Spinoza's parallelism doctrine and metaphysical sympathy

Karolina Hübner

[forthcoming in Sympathy, edited by Eric Schliesser,
series editor Christia Mercer, Oxford UP]

By what natural connection and as it were harmony and mutual agreement, which the Greeks call sympathy, can there be coordination between the fissure in a liver and my small fortune, or between my small profit and heaven, the earth, and the nature of things? (Cicero, Divination 2.33-4)

§1 Introduction

There are many different ways to think about the notion of cosmic “sympathy”.¹ In this paper I want to approach this idea as a thesis of a fundamental connectedness of all things, a connexio rerum, and look at how this idea figures in the metaphysics of an early modern thinker, Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677). I want to show that the ancient idea of cosmic “sympathy”, reinterpreted in accordance with Spinoza’s demand for a universal intelligibility, offers a fruitful way of approaching key doctrines of his metaphysics: his conception of identity, and of the relation between thought and being.²

Admittedly, one may be surprised to find Spinoza and “sympathy” as bedfellows. For one might have expected that the advent of mechanism as the dominant explanatory paradigm in the early modern period would have rendered the idea of cosmic sympathy “occult”, and hence

¹ Thanks to the volume editors and to the participants of the Sympathy conference at the University of Richmond, especially Eric Schliesser, for invaluable comments on an earlier version of this paper.
² For an account of how Spinoza understands sympathy in his ethics, see Hanley, this volume.
philosophically illegitimate in the eyes of most thinkers. Prima facie, sympathetic relations between things seem irreducible to deterministic motions of bodies defined by size, shape and motion alone, as mechanism demands. Likewise, sympathetic action-at-a-distance seems to evade the basic mechanistic requirement that there be contact between bodies for action to occur. In fact, however, many early moderns didn’t reject sympathy tout court. Instead, they undertook to better explain the phenomena that had been deemed ‘sympathetic’, and to reduce allegedly sympathetic relations to purely mechanistic ones.\(^3\) And so Descartes for example – arguably Spinoza’s most important intellectual precursor – writes,

> I have deduced the causes - which I believe to be quite evident - of these and many other phenomena from principles which are known to all and admitted by all, namely the shape, size, position and motion of particles of matter. And anyone who considers all this will readily be convinced that there are no powers in stones and plants that are so mysterious, and no marvels attributed to sympathetic and antipathetic influences that are so astonishing, that they cannot be explained in this way.\(^4\)

\(^3\) For an example of early modern resistance to such mechanistic reduction of sympathetic phenomena see Henry More, *Immortality of the Soul*, ed. A. Jacob (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 3.5.1.

\(^4\) Rene Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 4.187. Cf. “The sciences, however abstruse [occultae], are to be deduced only from matters which are easy and highly accessible, and not from those which are grand and obscure...To inquire whether a natural power can travel instantaneously to a distant place...I shall not immediately turn my attention to the magnetic force, or the influence of the stars...I shall, rather, reflect upon the local motions of bodies... readily perceivable...nor shall I prattle on about the moon’s warming things by its light and cooling them by means of some occult quality. Rather, I shall observe
In similar spirit, Hobbes (another major influence on Spinoza) tried to explain magnetism – the sympathetic phenomenon par excellence – by reference to infinitesimal motions of bodies.\(^5\)

This kind of deflationary attempt to integrate ancient thought within a modern framework is also one of the hallmarks of Spinoza’s thought. Spinoza systematically reinterprets received doctrines – what others saw but only “as if through a cloud” – in accordance with the a pair of scales” (Descartes, Rules for the Direction of the Mind, 9).

Hobbes writes, “the attractive power of the loadstone is nothing else but some motion of the smallest particles thereof. ...As for those that say anything may be moved... by itself, by species,...by substantial forms,... by antipathy, sympathy, occult quality, and other empty words of schoolmen, their saying so is to no purpose” (Thomas Hobbes, De Corpore, IV.xxvi.7, xxx.15).

Likewise, Leibniz’s notion of a “pre-established harmony” among the perceptions of causally-isolated substances can be seen as an attempt to rehabilitate the idea of a sympathetic connectedness of all things, arguably in a less deflationary manner than we find in Hobbes, Descartes or Spinoza. Cf. e.g. “[P]re-established harmony... between all the monads or simple substances...takes the place of that untenable influence of the one on the others” (Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, New Essays on Human Understanding, ed. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 296). Cf. also 'Discourse on Metaphysics' 33: sense perceptions “must necessarily contain some confused feeling, for our body receives the impression of all other bodies, since all the bodies of the universe are in sympathy” (Philosophical Essays, ed. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1989)). On Leibniz and sympathy, see Christia Mercer, Leibniz’s Metaphysics: Its Origins and Development (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 193f, 354f, and this volume; see also Brian Copenhaver, “The occultist tradition and its critics,” in The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, 455-512 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 499ff.

See also David Hume’s invocation of physical sympathy in A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford/New
demands of what he takes to be truly “adequate” thought: timelessly true descriptions of the essences and properties of things. And so in his system the newfangled, mechanistic physics coexists with a Platonic, emanative metaphysics, as well as with a neo-Stoic ethics.

