which somehow bridge the infinite over here with the finite over there, in their own frames at a distance from one another.

Despite the merits and, indeed, genius of Spinoza's solution, a problem lingers. Although Spinoza's arguments do not *use* self-negation *to defend* his conclusions, his conclusions still imply being-there and so tacitly presuppose the legitimacy of that concept. For this reason, although the separation of these frames of reference pushes being-there into the background, being-there nevertheless remains in the background, in the hiding place these frames of reference provide.

In what sense do his conclusions imply being-there? The containment element of Spinoza's ontology does not just apply to *infinite* modes but applies to *all* modes, finite modes included. For this reason, finite modes are immediately united with substantial being just as much as infinite modes. As a result, there is nothing underlying the problem of finitude which is not already at play here: the problem of finitude has not been avoided. We are still left with substantial being, insofar as it is present in the finite, being itself and not being itself, insofar as it is present in the finite's negation. This unification of being and nonbeing is, of course, being-there: the concept which emerged as the breaking point between Hegel and Spinoza when we were working through the initial arguments of the *Science of Logic*. While accepting being-there would let us avoid the problem of finitude entirely, the problem only ever arose because Spinoza rejects being-there. Spinoza's solution, then, as much of a lesson in a "philosophy of pure affirmation" as it might be, cannot be regarded as a satisfactory solution to the problem of finitude. It involves tacitly rejecting a principle that Spinoza accepts.

On an interpretive level, then, I think I would be in my rights to say that Hegel's acosmist reading of Spinoza does not follow even the letter of the text especially closely. His reading is allusive, elliptical, and often terse. As a result, Hegel prefers to explain the relationship between the finite and

infinite in terms of the concept of negation alone, foregoing a detailed analysis of Spinoza's attempt to bridge the finite and the infinite by providing a mediating role to infinite modes.¹¹² He holds Spinoza to his own principles and declares him an acosmist, but what he misses by passing over this part of Spinoza's text, surprisingly enough, is the moment that Spinoza becomes the most Hegelian: the moment when he abandons that "formless abstraction" of negation, his supposedly "Eleatic" understanding of being, and all the rest. What does he abandon them for? Nothing less than the characteristically Hegelian concept of being-there. The problem of finitude suggested we would have to embrace these concepts or accept acosmism: to approach Hegel or keep a distance from him. Hegel's reading maintains the distance by setting Spinoza in the second camp, but perhaps he would have been even more satisfied to realize that, after all, Spinoza himself collapses the distance, for just a moment, and becomes all the more Hegelian because of it.

¹¹² See, e.g., 20/179, SL21.101, and EL§151a.

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