

The Harmony of Spinoza and Leibniz

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According to a common reading, Spinoza and Leibniz stand on opposite ends of the modal spectrum. At one extreme lies “Spinoza the necessitarian,” for whom the actual world is the only possible world. At the other lies “Leibniz the anti-necessitarian,” for whom the actual world is but one possible world among an infinite array of other possible worlds; the actual world is privileged for existence only in virtue of a free decree of a benevolent God. In this paper, I challenge both of these readings. Spinoza is no necessitarian and Leibniz is no anti-necessitarian – at least as these characterizations are usually understood. Rather, I contend, Spinoza and Leibniz are both *anti-essentialists*; they believe that the modality of objects (both individually and as collected into a possible world) can vary relative to how those objects are conceived. This shared commitment to anti-essentialism allows them to consistently affirm both necessitarianism *and* its denial, relative to different ways of conceiving the world.¹ Their embrace of this modal

¹ Some may immediately balk at the *prima facie* implausibility of this commitment. One way to try to motivate a general version of this sort of relativity is to appeal to the (alleged) variability of our modal intuitions across differing contexts of ascription. (Although she is not an anti-essentialist, L.A. Paul pursues this line in “The Context of Essence,” in *Lewisian Themes: The Philosophy of David Lewis*, ed. Frank Jackson and Graham Priest (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).) Another way, which I will attribute to Spinoza, is to offer an analysis of modality in terms of something else that readily admits of such variability of truth-values, relative different ways of conceiving one and the same object. (Spinoza appeals to conceptual relations as the relevant *analysans*.) A third route, which I will attribute to Leibniz, is to back into anti-essentialism as a way of avoiding concerns with invariant accounts. (Leibniz backs into it by worrying about what would otherwise be the modal consequences of a very tight connection between God and the actual world. More recently, Michael Della Rocca offers a backing-in strategy (based on very different concerns) in “Essentialism Versus Essentialism,” in *Conceivability and Possibility*, ed. Tamar Gendler and John Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).)

theory, I further argue, is grounded in their similar views on metaphysical perfection, ontological plenitude, and the principle of sufficient reason.

The relationship between Spinoza and Leibniz may seem like well-trod ground.² There is nothing novel in raising a doubt, for instance, about whether Leibniz's early modal theory – the non-infinite analysis variety³ – escapes the orbit of Spinoza's own modal views, a doubt I will raise here. However, previous comparisons have been hindered by an incorrect understanding of Spinoza's own metaphysical views. The straightforward necessitarianism that is usually ascribed to Spinoza is inaccurate. On my account, Spinoza has an important place and role for contingency, albeit contingency understood within an anti-essentialist framework. So in suggesting that Leibniz's early thinking in the 1670s had strong affinities with Spinoza's modal theory, I will *not* be suggesting that Leibniz's modal views collapse into some kind of straight-forward necessitarianism. (This is the more familiar, but perhaps tired charge.) Instead, I will argue that the best and most charitable way to understand Leibniz's early *per se* modal claims is along the same lines used for best understanding Spinoza's modal theory – and its corresponding use of intensionality.⁴ On my reading, to the (non-zero!) extent that the

² It has even entered the public sphere recently with Matthew Stewart's well-received, popularized account. (Matthew Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza and the Fate of God in the Modern World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).)

³ I will not here add directly to the interpretive debate over whether Leibniz's later infinite analysis account of contingency came to supplant or merely supplement his earlier *per se* theory of modality. Nonetheless, if my interpretation of Leibniz's early modal theorizing is correct, it will undermine at least one strong reason for thinking Leibniz later abandoned his *per se* defense against necessitarianism in favor of his infinite analysis theory. The strong reason, put forward by Robert Sleigh, is that the *per se* defense is an utter failure at blocking necessitarianism, a failure Leibniz himself eventually came to appreciate. On my reading, the defense actually works, and I see no explicit evidence that Leibniz thought otherwise. For the best representatives of this debate, see Robert Merrihew Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 13n6.; Robert Sleigh, *Leibniz and Arnauld* (1994), 82f.; and the illuminating exchange between Adams and John Carriero (John P. Carriero, "Syposium on *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*," *Leibniz Society Review* 6 (1996) and Robert Merrihew Adams, "Response to Carriero, Mugnai, and Garber," *Leibniz Society Review* 6 (1996)).

⁴ Modality is an intensional environment if substitutions of co-referring designators in sentences involving predications of modal properties do not guarantee truth-value preservation in the resulting sentences.

early Leibniz successfully avoids necessitarianism, to that extent so does Spinoza, and vice versa.

The second, and related, point of overlap surrounds the topic of metaphysical perfection. Leibniz believes that the metaphysically perfect world contains an optimal balance of ontological unity and ontological diversity. He frequently labels this optimal balance “harmony.” Spinoza, I will argue, consistently maintains an extreme version of Leibnizian harmony by repeatedly appealing to intensionality. Spinoza’s appeal to intensionality as a way to maximize ontological parsimony and plenitude also motivates, in turn, his anti-essentialist theory of modality. Hence, the result of my reading will be at once a more Spinozistic Leibniz and more Leibnizian Spinoza.

This paper is divided into two main parts. In the first half, I argue that Spinoza is committed to several axes of ontological plenitude, despite his famous belief in substance monism, the thesis that there is only one substance. Plenitude and parsimony are both constitutive of the metaphysically perfect world, according to Spinoza (§2.1). However, given the wide range of plenitude Spinoza hopes to capture, it is difficult to see how he can consistently maintain his monism. I claim that Spinoza regularly appeals to intensionality as the means for consistently satisfying both desiderata (§2.2). Spinoza’s views on the modality of finite objects, I then contend, must be understood against this backdrop. Seeing how plenitude and intensionality shape his modal beliefs leads us to conclude that Spinoza was, in fact, an anti-essentialist (§2.3). In the second half of the paper, I turn to Leibniz’s early modal theorizing to show that he too was committed to a similar form of anti-essentialism (§3.1). If so, we can now see how Leibniz’s early *per se* modal theory successfully avoids the denial of genuine contingency, a success that even some of Leibniz’s most sympathetic interpreters have denied. I conclude by examining just where, on my new reading, Spinoza and Leibniz most fundamentally disagree on these matters. My answer points to a quasi-theological premise about God’s immanence or transcendence and not, as is commonly supposed, to a premise about the ineliminable role of Divine choice in world-creation (§3.2).

§2.1 Spinoza on Plenitude and Perfection

I will begin with a new account of Spinoza’s metaphysics which highlights the previously unappreciated roles of intensionality and plenitude in his theories of modality and perfection. Spinoza’s belief

in ontological parsimony is well-known. He's a substance monist, after all.⁵ As he famously claims in his *Ethics*, "Except God, no substance can be or be conceived" (Ip14). The next proposition spells out the implications of his monism for all other existing objects: "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God" (Ip15). That is, whatever else exists must inhere in substance and locate in substance both its causal origins and the grounds for its very intelligibility.⁶

One might expect such an ontologically sparse substance monism to leave little room for metaphysical diversity. Yet in the very next proposition (Ip16), Spinoza turns from substance monism to a statement of ontological plenitude: "From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways [*modis*], (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect)."⁷ We will look at the precise nature of Spinoza's plenitude in a moment. But first, a more general observation about the juxtaposition of these passages is warranted. The fact that one of Spinoza's strongest statements of plenitude comes on the heels of the monistic conclusions of Ip15 suggests, to my mind at least, that there is an implicit "nonetheless" between the two propositions. Yes, Spinoza affirms in Ip15, at the ontological ground floor, extreme parsimony (identity!) rules; *nonetheless*, Spinoza assures

⁵ Though Spinoza's substance monism is an obviously parsimonious doctrine, it is by no means the only such parsimonious bit of his ontology. Spinoza argues for a number of surprising identity claims (at least surprising from the perspective of his predecessors), including the identities between minds and parallel bodies (IIp7s), ideas and ideas of those ideas (IIp20); human ideas and God's parallel ideas (IIp11c); volitions and ideas (IIp49); the will and the intellect (IIp49c); volitions and the faculty of willing (IIp48s); ideas and the faculty of the intellect (IIp48s); power and virtue (IVd8); power and active essence (IIp7); power and perfection (IVPref.). Furthermore, I have argued elsewhere that Spinoza's actual argument for substance monism presupposes a more general commitment to ontological parsimony (Samuel Newlands, "Another Kind of Monism," *Nous* (forthcoming)). (Thanks to a referee for pressing me on this point.)

⁶ This is a redundant way of putting Spinoza's point, since Spinoza seems to think that both inherence and causal relations stem from a single dependence relation of conceptual involvement. (One reason for thinking this is Spinoza's Latin in Id3 (and similar passages): "Per substantiam intelligo id, quod in se est et, & *per se* concipitur: hoc est id, cuius conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei, a quo formari debeat" (*OP*, Id3; G II/45). What follows "hoc est id" explains and analyzes *both* conjuncts of the relative clause following the initial "id" (Newlands, "Another Kind of Spinozistic Monism").) For two alternative and very different accounts of these relations in Spinoza, see Edwin Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard, 1969), ch. 1 and John P. Carriero, "On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33 (1995). However, nothing I will say here turns on my reading of such passages; there are alternative ways of making the same points without inherence or predication talk.

⁷ I have altered Curley's translation slightly, rendering *modus* as the less technical "ways." See Curley's discussion of this translational difficulty in C 424n43.

us in Ip16, this singular substance actually gives rise to maximal diversity among the predication that can be made of it truly. Together, Ip15 and Ip16 affirm Spinoza's commitment to *both* a kind of maximal unity and a kind of maximal diversity.

Spinoza also believes that the truth of substance monism and some kind of ontological diversity is a perfect-making feature of the actual world. God exists as the sole substance in the actual world and brings about the perfect series of things in this world.⁸ Spinoza explicitly highlights the plentiful character of this perfect series (Ip16), suggesting that the very abundance of things inhering in God contributes to the perfection of the world as a whole. More concisely, Spinoza seems to think that the perfection of the actual world minimally consists in the existence of a single substance combined with a plentiful range of predication that can truly be made of that substance.⁹

There is a problem, however, when one considers just how plentiful the range of true predication of one and the same substance is supposed to be. Undoubtedly, some pairs of seemingly inconsistent predication ("substance is round" and "substance is not round") can easily be handled by more and less fine-grained spatial and temporal indexing or a form of adverbialism.¹⁰ But Spinoza's demands for plenitude are more radical yet. At times his plenitude demands the truth of independently consistent predication which, taken together, seem contradictory and for which no obvious relativizing or adverbializing strategy is available. For example and perhaps most famously, Spinoza claims that parallel mental and extended modes are identical (IIp7s; IIp21s; IIIp2s) and that modes of each attribute are causally unrelated to the modes of any other attributes (IIp6; IIIp2d). This means that the following claims are all true for Spinoza:

⁸ See especially Ip33s2.

⁹ Does the perfection of a world, for Spinoza, consist in *more* than these two structural features? One candidate that Spinoza emphatically rules out is one Leibniz might have offered: its goodness (where a world's goodness is an intrinsic feature of it evaluated according to an external standard of excellence). Spinoza dismisses such attempts to link this notion of goodness with perfection as based on little more than failed teleological models and anthropomorphic projections (G I/165; IApp; IVPref.). But as we will later see, Leibniz himself explains a world's perfection in terms of these same two structural features, suggesting that a world's excellence supervenes on non-moral facts about its parsimony and plenitude. So perhaps their difference here will not be as great as initially seems.

