

The Allegedly Cartesian Roots of Spinoza's Metaphysics

There is a familiar story about Spinoza on which he borrows the fundamental building blocks for his philosophical edifice directly from Descartes, his greatest influence. Specifically, on this story, Spinoza's celebrated substance *monism* arises straightforwardly from Descartes' own conception of substance, which Descartes himself combines—not entirely consistently—with substance *pluralism*.

At the center of the story's plot is a crucial premise in Spinoza's argument for monism: namely, the premise that no substance can be produced, or caused, by another substance. This premise allows Spinoza to eliminate a variety of candidates for substance, eventually leaving only one: *Deus sive Natura*, the one, uncaused substance. According to the familiar story, this premise is already implied by Descartes' own view of substance as an independent being. If this implication holds, then an important first step on the road to Spinozism is already taken—however unintentionally—by Descartes.

Familiar and tempting as the story is, however, I think that it is mistaken. I will argue that Descartes disagrees with Spinoza on this crucial premise. In particular, Descartes' view of substance—characterized in the Second Replies in terms of inherence, and later in the *Principles of Philosophy* in terms of independence—does *not* imply, in and of itself, that substance is *causally* independent, or that substance monism is true. On the contrary, Descartes' view of substance is fully compatible with his pluralism. The crucial disagreement between Descartes and Spinoza, it will turn out, concerns whether causation is what I will call an *ontological dependence relation*—the kind of dependence relation, of which inherence is the paradigm, that a substance does not (indeed, cannot) bear to any other entity.

Ultimately my goal is not simply to establish that Descartes and Spinoza are divided by a substantive metaphysical disagreement, but to understand the philosophical content of this disagreement, and to place it in its broader historical and philosophical contexts. Thus I will examine the familiar story with an eye to uncovering, by making explicit, the particular claims and commitments that underwrite each of Descartes' and Spinoza's treatments of causation, dependence, and substance. Eventually I will argue that just as the familiar story does not do justice to the coherence of Descartes' metaphysical system, wrongly faulting it with inconsistency or compromise, so too it fails to appreciate the innovation of Spinoza's. If I am correct, the familiar story must be replaced by a more nuanced narrative that acknowledges the substantive metaphysical disputes that divide the two figures. In the conclusion, I briefly examine a few forms that this alternative narrative might take.

1. The Familiar Story

Early on in the *Ethics*, Spinoza rejects the possibility of a substance that is produced or caused to exist by another substance:

(E1p6) One substance cannot be produced by another substance.¹

This proposition is what I referred to above as the crucial premise in Spinoza's argument for the anti-Cartesian thesis of substance monism (which concludes at E1p14). If no substance can be

¹ All translations of Spinoza's work are from Spinoza (1985). I follow the standard method of citing passages from the *Ethics* by part, type, and number (for example, "E1a4" is axiom 4, part 1 of the *Ethics*; other abbreviations for type are "p" for proposition, "c" for corollary, and "d" either for definition (when following a part number) or demonstration (when following a proposition or corollary)). I use 'TIE' when referencing Spinoza's *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, and 'Ep' when referencing one of Spinoza's letters. Translations of Descartes' works are from Descartes (1985–1992). References to Descartes' works cite the volume and page number in Descartes (1996) (abbreviated 'AT'), followed by the volume and page number in Descartes (1985–1992), vols. 1 and 2 (abbreviated 'CSM'), or by the page number in vol. 3 (abbreviated 'CSMK'). I use the following abbreviations for specific works by Descartes: 'Discourse' for *Discourse on Method*, 'Meditations' for *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 'Principles' for *Principles of Philosophy*, 'Passions' for *Passions of the Soul*, and 'Comments' for *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet*.

produced by another substance, as E1p6 states, then minds and bodies, which are created substances for Descartes, cannot be substances; the only candidates for substance are self-caused (or, *per impossible*, uncaused) entities—of which, it turns out, there can be only one.²

According to the familiar story about this part of the *Ethics*, whose contours I sketched in the introduction, in adopting this view Spinoza is not so much departing from Descartes as much as he is spelling out an implication that is already latent in Descartes' position.³ This implication allegedly arises given Descartes' characterization of substance, in the *Principles of Philosophy*, as a being that depends on no other being for its existence:

By substance we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence. And there is only one substance which can be understood to depend on no other thing whatsoever, namely God. In the case of all other substances, we perceive that they can exist only with the help of God's concurrence. (*Principles* 1.51, AT 8A.24/CSM 1.210).⁴

The story holds that Spinoza agrees with Descartes' characterization of substance as an independent being—a being that “exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence”. And yet Spinoza goes on to employ this characterization in a more consistent and uncompromising fashion than Descartes does. For Spinoza rejects the exception Descartes is seemingly willing to make in the case of minds and bodies, which are not fully independent, since—as Descartes himself insists—they require God's continuing concurrence in order to exist.

This familiar story is evoked in what Steven Nadler (2006, 56) would have Spinoza

² See Garrett (1979) for an analysis of the argument culminating in E1p14.

³ My discussion will focus on the alleged influence of Cartesianism on Spinoza in this part of the *Ethics*. For discussions of other possible connections between Spinoza and Cartesianism, see, e.g., Nadler (1999) and Douglas (2015).

⁴ See also *Principles* 1.48 and 1.53 (AT 8A.22-25/CSM 1.208-210). I will discuss the remainder of this famous passage, in which Descartes denies the univocity of the term ‘substance’, in section 6.

object to Descartes:

I agree that a substance is essentially what exists in such a way that it depends on nothing else for its existence; but then, as you yourself admit, strictly speaking only God is a substance; and I, in order to be fully consistent, refuse to concede to finite things even a secondary or deficient kind of substantiality.

In the same vein, Michael Della Rocca (2008a, 42) writes: “Spinoza would agree with Descartes that only God meets the requirements for being a substance, but, unlike Descartes, he does not look for a way to have finite things count as substances as well.”⁵ And interestingly, a version of the familiar story is offered by Spinoza himself, in an early unpublished work, *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being*, where in a dialogue between “Reason”, Spinoza’s mouthpiece, and “Lust”, a representative of Cartesianism, Reason declares:

O Lust! I tell you that what you say you see—that there are distinct substances—is false. For I see clearly that there is only one, which exists through itself, and is a support of all the other attributes. And if you want to call the corporeal and the intellectual substances in respect to the modes which depend on them, you must equally call them modes too, in relation to the substance on which they depend. For you do not conceive them as existing through themselves. (1985, 75)⁶

Spinoza here suggests that just as the dependence of modes (on would-be material and mental substances) disqualifies these modes from being substances, the dependence of these would-be

⁵ The familiar story is also suggested in Curley (1969, 37), Donagan (1980, 91-92), Bennett (1984, §15.2), Curley (1988, 19-23), and Moore (2013, 45-46), who writes: “Spinoza acknowledges only one substance. (Descartes acknowledged only one substance ‘in the strictest sense’. But in Spinoza there are no concessions.)” It may also lie behind Bayle’s (1991, 295) suggestive comment in his *Dictionary*: “It is not wrong to think that the ill use he [Spinoza] made of some of this philosopher’s [Descartes’] maxims led him to the precipice”—which, for Bayle, looms over the abyss of substance monism and heresy. Carriero (2002, 43) considers this type of story about Spinoza’s relationship to Descartes, but rejects it himself as “uninteresting”. For my part, I do not challenge the interest of the familiar story, though I will deny its veracity.

⁶ I am grateful to [name redacted] for drawing my attention to this passage.

substances (on God) would likewise disqualify them from being substances. The dependence in both cases, it is suggested, is on par, and hence the ontological status of the dependent entities should be taken to be on par as well: in neither case are they substances.⁷

It is important to understand the familiar story's claim (voiced explicitly by Nadler's Spinoza, and hinted in what Della Rocca and Spinoza say) that Descartes is not being "fully consistent" in *Principles* 1.51.⁸ Where is the inconsistency? Getting clear about this is essential to a proper understanding, and assessment, of the familiar story.

As I understand it, the charge of inconsistency begins with the correct observation that Descartes is committed to all of the following:

- (1) A substance is an independent being.
- (2) Minds and bodies are substances.
- (3) Minds and bodies causally depend on God.⁹

Importantly, (1) - (3) are not, in and of themselves, inconsistent. To secure inconsistency what is needed is that the causal dependence of minds and bodies in (3) entails the absence of the type of independence in (1). In other words, a conflict arises among (1) - (3) only if *the independence of substance includes or entails causal independence*. The familiar story is framed by the assumption that Descartes and Spinoza take this to be the case—or, at the very least, that acceptance of this entailment follows rationally from claims to which both philosophers are antecedently committed (for brevity, I will henceforth speak simply of 'acceptance' of or 'commitment' to (4)).

