

**PANTHEISM IN SPINOZA, HEGEL, AND CONTEMPORARY
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION**

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A Thesis

*Submitted to the Faculty of Purdue University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of*

Doctor of Philosophy



Department of Philosophy
West Lafayette, Indiana
December 2019

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“What is a man but nature’s finer success in self-explication?”

-Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays, First Series, Art*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to all those that have helped this project come to fruition, in ways both large and small: to my partner Myra, whose encouragement and support in finishing this project, along with many conversations through the years, were integral in bringing this project to completion; to my committee members for stimulating conversations through the years, comments on drafts of this project, and challenging me in ways that helped to improve both my thinking and writing; to the faculty and fellow graduate students at Purdue University for spirited discussions about issues of existential import, and for helping to make me a better philosopher; to cross-country teammates of mine at the University of Notre Dame, for some of the most memorable extended philosophical discussions, had while running around South Bend; to others who encouraged me to finish this project, especially my parents Ken and Karen; and to various of my current colleagues at the Grand Canyon Trust who encouraged me in the final stages of this effort. This project is dependent upon these influences and many others, both known and unknown, and I am grateful for their confluence in my life and in this project.

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ABSTRACT

In this project I examine pantheistic views in the history of philosophy and advocate for pantheism as a philosophical position in contemporary philosophy of religion. I take pantheism to be the view that everything that exists constitutes a unity, and that that unity is divine. My contention is that what I call *rationalistic pantheism*, sufficiently articulated with the help of historical figures, is a position worthy of consideration in contemporary philosophy of religion and metaphysics and not merely as an historical artifact. Pantheism is usually not even considered as an alternative to the belief in the God of perfection theism, a perfect personal God. Often people see atheism as the only alternative to the perfect God of traditional theism. A primary aim of this project is to articulate a version of pantheism that is distinct both from perfection theism and atheism. I discuss in what way the rationalistic pantheist sees all of existence as forming a unity, and what it is about this unity that warrants calling it divine or God. Pantheism has a powerful tradition in the history of philosophy, and the rationalistic pantheism that I develop is based on the views of Spinoza, Herder, and Hegel. In the first three chapters I consider the views of each of these philosophers as distinct but closely related versions of pantheism. I attempt to provide a systematic and charitable account of each of their views while also considering objections to those views from various directions. In the final chapter I provide the basis for what I take to be the most plausible version of pantheism resulting from this historical analysis, which I call rationalistic pantheism. According to this view, God, or the divine, should be conceived of as an all-encompassing unity that exists necessarily, is radically independent, is structured in accordance with rational principles, and provides an explanatory basis for everything that exists. In addition, the recognition of the rational principles of existence on the part of rational agents such as human beings constitutes one of the highest achievements of this divine unity. I briefly consider additional argumentative resources that could support such a view, as well as what I take to be the distinct philosophical advantages of rationalistic pantheism over perfection theism. Ultimately, I think pantheism is worthy of serious consideration as a viable position both in philosophical debates, as well as in discussions of religion at large, providing a refreshing middle ground between traditional theism and atheism.

INTRODUCTION

My project stems principally from a dissatisfaction with the current categories and salient positions in contemporary philosophy of religion, a recognition of the viability of certain philosophical accounts of the nature of the divine in the history of philosophy, most notably from Spinoza and Hegel, and finally the conviction that these positions help to fill in what I take to be a significant gap in the contemporary landscape. Thus, in very broad strokes, what I aim to do is to explicate Spinoza's and Hegel's conceptions of God and to present a pantheistic framework that has roots in these thinkers and that is a viable alternative to the salient positions in contemporary philosophy of religion that is worthy of serious consideration. In this Introduction I first present the general framework of my project, followed by a brief description of each of the chapters.

I. General Framework

One of the first orders of business is to get clear on the terminology in play when talking about God/gods/the divine. The failure to do this can cause, and in certain instances I think has caused, an unnecessary murkiness in the related discussions. I intend to present the terms in play and specify in what way I am understanding them, and in turn how I think they should be understood in the debate at large. I am not interested in the merely semantic points, but in the philosophical ones, and think that the discussion of the philosophical positions can be aided by a greater clarity in terminology. So first, theism. I am taking theism to be the belief in the existence of at least one divine reality. So under the general rubric of theism is included polytheism, monotheism, deism, pantheism, etc. I recognize that this is not the way that 'theism' is usually taken in the

contemporary debate¹, but am suggesting its adoption because I think it captures positions such as polytheism, deism, pantheism, and certain kinds of monotheism; labeling these positions as versions of atheism because they fail to meet the requirements of a *certain kind* of theism seems clearly misguided. After all, they all include the commitment to at least some kind of divine entity. This sentiment is echoed by Paul Griffiths in an article entitled “Nontheistic Conceptions of the Divine”, which he begins by stating the following: “That there are nontheistic conceptions of the divine is at first sight a puzzling idea. To call something ‘divine’ is, after all, just to call it God, or at least to place it in close proximity to God”.²

William Rowe recognizes something like the distinction between the definition of theism that I am advocating and the definition that is prevalent in contemporary philosophy of religion when he distinguishes between wide and narrow theism:

By a ‘theist’ in the narrow sense I mean someone who believes in the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, supremely good being who created the world.
By a ‘theist’ in the broad sense I mean someone who believes in the existence of some sort of divine being or divine reality.³

Rowe’s distinction is, I think, very helpful, but should be sharpened up a bit. Rowe’s definition of narrow theism seems to be broadly the conception of God of traditional/orthodox monotheistic religious systems. However, I’m not sure that everything that he lists should be considered as essential to narrow theism. For one, what exactly is meant by ‘eternal’? Does it imply that God exists outside of time? Additionally, what if the world is ontologically dependent on God, but

¹ A representative example is the following definition given by Paul Draper: “Theistic supernaturalism (theism) =df. There exists a supernatural person who (timelessly or temporally) creates and sustains the natural world, acts in it, and is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect.” (Draper, Paul. “God, Science, and Naturalism.” *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*. Ed. William J. Wainwright. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 280.)

² Griffiths, Paul J. “Nontheistic Conceptions of the Divine.” *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*. Ed. William J. Wainwright. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 59.

³ Rowe, William. *Evil and Theodicy*. 1988. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*. Eds. Michael Peterson, et. al. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 325.

uncreated? What I think is the core of narrow theism is the belief in the existence of a perfect personal being, an independent, (at least partially) transcendent being who has a mind and is at least omniscient, omnipotent, and supremely good, but who may or may not have created the world *ex nihilo*, for instance. This kind of theism I call *perfection theism*. By conceiving of God as *personal*, I mean that God is minded, an agent, a self, in a way that is somewhat analogous to the way in which human beings are minded. I do not intend to give a full account of what it means to be personal, but a necessary condition for conceiving of God as a person, one that is crucial for my purposes, is that God is or has a mind among minds that are *not* part of the mind of God (e.g., yours and mine). If God is personal in something like the way we normally use the term, then God has a unique mental life that is limited in the sense of being distinct from the mental lives of others.

Paul Griffiths, in his article, “Nontheistic Conceptions of the Divine”, also makes a distinction between a kind of unrestricted theism and something like what I am calling perfection theism. Griffiths distinguishes between theistic and nontheistic conceptions of the divine. He characterizes the divine as “what is taken to be maximally and finally significant”.⁴ Griffiths’ conception of theism is roughly similar to Rowe’s narrow theism, both of which map on to the God of traditional/orthodox monotheistic religious systems, and he characterizes a nontheistic conception of the divine as one that departs from this general tradition.⁵ What I want to highlight from Griffiths’ account of the distinction under discussion is that at least certain nontheistic systems (in my terminology, non-*perfection* theistic) still include a commitment to something that is to be taken as most significant. Of course not all non-perfection theistic worldviews need include such a commitment, but it is perfectly consistent for a non-perfection theistic system to

⁴ Griffiths, p. 60.

⁵ Griffiths, pp. 59-60.

include such a commitment and to thus provide the basis for a form of religiosity. What I am particularly interested in in this project is not in the first place a non-perfection theistic *religious* system, but a philosophical, and in particular metaphysical system, that can potentially serve as the basis for a form of religiosity.

Given this distinction between theism broadly construed and perfection theism, there are two corresponding forms of atheism, one consisting of the denial of the existence of the God of perfection theism, which we might call perfection atheism, and the other consisting of the denial of any kind of divine being whatsoever, which I call categorical atheism, and which is analogous to Rowe's broad atheism.⁶ I do not intend to give an exhaustive list of what one would have to deny in order to qualify as a categorical atheist; what exactly one would have to deny depends upon the wide variety of different kinds of theism that one might march out. What I do intend to argue is that to be a categorical atheist one would at least have to deny the central claims of the kind of pantheistic framework that I intend to explicate. A further distinction that is pertinent to the distinction between theism and atheism is that between supernaturalism and naturalism. Here I only want to mention that the denial of the existence of anything supernatural does not automatically entail that one is a categorical atheist. That is, one may be a naturalist (in a certain sense) and still believe in the existence of a divine being.

Earlier I stated that pantheism is a species of theism, where theism is defined as not being restricted to any particular *kind* of divine being. I am taking pantheism to be the position that everything that exists constitutes a unity, and that this unity is divine or God. One initial thing to note is that there is a difference between pantheism conceived of as a metaphysical position and a kind of pantheistic religiosity. Here I am mainly concerned with pantheism as a metaphysical

⁶ "To be an atheist in the broad sense is to deny the existence of any sort of divine being or divine reality." (325). I prefer the term 'categorical atheism' only because I think it is more descriptive than 'broad atheism'.

position, although I do intend to briefly touch on the issue of religiosity in this context insofar as it is pertinent to the question of whether or not this unity is divine. Michael Levine, in his book *Pantheism: A non-theistic concept of deity*, claims that pantheism denies both that God is a person and that God is in some way transcendent to everything else that exists.⁷ Although I do not intend to go into the details here, I think both of these claims follow from the basic definition that I have given above. Thus according to pantheism God is non-personal (in the sense defined above) and wholly immanent. According to my definition of theism, however, this does not mean that pantheism is non-theistic or atheistic. Pantheism is non-perfection theistic or perfection atheistic, but not categorically atheistic, which should be clear from the fact that the pantheist believes in the existence of some kind of divine being or God as outlined above. There is a long history, however, of conceiving of pantheism as atheism, of which Spinoza is a significant catalyst. There is also a history, however, of seeing this identification of pantheism with atheism as misguided. For instance, the late 18th century German thinker Johann Gottfried Herder, in his dialogue, *God: Some Conversations*, questions how atheism and pantheism are possible in one and the same system.⁸ Speaking in relation to Spinoza specifically, Hegel is clear that labeling a philosophy that claims that God and only God exists as atheism is misguided.⁹ Interestingly even Levine, who makes clear already in the title of his book that pantheism is *non-theistic*, claims that it is not *atheistic*.¹⁰

⁷ Levine, Michael P. *Pantheism: A non-theistic concept of deity*. London: Routledge, 1994, p. 28.

⁸ Herder, Johann G. *Gott. Einige Gespräche. Johann Gottfried Herder Werke. Band 4. Schriften zu Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst, und Altertum 1774-1787*. Ed. Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994, p. 686.

⁹ Hegel, G.W.F. *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*. Vol. I. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970, §50, p. 134. (Hereafter referred to as *Enzyklopädie Logik*)

¹⁰ Levine, p. 6. This is reminiscent of the terminology of Griffiths discussed earlier. I think it is turns of phrase like this (that *pantheism* is *non-theistic*) that obviously call for a rethinking of how these terms are used.

My contention is that a certain kind of pantheism, sufficiently articulated with the help of historical figures, is a position worthy of consideration in contemporary philosophy of religion and metaphysics and not merely as an historical artifact. Such a position is often overlooked as a viable alternative to the current salient positions, which I maintain has resulted in a significant gap in the current landscape that I think my project can draw attention to and help to fill. One of the first challenges that arises is to provide a coherent and plausible account of the divine or God that differs from perfection theism. I maintain that the kind of pantheistic framework that I explicate through these historical figures can successfully do this. This framework attempts to access truths about the divine through reason alone, or philosophically. Furthermore, it is naturalistic, and consistent with a basically scientific worldview. Depending on where one wants to place the emphasis, such a view could be characterized as a kind of immanent idealism or rationally-structured materialism. One of the key benefits of such a view is that it does away with what are often seen as problematic ontological bifurcations, such as between the supersensible and sensible, the supernatural and natural, heaven and earth. Hegel for instance applauds the tendency to bring us back “from the abstract otherworldliness of God.”¹¹ Furthermore, the pantheistic framework that I intend to explicate can handle the existence of what we take to be evil better than perfection theism, and also seems to be able to utilize the resources of the Cosmological Argument.¹² Finally, in virtue of proceeding philosophically and by reason alone, pantheism doesn’t have to bite any bullets that include a commitment to the in

¹¹ Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Volume II: Determinate Religion*. Ed. Peter C. Hodgson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 532.

¹² For starters, pantheism is not burdened with the responsibility of getting from the conclusion of this argument to the attributes of the perfection theistic God, and this framework can be bolstered by the proof of a necessary being.

principle unintelligibility of God (mystery) or to the necessity of having to take a leap of faith to the belief in God.

In the previous paragraph I considered the first significant challenge to my project, to provide a coherent and plausible account of God that differs from perfection theism. The second significant challenge is to answer the following question: Supposing that everything that exists does in fact constitute some kind of unity, why think that this unity is divine or God? This unity might be nothing more than the universe as a whole, for instance, and it sure isn't customary to apply the name 'God' to something like that. According to the pantheistic framework that I intend to present, this unity has the following characteristics, which I maintain together are sufficient for calling this unity God or divine:

1. It is the ontologically most fundamental thing in existence.
2. It exists necessarily.
3. It is independent, and any one thing taken in isolation is radically dependent upon the rest of the existence.
4. It is structured in accordance with rational principles, such as basic principles of logic and the laws of nature.
5. It is the explanans of everything that exists.
6. While its existence is consistent with naturalism, it is not consistent with a view that bottoms out in unintelligibility, randomness, disorder, meaninglessness, nihilism, etc.

In his article, "God, Science, and Naturalism", Paul Draper, in the context of speaking about metaphysical naturalism, considers the following hypothetical objection:

One might object that, on naturalism, one would not expect natural phenomena to have explanations of any sort, while on theism, one would expect explanations of some sort, naturalistic or supernaturalistic, and so the fact that explanations of any kind are available is evidence favoring theism over naturalism.¹³

The general assumption behind this objection is that it is unlikely that natural phenomena would have explanations given naturalism, but more likely given (perfection) theism. Regardless of

¹³ Draper, p. 299.

whether or not this is a good argument against metaphysical naturalism, I think it is clear that it doesn't have any traction against the kind of pantheistic framework outlined directly above.

Explanation of natural phenomena is built into this framework, and so perfection theism doesn't have a distinct advantage over pantheism on this score. Furthermore, if I'm right that this kind of pantheistic framework is consistent with metaphysical naturalism, the objection as presented would fail. At the very least, the objection betrays a failure to take into account the kind of framework that I am considering, which provides a plausible account of the explanation of natural phenomena based on a conception of the divine that is non-perfection theistic.

Paul Griffiths states that "resources that pose the question of how to understand what is maximally significant from outside the Christian tradition have yet to find a significant place in philosophy of religion."¹⁴ I think that part of the reason for the focus of contemporary philosophy of religion on the truth or falsity of perfection theism, or a position closely related to it, is due to the tradition of such a view in the history of philosophy and religion. It has an elaborate, powerful framework built up around it that helps to account for its plausibility. Many people nowadays do not recognize any plausible option for belief in a God other than the God of perfection theism, or something closely related to it. As a result, it is common that when someone finds perfection theism ultimately unsatisfying, that person becomes what I have called a categorical atheist. In such a case they have swung on the pendulum to the opposite extreme of the spectrum of possible conceptions of God, and perhaps unjustifiably so in virtue of not considering the possibility of a conception of the divine that falls between perfection theism and categorical atheism. I think that pantheism has a powerful tradition of its own as illustrated by a consideration of the views of Spinoza, Herder, and Hegel, and that it is high time that such a

¹⁴ Griffiths, p. 61.

position be shown to be viable, not only in contemporary philosophy of religion, but for the religious landscape at large.

II. Chapter Summaries

I intend to begin the task of making headway towards providing a plausible pantheistic position by explicating and evaluating Spinoza's conception of God in the first main chapter of this project. For Spinoza, God is identical to Nature. By Nature Spinoza does not mean only the (regrettably decreasing) havens for the flourishing of plants, animals, and ecosystems as a whole. Rather, Nature is all of being, including plants and animals, but also skyscrapers and landfills. According to Spinoza God, or Nature, is a substance, which he thinks entails that God is radically independent and is thus the only substance, exists necessarily, and is infinite. An integral part of Spinoza's pantheism is that whatever exists, exists as a part of God and is dependent upon God for its existence. Particular things, which Spinoza calls modes, are affections of the attributes of God, ways in which God's nature is expressed in a particular way. These claims regarding particular things, or modes, apply to human beings just as much as to any other determinate, limited thing. Also integral to Spinoza's conception of God is his necessitarianism. According to Spinoza, everything that happens does so necessarily; things couldn't have been other than they in fact are. Understanding the order and connection of causes in Nature provides one with an explanation of *why* things are the way they are and is what constitutes human knowledge of God. Spinoza thinks that such knowledge is deserving of the appellation 'divine', and is the highest good and greatest blessedness of human beings. Thus for Spinoza the human being is a part of God and can come to know the nature of God, and itself, through reason. Finally, Spinoza himself doesn't think that the view of God he presents amounts

to a kind of atheism (as some would have it). For instance, in the *Theological-Political Treatise* he speaks of atheism disparagingly, and takes himself to be strengthening true religion.

The second chapter of this project examines Immanuel Kant's critique of rational theology and the Pantheism Controversy in Germany in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* presents a significant challenge to a metaphysical account of the divine that attempts to proceed by way of reason alone, such as Spinoza's. Due in part to Kant's account of the empirically-conditioned structure of human cognition, he claims that we cannot have knowledge of what is not a possible object of experience, which for Kant includes God. However, Kant seems to have something like perfection theism in mind when speaking about 'God' in this context, and more particularly the Leibnizian account of God. In the wake of Kant's first critique there arose voices positing the viability of a pantheistic conception of God different from the more or less traditional conception considered by Kant. What I intend to argue is that unlike perfection theism, pantheism falls through the net of Kant's critique of rational theology and can hold in spite of that critique. One proponent of such a pantheistic conception was Johann Gottfried Herder in his dialogue *God: Some Conversations*. This work was one of the earliest responses to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's letters on Spinoza, wherein Jacobi claimed that Spinoza's philosophy, when rightly understood, amounts to atheism. Herder resists this claim of Jacobi's by advocating a pantheistic conception of God that has its roots in Spinoza. However, he modifies Spinoza's account in certain ways, most notably proposing a unification of the Spinozistic attributes of thought and extension. Herder departs further from Spinoza by labeling the necessity of the course of nature due to its internal rational structure as inherently good. Jacobi and Herder are two of the earliest voices in what has come to be called the Pantheism

Controversy, a debate in German philosophy about whether or not Spinoza's philosophy (and pantheism more generally) is a kind of atheism, which continues on up through Hegel's thought.

The third chapter examines Hegel's conception of God or the Absolute, and is the final historical position that I intend to explicate towards the end of providing what I take to be the most plausible pantheistic position. Hegel defines the Absolute as all reality. God, according to Hegel, is not such that something exists that is external to God; there is no "other" to God, no remnant of reality that is left over once one has taken full consideration of God. Thus given my definition of pantheism as the position that everything that exists constitutes a unity, and that this unity is divine or God, Hegel is a kind of pantheist. He even claims that philosophy itself "is nothing else but a study of the definition of unity".¹⁵ According to Hegel, nature is a part of God, and it is part of the essence of the divine that nature become spirit, that nature achieve self-consciousness through the rational activity of human thought. The principal characteristic of God that Hegel takes as distinguishing his conception of God from Spinoza's is conceiving of God not merely as substance, but also at the same time as subject, which is closely connected to Hegel's requirement that God be conceived of as self-conscious. One of the questions that I intend to adjudicate is what exactly Hegel's conception of subjectivity is in this context, and how this relates to the account of personhood that I presented previously. More generally, I intend to explicate Hegel's criticisms of Spinoza's conception of the divine, and to delineate similarities and differences between these two thinkers' account of God.

My intention is for the previous three chapters to be historical and interpretive, mainly attempting to explicate the views of these historical thinkers, and in the cases of Herder and Hegel especially, to explicate their criticisms of their predecessors. My intention in the

¹⁵Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Volume I: Introduction and the Concept of Religion*. Ed. Peter C. Hodgson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 379.

concluding chapter is to provide a plausible, philosophically rigorous framework of pantheism for consideration in contemporary philosophy of religion, which has its roots in these historical thinkers. The pantheistic framework that I intend to explicate is that which I presented above in my discussion of the general framework of my project, but informed and filled out by the insights gleaned from my analysis of these historical thinkers. I call the resulting view rationalistic pantheism: God, or the divine, should be conceived of as an all-encompassing unity that can be characterized as rationally-structured Being, which exists necessarily, is radically independent, and is the explanans of everything that exists. With the main thrust of my project complete, I close this concluding chapter by briefly considering three topics relevant to the further development of my pantheistic account into realms that are beyond the scope of this project, but which might be undertaken more systematically in future work. I first consider additional argumentative resources, beyond those considered in my historical analysis, that might be marshalled in support of rationalistic pantheism. Next I outline what I take to be the distinct philosophical advantages of this basic version of pantheism over perfection theism. And lastly, while the main thrust of my project has focused on pantheism as a philosophical position, I consider the relation between such a position and religiosity. Ultimately, I think pantheism is worthy of consideration as a viable position both in philosophical debates, as well as in discussions of religion at large, both of which I hope to advance with my project.

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CHAPTER 1: SPINOZA & PANTHEISM

Spinoza is perhaps the most likely candidate in the history of western philosophy to be associated with the term pantheism by anyone with a basic knowledge of that history. Given the definition of pantheism that I have adopted and given in the Introduction, namely, that pantheism is the belief that everything that exists constitutes a unity, and that this unity is divine, I take it to be relatively uncontroversial that Spinoza is a pantheist. Spinoza believes that there is only one independent entity (in his terminology, one substance), and that everything else that exists is a modification of, and thus part of, that one substance, which Spinoza calls God or Nature. I first lay out this basic concept of God/Nature, followed by the parts of Spinoza's philosophical system that particularly highlight his pantheistic commitments. I next consider three aspects of his philosophical system that are central to his pantheism: Spinoza's necessitarianism, the relation between the attributes of Thought and Extension, and the human project of knowing God/Nature and immortality, the last of which comprises the culmination of his masterpiece, *Ethics*. Subsequently I explicate Spinoza's claims regarding good and evil and teleology, both because of their role in Spinoza's system itself, and also because of their relevance to a consideration of pantheism in contemporary philosophy of religion. Finally, I present Spinoza's own views on the relation between pantheism and atheism, an issue that is at the heart of this project, and that was to be extensively dealt with in 18th and 19th century German philosophy. Thus this chapter is in the main meant to provide an overall sketch of Spinoza's position regarding the nature of the divine, but not the detailed arguments for all of the facets of his position just mentioned; such a treatment would far outstrip the scope of this chapter. I have decided to treat those aspects of Spinoza's system that are most relevant to his pantheism, and to the general trajectory of my project as a whole, and in such a way as to provide a comprehensive

overview of his account of pantheism. This account serves as the first primary candidate for the kind of philosophically defensible pantheistic position outlined in the Introduction.

I. Basic Concept of God/Nature

One of the most basic characterizations of God/Nature for Spinoza is that it encompasses all of reality. In his early work, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza says the following regarding what he there calls the origin of nature: “this entity is unique and infinite; that is, it is total being, beyond which there is no being.”¹⁶ In another early work, which can be seen as a precursor to his masterpiece *Ethics*, entitled *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, Spinoza states that God is “all that is Anything”.¹⁷ So Spinoza seems to be identifying God with being, with all that exists; God encompasses all of reality, and there is nothing that exists that is not a part of God. Interestingly, Spinoza also identifies God and Truth in the *Short Treatise*.¹⁸ Spinoza’s identification of God on the one hand with Being, Truth, and Nature on the other should be our first indication that Spinoza’s conception of God is quite unorthodox, and in particular that Spinoza’s conception of God is not likely to be personal in the sense outlined in the Introduction.

We get Spinoza’s full-blooded account of God in Part I of the *Ethics*, which is entitled “Concerning God”. Definition 6 of Part I reads: “By God I mean an absolutely infinite being, that is, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence.” Spinoza explicates this definition by adding: “if a thing is absolutely infinite,

¹⁶ Spinoza, Benedict de. *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. *Spinoza: Complete Works*. Trans. Samuel Shirley. Ed. Michael L. Morgan. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002, p. 21. All subsequent references to writings by Spinoza are from this edition.

¹⁷ *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* I.II, p. 40 fn. 6. Hereafter referred to as ‘*Short Treatise*’.

¹⁸ *Short Treatise* II.V, p. 68 and II.XV, p. 80.

whatever expresses essence and does not involve any negation belongs to its essence.”¹⁹ With this additional rider we get the explicit inclusion of everything that exists within the essence of God, which we saw in Spinoza’s two earlier works. However, in the *Ethics* we also see Spinoza characterizing God as a substance. A shorthand way of characterizing a substance according to Spinoza is that a substance is radically independent – it does not depend on anything else for its existence, and it is not influenced or acted on by anything external to it. Thus Spinoza states in Ip7 regarding a substance that “its essence necessarily involves existence; that is, existence belongs to its nature.”²⁰ In Ip11 Spinoza attempts to demonstrate that God, as defined in Id6 (and crucially in this context, as a substance), exists, and then in Ip14 that God is the only substance; that there cannot be any other substance besides God. So clearly Spinoza’s account of God meets the second and third criteria I mentioned in the Introduction for considering the pantheistic unity to be divine, namely that this unity is independent and exists necessarily. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I do not intend to give a comprehensive survey of Spinoza’s line of argument for these claims in the opening propositions of the *Ethics*; this has been ably done by many others. Instead I want to briefly focus on two particular aspects of this line of thought: the third proof that Spinoza gives for the existence of God in Ip11, and what can be called Spinoza’s substance monism.

In Ip11 Spinoza himself labels and provides three different proofs for the existence of God, and can also be taken as offering a fourth directly following the third, in the Scholium.²¹ The third proof is the only one that includes an a posteriori premise; the others are a priori, and can be taken to be broadly based on an Ontological Argument in the tradition of Anselm and

¹⁹ *Ethics* Id6, p. 217.

²⁰ *Ethics* Ip7d, p. 219.

²¹ See also Don Garrett’s “Spinoza’s ‘Ontological’ Argument.” *The Philosophical Review* 88.2 (1979): 198-223.

(particularly important for Spinoza) Descartes,²² and which employ Spinoza's own stipulative definitions. Spinoza himself seems to favor the Ontological over the *a posteriori* third proof (which can be taken as a version of the Cosmological Argument). It seems clear that Spinoza thinks his first, short proof, which is clearly ontological in nature, as definitive. Furthermore, following the third (a posteriori) proof, Spinoza states: "In this last proof I decided to prove God's existence a posteriori so that the proof may be more easily perceived, and not because God's existence does not follow a priori from the same basis."²³ Spinoza's third proof relies on the empirical premise that we (or I) exist, along with a strong version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), which for Spinoza requires in this case either that we exist necessarily or that we exist "in" something else that itself exists necessarily. I highlight Spinoza's third proof since, as I intend to explicate in Chapter 4, I think such a proof, or something similar to it, is the best candidate for establishing the existence of a necessary being, which one might in turn call divine or God (rather than for establishing the existence of the perfection-theistic God).

With Spinoza's claim that God is a substance, exists, and is in fact that *only* substance that exists, we arrive at what can be called Spinoza's substance monism. Spinoza's substance monism is at base the claim that only one substance exists; however, in order to appreciate the import of this claim, we have to provide an account of other "things" that exist, but that *aren't* substances according to Spinoza. These he calls modes, and substance and mode are the only categories of existent things. Modes are the affections of a substance, or the ways in which a substance expresses itself, and they are dependent both for their existence and for their essence

²² Spinoza himself wrote a work entitled *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*. Additionally, his library included many editions of Descartes, including a Dutch translation. For comparison, it included a single Latin edition of Aristotle, and nothing from Plato. See W.N.A. Klever's "Spinoza's life and works." *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*. Ed. Don Garrett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 51.

²³ *Ethics* Ip11s, pp. 222-223.

upon the substance of which they are a modification. According to Spinoza, there are infinitely many modes. Thus Spinoza is not a monist in every sense of the word, but is best characterized as a *substance* monist: there is only one *substance*, but there are infinitely many modes or things (such as human beings, trees, stones, stars, etc.).

It is important to keep in mind, however, that these infinitely many modes or things are radically dependent on the one substance, God/Nature. In spite of all being dependent on God/Nature, these modes can exhibit relative independence: human beings can be relatively independent as compared to other animals (due principally to their capacity to reason), which can in turn be relatively independent as compared to plants (for instance, in their capacity for locomotion), and so on. Other than God/Nature, human beings are the most independent things we know of; they still remain, however, radically dependent upon God/Nature (e.g. for their existence, for their genetic make-up, for the oxygen necessary for survival, etc.). It is the sentiment behind this notion of radical dependence that also lies at the basis of the following claim made by Spinoza in the *Short Treatise*: “‘part’ and ‘whole’ are not true or real entities, but only ‘things of reason,’ and consequently there are in Nature neither whole nor parts. A thing composed of different parts must be such that the parts thereof, taken separately, can be conceived and understood one without another.”²⁴ Real, robust parts of something must be able to be conceived through themselves, that is, they must be independent, and thus substances. But there is only one such thing, God/Nature, which encompasses all of reality; anything else is therefore a modification of the one substance that is nested within a matrix of interrelations with other modes, and is thus radically dependent in a host of ways. This dependence, which seems to be merely a dependence on other modes, also amounts to a dependence on substance, as should

²⁴ *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* I.II, p. 44.

become clear subsequently. This passage begins to shed light on Spinoza's account of the unity of all things, one of the two main components of pantheism, which I consider in the next section.

Thus far we've seen that according to Spinoza God/Nature encompasses all reality and exists necessarily, and that his view on God/Nature can be characterized as a *substance* monism.

Before examining more closely the pantheistic strands of his thought, I'd like to highlight two more aspects of Spinoza's concept of God/Nature: conceiving of God as infinite, and as non-personal. In Id6 of the *Ethics* Spinoza defines God as absolutely infinite, which he seems to think entails that God consists of infinitely *many* attributes, since he adds that each attribute individually expresses the infinite essence of God. However, in the explication of that definition, Spinoza seems to define absolute infinitude as including whatever expresses essence and does not involve any negation. There thus seem to be two (potentially) conflicting characterizations of the infinitude of God here: one according to which God has infinitely many attributes, and another according to which the essence of God includes whatever expresses essence or reality (however much or however many attributes that might amount to). Based on the rest of Spinoza's writings, he seems to favor and argue for the former, while holding that we human beings are only acquainted with two of those attributes, Thought and Extension.²⁵ As I shall attempt to argue subsequently, however, even by his own lights he need not accept this more ambitious characterization of the infinitude of God/Nature rather than the latter characterization.

Finally, Spinoza's conception of God/Nature is non-personal. In the Introduction I said that a necessary condition for conceiving of God as a person is that God is or has a mind among minds that are *not* part of the mind of God, and that this would mean that God has a distinct, unique

²⁵ For instance, see the following from *Short Treatise* I.I, footnote 3: "According to the foregoing consideration of Nature, we have so far not been able to discover more than two attributes only which belong to this all-perfect being....we find in us *a something* which openly tells us not only of more, but of infinite perfect attributes, which must belong to this perfect being before he can be said to be perfect." (p. 39)

mental life. Taking God and Nature as interchangeable terms should be one of the first clues that Spinoza denies personality in the sense in question to God, in addition to his claims that God can be identified with Being and Truth canvassed earlier. In Proposition 17 of Part I of the *Ethics* Spinoza famously says that “neither intellect nor will pertain to the nature of God.”²⁶ Just as I have been focusing on the use of the term ‘person’ as we normally use it, Spinoza has the normal use of ‘intellect’ (and ‘will’) in mind in this statement. Later in Part I of the *Ethics*, he says: “By intellect...we do not understand absolute thought, but only a definite mode of thinking which differs from other modes such as desire, love, etc., and so must be conceived through absolute thought—that is, an attribute of God which expresses the eternal and infinite essence of thought”.²⁷ I deal with Spinoza’s complex account of the attribute of Thought and the modes of that attribute subsequently; however, without going into those details here, it is clear from this passage that Spinoza is denying to God the possession of specific, determinate modes of Thought that differ from other modes. In other words, he is denying to God the kind of mental life that humans (and other beings) experience. He does not want to deny the attribute of Thought (in this passage ‘absolute thought’) to God, for this attribute expresses God’s essence. Spinoza is denying to God a unique mental life made up of particular, unique modes of Thought that is different from another collection of such modes, but in fact thinks that all modes of Thought together express the essence of God in a particular way (in a *mental* way, as opposed to in an *extended* way). Thus, it might turn out that for Spinoza the amalgamation of every mode of Thought makes up the ‘mind’ of God. However, due to the failure of this characterization to meet my necessary condition for personhood, as well as to the fact that (as I shall attempt to argue) modes of the attribute of Thought, when rightly conceived, lack any phenomenal

²⁶ *Ethics* Ip17s, p. 228.

²⁷ *Ethics* Ip31d, p. 235.

psychological experience, God is not personal according to Spinoza. And I think this would hold not just based on my own stipulative definition, but by Spinoza's own lights as well.

II. Pantheism

A commitment to pantheism includes both the claim that everything that exists constitutes a unity, and that this unity is in some sense divine. Spinoza's characterization of God/Nature as encompassing all of reality already strongly gestures in the direction of pantheism, but it remains to flesh out the particular nature of Spinoza's pantheism, in particular, in exactly what way everything that exists constitutes a unity. Ip15 from the *Ethics* reads: "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God."²⁸ By the 'whatever is', aside from God (the only substance), Spinoza has modes in mind.²⁹ This is a restatement of the radical ontological dependence of all things on God addressed earlier. In Part I Spinoza goes on to write:

"Particular things are nothing but affections of the attributes of God, that is, modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way."³⁰ Thus, modes are not merely dependent upon God for their existence and their essence; they also express the attributes of God in a particular way, attributes which in turn constitute the essence of God.³¹ So modes are particular, determinate expressions of God's nature. So it follows that we can find out about the nature of God, gain knowledge of God, through these particular modifications: "The more we understand particular things, the more we understand God."³²

In the earlier *Short Treatise*, Spinoza states the following with respect to God: "he is an *immanent*, and not a *transuent cause*, since all that he produces is within himself, and not outside

²⁸ *Ethics* Ip15, p. 224.

²⁹ See the Demonstration of *Ethics* Ip15, p. 224.

³⁰ *Ethics* Ip25c, p. 232.

³¹ See *Ethics* Id4.

³² *Ethics* Vp24, p. 374.

him, because there is nothing outside him.”³³ According to Spinoza, the way in which God is the cause of particular things, or modes, is not in such a way that God affects things that are outside of, or other than, God, such as according to a conception of God where God creates the world, and the world is not to be identified with God, for instance. God is instead an immanent cause, since the causality of God takes place wholly ‘within’ God, rather than being communicated from God to something else.³⁴ In addition to what might be called this top-down characterization of his pantheism, with an emphasis on the dependence of all things on God, Spinoza also offers characterizations of God/Nature in terms of finite things or modes: “the universal power of Nature as a whole is nothing but the power of all individual things taken together”.³⁵ Additionally, reaffirming the interpretation of God/Nature as non-personal according to Spinoza presented earlier, in the *Short Treatise* Spinoza writes that “to God no modes of thought can be ascribed except those which are in his creatures”.³⁶ These passages, from both a top-down and bottom-up perspective, point to a tight identification between God/Nature and particular finite things or modes. With this identification in place, we can pick up on the issue of the dependence of modes flagged earlier. I said that this dependence can seem to be merely a dependence on other modes, but that it also amounts to a dependence on substance itself. For Spinoza substance just is the collection of the totality of modes, and there is no entity upon which modes can be dependent once one has abstracted away from all individual modes. So an individual mode is

³³ *Short Treatise* I.III, p. 50.