¹⁰ Bayle raised examples of this sort to charge Spinoza with an inconsistency (Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, trans. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 306–7.). These criticisms are sometimes dismissed by challenging the view of inherence that Bayle's objections presuppose. But there is another way of understanding Bayle's worries on this score that do not turn on a particular interpretation of inherence relations. Bayle is generally wondering how Spinoza can maintain his monism in the face of his demands for plenitude. A fair and good question, though not one hopeless of solution, as we will see.

- (i) My mind is identical to my body.
- (ii) My mind causes only mental effects.
- (iii) My body causes only extended effects.

But, on the *prima facie* innocent assumption that Leibniz's Law is valid for causal contexts, simple substitutions will generate (iv.):

- (iv) My mind causes only mental effects and only extended effects.

Among its other vices, (iv.) conflicts with the purported causal isolation of modes across differing attributes. Obviously, something has to give, but the point so far is that Spinoza's identity theory is at least *prima facie* in tension with his desire to have a plentiful variety of non-redundant, causally isolated attribute contexts.¹¹ Making matters worse, I will argue in later sections that Spinoza's plenitude and views of modality also commit him to mutually true pairings like these: “finite object *o* exists necessarily” and “*o* does not exist necessarily.” But how can this be?

The general worry about consistency now looms large. If Spinoza intends his plenitude to range over these sorts of disparate, seemingly inconsistent predication, how can he consistently maintain his parsimonious identity claims, such as the identity of the thinking and extended substance and the identities of parallel modes? There is a philosophically rich answer to this that turns on Spinoza's appeals to intensionality; we'll see an instance of this strategy in the case of modality. But before we can evaluate his efforts, we need to have a better understanding of the precise nature of plenitude in his system, as it is a topic (unlike his monism) that has been largely neglected by his interpreters. In the next section, I will begin with what is behind Spinoza's strong demands for plenitude: the principle of sufficient reason. I will suggest how that principle leads Spinoza to endorse a very strong version of plenitude that generates the

¹¹ See, for instance, worries expressed in Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1984), 141–45. Parallel to these problem cases is the long-standing question of how Spinoza can consistently maintain a plurality of attributes of radically different natures within a single substance. (See Ep8 for an early version of this objection from Simon de Vries.) However, if I am correct, this long-standing interpretive question and similar ones about the subjective/objective nature of the attributes are just instances of a more pervasive and general worry about Spinoza's combination of his parsimonious identity claims with theses endorsing various levels of ontological plenitude. The best solution in the attribute case, which I will mention in the next section, is likewise but an instance of a *general* Spinozistic approach to the overarching problem of balancing these twin demands of metaphysical perfection.

aforementioned worries. I will then articulate Spinoza's general answer to these worries and apply it specifically to the case of modality.

§2.2 Plenitude and Intensionality

One of Spinoza's most pervasive commitments is his explanatory rationalism, his belief in the thoroughly intelligible structure and order of the world. This commitment is exemplified in his endorsement of a very strong version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), one that includes a demand for explanations of facts about non-existence as well as facts about existence.¹² Although Spinoza is rarely as up-front about it as Leibniz, the PSR plays a significant role in generating a number of Spinoza's conclusions, including substance monism.¹³ It is also plausible to think that Spinoza's embrace of the PSR motivates his embrace of ontological plenitude.

To see this, let us first notice a connection between a generic principle of plenitude (POP) and the PSR. A generic POP states that the fullest, or maximal, range of compossible existents exists.¹⁴ Actuality, as it were, is as filled up as it can be. By this principle of plenitude, if there were an intrinsically possible object that did not exist, such non-existence could be explained only by an incompatibility between it and the maximal compossible set of existents. On the other hand, a positive reason for the existence of anything intrinsically possible will be the fact that there is nothing in the maximal series of compossible objects that prevents or excludes its existence. The fact that there is nothing in the maximally full series preventing its existence provides a

¹² See Ip11d for the clearest statement of the PSR. Traces of it, however, can be deduced from the conjunction of several earlier remarks. In the first axiom, everything is said to be "either in itself or in another" (Iax1). The "in" relation is analyzed earlier in Id3 and Id5 in terms of a conceptual relation: to be in oneself is to be self-conceived and to be in another is to be conceived through another. Spinoza treats this "conceiving through another" relation as equivalent to an explanatory relation in Iax5. Thus, according to Spinoza, all of reality is either explained through itself or explained through another, which is merely another way of saying that reality is wholly intelligible and susceptible to explanation; there are no brute facts. There is nothing in Spinoza that suggests this is limited to contingent facts (or contingently existing objects), though he does believe in self-explaining facts.

¹³ See Michael Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Substance Monism," in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, ed. Olli Koistinen and John Biro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), though I argue elsewhere that the PSR does not achieve quite as much in the proof for monism as Della Rocca thinks it does (Newlands, "Another Kind of Spinozistic Monism").

¹⁴ The most sweeping study on this topic is Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1936), though I come to very different conclusions about the nature and strength of Spinoza's plenitude (cf. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, 155–6).

positive reason for its existence. Thus, if there is ontological space to be filled, it will be filled. Why? Because, by *reductio*, if there were unfilled ontological space (*pace POP*), there would be something which had no reason for not existing, but which nonetheless didn't exist. Such non-existence would be an unexplained brute fact, something ruled out by Spinoza's PSR. Thus, Spinoza's conclusion would run, from the PSR we have some version of POP. As Leibniz nicely puts the point:

But my principle is: whatever can exist and is compatible with others, exists. For the sole reason for limiting existence, for all possibles, must be that they are not compatible. So the sole reason for limitation is that those things should preferably exist which involve the greatest amount of reality (DSR 105, emphasis mine).

Spinoza's particular kind of plenitude is a plenitude of what he calls "expressions," or ways of conceiving substance, and it is a plenitude that is realized along multiple axes. Substance, or God, has a maximal number of attributes (Ip9), each of which expresses the essence of God in a complete and self-contained manner (Ip10). As Spinoza states his thesis of attribute plenitude, "God is an absolutely infinite being, of whom no attribute which expresses an essence of substance can be denied" (Ip14d).¹⁵ In more familiar Spinoza terms, substance can be conceived as extended and substance can be conceived as thinking (IIp6).¹⁶

¹⁵ Spinoza's proof of this attribute plenitude could run similarly to the above proof from the PSR. If, by *reductio*, there were some other attribute α which did not express an essence of the one and only substance, what principled reason could there be for its exclusion from being among that substance's attributes? As we saw, the best answer Spinoza could provide to such a question would be to appeal to the fact that the maximal set of attributes of substance excluded α . But, according to Spinoza, there are no entailment relations, conceptual or otherwise, between the attributes (Ip10). Thus there could be no such grounds for the exclusion of α , since no other attribute could bear a relation to α in virtue of which it might exclude α . Therefore, the fact that there are no possible excluding relations provides a sufficient reason for including α among substance's attributes. Thus substance will possess all possible attributes, which is just to say that substance is such that all possible ways of expressing an essence of substance do, in fact, genuinely express such an essence. From the PSR and the conceptual barrier between attributes, Spinoza's system guarantees the expressive plenitude of attributes.

¹⁶ Attribute plenitude alone does not prove that the number of attributes is greater than two. (Jonathan Bennett comes close to endorsing the two attribute reading (Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1984), 76–79.) Still, if I am correct about the role of the PSR in motivating attribute plenitude, there will be a pressing question for the two attribute interpretation: in virtue of what is the maximal number of attributes two? I do not know of a satisfying answer to this question.

God also has a maximal number of modes (Ip16), each of which expresses an essence of God in a “certain and determinate” manner (Ip25c). What is this “certain and determinate” manner of expression? Spinoza describes an attribute in Ep36 as “something that expresses God’s nature in some way,” and describes that quality of expression as being perfect and involving no negation (see also Id6). I take it that this attribute way of expressing God’s nature is in contrast to the “certain and determinate” way modes express God’s nature or power (Ip36d). That is, modes express God’s nature in an incomplete and limited way; there is more to the nature of God than any particular mode expresses. Spinoza’s plentitude of modes means that the nature of substance can be consistently expressed in many, many incomplete or partial ways – as many modes as there are. Spinoza also links expressive and conceptualizing activity.¹⁷ Hence, Spinoza’s substance is such that it can be conceived in a plentiful number of complete and incomplete ways via all the attributes and modes.¹⁸ “It is certain,” Spinoza writes in the *TPP*, “that all things in nature involve and express the concept of God” (G II/60). This richly expressible nature of substance also means that quite a variety of predication can be truly said of substance – so many that, as we have already seen, the consistency of substance’s nature will be jeopardized.

Spinoza explicitly appeals to God’s rich nature to explain how God can maintain such a diversity of ways of being conceived:

But to those who ask ‘why God did not create all men so that they would be governed [only] by the command of reason?’ I answer only ‘because he did not lack material to create all things, from the highest degree of perfection to the lowest; or, to speak more properly, because the laws of his nature have been so ample [amplae] that they sufficed for producing all things which can be conceived by an infinite intellect’ (as I have demonstrated in Ip16),” (emphasis mine, IApp).

¹⁷ For instance, in Ip10s, Spinoza infers from the expressive activity of attributes that they are also “self-conceived.” In Ip20d, Spinoza explicitly calls the expressive activity of attributes *explanatory*, and there is ample textual evidence for thinking that conceiving and explaining are the same for Spinoza. (See also Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*, 4–5.)

¹⁸ In what follows, it will be important to keep in mind that Spinoza does not think of ways of conceiving substance and modes as identifiable with tokened mental states (“ideas”) or as operating in purely epistemic space. Rather, he thinks that ways of conceiving are metaphysically reified, attribute-neutral, and ontologically prior to any finite mind, though they are especially well-suited to be grasped by minds like ours (see Ip28d, IIId1, IIp1-2, IIp5-6). (For more on this point and the nature of conceptual relations in Spinoza, see Samuel Newlands, “Thinking, Conceiving, and Idealism in Spinoza” (ms).)

Spinoza claims that the internal richness and complexity of God's nature is such that it can accommodate these infinitely many ways of truly conceiving God. Perhaps so, we might respond, but this hardly removes our puzzlement. Let God's nature be quite fertile indeed; it remains quite unclear, e.g., how one and the same object can both be extended and thinking if, as Spinoza and Descartes agree, being extended and being thinking are wholly heterogeneous ways of being.