⁷ Below we will see that in the *Ethics*, Spinoza does not present his argument in quite the same way, but invokes a crucial claim that connects the two types of dependence (what I will formulate later as (ODR-3)).

⁸ Later, in section 6, I will consider the charge that Descartes' position is not strictly inconsistent but treads on an equivocation that leaves him committed to just one substance in the strict sense.

⁹ While there is some scholarly disagreement about what God's concurrence amounts to, it is agreed that minimally, it is a causal act of conserving finite beings in existence, broadly akin to the initial causal act of creating them. I will return to the debate surrounding concurrence below, in note 47.

The significance of this assumption cannot be overstated. For once, and only once, it is in place, can Descartes' and Spinoza's disagreement about whether or not substances can be produced by other substances, as in Spinoza's E1p6, be legitimately regarded as resulting from Descartes' inconsistent (or less-than-strict) application of the independence criterion for substances to the case of minds and bodies.

Below I will argue that the assumption I have just identified is mistaken. But first I would like to introduce some terminology, which allows an improvement to our formulation of the assumption, and a clearer statement of the interpretation of Descartes and Spinoza advanced by the familiar story. I will continue to say that an entity is *causally independent* just in case it is not caused or produced by any other entity; otherwise, it is *causally dependent*. I will call the type of independence that substance enjoys *ontological independence*, and its contrary *ontological dependence*; ontological independence obeys the following conditional, while ontological dependence obeys its contrapositive:

(OD) If x is a substance, then x is ontologically independent.

The intention is to introduce a label for the independence that underwrites a characterization of substance as an independent entity, as in Descartes' *Principles* 1.51, and not yet to make claims about what type of independence is invoked, or to offer an analysis of it.¹⁰ Finally, I will call all and only relations that exclude this type of independence *ontological dependence relations*; these

¹⁰ This way of introducing the term 'ontological independence' is different from how it is sometimes introduced in contemporary philosophy, as picking out a special kind of relation that is "metaphysical in character", holding when a being does not require another "for its existence or for its identity" (Lowe 2010); cf. Correia (2008, 1013): "A[n ontologically] dependent object, so the thought goes, is an object whose ontological profile, e.g. its existence or its being the object that it is, is somehow derivative...". The related term 'grounding' is often introduced in similar ways (see, e.g., Schaffer (2009), Rosen (2010), Fine (2012), and Koslicki (2015)). By contrast, what anchors the notion of ontological independence in the present discussion is a connection to substancehood. This is nonetheless compatible with providing an analysis of the notion in a way that ultimately does not mention substance, but instead existence, identity, or something else altogether; indeed, later (in section 5) I will offer an interpretation of Descartes' understanding of the relation of ontological independence in terms of the *natures* of its relata.

relations obey the following conditional:

(ODR) If xRy , then x ontologically depends on y .

Once again, this is not meant as an analysis; nor is it to say which relations, if any, satisfy this conditional. It is simply to introduce a label for relations that have a certain property: they are relations that exclude the independence required for substancehood—to wit, ontological independence.¹¹

Using this terminology, we can now offer a more precise rendering of (1):

(1') Substance is ontologically independent.

And the assumption framing the familiar story can be formulated as the assumption that both Descartes and Spinoza are committed to the following thesis:

(4) Ontological independence entails causal independence.

In other words, the familiar story assumes that for both Descartes and Spinoza, causation is an ontological dependence relation, and as a result, that for both thinkers substance is causally independent.¹²

This formulation makes the charge of inconsistency precise. Put simply, the charge is that Descartes maintains that minds and bodies are substances, hence *ontologically independent*, as (1') and (2) jointly imply, and yet that they are causally dependent (on God), hence *ontologically dependent*, as (3) and (4) jointly imply. This is clearly an inconsistent position.

¹¹ As should be clear, use of the term 'ontological dependence relation' also does not commit its user to any particular view about the ultimate unity or plurality of ontological dependence relations (or, relatedly, of the unity or plurality of metaphysical grounding, as discussed in Wilson (2014) and Koslicki (2015)). Throughout, " xRy " should be read as " x bears relation R to y ".

¹² The position that causal dependence entails ontological dependence may seem like a non-starter to contemporary metaphysicians who appear to take it for granted that what they call 'ontological dependence' (as well as 'grounding') is a paradigmatically *non-causal* dependence relation; see, e.g., the citations in note 10. If my arguments in what follows are correct, then Descartes, but not Spinoza, is in agreement with contemporary metaphysicians who endorse a non-causal view of this relation (to the extent they are concerned with the same relation, i.e., one that excludes substancehood; again, recall note 10). However, Descartes does not (I will argue) take the divergence between causal and ontological dependence for granted, but has a principled reason for subscribing to it.

As we shall see, a significant virtue of this way of spelling out the familiar story is that it enables us to place the debate between Descartes and Spinoza in its broader historical context, and to better appreciate what is at stake, philosophically. I will briefly address the historical context in the next section. This will set the stage for engagement with the philosophical issues in subsequent sections.

2. Substance and Independence in the Aristotelian Tradition

Although Descartes and Spinoza both reject Aristotle's hylomorphism, their metaphysics of substance is firmly grounded in the philosophical tradition stemming from Aristotle. In that tradition, substance is the ultimate subject of properties, or that in which accidents exist or inhere without existing or inhering in anything in turn. Inherence, moreover, is thought of as a type of dependence: a substance is a being that is independent insofar as it exists *per se*—that is, it exists by or through itself, in its own right, because, or insofar as, it does not inhere in anything. Accidents, on the other hand, do not exist *per se*, but rather by or through, in a manner that depends on, substances, insofar as they inhere in substances. The locus classicus of this Aristotelian position is a well-known passage from the *Categories*:

A substance—that which is called a substance most strictly, primarily, and most of all—is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject, e.g. the individual man or the individual horse...all the other things are either said of the primary substances as subjects or in them as subjects. So if the primary substances did not exist, it would be impossible for anything else to exist. (*Categories* 2a11-b6)

According to this passage, insofar as certain non-substances are in substances and insofar as certain non-substances are said of substances (and, moreover, insofar as certain non-substances

are *both* in substances and said of them), these non-substances depend on substance. Substances, on the other hand, are neither said of nor in—they do not inhere in—anything else.¹³ In the terminology of the previous section, *being-in* and *being-said-of* are ontological dependence relations, and substance is ontologically independent.¹⁴

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle famously invokes the notion of “priority in nature” to describe the independence he mentions in the *Categories*:

Some things then are called prior and posterior...in respect of nature and substance, i.e. those which can be without other things, while the others cannot be without them.

(*Metaphysics* Δ 11, 1019a1-4; cf. *Metaphysics* Z 10 and Θ 8)

This priority is the independence an entity enjoys when it can be without another entity (yet the latter cannot be without the former)—the selfsame independence that in the *Categories* is ascribed to substances.¹⁵ In the terminology introduced above, priority in nature is ontological independence, and posteriority in nature is ontological dependence; again, *being-in* and *being-said-of*, which entail posteriority in nature, are ontological dependence relations. As we will see in a moment, the expression “prior in nature” reappears in Spinoza, when he echoes Aristotle in speaking of the independence of substance with respect to its modes.

It is generally thought that both Descartes and Spinoza adopt traditional Aristotelian notions of substance, mode (or affection), and their relations—which they then go on to develop

¹³ To my knowledge, these comments on the *Categories* passage are uncontroversial: they do not offer an analysis of ontological dependence in Aristotle, but only identify a widely-acknowledged connection between such dependence and the relations *being-in* and *being-said-of* in the *Categories*. For further discussion see, e.g., Corkum (2008).

¹⁴ The connection between inherence and substance independence is endorsed by later Aristotelians as well. Consider, for example, the following remarks by Eustachius of St. Paul: “To subsist, or to exist by itself [*per se*], is nothing but not to exist in another thing as in a subject of inherence. Substance differs in this respect from accident, which cannot exist by itself [*per se*], but only in another thing, in which it inheres.” (*Summa* I: 96; quoted in Broackes (2006, 138)). Further examples are cited in [title redacted].