³⁴ Compare the following passage from a letter of Spinoza to Henry Oldenburg from 1675, with an interesting elaboration: “I entertain an opinion on God and Nature far different from that which modern Christians are wont to uphold. For I maintain that God is the immanent cause, as the phrase is, of all things, and not the transitive cause. All things, I say, are in God and move in God, and this I affirm together with Paul and perhaps together with all ancient philosophers, though expressed in a different way”. Letter 73, p. 942.

³⁵ *Theological-Political Treatise* Chapter 16, p. 527.

³⁶ *Short Treatise* II.XXIV, p. 96.

dependent on the rest of the totality of the modes for both its existence and its essence, and this complex taken as a unified whole just is substance.

Spinoza explicitly affirms this tight identification between God/Nature and modes in the context of particular doctrines. Spinoza states that human love towards God (to be dealt with at length below) is “an activity whereby the mind regards itself... that is, an activity whereby God, insofar as he can be explicated through the human mind, regards himself...”.³⁷ Here a particular activity of the human mind can also be considered as an activity on the part of God; the human mind is here a vehicle for the activity of God, or, as it was characterized previously, a particular way in which the essence of God/Nature is expressed. Additionally, regarding his conatus doctrine, Spinoza states: “The power whereby each single thing, and consequently man, preserves its own being is the very power of God, or Nature”.³⁸ These passages are intended to make it clear not only that all things constitute a unity, that can be labeled ‘God’, but also the particular nature of the unity between God and particular things. All things are part of God in such a way that they express the essence of God in a particular way. Furthermore, God is an immanent cause, not being related to particular things as external to itself. Nor is it the case that when one has taken full account of the totality of modes there is something additional left over that pertains to the essence of God alone. Instead God and the totality of modes completely coincide in such a way that the essence of the unity, in Spinoza’s case the one substance, is exhaustively expressed by the totality of its particular modifications.

³⁷ *Ethics* Vp36d, p. 378.

³⁸ *Ethics* IVp4d, p. 324. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza characterizes the conatus or striving present in Nature as the providence of God, including both general and special providence. See Chapter V, p. 53.

III. Necessitarianism

A crucial component of Spinoza's pantheistic system is his necessitarianism – the view that it is impossible that things could have been any other way than they in fact are; in other words, there is only one possible world. Spinoza's necessitarianism is integral to his pantheism for a few reasons: Firstly, as with everything else by Spinoza, this doctrine is grounded in the essence of God/Nature. Additionally, this doctrine governs the activities of all modes – human beings as well as stones – and has important implications for Spinoza's ethics, for his prescriptions on how to become virtuous, free, and happy, and for the love of God, which as I intend to argue is to be characterized as a kind of religiosity for Spinoza. Spinoza ties his necessitarianism to some of the views explored earlier in the section on pantheism in the following excerpt from Ip15s: “All things...are in God, and all things that come to pass do so only through the laws of God's infinite nature and follow through the necessity of his essence.”³⁹ That is, God's essence is necessarily the way it is (along with the fact that it includes existence), and everything that takes places follows from the essence of God in accordance with fixed laws. Spinoza goes on in Ip17s to write that “from God's supreme power or infinite nature an infinity of things in infinite ways—that is, everything—has necessarily flowed or is always following from that same necessity.”⁴⁰ Thus, since the essence of God is necessary, and everything is radically dependent on God according to Spinoza's pantheism, whatever follows from God's essence is just as necessary. This latter excerpt is another place where the ambiguity of Spinoza's conception of infinity addressed earlier shows itself. It need not be the case that an account of *everything* includes infinitely many *things* (which I take to refer to modes), nor that such things are conceivable in infinitely many *ways* (which I take to refer to the attributes).

³⁹ *Ethics* Ip15s, p. 227.

⁴⁰ *Ethics* Ip17s, p. 228.

If there is any doubt about whether or not Spinoza is a necessitarian in the early stages of Part I of the *Ethics*, he makes his position eminently clear in the later propositions of that Part. Proposition 29 reads: “Nothing in nature is contingent, but all things are from the necessity of the divine nature determined to exist and to act in a definite way”,⁴¹ and is followed shortly by Proposition 33: “Things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order than in the case.”⁴² What might justify Spinoza’s commitment to the claim that not only is the world deterministic, but also that no other world or order of nature other than the actual one is possible? One of the principal grounds for this commitment is given in the demonstration of Ip33: “if things could have been of a different nature or been determined to act in a different way so that the order of Nature would have been different, then God’s nature, too, could have been other than it now is”.⁴³ That is, if something in nature had been different than it in fact is, and everything necessarily follows from the essence of God, then it would have to be the case that God’s nature would also be different than it in fact is. What this justification makes clear is also Spinoza’s reliance on one of the other principal grounds for his commitment to necessitarianism, the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). Broadly construed, a strong version of the PSR, which Spinoza seems to adopt, at least requires that there be a reason or explanation or cause for the existence of each thing as well as for the particular way in which each thing exists and is related to other things.⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Ethics* Ip29, p. 234.

⁴² *Ethics* Ip33, p. 235.

⁴³ *Ethics* Ip33d, p. 236.

⁴⁴ I say ‘at least’ since Spinoza requires that there be a cause or reason for the *nonexistence* of things as well. See the beginning of the second proof of God’s existence in *Ethics* Ip11: “For every thing a cause or reason must be assigned either for its existence or for its nonexistence.” (p. 222). It seems to me that this rider about the nonexistence of things is unnecessary, however. If one had a full explanation of the entirety of nature, which would include the reasons or causes for both the existence of everything and for the nature and interrelations of those things, then the reasons or causes for the *nonexistence* of things would be included in that full explanation. It wouldn’t be required to offer additional reasons for these nonexistent things; one could read off the reason for their nonexistence from the full explanation of nature already in hand (hypothetically, of course).

One might ground a commitment to determinism on a strong version of the PSR, but still think there are other possible worlds, as Leibniz did, perhaps strongly motivated by a desire to avoid the consequences of Spinoza's own necessitarianism. Spinoza seems to think, however, based on the passage from Ip33d quoted above, that a commitment to a strong version of this principle not only leads to determinism, but also to necessitarianism. We can imagine Spinoza charging Leibniz as being committed to the claim that God's nature could have been different than it in fact is, *if* it is true that the order of nature could have been different than it in fact is. For, on Leibniz's picture, what could have been the reason or cause of God's selection of a possible world different from the actual one to instantiate? Supposing that there must be such a reason or cause, it could be nothing other than God himself having a different nature, which would in turn serve as the cause or reason for the instantiation of a different world. Short of this, there would be no reason for such an instantiation, the PSR would be flouted, and we'd be saddled with a capricious God, a consequence that Leibniz clearly wants to avoid.⁴⁵

This commitment on Spinoza's part to a strong version of the PSR helps to further elucidate the issue of the dependence relation of modes on substance. Although modes might seem to be dependent merely on each other, a full explanation of the existence and essence of a particular mode, in accordance with Spinoza's version of the PSR, would require a full explanation of the universe or existence as a whole. And *this* explanation is just an explanatory account of substance as it relates to the role that the particular mode occupies; so this drive for a full explanation locates the dependence of a mode in substance, and not merely in a subset of the

⁴⁵ It seems clear that Leibniz's footwork that attempts to avoid necessitarianism by distinguishing between metaphysical and moral necessity would have no traction with Spinoza. The bottom line is that God (when taking into account his nature as a whole, i.e., both his intellect and his will on Leibniz's picture) could not have created another world than he in fact did; and the world that he did in fact choose to create is grounded in his nature, as being benevolent.

totality of modes. Therefore Spinoza also satisfies the fifth criterion stated in the Introduction for calling the pantheistic unity divine, namely that this unity is the explanans of everything that exists. Further, we are now in a position to see that Spinoza also satisfies the fourth and sixth criteria from the Introduction, which are that the unity is structured in accordance with rational principles, and that its existence is not consistent with an at bottom unintelligibility or inexplicability. Why Spinoza satisfies this sixth criterion is clear, as is his general commitment to the fourth; however, the details with respect to this fourth criterion are yet to be worked out, and the more specific nature of how God/Nature is structured in accordance with rational principles is dealt with in more detail in the following section.

Despite his strong commitment to necessitarianism, Spinoza also holds that God is free, and is indeed the freest being that there is. In the early *Short Treatise*, Spinoza writes the following regarding ‘true freedom’: “this is by no means what they think it is, namely, the ability to do or to omit to do something good or evil; but *true freedom is only, or nothing other than* [the status of being] *the first cause*, which is in no way constrained or coerced by anything else”.⁴⁶ Spinoza is not clear about what he means by ‘first cause’ in this context, but it is clear that his considered position in the *Ethics* is that God is not a first cause in a temporal sense. Given this definition of true freedom, Spinoza’s conception of God seems to qualify as free just in virtue of being a substance. In Id7 of the *Ethics* Spinoza offers an explicit definition of freedom and necessity: “That thing is said to be free [*liber*] which exists solely from the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself alone. A thing is said to be necessary [*necessaries*], or rather, constrained [*coactus*], if it is determined by another thing to exist and to act in a definite and determined way.”⁴⁷ Hence, given Spinoza’s substance monism, God is the only free being on

⁴⁶ *Short Treatise* I.IV, p. 52.

⁴⁷ *Ethics* Id7, p. 217.

this definition. Human beings cannot be free in the way that God is in virtue of being modes rather than a substance, and of being determined by something outside of themselves to be and to be the way that they are (at least in certain respects). Part V of the *Ethics* however, based on the title given it by Spinoza, purports to deal with human freedom. So although human beings cannot exercise the freedom of God/Nature, they can still achieve and exhibit a degree of freedom, just as they can be relatively independent in spite of being radically dependent upon God/Nature, as I stated in the first section of this chapter on the basic concept of God/Nature.

Thus Spinoza thinks that freedom and necessity can peacefully coexist, both for God and for humans (albeit a lesser degree of freedom when it comes to humans as compared to God). In a letter to Hugo Boxel, dated 1674, Spinoza writes: “That ‘necessary’ and ‘free’ are contraries seems no less absurd and opposed to reason. Nobody can deny that God freely knows himself and all other things, and yet all are unanimous in granting that God knows himself necessarily.”⁴⁸ This passage can be somewhat misleading, I think. It seems clear that Spinoza does not think that freedom and necessity are opposed, and he illustrates this point with God’s self-knowledge. As I attempted to argue previously, however, for Spinoza God/Nature is non-personal, and is thus not minded in the way in which human beings are minded. So if I’m right about that, it’s somewhat puzzling what the self-knowledge of God would amount to in Spinoza’s system. There seem to be three principal ways to construe Spinoza’s claim here that are consistent with my claim that God/Nature is non-personal according to Spinoza: God’s self-knowledge could refer to the attribute of Thought taken as a whole, or to human knowledge of God,⁴⁹ or Spinoza could just be canvassing the views of others who hold that God is personal in a more traditional

⁴⁸ Letter 56, p. 903.

⁴⁹ i.e., God’s knowledge of himself. See Vp36d, cited previously.

sense.⁵⁰ What is clear is that freedom and necessity are consistent according to Spinoza, as is confirmed in a letter to G. H. Schuller from 1674: “I place freedom, not in free decision, but in free necessity.”⁵¹

IV. Unity of Thought and Extension?

The relation between the Spinozistic attributes of Thought and Extension is a complex issue that is both germane to Spinoza’s own pantheistic system, and is relevant to the subsequent chapters of this project and their corresponding topics. As I have already mentioned, Spinoza holds that God/Nature consists of infinitely many attributes, but that we human beings are only aware of two of these, Thought and Extension. The particular issue having to do with the relation between these two attributes that I am concerned with here is the question of ontological priority: Is one of these two attributes ontologically prior to, or in some way more fundamental than, the other? And if so, which, and what exactly is the nature of this priority? If one answers the first question in the affirmative, there are two options: we might characterize the position that Thought is more fundamental as a kind of idealism (at least when only these two attributes are under consideration), and the position that Extension is more fundamental as a kind of materialism. Spinoza can be, and has been taken as both a kind of idealist and materialist by various philosophers. The distinction is crude at the moment; one might think that Spinoza is committed to the ontological priority of one of the attributes, but still think that the other attribute ‘obtains’ in some sense rather than being illusory or completely reducible to the other. We might label the

⁵⁰ For a parallel passage, see Letter 75 to Oldenburg, from 1675: “no one conceives that God is forced by some fate to understand himself; it is conceived that God understands himself altogether freely, though necessarily.” (p. 945) These passages, in light of their potential construals, do not seem to constitute strong evidence in favor of Spinoza holding that God is in fact personal, or of Spinoza going back on a previously held commitment to the non-personhood of God.

⁵¹ Letter 58, p. 909. Although not the topic of this section, this claim could be applied to human beings as well as to God.

two relevant positions here as immanent idealism or rationally-structured materialism, which are the two primary characterizations of pantheism that I mentioned in the Introduction, given the pantheist's commitment to immanence. So, given that we've seen that Spinoza is a pantheist committed to the immanence of the divine, the question about the relation between Thought and Extension for Spinoza can also be taken as the question of whether Spinoza is best thought of as an immanent idealist or a rationally-structured materialist (or neither).

At first blush one might wonder where this impetus for a consideration of ontological priority with respect to the attributes comes from. Thought and Extension seem to be explanatorily distinct.⁵² Furthermore, in a footnote in the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza states that Thought and Extension have nothing at all in common.⁵³ However, one of the strongest reasons for thinking that Thought might be ontologically prior to Extension in some way is that it seems as though human beings distinguish the attributes themselves through thought. After all, the definition of attribute is "that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence."⁵⁴ There thus seems to be a kind of asymmetry between the attributes. This is highlighted in an early article dealing with this topic by J. Clark Murray, when he states: "Thought is conscious of itself, but it is conscious of extension as well."⁵⁵ The attribute of Thought seems to have a certain kind of intentionality with respect to Extension that Extension does *not* have with respect to Thought. Another place where Spinoza seems to give pride of place to Thought is in the statement of Ip16, which reads: "From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinite things in infinite ways (that is, everything that can come with the scope of the divine

⁵² See Spinoza's famous statement of what has come to be called the parallelism doctrine in *Ethics* IIp7, p. 247.

⁵³ *Short Treatise* I.II, p. 43 fn. 10.

⁵⁴ *Ethics* Id4, p. 217.

⁵⁵ Murray, J. Clark. "The Idealism of Spinoza." *The Philosophical Review* 5.5 (1896): p. 480.

intellect).”⁵⁶ In addition to a potential commitment to the kind of priority of thought for human beings alluded to above, Spinoza here claims that it is in accordance with the *intellect* of God that everything necessarily follows from God’s nature.

An important point to keep in mind in light of this discussion is that the attributes of Thought and Extension are the expressions of an underlying unity, both when it comes to substance and to modes: “Thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that. So, too, a mode of Extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two ways.” What is striking about this passage, however, is that the various expressions of the single substance (or mode) are accessed by *comprehending* them under the attribute of Thought or of Extension. Spinoza goes on in this same Scholium to write: “whether we conceive Nature under the attribute of Extension or under the attribute of Thought or under any other attribute, we find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes—that is, the same things following one another.”⁵⁷ Here the different expressions of substance in the form of attributes are accessed through our act of conceiving; and not only does conceivability allow one to distinguish Thought and Extension as expressions of the underlying unity, but it seems at least in principle to allow one to distinguish whatever other attributes there might be, were such a process possible. Thus the attribute of Thought seems to have a certain priority with respect to the other attributes, at least when it comes to its role in human mental activity, if not also ontologically. Additionally, these passages point to a unity underlying the various expressions of that unity in the form of attributes.

Alan Donagan, in an article entitled “Spinoza’s theology”, attempts to deal with passages such as the ones just cited, and what has come to be called Spinoza’s parallelism, as follows: “I

⁵⁶ *Ethics* Ip16, p. 227.

⁵⁷ *Ethics* IIp7s, p. 247.

conjecture that Spinoza thought that there must be transattribute laws of nature determining, for a substance's modes as constituted by any one attribute, how they are constituted by any other.... I know of no coherent alternative that does not contradict his text".⁵⁸ I think that this approach, although it might solve some of the puzzlement about Spinoza's parallelism, is not itself consonant with Spinoza's text, and that there is an alternative solution that is more in line with Spinoza's account in the *Ethics*. Donagan's interpretation seems to stray from the text in positing these 'transattribute laws of nature'; to my knowledge Spinoza himself does not mention any such laws in the *Ethics*, and it would be quite curious if Spinoza himself thought that such laws were the key to understanding his parallelism, *and* he failed to elucidate this point. Furthermore, I think that Donagan's interpretation fails to do justice to passages such as the ones cited in the previous paragraph that point to a unity underlying the attributes. An alternative interpretation, one that seems to me to be more in the spirit of Spinoza's own thought, is that the attribute of Thought can be characterized as a complete explanatory or causal account of Nature as extended, so that the laws of nature would be contained within the attribute of Thought, and would serve as the causal explanations of the activities and interactions of extended things or modes. This would allow for the tight connection between Thought and Extension that Spinoza's parallelism seems to require, but also do justice to the passages highlighting the unity of substance and modes that underlies their various expressions in the form of attributes. Spinoza provides a specific example of this unity in relation to human beings: "the idea of the body and the body itself—that is, mind and body—are one and the same individual thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought and now under the attribute of Extension."⁵⁹ In

⁵⁸ Donagan, Alan. "Spinoza's theology." *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*. Ed. Don Garrett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 352.

⁵⁹ *Ethics* IIp21s, p. 259.

addition, Spinoza's emphasis on the role that the intellect plays in distinguishing the attributes is further and more definitively substantiated by the following passage from a letter to Simon de Vries (1663):

By substance I understand that which is in itself and conceived through itself; that is, that whose conception does not involve the conception of another thing. I understand the same by attribute, except that attribute is so called in respect to the intellect, which attributes to substance a certain specific kind of nature.⁶⁰

One further wrinkle to add to this discussion has to do with the attributes in addition to Thought and Extension to which we human beings are not privy. In the second appendix to the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, which is entitled 'On the Human Soul', in passing Spinoza curiously mentions, in addition to the modes of Extension "the modes of all the infinite attributes, which have also each its soul, just as in the case of extension."⁶¹ The reference to extension seems to imply that the attribute of Thought is the 'soul' of extension. Furthermore, this passage seems to suggest that the infinitude of attributes that there are in addition to Thought and Extension come in pairs, just as Thought and Extension, where one of the two is the 'soul' (ideal version?) of the other. This line of thought does not seem to be an aberration on the part of the young Spinoza that was later smoothed out. In a letter to Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus from 1675, two years before his death, Spinoza writes the following: "although each thing is expressed in infinite modes in the infinite intellect of God, the infinite ideas in which it is expressed cannot constitute one and the same mind of a particular thing, but an infinity of minds. For each of these infinite ideas has no connection with the others".⁶² Here again Spinoza seems to be pointing to an infinite plurality of attributes that are at least analogous

⁶⁰ Letter 9, p. 782.

⁶¹ *Short Treatise* Appendix II, p. 105.

⁶² Letter 66, p. 921.

to Thought (the ‘infinite ideas’)⁶³, which are, however, distinct from Thought. As Spinoza says, they are not all pooled into a single mental category, but comprise different ‘minds’ due to their being attributes.⁶⁴

My aim thus far in this section has been to present evidence from Spinoza’s writings for the claim that the attribute of Thought has a certain priority over Extension in his philosophical system. Thus far, we’ve seen that there is an asymmetry in the relation between Thought and Extension due to the intentionality inherent in Thought: it seems as though Thought can be *about* Extension, but not vice versa. Secondly, Spinoza seems to be clear that it is through thought, or at least through the intellect, that we as human beings can distinguish the attributes, which are various expressions of the essence of God/Nature, from one another. And lastly, we’ve seen that Spinoza seems to think that there is a corresponding ideal or mental attribute for the rest of the infinitude of attributes that express the essence of God/Nature. I would now like to make two further points in order to bolster my case for the priority of Thought for Spinoza, and to offer one clarificatory point about what might be called Spinoza’s ‘idealism’. The first point is that in addition to conceiving of the attributes as distinguished by the intellect, Spinoza seems to think that they are explanatory. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza writes the following regarding the definition that ‘the Philosophers’ give of God: “we do not see that they give us... any *attribute* or attributes through which it can be known what the thing (God) is, but only some *propria* or properties which do, indeed, belong to a thing, but never explain what the thing is.”⁶⁵ Spinoza is claiming that what is distinctive about an attribute over and against a property is that

⁶³ Compare *Ethics* Ip21d, where Spinoza characterizes Thought as infinite (p. 230).

⁶⁴ The attributes, like substance, are supposed to be independent in the sense that they are conceived through themselves. See Letter 9, p. 782, also given above.

⁶⁵ *Short Treatise* I.VII, pp. 56-57. The actual definition is not pertinent to my purposes here, but can be found above the passage that I cite in Spinoza’s text.

an attribute provides some kind of explanation that is relevant to the essence or nature of the thing under consideration.⁶⁶ Thus the attributes themselves, of whatever kind, are *explanatory* in the sense of expressing the essence of substance, a characteristic that seems to have a close affinity with Thought (as characterized previously), at least closer than with Extension.

Secondly, I would like to highlight the dependence of the attributes on the intellect with the following strong claim from *Ethics* Ip4: “nothing exists external to the intellect except substances and their affections.”⁶⁷ If there was any doubt about whether Spinoza really thought that it is the intellect that distinguishes the attributes, this passage should lay it to rest. He cites Definitions 3 and 5 (of substance and mode respectively) in support of this claim, which sandwich the definition of attribute, which itself highlights the crucial role of the perception of the intellect. Once the intellect is taken out of the equation, all that exists is substance and its modes. This passage further substantiates the importance of the unity underlying the various expressions of substance and individual modes in the form of attributes that I emphasized previously. I therefore think there are compelling reasons to think that Spinoza is an idealist in the sense that Thought has a certain priority over Extension. To be clear, however, I do not think that Spinoza is a full-fledged idealist in the Berkeleyan sense; extended things don’t disappear from his ontology, but are still around, bumping into each other in good Newtonian fashion. His idealism merely amounts to giving primacy to Thought over Extension in the ways that I’ve canvassed thus far in this section, and which we can call a kind of immanent idealism.

The last thing I’d like to do in this section dealing with the relation between the attributes of Thought and Extension is to present and respond to what I take to be perhaps the strongest case

⁶⁶ This characterization of an attribute is consistent with that of the *Ethics*. See Id4, where an attribute is characterized as constituting the *essence* of substance.

⁶⁷ *Ethics* Ip4d, p. 218.

for *not* taking Spinoza as an idealist, which is presented by Samuel Newlands in his paper entitled “Thinking, Conceiving, and Idealism in Spinoza”. One of Newlands’ theses in this paper is that there is a distinction to be found in Spinoza between the conceptual and the mental; conceptual relations are attribute neutral, meaning that they can obtain for any attribute, and mental relations are a proper subset of conceptual relations. More specifically, all mental relations and entities fall under the rubric of Thought. One of the doctrines regarding the attributes that Newlands wants to preserve is what he calls attribute parity, which he defines as follows: “the thesis that no attribute is more fundamental than any other attribute; all attributes are on ontologically even footing”. Referring to Jonathan Bennett’s *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, Newlands writes: “Bennett is surely right that Spinoza wanted attribute parity, though I am not aware of a passage in which Spinoza directly asserts it.”⁶⁸ Whether or not it’s the case that Spinoza in fact wanted attribute parity, my contention is that based on the evidence I’ve presented he’s committed to a privileging of the attribute of Thought.

One reason why Newlands focuses on pulling apart the conceptual and the mental in Spinoza is that it helps to preserve attribute parity. If Spinoza gives pride of place to the conceptual, but conceptual relations are attribute neutral rather than falling under the attribute of Thought, then Spinoza can preserve attribute parity. Newlands suggests thinking of conceivability in Spinoza along the lines of being structured or characterized in a particular way, where the ‘particular way’ here refers to an attribute. Thus he says: “God and finite things are conceived as, i.e., structured by, a multiplicity of highly general, pervasive, and fundamental features such as Extension and Thought.”⁶⁹ According to Newlands, this structuring can be characteristic of any

⁶⁸ Newlands, Samuel. “Thinking, Conceiving, and Idealism in Spinoza.” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 94.1 (2012): p. 35.

⁶⁹ Newlands, p. 46.

attribute and is thus attribute neutral, and is what Spinoza means by conceivability.

Subsequently he concludes: “In the end Spinoza avoids idealism precisely by insisting that the realm of the extended, and the non-mental more generally, is as conceptually structured, metaphysically basic, and explanatorily transparent as the realm of the ideal.”⁷⁰ I am in agreement with Newlands’ claims regarding the conceptual structuring of the extended and non-mental,⁷¹ but disagree that this is how Spinoza avoids idealism; rather, I think it is this that is at least partly constitutive of his idealistic tendencies, especially when one takes the attribute of Thought to be a complete explanatory or causal account of Nature as extended, as I have suggested.⁷² What it means to be structured and explanatorily transparent in the first place is to fall within the matrix of the attribute of Thought, which is the full explanatory account of Nature. In this case, conceptual relations would clearly fail to be attribute neutral. Furthermore, what would this conceptual structure and explanatory transparency amount to in an attribute-neutral context, particularly one in which Thought is ruled out? It seems as though we’ve achieved the attribute-neutrality of conceptual relations at the expense of their content, or any touchstone with which we might be familiar.

Newlands advocates a distinction between the conceptual and the mental, where the mental refers to what falls under the attribute of Thought, whereas I suggest associating the conceptual with the attribute of Thought, and the mental with the merely psychological, or with the human intellect.⁷³ According to this interpretation, modes of the attribute of Thought lack

⁷⁰ Newlands, p. 49.

⁷¹ Where non-mental here means not falling under the attribute of Thought.

⁷² Further evidence for this interpretation is provided by the passages cited above that suggest a kind of pairing of attributes where one of each pair is ideal, or mental, or something analogous to Thought.

⁷³ As we will see in the next section, these categories are not mutually exclusive.

phenomenality;⁷⁴ they are rather the explanatory facts that correspond to extended bodies and their activities. I think a good piece of evidence for this interpretation of the attribute of Thought is that it seems clear that Spinoza's God does not experience emotions, which seem to be the main kind of phenomenal experience with which Spinoza concerns himself, and God is constituted by the entirety of the modes of the attribute of Thought. Newlands recognizes that Id4, with its reference to the activity of the intellect, provides an obstacle to his interpretation, but thinks that it is an obstacle for all "objectivist" interpretations of the attributes.⁷⁵ I think that my interpretation, however, can accommodate Id4 without much trouble: The intellect, here associated with Thought, can understand the essence of substance through the attributes, which are objectively distinct, by gaining adequate ideas. The intellect can also fail to do so, however, so what is implicit in Id4 is that the activity of the intellect is successful. Thus on my interpretation it is the case both that Id4 need not be translated into conceptual terms (though it could be), and also that it doesn't collapse into the subjectivist interpretation. My final piece of evidence for the priority of Thought over Extension in Spinoza is that the mind of human beings can achieve eternity, whereas the body cannot, which is the topic to which I now turn.

V. Human Project of Knowing God & Eternity of the Mind

Spinoza's account of the eternity of the mind is relevant not only to the question of the relation between Thought and Extension, but is also an integral aspect of Spinoza's pantheism more generally. Furthermore, within this discussion is included Spinoza's version of what might be

⁷⁴ Thus this interpretation also avoids the counter-intuitive pancreas or frying pan problem that one might think follows from Spinoza's parallelism, according to which all extended things have some kind of phenomenal experience, however different it may be from the human.

⁷⁵ According to the "subjectivist" interpretation, "the multiplicity of attributes is entirely constructed by the mental activities of finite intellects." (Newlands 50) As should be clear from above, I also reject the subjectivist interpretation.

called a kind of religiosity in a pantheistic framework, an issue I highlighted in the Introduction. Spinoza's account of the eternity of the mind is closely connected to his account of the relation between the mind and the body. I thus begin this section by presenting Spinoza's account of this relation in the earlier *Short Treatise*, in which we can see the roots of Spinoza's later thought on these topics in the *Ethics*. In the *Short Treatise* Spinoza calls the knowledge or idea of anything that is 'real' the soul of that thing,⁷⁶ and thinks that this applies to human beings as much as to anything else.⁷⁷ This is what leads Spinoza to claim that the soul is the idea of the body, and furthermore that the soul is nothing more than this.⁷⁸ In the *Short Treatise* Spinoza is clear that there is a tight connection between the body and the soul. He says that "as the body is, so is the Soul, Idea, Knowledge, etc."; more specifically, he states the following regarding the proportion of motion and rest in the body: "as much as it changes, so much also does the soul always change."⁷⁹ Thus the soul, the idea or knowledge of the body, changes as the body itself changes. From this alone it should already be clear that Spinoza is working with a quite unorthodox conception of the soul. Here the soul seems to be something like the explanatory account of the physical status of the body, and this is confirmed near the very end of the *Short Treatise*: "the 'objective essence' of this actual ratio of motion and rest which is in the thinking attribute, this (we say) is the soul of the body".⁸⁰ I take the 'actual' here to refer to the same thing as the 'real' above, namely that which is extended. I thus take Spinoza here to be saying that the explanatory or causal correlate of some physical entity (in this case, the body) is what is contained in the attribute of Thought, and that this is the soul of the body.

⁷⁶ *Short Treatise* II.Preface, p. 60 fn. 6.

⁷⁷ See II.Preface, fn. 9.

⁷⁸ *Short Treatise* II.XIX, p. 88; II.XXI, pp. 92-93 fn. 22.

⁷⁹ *Short Treatise* II.Preface, p. 61 fns. 11 & 12.

⁸⁰ *Short Treatise* Appendix II, p. 106.

In addition to an account of the relation between the body and the soul, Spinoza also provides the rudiments of an account of the eternity of the mind in the *Short Treatise*, which is based on the former: “since it [the soul] is a mode in the thinking substance, it could also know, and love this [substance] as well as that of extension, and by uniting with substances (which remain always the same) it could make itself eternal.”⁸¹ Thus Spinoza seems to think that there is something about the soul that would allow it to unite with substance(s), which would allow for its eternity due to the eternity of substance(s); this remark comes in a footnote, however, and his view is not fleshed out as in the *Ethics*. What I want to emphasize in the *Short Treatise* is Spinoza’s account of the relation between body and soul, for I think it is this that is picked up again in the *Ethics* and developed further in relation to his account of the eternity of the mind. Further, I think that my interpretation of the relation between Thought and Extension given previously is further bolstered by Spinoza’s considerations regarding body and soul in the *Short Treatise*. In a footnote in Chapter XX of Part II, which deals with human happiness, Spinoza writes that “there is no thing whose Idea is not in the thinking thing, and no idea can exist unless the thing also exists.” Thus the idea, or soul, of every thing is a mode of the attribute of Thought, in the language of the *Ethics*, and there are no completely uninstantiated ideas (at least at some point), for then a mode of Thought would lack its correlate in Extension, which would not only violate parallelism, but more importantly would flout Spinoza’s commitment to the underlying unity of individual modes across their various expressions through the attributes. He goes on to write: “we are speaking here of such Ideas as necessarily arise from the existence of things together with their essence in God; but not of the Ideas which the things now actually

⁸¹ *Short Treatise* II.Preface, p. 61 fn. 15. He also states that knowledge “does not consist in being convinced by Reasons, but in an immediate union with the thing itself”, which, like the previous excerpt, looks to be a forerunner to his doctrines on the eternity of the soul in the *Ethics*, in this case to the third kind of cognition from IIp40s2.

present to us, [or] produce in us.”⁸² Thus Spinoza seems perfectly comfortable talking about ideas or souls of things which, in our terminology, might be not be cognized by a thinking subject, and might themselves be completely devoid of any phenomenal experience; these ideas are based on their essence in God and durational existence, not on the presence of any kind of discursive thought on the part of a subject. Spinoza explicitly distinguishes between the sense of ‘idea’ in which he is interested, and whatever happens to be in our heads. It is the conglomeration of these ideas that constitute the attribute of Thought as a whole: “I hold that in Nature there also exists an infinite power of thinking which, insofar as it is infinite, contains within itself the whole of Nature ideally, and whose thoughts proceed in the same manner as does Nature, which is in fact the object of its thought.”⁸³

Spinoza’s view on the relation between body and soul in the *Short Treatise* can be summed up in the following passage from the second appendix, entitled ‘On the Human Soul’: “the essence of the soul consists in this alone, namely in the existence of an Idea or ‘objective’ essence in the thinking attribute, arising from the essence of an object which in fact exists in Nature.”⁸⁴ My contention is that it is this account of the relation between body and mind that is also at work in the *Ethics*. In IIp19 Spinoza states, in what sounds like an identity statement: “The human mind is the very idea or knowledge of the human body”.⁸⁵ Here again we see the mind (changed from the ‘soul’ language of the *Short Treatise*) cast in quite unorthodox terms: the mind amounts to the idea or knowledge of the body, in some sense. Further, the idea or knowledge of the body seems to be a limiting factor on the scope of the human mind, at least

⁸² *Short Treatise* II.XX, p. 91 fn. 21.

⁸³ Letter 32 (to Oldenburg), p. 849. Compare also the following parallel passage from the *Short Treatise*: “there is produced in Thought an infinite idea, which comprehends *objective* the whole of nature just as it is in *realiter*.” (Appendix II, p. 104)

⁸⁴ *Short Treatise* Appendix II, p. 105.

⁸⁵ *Ethics* IIp19d, p. 258.

with respect to extended things: “The human mind does not perceive any external body as actually existing except through the ideas of affections of its own body.”⁸⁶ Any knowledge of an external body involves and is mediated by knowledge of the way in which one’s own body is affected by that external body. The idea or knowledge of external bodies is what comprises the minds of those external things, or the modes of Thought that correspond to them as modes of Extension.

With this account of the relation between body and mind in place, we are now in a position to understand Spinoza’s account of the eternity of the mind, with which he ends the *Ethics*. Spinoza states, “It is in the nature of reason to perceive things in the light of eternity [*sub quadam specie aeternitatis*].”⁸⁷ This hearkens back to his mention of eternity in the *Short Treatise* in connection with knowledge on the part of the soul. The ability of reason to understand things under the guise of eternity is integral to the potential of the mind to achieve eternity. In Part V Spinoza ties together his discussions of the relation between body and mind and the ability of reason to grasp truths *sub specie aeternitatis*: “The mind conceives nothing under a form of eternity except insofar as it conceives the essence of its body under a form of eternity, that is, except insofar as the mind is eternal.”⁸⁸ Thus an adequate idea of one’s own body is a precondition for the possession of other adequate ideas (at least when it comes to extended things), and here adequate ideas of the body are identified with the eternity of the mind. This does not, however, prevent Spinoza from emphasizing the importance of seeking knowledge of external things. In Chapter 4 of the *Theological-Political Treatise* he says, “we

⁸⁶ *Ethics* IIp26, p. 261. Compare IIp25d: “an adequate knowledge of the external body is not in God insofar as he has the idea of an affection of the human body; i.e., the idea of an affection of the human body does not involve an adequate knowledge of an external body.” (p. 261)

⁸⁷ *Ethics* IIp44c2, p. 270.

⁸⁸ *Ethics* Vp31d, p. 376.

acquire a greater and more perfect knowledge of God as we gain more knowledge of natural phenomena.”⁸⁹ If God is identified with Nature, and the essence of God encompasses all of existence, then understanding particular natural phenomena amounts to understanding a particular aspect of God. The project of human knowledge outlined by Spinoza in his later works is also present in the early *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*: “we shall endeavor to connect and arrange [all ideas] in such a manner that our mind, as far as possible, may reproduce in thought the reality of Nature, both as to the whole and as to its parts.”⁹⁰ If I am right that the attribute of Thought is to be construed as the explanatory or causal account of extended Nature, then the task for human beings seeking knowledge is to gain as many adequate ideas or modes of Thought as is possible.⁹¹

Spinoza variously characterizes the knowledge of God that we’ve been considering as the mind’s highest good, highest virtue, and greatest happiness or blessedness.⁹² Spinoza claims that “natural knowledge...has as much right as any other kind of knowledge to be called divine”,⁹³ and it is Spinoza’s commitment to the claim that such knowledge is knowledge *of God* that is in part constitutive of his account of the eternity of the mind. He writes: “the greater the number of things the mind knows by the second and third kinds of knowledge, the greater is the part of it that survives”,⁹⁴ referring back to the three kinds of cognition outlined in IIp40s2. What the

⁸⁹ *Theological-Political Treatise* Chapter 4, p. 428. Compare also Vp24 of the *Ethics*: “The more we understand particular things, the more we understand God.” (p. 374)

⁹⁰ *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, p. 25.