This confusion becomes more pressing once we notice that there is yet a further dimension of expressive plenitude in Spinoza's ontology, one that is supposed to give rise to even more seemingly inconsistent sets of true predication. This dimension will also be very important for correctly interpreting Spinoza's modal views. As we have just seen, Spinoza thinks substance can be conceived in a plentiful number of complete and incomplete ways, via the attributes and modes. But Spinoza also thinks that individual finite modes themselves can be conceived in more and less complete ways. Indeed, even within a single attribute, each finite mode will be conceivable in *infinitely* many broader and narrower ways. These more fine-grained ways of conceiving finite objects are distinguished by how many of the object's external causal relations are included in the relevant concepts. More schematically at first, each limited expression (mode) is itself capable of being expressed in more and less complete ways. In this sense, modes isomorphically mirror the expressiveness of substance itself, thus generating another axis of plenitude.¹⁹

This third dimension of plenitude, what I will label “intra-attribute mode plenitude,” is founded textually on Spinoza's frequent distinction between finite objects considered more narrowly or “conceiving their essence alone,” and those same objects considered in relation to the whole order of nature.²⁰ Spinoza believes that the difference between these broader and narrower ways of conceiving objects is a function of the extent to which their infinitely many causal relations are included in the concepts.²¹ That is (simplifying considerably), my body can be conceived solely in terms of (a): its intrinsic properties, or in terms of (a) plus (b): its immediate efficient cause, or in terms of (a), (b), and (c): the immediate efficient cause of (b), and so on throughout its infinitely long

¹⁹ Deleuze calls modes “a second level of expression” Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 14. Using his terminology, I am claiming that there is something like a third level of expression in Spinoza's ontology: the expressions of expressions of expressions, which corresponds to broader and narrower concepts of modes of substance.

²⁰ E.g., CM I/iii; I11d, Ip24d, IIIp6d, IIId7, IIIId1-2, IVd3-4, IVd8; TIE 57; Ep 12, Ep32.

²¹ This is clearest in IVp3-4. There will thus be an infinitely long continuum of concepts of each mode, between the narrowest and the broadest.

causal history, terminating with a maximally inclusive way of conceiving my body that includes all of its causal ancestors.²²

²² One might worry whether (a) is really a possible way of conceiving objects for Spinoza, given his claim in Iax4, “The knowledge [*cognitio*] of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause.” How can modes be conceived independently of their finite causes, if cognition of them requires grasping a relational property involving their cause? The first thing to notice is that, even if successful against (a), the objection will be irrelevant to the issue of modality. Modes will fail to be absolutely necessary on *any* way of being conceived, save according to maximally broad and inclusive ways. So a finite mode conceived in a way that includes relations to some, but not all, of its direct and indirect causes will still fail to be absolutely necessary for Spinoza, even if (by Iax4) it turns out that all modes must be conceived as having at least one external causal relation. Thus, so long as (b) above represents a genuine way of conceiving a mode for Spinoza, the forthcoming conclusion about his modal views will still follow even if (a), the narrowest way, is rejected. (I do not think Spinoza understood Iax4 to be iterative, such that cognition of an object requires not only knowing its cause, but also the cause of its cause, the cause of the cause of its cause, and so forth ad infinitum. He doesn’t apply Iax4 in this way (see Ip3; Ip25; IIp5-7; IIp16; IIp45; and Vp22) and there are numerous places where Spinoza writes about objects as they are considered independently of at least some of their causal relations – an impossibility if Iax4 entails the highly implausible thesis that cognition of one object requires cognition of every one of its infinitely many indirect causes.)

Secondly, even if Iax4 were relevant to the modal case, I do not believe it entails the impossibility of conceiving objects in the narrowest way, (a). Presumably Iax4 applies to knowledge of substance as well as modes. If so, the causal relations that must be included in the genuine ways of conceiving all objects need not be *external* causal relations. After all, Spinoza’s God has no external relations, though God remains genuinely conceivable and chalked full of causal relations – self-causal relations. So even if Iax4 claims that some causal relations must be included in all ways of conceiving objects, there is no reason to think those causes must be *external*. (In Ep60, Spinoza states that “I take it that an efficient cause can be both internal as well as external.”) But now consider the case of finite modes: what are the properties included in (a), the narrowest way of conceiving that mode? Spinoza is very vague; the closest general description he offers of such intrinsic properties are in relational terms: the “internal cause [*causam internam*]” of the mode (C 307; G I/241). That is, modes are, to some degree, self-caused in the sense that they have some internal structure, essence, or power (these are equivalent for Spinoza) that he describes in terms of an internal causal relation (see also IIp13L4 for a slightly richer account of this structure in extended terms). But just as substance can be conceived through its internal relational properties and still satisfy Iax4, so too finite modes can be conceived through their “internal causes,” their intrinsic structure, and satisfy Iax4.

We can reach a similar conclusion by applying an insight of Don Garrett’s interpretation of Spinoza’s *inherence* doctrine: all modes are, to some degree, in themselves, and this is in fact a way of being in substance (Don Garrett, “Spinoza’s *Conatus Argument*,” in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, ed. Olli Koistinen and John Biro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 138–141). Given my earlier claim that *inherence* and causal relations are necessarily co-extensive, it follows that all modes are to some extent self-caused; they are like impoverished expressions of substance. But if so, this too will be sufficient to discharge the worry about Iax4: conceiving an object independently of its external causes is compatible with always conceiving objects in ways that include some internal causal relations. And (a) is a way of conceiving objects that includes *only* those internal properties. Why read the word “*external*” into Iax4 if it isn’t there, especially given Spinoza’s fondness for internal relations?

More interestingly, Spinoza also believes that some metaphysical features of modes will vary relative to these broader and narrower ways of being conceived. That is, the truth-value of predication of certain metaphysical properties to modes is sensitive to how broadly a given mode is conceived.

Before filling this out with the concrete example of modality, notice how this general variation in the properties of modes, relative to how broadly or narrowly a mode is conceived, is similar to a perhaps more familiar Spinozistic variation of properties, relative to ways of being conceived. As I mentioned, Spinoza thinks the one and only substance is such that it can be expressed or conceived in an infinite number of wholly distinct ways, via all the attributes. That is, the sole thinking substance is identical with the sole extended substance. Nonetheless, by Spinoza's causal barrier between the attributes (Ip10s), the thinking substance causes only thinking effects and the extended substance causes only extended effects. But if the thinking substance *is* the extended substance, how is this just not a straight violation of Leibniz's Law (to put it quite anachronistically)? More generally, how does Spinoza square his attribute plenitude with his substance monism?

Spinoza's favored response appeals to the intensionality of attribute contexts and the rejection of an extensional analysis of causal relations.²³ IIp6 makes this especially clear:

The modes of each attribute have God for their cause only insofar as [*quatenus*] he is considered [*consideratur*] under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute.

That is, whether or not substance causes extended effects depends partly on how substance is being conceived with respect to the attributes.²⁴

²³ The earlier definition of intensionality in the modal case applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to causality as well: causality is non-extensional (i.e. intensional) if substitutions of co-referring designators in sentences involving predication of causal relations do not guarantee truth-value preservation in the resulting sentences.

²⁴ A similar appeal to intensionality can and should be made about the second dimension of plenitude, according to which one and the same mode causes thinking effects and causes no thinking effects, relative to the attribute under which it is conceived. The best defense of this reading, especially as it relates to Spinoza's theory of mind-body relations is found in Michael Della Rocca's *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). I believe that behind Spinoza's non-extensional account of causation is his analysis of causal relations in terms of conceptual relations, which are non-extensional *par excellence* (Newlands, "Another Kind of Spinozistic Monism").

There is a similar, though much broader role for intensionality in Spinoza's intra-attribute mode plenitude. Just as what attribute substance is being conceived under is relevant to determining its causal relations, so also how broadly or narrowly a particular mode is being conceived, even within a single attribute, is relevant to determining certain metaphysical features of it. One such metaphysical feature is the modality of these finite objects' existence. Whether or not a finite object exists necessarily or contingently depends partly on how narrowly or broadly it is conceived. I will now outline the case for this interpretation of Spinoza's modal theory before turning to Leibniz's strikingly similar theory.

§2.3 Spinoza's Anti-Essentialism

Let us begin by noticing that Spinoza clearly affirms both the contingent *and* necessary existence of finite modes, though always relative to these broader and narrower ways of being conceived. For instance, in his earlier *CM*, Spinoza claims,

Things, e.g. material things, are said to be either impossible or necessary with respect to their cause. For if we consider only their essence [*tantum ad earum essentiam respicimus*], we can conceive it [*illam concipere*] clearly and distinctly without existence (C 306; G I/240, emphasis mine).

According to such a narrow concept of an existing body, its existence is contingent. Why? As the first sentence suggests (and Ip33s states more explicitly), there is no *reason* in virtue of which it, so narrowly considered, would exist necessarily. As Spinoza's transfer principle of necessity makes clear (Ip21-22), modes exist necessarily only in virtue of being necessarily caused to exist by something outside themselves that itself necessarily exists.²⁵ Since any such external relational properties have been excluded from the narrow concept of a finite body, there can be no reason for that body's necessary existence. By the PSR, the lack of any reason entails falsity. Hence, it is false that such a mode exists necessarily, according to its narrow concept.²⁶

²⁵ This principle is closely connected to, but significantly stronger than, the familiar modal axiom that gives a sufficiency condition for the transfer of *de re* necessity: $\Box(p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow (\Box p \rightarrow \Box q)$. Spinoza's stronger modal transfer principle is warranted, however, if we grant his analysis of modality in terms of conceptual relations and his account of what conceptual relations there are, as I will argue below. For more on Spinoza's transfer principle of necessity, see Samuel Newlands, "Spinoza's Modal Metaphysics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza-modal/>).

²⁶ See similar claims about the contingency of things, considered narrowly, in Ep12, Ip24, IIp31c and IVd3-4.

Yet, slightly later in the same passage, Spinoza draws a very different conclusion about the modal status of modes when they are conceived more broadly: “If [someone] attends [*attendat*] to nature and the way it depends on God, he will find nothing contingent in things...”²⁷ Spinoza here claims that existing objects, conceived in relation to all of nature and, ultimately, to God qua substance, exist necessarily, though such necessity is derived from an external source.²⁸

Spinoza makes a similarly qualified point in Ip29d:

Next, the modes of the divine nature have also followed from it necessarily and not contingently (by Ip16), and that either [*idque, vel*] insofar as the divine nature is considered absolutely (by Ip21) or [*vel*] insofar as it is considered to be determined to act in a certain way (by Ip28).²⁹

As I read this famous passage, Spinoza’s claim is that according to two ways of considering the relation between modes and God, those modes exist necessarily. This is at least consistent with a third alternative: a mode may be considered in neither of these two ways. The first way of being related to God Spinoza mentions is reserved for the infinite modes. But a *finite* mode can also be related to God insofar as it stands in relation to all the other finite modes, an entire series that is itself a way of considering God.³⁰ But we have seen that Spinoza’s third axis of plenitude commits him to their being another way of considering a finite mode, independently of at least some relations to all the

²⁷ C 308; G:I/242. Spinoza uses “attending,” “considering,” and “conceiving” interchangeably.

²⁸ See similar claims in Ip16, Ip17s, Ip29, Ip33, Ip35.

²⁹ Curley renders the Latin “*idque*” simply as a dash: “(by P16) – either insofar as...” which makes the two “*vel...vel...*” (either/or) clauses that follow sound as though they are supposed to be exhaustive. As a matter of interpretation, that might be Spinoza’s intent, but I don’t see that option forced on us by the text, which reads to me more like the claim that there are at least two ways in which modes may be considered in relation to God, either of which will be sufficient to entail their necessary existence.

³⁰ This point reads into Ip29 more than it strictly says, since Ip29 appears to claim that being related to *any* external finite cause is sufficient for existing necessarily. But even on strict necessitarian readings that claim will be false. It is only in virtue of being considered in relation to *all* other finite modes that any individual finite mode will inherit necessity, according to such necessitarian readings (see Don Garrett, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism,” in *God and Nature in Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 198. And on non-necessitarian readings, the way of considering finite modes explicitly mentioned in Ip29 is already sufficient to entail their non-necessary existence. So my “expansive” reading of Ip29 here is at least consistent with both necessitarian and weaker, non-necessitarian readings.

other modes. (Later, we will see why Spinoza thinks being considered in this narrower way is nonetheless sufficient for being “conceived through God,” as Id5 requires of all modes.) What will be the modal status of an object considered in such a narrower manner? Ip29d is silent; to see Spinoza’s answer, we need to delve deeper into Spinoza’s modal theory.