¹⁵ This comment on the *Metaphysics* passage is also to my knowledge uncontroversial, and does not attempt an analysis of priority in nature; it merely notes a connection between such priority and the relations invoked in the *Categories*. See Peramatzis (2011) and Malink (2013) for further discussion.

or articulate in distinctive (non-hylomorphic) ways.¹⁶ Our terminology preserves and sharpens this point. Yet as we return to our main thread, we will see that Descartes and Spinoza are both Aristotelians not only in that they view substance as an independent being, but also in that they view inherence (*being-in*) as an ontological dependence relation. The question is whether they also agree, as assumed by the familiar story, on what relations beyond inherence are ontological dependence relations—specifically, on whether causation is such a relation. It is to this question that I now turn.

3. Independence and Causation: The Case of Spinoza

Let us begin with Spinoza. I will present evidence suggesting that he accepts (4), and hence that causation is an ontological dependence relation. To this extent, I believe, the familiar story is correct. I will proceed in two steps: first, I will show that Spinoza thinks of another relation, conceiving-through (or conception), as an ontological dependence relation (§3.1); and second, that he holds that causation (in the relevant sense of one substance *per hypothesi* causing another substance) entails conception (§3.2). Hence, it follows that causation is itself an ontological dependence relation.

The second step, which establishes the entailment from causation to conception, will be familiar to readers steeped in Spinoza scholarship; indeed, scholars have argued not only that this

¹⁶ Regarding Descartes' place in the tradition, see, e.g., Garber (1992, chapter 3), Carriero (1995), Rozemond (1998, chapter 1), and Pasnau (2011, chapter 8). Regarding Spinoza's, see, e.g., Bayle (1991, 331), Carriero (1995), Melamed (2009), and Della Rocca (2008a). Curley agrees that Descartes belongs to this tradition, but sees Spinoza as departing from it, writing (1969, 18 and 21) that "Spinoza's use of these terms [substance, mode, attribute] is highly idiosyncratic" and that whereas Descartes continues a tradition regarding substance "going back ultimately to Aristotle", "it is one of Spinoza's principal novelties that he breaks with this long tradition." Curley's position is based on his claim that Spinoza, unlike Aristotle and Descartes, understands the inherence relation as a type of causal dependence. However, the terminology introduced in the previous section allows us to see that according to Curley, Spinoza nevertheless agrees with Aristotle that substance is ontologically independent and that inherence is an ontological dependence relation—however the inherence relation is further understood.

entailment holds, but that its converse holds as well (as well as myriad other entailments between important relations in Spinoza's system).¹⁷ Yet even if scholars generally agree that Spinoza subscribes to this entailment, I believe that they are not always fully cognizant of its philosophical significance, as well as of its controversial status, vis-à-vis Descartes and Cartesianism.¹⁸ It is this dual oversight, I will suggest, that helps make the familiar story appealing. Hence in order to examine, and eventually overcome, the familiar story, it will be important to examine this entailment in some detail.

3.1. *Conception as an Ontological Dependence Relation*

Spinoza's definitions of substance and mode at the outset of the *Ethics* invoke two relations, *inhering* (*being-in*) and *conception*:

(E1d3) By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself [*id quod in se est et per se concipitur*], that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed.

(E1d5) By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another and through which it is conceived. [*id quod in alio est, per quod etiam concipitur.*]

Two considerations support the suggestion that, according to Spinoza, insofar as substance is in itself and conceived through itself, it is an ontologically independent being; and insofar as a mode is in and conceived through another, it is ontologically dependent.

First, the relation of inherence invoked here seems to be the same relation as (or, at least, sufficiently like) the relation of inherence (*being-in*) invoked in the Aristotelian tradition, so that

¹⁷ For the claim of mutual entailment between causation and conception, see, e.g., Jarrett (1978), Bennett (1984), Wilson (1999), Garrett (2002), Della Rocca (2008b), Newlands (2010), and Lin (forthcoming). (Della Rocca, Newlands, and Lin also argue for mutual entailment between inherence and causation/conception.) Melamed (2012) endorses a restricted version, according to which some but not all types of causation mutually entail some but not all types of conception. A notable exception to these interpretations is Morrison (2013), who endorses only the entailment from causation to conception and denies that the entailment holds in the other direction.

¹⁸ In notes 25 and 27 below I provide several illustrations of this claim from the literature.

if the latter is an ontological dependence relation, then there is good reason to view the former as an ontological dependence relation as well. After all, there is no reason to think of the coincidence as a *mere* coincidence; it is far more plausible to see Spinoza as drawing on the tradition in his definitions, which—he can reasonably assume—will be readily recognized and accepted by his readers.¹⁹

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the first proposition of the *Ethics* reads:

(E1p1) A substance is prior in nature to its affections.

The pithy demonstration of this proposition reads: “This is evident from E1d3 and E1d5.” Hence the priority in nature of substance with respect to its modes (or affections) simply follows, according to Spinoza, from the fact that a substance is in and conceived through itself, whereas a mode is in and conceived through another. If priority in nature just is ontological independence, as I suggested above, it is plausible that Spinoza thinks of inherence and conception as ontological dependence relations.²⁰ That is, it is plausible to read Spinoza as endorsing the following two claims:

(ODR-1) If x is conceived through y , then x ontologically depends on y .

(ODR-2) If x inheres in y , then x ontologically depends on y .

Let us now consider how, for Spinoza, inherence and conception are linked to causation.

3.2. *Causation entails Conception*

Recall E1p6, the proposition that “one substance cannot be produced by another substance”, which Spinoza employs to eliminate created substances, and which, according to the

¹⁹ As indicated in note 16 above, this is compatible with a very different understanding of inherence than the one current in the Aristotelian tradition, such as the one Curley (1969) attributes to Spinoza.

²⁰ While strictly speaking, the demonstration of E1p1 is compatible with only one of the two relations, inherence and conception, being an ontological dependence relation, Spinoza’s treatment of them elsewhere arguably indicates that he views both as such relations. For example, as mentioned in note 17, scholars have argued that Spinoza views inherence and conception as mutually entailing; if so, then if one of the two relations entails ontological dependence, both of them do.

familiar story, relies on premises and assumptions regarding substance and independence that Descartes also holds. Spinoza offers several demonstrations in discussion of this proposition, one of which is particularly relevant to our discussion, as it features the definition of substance in terms of inherence and conception—both ontological dependence relations. The demonstration reads:

(E1p6cd2) This is demonstrated more easily from the absurdity of its contradictory. For if a substance could be produced by something else, the cognition of it would have to depend on the cognition of its cause (by E1a4). And so (by E1d3) it would not be a substance.²¹

In addition to the definition of substance, E1d3 (quoted above), the demonstration relies on E1a4, the so-called “causal axiom”, which reads:

(E1a4) The cognition [*cognitio*] of an effect depends on, and involves, cognition of its cause.²²

The exact meaning of the causal axiom and the terms it employs is a matter of debate, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to weigh in, let alone settle, the surrounding controversies.²³ Yet even without committing ourselves to any specific interpretation of the causal axiom, we can safely say—however it is interpreted—that it commits Spinoza to the following link between

²¹ Technically, the demonstration is not of E1p6 itself, but of its corollary, “a substance cannot be produced by anything else.” (Here I am grateful to [name redacted].) However, clearly, E1p6 does follow from this demonstration as well, since the corollary is a general claim of which E1p6 is an instance.

²² I have altered Curley’s translation, replacing his ‘knowledge’ with ‘cognition’, as I tend to agree with scholars who think that E1a4 applies to inadequate cognition as well, which arguably falls short of knowledge (see Wilson (1999) for an expression of this position). However, nothing in my discussion turns on this choice, and readers who prefer ‘knowledge’ can replace it throughout without the main points being affected.

²³ These include whether *cognitio* is meant to include only adequate or also inadequate cognition (recall the previous note); whether the axiom expresses a conditional or a bi-conditional (recall note 17); whether the causation at stake is efficient, formal, or other (e.g., some sort of “logical inference”; see Hübner (2015) for a helpful discussion of this and other interpretive approaches); and whether the axiom applies to all cases of causation or only to a restricted subclass (as in, e.g., Morrison (2015)). See also Wilson’s comment (1999, 143) that “not only ‘*cognitio*’, but also ‘*causa*’—and perhaps ‘*dependet*’ and ‘*involvit*’ as well—take on peculiar technical significance as the axiom becomes entwined with the unfolding of Spinoza’s system.”

causation and cognition:

(Link-a) If x is caused by y , then the cognition of x depends on, and involves, the cognition of y .