⁹¹ Thus I find the following claim from Alan Donagan’s “Spinoza’s theology” quite misguided: “Nothing in any human idea, however inadequate, forbids that it be part of the complex infinite adequate idea that is an infinite mode of such an infinite thinking substance.” (p. 351) Something’s being a part of a human idea does not guarantee that it is a mode of the attribute of Thought, although it does not rule this out either. As I shall attempt to argue in the context of the eternity of the mind, it is precisely an idea’s being inadequate that *does* rule it out from being part of the attribute of Thought.

⁹² *Ethics* IVp28, p. 334; IIp49s, p. 276.

⁹³ *Theological-Political Treatise* Chapter 1, p. 395.

⁹⁴ *Ethics* Vp38d, p. 379.

second and third kinds of cognition have in common is that they both involve adequate ideas; thus the eternity of the mind consists in the amount of adequate ideas grasped. Two things to note initially are that the eternity of the mind is an achievement for Spinoza, and one that comes in degrees. The share one has in eternity can vary depending on how many adequate ideas one has amassed. Although the second and third kinds of cognition can both be constitutive of the eternity of the mind, Spinoza gives priority to the third kind, and the best clue to the basis for this preference seems to be the following passage:

although I demonstrated in a general way in Part I that everything (and consequently the human mind, too) is dependent on God in respect of its essence and its existence, that proof, although legitimate and exempt from any shadow of a doubt, does not so strike the mind as when it is inferred from the essence of each particular thing which we assert to be dependent on God.⁹⁵

In the run-up to this passage Spinoza characterizes the second kind of cognition as abstract, and the third as intuitive. One of the advantages that the third kind of cognition seems to have over the second is that it is related to particular, determinate things, rather than being a general proof that applies to a large class of (or even all) phenomena.

The other aspect of the third kind of cognition that gives it an advantage over the second is closely related to, and in fact seems to be due to, its being particular rather than abstract: it has a more striking effect on the mind. In this passage, Spinoza only mentions this difference between the two kinds of cognition in passing, but I think he elaborates on his intentions here more fully in his discussion of love. Spinoza claims that “the more we are affected with pleasure, the more we pass to a state of greater perfection; that is, the more we necessarily participate in the divine nature.”⁹⁶ It is thus clear that pleasure plays an integral role in Spinoza’s account of the knowledge of God, which for him is the highest good of human beings. Already in the earlier

⁹⁵ *Ethics* Vp36s, p. 379.

⁹⁶ *Ethics* IVp45s2, p. 345.

Short Treatise Spinoza emphasizes love that is based in knowledge,⁹⁷ which also seems to be the basis of the intellectual love of God of the *Ethics*. So in addition to being more determinate and particular than the second kind of cognition, the third kind of cognition seems to be distinguished from the second in virtue of including this affective component of pleasure that arises from its more particular and intricate subject matter. Perhaps Spinoza's idea here is that if the second kind of knowledge involves this affective component, it is unlikely to be as strong as in the third kind, and to come in as many flavors or varieties as the third due to its more multifarious content. Spinoza even links this third kind of knowledge with his conatus doctrine: "The highest virtue of the mind, that is, its power or nature, or its highest conatus, is to understand things by this third kind of knowledge."⁹⁸ Interestingly, here we see a potential application of Spinoza's conatus doctrine, the doctrine that each thing strives to persevere in its own being as much as possible, to eternity in the case of human beings, due to their potential to understand through reason.⁹⁹ If the conatus of human beings is to understand via the third kind of cognition, and the third kind of cognition is in part constitutive of the eternity of the mind,¹⁰⁰ then the conatus of human beings is to achieve eternity as much as possible through an adequate understanding of the intricacies of nature. So the human being is not only part of God/Nature just like every other mode, but can become 'divinized' we might say in a unique way: humans can achieve eternity by grasping ideas that are part of the 'mind' of God (the attribute of Thought) during their durational existence, through the use of reason. The highest form of this grasping of the ideas that are modes of the attribute of Thought also includes the positive affective component of pleasure and

⁹⁷ *Short Treatise* II.V ('On Love'), pp. 68 & 70.

⁹⁸ *Ethics* Vp25d, p. 375.

⁹⁹ Additionally, we can also see this as an application of the conatus doctrine to human teleology, the topic of a subsequent section of this chapter.

¹⁰⁰ I say constitutive in part, since cognition of the second kind is also included, but downplayed by Spinoza in favor of the third kind.

love with respect to the divine, which can be characterized as a form of religiosity in Spinoza's system. Thus we have here one shape that religiosity might take in a pantheistic system more generally of the kind sketched in the Introduction.

The last main topic I'd like to consider in this section in light of the preceding discussion is a point of contention amongst interpreters of Spinoza on the issue of the eternality of the mind: whether or not there is a commitment to any kind of personal immortality (or personal eternality¹⁰¹) in Spinoza. If the second and third kinds of knowledge are what are constitutive of the eternality of the mind, and we should strive to have such knowledge of a host of particular things, then it doesn't automatically seem as though this set of knowledge need be personal in any way; it might turn out that two individuals have the same set of adequate ideas, and thus that the eternal part of their minds is indistinguishable. Given, however, that it is the eternality of the *mind* that is under consideration, we need to keep Spinoza's account of the mind, canvassed previously in this section, in view, according to which the mind is the idea of the body. So perhaps the tight connection that Spinoza posits between the body and mind, and the relative ease with which we can individuate bodies, provide an avenue by which minds that achieve eternality can be individuated. Don Garrett, in his article "Spinoza on the Essence of the Human Body and the Part of the Mind That Is Eternal", presents the following obstacle to such a strategy: "it seems that relatively little of one's intellectual cognition concerns the pattern of motion and rest of one's own body. Thus, it seems that an idea of the formal essence of the human body does not have the right content to be or to explain the eternal part of the human

¹⁰¹ Steven Nadler makes the following perceptive point in his article "Eternity and Immortality in Spinoza's *Ethics*": "Spinoza obviously goes to great lengths to avoid the traditional vocabulary. The phrase 'immortality of the soul [*immortalitas animae*]' does not once appear in Spinoza's own account in *Ethics*. He consistently—and, I am sure, self-consciously—uses instead the phrase 'eternity of the mind [*mentis aeternitas*].'" (Nadler, Steven. "Eternity and Immortality in Spinoza's *Ethics*." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XXVI (2002), p. 227). As mentioned previously, however, Spinoza does talk about the eternality of the soul in the *Short Treatise*.

mind.”¹⁰² Garrett goes on to say: “No matter what [human beings] do, of course, they cannot achieve *personal* immortality, with continuing sensation or memory.”¹⁰³ A similar sentiment is echoed by Nadler, who states that “if what one is looking for after this temporal existence is a personal immortality in the world to come...a conscious, full-blooded...life after death”, then one is bound to be disappointed by Spinoza’s account of the eternity of the mind.¹⁰⁴

It seems as though this debate turns importantly on exactly which conception of ‘personal’ is at work in the claims being made. If personal eternity requires things like sensation, memory, consciousness and self-consciousness, then I am in agreement with Garrett and Nadler that that kind of eternity is not in the cards in Spinoza’s system. However, we might conceive of personal eternity in such a way that all that is required is the possession of a mind that is unique and distinct from other minds.¹⁰⁵ So the challenge that would have to be overcome here is showing how it would be ruled out for two individuals to have the same set of adequate ideas. Given Spinoza’s account of the mind, such a conception of personal eternity need not even require that such a mind have the ability to exercise discursive thought. So how might such a story go? My proposal is that Spinoza’s account of the relation between body and mind provides the resources to necessarily individuate the various minds that achieve eternity. In addition to characterizing the mind as the idea of the body, Spinoza also emphasizes, as mentioned previously, that human beings perceive extended objects other than their own bodies only through the affections of their own bodies. Thus, if one has amassed a set of adequate ideas of

¹⁰² Garrett, Don. "Spinoza on the Essence of the Human Body and the Part of the Mind That Is Eternal." *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*. Ed. Olli Koistinen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 293.

¹⁰³ Garrett, p. 302.

¹⁰⁴ Nadler, p. 237.

¹⁰⁵ This was the crucial necessary condition for conceiving of the divine as personal that I emphasized in the Introduction. Here the discussion has to do with conceiving of the particular mind of a mode of God as personal, and I am suggesting that there is a way to construe ‘personal’ such that this necessary condition is also sufficient.

external objects, then those ideas necessarily carry along with them a relation to one's body. In order to have an adequate idea of an external object, one would also need to have adequate ideas about how one is affected by that object, about the nature of the relations that obtain between the object and my perceptual faculties. So, for instance, in order to have an adequate idea regarding the pigment of the petals of a particular flower that I am observing, I need to have adequate ideas of things such as the kind of light in which I find myself and the flower, and how the light rays interact with my eye. An adequate idea of what the color of the flower actually amounts to is intricately tied up with adequate ideas about the way in which the flower affects me, not only generally, but also in this particular instance (for instance, whether or not I am viewing the flower under colored light). Thus the set of adequate ideas that I have of external objects will be particular to me, since such ideas also include adequate ideas about the relation between my perceptual faculties and the objects. If this is right, then such a set of adequate ideas could be considered personal in the sense that no other mind possesses *this* set of adequate ideas, and not only as a matter of chance, but necessarily, and could thus be constitutive of a kind of personal eternity.

I thus take the account that I've presented, which is grounded in Spinoza's own thought, to be a response to the following worry of Nadler's about personal eternity: "it is hard to see *how* one eternal mind—or, rather, the body of eternal adequate ideas that once belonged to a person's mind—could be qualitatively differentiated or individuated from another. Or, to put it more precisely, there is no reason why two eternal minds should *necessarily* be distinguishable from one another."¹⁰⁶ Nadler also offers a challenge to individuating bodies *sub specie aeternitatis*, saying that such a body

¹⁰⁶ Nadler, pp. 238-239.

need not in principle be distinguishable from the mathematical, atemporal formula constituting the essence of another, qualitatively similar body. Two bodies may be precisely alike in all of their ‘intrinsic’ qualities and distinguishable only through the different relations in which they stand to other bodies...and, thus, only as long as they actually exist.¹⁰⁷

If Nadler was right, this would pose a problem for my interpretation, for the individuation of the eternal human mind is based on the individuation of the human body, and furthermore because my account relies on relational properties between external objects and the body to individuate the human mind. Even if we were to grant Nadler the possibility of there being two bodies that are indiscernible when it comes to their intrinsic qualities (which seems far from clear on Spinoza’s terms), I think there is still a major problem with his proposal in light of Spinoza’s overall system. There doesn’t seem to be any good reason to rule out relational properties when it comes to individuating things *sub specie aeternitatis*, perhaps most of all for a philosopher like Spinoza! Instead, Spinoza’s emphasis on the interdependence of all modes and on the pervasive role of causation in his account of the determination of modes should lead us to think that attempting to adequately understand a mode independent of its relational properties is a fool’s errand. Further, why should such relational properties only obtain so long as the body under consideration exists? If Thought is indeed the explanatory or causal account of the whole of extended Nature in all its complexity, then we should well expect that such an explanatory account include a plethora of relational properties between individual modes, some of which may no longer exist.¹⁰⁸

Finally, what I would like to recommend is an interpretation of the eternality of the mind in Spinoza according to which the human mind has a share of eternity during its lifetime, within durational existence. Nadler says that “the more adequate ideas we acquire as part of our mental

¹⁰⁷ Nadler, p. 242.

¹⁰⁸ Even though there is not a multiplicity of individuals in the strongest sense for Spinoza, that is, substances.

make-up in this life—the more we ‘participate’ in eternity now—the more of us remains after the death of the body and the end of the durational aspect of ourselves.”¹⁰⁹ I find his conception of participation in eternity now spot on, but am puzzled by the last part of his claim. I think that Spinoza is a thoroughgoing naturalist, and doesn’t go back on this orientation at the very end of the *Ethics* when it comes to the topic of immortality; I don’t think there’s room for any kind of commitment to a spooky ‘something’ that survives the death of the body. Instead, I think it best to interpret Spinoza on eternality along the lines of what we saw previously from the *Short Treatise*¹¹⁰: eternality consists in uniting with substance, which is itself eternal, and human beings can best do this through understanding, molding their minds to resemble the explanatory account of Nature that is present in Thought. This is done on the part of the discursive intellect of the human being, and the highest attainment of eternality within time issues in pleasure and the love of God. Before and after our durational existence, however, all that remain are the ideas within Thought that we latched onto through reason during the brief blip of our existence. Nevertheless, this account of the eternality of the mind is an integral component of Spinoza’s pantheism, for it sheds light on a human experience that includes an important affective dimension, which can be seen as a correlate in Spinoza’s system to more traditional forms of religiosity. For Spinoza, it amounts to philosophizing in its original sense – to loving wisdom.

VI. Good & Evil

The topics that I consider in these next two sections are undertaken both because they play an important role in a comprehensive account of Spinoza’s pantheism, and also because of their relevance to a consideration of pantheism in contemporary philosophy of religion. An additional

¹⁰⁹ Nadler, p. 237.

¹¹⁰ *Short Treatise* II.Preface, p. 61 fn. 15.

normative term to ‘good’ and ‘evil’ that Spinoza often employs is ‘perfection’, and I would like to begin by trying to get clear on what Spinoza means by perfection since it has a bearing on his account of good and evil. IId6 of the *Ethics* reads: “By reality and perfection I mean the same thing.”¹¹¹ Spinoza elaborates on this in a letter to John Huddle, from 1666: “I have only assumed that perfection consists in being, and imperfection in the privation of being.”¹¹² Thus Spinoza seems to conceive of being and perfection as coextensive; insofar as something exists, it is perfect in proportion to how much reality or being it has. Two consequences of this are that God is the most perfect being, since God encompasses all of being or reality, and that there is no imperfection in God; God is maximally perfect. Spinoza goes on in the letter to Huddle to say regarding imperfection in particular that “it signifies that a thing lacks something which nevertheless pertains to its nature.”¹¹³ Thus individual things, or modes, can be perfect of their kind, even if they cannot be as perfect as God in virtue of being finite. Additionally, in a letter to Willem van Blyenbergh from 1665, he states that we can have a conception of the imperfection of something by comparing it with something else that contains more perfection.¹¹⁴

In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza explicitly offers a distinction between good and evil, on the one hand, and perfection on the other: “good and evil, or sin, are only modes of thought, and by no means things, or anything that has reality...For all things and works which are in nature are perfect.”¹¹⁵ So Spinoza is here consistent in holding that all things that exist are perfect (to the extent to which they express being or reality), but claims that good and evil are merely modes of Thought without any reality. One way to characterize his position regarding good and evil here

¹¹¹ *Ethics* IId6, p. 244.

¹¹² Letter 36, p. 858.

¹¹³ Letter 36, p. 859.

¹¹⁴ Letter 19, p. 808.

¹¹⁵ *Short Treatise* I.VI, p. 56.

is that such terms are expressions of our attitudes with respect to certain things, occurrences, etc., but that they do not have any ontological reality. Rather they are grounded in our particular constitution as human beings and how we are affected by these various things. A good class of examples to illustrate Spinoza's point here is to consider natural disasters. An earthquake that wreaks havoc on human lives, infrastructure, the economy, etc., and that we might call evil or a 'bad' thing, isn't bad *in itself*, but is only considered bad by us, perhaps because of the detrimental consequences that it has for human beings. Thus Spinoza says in the *Ethics* that "in Nature nothing happens which can be attributed to its defectiveness", and in the *Short Treatise*, "if we use our Reason aright, we can feel no hatred or aversion for anything, because, if we do, we deprive ourselves of that perfection which is to be found in everything."¹¹⁶ So we should not feel hatred or anger towards the event of the earthquake because, since it exists (however we cash that out), it participates in or exhibits perfection to some degree. It may be detrimental to human beings, but there is nothing 'evil' or 'bad' about the physical processes themselves that resulted in the earthquake.¹¹⁷

Spinoza gives the following argument for the non-existence of good and evil as ontological entities in the *Short Treatise*: "All things which are in Nature, are either things or actions. Now good and evil are neither things nor actions. Therefore good and evil do not exist in Nature. For, if good and evil are things or actions, then they must have their definitions. But good and evil (as, for example, the goodness of Peter and the wickedness of Judas) have no definitions apart from the essence of Judas and Peter, because this alone exists in Nature".¹¹⁸ So Spinoza's point here is that there is nothing to good and evil over and above the essence or nature of the things

¹¹⁶ *Ethics* III.Preface, p. 278; *Short Treatise* II.VI, p. 71.

¹¹⁷ See also the *Theological-Political Treatise* Chapter 16: "that which our reason declares to be evil is not evil in respect of the order and laws of universal Nature, but only in respect of the laws of our own nature." (p. 528)

¹¹⁸ *Short Treatise* I.X, pp. 59-60.

that exist in nature; all claims about the goodness or badness of particular things can be reduced to the essences of those things along with the way in which the evaluator is affected by those things. So if one were to give an account of Nature that included the essences of all things along with their causal interrelations, it's not as though such an account would have failed to capture some fundamental ontological entities by not taking stock of good and evil.

In addition to the contexts in which Spinoza distinguishes between good and evil, on the one hand, and perfection on the other, he also talks about them in conjunction. In the *Short Treatise* he writes, “whatever advances us towards perfection, we call good, and, on the contrary, what hinders, or also what does not advance us toward it, bad.”¹¹⁹ Since the degree of perfection of something is dependent on the being or reality of a thing, an increase in the perfection of a human being would mean an increase in the ‘amount’ of being or reality that a human being expresses. So what exactly could constitute an increase in being or reality on the part of a human being? Spinoza seems to think that it is an increase in knowledge; this is, after all, what is constitutive of our highest end.¹²⁰ This, however, seems to move away from the more relativistic account of good and evil presented above in favor of one that is grounded in (what seems to be) an objective fact about the end of human beings and what leads to its furtherance. This applies not only to human beings, but also to Spinoza’s account of the relation between God and good and evil. Spinoza characterizes God as the highest good itself, and as all that is good.¹²¹ Thus there seems to be present in Spinoza’s system not only an objective basis for perfection, but also for the good in at least some contexts.

¹¹⁹ *Short Treatise* II.IV, p. 67.

¹²⁰ See the previous section. Compare also the following passage from the *Short Treatise* II.IV: “the final end that we seek, and the highest that we know, is true knowledge.” (p. 67)

¹²¹ *Short Treatise* II.XXVII, p. 86 & II.VII, p. 72.

Spinoza also resists a full-blown relativistic account of good and evil in his letters to van Blyenbergh. Writing in 1665, he says, “it is indeed true that the wicked express God’s will in their own way, but they are not for that reason comparable with the good; for the more perfection a thing has, the more it participates in Deity, and the more it expresses God’s perfection.”¹²² Clearly the implication here is that it is the good person that is more perfect and that participates more in the divine. Because of Spinoza’s necessitarianism, it is true that both of the people in question express the ‘will’ of God, but it is not the case that there is no proper normative assessment of them, or that any assessment is as good as any other. In a letter to van Blyenbergh from later that same year, he writes regarding a thief that he “necessarily lacks the knowledge of God and of himself; that is, he lacks the principal thing that makes us men.”¹²³ Disregarding the details of exactly what the nature of the knowledge is that the thief lacks, it is clear that a proper assessment of him is grounded in his failure to sufficiently maximize his share of perfection, which Spinoza takes to be our final end, due to his lack of knowledge. Although Spinoza’s account here seems to rely on a conception of human teleology, which is the main focus of the next section, the point that I want to emphasize here is that Spinoza posits an objective basis not only for perfection, but also for the good, both in general (as grounded in God) and with respect to human beings in particular (as grounded in our good of knowledge and union with God/Nature).

The interpretation of Spinoza that I’ve presented here is similar to what Charles Jarrett in his article “Spinoza on the Relativity of Good and Evil” calls the model-relativity of good and evil, which he defines as follows: “A thing is good or bad only in relation to an idea that we form and

¹²² Letter 19, p. 810. Compare also the following passage from a later letter to van Blyenbergh: “If the question is whether men who murder and men who give alms are equally good and perfect, again I answer No.” (Letter 24, p. 834)

¹²³ Letter 24, p. 834.

regard as a model (*exemplar*) of human nature.”¹²⁴ Although Jarrett classes this as a kind of relativity with respect to good and evil, I think there is an objective basis at its foundation, which the following excerpt from Jarrett itself suggests:

Spinoza himself accepts and advocates the assessment of things as good or bad from the standpoint of, or relative to the model constructed by, reason. He appears to hold that a unique model of human nature will be constructed by all people, insofar as they are rational, and that on this model or ideal only what advances or hinders our attainment of understanding is good or bad.¹²⁵

If Spinoza holds that reason itself dictates a particular model of human nature upon which we can ground normative assessments, as well as the criterion according to which such assessments are to be made, it seems more apt to characterize this as an objective account of the good (for human beings) rather than as a species of relativity.¹²⁶ I say only an objective account of the good, rather than of both good and evil, for Spinoza seems to think that evil and imperfection are merely privations having no reality in themselves.¹²⁷ There thus seems to be an asymmetry in Spinoza, according to which perfection and the good (both with respect to God and to human beings) are objectively grounded, while imperfection and evil have no reality.

VII. Teleology

It is clear that Spinoza is opposed to the application of any teleological principles to God/Nature, or the world as a whole. He even seems to take this as relatively obvious, and doesn't offer much by way of justification for this claim. In the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics* he writes: “There is no need to spend time in going on to show that Nature has no fixed goal”. He lists as

¹²⁴ Jarrett, Charles. "Spinoza on the Relativity of Good and Evil." *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*. Ed. Olli Koistinen and John Biro. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 159.

¹²⁵ Jarrett, p. 161.

¹²⁶ Jarrett's account of model-relativity in Spinoza also includes a teleological dimension: “The idea of a human being that we form and use as a model is thus, as in the TdIE, a representation of an end or goal, in relation to which a thing is good or bad as a means.” (p. 163)

¹²⁷ For example, see Letter 19 (to van Blyenbergh), p. 809.

one of the justifications for this claim “that all things in Nature proceed from all eternal necessity and with supreme perfection.”¹²⁸ However, there doesn’t seem to be anything about necessitarianism, whether Spinoza’s or of another stripe, that precludes nature from operating in accordance with an end. Couched in the language of God rather than Nature, Spinoza writes: “if God acts with an end in view, he must necessarily be seeking something that he lacks.”¹²⁹ So it seems to be the perfection of God/Nature that precludes the attribution of teleological principles.

Although it is well established that there isn’t any room for teleological principles with respect to God/Nature as a whole for Spinoza, whether or not Spinoza is opposed to any and all teleological principles is less often addressed. As I suggested in the previous section, it seems as though Spinoza employs teleological principles at least when it comes to human beings, even if it is often not explicit. One of the places where Spinoza comes closest to explicitly endorsing a kind of human teleology is in the *Short Treatise*, Part II, Chapter XVIII. Here he draws an analogy between a carpenter and a hatchet, on the one hand, and God and a human on the other. He states that if a carpenter ceased using his hatchet, it would fail of its end and cease to be a hatchet. Just so, if God should will that a human cease to serve him, it would cease to be a human, for it is in the serving of God that it consists.¹³⁰ Here the telos of man seems to be to serve God, analogous to the participation in the divine perfection from the previous section. This service to God, which gets fleshed out and given a particularly Spinozistic spin in the *Ethics* as philosophic knowledge of God/Nature, is there characterized as the conatus or nature of the mind.¹³¹ Additionally, in Letter 24 to van Blyenbergh, Spinoza considers someone who would enjoy a more perfect life by engaging in villainy rather than virtue and considers such a person as

¹²⁸ *Ethics* I.Appendix, p. 240.

¹²⁹ *Ethics* I.Appendix, p. 240.

¹³⁰ *Short Treatise* II.XVIII, p. 86.

¹³¹ See Section V above.

having a “perverted human nature”.¹³² Thus my contention is that it seems as though Spinoza ascribes to a kind of natural teleology with respect to human beings that is grounded in our capacity for rational thought.¹³³

VIII. Spinoza on Pantheism & Atheism

The final topic that I would like to consider in this chapter on the pantheistic elements of Spinoza’s system is Spinoza’s own view on how his position is to be characterized with respect to the categories of philosophy of religion that are of primary interest in this project. I treat this topic not only to explicate Spinoza’s view, but also to shed some light on the relation between a pantheistic position and these categories more generally. Not only after his death, but also during his lifetime Spinoza was charged with atheism and irreligiosity, and this despite the absolutely central role that God plays in his philosophical system. Clearly such charges were based on his departure from traditional or orthodox conceptions of God, primarily the views that I have canvassed thus far in this chapter. Given the drastic difference between Spinoza’s view and such a traditional conception, one might wonder why Spinoza even calls the one substance God; is it merely a throwaway term to seem more orthodox, or to appease a certain audience? What is it that warrants the appellation of God to the necessarily existing substance? It seems clear to me that Spinoza is not being disingenuous in calling the one substance God. Spinoza even conceives of the human pursuit of knowledge that he advocates in the *Ethics* as a kind of religious activity, towards which I have gestured earlier. In IVp37 of the *Ethics* he writes: “Whatever we desire and do, whereof we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God, that

¹³² Letter 24, p. 834.

¹³³ Even in the early *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* Spinoza writes, “if it is in the nature of a thinking being, as seems apparently to be the case, to form true or adequate thoughts...” (p. 20).

is, insofar as we know God, I refer to Religion [*religio*].”¹³⁴ However, for Spinoza, everything is in principle susceptible to be understood in relation to God, and similarly all of our actions can be so related. So the scope of religion or religious activity, in Spinoza’s sense, can potentially be quite wide, encompassing all of the activities of a human being. Moreover, in a letter to Henry Oldenburg around the end of 1675, Spinoza states that “the chief distinction I make between religion and superstition is that the latter is founded on ignorance, the former on wisdom.”¹³⁵ Spinoza does not conceive of his philosophical project as separate from and devoid of any kind of religiosity; rather he posits the knowledge of God as a form of religiosity, one that is grounded philosophically and through reason.

In addition to making room for a form of religiosity in his philosophical system, Spinoza seems to want to avoid the association of his view with atheism. In an earlier letter to Oldenburg, he writes the following regarding the opinion of the “common people” who he says constantly accuse him of atheism: “I am driven to avert his accusation, too, as far as I can.”¹³⁶ Another noteworthy context in which Spinoza mentions atheism is in his discussion of miracles in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. He states, regarding the occurrence of a miracle, that “this would be contrary to Nature and Nature’s laws, and consequently such a belief would cast doubt on everything, and would lead to atheism.”¹³⁷ Spinoza here seems to be associating atheism with a commitment to inexplicability or randomness or chaos, a problem that he avoids due to his strong commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason and the role of explanation. Additionally, the implication here is that his own view doesn’t amount to atheism. Instead, later in the same work, he claims that there is nothing that he has said that is contrary to true religion,

¹³⁴ *Ethics* IVp37s1, p. 339.

¹³⁵ Letter 73, p. 942.

¹³⁶ Letter 30, p. 844.

¹³⁷ *Theological-Political Treatise* Chapter 6, p. 448.

but rather that he is strengthening it. He writes: “If this were not so, I should have resolved to remain completely silent.”¹³⁸ I thus think it is clear that Spinoza genuinely thinks that his philosophical system can serve as the basis for a form of religiosity, and that his position is not atheistic; he is not an atheistic wolf in sheep’s clothing using covert terminology for some ulterior purpose.

However, Spinoza’s position is not merely that there is room for religiosity within his system and that he can avoid the charge of atheism; it’s stronger than that: “My opinion is so far from being pernicious that, on the contrary, for those who are not hampered by prejudices and childish superstition it is the one means of obtaining the highest degree of blessedness.”¹³⁹ Thus it is not merely that religiosity is compatible with his philosophical system, but the knowledge of God that he outlines is the highest form of religiosity, being grounded philosophically and through reason rather than superstition. In a letter to Jacob Ostens, he asks rhetorically: “Does that man, pray, renounce all religion, who declares that God must be acknowledged as the highest good, and that he must be loved as such in a free spirit? And that in this alone does our supreme happiness and our highest freedom consist?”¹⁴⁰ Spinoza is not merely hedging his bets by using language couched in religious terminology for what he takes to be at bottom irreligious commitments; rather, as can be seen from this excerpt, Spinoza points to both theoretical and practical reasons why his philosophical system is not irreligious or atheistic. Furthermore, Spinoza also doesn’t see himself as advocating a kind of atheistic reductive materialist framework, as some interpreters would have it. In Letter 73 to Oldenburg he writes: “as to the view of certain people that the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* rests on an identification of God

¹³⁸ *Theological-Political Treatise* Chapter 12, p. 504.

¹³⁹ Letter 21, p. 825.

¹⁴⁰ Letter 43, p. 879.

with Nature (by the latter of which they understand a kind of mass or corporeal matter) they are quite mistaken.”¹⁴¹ Spinoza quite clearly identifies God with Nature in the *Ethics*, but Nature is comprised of infinitely many attributes; here Spinoza is resisting those who would identify Nature with the attribute of Extension. Regardless of the question of how many attributes there are in addition to the two with which we are familiar, Spinoza clearly sees the attribute of Thought as an integral and indispensable component of his philosophical position.

I therefore think that it is legitimate to consider Spinoza’s philosophical framework as a version of pantheism. To employ the terminology from the Introduction, Spinoza is clearly a perfection atheist, but is clearly *not* a categorical atheist.¹⁴² Thus to label Spinoza merely as an atheist is at best vague, and at worst misguided and inaccurate. Throughout this chapter, however, I have also emphasized the naturalistic aspects of Spinoza’s philosophical program. The divine is fully immanent according to Spinoza, not existing outside of nature as he conceives it. In addition, and in part as a consequence of this commitment to immanence, we gain knowledge of God by gaining knowledge of natural phenomena, and there are no other kinds of phenomena.¹⁴³ Thus although Spinoza is a pantheist who makes room for religiosity, he does so in a naturalistic framework. Donagan advances a similar view; he thinks that the application of the term ‘theology’ to Spinoza’s philosophical system is appropriate, but says that Spinoza’s

¹⁴¹ Letter 73, p. 942.

¹⁴² Alan Donagan, in “Spinoza’s theology”, writes: “If God is conceived as traditionally minded Jews and Christians conceive him, Spinoza denies his existence, and can legitimately be accused of atheism.” (p. 357) Thus I think that the employment of the terminological framework that I outlined in the Introduction is not only helpful in the context of contemporary philosophy of religion, but in historical contexts such as this one as well.

¹⁴³ A passage written by Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus, a close correspondent and follower of Spinoza’s, could well serve as a statement of Spinoza’s own view on this topic: “By physics I understand nothing else than the science of the universe...This science is truly divine. One here exposes its laws...according to which everything produces invariably its effects.” Cited in Klever, “Spinoza’s life and works”, p. 52. Compare the following from Chapter 1 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, also cited previously: “natural knowledge...has as much right as any other kind of knowledge to be called divine” (p. 395).

theology is radically naturalistic and that it “naturalizes God.”¹⁴⁴ It should thus by now be clear that Spinoza can meet the two salient challenges to a pantheistic system mentioned in the Introduction: Spinoza’s account of God clearly differs from perfection theism, and the unity that he posits can be considered divine both because of its qualities canvassed in this chapter (as necessary, being the explanans of all that exists, and being structured by Thought) and because of the kind of attitude that is proper for human beings to have towards this unity.¹⁴⁵ We thus have one comprehensive overview of a systematic philosophical account of pantheism under our belts. I now turn to the reception of Spinoza in late 18th Century Germany and some of the most important developments of his thought for the purposes of my project prior to Hegel.

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¹⁴⁴ Donagan pp. 343, 355. He also states, in a similar vein to what I have said regarding religiosity, that “the intellectual love Spinoza thinks due to his God, while unlike monotheistic worship, has some analogy to it.” (p. 357)

¹⁴⁵ Compare Donagan on this point: “Spinoza can legitimately claim that his absolutely infinite being is sufficiently like the Jewish and Christian God, and the attitude it would be rational to take to such a being sufficiently like worship, for it to be proper to describe it as ‘God.’” (p. 357)

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CHAPTER 2: KANT'S CRITIQUE OF RATIONAL THEOLOGY, THE PANTHEISM CONTROVERSY, & HERDER'S CONTRIBUTION

Not only Spinoza's philosophy, but all previous metaphysical systems underwent a thoroughgoing critique from Kant, particularly in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Thus any attempt to demonstrate the viability of a pantheistic framework, if it is at least in part inspired by and dependent on Spinoza's views, must grapple with this critique, in particular as it relates to pantheism. Accordingly in the first part of this chapter I examine and assess Kant's critique of rational theology as it pertains to pantheism, relying principally on the first *Critique*. This examination is admittedly limited to what is most pertinent to my general approach in this project; a full examination of Kant's critique of rational theology would far outstrip the space that I have here allotted to it. In this section I attempt to substantiate the claim that a pantheistic framework with a Spinozistic *Herkunft* or ancestry falls through the net of Kant's critique and into the hands of his German successors, in large part due to the fact that this critique is generally directed at something very close, if not identical, to what I've called perfection theism in the Introduction. That is, even if the net of his critique is successful in catching at least certain versions of traditional theism, pantheism survives.

Perhaps even more clear than the relevance of Kant's *Critique* to my project is the so-called Pantheism Controversy (*Pantheismusstreit*) that began in Germany around the same time, in 1785, shortly after the publication of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) but before the second (1787).¹⁴⁶ The controversy was set off by a correspondence between Friedrich

¹⁴⁶ It is noteworthy that we don't see much by way of Kant addressing the Pantheism Controversy in the second edition of the first *Critique*. His *What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?* (1786) is generally taken to be his contribution to the controversy, but even this doesn't show deep engagement with the controversy or with Spinozism. The following is the best we get, and it is relegated to a footnote: "The *Critique* [of *Pure Reason*] completely clips dogmatism's wings in respect of the cognition of supersensible objects, and Spinozism is so dogmatic in this respect that it even competes with the mathematicians in respect of the strictness of its proofs."

Heinrich Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn centered on Jacobi's claim that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, in conversation, had told Jacobi that he had become a Spinozist and a pantheist. The controversy was bigger than the merely historical issue of whether Lessing, by this point deceased, had in fact become a pantheist. It was also, and more importantly, about the relation of pantheism to philosophy and religiosity more generally, and, along with Kant's philosophy, played a significant role in the subsequent development of German philosophy. Frederick Beiser, in *The Fate of Reason*, states: "Along with the publication of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in May 1781, the most significant intellectual event in late eighteenth-century Germany was the so-called pantheism controversy between F.H. Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn." And he agrees that its implications for subsequent philosophical thinking were far-reaching: "It is indeed no exaggeration to say that the pantheism controversy has as great an impact on nineteenth century philosophy as Kant's *Kritik*."¹⁴⁷

My focus in this chapter as it relates to the Pantheism Controversy, however, is not primarily on its historical role; that has been ably examined by many others, one of the foremost of which is Beiser.¹⁴⁸ Instead I focus on what I take to be perhaps the most important direct philosophical outcome of the controversy – Johann Gottfried Herder's *Gott: Einige Gespräche* ('God, Some Conversations'). Herder was in written correspondence with Jacobi about these issues, and Jacobi explicitly addresses Herder's *Gespräche* in the second edition of the book that made the controversy public, his *Spinoza Letters*. I focus on Herder's contribution to the controversy for two reasons: first and foremost, he appropriates but revises Spinoza's pantheism in

(Kant, Immanuel. *What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking? Religion and Rational Theology*. Ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 15)

¹⁴⁷ Beiser, Frederick C. *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 44.