What should we make of Spinoza’s repeated uses of these “insofar as” modes are “attended to,” “considered as,” and “conceived as” qualifiers in his claims about modality? Why should the possible non-existence of an existing mode turn on whether the mode is conceived in relation to “all of nature” or independently of at least some of those relations? Read straightforwardly, Spinoza’s idea seems to be that the modality of finite objects can vary according to broader and narrower ways of being conceived. Modal ascriptions, on such an account, are sensitive to these ways of being conceived. This is not yet a form of anti-essentialism, however, since Spinoza might also believe that the predication of contingency generated by the narrower way of conceiving a mode is always false.³¹ All we have so far, given intra-attribute mode plenitude, is (1):

- (1) One and the same finite object can be genuinely conceived in broader and narrower ways.

Spinoza’s remarks about the variability of modality at least suggest that modal facts depend on these ways of being conceived, but we have not yet seen him endorse (2):

³¹ Spinoza will not, I hasten to add, believe that these predication are all false simply in virtue of the fact that they involve narrower ways of conceiving modes. But, one might object, won’t these narrower, incomplete ways of conceiving modes be inadequate? And aren’t all inadequate ideas, by definition, false? (Thanks to a referee for pressing this point.) I agree that in one sense of inadequacy (IIp11c), all narrower ways of conceiving objects are inadequate, in the sense of “partial.” But I deny that taken in this sense, inadequacy entails falsity. In the passages where Spinoza most explicitly makes the connection between falsity and this sense of inadequacy (IIp35, IIp49s), he infers from falsity to inadequacy, but not vice versa. And my interpretation respects this entailment, just as it respects the entailment from adequacy to truth. But I deny that such passages establish the bi-conditionals that would also move us from inadequacy to falsity in all cases or from truth to adequacy in all cases. More positively, I have also argued above that Spinoza’s plenitude motivates him to allow true but limited expressions of substance (the activity of modes), and I have shown that he applies a similar plenitude to modes themselves, allowing them also to be more and less completely expressed. But surely it will be strange if some limited or partial expressions of substance can be involved in true predication, while no limited or partial expressions of modes can involve true predication. Why should falsity and truth work so differently for incomplete expressions of substance and modes?

(2) The modality of a finite object can vary relative to those broader and narrower ways of being conceived.

I take (2) to be an instance of a broadly anti-essentialist theory of modality, according to which modal facts of objects are sensitive to the manners in which they are designated.³² But to see how and why Spinoza endorses (2), we need to consider just how Spinoza understood the nature of modality itself.

Given his PSR-inspired commitment against all things primitive, it is not surprising that Spinoza offers an analysis of modality.³³ Just as he rejects primitive causation, so too he rejects primitive modality. And just as he does with causation, Spinoza offers an analysis of modality in terms of conceptual involvement relations; indeed, causation, modality, and conceptual connection are deeply intertwined for Spinoza, as we will see. In the case of God, Spinoza claims that the necessity of God's existence is a function of God's being self-caused (Ip7; Ip11d; Ip19d). Self-causation, according to Id1, is a relation in which a thing's essence "involves" existence, a manner of involvement that Id1 glosses in conceptual terms: "whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing." As causal relations are, in general for Spinoza, grounded in or explained by conceptual relations, the fact that God's necessary existence is explained by God's self-causation entails that God's necessary existence is explained by conceptual facts.³⁴ As he claims in Ip24d, "For that whose nature involves existence (considered in itself), is its own cause and exists only from the necessity of its nature." The conceptual nature of this involvement relation is also highlighted in definitional terms in Ip19d, where Spi-

³² I won't take up here Quinean concerns about the compatibility of *de re* modal ascriptions and anti-essentialism. If we at least begin with a more neutral account of *de re* ascriptions (i.e., not building into the very definition of "*de re*" a denial of substitution failures), then Spinoza has a *prima facie* consistent form of *de re* modal claims. (For just such a neutral account of *de re*, see Tyler Burge, "Belief De Re," *The Journal of Philosophy* 74, no. 6 (1977). Thanks to José Bermúdez for drawing my attention to this article in this context.) Spinoza's anti-essentialism says only that, in addition to the modal property and object, *de re* modal ascriptions also require an argument place for something like the presentational guise of the object. Notice also that what else such a broadly "conceptualist" account of modality entails about the nature of modal facts turns heavily on the nature of the concepts doing the work.

³³ For a very different account of Spinoza's methodology and its application to his views on modality, see Richard Mason, *The God of Spinoza* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 62–72).

³⁴ The connection between causation and conceptual involvement is not, I take it, a particularly novel or controversial interpretive point; see the terminological mapping of Ip3d, Iax5, and Id1.

noza outright defines the necessary existence of God as “from whose definition it follows that he exists.”³⁵

Spinoza applies this analysis of necessity in terms of conceptual relations to modes as well. In Ip17s, Spinoza claims that the necessity of modes is the “same necessity...as from the nature of a triangle it follows, from eternity to eternity, that its three angles equal to two right angles.” What is the nature of the relation between a triangle and its interior angles for Spinoza, if not a conceptual relation? (Spinoza suggests just this in IIp49d, citing the same triangle example in a different context.) Similarly, in Ip16d Spinoza describes the necessity of modes in terms the manner in which “a number of properties” follow from a thing’s “given definition,” where again the relation in question seems to be a kind of conceptual relation obtaining between the concept of a thing and that which follows from it or is contained within it. Ip35 is especially emphatic on this point: “What-ever we conceive to be in God’s power, necessarily exists” (emphasis mine).

More indirectly, as mentioned above, Spinoza claims that if modes exist necessarily, it is in virtue of being necessarily caused to exist by a necessarily existing object. And since Spinoza understands causal relations to be instances of explanatory or conceptual relations, a finite mode will exist necessarily in virtue of a conceptual relation between that mode and the concept of its causes. Indeed, the deepest reason why the necessity of finite modes, broadly conceived, depends on modes’ causes (Ip33s2) is that the causal relation is itself conceptual, and modality is a function of conceptual relations. That is why Spinoza’s modal transfer principle works (Ip21-22): it maps onto chains of conceptual involvement relations that include relations to God. This is also why, recalling the earlier passage from *CM*, Spinoza thinks modes

³⁵ In a passing comment in his work on Descartes, Spinoza does gloss involvement as conceptual “containment” (C 245; G I/157); see also a passage from TIE (C 29; G II/28). I have resisted calling Spinoza’s theory of modality “reductive” precisely because he is unclear about the nature of this underlying conceptual involvement. Is conceptual involvement supposed to be a relation of something like an unmodalized part-whole containment relation? Spinoza is never clear. But we should probably be suspicious of trying to understand Spinoza’s involvement relations solely in terms of analyticity relations, despite some affinities. The *relata* of analyticity relations, at least on some accounts, need not stand in any sort of dependence relations, whereas Spinoza’s conceptual involvement relation is supposed to track anti-symmetrical dependence relations like causation and inherence (and perhaps even underlie them). Distinguishing Spinoza’s involvement relation from analyticity also prevents his anti-essentialism from degenerating into a cheaper form of anti-essentialism, according to which cheaply made analytic connections between non-causally relevant concepts are sufficient for determining modal truths.

exist necessarily only according to a very broad concept of them. The conceptual breadth that includes a suitable relation to God's necessity and causal activity itself partially determines the modality of finite modes' existence. Their modality, we might say, is partly a function of how broadly they are conceived.

Conversely, the contingency of existing finite things is explained by the fact that their concept does not involve existence and is not conceptually linked to something whose concept does involve existence. Of course, that is true of modes only according to less-than-fully-broad concepts of those modes. Spinoza's appeals to ignorance in his discussion of modality are now easier to understand (e.g., Ip32s and IVd4). Ignorance is a leading cause of adopting less-than-fully-broad ways of conceiving objects, and hence a leading explanation for predications of contingency.³⁶ But conceived in the broadest way possible, such that a mode is conceived in relation to God's necessary causal activity in the attributes, infinite modes, and infinite series of finite modes, it *will* be conceptually linked to something whose concept involves existence. Hence, so broadly conceived, that mode will exist necessarily – that's just what necessary existence amounts to, according to Spinoza. More importantly, whether a mode exists necessarily is, by this account of modality, dependent on how broadly it is conceived.

By advancing an analysis of modality in terms of conceptual relations [2] and affirming variations among the modally relevant concepts of one and the same object [1], Spinoza thereby endorses a form of anti-essentialism about modal facts that is sophisticated, even if underdeveloped. This allows him to consistently predicate *both* necessary and contingent existence of one and the same object. Spinoza appeals to the more fine-grained conceptual relations that he thinks modal facts track in order to avoid inconsistency. Jonathan Bennett is thus correct in his set-up and quite wrong in his famously scathing conclusion:

In certain ways, Spinoza commits himself to the remarkable conclusion that there are no contingent truths...in other ways he commits himself to the opposite...[Conclusion:] Spinoza was no logician; his

³⁶ Spinoza's remarks about ignorance do not, on this reading, shift Spinoza's claims about the link between ignorance and contingency into a purely epistemic modal space, as others have suggested (Richard Mason, "Spinoza on Modality," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 36, no. 144 (1986) and Jon A. Miller, "Spinoza's Possibilities," *Review of Metaphysics* 54, no. 4 (2001)). See (C 26–27; G II/22) for Spinoza's indication that ignorance isn't the *only* source for conceiving objects in narrower ways.

modal thinking seems to have been neither skillful nor knowledgeable...³⁷

Appreciating Spinoza's anti-essentialism also helps settle a well-known interpretive dispute over the strength of Spinoza's necessitarianism by undermining a central premise of the entire debate. All parties have implicitly assumed that modal facts, for Spinoza, are insensitive to ways in which objects are conceived. But if I am correct, whether Spinoza endorses strict necessitarianism or a weaker form of determinism genuinely depends on how the relevant objects are conceived. In a sense, Spinoza endorses both necessitarianism and mere determinism, though neither tells the entire modal story.³⁸

Spinoza is driven to this theory of modality because of his belief in the conceptual nature of modal facts and in the plentitude of the relevant range of ways of conceiving substance and its modes. Because the differences between these ways of conceiving are more fine-grained than mere extensional analysis can discern, the identity of the underlying objects can be consistently maintained amidst these highly disparate predication. But this, I have suggested, is simply a piece of the more general Spinozistic pattern: appeal to intensionalist analyses of certain metaphysical features of objects in order to consistently maintain a plurality of disparate, but true predication of one and the same object (be it substance or modes).

This brief overview of the nature and far-reaching applications of Spinoza's plenitude has helped us see the important ways in which his commitment to plenitude shapes the contours of his metaphysical system. It also reveals the lengths Spinoza will go to in order to maintain a truly *maximal* range of complete and incomplete expressions of the single substance. Even if it requires generating (perhaps) independently implausible analyses of causation and modality, Spinoza is willing to embrace widespread intensionality in order to maintain the unity of substance amidst the richly complex and multi-faceted diversity of all that is in substance and can be truly said of substance.