Moreover, even if we do not commit ourselves to any specific interpretation of the causal axiom, we can safely say, on the basis of the way Spinoza employs it in the demonstration just cited, that he is committed to:

(Link-b) If the cognition of x depends on, and involves, the cognition of y , then x is conceived through y .

This further thesis is required to secure the demonstration, which can be reconstructed as a valid argument only when (Link-b) is added as a premise:

1) If x is caused by y , then the cognition of x depends on, and involves, the cognition of y .

(Link-a)

2) If the cognition of x depends on, and involves, the cognition of y , then x is conceived through y . (Link-b)

3) Therefore, if x is caused by y , then x is conceived through y . (from 1 and 2)

4) A substance is conceived through itself and not through anything else (including another substance). (E1d3)

5) Therefore, a substance is not caused by anything else (including another substance).
(from 3 and 4)

Step 3, which follows from (Link-a) and (Link-b), is the thesis that causation entails conceiving-through:

(Link-c) If x is caused by y , then x is conceived through y .

Since Spinoza holds that conception is an ontological dependence relation (recall ODR-1), it

follows from (Link-c) that for Spinoza, causation is an ontological dependence relation as well:

(ODR-3) If x is caused by y , then x ontologically depends on y .

Of course, (ODR-3) is equivalent to (4), the claim to which both Descartes and Spinoza are committed, according to the assumption framing the familiar story:

(4) Ontological independence entails causal independence.

We can now see that (and why) Spinoza indeed accepts this claim.

In this way, the above demonstration of E1p6, the proposition that a substance cannot be produced by another substance, shows that Spinoza regards causation as an ontological dependence relation, and hence that he accepts (ODR-3)—which is equivalent to (4), to which, according to the familiar story, both Descartes and Spinoza are committed. Moreover, according to Spinoza, (ODR-3) follows in part from the connection between causation and conception, (Link-c), which is an implicit premise in the demonstration.²⁴

That (Link-c) plays the role of anchoring a necessary step in Spinoza's argument for substance monism underscores its significance.²⁵ That it anchors the anti-Cartesian position expressed in E1p6, that there are no created substances, underscores its controversial nature,

²⁴ (ODR-3) also follows from (ODR-2) and another thesis that Spinoza is often taken to hold, and which below (in section 5) I call (Link-d): If x is caused by y , then x inheres in y (see, e.g., Della Rocca (2008b) and Newlands (2010), as mentioned in note 17). I focus on the route to (ODR-3) that I do, from (ODR-1) and (Link-c), because, first, (Link-c) is ascribed to Spinoza more frequently (and less controversially) than (Link-d); and, second, because (Link-c) is operative in the demonstration of E1p6 discussed above, which is directly relevant to the familiar story.

²⁵ This point seems to me to not be fully appreciated by certain interpretations of the causal axiom, and hence of (Link-c): for example, interpretations of the causal axiom as (i) restricted to immanent causation (where y is the immanent cause of x just in case x is caused by y and x inheres in y), or as (ii) restricted to formal causation (where y is the formal cause of x just in case y is the form or essence of some entity and x is a necessary property that follows from this essence). These interpretations make it hard to see how (Link-c) can play the role it does in E1p6cd2. The hypothesis framing E1p6cd2—which is reduced to a contradiction with the help of (Link-c)—is that one substance causes or produces another substance, and this is a case of neither immanent nor of formal causation. It is not clear how a restricted version of (Link-c) will help reduce this hypothesis to a contradiction, and hence yield the required conclusion. For the restriction in (i), see Viljanen (2008) and (2011, chapter 2), and Hübner (2015) and (forthcoming); for the restriction in (ii), see Melamed (2012) and Morrison (2015).

showing that it is not an assumption Descartes could easily accept.²⁶ Yet the fact that the familiar story has the traction it does suggests that the controversial nature of (Link-c) has not been fully appreciated—for the familiar story simply assumes that Descartes is committed to (ODR-3), which as we have just seen is based on (Link-c).²⁷ In a moment I will argue that Descartes indeed rejects (Link-c), and with it, the entailment from causation to ontological dependence, in (ODR-3), that it yields.

4. Substance Under Threat

But first let me make an observation about Spinoza's argument, which is not wholly anomalous but belongs to a class of arguments, offered by philosophers past and present, intended to undermine a certain type of entity's claim to being a substance. These arguments accept the broadly Aristotelian premise that a substance is ontologically independent, and then argue that the entity in question stands to another entity in an ontological dependence relation, hence is not a substance. In Spinoza's case, these entities include created minds and bodies, and the relation is causation, as in (ODR-3). Other philosophers have offered arguments that employ claims connecting various other relations to ontological dependence. Examples include:

(ODR-4) If x has y as a part, then x ontologically depends on y .²⁸

²⁶ This fact is noticed by Wilson, who writes (1999, 150) of the causal axiom that underwrites (Link-c): "To clarify the significance of Spinoza's axiom, it is important to see its role in [certain] anti-Cartesian arguments", adding: "the Cartesian... must reject axiom 4 as Spinoza interprets it." However, Wilson focuses on anti-Cartesian arguments against mind-body interaction, and not on the argument for substance monism at issue in the present discussion.

²⁷ In addition to the endorsements of the familiar story quoted above, see also Melamed's comment (2009, 49n98): "What Spinoza does in E1p6 is to show that given certain assumption, which he expects the Cartesians to share with him, he can prove that substance must be causally self-sufficient"; cf. Garrett (2003, 170), who (following Curley 1988, 19-23) views the early passages of the *Ethics* (presumably including E1p6cd2) as "drawing out the logical consequences of the Cartesian theory of substance and God."

²⁸ See the discussion of Leibniz below. For one appearance of (ODR-4) in contemporary metaphysics, see, e.g., Heil (2012, 167): "[One] tradition begins with a notion of independence: a substance is a non-dependent entity, one the existence of which does not require the existence of any other distinct entity. ... One result of characterizing substances in this... way is that complex objects... will not be substances." See also Toner (2011) and Gorman (2012).

(ODR-5) If x is a part of y , then x ontologically depends on y .²⁹

(ODR-6) If x is an abstraction with respect to y , then x ontologically depends on y .³⁰

(ODR-7) If x is constituted by y , then x ontologically depends on y .³¹

Other possible conditionals invoke antecedents regarding various other relations that have been linked to dependence, such as *being-functionally-realized-by*, *being-a-determinable-of*, or *being-a-determinate-of*.³² If any of these conditionals is true, then insofar as substance is held to be ontologically independent, an entity for which the antecedent of the relevant conditional is true is *not* a substance. For it is thereby shown that it stands in an ontological dependence relation to another entity. Put differently, would-be substances come under threat whenever they bear a relation to another entity that is alleged to be an ontological dependence relation.

The previous section detailed how Spinoza, a substance monist, employs this strategy to threaten created substances. Others employ the strategy as well. Consider, for example, Leibniz's position that Cartesian bodies, which he regards as mere aggregates, are not substances. One argument for this view proceeds from the premises that every corporeal entity has further parts (i.e., there are no corporeal atoms), and that a whole that is an aggregate is posterior to—that is, ontologically depends on—its parts. If so, then no aggregate, and hence no body, is a substance.³³ This version of the strategy relies on (ODR-4). But one could invoke (ODR-5)

²⁹ See the discussion of Schaffer below.

³⁰ See, e.g., Armstrong (1989, 113-15) for concerns about the substantiality of tropes, understood as “abstract particulars”. Although Armstrong does not there explicitly identify the abstraction relation when voicing these concerns, it seems to be a plausible source for them. Cf. the discussion of abstraction as “grounding by subsumption” in Goff (forthcoming).

³¹ See, e.g., the concerns about hylomorphic compounds, understood as standing in the *being-constituted-by* relation to both form and matter, discussed by Koslicki (2013).

³² See Corriea (2008) and Wilson (2014) for other possible relations.