¹⁴⁸ See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, Chapter 2, 'Jacobi and the Pantheism Controversy'.

philosophically significant and interesting ways, and secondly, in so doing, serves as a bridge between Spinoza and Hegel in virtue of dealing with issues in this context that are later taken up by Hegel, such as the role and importance of advancements in the natural sciences. Herder's position, while preparatory for the great system of Hegel, is not merely that; it has philosophical merits in its own right that are worthy of careful attention, even if it does not aspire to the same systematicity as a Hegel or Kant.

On a more general level, this period in late eighteenth century German philosophy has certain affinities with the landscape of current philosophy of religion as I laid it out in the Introduction. There was not yet the conceptual space between (categorical) atheism and (perfection) theism that there would be by the time that thinkers like Herder and Hegel were through. The one thinker who, as I've tried to argue, can plausibly be taken to be offering such an intermediate view (Spinoza) was generally taken to be an atheist, as were contemporary thinkers of the time who were deemed Spinozists. Beiser highlights this unique role of Spinoza in the historical context:

part of the appeal of Spinozism at the end of the eighteenth century was its religious attitude toward the world, an attitude that was still consistent with, if not the result of, modern science. Spinoza's pantheism seemed to be a viable middle path between a discredited theism and deism on the one hand and a ruthless materialism and atheism on the other hand.¹⁴⁹

It is in part this close correspondence between the situation in eighteenth and nineteenth century Germany and the contemporary landscape that makes the historical ideas of this period worthy of consideration as relevant factors in the contemporary discussion.

¹⁴⁹ Beiser, p. 60.

I. Kant's Critique of Rational Theology

In this section of the chapter I focus on what I take to be the heart of Kant's critique of rational theology, namely *The ideal of pure reason* in the first *Critique*. In *The ideal of pure reason*, Kant attempts to dismantle theoretical arguments for the existence of God, focusing on the ontological proof, the cosmological proof, and the physico-theological proof. According to Kant, "besides these three paths no more are open to speculative reason".¹⁵⁰ In his analysis of the cosmological and physico-theological arguments, Kant claims that both ultimately rely on the ontological argument for their success. After his consideration of the physico-theological proof, Kant writes that "the physico-theological proof of the existence of a single original being as the highest being is grounded on the cosmological, and the latter on the ontological". He goes on to say that the ontological proof is the only possible proof of the existence of a single original being as the highest being.¹⁵¹ Kant's argument aimed at debunking the ontological proof for the existence of God relies upon his analysis of 'being' or 'existence'. As is well-known, Kant claims that all existential propositions are synthetic and do not add to the concept of a thing. Rather existence claims must be substantiated through their connection with experience. In light of Kant's application of this account of 'being' or 'existence' to the ontological and cosmological arguments in particular, I challenge Kant's idea of an absolutely necessary being, providing an alternative conception that the pantheist can subscribe to that, although it might not live up to the standards desired by the proponents of the three proofs of God's existence and even Kant himself, seems to evade the arguments put forward by Kant against the concept of an absolutely necessary being. I then consider possible problems with this alternative conception

¹⁵⁰ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, A630/B658. All subsequent references to the *Critique* are to this edition.

¹⁵¹ A630/B658

that Kant himself may have pointed to given what he says in the text, and finally consider Kant's account of 'the abyss' in light of these preceding considerations.

i. Kant's Account of an Absolutely Necessary Being

In *The ideal of pure reason* Kant focuses on a certain conception of an absolutely necessary being, that of the *ens realissimum*, in his consideration of the proofs for God's existence. My aim here is not to present an account of Kant's notion of the *ens realissimum*, but rather to present an alternative conception of an absolutely necessary being that seems to evade the criticisms put forward by Kant against arguments for the existence of the concept of an absolutely necessary being. I analyze this alternative concept in terms of what Kant does say about an absolutely necessary being, which is often not necessarily connected or strictly limited to the idea of the *ens realissimum*. Kant states that "a nominal definition of [the concept of the **absolutely necessary** being] is quite easy, namely that it is something whose non-being is impossible".¹⁵² The alternative conception of an absolutely necessary being that I explore here fits that nominal definition quite clearly: Being. Being is accessed by the fact that there is something rather than nothing. By means of recognizing anything as existing, as having 'being', one accesses Being, the exclusion of nothingness by Existence. Now Being can be conceived of as something whose non-being is impossible not merely by means of an analysis of this concept, but by the given fact that something exists. Given that something exists, it is the case that complete nothingness does not obtain; that is, we might say that in the actual world the complete non-Being of Being does not obtain. If we ask counterfactually, "Might there not have been anything at all?" some further leg work has to be done to answer this in the negative.

¹⁵² A592/B620

One way to do so is provided by Spinoza's necessitarianism – the claim that there is only one possible world. If the actual world is the only possible world, and something exists in the actual world, then it is false that the complete lack of Being obtains, and therefore impossible that there 'be' nothing rather than something.¹⁵³ Such an approach clearly depends heavily upon Spinoza's argument that there is only one possible world, which in turn depends heavily upon the Principle of Sufficient Reason. This is not the place to go into the intricacies of such an argument; rather I only want to point to the availability of this alternative conception of an absolutely necessary being to the pantheist that falls under Kant's nominal definition of the absolutely necessary being. Interestingly, Kant himself seems to have thought that he had his own argument for the claim that being or existence is necessary. In *The only possible argument in support of a demonstration of the existence of god* he writes: "It is absolutely impossible that nothing at all should exist."¹⁵⁴ The crucial claim for Kant's argument for this conclusion is that if one admits that something is possible, then something must exist, for it is self-contradictory to claim that nothing exists and also that something is possible. It is not at all clear, however, that in this way one can secure the 'absolute impossibility' that Kant claims; or, to put it another way, it's not clear that Kant would be justified in answering "Might there not have been anything at all?" in the negative, which is what 'absolute impossibility' would seem to entail. Jacobi himself, who played a significant role in setting off the Pantheism Controversy, seems to have seen the affinity of Kant's approach here with Spinoza's pantheism. Regarding Kant's line of thought in *The only possible argument*, Beiser writes:

¹⁵³ Philosophical terminology runs into difficulty here. This is exemplified by the fact that in contemporary discussions about possible worlds, at least so far as I know, the 'state of affairs' in which nothing at all exists isn't even considered to be a possible world or a 'state' at all. Whether this consequence of possible worlds modality betrays some deeper philosophical commitment with respect to the possibility of such a 'state of affairs' is harder to say, and not clear to me.

¹⁵⁴ Kant, Immanuel. *The only possible argument in support of a demonstration of the existence of god. Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*. Ed. David Walford. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 2:79.

Jacobi enthusiastically endorsed Kant's new proof of the existence of God; but he accepted it with one significant qualification, one that would have horrified Kant: namely, that it was true only for Spinoza's God. Kant, in Jacobi's view, had unwittingly demonstrated the necessity of pantheism.¹⁵⁵

The alternative conception of an absolutely necessary being sketched above shares with the cosmological proof for the existence of God the characteristic of beginning with the experience of something existing. Kant himself recognizes the power of presupposing something as existing. He states: "There is something exceedingly remarkable in the fact that when one presupposes something as existing, one can find no way around the conclusion that something also exists necessarily".¹⁵⁶ However, Kant seems to conceive of this move somewhat differently from the way that I have employed it in my account of Being as an absolutely necessary being. In his analysis of the cosmological proof for the existence of God, Kant characterizes a crucial aspect of the proof as follows:

On the ground of an actual existence (an experience in general), we infer, as best we can, some absolutely necessary condition of that existence. Then we have no necessity of explaining the possibility of this condition. For, if it has been proved that it exists, then the question of its possibility is quite unnecessary.¹⁵⁷

Kant seems to conceive of the move from presupposing something as existing to the conclusion that something is necessary as based on that which is necessary serving as a *condition* for the existence that one begins with. The alternative conception that I have proposed is not reliant upon this claim that Being is a *condition* for the existence that one begins with in order to arrive at the idea of an absolutely necessary being, although it certainly leaves room for this move to be made. This understanding of how Kant conceives of the relationship between a given existence and something that exists necessarily is echoed by Henry Allison in his *Kant's Transcendental*

¹⁵⁵ Beiser, p. 55.

¹⁵⁶ A615/B643

¹⁵⁷ A610-611/B638-639

Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense. He claims that what Kant “takes to be the fundamental assumption of common human reason...is that if one admits that anything at all exists, then one must also concede that something exists with absolute necessity.” He clarifies as follows:

This is because reason is constrained to think something that exists in this manner as the ultimate ground of the contingent (A584/B612). At one point, Kant suggests that this reasoning, which arises as soon as one reflects on the causes of things, is based on the thought of the “inner insufficiency of the contingent” (A589/B617).¹⁵⁸

This characterization of Kant’s position further distinguishes it from the alternative conception of an absolutely necessary being that I have proposed. Allison highlights the fact that Kant’s account of the move from some existing thing to something that exists necessarily is based on the need to posit a necessary ground to account for the contingency encountered in the realm of experience. Although Being might be conceived of as the ground of what is encountered in experience, it is not this relationship that provides the justification for the move from some existing thing to Being. Thus although the alternative account of a necessary being that I have proposed is rooted in the presupposition of an actual existence, the move from that starting point to the positing of an absolutely necessary being differs significantly from the account that Kant gives of this move.

On Kant’s account of the move from an actual existence to an absolutely necessary existence, given the tendency of reason to assume an absolutely necessary being, “the task is to find a candidate on which to bestow the exalted status of absolutely necessary existence”, as Allison puts it.¹⁵⁹ The concept of an *ens realissimum* (most real being) suggests itself as the candidate

¹⁵⁸ Allison, Henry E. *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*. Yale University Press, 2004, p. 411.

¹⁵⁹ Allison, p. 411.

for this absolutely necessary being. Michelle Grier echoes and expands upon this line of thought:

Kant claims that we must answer our demand for a necessary being by seeking to identify the concept of a being that most closely ‘squares’ with it....the *ens realissimum* is precisely such a concept, for it alone is a concept which has nothing ‘within itself conflicting with absolute necessity’ (A585/B613).¹⁶⁰

It is not at all clear, however, that the concept of the *ens realissimum* is *the only* concept that has no internal conflict with absolute necessity, as opposed to the alternative conception of a necessary being that I have proposed, or a whole host of other potential conceptions. Allison also highlights the suitability of the concept of the *ens realissimum* to an absolutely necessary existence, especially one conceived of as the ground of the contingent, in the following passage: “Since, *ex hypothesi*, the *ens realissimum* contains all reality, there can be nothing on which it depends.”¹⁶¹ The *ens realissimum* serves as the unconditioned condition for all reality and consequently fills the role of the absolutely necessary being that is the ground of the contingent. If, however, one conceives of the absolutely necessary being in the way that I have proposed rather than as the condition or ground of contingent existence, one need not identify the absolutely necessary being with the *ens realissimum*. Allison, in agreement with Grier, notes, “[the ontological and cosmological proofs] both end up relying on the assumption that absolutely necessary existence pertains uniquely to the object of [the concept of the *ens realissimum*].”¹⁶²

If, however, absolutely necessary existence need not be identified with the *ens realissimum* but can instead be identified with the notion of Being that I have put forth, then Kant’s arguments against the positing of an absolutely necessary existence by arguing against the *ens*

¹⁶⁰ Grier, Michelle. “The Ideal of Pure Reason.” *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. Ed. Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 274.

¹⁶¹ Allison, p. 411.

¹⁶² Allison, pp. 417-418.

realissimum are not convincing. This is because the *ens realissimum* as Kant conceives of it seems to be a descendant of Anselm's 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' and broadly speaking the traditional (perfection) theistic conception of God. Grier notices this as well:

what is most interesting about this coupling of the ideas of the *ens realissimum* and necessary being is that it displays all the elements of the traditional conception of God, as an object of rational theology – that is, a supremely real being containing all perfections (positive predicates) that exists necessarily.¹⁶³

This is not to say according to my approach that substituting Being for the *ens realissimum* would provide a cogent proof for the existence of God, as traditionally understood, but it does provide grounds for positing an absolutely necessary being even if this being is different from that aimed at in the three proofs for the existence of the traditional (perfection) theistic God.

Since the conception of Being that I have proposed is grounded in an actual existence it is fruitful to consider this conception in light of Kant's position on the relation between the realm of experience and an absolutely necessary being. Regarding the experience that is used in the cosmological proof, Kant claims that "the supposed experience is quite superfluous – perhaps leading us only to the concept of a necessary being, but not so as to establish this concept in any determinate thing".¹⁶⁴ The latter claim that the concept of a necessary being established by an experience would not apply to any determinate thing is taken up in the subsequent sub-section where possible objections to my proposal from Kant's position are considered. That the experience is deemed by Kant as superfluous rests on his assumption that it is the concept of the *ens realissimum* that provides the content for an absolutely necessary being rather than some other concept, such as Being, that might provide the content for an absolutely necessary being by

¹⁶³ Grier, p. 274

¹⁶⁴ A607/B635

means of an experience. In such a case the experience would be far from superfluous in the determination of an absolutely necessary being. Grier agrees with the first part of this assessment. With respect to the Cosmological Argument, she writes: “despite the argument’s appearing to proceed from experience, it actually abandons any appeal to experience in the second part – that is, the subsequent attempt to infer that the necessary being is the supremely real being.”¹⁶⁵ It is what Grier here calls the second part of the Cosmological Argument that constitutes its reliance on the Ontological Argument, according to Kant, i.e. its attempt to move from the necessary being to the *ens realissimum*. The pantheistic approach that I have sketched, however, avoids this problem inherent in Kant’s understanding of the Cosmological Argument since Kant understands it as an argument for the God of perfection theism, whereas the pantheist does not aspire to so tall an order. This approach doesn’t abandon experience by relying on mere conceptual analysis as the Ontological Argument does, which seems to be Kant’s main gripe with the feasibility of the Cosmological Argument going through as well.

Kant also has reservations regarding the move from some existence to a necessary existence, which he expresses in the following passage:

Although for the existing in general I must assume something necessary, I cannot think any single thing itself as necessary in itself. That means: in going back to the conditions of existing I can never **complete** the existing without assuming a necessary being, but I can never **begin** with this being.¹⁶⁶

The first part of each of the two sentences in this passage restates the aspect of the account of the relation between an actual existence and some necessary existence sketched above. The problem of not being able to think any *single thing* as necessary is considered in the subsequent subsection. What is of primary interest to me here is Kant’s claim that one can never begin with a

¹⁶⁵ Grier, p. 282.

¹⁶⁶ A615-616/B643-644

necessary being. This is the case because, as explained in the sentence prior to this passage, no concept guarantees the absolutely necessary existence of a thing (i.e., existence claims must be substantiated through their connection with experience), and one may think the non-being of whatever exists. More specifically, since whatever exists must be given empirically, “if everything perceived in things by us has to be considered as necessarily conditioned, then no thing (which may be given empirically) can be regarded as absolutely necessary”.¹⁶⁷ It is my contention, however, that there is an existing entity that does *not* permit of being thought of as not existing in the pantheist’s framework, namely Being. Being is given empirically by means of things perceived by us, but although one might conceive of these perceived things as conditioned, as Kant does, that does not necessarily entail that Being, although (partially) given empirically, is also conditioned, since Being is not empirically given as a particular thing but is the totality of particular things. There is one final point in relation to Kant’s discussion of the physico-theological proof that could serve to further determine the pantheist’s general notion of Being. Kant allows for the possibility of the physico-theological proof to lend support to any other proofs of the existence of God by providing intuition for the further determination of an absolutely necessary being.¹⁶⁸ Again, the pantheist’s account of Being is not meant to eventually measure up to the traditional theistic conception of God, but considerations such as those contained in the physico-theological proof, and in the natural sciences more generally, can serve to further determine the notion of Being that I have presented.

¹⁶⁷ A617/B645

¹⁶⁸ A637/B665

ii. Objections to Taking ‘Being’ to Be an Absolutely Necessary Being from Kant’s Position

I consider two objections to the pantheist’s move of taking Being to be an absolutely necessary being that one might raise from Kant’s position presented in the text, neither of which are, in my opinion, successful. The first objection, which has to a certain extent already been dealt with, lies in Kant’s assumption that a necessary basis of existence has to be “unconditioned and certain *a priori*”.¹⁶⁹ I do not see any difficulty in conceiving of Being as unconditioned, but, given the *a posteriori* component of its epistemic justification, one might charge that Being is not certain *a priori* and therefore does not fulfill the criteria for an absolutely necessary being. As I argued in the preceding section, however, the *a posteriori* basis of the notion of Being does not necessarily preclude it from being considered as necessary since, even if one takes everything in the realm of experience to be conditioned, Being is not a thing perceived in the realm of experience but is rather the sum total of those things, part of which is experienced empirically. Furthermore although Being is accessed by means of something that actually exists, the pantheist has an argument that it is itself necessary given that there is something rather than nothing.

The second objection deals with the lack of individuality and the indeterminacy of the notion of Being. Kant states that what he means by ‘the ideal’ in *The ideal of pure reason* is an idea “not merely *in concreto* but *in individuo*, i.e., as an individual thing which is determinable, or even determined, through the idea alone”.¹⁷⁰ If Being is not conceived of as an individual thing determinable through the idea alone, it would seem to be located outside the realm of Kant’s discussions in *The ideal of pure reason*. But are there stronger reasons related to the ideas of individuality and determinability for excluding the notion of Being from consideration that are not merely definitional? According to Kant the experience used in the cosmological proof, and

¹⁶⁹ A603/B631

¹⁷⁰ A568/B596

presumably also such an experience as the one used in justifying the notion of Being, does not “establish [the concept of a necessary being] in any determinate thing”.¹⁷¹ Consequently one might object that the notion of Being that has been sketched does not refer to any particular thing that I have encountered in experience. This is quite different, however, from claiming that the notion of Being does not refer to anything in the sense that it has no referent. The notion of Being might not refer to a thing in the sense of something that one has a direct experience of in the same way that one experiences a particular thing in the empirical realm, but it might be said to refer to a thing in virtue of having a referent and being capable of being further determined in certain ways. It is the sum total of all particular things, interdependent and unified, and can be accessed and experienced *through* particular things, even if only ever partially. So to the connected challenge that one never experiences Being in its entirety, the pantheist admits this as a matter of course, but submits that we don’t need such an experience; the pantheist’s approach is not akin to the Ontological Argument where we’re trying to pull a rabbit out of a hat (or God out of a concept). Rather the pantheist begins with some admittedly partial sensible intuition of Being (whether, in Kant’s system, with the internal intuition of the ‘I think’ or some external intuition) and fills it in with experience and observation as we go along.

The concept of the *ens realissimum* is thoroughly determined and is therefore an individual thing. Thus given Kant’s definition of the ‘the ideal’ presented above, the *ens realissimum* is the only concept that he identifies with an absolutely necessary being in *The ideal of pure reason* since it is the only idea that is thoroughly determined and hence an individual thing. But is Kant justified in limiting the considerations in *The ideal of pure reason* only to an idea that is a thoroughly determined individual thing? Being, as a concept of an absolutely necessary being

¹⁷¹ A607/B635

that is not thoroughgoingly determined through the idea alone but may be considered a ‘thing’ in some sense, seems deserving of consideration. Perhaps Kant’s approach is based on a certain conception of the extent and kind of determinacy required in discourse about an absolutely necessary being. This possibility finds plausibility in the following claim put forth by Wood: “Kant himself always thought that a theology which fell short of establishing the supreme ontological perfection of the divine being would have to be judged a complete failure.”¹⁷² Perhaps Kant saw any attempt to identify something besides the *ens realissimum* with the absolutely necessary being as failing to establish supreme ontological perfection. It isn’t clear, however, that the absolutely necessary being must be conceived of as the *ens realissimum* to ensure supreme ontological perfection, nor that ontological perfection, as Kant conceives of it, must be the guiding concern in rational theology.

iii. The Abyss?

“The unconditioned necessity, which we need so indispensably as the ultimate sustainer of all things, is for human reason the true abyss”.¹⁷³ This statement of Kant’s consists of a summation of two important aspects of his thought as it has been presented previously, namely reason’s tendency to posit an unconditioned necessity and its inability to prove the existence of such a necessity. Regarding “the transcendental object lying at the ground of appearances”, Kant claims that “the thing itself is given, only we have no insight into it”.¹⁷⁴ Michelle Grier summarizes Kant’s position on this point as follows:

we cannot but conclude, from the fact of anything’s existing, that there must be something that exists necessarily. The perplexity (or abyss) into which reason falls as a result of this unavoidable inference stems from the fact that we seem to

¹⁷² Wood, Allen W. *Kant's Rational Theology*. Cornell University Press, 1978, p. 99.

¹⁷³ A613/B641

¹⁷⁴ A615/B643

be incapable of finding anything that either corresponds to this idea or would allow us to think it in anything like a determinate manner¹⁷⁵

Kant imagines the highest of all possible beings saying to itself, “**Whence** then am I?” at which point “everything gives way beneath us” and the perfections of this highest of all possible beings could easily vanish before us due to the absurdity of this question.¹⁷⁶ The problem of the abyss, however, is rooted in Kant’s focus upon the identification of the *ens realissimum* with the absolutely necessary being. Given the pantheistic notion of Being that I have considered, however, I have argued that positing the existence of an unconditioned necessity is possible, and if we imagine Being saying to itself, “Whence then am I?”, we remain on solid ground, seeing that the question is absurd not because of its tension with the interrogator, but because of the impossibility of something coming from nothing. This pantheistic approach does not fall victim to Kant’s critique of rational theology, even in large part on Kant’s own terms, primarily for the reason that it rests content with a necessary being rather than aspiring to the *ens realissimum*. It is this alternative conception of the divine with Spinozistic roots, the departure from the tradition of perfection theism, that was to play a significant role in the subsequent development of German philosophy and in the history of pantheism.

II. The Pantheism Controversy & Herder’s Contribution

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the focus of this section is primarily on Herder’s *Gott: Einige Gespräche*, one of the first philosophical responses to the *Pantheismusstreit*. Before going into a close analysis of Herder’s contribution, I would like to briefly highlight some of the content of Jacobi’s *Spinoza Letters* that is most pertinent to the

¹⁷⁵ Grier, p. 285.

¹⁷⁶ A613/B641

subsequent rise of pantheism. The *Letters* are based on the correspondence between Jacobi and Mendelssohn that I mentioned previously regarding Lessing's alleged conversion to pantheism. According to Jacobi, Lessing told him that "The orthodox concepts of divinity are no longer for me; I cannot enjoy them. One and all! I know nothing else".¹⁷⁷ Interestingly, in a letter to Jacobi before the publication of the *Spinoza Letters* dated February 6, 1784, Herder began with 'One and all'. He says that in Lessing he unexpectedly found "a companion in belief of my philosophical creed".¹⁷⁸ Jacobi goes on to report Lessing as saying: "There is no other philosophy, than the philosophy of Spinoza".¹⁷⁹ Jacobi writes that Lessing believed in a ground (*Ursache*) of all things that is not distinct from the world, which, according to Jacobi, means that Lessing is a Spinozist.¹⁸⁰ As I mentioned previously, to be labeled an adherent of Spinoza's philosophy often meant being labeled an atheist, and Jacobi is not only no exception to this identification, but is partly responsible for its purchase in this period in Germany. He says, in no uncertain terms, „Spinozismus ist Atheismus“, and that when rightly understood, there is no room for any kind of religion in Spinoza's philosophy.¹⁸¹

However, just as I am arguing for in contemporary philosophy of religion, there is another strand of thought among Kant and Jacobi's contemporaries for whom this identification of Spinozism with atheism is not only misguided, but also ignores a live option in philosophy and religiosity more generally that is an alternative to traditional (perfection) theism. Goethe provides a voice for this strand of thought in a letter written to Jacobi himself: "[Spinoza] does

¹⁷⁷ Jacobi, Friedrich H. *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi Werke. Band 1,1. *Schriften zum Spinozastreit*. Ed. Klaus Hammacher and Irmgard-Maria Piske. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1998, p. 16. The translation is mine.

¹⁷⁸ Herder, Johann G. "An Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, 6. Februar 1784." *Johann Gottfried Herder Briefe*. Ed. Wilhelm Dobbek and Günter Arnold. Band V. Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1979, p. 27. Translation mine.

¹⁷⁹ Jacobi, p. 18. Translation mine.

¹⁸⁰ Jacobi, p. 41.

¹⁸¹ Jacobi, p. 120.

not prove the existence of God, existence is God. And when others as a result berate him as an atheist, I would like to designate and praise him as a paramount theist and Christian.”¹⁸²

Goethe’s assessment reflects the pantheistic response to Kant’s critique of rational theology sketched in the previous section, as well as Spinoza’s own resistance to being classified as an atheist that I addressed at the end of the last chapter. In retrospect Heinrich Heine said that pantheism became “the unofficial religion of Germany”,¹⁸³ and in *Herder und die deutsche Aufklärung* Emil Adler writes: “The spinozistic pantheism...is a *naturalistic pantheism* and presents the most radical form of theological opposition historically possible at the time.”¹⁸⁴

Jacobi’s exclusion of Spinozism from the realm of religion didn’t win the day. And one of the earliest and most sophisticated responses to Jacobi is contained in Herder’s *Gott: Einige Gespräche*, in which he comes to the aid of the pantheist under attack from Kant and Jacobi.

Thus there is a significant spike in the interest in Spinozism shortly after the publication of the first edition of Kant’s *Critique*. Despite the breadth of Kant’s *Critique*, this movement could be seen as indicative of Kant’s lack of engagement with the pantheistic position that I explored in the previous section, opting to instead focus on the perfection theism of the Leibnizian/Wolffian tradition. I now turn to Herder’s *Gespräche* and his contribution to the development of pantheism in classical German philosophy.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Goethe, Johann W. “An F. H. Jacobi, 9. Juni 1785”. *Goethes Sämtliche Werke* (Propyläen-Auflage). Band 4. München: Georg Müller Verlag, 1910, p. 392. Translation mine.

¹⁸³ Beiser, p. 45.

¹⁸⁴ Adler, Emil. *Herder und die deutsche Aufklärung*. Wien: Europa Verlag, 1968, p. 273. Translation mine.

¹⁸⁵ Compare Beiser: “The revival of Spinozism in late eighteenth-century Germany is indeed more a flowering of Herder’s vitalistic pantheism than Spinozism proper; and that vitalistic pantheism ultimately has its roots in *Gott, Einige Gespräche*.” (p. 163)

i. Herder's Revision of Spinoza's Metaphysics in *Gott: Einige Gespräche* – Introduction

In this work of Herder's the metaphysical system of Spinoza, specifically the commitment to the existence of God in a pantheistic system, plays a central role. Early in the first conversation (of which there are five in all) Herder's character Theophron alludes to the association of a pantheistic system, such as Spinoza's, with atheism: "how are [atheism and pantheism] both possible in one and the same system? After all, the pantheist always has a God".¹⁸⁶ On the face of it, it seems misleading to label the pantheist an atheist since the pantheist claims that there is a God, as Spinoza does.¹⁸⁷ The point of contention is over the conception of God employed by the pantheist, and whether or not that concept deserves the title of 'God'. In the terminology employed in the Introduction, it seems fair to consider the pantheist to be a perfection atheist, but not at all a categorical atheist. One of the principal aims of this section is to elucidate the conception of God employed by Herder in the pantheistic framework of his *Gespräche* and to give an evaluation of this framework in comparison to that of Spinoza. I argue that the pantheistic picture presented by Herder revises that of Spinoza in multiple ways that are improvements upon Spinoza's system.

To this end, I give an account of *substantielle[r] Kraft* or substantial force, which ultimately provides a unification of the two attributes of God that Spinoza considers, namely Thought and Extension, as well as a way to avoid the Spinozistic commitment to God's having infinitely many attributes. According to Herder this substantial force manifests itself in natural organic forces; thus speculative philosophy should take the form of metaphysics in the sense of following

¹⁸⁶ Herder, Johann Gottfried. *God, Some Conversations*. Translated by Frederick H Burkhardt, Howard W. Sams & Co., Inc., 1940, pp. 80-81. Translation modified. All subsequent references to passages by Herder are to this edition, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁸⁷ This point is reinforced by Beiser: "We cannot say that Spinoza is an atheist, Herder argues, because an atheist is someone who denies the existence of God, no matter how he is conceived." (p. 160)

on the heels of natural science. Herder's proposal to conceive of God as being characterized in accordance with *substantielle Kraft* not only provides a way to unify the attributes of Thought and Extension, but also gives priority to the role of thought in this characterization rather than extension or matter. Thus the attendant necessity in Herder's pantheistic framework is not a *blind* necessity, but a *wise* necessity. The most basic characterization of God, and a demonstration of God, is rooted in the role of *Vernunft* for Herder, and it is Herder's particular characterization of *Vernunft* that enables him to reply to Jacobi's worry about the coherence of a non-personal intelligence. Finally, although a principal aim of mine is to argue that Herder outlines revisions of Spinoza that should be taken as improvements on the latter's pantheism, I end with a brief consideration of the relation of God to the human being in the *Gespräche*, which has deep affinities with Spinoza's account of this relation.

ii. Substantial Force & Organic Forces

In the second conversation, Herder's character Philolaus refers to an idea from Spinoza that can be taken as a guiding principle both for Spinoza's metaphysical system and for Herder's revision of it as it is presented in the *Gespräche*: "all truth, like all existence, follows only from eternal truth, from the eternal, infinite existence of God."¹⁸⁸ All existence follows from the existence of God. For Spinoza, this is to be understood with particular reference to the attributes of God, which Spinoza seems to claim are infinite in number.¹⁸⁹ Everything that exists has to be understood as participating in the attributes of God in virtue of being modes of God. Herder's account of *substantielle Kraft*, in my estimation, provides some machinery to make two marked improvements upon Spinoza's account of the attributes: first, it provides a concept that can unify

¹⁸⁸ Herder, p. 95.

¹⁸⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics* Id6, p. 217; Ip10s, p. 221.

the attributes of Thought and Extension, thought to be radically distinct by Spinoza, and thus avoid problems associated with Spinoza's parallelism and the deep bifurcation between Thought and Extension. Secondly, as a consequence of this unification, Herder's account offers a single attribute or characterization of God that can be taken as providing a comprehensive but parsimonious explanation of reality, and can thus avoid what seems to be an unjustified commitment on Spinoza's part to God having infinitely many attributes.

Herder labels *substantielle Kraft* as *the intermediate conception between spirit and matter, which Spinoza sought in vain*.¹⁹⁰ Thus it is an account of substantial force that is supposed to provide the unification of the distinct attributes of Thought and Extension in Spinoza's system. The details of the nature of this *substantielle Kraft* are first approached by means of natural science, but substantial force is supposed to serve as a replacement for the attributes of Thought and Extension in virtue of being a characterization of *God*, and not merely of the objects of natural science, if those objects are seen as distinct from God. Although much needs to be done to fill in the details of this picture, Herder provides an indication that this is the general trajectory of his account through Philolaus in the second conversation: "He, the Self-dependent, is Power in the highest and only sense of the word, that is, the primal Force of all forces".¹⁹¹ Thus God is to be understood as the fundamental force that grounds all other forces and from which these other forces flow. This claim is structured, however, by a consideration of these individual forces and the relation between such forces and *Vernunft*.

Herder begins to fill out the content of his revised pantheistic picture by a consideration of organic forces in nature. In somewhat of a Spinozistic vein, Philolaus claims: "Everywhere organic forces alone can be active, and every one of them makes attributes of an infinite God

¹⁹⁰ Herder, p. 103.

¹⁹¹ Herder, p. 104.

known to us.”¹⁹² Thus organic forces, forces operative in the realm of nature, provide information about the nature of God. So similarly to Spinoza, who claims that whatever exists expresses God’s essence in a determinate way,¹⁹³ Herder is claiming that these organic forces provide a means by which to recognize something about God’s nature, and these forces are everywhere active. Regarding these powers Philolaus states, “all in their innermost connection express in every limitation, form, and appearance, His self-dependent nature, through which they all exist and work.”¹⁹⁴ Every determination of these organic powers is an exemplification of the essence of God in a particular way; and furthermore, the existence and exertion of these exemplifications of God’s essence are grounded in the essence of God. So although they are the way one can access the essence of God epistemologically, it remains the case that the essence of God is ontologically more basic than particular instances of forces that are its manifestation.

This characterization of organic forces allows Herder to begin to provide a unified account of the essence of God that undermines Spinoza’s bifurcation of Thought and Extension. Thus Philolaus states:

[Matter] is not dead, but lives. For in it and conforming to its outer and inner organs, a thousand living, manifold forces are at work. The more we learn about matter, the more forces we discover in it, so that the empty conception of a dead extension completely disappears.¹⁹⁵

Herder is using the conception of organic forces in order to show that a characterization of matter merely as extension must be mistaken. The nature of matter is dependent on the operation of various forces, and according to Herder the more we know about matter the more we recognize the crucial role of these forces in understanding the nature of matter. Thus these forces require

¹⁹² Herder, p. 104.

¹⁹³ Spinoza, *Ethics* Ip36, p. 238.

¹⁹⁴ Herder, p. 104.

¹⁹⁵ Herder, p. 105.

us to characterize matter as more than mere extension. Although this is far from a unification of Spinoza's attributes of Thought and Extension, it is the inclusion of substantial force in an analysis of matter which, when explicated more fully, facilitates this unification. Hermann Timm, in his work on *„die Spinozarenaissance“* in Germany, points to the fact that these forces cannot be completely abstracted from their manifestation: “No force without an organ, through which it turns its interiority out into the realm of appearance.”¹⁹⁶ These forces, in order to manifest themselves, must do so in a determinate manner, and are therefore not to be thought of in abstraction from their manifestation in some way or another.

If God is thought of as the fundamental force that grounds all other forces and from which these other forces flow, then an investigation into the nature of these individual, particular forces is also thereby an investigation into the nature of God. Theophron states:

All senseless fear vanishes when on every hand there is discovered the joyous, clear security of a creation in whose smallest point, God with His wisdom and goodness is present in His totality, working according to the nature of each creature with His undivided and indivisible divine power.¹⁹⁷

In virtue of being operative by means of various forces God is present in all things that we come into contact with, since all things we come in contact with are structured by these forces.

Furthermore Theophron suggests that the various forces are not to be thought of as radically ontologically distinct. It is the fundamental force that characterizes God, the *Gotteskraft*, that is at work in the natural world, and Theophron characterizes it as undivided and indivisible.¹⁹⁸

Thus knowledge of particular things is ultimately reducible to this fundamental, unified force of God, and can therefore also be characterized as an investigation into the nature of God.

¹⁹⁶ Timm, Hermann. *Gott und die Freiheit: Studien zur Religionsphilosophie der Goethezeit. Band 1: Die Spinozarenaissance*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann Verlag, 1974, p. 325. Translation mine.

¹⁹⁷ Herder, p. 117.

¹⁹⁸ I plan to return to this issue of the unity of forces later in this section of the chapter.

Philolaus states that “All things...are not separable parts of an entirely indivisible, single Being.”¹⁹⁹ Thus similarly to the forces that characterize them, all things are to be thought of as parts which cannot be separated or isolated from the entirety of a unified existence, nor abstracted from it. Furthermore existence itself (*Dasein*), which as I subsequently claim is to be taken as synonymous with God, is a unified whole that cannot be parced into robustly individual constituents. Therefore in virtue of considering the various organic forces active in nature as manifestations of a single unified entity, God, Herder claims both that everything is a part of God in virtue of being structured by these forces, and also that the whole of existence is a unified entity, the determinate nature of which depends on these forces. Thus at this point it should be clear that Herder’s account is a kind of pantheism according to the framework that I laid out in the Introduction: everything that exists is unified in a robust way through the activity of various forces that are themselves at bottom unified, and this unified existence just is God or the divine.

iii. Natural Science & Metaphysics

This approach of Herder’s indicates a more general methodological tendency to consider metaphysics, at least with respect to the existence and nature of God, as following closely on the heels of natural science. Theophron states that “speculative philosophy is only metaphysics, that is, an after-physics”, pointing to how crucial natural science is, “without which metaphysics only builds castles in the air or gropes about in the dark.”²⁰⁰ Natural science is the gateway to metaphysical considerations regarding the nature of God since it provides the determinacy which manifests the particular nature of God. Hermann Timm points to the importance of determinacy in this context when he says: “The general...first comes to determinacy in the concrete diversity

¹⁹⁹ Herder, p. 108.