³⁷ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 111 and 124.

³⁸ The best representatives of this debate are, on the strict necessitarian side, Don Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism" and, on the mere determinism side, Edwin Curley and Gregory Walski, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism Reconsidered," in *New Essays on the Rationalists*, ed. R Gennaro and C. Huenemann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). For further discussion of their interpretations, see Newlands, "Spinoza's Modal Metaphysics."

Returning now from our brief tour through some of Spinoza's metaphysics, let us recall where we are. I claimed that Spinoza's metaphysical system was oriented around his commitment to maintain both extreme ontological parsimony at the fundamental level of substance and maximal expressive plenitude of that singular substance. I also suggested that Spinoza regularly appeals to intensionality as the philosophical tool to help him try to pull this off, including in the case of modality. Such a general description of the metaphysically perfect world, one that respects the demands of both simplicity and diversity may sound familiar, even if it is carried out in uniquely Spinozistic ways. Such a world could be described accurately as maintaining "similarity in variety, that is, diversity compensated by identity." This description of the metaphysically perfect world is from Leibniz (CP 29), who, as we'll now see, endorses a similarly anti-essentialist theory of modality to maintain both necessitarianism and genuine contingency for objects in that metaphysically perfect world.

§3.1 Leibniz's *per se* Modal Theory

Leibniz once noted that his earlier self had just barely avoided the falling over the "precipice" of necessitarianism by engaging in a more careful consideration of the nature of possibility (L 263). Leibniz was referring to the saving graces of his early "*per se* modal theory." This was a theory developed in the 1670s and built around what Leibniz took to be a very important distinction between the modality of objects whose existence was, on the one hand, necessary or contingent *per se*, and, on the other hand, necessary or impossible *per accidens/ex alterius hypothesi*.³⁹ We should think of the latter as being necessary "all things considered." That is, Leibniz distinguishes between the modal status of an object that it has in virtue of all of its properties and the modal status it has in virtue of a particular subset of its properties (i.e., its *per se* properties). (We will later examine just which subset of properties contains an object's *per se* properties, but we can and should postpone that discussion until we have a better sense of how the general distinction works.) This

³⁹ See especially CP 123 and Spinoza's nearly identical formulation of this distinction in Ip33s2. John Carriero has also noticed a similarity in these formulations, but draws a different conclusion about both Spinoza and Leibniz's modal commitments (see especially John P. Carriero, "Spinoza's Views on Necessity in Historical Perspective," *Philosophical Topics* 19 (1991) and John P. Carriero, "Leibniz on Infinite Resolution and Intra-Mundane Contingency. Part Two: Necessity, Contingency, and the Divine Faculties," *Studia Leibnitiana* 27, no. 1 (1995)).

general distinction – the modality of things *per se* versus their modality all things considered – constitutes the core distinction in Leibniz's early thinking about modality.⁴⁰

According to Leibniz's use of this distinction, while finite objects in the actual world are necessary, all things considered, nonetheless, many of those very same objects are contingent through themselves (*per se*). Here is a typical passage, in which “*sua natura*” is equivalent to “*per se*”:

Indeed, even if God does not will something to exist, it is possible for it to exist, since, by its nature [*sua natura*], it could exist if God were to will it to exist. “But God cannot will it to exist.” I concede this, yet, such a thing remains possible in its own nature [*sua natura*] even if it is not possible with respect to the divine will, since we have defined ‘possible in its nature’ as that which, in itself, implies no contradiction, even though its coexistence with God can in some way [*aliquo modo*] be said to imply a contradiction (Ak VI/4.1447, cited from PE 21 with slight modification).⁴¹

That is, non-existing finite things are impossible, though only in virtue of relations to something outside themselves (God) and existing finite things are necessary, though only in virtue of similarly external relations. This is a familiar point from Spinoza, as we saw above.

Here is a first pass at filling Leibniz's account out. Under a complete account of some existing finite substance *s*, which includes *s*'s relations to all aspects of God and its relative degree of goodness, it is true that *s* necessarily exists, though under an incomplete account of *s*, – *s per se* – it is true that *s* does not necessarily exist.

⁴⁰ The general distinction between absolute and hypothetical necessity has a long history tracing back to at least Aristotle (see his *Physics* 2.9). The distinction between possible *per se* and necessary in virtue of one's causes is found most famously in Avicenna, though there are traces of it in other Arabic philosophers around the same period. (For an excellent study of the origins and development of Avicenna's distinction, see Robert Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), from which I draw the previous point. I am also indebted to Wisnovsky for his translation of a number of relevant texts. I have found helpful translations of other relevant passages in Parviz Morewedge, *The Metaphysica of Avicenna* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973); Arthur Hyman and James. J. Walsh, eds., *Philosophy in the Middle Ages: The Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 240–63; and George Hourani, “Ibn Sīnā on Necessary and Possible Existence,” *Philosophical Forum* 4, no. 1 (1972).)

⁴¹ A very textually responsible discussion of passages like these is found in Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, ch.1., though I will disagree with some of his conclusions below.

An alternative way of expressing the same idea, which does not appeal to the notion of truth-under-an-account, is that the existence of *s* is necessitated in virtue of some relations, but not others.⁴² Leibniz is thus claiming that there is a way in which *s* is not necessitated, namely in virtue of its *per se* properties alone, though there may well be another way in which it *is* necessitated, namely in virtue of other relational properties *s* has. Leibniz suggests that the *per se* properties of finite substances do not themselves provide a sufficient ground for such necessitation. Putting it this way emphasizes the role of *reasons* (and, by extension, causes) in necessary existence, which Spinoza also endorses (Ip33s).

As I have formulated Leibniz's *per se* distinction, its function is not to introduce new kinds of modalities to stand beside more familiar, metaphysical modalities. His point, on my account, is to explain with more care just how these everyday, metaphysical modalities work. This, however, is not a neutral interpretive point (though it will be crucial for evaluating the successfulness of Leibniz's theory). Robert Sleigh has argued that Leibniz's “*per se* modalities” (his term) are meant to stand along side everyday metaphysical modalities as distinct kinds of modal properties.⁴³ Sleigh's case for this reading rests very heavily on his interpretation of this passage from 1675:⁴⁴

Impossibility is a two-fold concept: that which does not have an essence, and that which does not have existence, i.e., that which neither was nor is nor will be, because it is incompatible with God... (DSR 7; A VI/3.463)

Sleigh claims that this passage points to a distinction in *kinds* of impossibility: impossible *per se* (“that which does not have an essence”) and

⁴² Thanks to Don Garrett for discussion on this point.

⁴³ Robert Sleigh, “Leibniz's First Theodicy,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 10 (1996): 493–97. Sleigh repeats this point in his introduction to CP (xxvi), though when I presented this paper to an audience in which he was present, he replied that he did not intend to say anything quite so strong. Because I defer to his interpretive authority on his own writings, I will here stipulate that the position of Sleigh's I'm criticizing is one I draw (somewhat naturally, I think) from his writings, even though it may not have been his original and/or on-going intent. (As we'll see, what I'm calling Sleigh's position is actually shared by a wide-range of commentators, so it is at least a plausible position to maintain.)

⁴⁴ The date is important because it occurs between Leibniz's original draft (circa 1672–3) and later revisions (circa 1677–1680) of *Confessio Philosophi*. This dialogue contains Leibniz's most developed early discussions of God's relation to evil and the later revisions include explicit references to his *per se* modal theory. Thus, on Sleigh's account, this 1675 passage reveals an important transitional point.

impossible all things considered (“that which...is incompatible with God”).⁴⁵

There are two major worries about Sleigh’s interpretation. First, the 1675 passage is far from conclusive on the question of whether this “two-fold concept” of modality corresponds to a two-fold division in *kinds* of modality (Sleigh) or a two-fold division in source (me).⁴⁶ Indeed, a few lines later in the same passage, Leibniz strongly suggests that he has the latter distinction in mind. “The origin [*origo*] of impossibility is two-fold: one from essence, the other from existence, or positing as actual” (emphasis mine). Here Leibniz expounds on his previously cited division of impossibility, the one that Sleigh appeals to. If so, then the division which maps the *per se*/all things considered distinction does not seem intended to introduce a new variety of modal relations to stand along side everyday metaphysical modalities. Rather, the division is *internal* to our ordinary metaphysical notions. (Notice that Leibniz does not disambiguate which “kind of impossibility” he is now referring to, a somewhat surprising omission if he just made this disambiguation a few lines earlier.) Impossibility, Leibniz is claiming, holds for two different sorts of *reasons*: in virtue of essence or in virtue of facts about causal relations (ultimately with God). Leibniz’s next sentence confirms this: “In the same way there is a two-fold reason for impossible problems...” (emphasis mine). As I read such passages, Leibniz merely reiterates a point Spinoza made as well: modal facts are sensitive to reasons involving objects’ relations to God.⁴⁷ This point, however, does not require a division into kinds of modalities.

Secondly, Sleigh’s reading has the uncharitable result of making Leibniz’s *per se* modal theory an abysmal failure. To see this, let us consider the use to which Leibniz puts his *per se* distinction. Its most central role in these early writings is to block what I will call the *simplified necessitarian entailment* (SNE):

⁴⁵ Sleigh, “Leibniz’s First Theodicy,” 493 and CP xxv. The terminology of “all things considered” is mine.

⁴⁶ Sleigh is characteristically honest about the thin textual evidence for his reading. I think the real strength of Sleigh’s reading is its ability to cleanly weave Leibniz’s early writings on modality into a larger developmental narrative throughout this period. I do acknowledge the heavy weight such narrative considerations carry; in this case, however, I think there is sufficient textual evidence that Leibniz did not intend Sleigh’s proposed division.

⁴⁷ Perhaps unsurprisingly, some have also attributed to Spinoza the view that there are different *kinds* of necessity/impossibility (see Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza’s Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 49–50. However, Spinoza nowhere says this, though he repeatedly distinguishes two different *reasons* for necessity (cf. Ip33s1).

- (3) Necessarily, God exists;
- (4) Necessarily, God's existence entails the existence of any finite object o ,
- (5) Whatever necessarily follows from something necessary is itself necessary;
- (6) Therefore, o itself necessarily exists.⁴⁸
- (7) Therefore, o does not exist contingently.⁴⁹

Leibniz was strongly attracted to both (3) and (4) during this early period. For instance, he claims that “It must be held that God having been posited, this series of things follows, and accordingly, this proposition is true: if A [God] exists, then B [the actual world] will also exist” (CP 47). Both Leibniz and his interpreters usually insist that God's choice or willing is behind the move from (3) to (4) and so *that* is the relevant feature of God that must ultimately be excluded from *per se* properties in order to help block SNE. However, to issue a promissory note, I am not convinced that the Divine will is really doing that kind of work in these early writings. In the final section of

⁴⁸ The more filled out chain of Leibniz-friendly reasons to this conclusion proceed thusly: (A) Necessarily, God always brings the best object/world into existence. (B) The intrinsic value of an object/world is a non-contingent feature of that object/world. (C) If some object/world is necessarily the best, and necessarily, God always brings the best into existence, then that object/world will necessarily be brought into existence (by an equivalent modal inference $[(\Box\alpha \wedge \Box(\alpha \rightarrow \beta)) \rightarrow \Box\beta]$ to the one mentioned in n25). Leibniz's later theory of infinite analysis is used to challenge (B). His *per se* modal theory will challenge a form of (C).