³³ Leibniz writes in a letter to Arnauld: “[A body] will always be an aggregate made up of many. Or rather, it will never be a real being [i.e., substance], since the parts that make it up face just the same difficulty, and so we never arrive at real being, because beings by aggregation can have only as much reality as there is in their ingredients.” (Leibniz (1875-90, vol. 2, 71-2); cited in Levey (2012)) On a plausible interpretation of this passage, the “difficulty” a body qua aggregate faces is that it ontologically depends on its parts: an aggregate of parts “can have only as much

instead (though presumably not also). Consider a contemporary monist view, akin to Jonathan Schaffer's, according to which the whole physical universe—the cosmos—is the only concrete substance. One argument for this view proceeds from the premise that every concrete entity other than the whole universe is a part of the universe, and that a part ontologically depends on the integrated whole of which it is a part. If so, then no concrete entity smaller than the entire universe is a substance, leaving the latter as the only candidate for this status.³⁴

The point is that Spinoza's argument is an instance of a more general argumentative strategy, one that calls a class of would-be substances into question. The threat to substances, pressed by Spinoza, is not specific to causation but can easily be seen to generalize to a host of other important—and popular—metaphysical relations. Consequently, many philosophers (past and present) join Descartes in facing threats to their favored substances. Whether and (if so) how Descartes manages to stave off the threat should, therefore, be of broad interest. In the next section, I argue that Descartes does not endorse (ODR-3), the claim that Spinoza invokes in the course of executing the general strategy outlined above. If this is right, then Descartes is not committed to premises that lead to Spinoza's monistic conclusion, contrary to the familiar story.

5. Independence and Causation: The Case of Descartes

Like Aristotle and Spinoza, Descartes provides a characterization of substance that

reality as there is in [its] ingredients", which (Leibniz seems to imply) will always be less reality than what is possessed by a substance; and so a body, understood as an aggregate, is not a substance. Whether at any period of his career Leibniz held a different view of body, not as a mere aggregate but as something that has a "principle of unity" (i.e. a soul, form, or entelechy), and whether he regarded such a principle as securing a body the status of substance, is a matter of much scholarly debate. For a helpful discussion, see Levey (2011).

³⁴ Schaffer's argument is of course more sophisticated than this, and just as Spinoza offers a defense of (ODR-3), Schaffer offers a defense of (ODR-5). The chief point is simply that Schaffer's defense of monism is committed to (ODR-5)—as indicated when, for example, in the course of his argument that "among the cosmos and its proper parts, the cosmos is the one and only substance" (2013, 82), he emphasizes that "to speak of the cosmos as a single clockwork is not to deny that it has parts, but rather to *characterize the parts as dependent...*" (Ibid., 80 emphasis added). See also Schaffer (2010).

invokes the inherence relation. He writes in the so-called “Geometrical Exposition” of the *Meditations* in the Second Replies:

Substance. This term applies to everything in which immediately inheres [*inest*], as in a subject, or³⁵ by means of which exists [*per quam existit*], whatever we perceive. By ‘whatever we perceive’ is meant any property, quality or attribute of which we have a real idea. (AT 7.161/CSM 2.114)

This passage seems to manifest a commitment to the idea that substance is ontologically independent, and to inherence being an ontological dependence relation. Substance is that in which and by which a property or mode (Descartes’ preferred term) exists, whereas a mode exists in and by means of its substance.³⁶ Descartes here explicitly links this point about the ontological dependence of modes to inherence.³⁷ For Descartes, as for others in the Aristotelian tradition, including Spinoza (as discussed above), a mode exists by means of a substance insofar as it inheres in a substance. In other words, inherence entails ontological dependence.

Descartes also holds that ontological dependence is connected to a type of intelligibility, a conceptual relation of a piece with what Spinoza labeled ‘conception’ (conceiving-through). For Descartes, modes are intelligible only in terms of their substances (i.e., the things of which they are modes), upon which they depend. Consider, for example, this passage from the *Principles*:

[S]hape is unintelligible [*intelligi*] except in an extended thing; and motion is unintelligible except as in an extended space; while imagination, sensation and will are

³⁵ Although ‘or’ is a standard translation for the term ‘*sive*’ that appears here, this term usually indicates not a disjunction but an equivalence.

³⁶ Cf. the 9 February 1645 letter to Mesland: “[A] mode, or manner of being, cannot be changed without a change in that *in which or by which* it exists” (AT 7.163/CSMK 241; my emphasis).

³⁷ See, e.g., the Fourth Replies: “modes must inhere in something if they are to exist.” (AT 7.222/CSM 2.156) Cf. the Sixth Meditation (AT 7.79/CSM 2.55).

intelligible only in a thinking thing. (*Principles* 1.53, AT 8A.25/CSM 1.210)

That intelligibility is a conceptual relation is made clear when Descartes remarks in the

Comments:

[T]he nature of a mode is such that it cannot be understood [*intelligi*] at all unless the concept of the thing of which it is a mode is involved in its [the mode's] own concept.

(AT 8B.355/CSM 1.301)³⁸

Conversely, Descartes seems to think, a substance need not be conceived through another entity, either another substance, as evidenced by his view that “we can clearly and distinctly understand one [substance] apart from another”, or through a mode, as evidenced by his view that “we can clearly and distinctly perceive substance apart from the mode which we say differs from it.”

(*Principles* 1.61-62; AT 8A.28-30/CSM 1.213-14)

So far, then, Descartes and Spinoza seem to be in agreement: modes, which ontologically depend on a substance, both inhere in and are conceived through a substance; a substance, which is ontologically independent, is neither in nor conceived through any other entity. That is,

Descartes appears to endorse both of the following claims:

(ODR-1) If x is conceived through y , then x ontologically depends on y .

(ODR-2) If x inheres in y , then x ontologically depends on y .

Let us now turn to causation. Here I think that the agreement ends. Descartes does not think, as Spinoza does, that causation implies a kind of conceptual relation (viz., intelligibility or conception) that entails ontological dependence—as we saw in section 3, this is Spinoza's route, via (ODR-1) and (Link-c), to the conclusion that causation entails ontological dependence, as in

³⁸ Cf. *Principles* 1.48, 53 and 61 (AT 8A.22-30/CSM 1.208-14); the 19 January 1642 letter to Gibieuf (AT 3.475/CSMK 202); and Sixth Replies (AT 7.444/CSM 2.299). See also Garber (1992, chapter 3, especially pp. 68-70).

(ODR-3). An alternative route to (ODR-3) is via (ODR-2) and the following link:

(Link-d) If x is caused by y , then x inheres in y .³⁹

But it, too, is a road that Descartes does not travel: he does not think that causation entails inherence. Let me explain each of these points in turn.

First, Descartes does not think that an effect is always conceived through its cause, or vice versa. That is to say, from the perspective of intelligibility—with respect to understanding or conceiving an entity—causal relations are not always relevant. This point has been well-documented in the literature on specific types of Cartesian causation (body-body, mind-to-body, and body-to-mind), each of which has been argued to hold without there being conceptual relations between the cause and the effect.⁴⁰

Descartes seems to reaffirm this view in the Second Replies. In the course of discussing the claim that God's concept includes necessary existence, Descartes writes:

[I]t may be, with respect to a given thing, that we understand there to be nothing in the thing itself that precludes the possibility of its existence, while at the same time, from the causal point of view, we understand there to be something that prevents its being brought into existence. (AT 7.152/CSM 2.108; cf. AT 7.162/CSM 2.114)

Immediately before this passage, Descartes considers cases in which the *concept* of an entity entails its merely possible (or contingent) existence (unlike the case of God, whose concept entails his necessary existence, or that of a round square, whose concept entails its impossible

³⁹ This claim was already mentioned above, in note 24, as one that Spinoza plausibly endorses.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Loeb (1981, chapters 3-4), Wilson (1999), Della Rocca (2008c), and De Rosa (2013). Loeb and Wilson both explicitly compare Descartes and Spinoza on this point, noting in each case that the entailment expressed by Spinoza's causal axiom (from causation to conception) is not one that Descartes would accept—nor is it something that he is inadvertently committed to, even on the strength of his infamous causal principle that “there must be at least as much in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause” (AT 7.40/CSM 2.28). Della Rocca and De Rosa also note that Descartes' principle does not commit him to this entailment, although they do not draw a contrast to Spinoza's causal axiom.

existence). So it is plausible to see him as concerned with concepts here as well. In some cases the concept of a thing includes the possibility of its existence, but excludes what brings it into existence (or what prevents it from existing)—it does not settle what is the case “from the causal point of view.”⁴¹ If this is right, then Descartes recognizes a gap between the causal point of view and what we might call the conceptual point of view; thus he does not accept the claim, in (Link-c), that causation entails conception. So he can accept (ODR-1), which links conception with ontological dependence, without thereby accepting the thesis, in (ODR-3), that causation entails ontological dependence.