²⁰⁰ Herder, p. 111, 102-103.

of its forms of expression.”²⁰¹ It is only through its manifestation that any determinacy can be ascribed to God, and this manifestation takes place in a multitude of ways that correspond to the various forces operative in the natural world. These forces that allow for manifestation and determinacy, however, are the modes of expression *of* God and part of God’s nature, and should not be construed merely as a medium of transmission that is ontologically independent of God. Rather these various forces comprise the nature of God, and nothing that we come into contact with falls outside the scope of the nexus of these forces. Thus Theophron says: “We are surrounded by omnipotence. We swim in an ocean of omnipotence.”²⁰²

Friedrich Kantzenbach, in his „Selbstheit‘ bei Herder. Anfragen zum Pantheismus Verdacht“, importantly stresses the dynamic aspect of the natural world that is also crucial to Herder’s characterization of God: “[Herder] called upon Spinoza as a witness for the dynamic conception of Being against a static, transcendent God.”²⁰³ I think it is both right that Herder’s appropriation of Spinoza structures his characterization of God, and that Herder’s characterization of God can be considered ‘dynamic’ in virtue of the role of organic forces in his account that I have described. It is not so clear, however, that Herder takes Spinoza to be an exemplar of this particularly *dynamic* characterization of God. On his own terms, Spinoza seems to be an advocate of a more static conception of God that can be understood in accordance with adequate ideas *sub specie aeternitatis*, although admittedly not of a transcendent conception of God. Furthermore, Herder seems to see himself as departing from Spinoza’s conception of God in this respect. In a letter to Jacobi two years before the publication of the *Gespräche*, Herder writes: “Spinoza has no concept of becoming, of not-having-become, origination and not-

²⁰¹ Timm, p. 329. Translation mine.

²⁰² Herder, 107.

²⁰³ Kantzenbach, Friedrich W. „Selbstheit‘ bei Herder. Anfragen zum Pantheismusverdacht.“ *Johann Gottfried Herder: 1744-1803*. Ed. Gerhard Sauder. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1987, p. 15. Translation mine.

having-originated....For him Being is first and last.”²⁰⁴ This seems to be in clear distinction from Herder’s own view as it is developed in the *Gespräche*. Thus although Kantzenbach may go astray in seeing Spinoza as an exemplar for Herder’s particularly *dynamic* characterization of God, he points to the importance of this dynamic character of God.

Furthermore, this dynamic characterization of God, which when understood in the way I have suggested, undermines a characterization of God as transcendent, which Kantzenbach also highlights. Brian Gerrish, in his insightful article, “The Secret Religion of Germany: Christian Piety and the Pantheism Controversy”, writes: “The image of the divine being who sits above the circle of the earth and intervenes, now and then, in human destiny had fallen on hard times once nature had come to be perceived as moving in accord with its own immanent laws.”²⁰⁵ This applies not only to Herder, but also to Spinoza, whose discussion of miracles comes to mind in this context. Thus with respect to the transcendence of God Herder is in line with Spinoza. And here again we see Herder’s account measuring up to the characterization of pantheism from the Introduction: the divine is wholly immanent in the world and can be understood through rational inquiry in natural science.

Herman Timm characterizes Herder’s *Gespräche* as “a speculative, theological empiricism”, and captures Herder’s appropriation of Spinoza a bit more precisely than Kantzenbach:

“Spinoza’s theory of God is developed into the principle of a general ontology of power and force.”²⁰⁶ Spinoza’s pantheism is crucial for the conception of God that Herder advocates in the

²⁰⁴ Herder, Johann G. "An Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, 6. Juni 1785." *Briefe*, p. 127. Translation mine. There is also the further question of whether Herder goes too far in his characterization of Spinoza here. Although it certainly seems true that the concept of Being would take priority over Becoming for Spinoza, that’s not to say that Spinoza can’t make sense of Becoming using the machinery of adequate ideas *sub specie aeternitatis*. It seems perfectly plausible that such a framework could be employed to provide a full explanation of a phenomenon that we might ordinarily consider to be an instance of Becoming.

²⁰⁵ Gerrish, B.A. "The Secret Religion of Germany: Christian Piety and the Pantheism Controversy." *The Journal of Religion* 67.4 (1987), p. 448.

²⁰⁶ Timm, p. 323, 325. Translation mine.

Gespräche, but it is revised and extended to include an account of *substantielle Kraft* that emphasizes the role of natural science in a more conspicuous and detailed way than Spinoza's account.

iv. Thought & Necessity

In order to see why Herder's characterization of God is to be considered as an improvement over that of Spinoza in virtue of unifying the radically distinct Spinozistic attributes of Thought and Extension, I here explicate the role of thought and its relation to *substantielle Kraft*. Up to this point in this section of the chapter I have focused on *substantielle Kraft* in general and the relation of it to organic forces in nature, which can be seen as the component of Herder's account of God that corresponds to the Spinozistic attribute of Extension. What I now intend to do is explicate the role of thought in Herder's characterization of God in order to show exactly how the relation between thought and *substantielle Kraft* serves as the basis for his improvements on Spinoza's pantheism. Regarding whether the characterization of God that Herder has been developing could lack reference to any kind of thought, Theophron states: "Thus his highest Being which possesses all perfection in the most perfect manner, cannot lack thought, the most excellent of these perfections; for how else could there be thoughts and perceptions in finite thinking creatures?"²⁰⁷ Herder is here suggesting that the essence of God must somehow include thought; otherwise how could it be the case that finite entities could exhibit particular modifications of thought if God, which is all-encompassing, lacks anything resembling thought? If something within the realm of existence can be characterized by thought, then thought pertains also to the essence of God in the pantheistic framework. Although the details of the relation

²⁰⁷ Herder, p. 119.

between God and thought must be spelled out, Herder is here claiming that it cannot be the case that an account of God lacks any reference to thought whatsoever.

It is the relation between thought and the various forces active in nature that Spinoza failed to light upon, according to Herder, and as a result did not see how the attributes of Thought and Extension might be unified. Regarding Spinoza, Theophron says:

Then what did he lack, that he did not unite to infinite powers of thought and action, and in their union, did not express more clearly what he must necessarily have found in them, namely that the highest Power must necessarily also be the wisest, that is to say an infinite goodness ordered according to inherent, eternal laws? For an unorganized lawless, blind power is never the highest; it can never be the prototype and summation of all order, wisdom, and regularity.²⁰⁸

Macht, which here refers to the *Gotteskraft* or *substantielle Kraft*, must be understood as operating in accordance with intelligible principles; as Theophron says it follows its own inner laws. Thus this power or force should be considered to be a *wise* force, not necessarily in virtue of its being directed by an intentional agent, but just in virtue of its operation in accordance with intelligible laws or regularities. It is indeed only such a power or force, namely one that operates in accordance with intelligible principles, rather than a blind force, that could function as a sufficient explanation of the order and regularity that is observed in the world. According to Herder the manifestations of *substantielle Kraft* extend to processes of thinking such as those exhibited by human beings, and are not limited to the kinds of organic forces with which much of the natural sciences are concerned, namely those that don't exhibit thought processes analogous to those of human beings. In support of this point Philolaus claims that various forces are operative both in matter and in the processes of thought. Similarly to matter, thought processes also operate in accordance with intelligible principles and consequently exhibit order and regularity. The concept of a force operating in accordance with intelligible principles is

²⁰⁸ Herder, pp. 122-123. Translation modified.

common both to matter or the physical world and to thought processes, and thus the rational intelligibility or regularity characteristic of force can serve to unify the operations of forces in the physical world and in thought processes by positing them as two different exemplifications of a single, unified force.²⁰⁹

On Herder's account, however, it is not merely the case that matter and thought processes are two different exemplifications of a force that is fundamentally single, but also that the intelligibility and regularity characteristic of force has a certain ontological priority over the material or physical manifestation of that regularity. In a letter to Jacobi from 1784, Herder writes: "Were our soul to have the clarity of the concept of itself and of its body, which God has: it would thus know that the body is no longer just a crude body, but rather is the soul itself, active via such-and-such forces, according to such and no other manners."²¹⁰ That is, an adequate understanding of body would reveal that it is not merely body or extension, but that it is structured by thought in virtue of the activity of forces in structuring and affecting it.²¹¹ A few years later, in the dialogues, Herder's Philolaus claims: "Thought is also a power, and indeed the most perfect".²¹² That is, the most complete manifestation of force as thought carries along with it operation in accordance with intelligible principles, and this characteristic is the hallmark of forces operative in the material or physical world when such forces are rightly understood.

Therefore in contrast to Spinoza, Herder has here provided an account of how the Spinozistic attributes of Thought and Extension can be subsumed under an account of force or *substantielle Kraft*. The operation of forces in accordance with intelligible principles is itself what comprises

²⁰⁹ Herder, p. 123.

²¹⁰ Herder, Johann G. "An Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, 6. Februar 1784." (*Briefe* p. 29). Translation mine.

²¹¹ This is not to say that body or extension drops out of the picture completely, giving us a kind of Berkeleyan idealism, but only that thought is more fundamental; extended things are still around.

²¹² Herder, p. 123.

the physical world. Thus unlike Spinoza, one does not need to posit these two ontologically distinct attributes since the modes that participate in these purportedly distinct attributes can be accounted for just by the single, unified concept of *substantielle Kraft*.²¹³ Claas Cordemann, in his *Herders christlicher Monismus*, rightly identifies the avoidance of the multiplicity of Spinozistic attributes as a primary goal of Herder's in *Gott*:

The goal of Herders reflections is to establish an organic connection between the recent formulation of the concept of matter and the concept of spirit, which allows both entities to be grasped in their substantial unity, without retaining the diversity of the attributes to which Spinoza held fast.²¹⁴

Cordemann goes on to write:

The intermediate concept of power brought against Spinoza performs a double function: it both guarantees a unified concept of the world in that the duality of extension and thought is superseded, and also enables the plurality of worldly appearances to be related back to the concept of God. Therefore Herder's concept of force not only imparts a single, unified worldview, but at the same time mediates between physics and metaphysics.²¹⁵

Echoing the previous discussion of the relation between natural science and metaphysics for Herder, Cordemann here highlights how it is Herder's account of substantial force that undergirds both this relation as well as his revision of Spinoza's theory of the attributes.

Although it is widely recognized that the concept of substantial force plays a crucial role in Herder's attempt to unify the Spinozistic attributes of Thought and Extension, what is less often discussed is why such a unification might be desirable. One way to come at this question is to see what benefits this might have from an 'orthodox' Spinozistic perspective. And armed with the resources of his account of *substantielle Kraft*, Herder can avoid two problematic aspects of

²¹³ Compare Beiser: "This notion of power not only replaces extension as the essence of matter, but it also mediates between mind and body, so that they are no longer distinct attributes, but different degrees of organization of one and the same primal force." (p. 163)

²¹⁴ Cordemann, Claas. *Herders christlicher Monismus*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010, p. 98. Translation mine.

²¹⁵ Cordemann, p. 103. Translation mine.

Spinoza's account of the attributes. The first problematic aspect of this account that Herder avoids is Spinoza's parallelism, the commitment to there being a one-to-one correspondence between modes of Thought and modes of Extension despite the radical distinctness of each of these attributes with respect to the other.²¹⁶ Not only is positing such a correspondence unnecessary for Herder's account since *substantielle Kraft* can account for the phenomena of both of the purported attributes, but the unification of these two attributes can also help to explain why the modes of these two attributes might seem to run parallel to each other – it is because they are at bottom manifestations of a single thing, substantial force. The second problematic aspect of Spinoza's account of the attributes that Herder avoids is Spinoza's commitment to a numerical infinity of the attributes of God. Spinoza's requirement for absolute infinitude, a characteristic that applies to God for Spinoza, is that “whatever expresses essence and does not involve any negation” belongs to the essence of that which is absolutely infinite.²¹⁷ Herder's account of *substantielle Kraft* purports to in principle allow for a comprehensive account of the phenomena observed in the world under a single concept. Thus Herder's God also exhibits the fifth characteristic of the pantheist's unity enumerated in the Introduction – that it is the explanans of everything that exists. If this account of Herder's is right, then it is not necessary to posit any attributes in addition to substantial force since this concept could in principle account for all observed aspects of reality and would thus include “whatever expresses essence”.

In accordance with the account of thought as the most complete manifestation of force, Theophron states: “Every true natural law which was found, would thus be a discovered rule of

²¹⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics* IIp7, p. 247.

²¹⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics* Id6, p. 217; Ip10s, p. 221.

the eternal divine intelligence”.²¹⁸ This claim reflects the general methodological tendency in the *Gespräche* of metaphysics following in the wake of natural science that I discussed in the previous sub-section. Discovering laws of nature, which include laws that apply to thought processes as well as those that apply to the physical world, amounts to alighting upon intelligible principles that account for observed order and regularity. Such principles, in virtue of their affinity with the intelligibility characteristic of thought processes, are termed principles of *Verstand*, and, in Herder’s pantheistic framework, each such principle is considered a constituent of the *Verstand* of God.²¹⁹ Hermann Timm helps to characterize the relation between force and thought when he states: “It belongs to the essence of force to coherently transcend each of its actions.”²²⁰ The nature or essence of a force cannot be reduced merely to a particular activity of that force, or even to a collection of the various activities of that force; rather in order to light upon the essence of the force the activity of the force must be understood in the context of some intelligible principle or principles according to which the particular activity of the force can be given a coherent explanation. And if God just is the unified entity characterized by the various manifestations of forces, then Herder’s God also exhibits the fourth pantheistic characteristic from the Introduction, namely that God is structured in accordance with rational principles.

It is the wide-ranging scope of thought understood in terms of intelligibility, order, and regularity that serves as the basis of Herder’s claim that the necessity characteristic of force is *wise* rather than *blind*. Theophron states: “The more true physics advances, the more we depart from the realm of blind power and arbitrariness and enter the realm of the wisest necessity, of a

²¹⁸ Herder, pp. 133-134. Translation modified.

²¹⁹ I am in agreement with Cordemann on this point, when he writes: “The essential presence of God in the activity of finite entities realizes itself in the form of ‘eternal laws’. For Herder, the lawfulness of the cohesion of the world both as a whole and in its smallest part bears the stamp of divinity.” (p. 109). Translation mine.

²²⁰ Timm, p. 326. Translation mine.

goodness and beauty steadfast in themselves.”²²¹ Knowledge of the operation of forces, here forces that are the subject matter of physics in particular, reveal a necessity in that operation rather than a blind arbitrariness in virtue of operating in accordance with a principled regularity.

On this point Gerrish writes:

According to Herder, we cannot think any longer of God as a being who acts from outside the world on other beings, nor can we represent the divine activity as arbitrary. Rather, God is precisely the luminous, rational necessity that discovers itself within nature to scientific inquiry.²²²

Philolaus further specifies the nature of this necessity by claiming the following regarding the activity of God, or of *substantielle Kraft*: “The effect flowed out of the nature of the most perfect Being. It is unique, and nothing else was possible.”²²³ The activity of God or of substantial force taken as a whole is to be conceived as a single activity other than which no other was possible. This activity, however, is not mysterious, inexplicable, or arbitrary, but flows from the essence of God in accordance with intelligible principles that could not have been other than they are. Thus Herder characterizes the necessity of God or of *substantielle Kraft* as an *intelligent necessity*, or a necessity that can be characterized in accordance with the principled intelligibility of thought.²²⁴ Elsewhere Herder characterizes the necessity of God as “a kind of inner necessity” which he associates with “complete concepts which only the knowledge and love of God can reveal to us”.²²⁵ Here Herder makes clear that the necessity of God is characterized by complete concepts, the intelligibility of which allow us to arrive at a knowledge of the activity of God. Such knowledge, characterized as it is by intelligible principles, can

²²¹ Herder, p. 117.

²²² Gerrish, p. 448.

²²³ Herder, p. 124.

²²⁴ Herder, p. 124.

²²⁵ Herder, p. 138. Translation modified. This connection of knowledge or cognition and the love of God hearkens back to Part V of the *Ethics* where Spinoza explicates the intellectual love of God based on the third kind of knowledge. It isn’t clear whether this parallel is intentional on the part of Herder or not.

consequently give rise to attitudes such as the love of God and seeing God as good; the necessity characteristic of the activity of God points to at least a certain kind of wisdom in virtue of its intelligibility and regularity rather than to arbitrariness or capriciousness, and it is the recognition of this wisdom through understanding the activity of God that can serve as the basis of the aforementioned attitudes.²²⁶ There is nothing about this account, however, that entails that any kind of personality, in the sense outlined in the Introduction, can be applied to God or *substantielle Kraft*; characterizing the necessity of substantial force as *thinking* or *wise* just amounts to positing its operation in accordance with intelligible principles, and not the further claim that the corresponding order or regularity is the effect of a personal agent.

Although Herder's account of *substantielle Kraft* can be seen as offering an improvement over the Spinozistic pantheistic framework in virtue of avoiding problematic aspects of Spinoza's account of the attributes of God, Herder's account of necessity has deep affinities with Spinoza's necessitarianism. Similarly to Herder, Spinoza seems to deny that the kind of necessity that he has posited is something to be deplored in virtue of being arbitrary or capricious. He claims that "in nature nothing happens which can be attributed to its defectiveness", and further: "He who rightly knows that all things follow from the necessity of the divine nature and happen in accordance with the eternal laws and rules of nature will surely find nothing deserving of hatred, derision, or contempt".²²⁷ In fact, Spinoza's account of necessity can be characterized as wise rather than blind (in Herder's sense) in virtue of characterizing all of reality as being structured in accordance with intelligible principles. Thus, similarly to Herder's account of necessity, the necessity explicated by Spinoza's is not to be taken as a defect or deplorable aspect of Nature since it is structured by intelligible principles

²²⁶ Herder, pp. 128-129.

²²⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics* III.Preface, p. 278; IVp50, p. 346.

rather than being characterized as a blind, unintelligible necessity. So for Herder, as for Spinoza, the sixth characteristic of the pantheist's unity that I outlined in the Introduction also applies to the divine, namely that its existence is not consistent with unintelligibility, randomness, disorder, meaninglessness, nihilism, etc. Despite this agreement between Spinoza and Herder, Herder's emphasis on the priority of thought that I have attempted to explicate in this section highlights a divergence at least in emphasis from the Spinozistic picture. Herder claims that the manifestation of *substantielle Kraft* as thought is the most complete manifestation of force since thought carries along with it operation in accordance with intelligible principles, which affords it with a priority in an account of the nature of substantial force. On the other hand, although I argued in the previous chapter that Spinoza seems to give *some* priority to Thought over Extension, it is not as explicit as it is in Herder.

v. The All-Encompassing Nature of God

Now that I have provided a detailed account of *substantielle Kraft* and its relation to organic forces and to thought in Herder's *Gespräche*, I intend to explicate Herder's account of the all-encompassing scope of influence of substantial force. Philolaus provides the following description of how the world is shot through with the effect of substantial force, or God:

The world...shows traces of wisdom and goodness, not only here and there, as is commonly said, but in every point, in the nature of everything and its attributes, it reveals, if I may say so, God complete, that is, as He could become visible and active in this guise, in this point of space and time...²²⁸

The activity of God is to be recognized in every modification of reality, not merely in some places or instances but not in others. Whatever one encounters in the world is an expression of the activity of God, and it is both the essence and the characteristics of things that can be so

²²⁸ Herder, p. 129.

characterized. So there *is* nothing that falls outside of the scope of influence of God. This manifestation of substantial force is not indiscriminate and everywhere alike, but is expressed in a myriad of ways in virtue of manifesting itself in particular, determinate ways; *everything* in the world is a unique manifestation of substantial force in a particularized context.

Despite this diversity and plentitude of manifestation or expression, however, Herder points to a unity that underlies this diversity at the fundamental level. Thus with respect to the multitude of forces operative in a variety of contexts Theophron states: “But all of these differences, each of which is perfectly determinate, have, however, something in common, dynamic, interactive, otherwise they could form no unity, no whole.”²²⁹ Thus although it is the case that the world around us is composed of various forces operative in a multitude of contexts, Herder claims that these forces must have something in common; they must be related and act upon each other in some way since otherwise they would not conspire to produce a single, unified whole. A force that comes under our observation could not be completely independent of any relation to other forces since it would consequently structure some aspect of reality that is completely independent. But our experience of the world is of a unified whole, not of causally independent pockets of reality, and thus all the forces must be connected to or related to each other in such a way as to produce this whole. Theophron even points to some single law that would be the ground of the relation of the multifarious forces: “finally everything in nature must be interconnected, and there can be but one principal law, according to which even the most different forces are ordered.”²³⁰

²²⁹ Herder, p. 173. Translation modified.

²³⁰ Herder, p. 182. In this Herder might be seen to be advocating a view that is in outline similar to the drive in contemporary physics for some kind of parsimonious unification of the various forces in a Grand Unified Theory or Theory of Everything.

Whether or not Herder is right that there has to be a single law underlying and unifying the various forces, the general emphasis on the unification of these forces implies that all of reality is to be characterized as a systematic unity. Theophron claims that “the whole, down to its smallest relations, is but a single system, wherein the wisest goodness reveals itself in accord with immutable, inner laws.”²³¹ There are no entities or relations that fall outside of the scope of the whole that is the expression of the activity of substantial force. The various forces and their particular, determinate activity form a single system. The variety and change characteristic of the system, however, is due to unchanging intelligible principles according to which the system as a whole, as well as any particular part, functions in an orderly and regular fashion. It is these intelligible principles, along with the richness and beauty of their effects, that characterize the necessity of *substantielle Kraft* according to Herder and justify the characterization of that necessity as wise and good. In light of these considerations, Philolaus’ claim that “God is...the eternal, infinite root of all things” and Theophron’s claim regarding God that the entire world is “an expression, an appearance of His eternally-living, eternally-active forces” encapsulate and express the distinctive version of pantheism developed by Herder in the *Gespräche*.²³²

Although I have attempted to argue that the pantheistic framework in the *Gespräche* is significantly different from that of Spinoza’s as presented in his *Ethics*, the two accounts are deeply similar with respect to characterizing God as all-encompassing. Furthermore, Herder’s idea that knowledge of forces operative in a particular instance amounts to grasping the activity of *substantielle Kraft* parallels Spinoza’s idea that grasping adequate ideas of particular things, or modes, amounts to knowledge of God since modes express the essence or nature of God in a determinate way. Lastly, Spinoza also claims that “the power whereby each single thing, and

²³¹ Herder, p. 133.

²³² Herder, pp. 130, 170.

consequently man, preserves its own being is the very power of God, or Nature”.²³³ Although Spinoza is here only addressing the preservation of the existence of each particular thing and not the particular way in which each thing exists, the all-encompassing nature of God as the root or ground of all existence mirrors this aspect of the account given by Herder as explicated above. All of this only further strengthens Herder’s account of the unity of everything that exists, and consequently the extent to which his view in the *Gespräche* is both pantheistic and Spinozistic.

vi. God, Reason, and Personality

With a relatively detailed account of Herder’s picture of God or *substantielle Kraft* in the *Gespräche* in place, I now intend to address the relation of Herder’s association of thought or reason with God to considerations regarding the attribution of personality to God. The concept of *Dasein*, which according to Herder in the *Gespräche* seems to mean something like Being or existence itself, is crucial to his account of in exactly what sense thought or reason are to be associated with God. With respect to the concept of *Dasein* Theophron claims that it is “the ground and essence of all forces”.²³⁴ So *Dasein*, or Being, is somehow supposed to be the ground of all the forces and that through which the forces are intelligible. Philolaus claims that “we...can but say of the highest cause, ‘It is. It is active’”.²³⁵ Thus it seems as though *Dasein* or Being is supposed to be identified with God (*der Grund aller Kräfte, die höchste Ursache*); and consequently, the way in which existence itself is structured just is the way in which God is structured – that is, as active in accordance with the influence of forces. It is this structure of existence itself, along with its attendant properties that I have characterized previously, that

²³³ Spinoza, *Ethics* IVp4, p. 324.

²³⁴ Herder, p. 140.

²³⁵ Herder, p. 130.

comprises the determinate nature of *Dasein* and thus of God. So although we can see Herder as inheriting the kind of Spinozistic response to Kant's critique of rational theology outlined in the first section of this chapter, we can also see that he adds a new layer, or if not, at least emphasizes and makes explicit something that doesn't receive the same degree of attention in Spinoza – namely the *activity* of the divine. God not only *exists*, but *actively* manifests itself in the world.

Theophron suggests that when one is working with this conception of God, a demonstration of God can be crafted from knowledge of the world in accordance with the pantheistic framework that has been developed: “that what can be thought can be related according to inner laws, and that by means of innumerable relations of this kind, harmony and order are revealed, is to me in itself the profoundest proof of God”.²³⁶ A demonstration of the existence of God, construed as existence structured in accordance with intelligible principles, is given by the concatenation of forces that manifest themselves in a harmonious and ordered way in accordance with those principles. Furthermore, these principles are *internal to* that which is being manifested, not imposed from a source external to that manifestation. Theophron goes on to state: “as soon as [a philosopher] recognizes [reason] and makes clear to himself what reason is, then in the idea of reason itself he is given proof of God, that is, of an essential necessity in the relation of truths.”²³⁷ Here Theophron is suggesting that the essential necessity of the activity of forces *itself* amounts to a demonstration of the existence of God. The concept of necessity that Theophron employs in this excerpt involves being structured in accordance with intelligible principles, as I discussed previously, and is contrasted with a conception of blind arbitrariness. He states that this demonstration can be extracted from the concept of *Vernunft* itself, which can

²³⁶ Herder, p. 150.

²³⁷ Herder, p. 151.

be seen to follow when by *Vernunft* is just meant the structuring of forces and of existence as a whole by thought in the sense explicated previously. It is important to see that the conception of reason or thought that Herder is working with in this context does not rely on any additional conception of personality; it rather points to the role of intelligibility, order, and regularity that is characteristic of and manifested in the activity of forces in nature.

In his *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn: Erweiterungen der Zweiten Auflage* of 1789, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi explicitly addresses Herder's *Gespräche* in his fourth *Beylage* and challenges Herder's account of thought or reason without personality. Jacobi states: "I have no concept of an intelligence without personality".²³⁸ According to Jacobi self-consciousness is a necessary constituent of personality: "Unity of self-consciousness constitutes personality, and every entity which is conscious of its identity is a person."²³⁹ Thus according to Jacobi intelligence requires some kind of personality, and this in turn requires self-consciousness. Summing up this line of thinking, Jacobi writes: "Thus, if we do not want to completely abandon the realm of the conceivable and judge in the absence of all concepts, we must necessarily also ascribe to the highest intelligence the highest degree of personality."²⁴⁰ Thus Jacobi's criticism seems to be that Herder's account of thought or reason amounts to a commitment to an intelligence, and that an intelligence in turn requires some form of personality that includes self-consciousness.

As I have argued, however, Herder does not seem to attribute the kind of intelligence that Jacobi has in mind to *substantielle Kraft* when he attributes thought and reason to it. For Herder,

²³⁸ Jacobi, Friedrich H. *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn: Erweiterungen der Zweiten Auflage* (1789). *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi Werke. Band 1,1. Schriften zum Spinozastreit*. Ed. Klaus Hammacher and Irmgard-Maria Piske. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1998, p. 220. Translation mine.

²³⁹ Jacobi, *Erweiterungen* p. 220. Translation mine.

²⁴⁰ Jacobi, *Erweiterungen* p. 221. Translation mine.

the attribution of thought and reason to *substantielle Kraft* does not amount to an attribution of intelligence and self-consciousness, but rather to its operation in accordance with intelligible principles that result in order and regularity. Herder's account of thought or reason seems to meet a facet of *Personalität* that Jacobi gives elsewhere, namely that a *Person* determines itself through *Vernunft*,²⁴¹ since for Herder thought or reason is not determined by something external to it, but it issues forth in activity or manifests itself in accordance with its own inner principles. This fact alone, however, does not imply that such thought or reason requires personality in order to be made sense of. Thus Jacobi seems to be arguing for a necessary attribution of personality or agency within Herder's framework in virtue of a misconstrual of Herder's account of thought and reason, namely as characterized by some sort of self-conscious intelligence rather than as an intelligible principle that confers order and regularity in its manifestation, as Herder claims.

Jacobi's objection to Herder on this point is the kind of thing that your run-of-the-mill perfection theist might level at the pantheist in contemporary philosophy of religion. This disagreement between Herder and Jacobi concerning the personality of God, however, is one facet of a wider disagreement about the nature of God in general, which also parallels the landscape that I laid out in the Introduction. This more general disagreement is exemplified in Herder's implicit response to Jacobi's charge that pantheism bottoms out in atheism. In the letter to Jacobi from February 6, 1784 cited previously, Herder writes: "What you dear folks mean by 'existing outside the world' I do not grasp; if God does not exist in the world, everywhere in the world, immeasurable, complete and indivisible, then he exists nowhere."²⁴² Here Herder is

²⁴¹ Jacobi, *Erweiterungen* p. 220.

²⁴² Herder an Jacobi, 6. Februar 1784, p. 29. Translation mine.

clearly advocating for an immanent, naturalistic pantheism, just as Spinoza does.²⁴³ In a letter to Jacobi from later in the same year, however, he goes even further: “You make this profound, highest, all-in-one-subsuming concept an empty name: thus are you an atheist, and not Spinoza.”²⁴⁴ Here Herder turns the tables on Jacobi. If God is thought of as distinguished and separated from the world and inaccessible to human reason, the concept of God lacks any determinate content and is consequently merely an empty label. And it is *this* that is to be characterized as a kind of atheism. On the other hand the pantheistic view, whether Spinoza’s or Herder’s, is that the natural world itself in all its diversity is an expression of the essence of God, and so a principle of plenitude reigns in distinction from Jacobi’s abstract and indeterminate God.²⁴⁵ Seen in this way, Spinoza or Herder’s pantheism is further from atheism than Jacobi’s own view.

vii. The Relation of God to the Human Being

Finally, now that I have attempted to provide Herder’s account of *substantielle Kraft* or God and to situate it with respect to questions about the attribution of personality to God on this picture, I would like to briefly explicate the relation between God and the human being in light of this account. In a vein similar to Spinoza’s pantheistic metaphysics, human beings are to be seen as a part of God in light of the all-encompassing nature of God discussed previously. The radical dependence of human beings on God that comes along with this view is captured by Philolaus when he characterizes ‘the One’ (*das Einzige*) as that “without which we are nothing, but

²⁴³ Beiser writes: “According to Herder, God is neither transcendent nor personal, but omnipresent and impersonal” (p. 159). He goes on to say that pantheism and naturalism are two essential Spinozist doctrines that Herder holds onto (p. 162).

²⁴⁴ Herder, Johann G. "An Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, 20. Dezember 1784." *Briefe*, p. 90. Translation mine.

²⁴⁵ We might see this as the historical parallel to the contemporary position of skeptical theism, where refuge in the mystery and inscrutable ways of Gods reigns supreme.

through which we are all what we are, what we can and do.”²⁴⁶ Thus similarly to Herder’s account of *Dasein* explicated previously, both the particular existence of an individual human being as well as the determinate way in which a human being is constituted are dependent on God. Furthermore, the exhibition of rational thought on the part of human beings makes for an especially deep affinity between God and human beings. This particular aspect of the relation between God and human beings is expressed by Theano, a character that first appears in the fifth conversation:

Thus we also have the essential law of God in us, to order our limited power according to ideas of truth and goodness...He thereby bestowed upon us something essential to Himself and made us into images of His perfection, in that it lies within the nature of a divine force to work, not blindly, but with the highest reason²⁴⁷

We bear a similarity to that which is highest in God in virtue of having the ability to think and order our thoughts and actions in accordance with intelligible principles. The activity of God is not to be characterized as blind but rather as wise, and the activity of human beings can also be so characterized when it is in accordance with intelligible principles that exhibit order and regularity. Human beings are able to become conscious of the principled regularities operative in the world and to modify their behavior accordingly to an extent unencountered elsewhere in the animal kingdom; and furthermore, so far as we know, humans are uniquely able to organize their own *thoughts* in accordance with intelligible principles through self-consciousness, and in such a way as to be tied to the governance of their behavior.

The especially deep affinity between God and human beings that obtains in virtue of a shared intelligible structure underlies what is suggested as the most noble vocation of human beings in the *Gespräche*. Philolaus states: “our mind knows no nobler task than to contemplate the order

²⁴⁶ Herder, p. 113. Translation modified.

²⁴⁷ Herder, p. 170.

which the Eternal conceived.”²⁴⁸ In virtue of having the capacity of thought that can comprehend the underlying intelligible structure of things, human beings can grasp the order and regularity that is characteristic of the manifestation of the *Gotteskraft*. This conception of the most noble activity of a human being has affinities with Spinoza’s account of the intellectual love of God. Although it might not be the case that such an endeavor is the *highest* activity for a human being, it at least points to an activity that highlights the potential for a unique relation between God and the human being based on the human capacity for rational thought and its correspondence with the intelligible structure of the activity of God.

Near the end of the *Gespräche* Theophron picks up this theme once again:

To pursue nature, first to conjecture her lofty laws, then to observe, test and confirm them, then to find them verified a thousandfold and to apply them anew, finally, to perceive everywhere the same wisest law, the same divine necessity, to come to love it and make it one’s own—all this gives human life its value.²⁴⁹

The emphasis on apprehending the principles and laws underlying the manifestation of *substantielle Kraft* echoes the emphasis placed on natural science and its relation to metaphysics that I addressed earlier. Along with a recognition and knowledge of these principles comes the ability to apply them in various ways. Additionally, a deep understanding and appreciation of the intelligible principles in accordance with which the world is structured can serve as the basis for self-formation and a flourishing life, in part due to the affective component of such an understanding and its attendant practical consequences. And this affective component in particular has the potential, as it does in Spinoza, to serve as the basis for a distinctively pantheistic form of religiosity.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Herder, p. 130.

²⁴⁹ Herder, pp. 182-183.

²⁵⁰ Compare Gerrish: “Empirical science, Theophron predicts, will one day exclude the last vestiges of divine arbitrariness. But this by no means excludes religion, too” (p. 448).

viii. Conclusion

In this section of the chapter I have attempted to argue that Herder offers a pantheistic framework that offers marked philosophical improvements over that presented by Spinoza in his *Ethics*. In particular, Herder's account of substantial force offers a way to unify the two radically distinct Spinozistic attributes of Thought and Extension under the unified rubric of substantial force, and also thereby avoids Spinoza's problematic assumption that God is a substance consisting of infinitely many attributes. Furthermore, Herder emphasizes the *active* or *dynamic* nature of the divine through his focus on forces and their activities, rather than the static conception of reality *sub specie aeternitatis* that we achieve through adequate ideas for Spinoza. And the role of intelligibility in Herder's account affords thought or reason an explicit ontological priority and allows Herder to claim that the necessity that can be ascribed to God is wise rather than blind. Although I take Herder to have provided a systematic pantheistic framework that is an improvement over that of Spinoza in the *Gespräche*, there are also many deep similarities between the two, and Herder can be seen as further developing the Spinozistic framework rather than rejecting it. This improvement is such that it avoids some philosophically problematic aspects of Spinoza's pantheism while giving priority to thought or intelligibility and simultaneously squaring with natural science.

Herder's pantheistic picture in the *Gespräche* is only the beginning of deep engagement with Spinoza and pantheism in the coming decades of German philosophy. As Gerrish notes: "The immediate future in German philosophy lay neither with Jacobi's philosophy of faith nor with Mendelssohn's rational theism but with the varieties of speculative idealism that emerged, one might say, at the confluence of the Kantian philosophy and 'Herderized' Spinozism."²⁵¹ The

²⁵¹ Gerrish, p. 450.

aim of this chapter has been to explicate the factors of this confluence that are most relevant to pantheism. Some of the aspects of Herder's revised pantheistic system are also taken up by Hegel, but in a more systematic and far-reaching way, and the aim of the next chapter is to examine the culmination of this pantheistic vein of German philosophy in his thought.

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CHAPTER 3: HEGEL & PANTHEISM

Hegel's philosophy can be seen as the culmination of the intense interest in Spinoza's pantheism that was sparked by Lessing's enthusiasm for Spinoza's "one and all" God. In the time between Lessing's death and the exposition of Hegel's mature philosophy, many others besides Herder drew inspiration from Spinoza's refreshing conception of God/Nature. Schleiermacher's popular *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, first published in 1799, was heavily influenced by Spinoza, but applied his thought to religiosity and intuition rather than metaphysics; Schelling was also an admirer of Spinoza. But it is in Hegel's thought that we find a systematic pantheistic framework that both is heavily influenced by, but also distances itself from, Spinoza's system. It is Hegel's aspiration for systematicity that produces a pantheistic framework that is worthy of consideration alongside Spinoza's rationalistic system, rather than the creative but less philosophically rigorous endeavors of some of Hegel's contemporaries.