⁴⁹ There are two major simplifications in SNE. First, the two conclusions (6–7) do not represent full-blooded necessitarianism. They say nothing, for instance, against the possible variability of the properties of objects, and instead deny only that there are (a) actual objects which might not have existed and (b) merely possible objects which might have existed. (Nonetheless, according to Leibniz's later complete concept theory, super-essentialism is true with respect to properties (for any property F of x , x is F in every possible world containing x). As will become clear, anti-essentialism about modality and super-essentialism with respect to properties are not incompatible.) But Leibniz's central metaphysical concern with necessitarianism is over the modality of finite substances' existence. Hence, even if I might have worn a different colored shirt today (*pace* Leibniz's later super-essentialism), if it is nonetheless false that I might not have existed, Leibniz would be worried enough.

The other simplification involves the condensed nature of (4). Later in the paper I will unpack (4) further, pointing to the role of metaphysical perfection and the Divine intellect in world creation. It is because Leibniz accepts (4) in his early writings that his *per se* modal theory seemed so promising.

this paper, I will argue that the more fundamental relation that Leibniz needs to exclude from the *per se* properties is God's intellect perceiving the relative degree of harmony of a *per se* possible, but all things considered necessary/impossible, world – thus pushing Spinoza and Leibniz even closer.

Premise (5) seems like a fairly basic modal axiom. But this readily yields (6), which represents the dreaded position of necessitarianism, a position dreaded for any number of moral, metaphysical, and theological reasons. Leibniz's *per se* modal theory represents a concerted effort to reject the most worrisome metaphysical consequence of (6), namely (7).⁵⁰ To defeat SNE, I believe Leibniz's strategy is to argue that there is an ambiguity in (5) which, once disambiguated, yields either the outright falsity of (5) or entails a similarly disambiguated version of (6) that does not entail (7). Either way, the argument runs, (7) does not follow from (6).⁵¹

The key to disambiguating (5) is based on Leibniz's *per se* / all things considered distinction. Consider the following passage, which contains Leibniz's key *per se* move from his *Confessio Philosophi*:

I reply that it is false that whatever follows from something necessary <*per se*> is itself necessary <*per se*> ...why [can't] something contingent <or necessary *ex alterius hypothesi*> [follow from] something necessary *per se*?... <For in this place we call *necessary* only what is necessary *per se*, namely, that which has the reason for its existence and truth in itself. The truths of geometry are of this sort. But among existing things, only God is of this sort; all the rest, which follow from the series of things presupposed – i.e., from the harmony of things or the existence of God – are *contingent per se* and only hypothetically necessary...> (CP 55-7).

(The material in angle brackets was added to the original 1672–73 manuscript sometime in the late 1670s).⁵² Leibniz tries to exclude from

⁵⁰ The *per se* modal theory, in and of itself, is not sufficient to address *all* the worries associated with (6), though overcoming the main metaphysical problem of denying contingent existence to finite substances will be a central piece of Leibniz's response to neighboring problems (such cogently denying God's authorship of and responsibility for sin).

⁵¹ Leibniz explicitly claims (CP 11) that ordinary languages often contain ambiguous modal expressions, reinforcing my suggestion that Leibniz thinks of himself as clarifying and disambiguating everyday modal claims, not introducing new kinds of modality. (I am indebted to Martin Lin for drawing my attention to this passage in this context.)

⁵² See Sleigh's very helpful discussion of the history of the text (and this passage) in his introduction to CP.

a finite object's *per se* properties any properties which would entail God's preference of it, a preference that would necessarily entail God's creation of it.⁵³ Leibniz then argues that although all finite things exist with hypothetical or all things considered necessity in virtue of God's activity and character, those things do not exist with *per se* necessity and will, in fact, be *per se* contingent.⁵⁴ Thus, (5) is false if it involves *per se* necessity, or else (6) is harmless if it involves only all things considered necessity, since that is compatible with that same object being genuinely contingent (pace (7)). I will later contend that whether this disambiguating move really eliminates the bite of SNE turns on the nature of modality itself – in particular, whether or not modal predictions exhibit the same intensional variation that Spinoza thought they did.

Before getting to that, however, we are now in a position to see why Sleigh's reading renders Leibniz's *per se* modal theory a complete non-starter. Recall that, according to Sleigh, necessary *per se* and possible *per se* are two distinct *kinds* of modality. They are distinct modalities from the ordinary metaphysical modalities of necessary and possibility (what I have been calling “necessary/possible all things considered”). If so, the best conclusion Leibniz can reach will be something like the following: existing finite substances are *per se* possible, despite being metaphysically necessary. And, as Sleigh well knows, this gets Leibniz nowhere towards denying the bite of SNE. For if the contingency Leibniz preserves is only this newly stipulated kind of contingency, Leibniz is still forced to admit that objects are not contingent in the ordinary, everyday metaphysical sense of “contingent” that we were worried about. Claiming that they are nonetheless contingent*, in some newly stipulated sense that neither challenges nor preserves ordinary contingency, seems wholly and obviously beside the point. (Frankly, it is so obvious that I have a difficult time believing that it took Leibniz ten to fifteen years to realize he had made such a blunder, as Sleigh's narrative would have it.⁵⁵) As I have suggested above and will now argue for, there is a much richer way to understand Leibniz's early *per se*

⁵³ See also CP 45-7.

⁵⁴ I will focus on existing objects and their modality; the same style story can be told about non-existing, but possible objects (what Leibniz sometimes calls the “pure possibles”).

⁵⁵ See Sleigh, “Leibniz's First Theodicy” and his introduction to CP (xxvi). In the latter, Sleigh notes that the response one “ought to have made [to Leibniz] sticks out like a sore thumb...that Leibniz's modal distinctions simply lack relevance [to the problem of necessitarianism].”

modal theory, according to which it has at least a fair shot at successfully solving the problem it was introduced to handle.⁵⁶

I will mention one small caveat before proceeding. Although Leibniz himself regularly speaks of particular events (such as Judas' sinning) as being candidates for applying *per se* modal distinctions, we could equally expand our discourse to the modal status of worlds.⁵⁷ For expediency, I will sometimes talk about the *per se* properties of objects in relation to God's preference, though it will be helpful to keep in mind that the individuals are only derivatively preferred.

Let us now explore the *per se* distinction. Just what are the *per se* properties of a substance? We might be tempted to think of them as a substance's intrinsic properties, but on at least some readings, Leibniz is committed to the view that every property of a substance is intrinsic to it.⁵⁸ So let us be less ambitious: what could Leibniz include in the set of *per se* properties of a finite substance without entailing that substance's *per se* necessity? He could include many inter-substantial relations (and even inter-world relations), as long as those relations do not entail God's preference for it over any other.⁵⁹ More importantly, it *prima facie* seems that Leibniz could include *either* (but not both)

⁵⁶ Sleigh is certainly not the only sympathetic Leibniz scholar to conclude that Leibniz's *per se* modal theory fails to preserve genuine contingency. See, for instance, Fabrizio Mondadori, "Necessity Ex Hypothesi," in *The Leibniz Renaissance*, ed. Fiorentino Centro (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1989), 191–2; Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, 20; Adams, "Response to Carriero, Mugnai, and Garber," 107; and Carriero, "Syposium on *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*," 67–68. Adams suggests that Leibniz's *real* goal with the *per se* modal theory is to preserve an ineliminable role for the Divine will in world creation. Carriero presents cogent reasons for thinking Leibniz fails to achieve even this, a conclusion I will also arrive at below for different reasons. Both, however, agree that Leibniz's *per se* modal theory fails to do what Leibniz himself sometimes suggests it is intended for: preserve genuine contingency among existing finite substances in the light of God's creative activity.

⁵⁷ According to Leibniz's theodicy project, it is more appropriate to speak about God's preference or choice of an entire world, rather than a particular member of it (though the properties of each member play a role in God's decision to create or not create the collection of all the members).

⁵⁸ See Sleigh, *Leibniz and Arnauld*, 57ff.

⁵⁹ Adams makes this point as well (Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, 14–15). Of course, it is quite infelicitous to speak of "inter-substantial relations" for Leibniz, but the reader should treat that as a placeholder for whichever complicated interpretation of Leibniz's theory of relations she holds.

God's propensity to bring about the best possible (God's justice) or the evaluative ranking of those worlds, without thereby ascribing *per se* necessity to the actual world. In his seminal work on these topics, Robert Adams opts for excluding God's justice, with some textual warrant.⁶⁰

But there seems to be something decidedly odd and *ad hoc* about excluding relations to God from a finite substance's *per se* properties in this modal discussion. After all, one of its most fundamental features will be its dependence, *qua finite*, created substance, on God.⁶¹ In fact, Leibniz claims, finite substances are "independent of every other thing outside of God" (PE 76). So why do the intrinsic-like, *per se* properties of an object discriminate in such a fashion against its nature as a created entity dependent on God? Spinoza faces an analogous worry, one that is aggravated by his substance monism and substance/mode ontology: how can relations to substance be genuinely excluded from a mode's narrow concept, when the very intelligibility of a mode (Id5) is based on its being related to and conceived through substance? In both cases, relations to God or substance seem so fundamental to the nature of a finite object that it is difficult to see how those relations would not be part of its intrinsic-like, *per se* properties.

Without going into much detail here, Spinoza's response distinguishes two ways in which a finite mode is made intelligible by being related to God. One of these ways, captured by Id5 and true simply in virtue of a mode's having *any* causal relations (including wholly internal ones), is included in all ways of conceiving a mode, but it is not

⁶⁰ Ibid., 15. The two passages that Adams appeals to involve Leibniz's reasoning about the possibility of God damning the innocent. In the second, fuller passage, Leibniz claims that it is not necessary for us to "examine the total harmony of things in order to know whether God will damn eternally an innocent," though the damning of innocents is possible *per se* (Ak VI.iv/1453; GR 300 (my translation)). This suggests that the properties most fundamentally excluded from the *per se* properties of these types of worlds involve relations to God's *justice*, not comparative relations to the relative goodness of other worlds. But Leibniz's claim here is at least consistent with a weaker conclusion: one not need take into account *all* the features of such a world in comparison to all the others worlds in order to discern its lack of suitability for actualization (emphasizing "total"). Some possible worlds may have features that are so intrinsically impoverished that, were even partial comparisons to other worlds included in their *per se* properties, those worlds would become *per se* impossible. As I will claim below, this reading is still consistent with excluding relations to God's justice from *per se* properties for the derivative reason that it will lack enough comparative information to play a role in world selection.

⁶¹ We might also worry that the narrower the excluded relations to God are – relations to God's *goodness* or *justice*, but not God's *omnipotence* (despite God's simplicity) – the more *ad hoc* the resulting account of contingency becomes.

sufficient for determining its modal status.⁶² A second way of being related to God, had in virtue of having relations that extend through the whole series of modes, *is* sufficient to determine a finite mode's modal status, but finite modes can be conceived independently of such enormously complex and long chains of relations for Spinoza, as I claimed above.

In Leibniz's case, this worry may put some pressure on him to concede that what the *per se* properties of a world exclude are not, fundamentally, relations to God's character so much as the comparative relations to other worlds.⁶³ In a loose sense, excluding comparative relations to other worlds certainly seems like a more natural rendering of *per se* than excluding something as fundamental to a collection of finite substances as their relation to God. It may also be the case that the particular bringing about role of God's justice is *derivatively* excluded from a world's *per se* properties in virtue of having no comparative grounds on which to exercise it.