Turning now to the second point, Descartes also does not seem to accept that there is the intimate link between causation and inherence specified by (Link-d), which, together with (ODR-2), would entail (ODR-3). If he did, then all cases of causation for Descartes would be between a substance and its own modes. Yet it is universally acknowledged that Descartes allows for some cases of causation that do not fit this label: for example, God creating substances; bodies generating, corrupting, or moving other bodies; the human mind moving the body; and the body giving rise to sensations in the mind.⁴² Given this, Descartes should be read as accepting (ODR-2), which links inherence with ontological dependence, without thereby

⁴¹ Cf. *Principles* 2.25 and 37 (AT 8A.53, 62 /CSM 1.233, 240-1), where the same basic point is made regarding the particular case of motion.

⁴² For evidence that Descartes endorses body-body causation see, e.g., *Discourse* 5 (AT 6.44-56/CSM 1.133-9), *Principles* 2.37 (AT 8A.58-9/CSM 1.237-9), the letter to Silhon of March-April 1648 (AT 5.135/CSMK 330), the letter to More of August 1649 (AT 5.403-4/CSMK 381), and *The World*, chapter 7 (AT 11.37-8/CSM 1.93). For mind-body causation, see, e.g., the Sixth Meditation (AT 7.88/CSM 2.60-1); *Passions* 1.41-44 (AT 11.359-62/CSM 1.343-4), and the letters to More of 15 April 1649 (AT 5.347/CSMK 375) and August 1649 (AT 5.403-4/CSMK 381). For divine causation, see the letter to Elizabeth of 6 October 1645 (AT 3.314/CSMK 272), *Principles* 1.51, cited in section 1, and additional passages cited in note 48 below. Of course, most of these cases are open to debate, and there are scholars who deny that one or perhaps more of them are genuine cases of Cartesian causation. For example, some deny that Descartes endorses body-body causation, reading him instead as an occasionalist in that realm, as in Garber (1992). Others deny that he endorses body-to-mind causation—or, at least, efficient transient causation, as in Nadler (1996). But no scholar, or at least none I know of, claims that *none* of them is a genuine case of causation for Descartes; yet this would have to be the case if Descartes held that causation entails inherence, as in (Link-d).

accepting the thesis, in (ODR-3), that causation entails ontological dependence.

Of course, it might be objected that Descartes' acceptance of cases of causation without inherence, as well as cases of causation without conception, does not manifest Descartes' rejection of (ODR-3), but is rather a symptom of his less than fully consistent commitment to it. This objection will seem attractive to proponents of the familiar story with which we started. The story, we saw, arose in part from Descartes' characterization of substance in *Principles* 1.51 as “a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence” and the accompanying distinction between God, which depends “on no other thing whatsoever”, and created substances, which “can exist only with the help of God's concurrence.” The latter distinction in particular has led many readers to interpret Descartes' characterization of substance in this passage to be first and foremost about causal independence.

However, although this causal interpretation (as we may call it) of *Principles* 1.51 is popular, it is not obligatory.⁴³ At least three other interpretations have been offered, partly due to dissatisfaction with inconsistencies, such as the one just mentioned, that the causal interpretation must ascribe to Descartes. Elsewhere I have discussed the relative merits and demerits of these interpretations of Descartes' characterization of substance, in the *Principles* and other passages.⁴⁴ Without rehearsing the suite of considerations in its favor, let me just state the interpretation I propose, and then indicate how it renders Descartes' characterization of substance consistent with his endorsement of cases of causation mentioned above, and with his rejection of (ODR-3).

The interpretation consists of two theses, the first concerning ontological dependence—the type of dependence that precludes substancehood—and the second concerning substance:

⁴³ The causal interpretation is endorsed by, e.g. Loeb (1981, 328), Markie (1994), Stuart (1999), and Secada (2000, 200). Further support for the causal interpretation is sometimes gleaned from the Synopsis to the *Meditations*.

⁴⁴ See [title redacted], where I also discuss the Synopsis passage mentioned in the previous note.

(NI-Dep) x ontologically depends on y if and only if (1) there is some relation R such that xRy , and (2) xRy by x 's nature but not by y 's nature.

(NI-Sub) x is a substance if and only if there is no entity y such that for some R , xRy by x 's nature but not by y 's nature.⁴⁵

The first thesis indicates Descartes' view that whether an entity is ontologically dependent hinges on its *nature*. The second applies this view to Descartes' characterization of substance as an ontologically independent being. According to this nature-based interpretation, as I call it, a substance is an entity that does not stand in any relation by its nature to any other specific entity.

This interpretation implies that an entity is a substance only if it does not stand in a causal relation to any other specific entity *by its nature*. A substance may (and generally does) stand in a causal relation to, and hence may be causally dependent on, other entities; it just cannot do so *by its nature*—a point that is corroborated by Descartes' discussion of “the causal point of view” in the Second Replies passage cited earlier, with its distinction between an entity's causes and what, by contrast, is “in the thing itself”. Insofar as causal relations do not hold by an entity's nature, its causal dependence does not threaten its status as ontologically independent, hence as a substance.⁴⁶

If this is correct, then Descartes does not view causation as an ontological dependence relation *in general*. But this leaves open the possibility that he views it as such *in particular cases*, specifically, in the case of divine causation, whereby minds and bodies—which, Descartes

⁴⁵ This approach is influenced by Lowe (2010).

⁴⁶ At this point it can naturally be asked whether Spinoza thinks that causal relations *do* hold by the nature of their relata, and if so, whether this difference from Descartes is at the root of their disagreement over (ODR-3). I briefly touch on this possibility, and other proposals as to what lies at the root of Descartes' and Spinoza's disagreement over (ODR-3), in the conclusion.

tells us, “can exist only with the help of God’s concurrence”—are causally dependent on God. Is this Descartes’ view?⁴⁷

There are good reasons to think that the answer is negative. Descartes’ discussions of the causal dependence of minds and bodies on God do not include the claim that such dependence belongs to the natures of minds and bodies.⁴⁸ Nor do they treat it as following from, or as a necessary consequence of, their natures (or what is known in the Aristotelian tradition as *propria*).⁴⁹ On the contrary, Descartes makes it clear that he views the causal dependence of minds and bodies on God as a necessary consequence of their natures *together with* other factors, concerning causation and time, that clearly do not belong to (or follow from) the natures of minds and bodies. We are told, first, that given that successive moments in time are distinct, a cause is required not only to bring something into existence but to conserve it in existence as well;⁵⁰ second, that one and the same cause must play both causal roles;⁵¹ third, and finally, that

⁴⁷ The relevant causal dependence is described by Descartes in the *Principles* as “concurrence”. Scholars differ as to what kind of divine causal contribution Descartes designates by “concurrence”: some limit it to the continuous conservation of entities in existence, along the lines of the position known as *conservationism* (identified most prominently with Durandus of Saint Porçain); others endorse a broader interpretation, on which it includes also God’s collaboration with created beings in bringing about natural effects in the world (along the lines of the position known as *concurrentism*, held by, among others, Aquinas and Suárez); yet others hold that Descartes’ position amounts to occasionalism, so that God is the *only* cause that brings about natural effects. In what follows I limit my discussion to concurrence understood as God’s conservation of created beings, though I believe that my comments apply *mutatis mutandis* for the other interpretations of concurrence. The main point I wish to make is that concurrence, however it is interpreted, does not belong to the natures of created substances, according to Descartes, but follows in part from other metaphysical factors external to their natures. For an overview of conservationism and concurrentism in the scholastic context, see Freddoso (1991); for a discussion of them as interpretive options with respect to Descartes, see, e.g., Gorham (2004) and Schmaltz (2008, especially chapter 3).

⁴⁸ Descartes argues for this causal dependence in several places, most prominently in the second (part of) the causal argument for God’s existence in the Third Meditation, where he claims that “the mere fact that I exist and have within me the idea of a more perfect being” can only be accounted for by the existence of God as my creator. See AT 7.48-51/CSM 2.33-35; cf. the First Replies (AT 7.107-9/CSM 2.77-79), Second Replies (AT 7.168-9/CSM 2.118-19), Fifth Replies (AT 7.369-70/CSM 2.254-5), and *Principles* 1.21 (AT 8A.13/CSM 1.200).

⁴⁹ For a related contemporary notion, see Fine (1995) on “consequential essence”.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., the Second Replies: “There is no relation of dependence between the present time and the immediately preceding time; and hence no less a cause is required to preserve something than is required to create it in the first place” (AT 7.165/CSM 2.116). Cf. the Third Meditation (AT 7.49/CSM 2.33) and First Replies (AT 7.109/CSM 2.78).