Considering Hegel's philosophy as a form of pantheism is not uncontroversial; one of my primary goals in this chapter is to explicate why Hegel's account of absolute spirit amounts to a kind of pantheism, along with the components of his view that differentiate it from Spinoza's and Herder's. In addition to the more general pantheistic framework present in Hegel's thought, I explicate various aspects of God or absolute spirit that both support and fill out this framework: God as necessary, as independent, as reason, as the true, as concrete rather than abstract, and as self-consciousness. I then consider Hegel's account of the relationship between God and nature, and the unity of thought and being, or Hegel's idealism. With the foundation of Hegel's account of God or absolute spirit in place, I discuss what Hegel had to say about pantheism and Spinoza in particular, and explore what Hegel seems to think is the crucial difference between Spinoza's account of God and his own – conceiving of God as a subject, and not merely as a substance. I

conclude the chapter with a discussion of the method of science/philosophy according to Hegel and its relation to religion and pantheism in particular.

As with the chapter on Spinoza, this chapter is not meant to provide detailed arguments for all of Hegel's positions that I explicate; indeed for Hegel, given his dialectical methodology, this could potentially amount to marching through his entire system. Not only would such an undertaking far outstrip the scope of this chapter, but it has been attempted by others who reach vastly different conclusions about the correct interpretation of Hegel. My goal is not to adjudicate these interpretive differences; instead I aim to provide an overview of Hegel's pantheistic thought and its internal coherence that can serve as a philosophically defensible pantheistic position alongside those of Spinoza and Herder. Upon completion of this survey we will have three distinct but closely related forms of pantheism that can lay claim to carving out a compelling alternative to the extremes of categorical atheism and perfection theism that are most salient in contemporary philosophy of religion.

I. Hegel's Pantheistic Framework

It is clear that Hegel takes Spinoza to be a crucial figure in the history of philosophy; even further, he seems to take Spinoza's philosophy as the foundation from which his account of God or absolute spirit must be built. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel says: "Spinoza is the centerpiece of modern philosophy: either Spinozism or no philosophy."²⁵² Early in their philosophical careers Schelling wrote the following in a letter to Hegel in response to Lessing's Spinozistic exclamation that set off the pantheism controversy: "For us as well the

²⁵² Hegel, G.W.F. *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III. Werke* vol. 20, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971, pp. 163-164. Translation mine. This is reminiscent of Jacobi reporting Lessing as saying, "There is no other philosophy, than the philosophy of Spinoza", cited in the previous chapter (Jacobi, p. 18).

orthodox concepts of God are no more. My reply is that we get even *further* than a personal Being. I have in the interim become a Spinozist!”²⁵³ Over the next several decades Hegel would develop a concept of God that could certainly be considered unorthodox, and that also goes further than the personal God as traditionally understood. He likely would not have considered himself a Spinozist, but in this section I will argue that his philosophical system is pantheistic, at least according to the way I’m understanding pantheism in this project.

In the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes: “The true is the whole. However, the whole is only the essence completing itself through its own development.”²⁵⁴ The truth after which philosophy seeks must be all-inclusive; it must contain the whole of existence. This idea is echoed in the Introduction of Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* where he addresses the beginning of philosophy: “In philosophy is the thought: the universal is the content, which is all Being.”²⁵⁵ The content that philosophy takes up includes all of Being; nothing falls outside the scope of the philosophical pursuit. And it is this standpoint that Hegel goes on to characterize as constituting the beginning of philosophy: “Philosophy begins where the universal is comprehended as the all-embracing existence, or where the existent is laid hold of in a universal form.”²⁵⁶ Thus not only is it the case for Hegel that philosophy concerns itself with Being as a whole, but it is this all-encompassing scope that is constitutive of even doing philosophy in the first place. But the beginning of philosophy gets specified in even more detail by Hegel:

²⁵³ Cited and translated in Franks, Paul W. *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism*. Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 84.

²⁵⁴ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Terry Pinkard, Cambridge University Press, 2018, §20, p. 13. All subsequent references to the *Phenomenology* are to this edition, with paragraph number and page number.

²⁵⁵ Hegel, G.W.F. *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I. Werke* vol. 18, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971, p. 115. Translation mine.

²⁵⁶ Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Translated by E.S. Haldane, University of Nebraska Press, 1995, Vol. I, p. 94. Subsequent references to these lectures are to this edition unless otherwise indicated.

Philosophy is properly to be commenced where...free thought not merely thinks the Absolute but grasps its Idea. That is to say where Thought grasps as Thought, the Being (which may be Thought itself), which it recognizes as the essence of things, the absolute totality and the immanent essence of everything.²⁵⁷

The *real* beginning of philosophy involves not just thinking about the Absolute, but grasping it as a totality that constitutes the immanent essence of everything. This seems to locate Hegel squarely in agreement with the first half of the definition of pantheism set out in the Introduction: everything that exists constitutes a unity. Hegel characterizes the proper conception of the Absolute as constituting the essence of all things, the nature of which remains to be spelled out.

The second half of the definition of pantheism that I've been working with is: the unity that is all-encompassing and is comprised of everything that exists is divine. So what textual evidence exists demonstrating that Hegel considered the unified entity of the Absolute as divine in some sense? Hegel seems to prefer the terms Absolute or Absolute Spirit to refer to the highest entity in his philosophy, but he also uses the term God in similar contexts.²⁵⁸ In the beginning of the Doctrine of Essence of the *Encyclopedia Logic* Hegel writes: "God, as the unqualifiedly infinite, is not the sort of entity that there simply is and *outside of* and *next to* which there are also still other essences [i.e. beings]."²⁵⁹ God, conceived of as absolutely endless, is not external to other entities but rather constitutes their essence in some sense. Near the end of the *Phenomenology* Hegel claims that a conception of the absolute that implies something existing externally to it is empty: "Absolute essence would be only an empty name if

²⁵⁷ *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 94.

²⁵⁸ 'Absolute' is also a logical category for Hegel, but he often seems to use the term more loosely to mean something like God, the divine, the ultimately real. It is this latter sense in which I also use the term, unless specified otherwise.

²⁵⁹ Hegel, G.W.F. *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*. Translated by Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom, Cambridge University Press, 2010, §112, p. 175. Subsequent references to the *Encyclopedia, Part I* are to this edition, with section number and page number, unless otherwise indicated.

in truth there were an *other* to it, if there were to be a *fall* [*Abfall*] from it.”²⁶⁰ The connection Hegel makes between philosophy and the Absolute as its ultimate object is paralleled in the very beginning of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*:

God is the one and only object of philosophy. [Its concern is] to occupy itself with God, to apprehend everything in him, to lead everything back to him, as well as to derive everything particular from God and to justify everything only insofar as it stems from God, is sustained through its relationship with him, lives by his radiance and has [within itself] the mind of God.²⁶¹

Although here Hegel utilizes the gendered pronoun germane to traditional monotheism, his point is that everything is to be understood through God or the Absolute, wherein those things are grounded. The excerpt closes with the intriguing claim that everything has within itself the mind of God; we will return to this important issue of the nature of God’s mind later in the chapter. In his Introduction to Part III of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* on “The Consummate Religion” Hegel states: “God himself is one in all”,²⁶² hearkening back to Lessing’s “one and all”.

Given that the primary object of philosophy is the all-encompassing Absolute or God, along with Hegel’s claim that “the whole of philosophy is nothing else but a study of the definition of unity”,²⁶³ it is clear that Hegel takes the Absolute to be a unity of everything that exists. One of Hegel’s great goals appears to be the elimination of conceptual bifurcations present throughout the history of religion and philosophy but brought into especially sharp relief by Kant. Most relevant to my purposes is the bifurcation between God and the world. Contra Kant, for whom God, if it exists, does so in the supersensible realm outside of space and time, Hegel asserts that

²⁶⁰ *Phenomenology* §780, p. 447.

²⁶¹ Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Edited by Peter C. Hodgson, Oxford University Press, 2007, Vol. I, p. 84. All subsequent references to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* are to this edition, with volume number and page number.

²⁶² *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. III, p. 63.

²⁶³ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 379.

the activity of the divine life is identical to the life of the world.²⁶⁴ Exactly what this means remains to be cashed out, but Hegel makes it clear that the divine does not exist in some other realm; rather the world we inhabit just is the activity of the divine unfolding. Kenneth Westphal underscores Hegel's desire to obliterate conceptual bifurcations in his essay, "Philosophizing about Nature: Hegel's Philosophical Project": "If there is a first rule of Hegel's metaphysics, it is: Posit no transcendent entities."²⁶⁵ According to Hegel the identity between the world and the divine is guided in some sense by the consciousness of the divine:

God's consciousness and subjectivity—the genuine object—is the whole. That God whom we designated as a mere object *over against consciousness* is an abstraction. God [is] the whole; hence he is the universal, the absolutely universal power, the substance of all existence, the truth—but as consciousness, <[as] infinite form, infinite subjectivity,> that is, as *spirit*.²⁶⁶

God is not an other in relation to our own consciousness that thinks about God; instead this consciousness is part of the divine itself, which is to be identified with the whole of existence. Thus Hegel conceives of the all-encompassing divine as consciousness or mind/spirit. This is the crucial juncture at which Hegel attempts to distance himself from Spinoza's pantheism, and it will take a detailed explication of Hegel's conception of the Absolute as subject to assess this alleged difference. At this point it should be clear that Hegel's characterization of the Absolute qualifies as pantheistic according to the definition laid out in the Introduction: everything that exists constitutes a unity, and that unity is divine. In the excerpts I've cited Hegel has spoken more of God than the divine (aside from one instance²⁶⁷). Using the term God certainly carries with it connotations of the divine, but the exact nature of Hegel's highest entity and the

²⁶⁴ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 232.

²⁶⁵ Westphal, Kenneth R. "Philosophizing about Nature: Hegel's Philosophical Project." *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*. Ed. Frederick C Beiser. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 307.

²⁶⁶ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. III, p. 62.

²⁶⁷ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 232.

characteristics that constitute its divinity must be explored in detail in order to solidify the purported characterization of the Absolute as divine.

II. God as Necessary and Independent

In Hegel's sketch of his logical system in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, in the final of his three main divisions entitled "The Doctrine of the Concept", the final of the three sub-parts of that section is "The Idea". In introducing this final sub-part of his logical system, Hegel characterizes the Idea as the unity of the ideal and the real "the *nature* of which *can only be conceived as existing*".²⁶⁸ Hegel's commitment to the necessary existence of the Idea is clear here, and his language hearkens back to Spinoza's claim that the essence of substance necessarily involves existence, or that existence belongs to the nature of substance.²⁶⁹ Generally, however, Hegel is more apt to characterize the Absolute as independent rather than as necessary.

In his introduction to his lectures on philosophy of religion, he states that God, which is the object of philosophy in addition to theology, "exists solely through itself and for its own sake."²⁷⁰ Thus Hegel places himself firmly in the tradition of conceiving of God as independent. But he goes further and puts his own spin on the independence of God utilizing the machinery of his philosophical system. In discussing the concept of God in his lectures, he states that God is "in and for itself, embracing and containing absolutely everything, is that through which alone everything is and has subsistence... This *One* is the result of philosophy." Shortly afterwards he goes on to say that God is "that upon which everything is dependent and apart from which nothing other than it has absolute, true independence."²⁷¹ Thus for Hegel the divine is the

²⁶⁸ *Encyclopedia, Part I*, §214, p. 284.

²⁶⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics* Ip7d, p. 219.

²⁷⁰ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 84.

²⁷¹ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, pp. 367, 368.

ground of the existence of all other things, while it doesn't exist through anything else, but exists necessarily. He also makes it clear that there is only one such thing that has "absolute, true independence". In the *Encyclopedia Logic* Hegel also states: "human beings know about the rational first and foremost insofar as they know of God and know him as determined by himself alone."²⁷² God is determined through itself and nothing external to it. For Hegel this independence makes the existence of God qualitatively different from ordinary things we encounter in the world. In the lectures on philosophy of religion he states: "If we ascribe a being to particular things, it is only a borrowed being, only the semblance of a being, not the absolutely independent being that God is."²⁷³ It seems that being, in the full-blown sense, is only applicable to God for Hegel, due to the fact that it is only God that is absolutely independent. In claiming that particular things only have a borrowed being, or "semblance" of a being, Hegel is not proposing a kind of idealism in which only God exists and particular things are illusions; in fact, as we'll see later, this is an objection leveled against Spinoza by Hegel. Instead Hegel seems to be claiming that to be, or exist, in the fullest sense is to exist independently. This doesn't mean that particular things don't exist, but they do so only in virtue of their dependence on God; in this Hegel is in agreement with Spinoza.

In the first excerpt from the philosophy of religion lectures above Hegel highlights his philosophical methodology in this context in claiming that the One [God] is the result of philosophy. This is not to say that philosophy somehow brings the Absolute into existence, but that its richness is most fully grasped once one has done the hard philosophical work that reveals its complex nature. In this Hegel departs sharply from the geometrical method of Spinoza, who

²⁷² *Encyclopedia, Part I*, §82, p. 132.

²⁷³ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 369.

begins with substance and derives his philosophical system from there. Hegel's philosophical methodology will be discussed in more detail below.

III. God as Reason and the True

Hegel's claims pertaining to God's necessity and independence are in some ways in line with the philosophical tradition that precedes him. His identification of God with Reason and the True, however, are less orthodox. He states that the object of philosophy of religion is God himself, which he identifies with "absolute reason".²⁷⁴ Rather than claiming that God is rational, he says that God *is* reason in some sense. It will require much of the rest of this chapter to spell out exactly what is meant by this claim, but we can make a start here. Shortly after this claim, Hegel says: "Absolute spirit is knowledge, the determinate rational knowledge of its own self."²⁷⁵

Hegel wants to go beyond claiming that the Absolute is rational, which is part of the traditional view that is committed to the radical bifurcation between God and the world. Hegel claims that the Absolute is to be identified with knowledge and the process of knowing itself, which takes place "on behalf of" human beings but is really part of the divine process of the Absolute. In his introduction to his lectures on the history of philosophy he states: "the life of God and all the deeds of time simply are the struggles for Spirit to know itself."²⁷⁶ Although up to now I have discussed Hegel's pantheism in the terms of God and the Absolute, Spirit is also relevant to this discussion. For Hegel, Spirit explicitly includes the dimension of consciousness, which some conceptions of the Absolute do not. The role of consciousness and subjectivity in Hegel's account of the divine is discussed in detail below; at this juncture the important point regarding

²⁷⁴ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 170.

²⁷⁵ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 170.

²⁷⁶ *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 23. Translation modified.

Spirit is just that the dimensions of consciousness and self-recognition are part of Hegel's account of the divine. According to Hegel everything that transpires can be characterized as Spirit striving to recognize itself in everything around it. Human beings appear to be the most advanced form of this recognition manifesting itself, and this process itself, mediated by reason, is the activity of the divine. It is for this reason that Hegel not only characterizes the Absolute as rational, but goes further in identifying it with reason itself.

Hegel also characterizes God as the True, which is related to but distinct from conceiving of God as Reason. In the lectures on philosophy of religion he says that from the religious standpoint the true, which has being in and for itself, we call God.²⁷⁷ This conception of God as the True is not limited to the context of philosophy of religion; in the lectures Hegel says that philosophy "has as its object the true, and the true in its highest shape as absolute spirit, as God."²⁷⁸ Thus, as was the case for being, it seems that for Hegel truth is also applicable in its fullest sense only to Absolute Spirit or God.²⁷⁹ Regarding the idea of God Hegel states: "Speculative science [has] recognized and demonstrated that this idea [is] the truth, the whole truth, the sole truth."²⁸⁰ This characterization of the divine as the highest shape of truth and as the all-encompassing truth further reinforces Hegel's pantheism – there are no truths independent from God, just as nothing can exist independent from God. Hegel also characterized the idea of God as the sole truth, implying some sort of unity amongst the various truths we might encounter

²⁷⁷ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 222.

²⁷⁸ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 446.

²⁷⁹ The identification of Absolute Spirit and God follows Hegel's lead in the preceding excerpt. It is worth mentioning, however, that Absolute Spirit includes art, religion, and philosophy, while the concept of God might be thought most appropriate in the narrower context of religion. I suspect that Hegel is using 'God' here more loosely and perhaps suggesting the identification between that more traditionally religious, representational concept and his philosophical account of Absolute Spirit.

²⁸⁰ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. III, p. 79.

grounded in God. In his introduction to his lectures on the history of philosophy, he describes this one truth, which is both the starting point and the goal of philosophy, as the:

source from which all else proceeds, both all the laws of nature and all the manifestations of life and consciousness of which they are mere reflections, or to lead these laws and manifestations in ways apparently contrary, back to that single source, and from that source to comprehend them, which is to understand their derivation.²⁸¹

God, as the sole truth, is both the source of all other truths but also the integrated system of individual truths. This is what allows Hegel to claim that there is only one truth. It is not necessarily the case that the truth of all existence could be captured in a single proposition, but instead such a truth is a unified whole. Hegel's entire methodology can be seen as an attempt to demonstrate that any individual "truth" taken in isolation is incomplete and thus in some sense a distortion of the highest truth. The other aspect of this passage worth noting here, which forges the connection between reason and truth, is that the particular things we encounter in everyday experience must be grasped and derived from God as the source of all truth through reason. And it is exactly this that Hegel's philosophy purports to do.

IV. God as Concrete vs. Abstract

In the previous section we saw Hegel claim that Absolute Spirit is the determinate rational knowledge of its own self.²⁸² Building determinateness into the absolute, in contrast with conceptions of God that tend toward the abstract, can be seen as a primary goal of Hegel's that is manifested in his philosophical methodology. In the section on Natural Religion in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel says the following regarding the initial representation of God as self-consciousness: "The *represented* self is not the *actual* self." By this I take Hegel to mean that a

²⁸¹ *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 20.

²⁸² *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 170.

representation of God as self-consciousness locates the divine as other than the consciousness doing the representing. Hegel goes on to say: “For what is represented only ceases to be something represented, ceases to be alien to spirit’s knowing, when the self has engendered it and when it therefore both intuits the determination of the object as *its own* determination and, in doing so, intuits itself within that object.”²⁸³ It is this bifurcation between God and the knowing subject, or between God and the world, that Hegel seems keen to do away with at every possible juncture. This overall thrust in Hegel’s thought is an attempt to conceive of God as concrete and determinate rather than as abstract and other-worldly.

In the final section on religion in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel provides the following resolution of the bifurcation between the abstract concept and determinate reality: “Spirit, which is expressed in the element of pure thinking, is essentially itself just this, that it does not exist only in pure thinking; it is also *actual*, for lying in the concept of spirit is *otherness* itself, i.e., the sublation of the pure concept which has only been thought.”²⁸⁴ For Hegel Spirit includes having gone out from the abstractness of the pure concept into the determinateness of the world, and subsumed it as part of its concept. Thus a proper conception of the divine includes the concreteness and determinacy of the world, and eliminates an abstract conception of God as distinct and separate from the world. This drive towards determinacy takes place in one of the most developed stages of Hegel’s system, in the relation between religion and art. In the section on the art-religion in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel writes that the essence of God is “the unity of the universal existence of nature and of self-conscious spirit”.²⁸⁵ In Hegel’s discussion of the concept of religion in general in his lectures on philosophy of religion, he states: “The concept

²⁸³ *Phenomenology* §684, p. 397.

²⁸⁴ *Phenomenology* §772, p. 442.

²⁸⁵ *Phenomenology* §707, pp. 406-407.

of God is God's *idea*, [namely,] to become and make himself *objective* to himself."²⁸⁶ Thus the concept of God involves not remaining a *mere* concept, or a disembodied self-consciousness, but becoming an object for itself in actuality.

It seems that for Hegel, the manifestation of the divine in actuality does not take place in a limited context distinct from other aspects of actuality (e.g., not as merely a manifestation in a single individual). Early in the *Encyclopedia Logic* Hegel writes that God is "the concrete totality".²⁸⁷ In the section on Absolute Spirit in the *Encyclopedia* Hegel says that philosophy "has to do with *unity* in general, though not with abstract unity, mere identity and the empty absolute, but with *concrete* unity (the concept), and in its whole course it has to do entirely with this alone".²⁸⁸ Thus for Hegel, philosophy's primary object, God or Absolute Spirit, is both a concrete totality and a concrete unity; and he goes so far as to say that this is the only object of philosophy, implying that everything that proceeds in his philosophical system is to be subsumed and integrated within it. In the introduction to his lectures on the history of philosophy Hegel seems to provide a definition of "the concrete": "The concrete is the universal that is determinate, thus containing its other in itself."²⁸⁹ Thus Absolute Spirit is a unified totality that subsumes while retaining the particular determinateness of all individual things. Hegel sees his philosophical enterprise as essential in demonstrating that this is the case as opposed to the abstract beyond of mainstream metaphysical and religious conceptions of God. In the same introduction he writes: "it is the business of philosophy, as opposed to understanding, to show

²⁸⁶ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 186.

²⁸⁷ Hegel, G.W.F. *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse, Erster Teil: Die Wissenschaft der Logik*. Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970, §51, p. 136. Translation mine.

²⁸⁸ Hegel, G.W.F. *Philosophy of Mind. Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences, Part III: The Philosophy of Mind*. Translated by W. Wallace and A.V. Miller, Oxford University Press, 2007, §573, pp. 273-274. Subsequent references to the *Encyclopedia, Part III* are to this edition, with section number and page number, unless otherwise indicated.

²⁸⁹ *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I*, p. 98. Translation mine.

that the truth of the Idea does not consist in empty generalities, but in a universal; and that is within itself the particular and the determined. If the truth is abstract it must be untrue.”²⁹⁰

V. God as Self-Consciousness

Self-consciousness as it applies to God has come up multiple times thus far in excerpts I have cited, and it is crucial to Hegel’s distinctive conception of God. But as has been alluded to, Hegel’s particular account of God as self-conscious seems to be unorthodox, at least with respect to the perfection theism dominant in the thought of some of his philosophical predecessors. Thus my aim in this section is to elucidate Hegel’s conception of God as self-conscious, which I maintain further solidifies Hegel’s philosophical system as pantheistic. In the introduction to his lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel states that “the starting point of the history of philosophy can be expressed as follows: that God is apprehended as the immediate, not-yet-developed universality.” He goes on to say that the goal of the history of philosophy, which is also “the goal of our time”, is to apprehend the Absolute as Spirit.²⁹¹ Hegel believes that the historical development of philosophy through time begins with a primitive apprehension of God, of the divine in its immediacy. But the most developed philosophical apprehension of God includes conceiving of God as spirit (*Geist*) in some sense. Hegel makes many different applications of the term *Geist*, from an individual human consciousness to Absolute Spirit. But it is clear that as it is applied to God, or is Absolute, it has a distinctive meaning. In his discussion of the historical development of the various philosophies, he says that “Spirit is, however, not only to be considered as individual, finite consciousness, but as that Spirit which is

²⁹⁰ *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 24. Translation modified.

²⁹¹ *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I*, p. 123. Translation mine.

universal and concrete within itself.”²⁹² This excerpt picks up on the discussion of concreteness in the previous section – Spirit is a totality that is at the same time concrete rather than abstract. In addition, however, Hegel here claims that Spirit, in its fullest development, is not an individual, finite consciousness but rather is universal. Although the traditional perfection theist might also deny that God’s consciousness is finite, Hegel’s point here is that it is a mistake to think of Spirit as circumscribed and limited in the sense that it is distinct from other individual consciousnesses. So what is Hegel’s positive account of the self-consciousness of God or Absolute Spirit?

In Hegel’s discussion of Absolute Spirit in the latter stages of the *Encyclopedia*, he writes: “God is God only in so far as he knows his own self; his self-knowledge is, moreover, a self-consciousness in man and man’s knowledge *of* God, which proceeds to man’s self-knowledge *in* God.”²⁹³ This excerpt starts out with the relatively mainstream claim that integral to God is that it knows itself, that it is self-conscious. Hegel goes on, however, to identify God’s self-knowledge with the self-consciousness of human beings. Initially this takes the form of knowledge of God on the part of human beings, but in its highest form the self-knowledge of human beings just is the self-consciousness of God at work. And as we saw in the preceding paragraph, Hegel does not seem to think that the self-consciousness of God is discrete and independent of others. Thus it seems as though the self-consciousness of God reaches its apex when human beings are conscious of their own mental activity as constitutive of the divine, and there does not seem to be any space for a divine self-consciousness independent of the collective mental activity of human beings. And this is a clear departure from the standard perfection

²⁹² *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 33. Translation modified.

²⁹³ *Encyclopedia, Part III*, §564, pp. 263-264.

theistic view according to which the self-consciousness of God is distinct and independent of the self-consciousness of human beings.

Hegel further specifies this conception of the self-consciousness of God as it relates to an individual subjective spirit in his discussion of the relation between philosophy and religion in the introduction to his lectures on the history of philosophy: “the active subjective Spirit is that which comprehends the divine, and in its comprehension of it it is itself the divine Spirit.”²⁹⁴ Here Hegel identifies the activity of a subjective spirit as the activity of the divine Spirit. This is not to say that an individual subjective spirit could be fully identified with the Absolute Spirit; this would contradict Hegel’s claims cited previously that Absolute Spirit is an all-encompassing totality. But an individual subjective spirit is a manifestation of the divine, which when taken collectively with others constitutes the self-consciousness of Absolute Spirit. Kenneth Westphal, in his chapter, “Philosophizing about Nature: Hegel’s Philosophical Project”, seems to agree with an interpretation along these lines, and describes the unique role of human beings in Hegel’s philosophy as follows: “Nature *does* form a systematically ordered hierarchy within which human beings have a particular and quite special place: Through our knowledge of the world-whole, the world-whole gains knowledge of itself.”²⁹⁵

In “Hegel’s Absolute: Transcendent of Immanent?”, Anselm Min provides a challenge to this general line of thought. Min writes: “if [the Absolute] could be conscious of itself ‘only’ in and through finite spirits, what or where would the Absolute have been, say, before the emergence of man in the evolutionary process?”²⁹⁶ The answer to such a question highlights the importance of distinguishing between different kinds of activities or manifestations of the

²⁹⁴ *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 73.

²⁹⁵ Westphal, p. 309.

²⁹⁶ Min, Anselm K. “Hegel’s Absolute: Transcendent of Immanent?” *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 56, no. 1, Jan. 1976, p. 66.

Absolute in Hegel's philosophy. Min begins by considering the scope of the Absolute's self-consciousness as limited to finite spirits and then asks where or what the Absolute would be before the existence of such finite spirits. If other beings have the capacity for self-consciousness the self-conscious activity of the Absolute could be present in those individuals as well. But it is the distinction between the Absolute as self-consciousness and the many other ways it manifests itself that provides Hegel with a relatively straight-forward response to such a challenge: if we suppose at some point in the past that no individuals exist that could be considered finite spirits, the world is still a manifestation of the Absolute, but does not yet contain or express the Absolute as self-consciousness. What I think Min highlights, however, is that self-consciousness is necessary for the fullest expression of the Absolute. In Westphal's terms, this is required in some form for the world-whole to know itself, to reflexively reflect upon itself. And this is perhaps the most crucial stage of the Absolute's development for Hegel; without self-consciousness, the bifurcation between the world and its logical structure can never be dissolved and unified. Hegel says, regarding *Geist*, "The fact that so many races and generations are devoted to these operations of its consciousness...it pursues its work on the largest possible scale, and has nations and individuals enough to spare."²⁹⁷ Although not the brightest picture from the perspective of certain nations or individuals, Hegel sees human history as the process of the Absolute becoming conscious of itself. But the question of the role of the Absolute in the natural world apart from or before human beings and societies is an important one, both in order to see how the Absolute can be a unified totality of all that exists, and also in order to situate Hegel on this point with respect to Spinoza and Herder, for whom the natural

²⁹⁷ *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 36.

world plays a crucial role in their respective pantheistic systems. It is to this topic that we now turn.

VI. God & Nature

The natural world plays an important but often overlooked role in Hegel's philosophy – it forms the lynchpin between the logic and the philosophy of spirit in Hegel's mature system, and in some ways it provides a more dependable touchstone for the exposition of his dialectical method than does the realm of spirit. Hegel himself was a great admirer of the natural sciences, and engaged with them more deeply than many philosophers of his time, a time in which keeping up with the deliverances of the scientific enterprise was becoming increasingly difficult. In Hegel's philosophical system, the natural world is the Absolute in its immediate externality; it is where the concreteness of the Absolute is made possible, and a necessary, integral part of its essence. In his discussion of the concept of religion in general in the lectures on philosophy of religion, Hegel says: "Spirit does have its own immediate nature, its physical, organic nature".²⁹⁸ Thus *Geist*, which is usually translated as 'spirit' but has also been translated as 'mind', for Hegel is constituted, at least in part, by the natural world; its scope does not just extend to entities with consciousness or sentience or some other psychological characteristic.

In the course of Hegel's lectures on philosophy of religion, he states the following regarding "the wisdom of God in nature": "This wisdom is a universal expression, and it is the concern of philosophical cognition to recognize this concept in nature and to grasp nature as a system, as an organization, in which the divine idea is mirrored."²⁹⁹ The "wisdom of God" is universally expressed throughout nature, and Hegel believes it should be grasped philosophically

²⁹⁸ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 187.

²⁹⁹ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. III, p. 90.

through reason. And it seems that what is divine about the natural world is that it is structured in a way that is accessible and intelligible to reason; it is the manifestation of the logical structure of the divine. Thus Hegel states: “to the extent that thinking recognizes that nature is created by God, that understanding and reason are within it, nature is known by thinking human beings. To that extent it is posited in relation to the divine, because its truth is recognized.”³⁰⁰ A crucial truth about the natural world is that it is rational, subject to being understood by human beings, and in virtue of being rational it is an integral part of the divine life. So investigating and understanding the rational structure underlying the natural world is an inquiry into the divine. Hegel says that “it is partly the instinct of reason, and partly its development, to know that reason is universal and that nature is therefore rational. Of course nature is not conscious reason, but it has determination according to purpose within it.”³⁰¹ This last sentence addresses Min’s concern raised earlier – the natural world, or particular aspects of it, do not necessarily require self-consciousness in order to be a manifestation of the divine. And Hegel makes it clear that he is comfortable with a characterization of nature as rational even in the absence of a thinking agent. In this excerpt he highlights determination according to purpose in nature, which seems to be a further specification of nature as rational. This might be taken as a commitment on the part of Hegel to teleology in nature, a topic which falls beyond the scope of this project. At the very least, nature is determined in accordance with rational principles which are intelligible to a rational mind investigating its details.

In one of the prefaces to the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel further specifies the relation between reason or thought and its objects as that relation applies to nature:

The fact that there is rhyme and reason [*Verstand, Vernunft*] to the world conveys exactly what is contained in the expression ‘objective thought’. To be sure, the

³⁰⁰ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. III, p. 294.

³⁰¹ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. II, p. 524.

latter expression is awkward because *thought* is habitually used for something belonging to the mind [*Geist*], i.e. to consciousness and what is objective is for the most part attributed to what is not mental.³⁰²

Hegel here identifies “objective thought” with the claim that reason exists in the world, and highlights that this is a somewhat unorthodox application of the term “thought”. We normally think that “thought” only emanates from conscious subjects or minds, but Hegel thinks this is a too-limited application of the term. Thought or reason is present in the world in an objective way, as an object external to and independent of a subject that can be discovered and intersubjectively verified by human minds. In the introduction to the philosophy of spirit, Hegel writes: “External nature too, like Spirit, is rational, divine, a presentation of the Idea.”³⁰³ Nature is both rational and divine, just as spirit is, and it is divine *because* it is rational.

Despite the elevated role that nature plays alongside spirit, Hegel makes it clear that the objective rationality of nature, if it lacks self-consciousness, is not the highest development of the Absolute. He states that “the necessity of nature is *to become spirit*, i.e., that the idea which it is implicitly should come to be *for itself*, that the concept which is its inner essence should also become object to it.”³⁰⁴ The rational expression of the Absolute in nature but in the absence of conscious minds is lacking the *recognition* of the inherent presence of reason. Importantly, this recognition does not come from something *outside of* nature. Instead nature becomes spirit; human beings issue forth from the natural world and allow it to reflect upon itself. Thus what was originally just implicit becomes explicit through consciousness and rational reflection. Thus Hegel states: “The true miracle is the appearance of spirit in nature, and the authentic

³⁰² *Encyclopedia, Part I*, §24, p. 58.

³⁰³ *Encyclopedia, Part III*, §381, p. 10.

³⁰⁴ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, pp. 226-227.

appearance of spirit is, in its fundamental aspect, the spirit of humanity and the human consciousness of the world.”³⁰⁵

In the beginning of the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel emphasizes the crucial role that human beings play in the recognition of spirit in nature: “Nature does not bring *nous* to consciousness; humans are the first to duplicate themselves in such a way that the universal exists *for* the universal.”³⁰⁶ Hegel claims that it is first in human beings that the all-encompassing totality becomes ‘for itself’, or an object to itself. However, so far as I know, Hegel’s claim that spirit becomes an object for itself *only* for human beings is never justified. It seems feasible that other organisms could potentially recognize the rational structure of nature in some inchoate way; many other organisms certainly seem to grasp this structure in a practical or operational way. Perhaps Hegel believes that discursive thought or something like a propositional knowledge of the laws of nature is necessary for the kind of recognition he has in mind here, but I’m not aware of any place that Hegel makes this explicit or gives anything like necessary and sufficient conditions for his conception of recognition in this context.

It is clear that Hegel believes that the realm of spirit is in some sense a higher manifestation of the divine than the realm of nature. In the introduction to his lectures on the history of philosophy Hegel writes the following with respect to God: “Does he not rule over what is spiritual, or rather since He himself is spiritual, in what is spiritual? and is not the ruler over or in the spiritual region higher than a ruler over or in Nature?”³⁰⁷ This is echoed again shortly after the previous excerpt: “Spirit is infinitely higher than nature, in it divinity manifests itself more than in nature.”³⁰⁸ If divinity consists in the manifestation of reason or that which is rationally

³⁰⁵ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. II, p. 677.

³⁰⁶ *Encyclopedia, Part I*, §24, p. 59. Translation modified.

³⁰⁷ *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 66.

³⁰⁸ *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I*, p. 88. Translation mine.

structured, it seems that the natural world has a strong claim to make in revealing the divine through its operations. The natural world, governed by natural laws, exhibits a regularity that, one might argue, rests on more solid empirical ground than the contention that the realm of spirit is governed by similar regularities. Hegel's point that having conscious minds to recognize the manifestation of the divine in the world is certainly a strong one, but one that applies equally to that recognition in the realm of nature or in the realm of spirit. Hegel seems to have in mind the achievements in art, religion, and philosophy as the highest of human beings. And an argument could certainly be made that those manifestations of the Absolute are "higher" than its manifestation in the natural world. But I'm not aware of Hegel making this specific argument; instead he generally argues along the lines cited above, that the realm of spirit is wholesale higher than the realm of nature. But this just doesn't seem to be the case. For instance, my psychological reflection on some mundane aspect of reality, such as what I would like for dinner tonight, seems, on Hegel's own terms, a much "lower" manifestation of the Absolute than the regularity always and everywhere exhibited by the laws of nature. But Hegel seems to believe that once spirit comes onto the scene in the form of human beings, the realm of nature has been superseded. It is not clear, however, that he has made good on this claim. Certainly the conscious recognition of the divine in the world on the part of human beings is qualitatively unique and significant; but it is not clear that divinity is always and everywhere manifested more so when the object of this recognition is part of the realm of spirit rather than "mere" nature. And perhaps Hegel would agree, but as far as I know this distinction is not considered in the more coarse-grained and general assessment that the realm of spirit is a higher manifestation of the divine than the realm of nature.