But in noticing that a similar worry faces both Spinoza and Leibniz, we begin to sense a deep similarity in the structure of their accounts of modality. Both account for contingency in terms of an entailment from a smaller subset of the properties of an object to its possible non-existence. Both agree that some non-existent objects are impossible in themselves, in the sense that their *per se* properties are inconsistent. Both also think that from a maximal account of existing finite objects' properties, the necessary existence of all such objects is true.

Indeed, I think the best and most charitable way to philosophically understand Leibniz's *per se* modal theory is precisely along the same intensionalist grounds I proposed interpreting Spinoza's theory. Up until now, I have referred to Leibniz's distinction as holding between an incomplete (*per se*) and complete (all things considered) "account" of objects and worlds. Is this incomplete account equivalent to an incomplete concept, for Leibniz? In at least one relevant place, Leibniz speaks explicitly of the modal status of the world as it is *considered* in itself:

On the hypothesis that the divine will chooses the best or works in the most perfect way, certainly only this world could have been produced;

⁶² Spinoza's substance/mode ontology is the key here, since he believes that there is a sense in which God causes or renders intelligible a finite mode simply in virtue of that finite mode having some essence or power (see esp. Ip28 and IVp4d) and not in virtue of standing in relation to every other finite mode. This explains why passages like Iax4 and IIp45 are consistent with excluding what would be necessitating Divine relations from narrower concepts of modes. See n22 above for a lengthier discussion on this point.

⁶³ See Ak IV.iv/1445 for a clear endorsement of this suggestion.

but, if the nature of the world is considered in itself [*per se spectatam*], a different world could have been produced (L 204).⁶⁴

In his slightly later correspondence with Arnauld, Leibniz repeatedly claims that there is an array of worlds, *considered* as possible, that are nonetheless non-actual in virtue of their failure to conform to “God’s goals” in actualizing a particular world.⁶⁵ Leibniz even explicitly invokes the relevant distinction: “all this must be understood...whether [facts about a given world] are considered [*considere*] in their actual state or considered as possible” (GER II/41, translation mine).⁶⁶ That is, the actual world can be conceived in a fuller way that includes properties entailing its actual existence, and it can be considered more narrowly, independently of such properties.

Indeed, what are these fuller and narrower accounts of worlds if *not* broader and narrower ways of conceiving? What is it to “consider” something in itself, or to “make reference to” only to its *per se* properties, or to “take into account” only certain of its properties – if not to conceive of it more narrowly, more restrictively?⁶⁷ When we examine a world’s *per se* properties, are we not considering it more narrowly, in a way that brackets certain of its properties that the world genuinely has, at least according to the broadest and most complete way of conceiving it? Leibniz’s whole theory – to the extent that I understand it, at least – rides on there being a distinction between a narrow and broader set of properties of objects/worlds and the capacity of conceiving those

⁶⁴ Interestingly, this passage occurs in the context of Leibniz’s discussing – and trying to make sense of – Spinoza’s own modal theory.

⁶⁵ For the reference to God’s goals (“fins”) in this context, see GER II/40. For other versions of the “considered in itself” locutions, see especially GER II/39–42; 49; 52. For earlier passages, see CP 49 and 115–9 (Ak VI.iii/124 and VI.iv/1376–78).

⁶⁶ In this early part of the correspondence, Leibniz is also distinguishing between a “complete concept” of an individual and an “incomplete” or general concept of a class of similar individuals. The former, unlike the latter, is fully determinate and uniquely designates a single individual. This complete/incomplete concept distinction is not the sort of complete/incomplete concept distinction relevant for our discussion. We are more interested in the distinction between complete (i.e., fully determinate, though still *per se*) and *exhaustively complete* (i.e., which also includes the relevant relations that make it all things considered necessary/impossible). That is, we should not confuse Leibniz’s distinction between general and uniquely specifying concepts (which he sometimes calls “incomplete” and “complete”) with his distinction between (a) uniquely designating concepts that include relations to God such that it follows that they are actual/non-actual and (b) uniquely designating concepts that do not include such relations. For the modal story, the latter distinction is the relevant one for tracking the difference between (a) an object all things considered and (b) the same object considered *per se*.

⁶⁷ Sleigh offers the “reference” gloss (CP xxvi) and Adams offers the “take into account” gloss (Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, 20).

objects/worlds in distinct ways that correspond to these broader and narrower sets of properties.

But if the difference between an object *per se* and the same object, all things considered, is a function of a difference in ways of being conceived, a difficult question for Leibniz can no longer be avoided: why should genuine modal properties track differences in these ways of conceiving objects? The centerpiece of Leibniz's theory of *per se* contingency is that genuine contingency can follow from a narrow concept of an object, an object considered *per se*, despite the fact that it is necessary according to a broader concept of that object (i.e., in virtue of more than just its *per se* properties). His response to SNE presupposes that modality really and truly tracks these differences in ways of being considered. However, this response is cogent only if modal properties are sensitive to the concepts designating the objects. And that is just to attribute to Leibniz the same kind of anti-essentialism I have suggested we attribute to Spinoza.⁶⁸

If, instead, modal properties are insensitive to conceptual designation (as the modern-day essentialist would have it), then it just seems outright *false* that any finite substance exists contingently for Leibniz, regardless of what some incomplete concept entails. But I take Leibniz's repeated appeals to the *per se*/all things considered distinction to be his way of denying that everyday metaphysical modalities are so concept-insensitive. This was the thrust of the previously quoted passage (CP 57), in which Leibniz asserted that whether an object necessarily existed in virtue of necessarily following from a necessarily existing object depended on whether that object was being conceived *per se* or in a broader, all things considered manner.

He wants to say that while something can be necessary, all things considered, that very same thing can also be genuinely contingent. In his own words: "Everything contingent is necessary in some way. That which is actual is necessary in some way" (GR 536, translation mine). This is his key to blocking SNE: premises (3) and (4) are true, while (5) is either false with respect to being necessary *per se* or else true with

⁶⁸ As Larry Jorgensen pointed out in conversation, it is a bit strange to think of Leibniz as an *anti*-essentialist when so many interpreters are debating just how strongly of a *super*-essentialist he was. However, I understand anti-essentialism as primarily a thesis about the mediating role of modes of designation for fixing the truth-values of modal predications. So by claiming Leibniz is a kind of anti-essentialist, I mean only that Leibniz's *per se* modal theory requires modal facts regarding existence to be sensitive to broader and narrower concepts of objects in a similar way to Spinoza's modal theory. One could combine this, as Leibniz in fact did, with a thesis of world-bound individuals and claim that, nonetheless, for any property *p* an individual *i* instantiates, *i* has *p* in every world in which *i* exists (trivial though that ends up being).

respect to being necessary all things considered – though the latter disambiguation also renders (6) harmless because it no longer entails (7). And the harmless nature of (6), so disambiguated (“*o* itself necessarily exists, all things considered”), is due to the fact that although *o* can be conceived in such a way that it is necessary, it can also be conceived in such a way that it is genuinely contingent. *But who cares*, we ought to wonder, unless the modal facts themselves vary according to these different ways of being conceived, as the anti-essentialist would have it. Thus the denial of (7) from the all things considered reading of (6) presupposes this anti-essentialist framework for interpreting modal claims.

I suggested that Spinoza’s appeal to intensionality in modal contexts was based partly on his PSR-inspired attempt to analyze modality in conceptual terms. Anti-essentialism, I argued, follows from such an analysis plus his plenitude-based commitment to conceptual variability. For Leibniz, the fact that his *per se* defense provides a way of rejecting SNE and preserving metaphysical contingency may well be a sufficient reason for him to accept the anti-essentialist underpinnings the response requires. But aside from its sheer serviceability, why else might Leibniz be at least open to explicitly agreeing with Spinoza about the concept-sensitive nature of modal facts? Leibniz believed, like Spinoza, that modal truths are not ungrounded. Leibniz argues in several passages that modal truths are grounded in the mind of God.⁶⁹ The structure of modality is, in effect, rooted in the intentional structures of the Divine intellect. This is part of Leibniz’s own PSR-inspired effort to reduce metaphysical primitives. But by basing modal facts on facts about intentional entities like God’s ideas, Leibniz also shows why modal facts might exhibit the intensional variability his *per se* defense requires. One and the same creaturely essence may be represented by multiple Divine ideas in ways that correspond to the more and less complete ways of being conceived the *per se* defense utilizes. The structure of modal facts would then, by Leibniz’s own account, mirror these relations among God’s ideas, providing him the framework for the concept-sensitivity his *per se* defense presupposes.

At the very least, Leibniz’s early *per se* defense reveals that he and Spinoza fundamentally agree on the structure of modal space as involving a range of objects that, considered more narrowly, are intrinsically or *per se* possible, though impossible or necessary, considered more

⁶⁹ See especially his well-known (though much later) M 43–45; Adams lucidly traces the development of Leibniz’s view on the Divine grounds of modal facts and its role in an argument for God’s existence (Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, 177–183).

broadly. And in both cases, the coherence of these claims rests on the purported intensionality of modal environments, i.e., their concept-sensitivity.

§3.2 Harmonizing Spinoza and Leibniz

So just what is the difference between Leibniz and Spinoza on these metaphysical topics, according to my (admittedly unorthodox) account? Well, let me first add a little more interpretive unorthodoxy: I am inclined to deny that their differences here are ultimately grounded in Leibniz's belief that God chooses by a free act of will a possible world to actualize. Certainly Leibniz himself, especially later in his career, plays up the role of the Divine will in world-creation, over against Spinoza's explicit denial of a distinction between God's intellect and will (Ip17c2s). And several commentators have suggested that Leibniz and Spinoza bottom out in their disagreement here.⁷⁰ But the disagreement between Spinoza and Leibniz on God's will strikes me as a disagreement over the *means* of actualization, as opposed to a difference over the content and structure of actuality itself.⁷¹ That is, Leibniz's emphasis on divine choice over against Spinoza's emphasis on Divine immanent causation seems more like a disagreement over the mechanism whereby one series of intrinsic possibles (narrowly considered or *per se*) is actualized over any other series.

To see why I think the disagreement of willing and choice is less important than some, including Leibniz himself, have suggested, let us return to the topic of metaphysical perfection. According to Leibniz, what accounts for the excellence of a world, in virtue of which God chooses it? Here we find another deep and striking similarity to Spinoza. In his early writings, Leibniz claims that the excellence of a world is a function of its harmony. Harmony, for Leibniz, is a relation between simplicity and diversity:

⁷⁰ See Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, 20–21; Margaret D. Wilson, “Leibniz's Dynamics and Contingency in Nature,” in *Ideas and Mechanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 436–7; G.H.R. Parkinson, “Leibniz's Paris Writings in Relation to Spinoza,” *Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa* 18 (1978), 87.

⁷¹ Interestingly, Avicenna was similarly accused by subsequent Islamic philosophers of eliminating a place for God's will in creation. Some even attempted to salvage orthodoxy in the manner that I have here suggested is open to Leibniz: they tried to appropriate Avicenna's modal distinctions while still leaving open the manner or mechanism of God's creation of the world (see Robert Wisnovsky, “Avicenna and the Avicennian Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 130–2.