⁵¹ See, e.g., the Third Meditation: “[I]t is quite clear to anyone who attentively considers the nature of time that the same power and action are needed to preserve anything at each individual moment of its duration as would be

minds and bodies lack the power to play this dual role with respect to themselves.⁵² Of these contentions, it is only the third, if any, that can reasonably be viewed as invoking what belongs to (or follows from) the natures of minds and bodies. Yet the thesis that God must be the cause of minds and bodies follows only when all three of these contentions are conjoined. Given that Descartes nowhere asserts, or even considers, that the causal dependence of minds and bodies on God belongs to the nature of minds and bodies, and moreover, given that his argument for such dependence explicitly invokes factors wholly external to the natures of minds and bodies, it seems reasonable to view Descartes as holding that the causal relation between God and minds and bodies belongs to the natures of the relata no more than other causal relations do—which is to say, not at all. In all of these cases, the “causal point of view” remains external to the natures of the relata.⁵³

I conclude that there is no reason to view Descartes as committed to thinking of causation in general, or of divine causation in particular, as an ontological dependence relation, or of substance as causally independent. Accordingly, there is no reason to view Descartes as committed to an inconsistent position regarding minds and bodies, as per the familiar story, holding that they are both ontologically independent and ontologically (because causally) dependent. Spinoza and Descartes disagree about whether or not minds and bodies are

required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence” (AT 7.49/CSM 2.33); cf. *Discourse 5* (AT 6.45/CSM 1.133) and *Principles 2.42* (AT 8A.66/CSM 1.243). Scholars disagree about what it is about time that leads Descartes to this conclusion, as well as about whether conservation is the same action-*token* or merely the same action-*type* as creation. For helpful discussions, see Gorham (1994) and Schmaltz (2008, §§2.2.2-3).

⁵² See, e.g., the Second Replies: “I do not have the power of preserving myself” (AT 7.168/CSM 2.118); the contrast is with God, who “possesses such great and inexhaustible power that it never required the assistance of anything else in order to exist in the first place, and does not now require any assistance for its preservation” (First Replies, AT 7.109/CSM 2.78).

⁵³ I have constructed the argument in this paragraph under the supposition that Descartes endorses (NI-Dep) and (NI-Sub), as explained above. The argument would be more complicated without this supposition, but the modifications would not affect the central point that Descartes holds that divine causation plays by the same rules as other cases of causation, which I have argued do not entail conception of the effect through the cause.

substances, not because Descartes is committed to an inconsistent position and Spinoza does away with the inconsistency, but because Spinoza, but not Descartes, views causation as an ontological dependence relation.

6. Substance Equivocal?

Even if everything I have said thus far is granted, the familiar story might appear to gain independent support from a comment that Descartes makes, in *Principles* 1.51, immediately following his observation that “there is only one substance which can be understood to depend on no other thing whatsoever, namely God”:

Hence the term ‘substance’ does not apply *univocally*, as they say in the schools, to God and to other things; that is, there is no distinctly intelligible meaning of the term which is common to God and his creatures. (*Principles* 1.51, AT 8A.24/CSM 1.210)

This comment may seem to imply that by Descartes’ own admission, his position escapes inconsistency only by equivocating on the notion of substance: in the strict sense, there is only one substance; it is only in a second, more lenient sense of the term that there is a plurality of substances. If so, then the spirit (if not the letter) of the familiar story remains intact: Spinoza is more Cartesian than Descartes, because even if Descartes’ pluralism can be made consistent with the fundamental tenets of Cartesianism, Spinoza adheres to these tenets more faithfully than Descartes does by adopting only the strict—hence, univocal—notion of substance, which does not admit a plurality. For Spinoza, “there are no concessions”.⁵⁴

The appearance that Descartes’ comment provides independent support for the familiar

⁵⁴ The quotation is from Moore (2013, 45-6), also cited in note 5 above. The charge is popular; see, e.g., Woolhouse (1993, 23): “God is strictly the only substance for Descartes—it is by equivocation that we talk of ‘created substances’.” Perhaps some of the endorsements of the familiar story cited in section 1 can be read as charging Descartes with concessive equivocation rather than plain inconsistency.

story rests on two interpretative claims: first, that if the term ‘substance’ is non-univocal, but rather has two senses, then it must be equivocal; and, second, that of those two senses, one is strict and the other is more lenient, in the sense that the second relaxes the criterion for substancehood associated with the first. I will now argue that the appearance of support is illusory, for the first claim is not compulsory, and the second is mistaken.

Regarding the first claim, for the scholastics (“in the Schools”), univocity and equivocity were not viewed as exhaustive: a third option, that of analogy, was commonly acknowledged. In both cases, there is no “distinctly intelligible meaning of the term which is common” to all of its applications. In the case of equivocation, this is because the term applies in two or more *different and unrelated* (e.g., non-overlapping) senses, whereas in the case of analogy, this is because the term applies in two or more *different yet related* (e.g., partly but not wholly overlapping) senses.⁵⁵ Following Aquinas, key metaphysical terms such as ‘being’, ‘perfection’, and ‘substance’ were widely held—for example, by Thomas Sutton, Cardinal Cajetan, and Francisco Suárez—to apply to God and his creatures analogically rather than equivocally. It is not implausible that Descartes also viewed ‘substance’ as analogical rather than equivocal, and that it is to this traditional view that he is referring when he rejects the univocity of ‘substance’.⁵⁶ So the interpretative claim that it is equivocity that Descartes has in mind in *Principles* 1.51 is not

⁵⁵ See Ashworth (2013) on the history of the threefold distinction between univocity, equivocity, and analogy.

⁵⁶ Cf. Schmaltz (2000, 90): “From the perspective of those in ‘the Schools,’ however, Descartes’ denial that names for God apply univocally to creatures leaves open the question of whether such names apply ‘equivocally’ or rather ‘analogically.’” Schmaltz goes on to argue that Descartes holds that the term applies analogically. Secada, on the other hand, claims that Descartes endorses equivocation, though his argument for this interpretation is unconvincing. He writes (2006, 77): “[Descartes] does not, here or anywhere else, indicate that the term is applied analogically. He must, then, be read as stating that it is applied equivocally to God and creatures.” But Descartes also does not indicate that the term is applied equivocally, so the same reasoning could be used to argue that the term applies analogically instead. Marion (1991, 116) also endorses an equivocal reading, based on a more complicated line of reasoning that ascribes to Descartes a particular interpretation, and subsequent rejection, of Suárez’s position on analogy, as underwritten by a Scotist assimilation of analogy to univocity. However, to my mind Schmaltz makes a compelling point when he writes, in reply to Marion’s proposal, “there is little reason to think that Descartes had the sort of scholastic sensibility that would have been required to recognize [the Scotist position] there [in Suárez]” (2000, 93). Cf. Beyssade (1996), who also prefers analogy.

compulsory.

However, from the perspective of the familiar story, what is crucial is the second claim, according to which ‘substance’ applies to God in a *strict* sense and to minds and bodies in a *more lenient* sense. For it may be said that, whether the strict and lenient senses are related by equivocation or analogy, they remain two distinct senses, only one of which applies to whatever is genuinely a substance. The two senses can presumably be stated as follows:

Substance_{Strict}: A being that is ontologically independent of everything.

Substance_{Lenient}: A being that is ontologically independent of everything other than God.

Whereas God is a substance in the first sense, minds and bodies are substances only in the second sense: the former is ontologically independent of everything, without any exception (or concession), the latter are ontologically independent of *almost* everything, the one exception being God.

This second interpretative claim invites us to consider why we should construe Descartes’ comment in *Principles* 1.51 as expressing the view that minds and bodies are substances in the second but not in the first sense. In other words, why read him as holding that minds and bodies are ontologically dependent on God? The only reason, it seems, is that Descartes explains that they are not substances in the same “distinctly intelligible” sense as God because they are *causally dependent* on God (or, more precisely, on God’s concurrence, which is his act of conserving them in existence⁵⁷). Of course, to move from the causal dependence of minds and bodies on God to their ontological dependence on God assumes that Descartes holds that causal dependence entails ontological dependence—either in general, or at least in the specific case of divine causation. However, the discussion in the preceding section argued that this assumption is

⁵⁷ Recall note 47.

mistaken. If that argument is correct, it follows that the second interpretative claim, which posits the strict and lenient senses of ‘substance’ stated above, is mistaken as well.