VII. Hegel's Idealism: The Unity of Being & Thought

Despite the concerns about the role of nature raised above, this should not take away from Hegel's overarching commitment to the unity of being and thought. Though he speaks of a realm of nature and a realm of spirit, both of these realms are characterized by physical things that have an underlying rational structure or logic; put another way, the rational structure of existence as a whole has a physical correlate. In the preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel identifies being and thought, writing that "being is thinking". What I attempt to do in this section is explicate what exactly is meant by this, and how Hegel's idealism avoids "that ordinary, non-comprehending talk of the identity of thinking and being".³⁰⁹

In his discussion of the consummate religion in his lectures on philosophy of religion, Hegel says: "God [is] all reality, and hence the reality of being too; i.e., being is contained in the concept [of God]."³¹⁰ As was discussed above, God or the Absolute is the all-encompassing totality in Hegel's philosophical system. In addition, God is identified with reason and the true. Thus, all of reality is rational in some sense – not necessarily conscious, but structured in accordance with rational principles. Hegel ends the *Vorbegriff* of the *Encyclopedia Logic* with the following: "we know God (who is the truth) in his truth, i.e. as absolute spirit, only insofar as we recognize at the same time that the world created by him, i.e. nature and finite spirit, are, in their difference from God, untrue."³¹¹ Hegel here makes the fairly unorthodox claim that we can *only* cognize God when we recognize that the world, which is composed of nature and finite spirit, is encompassed by the divine, and is the manifestation of the Absolute. This is confirmation of the earlier discussion that for Hegel the Absolute is not an abstract entity

³⁰⁹ *Phenomenology* §54, p. 34.

³¹⁰ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. III, p. 71.

³¹¹ *Encyclopedia, Part I*, §83, p. 134.

existing outside of the world. But Hegel seems to think that it is just this identification of the world with God that constitutes idealism. At the end of the preface to his 1827 lectures on philosophy of religion, when discussing absolute religion, Hegel states: “Ideality means that this being [that is] external [to me] (i.e. its spatiality, temporality, materiality, and mutual externality) is sublated.”³¹² This can be applied to existence as a whole as well as at the individual level.

Hegel’s idealism consists in the externality between the world and God being overcome. And it is thought, which is co-extensive with being, that Hegel thinks warrants the appellation of “the Absolute”. The Absolute is the expression for God “in the sense and in the form of thought.”³¹³

Thus Hegel thinks that the distinction between “the ideal” and “the real” is a false dichotomy. In the Doctrine of Being in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel writes: “ideality is not something that there is apart from and alongside reality. Rather, the concept of ideality consists expressly in being the *truth* of reality; that is to say, reality posited as what it is in itself proves to be ideality.”³¹⁴ Hegel confirms in this passage that reality *in itself* is rational; but conceiving of the ideal as the truth of the real makes this explicit. And cognizing the identity of the ideal and the real is a crucial step in overcoming their bifurcation. Additionally, however, Hegel claims that the ideal is *the truth* of the real, seeming to give it pride of place compared to the real. So it is Hegel’s idealism that reveals the priority that he places on the ideal over the real. Of course, the two are mutually dependent on each other conceptually, and one could not obtain without the other. In the *Encyclopedia Logic* Hegel writes:

Now nature is indeed not something fixed and finished for itself, something that could therefore subsist without spirit. Rather, nature achieves its end and truth only in spirit, and spirit for its part is similarly not just an abstract beyond of

³¹² *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 184.

³¹³ *Encyclopedia, Part I*, §85, p. 181.

³¹⁴ *Encyclopedia, Part I*, §96, p. 153.

nature; rather, it *exists* and validates itself as spirit only insofar as it contains in itself nature as sublated.³¹⁵

Nature could not subsist on its own, without spirit; but conversely spirit is only truly itself when it integrates the truths of the realm of nature; otherwise it would remain in the false abstractness of “the beyond”. But the priority for Hegel seems to be on the side of the logical or rational that provides the underlying structural framework of reality. Hegel characterizes spirit as the goal of nature, and it is spirit that takes up and incorporates nature, not vice versa. Thus despite the mutual dependence between nature and spirit, there exists an asymmetry according to which the rational, the ideal, is ontologically prior to nature, or the real. Hegel confirms this at the very end of the philosophy of nature in the *Encyclopedia*, where he writes: “spirit, as the purpose of nature, is thus prior to it”.³¹⁶

Interestingly, this seems to place Hegel in a similar camp to Spinoza, according to the interpretation of Spinoza’s attributes I proposed in Chapter 1. Taking the attribute of thought as the correlate for the ideal, and extension for the real, I argued that Spinoza also seems to place an ontological priority on thought, even if this is not as explicit as it is in Hegel’s philosophy. Herder also explicitly gives priority to thought over extension or the physical, as was discussed in the previous chapter. Thus all three of these thinkers are, in a sense, idealists – the ideal or the rational structure of the world is ontologically more basic than the real or physical world, even though one could not exist without the other. Furthermore, they are, in the terminology of my Introduction, immanent idealists – although the rational structure of the world is ontologically most basic, it is not independent of the world in some transcendent realm.

³¹⁵ *Encyclopedia, Part I*, §96, p. 153.

³¹⁶ Hegel, G.W.F. *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse, Zweiter Teil: Die Naturphilosophie*. Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978, §376, p. 538. Translation mine.

Thus far I have not discussed the issue of the transcendence (or lack thereof) of the Absolute in Hegel's philosophy. This is primarily because, as far as I know, Hegel does not address this issue head-on as it relates to his own account of God or the Absolute. He is everywhere keen to take a wrecking ball to conceptual bifurcations that seem to leave room for transcendence, such as between the physical world and the supersensible in Kant's philosophy. So from a more general procedural perspective, it would be surprising if Hegel held that the Absolute was transcendent in some sense. In this context I am understanding 'transcendent' to mean something like existing outside of (transcending) the physical world of space and time, in such a way that the transcendent entity is independent of and not subject to the constraints of the physical world. Hegel thinks that it is in the spatio-temporal world that the Absolute manifests itself, but I'm not aware of any discussion of the existence of the Absolute as outside of and independent of the world. Instead Hegel claims that the Absolute must necessarily manifest itself; thus there is a certain dependence of the rational on the spatiotemporal, something generally foreign to conceptions of the divine as transcendent. But as has been discussed, Hegel clearly places a priority on the rational over the spatiotemporal, while maintaining that they are mutually dependent upon each other. Thus it seems best to characterize Hegel's position on the relation between the Absolute and the world as an immanent idealism according to which reason has an ontological priority over the world, rather than as a kind of transcendence of the Absolute.

VIII. Hegel on Pantheism

In the preceding I have laid out various aspects of Hegel's account of God or the Absolute. I maintain that, when taken together, they dictate that Hegel should be considered a pantheist given the account laid out in the introduction and deployed throughout this project: Hegel clearly thinks that everything that exists constitutes a unity, and that that unity is divine. He

often calls the Absolute God, and believes that the highest deliverances of philosophy are the truth of religion. Hegel's view is much more complex than just claiming that everything is one, and he is anxious to build determinacy into his view with his accounts of nature, and the concreteness and self-consciousness of the Absolute, for example. But, at root, it is accurate to characterize his view as pantheistic in the sense above. In addition, he seems to have provided his own distinctive account of the characteristics that I maintain are together sufficient for calling the unity of all things God or divine: the Absolute is independent and exists necessarily, is the *explanans* of everything that exists, is structured in accordance with rational principles, and it is not consistent with a view that bottoms out in unintelligibility and randomness. Given this thesis that Hegel is a pantheist, it is worth considering what he himself would have thought of this claim.

Hegel discusses pantheism in two different places in his lectures on the philosophy of religion, and seems to provide two different definitions of the term. In his discussion of the concept of God in his 1827 lectures, he says: “Pantheism in the proper sense means that everything, the whole, the universe, this complex of everything existing, these infinitely many individual things—that all this is God.”³¹⁷ This is close to the way I've been using the term, and would be right on if Hegel would have ended with: “that all this taken together is God.” This would rule out taking individual things in this complex to be God or gods; and it seems that this is Hegel's intention in this excerpt. What is confusing, though, is that the other definition of pantheism that Hegel provides is just what I suggest ruling out. Near the end of his lectures of the same year (1827), he says: “‘Pantheism’ means ‘all is divine,’ and amounts to the notion that every thing taken singularly is God”.³¹⁸ This is strange as it seems to contradict the definition

³¹⁷ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 375.

³¹⁸ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 432.

provided above, along with the view of the most prominent pantheist with which Hegel engaged – Spinoza (discussed in detail below). Every thing taken singularly is part of the divine, and one might say each thing bears the stamp of the divine, but an individual thing is not the divine itself, in its totality.

In the discussion where Hegel provides the first definition of pantheism, he also provides a further specification of how he conceives of pantheism: “The absolute subject (the spirit) also remains substance, although it is defined not only as substance but also inwardly as subject. Those who say that speculative philosophy amounts to pantheism usually know nothing of this distinction”.³¹⁹ A crucial way in which Hegel sees his philosophy as distinguished from Spinoza’s is through an account of the Absolute as subject rather than merely as substance. This distinction is discussed in detail below. Regarding the definition of pantheism, Hegel seems to imply that a conception of the Absolute as subject rather than merely as subject disqualifies it from being a form of pantheism. Why this is so, however, is unclear. Perhaps Hegel is just using the term ‘pantheism’ to refer to pantheistic views in the history of philosophy, such as Spinoza’s; or perhaps Hegel does not want to be lumped under a pre-existing label, but to create a new one for his philosophy. Since Hegel doesn’t provide a clear (and charitable) account of what pantheism is and how his philosophy relates to it, it is difficult to say why he believes that conceiving of the Absolute as a subject disqualifies such a view from being pantheistic. In the end this may just be a matter of semantics. I think it is fairly clear that Hegel’s philosophy qualifies as pantheistic in the way I’ve defined it as part of this project, and it is more illuminating to examine Hegel’s engagement with Spinoza to understand his view on what he takes pantheism to be, which is the topic of the next section.

³¹⁹ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, pp. 374-375.

IX. Hegel on Spinoza

It is important to consider Hegel's views on Spinoza's pantheism for a variety of reasons.

Picking up on the previous section, it will help to get a clearer idea of Hegel's conception of pantheism, since he sees Spinoza as its main representative. From the wider perspective of this project, given that these two thinkers represent two of the primary representatives of a pantheistic worldview in the history of philosophy, it is worth taking the opportunity to understand one's perspective on the other. And from an interpretive standpoint, it is clear that Hegel has great respect for Spinoza and sees engaging with his philosophy as a crucial step towards arriving at the truth. Efraim Shmueli, in "Hegel's Interpretation of Spinoza's Concept of Substance", states that Spinoza received more discussion in Hegel's history of philosophy than all philosophers besides Kant.³²⁰ Hegel seems to think that it is necessary to adopt the standpoint of Spinozism in order to eventually arrive at his conclusions. In his discussion of Spinoza in his lectures on the history of philosophy, he states that "thought must place itself upon the standpoint of Spinozism; that is the essential beginning of all philosophizing. When one begins philosophizing, one must first be a Spinozist."³²¹ Thus in addition to the view of Spinoza being a necessary step, Hegel also says one must begin with such a view when one sets out philosophizing. Hegel even goes so far as to say: "Spinoza is the centerpiece of modern philosophy: either Spinozism or no philosophy."³²²

As has been addressed throughout this project, there is a long history of associating pantheism with atheism. And as I highlighted in the last chapter, the *Pantheismusstreit* in Germany was a significant moment in the intellectual culture of the time preceding the

³²⁰ Shmueli, Efraim. "Hegel's Interpretation of Spinoza's Concept of Substance." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1970, p. 178.

³²¹ *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III*, p. 165. Translation mine.

³²² *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III*, pp. 163-164. Translation mine.

development of Hegel's mature philosophy. Hegel weighs in on this charge in his lectures on the history of philosophy. He states: "The finite exists and likewise only we exist, and God does not; that is atheism. The finite is taken as absolute, it is the substantial; then God does not exist."³²³ So Hegel thinks atheism takes the finite (e.g., human beings) to be absolute, which Spinoza does not do. Hegel actually thinks that Spinoza goes too far in the other direction, as will be discussed below. But with respect to the charge of atheism as applied to Spinoza's philosophy, Hegel clearly thinks this is misguided. He says that "Spinoza's system is absolute pantheism and monotheism elevated in thoughts."³²⁴ And while we're on the "-isms", elsewhere he calls Spinoza's philosophy a form of "Idealismus", which is noteworthy given the somewhat controversial interpretation I've provided of Spinoza as a kind of idealist.³²⁵

Despite the praise heaped on Spinoza in the defense he provides against the charge of atheism, Hegel still has his criticisms. In the same section of the lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel states the following, referring to Spinoza's system: "God is the unity, the absolute substance, in which the world, nature goes under, disappears."³²⁶ Hegel concedes that for Spinoza the absolute is a unity, but he claims that it is an empty unity, lacking the concreteness that, as outlined above, Hegel thinks is essential to the conception of the Absolute. It's curious that Hegel says the world or nature has disappeared, or "gone under". Given the role of nature in both Spinoza and Herder's versions of pantheism outlined in the previous two

³²³ *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III*, p. 162. Translation mine.

³²⁴ *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III*, p. 164. Translation mine. It's interesting that Hegel characterizes Spinoza's system as monotheistic in addition to pantheistic. Given the definition of pantheism I've been working with, it's technically correct to consider pantheism as a form of monotheism, since there can only be a single unity of all things. But the appellation of monotheism has generally been reserved for the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and not applied to pantheism. Perhaps Hegel is attempting to tie a tight connection between pantheism and monotheism to combat the claim that pantheism is atheistic.

³²⁵ *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III*, p. 161.

³²⁶ *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III*, p. 162. Translation mine.

chapters, Hegel's characterization seems uncharitable, even if he believes that it hits home on a theoretical level. And it's unclear whether Hegel was even aware of Herder's *Gott: Einige Gespräche*. But Herder in particular goes to great lengths to make the connection between the divine and the natural world clear and determinate, and at a theoretical level rivals Hegel's treatment in the philosophy of nature, in such a way that this criticism seems especially uncharitable as applied to Herder. But to be charitable to Hegel, the criticism is meant for Spinoza, and we should evaluate it in that context.

This criticism is much more wide-ranging than just being relegated to a discussion in the lectures on the history of philosophy. Hegel takes it even farther and develops it much more fully in the lectures on philosophy of religion. In his 1827 discussion of the concept of God, he says: "no actuality at all is ascribed to individual things... Spinozism is *acosmism* rather [than pantheism]." ³²⁷ Acosmism is Hegel's label for this criticism, which he claims involves a denial of the world and all individual things. Later in the same lectures he states: "For Spinoza the absolute is substance, and no being is ascribed to the finite; his position is therefore monotheism and acosmism. So strictly is there only God, that there is no world at all". ³²⁸ It is unclear where this criticism stems from, or whether it has any textual support in Spinoza's *Ethics* or elsewhere. In the *Ethics* Spinoza provides a robust account of modes, which are the correlate to finite entities in Hegel's philosophy, and one would think that Hegel would welcome the determinateness that the modes provide in Spinoza's philosophy. Additionally, Spinoza's account of adequate ideas, which he goes to such lengths to elucidate, are not merely about God, but are also about the relation between modes in the world, and are had on the part of finite human subjects. The criticism is echoed again in the *Vorbegriff* of the *Encyclopedia Logic*: "in

³²⁷ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 377.

³²⁸ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 432.

the Spinozistic system the world is in fact determined as a mere phenomenon to which true reality does not pertain, so that this system is to be regarded much more as *acosmism*.”³²⁹ In none of the various accusations of acosmism thrown Spinoza’s way does Hegel deeply engage with the aspects of Spinoza’s philosophy that might be seen as lending concreteness to substance or constituting the determinacy of the world or nature. Paul Franks, in *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism*, provides an additional reason for thinking that Hegel’s criticism is misguided here from a spinozistic perspective: “Since substance is infinite and expresses its infinity in infinitely many ways, it would surely be accurate to say that substance has every possible determinacy and is *omni-determinate*.”³³⁰

Given what Hegel has to say about Spinoza’s philosophy elsewhere, we can speculate as to what might be the driving force behind Hegel’s criticism of acosmism leveled at Spinoza. In his discussion of Spinoza in the lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel says: “The absolute substance is the truth, but it is not yet the whole truth; it must also be thought of as active in itself, living, and precisely in this way determine itself as spirit.”³³¹ This is the root of Hegel’s claim that the Absolute must be cognized as subject and not merely as substance, which will be explored in detail in the next section. But it may shine a light on what is behind the acosmism objection. Hegel seems to think that conceiving of the Absolute as substance is too static, and perhaps he has in mind Spinoza’s emphasis on cognizing things *sub specie aeternitatis*. Such a view leaves out the dynamic activity of Spirit in the world, Hegel might say. But it is not at all clear that cognition *sub specie aeternitatis* would not capture the dynamism of Spirit in the

³²⁹ *Encyclopedia, Part I*, §50, pp. 98-99.

³³⁰ Franks, p. 27.

³³¹ *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III*, p. 166. Translation mine.

world; the underlying rational structure of such a dynamism could be understood atemporally, even if not experienced as such from an atemporal perspective. One could also argue that Spinoza's account of the intellectual love of God and immortality are just such an instance of Spirit as "active and living" in the world. Furthermore, a hallmark of Herder's revision of Spinoza's metaphysics is Herder's attempt to build this dynamic, living aspect of the world more fully into a pantheistic system that has its roots in Spinoza. The apparent oversight of Herder's work on the part of Hegel is highlighted by Brian Gerrish in his article, "The Secret Religion of Germany: Christian Piety and the Pantheism Controversy":

Hegel argued that absolute substance in Spinoza's philosophy was not yet conceived of as active, living Spirit, but only as the abstract unity of Spirit in itself. This, however, was in effect a proposal to move the notion of divine substance in the direction Herder had already pointed out.³³²

Again, it is unclear whether Hegel was familiar with Herder's work. And Hegel might have said that while Herder attempts to incorporate the dynamic aspects of the organic forces of the natural world, he fails to do so in a satisfactory way for the realm of Spirit. But it is worth noting that, at least in one sense, Herder took Spinoza in the direction that Hegel is suggesting with his acosmism objection. And given the philosophical engagement with the new and multiplying deliverances of the natural and social sciences during the period of classical German philosophy, it is perhaps unsurprising that both Herder and Hegel push in the direction of a dynamic and active conception of the divine.

Perhaps Hegel's issue in the acosmism objection is that Spinoza doesn't give sufficient weight to the role and importance of finite spirits like human minds; and in comparison to Hegel's philosophical body of work, that may be true. But if *that* is the main charge then

³³² Gerrish, B.A. "The Secret Religion of Germany: Christian Piety and the Pantheism Controversy." *The Journal of Religion* 67.4 (1987), p. 450.

Hegel's claim shouldn't be that the world or nature *disappears*; it clearly still plays a role for Spinoza. And Spinoza might have retorted that he has attempted to give the various aspects of the world equal weight, as opposed to what might be termed Hegel's anthropocentrism in seeing the human mind as the highest achievement of nature. One potential objection that, as far as I know, Hegel does not level at Spinoza, but could, is that Spinoza's pantheism lacks the mutual dependence between the Absolute and the world that Hegel maintains – the Absolute necessarily manifests itself, and would remain in the false abstractness of the beyond if it did not do so. It is in a sense dependent on the world for its manifestation. Spinoza could also claim that God or Nature is necessarily manifest in accordance with his doctrine of necessitarianism, but it is difficult to imagine him endorsing a dependence of substance on its modes. And so perhaps, in a sense, Hegel may see the modes as expendable in Spinoza's philosophy. But it remains the case that for Spinoza the modes exist necessarily in all their determinacy. Above I mentioned Hegel's contention that the Absolute must be cognized not merely as substance but also as subject, and the potential applicability of this line of thought to his criticism of Spinozism as acosmism. But the fact that Spinoza's substance is not conceived of as a subject does not entail that the world or nature disappears. However, I think that pushing this line of thought on the Absolute as subject is the more fruitful avenue by way of an objection to Spinoza's pantheism, and it is to this account that we turn in the next section. The acosmism criticism, as far as I can tell, ultimately fails.

X. God as Subject vs. Substance

Hegel's claim that the Absolute must be cognized not only as substance but also as subject is not only crucial to his own view, but also serves as perhaps the primary distinguishing factor between his pantheism and Spinoza's. In his introduction to the lectures on the history of

philosophy, Hegel describes the initial stage of the unification of substance and subject: “We have to deal with this unity of subjective principle and of substance; it constitutes the process of Spirit that this individual one of the subject puts aside its immediate character and brings itself forth as identical with the substantial.”³³³ Hegel thinks that subjectivity must be incorporated into substance, and here he indicates how that might go – the immediate unity of the subject, which takes itself to be a single entity distinct from everything “external”, must be replaced by a unity between the subject and substance. Thus Hegel writes in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*: “In my view, which must be justified by the exposition of the system itself, everything hangs on grasping and expressing the true not just as *substance* but just as much as *subject*.”³³⁴ Although Hegel sees the justification for this claim as residing in an exposition of his entire system, in this section I attempt to elucidate what exactly he means by this claim through reference to various aspects of his system.

Cognizing the Absolute as subject in addition to substance picks up on the discussion of the Absolute as dynamic or living from the previous section. Hegel goes on in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* to write: “Furthermore, the living substance is the being that is in truth *subject*, or, what amounts to the same thing, it is in truth actual only insofar as it is the movement of self-positing, or, that it is the mediation of itself and its becoming-other-to-itself.”³³⁵ Hegel here provides something close to a definition of ‘subject’ as applied to the Absolute: that which is the agent both of its own externalization and of its unification of that distinction. Thus it is the process of manifestation and reconciliation of difference at the highest level that distinguishes the Absolute as subject rather than merely as substance. However, as Hegel alludes to

³³³ *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp. 105-106. Translation modified.

³³⁴ *Phenomenology* §17, p. 12.

³³⁵ *Phenomenology* §18, p. 12.

elsewhere, Spinoza was onto the truth. It's not that conceiving of the divine as substance is misguided; it's just not the full truth, or in Hegel's terminology, the truth is not yet actual, since the movement of reconciliation hasn't been fully completed.

This conception of subjectivity is admittedly quite abstract and in some ways dependent on the machinery of Hegel's dialectical process. He attempts, in the closing pages of the *Phenomenology*, to highlight the basic truth that is missed by conceiving of the divine merely as substance:

The substance would only count as the absolute insofar as the substance was to be thought of, or intuited as, *absolute unity*, and all content would according to its diversity have to fall outside of substance; it would fall into reflection, which would not belong to substance because substance would then not be subject, would not be itself what is taking a reflective turn into itself and reflecting about itself, or would not be conceived as spirit.³³⁶

Hegel here claims that conceiving of the Absolute as substance involves the conception of an absolute unity that itself contains no determinate content. This seems to be because all determinacy and distinctions must come from reflection, and if reflection is built in as part of the absolute and not something outside and reflecting on it, substance has just become a subject. What is not exactly explicit in this excerpt, but what is crucial to Hegel's view, is that it is the *recognition* of determinate content that Hegel wants incorporated into the life of the divine. It is not that, when the absolute is conceived of as substance (or when there is no conception of the absolute whatsoever), there is no determinate content in the world itself; of course there is. It is just that the *recognition* of this content is not itself seen as the divine activity, but rather as a reflection upon that activity from the outside. Thus, it may be that the acosmism objection just boils down to the substance vs. subject objection. If it does, it is still not clear why substance has to be conceived of as an absolute unity devoid of all determinate content. On Spinoza's view,

³³⁶ *Phenomenology* §803, p. 464.

adequate ideas on the part of human beings, who are themselves modes or particular expressions of God, involve a recognition of the determinate content of substance. So perhaps Hegel's real point here is that the recognition of the content of the Absolute must be seen as the essential and highest moment of the divine life, when the Absolute realizes it is recognizing itself. And so the crucial difference between Hegel and Spinoza on this score seems to come down to how integral this recognition is to the nature of the divine. It seems to take place for both thinkers, but for Hegel this recognition seems to be an essential element, one without which the expression of the Absolute would be incomplete and fail to reach its highest development. Although, for Spinoza, the recognition of the content of substance is also essential in a sense, given his necessitarianism, his account explicitly lacks the developmental and teleological element of Hegel's.

In the above section on *God as Self-Consciousness*, I cited the following excerpt from Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy: "the active subjective Spirit is that which comprehends the divine, and in its comprehension of it it is itself the divine Spirit."³³⁷ Here Hegel speaks of the activity of a subjective spirit regarding the divine as an activity of the divine itself. Regarding this relation of the divine to itself through, for example, an individual human being, Hegel goes on in his lectures to say: "This unity is not the substance of Spinoza, but the apprehending Substance in self-consciousness which makes itself infinite and relates to universality."³³⁸ Thus it is through reflection about the divine, that is, for Hegel, through philosophy, that a subjective spirit is able to transcend its limited subjectivity. This activity is itself the activity of the divine, and the limited subjectivity of the individual becomes universal and in turn bestows the characteristic of subjectivity on the absolute substance. Thus the subjectivity of Absolute Spirit is dependent upon individual subjective spirits for its full

³³⁷ *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 73.

³³⁸ *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 73. Translation modified.

realization: the Absolute achieves the unification of its own externalization through philosophical cognition on the part of human beings. Thus, in a sense, cognizing the Absolute not merely as substance but also as subject is a logical movement that is executed by human beings philosophically arriving at the highest truth, rather than the positing of a “personal” God on Hegel’s part, according to the definition I laid out in the Introduction.³³⁹ Similar to how one might ask why the unity of all things should be considered divine, one could ask why Hegel calls the Absolute a subject in light of the interpretation I’ve laid out. The answer would be that the Absolute is a subject because the consciousness of human beings is necessary in order to effect the reconciliation of the world with its underlying rational structure. And, while not implying that the Absolute is personal, taking the Absolute to be a subject is perfectly reasonable given the role of Hegel’s account of subjectivity in his discussion of the Absolute.

XI. The Method of Philosophy

Given the role that philosophical thought *itself* plays in Hegel’s account of the Absolute as subject, it is worth taking stock of the claims made by Hegel in various places about the method of science (*Wissenschaft*) or philosophy. After all, given Hegel’s penchant for undermining and reconciling bifurcations, it is only fitting that the philosophical enterprise is not a reflection on the divine from the outside, but is constitutive of the final reconciliation between the world and its underlying logical structure. Additionally, Hegel’s claims about philosophical method further confirm his philosophy as pantheistic.

³³⁹ “By conceiving of God as *personal*, I mean that God is minded, an agent, a self, in a way that is somewhat analogous to the way in which human beings are minded. I do not intend to give a full account of what it means to be personal, but a necessary condition for conceiving of God as a person (in the actual world), one that is crucial for my purposes, is that God is or has a mind among minds that are *not* part of the mind of God (e.g., yours and mine). If God is personal in something like the way we normally use the term, then God has a unique mental life that is limited in the sense of being distinct from the mental lives of others.”

Since religion and philosophy are closely linked in Hegel's philosophical system, he often provides clarity on the nature of the philosophical enterprise in his discussion of religion to distinguish the two. In his lectures on philosophy of religion, he provides one definition of philosophy: "to know the rational in God's works—as produced by God and endowed with reason—that is philosophy."³⁴⁰ But this activity of investigating and knowing "the rational" in the world must be conceived as the activity of the divine itself: "Spirit believes that in its rational inquiry into God and nature it will recognize itself, the rational."³⁴¹ Thus through the philosophical enterprise Spirit sees the unity of its rational inquiry and its object due to the match in their rational structure. As I've discussed at length in this chapter, a primary goal for Hegel is the reconciliation of the bifurcation between the world and the realm of spirit. In concluding his lectures on philosophy of religion, he says:

insofar as thinking begins to posit an antithesis to the concrete and places itself in opposition to the concrete, the process of thinking consists in carrying through this opposition until it arrives at reconciliation. This reconciliation is philosophy. Philosophy is to this extent theology. It presents the reconciliation of God with himself and with nature, showing that nature, otherness, is implicitly divine.³⁴²

For Hegel it is thinking, on the part of human beings, that completes the reconciliation. That is why the subjectivity of human consciousness is essential in Hegel's system; without it, the world remains only implicitly divine, not recognized and reflected in consciousness. So for Hegel, philosophy's highest achievement is recognizing its own activity as an integral part of the divine, and its cognition of the divine is the consummation of theology. Hegel's pantheism is so thoroughgoing that philosophical thought itself is not only encompassed, but integral to the divine unity.

³⁴⁰ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 446.

³⁴¹ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 524.

³⁴² *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. III, p. 346-347.

The previous synthesizing excerpt also highlights nature's implicit divinity, and points to the role that the sciences other than philosophy can play in Hegel's system. In the *Vorabegriff* of the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel writes the following regarding the sciences other than his Logic, the philosophies of nature and spirit: "these other sciences are concerned simply with recognizing the logical forms in the formations of nature and of spirit, formations that are merely a particular manner of expression of the forms of pure thinking."³⁴³ The realms of both nature and spirit are underlain by logical forms accessible to human thought, and it is the task of thought to discover these determinate and particularized manifestations of the rational in the world. In his Introduction of the final part of the *Encyclopedia*, the Philosophy of Spirit, Hegel states:

All activity of the spirit is, therefore, only an apprehension of itself, and the aim of all genuine science is just this, that spirit shall recognize itself in everything in heaven and on earth. There is simply no out-and-out Other for the spirit.³⁴⁴

Thus not only do the remainder of the sciences investigate the rational nature of the divine, but the activity of those sciences themselves should involve a recognition of the kinship between the rational in both subject and object. Terry Pinkard gives an interpretation of Hegel along these lines in his essay "Transcendental Philosophy, Naturalism, and Hegel's Alternative":

Hegel seemed to think...that the world is fundamentally intelligible to our minds, that there is no fundamental, deep and hidden mystery to it that cannot be undone by the powers of thought. On Hegel's view, the order of the logic of our thoughts meshes with the order of the universe in that we are giving shape and expression to the rational *logos* that is at work in everything.³⁴⁵

Kenneth Westphal also sees Hegel's commitment to the intrinsic intelligibility of the world as central to Hegel's philosophical project, which he characterizes as Hegel's "rationalist aspiration

³⁴³ *Encyclopedia, Part I*, §24, pp. 60-61.

³⁴⁴ *Encyclopedia, Part III*, §377, p. 3.

³⁴⁵ Pinkard, Terry. "Transcendental Philosophy, Naturalism, and Hegel's Alternative." *Autonomy of Reason? Autonomie der Vernunft?*, edited by Riccardo Dottori, Lit Verlag, 2009, p. 92.

to show that all the fundamental features of the world are knowable and knowable by us”.³⁴⁶ In his lectures on philosophy religion, Hegel’s characterizes his treatment of determinate religion as “an example of the absolute, immanent method of science”,³⁴⁷ a description that could well be applied to the *Phenomenology* as well. Despite the tendency towards abstraction in Hegel’s logic³⁴⁸, for instance, he believes that it is crucial that the philosophical method be immanent with respect to the world – it must take the determinacy of the world as its material to demonstrate the operation of the logical or rational within it, and it must also ultimately effect a reconciliation of the rational and the natural world through the philosophical method itself. As mentioned by Hegel in an excerpt above, the method of science or philosophy is, in a sense, theology. In his discussion of the concept of God in his lectures on philosophy of religion, Hegel states that the starting point for the discussion, God, “is the truth of all things...is the result of the whole of philosophy.”³⁴⁹ Thus even in his philosophical methodology Hegel shows himself to be a pantheist: the truth of all things, arrived at through philosophy, is to be identified with God; and: “There is simply no out-and-out Other for the spirit.”³⁵⁰

Hegel argues that the vocation of human beings is to take an active part in the pursuit of truth within the world they inhabit. In his discussion of the concept of spirit in the *Philosophy of Spirit* in the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel writes:

The absolute is spirit. This is the highest definition of the absolute. To find this definition and to comprehend its meaning and content was, we may say, the absolute tendency of all culture and philosophy; it was the point towards which all religion and science pressed on; only out of this impetus is the history of the world to be grasped.³⁵¹

³⁴⁶ Westphal, p. 304.

³⁴⁷ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. II, p. 94.

³⁴⁸ This refers in general to the first of Hegel’s three main subdivisions in his philosophical system, along with the philosophy of nature and philosophy of spirit, rather than to a specific work (e.g., the *Encyclopedia Logic* or *Science of Logic*).

³⁴⁹ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 367.

³⁵⁰ *Encyclopedia*, Part III, §377, p. 3.

³⁵¹ *Encyclopedia*, Part III, §384, p. 18. Translation modified.

Hegel here highlights the conception of the absolute as spirit, discussed at length above. What is unique about this conception of the divine is its immanence and all-encompassing nature – philosophy, religion, science, and world history have as their goal the realization of Absolute Spirit. Thus the highest and most important truths are not compartmentalized in one discipline alongside many others, nor are they eternally hidden and beyond the grasp of finite human minds. Instead they are to be found through human existence in the world and our long and arduous attempt to understand our surroundings and ourselves. And perhaps most importantly, our attempt to understand existence is itself integral to its highest realization. Thus Hegel provides us with a version of pantheism that provides ample justification for taking the unity of all things to be divine, one that is both distinctive in the history of philosophy and illuminating as a live and compelling position in contemporary philosophy of religion.

XII. References

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CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

The preceding three chapters have provided an extensive analysis of three versions of pantheism that, while distinct, are also closely related. In addition to attempting to provide a systematic and charitable account of the views of Spinoza, Herder, and Hegel, my analysis has included making interpretive decisions, and considering objections to those accounts of my own, from the secondary literature, and of the later thinkers (Herder and Hegel) to Spinoza's account. Thus as a result of that analysis and the preliminary conclusions reached, certain avenues for the way a pantheistic account could go have been cut off. For interpretive reasons, however, I have treated each chapter as a self-contained whole, and have not explicitly traced a single version of pantheism through these chapters. What I aim to accomplish in this concluding chapter is to put forward what I take to be the most plausible version of pantheism resulting from the previous chapters. I describe the resulting view, and trace it through the three thinkers that have been the focus of this project. In doing so I also highlight some other directions one might take such a pantheistic view, while remaining non-committal on whether these are the best routes to take. Since, as stated in the Introduction, pantheism is characterized by the view that everything that exists constitutes a unity, and that unity is divine, I subsequently answer the following two questions: Why should what has been described be considered a unity? Why call that unity God or divine?

Thus having completed the main thrust of my project, I briefly consider three related issues pertinent to the potential further development of the pantheistic account I have provided. First, I consider what additional argumentative resources might be brought to bear in support of such a view, over and above those already contained in the historical figures examined. Next, I outline some ways in which this basic version of pantheism has philosophical advantages over

perfection theism. Finally, although my focus has been on the philosophical aspects of a pantheistic view, I consider the relation between such a view and religiosity. Providing a systematic treatment of these topics would far outstrip the scope of my project. Thus, my aim in this second part of the chapter (the last three sections) is to outline promising directions in which the basic pantheistic view described in the first part of the chapter might be taken in future work.

I. The Resultant View: Rationalistic Pantheism

In the previous three chapters I have made the case that the views of each of the main thinkers considered – Spinoza, Herder, and Hegel – are pantheistic. More specifically, I argued that each is committed to the view that everything that exists constitutes a unity, and that that unity is divine. The divine unity can be characterized as the entirety of existence structured in accordance with rational principles. This unity is non-personal, in the sense outlined in the Introduction, and is also immanent, in the sense of not existing in some transcendent realm that is separate from and by definition inaccessible to the probings of the human mind. This pantheistic view has its roots in Spinoza, but the direction of its subsequent growth is modified in important ways by both Herder and Hegel.

Spinoza's pantheism is a substance monism, meaning that there is only one substance. A pantheistic view need not be monistic; it is an additional trait that can, but need not, be included as part of a pantheistic view. Some might take monism to be a mark against a pantheistic view of which it is a part, but Spinoza's monism is not a bald monism, often characterized as the view that only one thing exists; Spinoza himself would deny this claim. There is only one *substance*, which is less controversial given Spinoza's requirement that substance be radically independent, in no way dependent on some other entity. The unity of all that exists is independent – there is nothing else upon which it could depend or by which it could be affected. Furthermore, Spinoza

argues that substance exists necessarily. He thinks that (infinitely) many things (modes) exist, but if they are dependent in one way or another, they are not substances. Spinoza does provide an account of relative independence amongst modes (e.g., human beings, due to their capacity for rationality, have a greater capacity for relative independence than do stones), but all modes are still radically dependent upon substance. Spinoza also claims that substance is infinite which, as was pointed out in Chapter 1, is ambiguous between meaning that it encompasses all that exists, and meaning that its attributes and modes are numerically infinite. As I argued there, Spinoza seems to think substance's infinitude includes both these senses of the word, but provides no justification for the numerical interpretation. Thus on my view, substance is infinite in the sense of being all-encompassing, including all reality, but not in the sense of being comprised of infinitely many attributes or things. Finally, Spinoza makes it clear that substance is non-personal. There is no unique mental life that can be ascribed to substance, and on my interpretation Spinoza's modes of the attribute of Thought lack phenomenal psychological experience for substance as such, a weak spot which is supplemented by Hegel's account, as I discuss below.