Harmony and discord consist in the ratio of identity to diversity, for harmony is unity in multiplicity, and it is the greatest in the case where it is a unity of the greatest number of things disordered in appearance and reduced, unexpectedly, by some wonderful ratio to the greatest symmetry (CP 43–5).⁷²

More succinctly, Leibniz defines harmony as “similarity in variety, that is, diversity compensated by identity” (CP 29).⁷³ As these passages make clear, harmony is deeply connected to plenitude in Leibniz’s mind as well. A harmonious world is a plentiful world, whose abundance is balanced by an underlying unity.⁷⁴ Interestingly, in these early writings, Leibniz frequently refers to *identity* as the relevant sort of unity. The maximally harmonious world is a world that maximally combines both identity and diversity.

Although Leibniz will often appeal to harmony for theodician purposes, harmony also functions as the sufficient reason for God’s choice in creation in these writings. As Leibniz rightly points out, the harmony of a world cannot be the result of God’s will, or else there would be an infinite regress in explaining God’s choice of a world (CP 49). Rather, harmony is grounded in “the nature of the things themselves, contained in ideas themselves of these things, i.e., in the essence of God” (CP 45). In his early letter to Wedderkopf, he is even blunter: harmony “is the ultimate basis [*ratio*] of the divine intellect” (L 146; CP 3).⁷⁵

Thus while it is true that what explains why this world was actualized is a free choice of God’s will, a necessary and sufficient condition for this willing is the perfection or harmony that God’s intellect recognizes in this world. Leibniz is quite clear during this early period: “If [God] holds it to be better that the sins cease to exist, then they must cease to exist, for the All-knowing wills what he holds to be best...now because the All-knowing God recognizes the best, it indeed follows that

⁷² There has been considerable interpretive discussion over the exact nature of this ratio or balance. Some have claimed that harmony is indeed a *balance* or trade-off between the competing desiderata, here identity and diversity (Nicholas Rescher, *Leibniz’s Metaphysics of Nature* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1981, 3ff.; George Gale, “On What God Chose: Perfection and God’s Freedom,” *Studia Leibnitiana* 8 (1976).). Others have argued, convincingly in my opinion, that this is not correct, despite the wording of passages like D6 (David Blumenfeld, “Perfection and Happiness in the Best Possible World,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, ed. Nicholas Jolley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Donald Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22–26.

⁷³ See also CP 43–44, L 150, and D5.

⁷⁴ In a well-known letter to Malebranche, Leibniz argues that the simplicity aspect of harmony is grounded on the principle of plenitude (L 211; see also DSR 21).

⁷⁵ Although Leibniz backed off of some of the conclusions of this early letter, he retains this point (see CP 21 and 137–9).

he wills it” (CP 21). There is thus a very fundamental sense in which the harmony of a world, for Leibniz, combined with the existence and understanding of God, *explains and entails* that world’s existence or non-existence. Willing comes along for the ride – though still freely, Leibniz insists. Hence, Leibniz explains, “So for things to exist is the same [*idem*] as for them to be understood by God to be the best, i.e., the most harmonious” (DSR 113).⁷⁶

Likewise, I have argued, for Spinoza. The metaphysical perfection of the actual world consists in its harmonious combination of plenitude and identity. And it is precisely this perfection, the combination of ontological simplicity and expressive plenitude, which explains the actual series of existing modes or finite objects. The fact that God or substance *can* uniquely give rise to a maximally plentiful range of modes both entails that and explains why God *does*, in fact, do so. (Recall Leibniz making the same point, as quoted above in §2.2 (DSR 105).) Hence, despite Leibniz’s sometimes strongly worded disavowals of Spinoza, both are committed to the same placement of the metaphysically perfect world within the same carving up of an anti-essentialist modal space.

A clearer and more fundamental difference on these topics involves Spinoza’s rejection of a transcendent God and Leibniz’s rejection of the identification of finite objects with modes of God, two sides of the same coin.⁷⁷ For Leibniz, for whom God must remain distinct from

⁷⁶ Sleigh admits that this conclusion about the centrality of the Divine intellect over the will in these writings represents “not an altogether implausible interpretive strategy,” though he thinks Leibniz struggled mightily to avoid it precisely *because* it was so close to Spinozism (Sleigh, “Leibniz’s First Theodicy,” 492). However, I do not see in these early writings the resources for Leibniz to avoid this conclusion; but neither do I think it yields “Spinozism” at least with respect to necessitarianism, as I have argued here.

⁷⁷ As ever, this difference is not *completely* free from controversy. Some have suggested that Leibniz at least flirted with either pantheism or monism (or both) during the period under consideration or at least *should* have felt more monistic pressure than he officially admitted. See the textual arguments by Marc Kulstad (Mark Kulstad, “Did Leibniz Incline toward Monistic Pantheism in 1676?” in *Leibniz und Europa: VI. Internationaler Leibniz-Kongress* (Langenhangen: Gottfried-Wilhelm-Leibniz-Gesellschaft 1994) and Kulstad, “The One and the Many and Kinds of Distinctness,” in *Leibniz: Nature and Freedom*, ed. Donald Rutherford and J.A. Cover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)). Cover and Hawthorne raise more systematic grounds for monistic pressure and find only partial relief available for Leibniz (J.A. Cover and John O’Leary-Hawthorne, *Substance and Individuation in Leibniz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 253–90. On the other side, Parkinson argues that at least one suspicious Paris period text can be read in a non-monistic light (Parkinson, “Leibniz’s Paris Writings in Relation to Spinoza.”). See also the discussions of Christia Mercer, “God as Both the Unity and Multiplicity of the World,” in *Unita E Molteplicita Nel Pensiero Filosofico E Scientifico Di Leibniz*, ed. Lamarra Antonio and Palaia Roberto (Florence: Olschki, 2000) and Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, 123–134.

creation, the basis for the identity or unity underlying world's harmony must be a function of the world as it is independently of the unity (and simplicity) of God.⁷⁸ Thus he eventually settles on nomological unity, the unity of relations organized under simple and sparse general laws or decrees (e.g., D 7). For Spinoza, on the other hand, God is not so distinct from the world. So the divine unity also constitutes the deepest ontological unity (substance monism), of which nomological unity is merely an upshot. I suspect Spinoza would challenge Leibniz to provide a plausibly relevant account of the relation of identity to diversity by which his (Spinoza's) substance monism would not be judged more harmonious and perfect than Leibniz's non-monistic alternative. I also suspect Leibniz would see Spinoza's concept of God in Spinoza's allegedly greater harmony as deeply misguided, if not downright incoherent. For Leibniz, Spinoza's non-transcendent God is no God at all. Here, I believe, we come close to bottoming out on metaphysical differences on these topics; the rest passes over into theology.

Nevertheless, despite this significant difference on the immanence or transcendence of God with respect to the rest of nature, both Leibniz and Spinoza postulate a very intimate connection between God's existence and perfect nature and the actualization of the perfect series or world. In fact, both explicitly argue that the harmony that is the perfect-making feature of the actual world as a whole and God's own nature are such that were the actual series of events in the world to differ even slightly, God's very nature would be altered.⁷⁹ Why? Because, as both now further agree, the most perfect world follows necessarily from the very nature of God. It is true that God, for Leibniz, uses an act of will based on a moral judgment of goodness to contribute to bringing this world about, a means of creation that Spinoza does not like. But notice how small a difference this value-laden mechanism of choice makes for both the explanatory basis and metaphysical structure of the actual world.

Returning then to the topic of modality, both Leibniz and Spinoza, on my reading, can nonetheless insist in the face of this

⁷⁸ There are nonetheless places where Leibniz seems to say that the world's harmony *just is* the harmony of God (e.g., CP 71 and Ak VI.i.499). And others have argued that Leibniz embraced a kind of neo-Platonic emanation theory of essences, such that the unity (and harmony) of the world is an expression of the unity of God's own nature (see Christia Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics: Its Origins and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, esp. 206ff.) and Lloyd Strickland, *Leibniz Reinterpreted* (London: Continuum, 2006, 18–27 and 105–107). The deeper worry is that it becomes even harder to find grounds for the non-identity of God and finite objects with which Spinoza himself does not already agree.

⁷⁹ The similarities of their arguments for this conclusion are striking. See Ip33s2 and CP 47.

intimate connection between (a) the ordering of the world and (b) God's necessary existence and nature that there remains an element of contingency in the existence and character of this world. The two-fold source of contingency is that, for both Leibniz and Spinoza, it will be true from a narrower concept of finite objects that those finite objects might not have existed and modal facts track these differences in concepts.

The preceding discussion of harmony also deepens our understanding of Leibniz's *per se* modal theory in turn. For we now see that what must be excluded from the *per se* properties of a world are most fundamentally the properties which entail both the relative harmony of that world and the comparative harmony of other possible worlds. Presumably this would involve facts about the numbers, kinds, and relations of finite substances as well as the laws under which they operate. But, in fact, even all these properties could be included, so long as similar facts about other worlds are not. This shows just how wide a variety of properties could be included in an object's *per se* properties (and, by extension, a possible world's *per se* properties) before crossing the line into the dreaded *per se* necessitarianism. I claimed that a good way of thinking about the inclusion/exclusion of these properties was in terms of *reasons* for necessitation. By seeing just how many facts must be included in the concept of a finite substance (and, by extension, its possible world) before it is necessitated, we see just how absent necessitating reasons are in even very inclusive ways of conceiving individual finite substances and their worlds. I suspect Leibniz would take this conclusion to be a symptom of the robustness of the contingency in his system.

However, since necessitarianism, according to Spinoza, also follows only from the very broadest way of conceiving objects, Leibniz ought to have recognized an equally robust place for contingency in Spinoza as well. He also, I have suggested here, ought to have more explicitly followed Spinoza in appealing to the intensional nature of modal environments to show more clearly how genuine contingency can be true of finite substances, conceived *per se*, which are nonetheless necessitated in virtue of (a) their fitness for existence in the metaphysically perfect world and (b) the fact that God, by His very nature, always brings about such metaphysical perfection. Explicitly agreeing with Spinoza on the intensional nature of modality and its role in establishing a place for contingency would have still left Leibniz room to deny that such "bringing about" must take the form of the value-neutral act of immanent causation. Hence Leibniz could have maintained his choice-laden mechanism for actualization, while still acknowledging the ways in which the contours of his thinking about the resulting actual world

and its concept-sensitive modal status are deeply rooted in theories of perfection and modality shared by Spinoza.⁸⁰

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Spinoza:

C *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Translated by Edwin Curley. Vol. 1. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

G *Opera*. Edited by Carl Gebhardt. 4 vols. Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925 (cited by volume/page).

All other abbreviations of Spinoza's works refer to the actual name of the text (CM = *Cogitata Metaphysica*; Ep = *Epistolae*; PP = *Descartes Principiorum Philosophiae*; TIE = *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*; TTP = *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*). All otherwise unlabeled references to Spinoza's text refer to the internal references of the *Ethics* by PartTypeNumber (e.g., Ip33). I have used Curley's translations, except where noted.

Leibniz:

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CP *Confessio Philosophi and Papers Concerning the Problem of Evil, 1671–1678*. Edited and translated by Robert Sleigh, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

D *Discourse on Metaphysics* in PE, 35–68 (cited by section number).

DSR *De Summa Rerum: Metaphysical Papers, 1975–1976*. Edited and translated by G.H.R. Parkinson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

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