To summarize, Descartes’ comment about the non-univocity of the term ‘substance’ in *Principles* 1.51 does not provide independent support for the familiar story. That is, it does not support the familiar story unless the assumption framing the familiar story—viz., that causal dependence entails ontological dependence—is already in place. Given this, the arguments provided in the previous section against that assumption preempt the current effort to defend the familiar story by drawing on Descartes’ comment about non-univocity.

We can go further. I believe Descartes’ comment may reasonably be interpreted in a way that not merely fails to independently motivate the assumption framing the familiar story, but is in fact incompatible with it. Just above I argued that it is not compulsory to interpret Descartes as holding that ‘substance’ is equivocal. Let me close this section by explaining how the term can be understood instead as analogical, in a way that chimes with the interpretation of Descartes offered in the previous section, and which makes clear the coherence and elegance of the resulting position. I will not attempt to show here that the analogical interpretation is correct; all that is needed for present purposes is that it is plausible.

On this interpretation, the two senses of substance can be stated as follows:

Substance_{Uncreated}: A being that is (1) ontologically independent of everything, and (2) causally independent of everything.

Substance_{Created}: A being that is (1) ontologically independent of everything, and (2') causally dependent on God.

Recall that a term is analogous when it applies in two different yet related senses, for example, when they partly but not wholly overlap. The two senses of substance just given overlap at a

crucial point, namely, (1).⁵⁸ It is this common component, which both equally share, that makes each notion a notion of substance. At the same time, the two senses are distinct, as each involves a component that the other lacks, namely, (2) or (2'). This entails that, as Descartes says in *Principles* 1.51, there is no “distinctly intelligible” sense of the term ‘substance’ that applies both to God and to created beings.⁵⁹

On this construal, it is not the case that one sense of ‘substance’ is “strict”, whereas a second sense of ‘substance’ is “more lenient”—at least not in a way that would vindicate the familiar story. Rather, there is one sense of ‘substance’ that applies to an important species of the genus substance (God), and a second sense of ‘substance’ that applies to another important species of that same genus (minds and bodies). It should be clear that to embrace the metaphysics that this construal describes is not to make any “concessions”, but rather to recognize a significant division among the plurality of substances that exist, according to Descartes.

Conclusion

The familiar story about the relation between Descartes’ and Spinoza’s metaphysics begins by observing, correctly, that Descartes and Spinoza agree that substance is ontologically independent, as in the Aristotelian tradition. However, this story fails to recognize that they

⁵⁸ This rendering of analogy is partly inspired by the discussion in Cross (2012) of analogy in Scotus. It should be noted, though, that many different variations of analogy were accepted by scholastic figures. See Ashworth (2013) for further discussion.

⁵⁹ It might be objected that this interpretation makes the term ‘substance’ univocal after all, having just one “distinctly intelligible” sense, given by (1)—it is just that among the entities that satisfy (1), some but not all happen to be causally independent. However, this does not follow. While the interpretation does provide an intelligible sense of the term ‘substance’ that applies to both God and created beings, that sense is not *distinctly* intelligible, because it is not intelligible independently of the two analogous senses, Substance_{Uncreated} and Substance_{Created}. In other words, the multiple distinct senses of the analogous term ‘substance’ must be understood as prior to its analogous, non-univocal sense. For relevant discussion of this type of analogy, see McDaniel (2010) and Brower (2014, §2.4).

disagree about which specific relations are ontological dependence relations, and in particular, whether causation is among them—hence, whether being created, and thereby causally dependent, precludes an entity from being a substance. I have argued that this oversight is rooted in oversight of a further disagreement about one of the premises in Spinoza’s argument for his position: namely, (Link-c), or the entailment from causation to conception, which Descartes does not accept.

In arguing that Spinoza’s path to substance monism in the *Ethics* is not based solely on Cartesian tenets, I have left open the possibility that there are other arguments Spinoza could have given for his rejection of Descartes’ pluralism, and if so, whether the premises of such arguments are, or follow from, principles to which Descartes is committed.⁶⁰ It is important to note, however, that this possibility—essentially one of rational reconstruction—arises for us only after the familiar story, which interprets Spinoza as actually reasoning from premises borrowed from Descartes, has been scrutinized and subsequently laid aside.

At the outset, I noted that the familiar story not only fails to do justice to the coherence of Descartes’ position, but that it also misses or obscures the innovation of Spinoza’s. If what I have argued is correct, then now, after rejecting the familiar story, we are in a position to ask questions, more clearly than the familiar story allows, about the philosophical origin or basis of Spinoza’s departure from Descartes, and to evaluate, more perspicuously than we could previously, answers that have been proposed in the literature. I will end with a few brief remarks about two of these proposals, before closing with a third, which highlights a thesis that has not to

⁶⁰ For example, I have not addressed the suggestion that for Descartes, minds and bodies are finite by their nature, and that being finite involves a relation to the infinite being, God. My own view is that whereas the second conjunct of the suggestion is true (as perhaps suggested in Descartes’ comment in the 23 April 1649 letter to Clerselier that “in order to conceive a finite being, I have to take away something from this general notion of [infinite] being” (AT 5.356/CSMK 377)), the first is false. However, I will not pursue this issue further here, though I plan to do so elsewhere.

my knowledge received detailed attention in the relevant literature.

One proposal, inspired by Samuel Newlands' interpretation of dependence relations in the *Ethics*, is that Spinoza adopts the entailment from causation to conception in (Link-c) because of its "metaphysical serviceability"—because it allows Spinoza to derive other positions (including substance monism) that he endorses.⁶¹ While this proposal is suggestive, it does not in my view offer a fully satisfying perspective on the disagreement between Descartes and Spinoza, to the extent that Descartes' rejection of (Link-c) also appears to be metaphysically serviceable—because it allows *him* to maintain other positions (e.g., substance pluralism, as well as the distinction between the causal and conceptual point of view) that *he* endorses. In effect, appealing to metaphysical serviceability does not answer but merely pushes back the question why Spinoza diverges from Descartes.

A second proposal, inspired by Michael Della Rocca's recent work on Spinoza and Spinozism, is that Spinoza's adoption of (Link-c) follows from his metaphysical rationalism, construed in terms of consistent and uncompromising employment of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Since causation and conception are both dependence relations, and since both (according to Spinoza) share all their important characteristics, there is reason to—and insufficient reason not to—assimilate them.⁶² However, I believe that this diagnosis is belied by what we have seen to be the coherence of Descartes' position, which obeys the Principle of Sufficient Reason insofar as there is (according to Descartes) a principled reason *not* to assimilate causation and conception, owing to a significant difference between them: conceptual relations do, whereas

⁶¹ Newlands (2010, 470): "I suggest [Spinoza's] motivation [for identifying various dependence relations, including causation with conception,] is based on an appeal to metaphysical serviceability: conceptual dependence monism provides Spinoza with a powerful way of consistently satisfying what he takes to be the demands of metaphysical perfection at work in our world."

⁶² Della Rocca (2008a, 44): "It's as if Spinoza is saying to Descartes: 'you have no good reason to separate these kinds of dependence, and if you do separate them, you are making causal relations unintelligible.'"

causal relations do not, belong to the nature of their relata.

A third proposal focuses on this last claim about causal relations and natures, whose significance is also suggested by the foregoing discussion. Perhaps Spinoza, unlike Descartes, holds that causal relations do belong to the nature of their effects—what we may call *a genetic view of natures*. To be sure, whereas I have argued that there is ample reason to interpret Descartes as rejecting this view, in the case of Spinoza, the matter is less clear-cut.⁶³ Let me suggest, then, that what is called for is further investigation into the nuances of Spinoza’s (possibly un-Cartesian) view of the connections between natures, causal relations, and substancehood.⁶⁴

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⁶³ Passages that suggest that this is Spinoza’s view include TIE §95 and Ep 60, in which Spinoza seems to espouse a genetic view of definition (for a helpful discussion of this view see Garrett (2003, chapter 6)); given the close connections between definitions and natures, it is plausible to infer from them a genetic view of natures as well. Passages that appear to suggest otherwise include E1p33s1 and E3p4d. What I am calling a genetic view of natures is importantly distinct from the view that an entity’s nature or essence is itself a causal power, or a “formal cause”—a view which some scholars have recently attributed to Spinoza (recall note 25). For example, the latter view does not entail that an entity’s nature includes causal relations in which this entity is the effect rather than the cause.

⁶⁴ [Acknowledgements redacted]

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