Also integral to Spinoza's account of pantheism is his commitment to both determinism and necessitarianism. The latter, far more controversial as it entails that there is only one possible world in contemporary parlance, is a consequence of the identification of God and Nature along with its necessary existence. If the order of nature could have been different, then God's nature could have been different. But this is impossible for a being that exists necessarily. Support for determinism, and perhaps necessitarianism as well, can be found in the famous quip of Einstein, who was a great admirer of Spinoza, that God does not play dice. Spinoza's commitment to both determinism and necessitarianism are driven by his reliance on a strong version of the Principle

of Sufficient Reason, which at least requires that there be a reason or explanation or cause for the existence of each thing as well as for the particular way in which each thing exists and is related to other things.

Finally, two aspects of Spinoza's system that are less central to his account than the foregoing: Spinoza provides an account of perfection according to which something is more perfect the more "reality" or "being" it has. One consequence of this, as I discussed in Chapter 1, is that evil has no ontological reality. In that chapter I also discussed the relation between the two attributes, out of the infinitely many that Spinoza thinks exist, of which human beings are aware – Thought and Extension. I suggested the possible unification of these two attributes, such that in addition to denying Spinoza's claim that there are infinitely many attributes, one might assert that there is only one, or simply, the way in which substance manifests itself. I argued that even on his own terms Spinoza seems to give ontological priority to Thought over Extension, and that his pantheism might be characterized as a kind of immanent idealism. And it is Herder who subsequently provides a systematic solution to this issue of the plurality of the attributes in Spinoza.

This Spinozistic pantheism takes on board a significant modification from both Herder and Hegel. Herder unifies the attributes of Thought and Extension through his account of substantial force and, in line with my interpretation of Spinoza, gives priority to the rational element over Spinoza's mere Extension in this unification. One consequence of this is that Herder does away with Spinoza's parallelism between the attributes and the untoward consequences of the panpsychist interpretation and the explanatory gulf between the attributes of Thought and Extension. Additionally, Herder places an explicit emphasis on the role of natural science in a pantheistic framework, allowing for the integration of the developments of the natural sciences in

the time since Spinoza. Spinoza didn't disallow the deliverances of natural science, but Herder shows not only how the scientific understanding of forces rather than Spinoza's mechanistic Newtonian framework could be understood from a pantheistic perspective, but also how this understanding of forces can serve to demonstrate the tight connection between the rational structure of the world and physical things, rather than their relative independence on Spinoza's view.

Lastly with respect to Herder, he goes beyond Spinoza in submitting that the necessity of the course of nature is inherently good, due to its internal rational structure. This is one of those issues which I do not consider in detail as part of this project; doing so would take me far beyond its scope. But the basic idea seems to be that there is something inherently good about the world (and everything in it) being structured in accordance with rational principles; it's better, in some evaluative sense, than the world being a chaotic jumble characterized (one can't even say "governed") by true randomness. This view has its intuitive pull, but more work would have to be done to spell out its details and proffer an argument in support of it. For now I only highlight this route as one that could possibly be taken, and which initially seems consistent with the view as expounded up to now.

Hegel shares with Spinoza both the view that God/the divine/Absolute is independent, and also that it is necessary. What he would have to say about Spinoza's substance monism, however, is hard to tell. Hegel's account also seems to meet Spinoza's essential requirement of substance that it be radically independent, but he clearly is opposed to the use of the term substance. So perhaps it is best to speak of the divine unity, in neutral terms, and its radical independence and necessity as a shared commitment of the two thinkers. As I discussed in

Chapter 3, Hegel's idealism can be characterized as a unity of thought and being, with thought given ontological priority, just as it is for Spinoza and Herder.

Hegel's distinctive (and quite significant) contribution to the pantheism under development in this project relates to my discussion of his primary objection to Spinoza's philosophy as a whole – what I have called his acosmism objection. The essence of this objection is that on Spinoza's view, it seems that no reality can be ascribed to individual things (modes, in Spinoza's terms). In Chapter 3 I argued that this objection seems to miss the mark as applied to Spinoza. Individual things are certainly real for Spinoza; they're just not radically independent like substance. And this seems like something Hegel would agree to as well, given a proper understanding of radical independence. Furthermore, this objection does not seem to apply to Herder's account at all, for whom the determinate content of the world as discovered by the rational scientific process comprises the content of the divine unity. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Hegel's real concern here might be the lack of dynamism in Spinoza's account (which is however present in Herder's), as truth for Spinoza is to be conceived *sub specie aeternitatis*, while for Hegel the full manifestation of truth takes place through a developmental progression. Or his main concern could be that finite spirits (in Hegel's terms) play no integral role on Spinoza's view. More specifically, Hegel's concern could be that Spinoza's pantheistic system lacks the kind of mutual dependence between the Absolute and the world, and rational agents in particular, that is so crucial to Hegel's final account. Whether or not this is what the acosmism objection amounts to, it seems clear that this is Hegel's primary complaint with Spinoza's pantheism, and it is his positive account of the role of rational agents in the divine life that constitutes his major revision of Spinoza's pantheism, and contribution to the pantheistic account developed through this project.

A hallmark of Hegel's pantheism is that nature become spirit, that nature achieve self-consciousness through the rational activity of human thought. This is behind Hegel's insistence that the Absolute be conceived of not merely as substance but also as subject, that is, as self-conscious. For Hegel, the rational recognition of the content of the Absolute on the part of human beings is the Absolute recognizing itself. And this recognition is essential to the nature of the divine. As I argued in Chapter 3, this recognition is constitutive of the subjectivity of the divine for Hegel – philosophical cognition on the part of human beings, as part of the Absolute, effects the highest unification of its own externalization. Spinoza can be interpreted as providing for the possibility of such a recognition as well, and even for its necessity given his necessitarianism. But for Spinoza this recognition is not an integral component of the nature of the divine. For Hegel, on the other hand, the lack of such a recognition would mean that the Absolute has not yet fully expressed itself and reached its highest development. Furthermore, Spinoza's account lacks, and even denies, the explicitly developmental and teleological element of Hegel's.

I argued in Chapter 1 that the most promising interpretation of Spinoza's attribute of Thought denies to its modes phenomenal psychological experience. This is not to say that individual things like humans and animals have no psychological experience, but rather that such experience is not an integral component of the attribute of Thought *sub specie aeternitatis*, nor of the nature of the divine as a whole. And so Hegel's addition to the account under development is that the kind of phenomenal experience described above is integral to the divine. For Spinoza even the highest phenomenal experience, the intellectual love of God, is a dead-end road – great for the individual experiencing it, but not of significant ontological import to the nature of the

divine. So in a sense, Hegel's account on this point ties up one of the loose threads left by Spinoza, further effecting the unity integral to pantheism, which I discuss further below.

Hegel's relation to Spinoza on the issue of pantheism really focuses on the line of thought above. It is hard to know what Hegel might say about other aspects of the account I've laid out, since as far as I know, he doesn't address many of them directly. For instance, I know of no place where Hegel addresses modality as it applies to his fully fleshed-out view of Absolute Spirit. His general *modus operandi* is to make criticisms internal to a view, to expose its inherent contradictions; and as we saw in Chapter 3, his most prominent criticism of Spinoza, the acosmism objection, largely fails. But his own positive account of the Absolute as subject, which is crucial to his philosophy as a whole, does hit home as an objection when applied to the pantheistic view under consideration, and thus is the main thrust of his contribution to such a view.

The other stark divide between Spinoza and Hegel, which I do not address in great detail, is over the issue of teleology. Spinoza explicitly denies the application of teleological principles to God/Nature, or the world as a whole. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Spinoza seems to think that teleological principles would contradict the perfection of God/Nature, since it entails that God would be seeking something which it lacks. As we've seen, however, Spinoza's account of perfection is quite distinctive: something is more perfect the more "reality" or "being" it has. There seems to be no *prima facie* contradiction between this account of perfection and teleological principles. So it could be that Spinoza's criticism of teleology is aimed at its inclusion as part of traditional theism in something like the doctrine of divine providence. Furthermore, the role of teleological principles in the natural sciences gained ascendancy in the time between Spinoza on the one hand, and Herder and Hegel on the other. Spinoza may not

have considered the possibility of teleological principles that do not require the directing mind of a divine agent for their operation. Teleological principles are not crucial to the version of pantheism I have been outlining; even the benefits of Hegel's insistence on the role of subjectivity and self-recognition of the divine could be attained without invoking a teleological dimension as part of the account. But teleological principles also do not contradict this account; such a dimension could be added with the proper development of the details of such a view. Similar to Herder's suggestion that the necessity of the course of nature is inherently good, this is another route that could possibly be taken. A systematic consideration of this possibility would be a substantial undertaking, and outstrips the scope of my project here.

As can be seen, the historical resources marshalled in support of this pantheistic view are significant. To distill this summary down to its most basic, here is what I take to be the most plausible pantheistic position resulting from this historical examination:

All of existence taken together is characterized by an interdependence of its parts and is governed by rational principles. This unified whole is itself radically independent, exists necessarily, and could not have been other than the way it is. Its rational principles are immanent in the world and inextricably linked to their manifestation and operation. The recognition of such principles on the part of rational agents constitutes one of the highest achievements of existence as a whole, and further effects the unity of its component parts. When all taken together, this all-encompassing unity is worthy of being called God or divine. Although it includes human beings, the divine unity is non-personal in the sense that it does not have a unique mental life of its own.

One of the distinctive unifying threads of the pantheistic accounts of the three main thinkers I examined is their commitment to the thoroughgoing rationality of the world. Thus, I call this resultant view *rationalistic pantheism*. It is in the end only the foundation of such a view; there are many ways such a view could be expanded or taken in different directions, such as into the realms of ethical theory and teleology as I suggested above. But this view is to be distinguished from other versions of pantheism that do not include this foundational commitment to the at-bottom rational structure of the world. The views of each of the three main thinkers I have considered can also be taken as their own forms of rationalistic pantheism. Although my view is obviously dependent on theirs in many ways, it is also distinct in the sense that it combines certain aspects of their views while dispensing with others in pursuit of what I take to be the most plausible version of rationalistic pantheism. This account's commitment to thoroughgoing rationality, perhaps its most distinctive aspect, is partly constitutive of why everything that exists, when taken together, is to be considered a unity.

As I've said many times, the core of the pantheistic worldview, whether the rationalistic version I've developed or some other kind, is that everything that exists constitutes a unity, and that this unity is divine. Two questions that naturally arise from this two-part characterization are: Why does everything that exists constitute a unity? And why is that unity divine? I address these in turn briefly, as much of the supporting details for the answers to these questions have been canvassed previously. The claim that everything that exists constitutes a unity is made much more plausible by an account of what constitutes that unity. This distinguishes such a unity from just a heap of everything that exists thrown together. My contention is that the unity of rationalistic pantheism is constituted in two primary ways. The first is that rationalistic pantheism posits that existence taken as a whole is a single radically independent entity.

Limited, individual things are all unified in virtue of being dependent on the rest of existence, all of which together constitute the unified whole. This leads to the second primary way in which this unity is constituted. The interdependence of individual things is characterized by the relations and connections between them being structured in accordance with rational principles. This commitment to a fundamental rational structure of the world means that everything shares this quality, and that it connects all things in virtue of constituting their relationships. Both the existence and the exact ways in which any individual thing exists is intimately tied up with the rest of existence through an explanatory nexus. It wouldn't be the way it is without its connection with the rest of existence, and conversely existence as a whole would also be different without it. Thus existence is unified by its rational structure; there is no pocket of reality set aside and immune from these qualities of rational structure and dependence.

So if everything that exists does constitute a unity, why call this unity divine or God? As I outlined in the Introduction, I maintain that the following qualities are sufficient for considering the unity of rationalistic pantheism to be divine:

1. It is the ontologically most fundamental thing in existence.
2. It exists necessarily.
3. It is independent, and any one thing taken in isolation is radically dependent upon the rest of the existence.
4. It is structured in accordance with rational principles, such as basic principles of logic and the laws of nature.
5. It is the explanans of everything that exists.
6. While its existence is consistent with naturalism, it is not consistent with a view that bottoms out in unintelligibility, randomness, disorder, meaninglessness, nihilism, etc.

One might in turn ask, "What is it about those particular properties that bestow divinity upon the all-encompassing unity?" One might answer that this set of properties is impressive and rare and thus deserving of the label divine. But at bottom, my answer is that the ascription of divinity to the pantheistic unity ultimately has an experiential basis; it is considered to be divine because it

is experienced as divine and worthy of certain attitudes – such as admiration, marvel, awe and reverence. I briefly examine this experiential dimension of pantheism in the final section of this chapter on religiosity. Here, I primarily address the objection that the qualities given above are jointly insufficient to justify the appellation of God or divinity.

One might apply the same request made here to the perfection theist: why do the properties ascribed to the highest being of perfection theism justify calling that being God or divine? Of course the answer that this is the title that has always been applied to the highest being will not do. Clearly the highest being of perfection theism is characterized by a set of properties different from those provided above. So what exactly is it about *those* properties that make God divine, while the unity of pantheism is looked at with a suspicious eye? As far as I know there is no convincing or widely-accepted systematic account of the relation between some set of properties and divinity. But even if there were, what would be the nature of such a relation? Would it be one of entailment? Supervenience? My sense is that such abstract considerations are totally foreign to the religious experience that naturally issues in the consideration of some being as divine – whether the highest being of perfection theism, the unity of pantheism, or any other being taken to be divine. This line of thought holds not just in response to the perfection theist, but to anyone demanding an account of exactly why certain properties justify the appellation of divinity. And one might wonder why this demand is rarely, if ever, made of the perfection theist. The experience of some being as divine is what justifies considering it as such; pantheism is at no disadvantage here with respect to other religious traditions.

One prominent view that might be thought to present particular difficulties for the pantheist is that God or the divine must play some soteriological role, saving us from some problem that, without a solution, would render our lives deeply unsatisfying. Paul Draper, in a discussion of

another unorthodox view of God which he calls panpsychotheism, writes that this soteriological role “seems to be more central to religion than any other”.³⁵² Draper goes on to quote John Hick, who claims that all major religions include the possibility of being saved from something that would otherwise make human life deeply unsatisfying.³⁵³ It is worth noting the essentially passive element here, which I maintain has roots in a traditional theistic worldview. On this view the individual human might have to do something to warrant or contribute to their being saved, but the essence of the saving is done by God; I return to this issue shortly.

Supposing that some soteriological role is necessary for the consideration of an entity as divine, and even supposing that it is most central to religion in general (both of which would require more argument), how might the rationalistic pantheist respond to this challenge? Draper highlights a dilemma from Bishop and Persyk according to which the title “God” requires this soteriological element, but God should not be blameworthy for our needing to be saved in the first place.³⁵⁴ The all-encompassing unity of the rationalistic pantheist is certainly not blameworthy for our needing to be saved in a necessitarian framework in which the unity is non-personal. The question is then whether the unity of the rationalistic pantheist can be salvific. Draper seems to think that if it is not conscious, it is doubtful whether it can play the relevant soteriological role. He agrees that the pantheistic God would not be responsible for our needing to be saved, but says that such a deity would “not be up to the task of saving us.”³⁵⁵ And in a sense, the pantheist would agree – the task before you is to save yourself through the proper use of reason. In doing so, one participates in divinity, and thus the deity plays some role, but the

³⁵² Draper, Paul. “Panpsychotheism.” *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Paul Draper, Routledge, 2019, p. 162.

³⁵³ Draper p. 162.

³⁵⁴ Draper pp. 163, 173.

³⁵⁵ Draper p. 174.

essence of the saving is not executed by an external being that renders the human agent largely passive in the process. Thus pantheism potentially contains a soteriological element according to which humans are empowered to actively “save” themselves rather than rely on a helping hand extended from some transcendent realm.

There is a long tradition of such a view in western philosophy, manifested most prominently in the Stoic tradition culminating in Spinoza. The emphasis on saving oneself rather than being saved is present in eastern traditions as well, from strands of pantheistic Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism to Taoism. These traditions share a commitment to there not being an easy fix to the most fundamental “problems” of human existence; rather one has to go through the difficult process of crafting a “solution” oneself. Finally, if there are good reasons for accepting rationalistic pantheism over the commitment to a divine agent that effects our salvation, there is a corresponding argument to be made that the sort of soteriological account available to the pantheist is more appropriate than one with its roots in traditional theism.

The focus of this project has been the development of a version of pantheism based in the thought of the three primary thinkers examined, which is also worthy of serious consideration in our contemporary context. Having completed the task of explicating the foundation of such a view, I move on to three final topics relevant to the further development of such a view in the contemporary landscape: additional argumentative resources that might be marshalled in support of this view, its philosophical advantages over perfection theism, and the issue of religiosity. Adequately addressing each of these topics would be a significant undertaking in its own right; here I treat each only briefly, suggesting promising avenues that the rationalistic pantheist might

take in the further development of such a view. In addition to the merits of rationalistic pantheism highlighted throughout this project, the additional considerations that follow help to further solidify rationalistic pantheism as a live option today.

II. Additional Argumentative Resources

The thinkers that I have examined as part of this project have extensive argumentative resources at their disposal, both for particular aspects of their accounts, and, for Spinoza and Hegel in particular given their methodological systematicity, for their philosophical worldview as a whole. However, for various reasons, each of their philosophical methodologies might be viewed with suspicion in the contemporary context: Spinoza's geometrical method has been thought by many to be a fool's errand from the start, and in any event dependent upon the stipulative axioms with which he begins the *Ethics*. Herder's contribution to rationalistic pantheism is presented in an exploratory dialogical format. And Hegel's system is based on a distinctive dialectical methodology, requiring one to follow his analysis and conclusions step by step, leaving perhaps more room for attack than nearly all other methodologies due to its all-encompassing aspirations. I do not think any of these methodologies disqualifies their conclusions from serious consideration; if I did I would not have undertaken this project. But I recognize that these methodologies are unlikely to garner broad support in the contemporary landscape, and thus think it worthwhile to briefly explore additional argumentative resources to increase the plausibility of the view in contemporary philosophy of religion.

So, first, in addition to the strategies employed by these historical thinkers, how might one argue for the existence of a necessary being? I maintain that the most promising avenue is to do so through a Cosmological Argument based on the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), along the lines of the well-known version put forward by Samuel Clarke. Clarke's argument is based

on an *a posteriori* premise positing the existence of dependent beings, and argues for the need of a reason or explanation or cause not just for each dependent being, but for the whole set of interrelated dependent beings. Such a reason or explanation or cause would still be required even if the chain of dependent beings extended infinitely backwards in time. The PSR would still call for an answer to the question of why this particular chain or amalgamation of dependent beings exists and not some other assemblage. Clarke concludes that the set of dependent beings together with the PSR require the existence of an independent necessary being to ground the dependent beings. Such an independent necessary being, since it is not dependent on anything else for its existence, could not have been brought into existence out of nothing by itself or anything else. Notoriously, the necessary being arrived at by the Cosmological Argument relies on the Ontological Argument to get one to the greatest thinkable being of perfection theism, which faces significant challenges. But rationalistic pantheism doesn't need the version of the *a priori* Ontological Argument aimed at establishing the existence of the greatest thinkable being; it can rest satisfied with the result of a "mere" necessary being, if a version of the Cosmological Argument is successful, and further fill out the details of this necessary being through other argumentative resources.

Although Spinoza's preference is for *a priori* arguments for the existence of God based on his stipulative definitions, he presents an *a posteriori* argument related to the Cosmological Argument of Clarke in the third proof of Ip11 in the *Ethics*. It relies on the empirical premise that we (or I) exist, along with a strong version of the PSR, which for Spinoza requires in this case either that we exist necessarily or that we exist "in" something else that itself exists necessarily. Don Garrett, in his article, "Spinoza's 'Ontological' Argument", writes: "Spinoza's belief that some definition of a substance must be consistent is, I think, chiefly based on his

belief that nothing could ultimately explain the existence *or the nonexistence* of particular modes unless at least one substance which is a logically necessary being exists.”³⁵⁶ If this interpretation is correct, then Spinoza’s definition of substance, along with the argument for a necessary being referred to above, is based on the existence of particular modes, an *a posteriori* premise. So the resources needed for arguing for a necessary being on the basis of an *a posteriori* experience are present in Spinoza’s thought, even if not fully fleshed out.

If the rationalistic pantheist is able to successfully argue for the existence of a necessary being, how might they argue for the identification of the all-encompassing divine unity with this necessary being? One potential objection here is that the unity of everything that exists could constitute only one possible world. I think the rationalistic pantheist’s best course of action here is to argue for their necessitarianism, which denies the possibility of the existence of other worlds. This of course requires further argument, but argumentative resources that I’ve discussed in the historical survey I’ve undertaken are available here. One might argue that a prominent motivation for positing possible worlds, at least in the historical tradition, is gone when the God of perfection theism is denied; for instance, Leibniz’s account of possible worlds is central to his response to the problem of evil, which I discuss below. But clearly a theory of possible worlds is employed by many philosophers without supernaturalistic religious commitments. I think that the best defense of necessitarianism available to the rationalistic pantheist is their insistence on a strong version of the PSR and the at-bottom rationality of existence. I discuss why the PSR might be thought to lead one from determinism to necessitarianism below in the context of Leibniz’s attempt to avoid this very conclusion.

³⁵⁶ Garrett, Don. “Spinoza’s ‘Ontological’ Argument.” *Philosophical Review*, 88.2, 1979, p. 222.

So finally, why might the rationalistic pantheist think that a strong version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason is true? The PSR has some *prima facie* intuitive pull, but many see our best quantum mechanical theories as presenting a challenge to its truth. A detailed consideration of this issue would obviously take me far beyond the scope of this project, but a few observations are worth making to sketch a potential defense open to the rationalistic pantheist. First, there is disagreement amongst scientists whether the proper interpretation of quantum mechanics is indeterministic. Einstein, for instance, who by the way was also an adherent of something like Spinoza's pantheism, seemed to deny ultimate indeterminism at the quantum level. I think that an *a priori* argument for a strong version of the PSR is unlikely to be successful and non-question-begging. The pantheist could make an inductive argument for the truth of the PSR, pointing to the success of assuming its truth in the scientific process, and highlighting the absence of a single definitive instance of its violation in the history of science. It's hard to know what a definitive violation of the PSR would even amount to, from an epistemological standpoint. How could one definitively prove the *absence of* any cause or explanation? It seems that this would require knowledge of the exhaustive set of all possible kinds of causes, and the demonstration that none of these were operative in a particular situation. But there are serious doubts about whether humanity could ever arrive at such knowledge, and how we could be justified in taking a certain set of causes to be exhaustive. The pantheist might highlight other cases through history in which humanity arrived at some apparent stop in an explanatory or causal account, only to subsequently find a deeper explanation or cause. On a related note, Einstein said: "the belief in the existence of fundamental all-embracing laws also rests on a sort of faith. All the same, this faith has been largely justified by the success of science."³⁵⁷ So, back

³⁵⁷ Einstein to P. Wright, 24 January 1936. Einstein Archive, reel 52-337. Cited in Jammer, Max. *Einstein and Religion*. Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 92-93.

to the objection originating from quantum mechanics, the pantheist could believe that there is likely a deeper explanation of the (to some) apparent indeterminism in quantum mechanics. Of course the pantheist could be wrong about that, but it is hard to see how we could ever definitively know that the PSR has been violated in any particular case.

III. Philosophical Advantages Over Perfection Theism

A primary philosophical advantage of rationalistic pantheism over perfection theism, and also a primary motivation for ascribing to the former rather than the latter, is that it avoids the problem of evil as traditionally conceived. I will briefly highlight some other philosophical advantages as well, but the problem of evil is my main concern in this section. The traditional problem of evil is generated by considering the existence of evil in light of certain qualities ascribed to the God of perfection theism, in particular God's being all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good. It should be clear that such a problem does not even arise for the pantheist, who denies the qualities of God that are purportedly in tension with the existence of evil. The pantheist may want to provide some sort of account of how suffering fits into their view, but that would be a very different undertaking from the perfection theist's response to the traditional problem of evil.

One might think that the rationalistic pantheist is confronted with a version of the problem of evil analogous to the problem as traditionally conceived: 1. God is the explanation of the world. 2. God is rational. 3. Rationality is incompatible with evil. From what I have said so far, it is clear that the view I have been proposing is committed to 1 and 2. And, given a fairly standard interpretation of evil or suffering, I don't think there is any reason for the rationalist pantheist to accept 3. One could hold that rationality is in some evaluative sense 'good', since it is in some sense 'better' that the world be rationally-structured and intelligible than a jumbled mess of randomness and ontological chaos; one might even argue that without such a rational

structure complex organisms like human beings that come to recognize this structure in the world would not develop. But a commitment to this minimal sense in which rationality is ‘good’ does not entail that rationality is incompatible with the evil and suffering observed in the world; in fact, the rational structure of the world provides an explanation for these phenomena, as for all others.

One other thing to mention at the outset of the discussion of the traditional problem of evil is that the rationalistic pantheist denies the existence of evil as an ontological entity of its own. This does not mean that there are not things like suffering in the world, but the rationalistic pantheist believes these can be given a naturalistic explanation, and further believes that no other state of affairs was possible. This distinction (whether or not evil is an ontological entity of its own or can be given a naturalistic explanation) is not central to the problem of evil as understood in contemporary philosophy; but it is a significant difference between at least some forms of perfection theism and rationalistic pantheism, and so worth highlighting.

Perhaps the most well-known perfection theistic response to the problem of evil is the free will defense. In broad strokes, this account holds that evil is, even for God, an unavoidable consequence of giving humans free will, but that free will is a great good without which the world would be worse off, in some relevant moral sense. This view is marshalled in defense of the existence of “moral evil”, which is committed by moral agents, rather than “natural evil”, which results from natural disasters, for instance. It’s not clear that this defense with respect to moral evil can succeed, however. As is well-known in this debate, it’s not clear why God could not have created a world in which moral agents always freely choose to do the morally good rather than evil. A proponent of the free will defense can hold that this is not something that God has the power to do, or that God cannot know or guarantee how a free agent will act “ahead of

time”. But on a traditional view of God as atemporal, for whom what is past, present, and future to us is all eternally present, it seems that God could know how moral agents would freely act, and thus that God could create a world in which moral agents always freely choose to do the morally right thing.

A discussion of this particular debate within the problem of evil could get much more detailed; my main point here is that if one employs the kind of free will defense outlined above in response to the problem of evil, one is committed to an unorthodox view of God’s relation to time, but most importantly, one is committed to libertarian free will. And libertarian free will comes along with its own host of problems, and may at bottom be inexplicable, mysterious, or even incoherent. Thus, I count it as an advantage of rationalistic pantheism that it is not saddled with a commitment to libertarian free will due to its conception of the nature of the divine. Furthermore, even if the free will defense were to work, it does not address natural evil, and surely does not address the sheer amount of natural evil in the world. This evidential strand of the problem of evil is perhaps an even bigger hurdle for perfection theism to clear than the existence of moral evil, and the fact that the problem generated for the perfection theist does not apply to the rationalistic pantheist is another mark in its favor.

The above is an outline of rationalistic pantheism’s advantage over a perfection theistic response to the problem of evil of a Plantingian stripe, which requires a commitment to libertarian free will. But what about a perfection theist who has more of a proclivity for determinism? Leibniz is the exemplar for a representative of such a view, and Leibniz and Spinoza exchanged blows on this very issue. Leibniz leverages his theory of possible worlds to respond to the problem of evil. For Leibniz individual worlds, which can be thought of as creation scenarios, are deterministic. But Leibniz resists Spinoza’s necessitarianism by claiming

that God chose the actual world amidst a plethora of other possible worlds, and thus the actual world is not necessary. God chooses the actual world for a moral reason, because it is the best of all possible worlds, and this, in a sense, constitutes Leibniz's response to the problem of evil: We live in the best of all possible worlds, the existence and amount of evil notwithstanding. Some find the claim that we live in the best of all possible worlds obviously false; I tend to think it is the most consistent and best shot that perfection theism has in responding to the problem of evil. But how might the rationalistic pantheist respond to such an account?

The rationalistic pantheist might claim that if it is true that the order of nature could have been different than it in fact is, then God's nature could have been different than it is, and this would be problematic for a purportedly necessary being. On Leibniz's picture, God chooses a world to create based on God's moral nature, choosing the world that is best, all things considered. It seems impossible that God could have created a different world, given God's nature. And as a necessary being, God's nature could not be other than it in fact is. So the other "possible worlds" aren't really possible after all. We might call them conceivable, but not possibilities that could have been instantiated, given God's nature.³⁵⁸ Leibniz attempts to avoid this necessitarian conclusion by distinguishing between God's metaphysical and moral necessity, such that the actual world is not metaphysically necessary, as there are many other worlds that are metaphysically possible, but it is morally necessary. But all things considered (i.e., God's necessary existence and nature) no world other than the actual was possible. So the rationalistic pantheist can argue that such a deterministic perfection theist's view collapses into

³⁵⁸ One might see similarities here to the contemporary appropriation of possible worlds; philosophers often speak flippantly of possible worlds and seem to imply that mere conceivability is sufficient for a world's being possible. Much more work would need to be done, and often is not done, to make the jump from conceivability to a real possibility that could have been instantiated. Additionally, conceivability is not yet possibility, since there may be a contradiction in the conceived world that is overlooked by a finite mind.

necessitarianism. However, given the perfection theist's commitment to conceiving of God as the greatest thinkable being, the problem of evil rears its head again, and it seems that a necessitarian perfection theist would have to deny that God is able or has the power to avoid the evils in the world, which is not likely a palatable result for most perfection theists.

There are a few other philosophical advantages that rationalistic pantheism has over perfection theism that I just highlight, without the same detailed discussion afforded to the problem of evil. The first relates to the discussion of the Cosmological Argument above – the rationalistic pantheist can utilize the Cosmological Argument without being saddled with the difficulties of making the further jump from a necessary being to the greatest thinkable being of perfection theism. Additionally, rationalistic pantheism does not rely on revelation or the authority of a religious figure (an advantage that I recognize is only seen as such from certain perspectives). Furthermore, rationalistic pantheism makes no appeal to mystery, or to the in-principle unintelligibility of the most basic aspects of reality. This avoids the drawback of being deeply and ultimately unsatisfying from a philosophical perspective, even if it might be satisfying to those using it as a defense for a religious perspective. I believe that all of these advantages taken together are significant, and are the direct result of denying the existence of the God of perfection theism. Despite this denial, the rationalistic pantheist is certainly not a categorical atheist, in part due to the role of religiosity, which I discuss in the final section of this chapter.

IV. Religiosity

In the Introduction I cited Paul Griffiths' statement that the divine is "what is taken to be maximally and finally significant".³⁵⁹ The rationalistic pantheist takes the all-encompassing unity to be maximally and finally significant, in a way that can potentially orient their life similar to the way in which this takes place across the religious spectrum. But this characterization of the divine, taken by itself, would not qualify as a sufficient condition for divinity in the above discussion of why the pantheist considers the all-encompassing unity as divine; for someone could take something to be maximally and finally significant but not consider it divine, such as the maximization of one's monetary net worth. This characterization of the divine by Griffiths has more of an affinity with religious experience than with necessary and sufficient conditions for divinity, which I maintain is really at the base of the pantheist's ascription of divinity to the all-encompassing unity. As with the preceding two sections of this chapter, a full treatment of this topic goes far beyond the scope of my project. But because of the connection between religiosity and the divine aspect of the pantheist's unity, I want to briefly outline the role that religiosity might play for the rationalistic pantheist.

Michael Levine, in *Pantheism: A non-theistic concept of deity*, writes: "Why do pantheists ascribe divinity to the Unity? The reason is similar to why theists describe God as holy. They experience it as such."³⁶⁰ Religious experience is the basis of the ascription of divinity, and not just for the pantheist. Levine calls upon Rudolf Otto as a witness for an account of religious experience that the pantheist might make use of, for whom the experience of holiness is primitive, and cannot be expressed in terms of other concepts.³⁶¹ Perhaps even more appropriate

³⁵⁹ Griffiths, p. 60

³⁶⁰ Levine, Michael P. *Pantheism: A non-theistic concept of deity*. Routledge, 1994, p. 48. Levine's subject is pantheism in general, rather than a specific version of pantheism as I'm considering, but the point holds.

³⁶¹ Levine, p. 48.

to my project, we might summon Friedrich Schleiermacher to aid in the development of an account of religious experience for the rationalistic pantheist. Schleiermacher's 1799 *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* is both inspired and informed by Spinoza's pantheism, and can be considered along with Herder's and Hegel's work as one of the seminal responses to the Pantheism Controversy in classical German philosophy. For Schleiermacher, the *essence* of religion is neither metaphysics nor ethics, but intuition or feeling; the core religious experience for Schleiermacher is an immediate intuition of the infinite. As might be surmised, Schleiermacher deviates from Herder and Hegel on the ultimate role of rationality in philosophy and religion. But his account of religious experience has the potential to nicely supplement the rationalistic pantheism I've developed in this project. Certain experiences, such as awe, reverence, and holiness in the face of the world by which we are surrounded and upon which we are dependent can be the underpinning for considering the all-encompassing unity to be divine. In light of such experience, one might consider the focus on salvation in the discussion of divinity above as opposed to true religiosity – instead of humbling the ego before the majesty of the world, one expects to be saved from aspects of the world that, according to the rationalistic pantheist, are actually necessary and unavoidable.

The challenge in employing both Schleiermacher's and Otto's views is the lack of any sort of objective underpinning to ground religious experience. Without an objective touchstone the view is in danger of sinking into a subjectivity that is immune from rational analysis and lacks the resources to distinguish veridical religious experience from illusion. In a roundabout way, this project was motivated in part by being enamored with Schleiermacher's account of religiosity, but recognizing this lack of objectivity as a fatal flaw that is not satisfactorily addressed in his more systematic works. The rationalistic pantheism I have developed in this

project could serve as the objective touchstone lacking in these accounts of religious experience, and provide the underlying basis for such experience. Of course a detailed account of the relation between the conceptual philosophical commitments and the affective component of religious experience would need to be worked out. Religious experience would not be *wholly* immediate or non-conceptual, as Schleiermacher and Otto would seem to have it, but mediated by the conceptual machinery of rationalistic pantheism, and even more basic conceptual machinery upon which that view depends. But their account of the experience itself, as an affective dimension attendant to or supervenient upon a conceptual foundation, has the potential to enrich the pantheist's account of divinity.

As is the case in other contexts, the roots of such a view can be found in Spinoza, even if a detailed account of the relation between pantheism's philosophical commitments and religious experience is not worked out. For Spinoza, knowledge of the order and connection of causes in Nature is knowledge of God, and is the highest blessedness for human beings, and the basis for the intellectual love of God. Spinoza already makes the connection between philosophical concepts and their attendant affective effect. For Spinoza, as for Hegel, philosophical cognition leads to the highest freedom. By doing philosophy and science, we can grasp the fundamental truths about reality, and through this knowledge be set free, and further actualize our own unity with the divine. Einstein said, "The further the spiritual evolution of mankind advances, the more certain it seems to me that the path to genuine religiosity does not lie through the fear of life, and the fear of death, and blind faith, but through striving after rational knowledge."³⁶² Thus it may be that the inkling for pantheism begins in religious experience, and ends in it as

³⁶² Einstein, A., "Science and Religion," *Transactions of the First Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion in Their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life* (New York, 1941); *Ideas and Opinions*, pp. 44-49; *Out of My Later Years*, pp. 28-33; *Nature* 146 (1940): 605-607. Cited in Jammer, p. 95.

well; a feeling that is grounded in the concepts represented by words on a page, but that also goes beyond them in the experience of the world as shot through with divinity.

V. References

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