Although this is not often noted, Spinoza was familiar also with the ancient concept of cosmic “sympathy”. The term appears in his writings as a label used to describe certain relations or influences in nature that appear as less than fully intelligible, insofar as we cannot penetrate into their causes. As he writes, “it can happen that we love or hate some things without any cause known to us, but only (as they say) from Sympathy or Antipathy [sympathia...et antipathia]”. In other words, from Spinoza’s point

York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.3.1.7.


Cf. Leibniz’s comments about “restoring” and “rehabilitating” the Aristotelian “substantial forms” “in a way that would render them intelligible, and separate the use one should make of them from the abuse that has been made of them” (Philosophical Essays, ‘New System of Nature’, 139); cf. Descartes, Philosophical Writings, AT 3.506.

For Spinoza an “essence” is roughly a set of properties necessary and sufficient for a thing to be what it is, and which obtain only when the thing itself obtains (Ethics 2def2). For a fuller account of Spinozistic essence see Karolina Hübner, “On the significance of formal causes in Spinoza’s metaphysics,” Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie, 2015; and “Spinoza on essences, universals and beings of reason”, Pacific Philosophical Quarterly, forthcoming.


8 Ethics 3p15s (II/152), emphasis added. Spinoza also mentions metaphysical
of view, to see sympathy as a force operative in nature is just to fail to grasp the causes of things.

Spinoza describes this knowledge of effects alone as a knowledge of “conclusions without premises”. For him, as for most ancient and early modern philosophers, causes are the key to nature’s intelligibility: things are what they are, and have the properties they do, because of their causes. So to adequately know any thing we must know the causes that necessitated its existence and properties. Such perfect causal knowledge of things is not only the epistemic ideal, but something already given in nature, insofar as all things are eternally adequately conceived in God’s “infinite intellect”.

Spinoza’s fundamental commitment to the universal intelligibility of all things is today often referred to by scholars as Spinoza’s commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), and I will adopt this shorthand in what follows. Spinoza’s commitment to the PSR means “sympathy” in his early manual on Descartes’s philosophy, when he notes that Descartes’s commitment to a “real distinction” between parts of matter shows that “Sympathy and Antipathy are to be rejected as false” (Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy 2p8s; I/197). This is presumably because really distinct bodies would be substances, independent from one another. Of course in his own philosophy Spinoza rejects the Cartesian thesis that parts of matter are really (as opposed to merely modally) distinct from one another – as well as the idea that real distinction corresponds to a numerical distinction (cf. 1p10s).

---

9 Ethics 2p28d.
10 Hence Spinoza asserts as an axiom, “The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause” (Ethics 1ax4). Cf. “nothing belongs to the nature of anything except what follows from the necessity of the nature of the efficient cause” (Ethics 4pref; II/207). For discussion (including discussion of the question whether 1ax4 applies to adequate knowledge only) see especially Margaret Wilson, “Spinoza’s causal axiom (Ethics I, Axiom 4),” in Wilson, Ideas and Mechanism: Essays on Early Modern Philosophy, 141-65 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
11 Ethics 2p3.
12 Ethics 1ax2, 1p11altd1; 1p30. For discussion see Michael Della Rocca, Spinoza
that his metaphysics will be thoroughly hostile to positing any phenomenon or law of nature that would in principle be inexplicable. (This is so even though Spinoza allows that it is not within the powers of a finite human mind to grasp the entire series of finite causes leading up to any particular phenomenon, as well as entire realms of nature – those that are neither mental nor physical – that are in principle excluded from being known by human minds.) Given the PSR, relations in nature that once may have been deemed “sympathetic” – i.e. relations that, on Spinoza’s diagnosis of “sympathy”, are known only through their effects, have to be either (i) completely eliminated from a Spinozistic metaphysics or (ii) made fully intelligible. That is, a Spinozist must either reveal the causes on which purportedly sympathetic effects depend (thus making the influences in question intelligible), or show that it is in fact metaphysically impossible for a relation to hold in a particular case.

---


14 Let me give here an example of what it would take to demonstrate the impossibility of a sympathetic relation. One of Spinoza’s principal metaphysical doctrines is that the relation of causal dependence is possible only within the boundaries of the same kind of being (*Ethics* 1p3, 1p10, 2p5-6). So, for example, contrary to what Descartes had proposed, according to Spinoza only bodies can enter into causal relations with bodies, and only minds can enter into causal relations with with minds. As a result, any putative “sympathetic” influence that crosses from the mental realm to the corporeal realm, or vice versa, will turn out to have been illusory on Spinoza’s account, or at least it cannot have been a matter of causal influence.

Could a non-causal relation be responsible for the sympathetic influence? Spinoza recognizes at least also conceptual relations, relations of inherence (e.g. *Ethics* 1def3,5), relations of intentionality (2p11,13), and relations of
In Spinoza’s view, in metaphysical rigour, all that happens in nature happens necessarily. Nature for Spinoza is a genuine unity, grounded in a single causal power (that of the sole “substance” or “God”); it is completely causally deterministic, and thus also thoroughly intelligible. But, he also thinks, for the most part we fail to understand this: we fail to understand the causes at work around us, and we fail to understand the causes that govern our own actions and appetites. This, he claims, is the origin of our long-standing but erroneous belief in “free will”: we do not grasp that every one of our actions and volitions in fact depends on an infinite series of prior causes, ultimately grounded in divine power.

In this sense, from Spinoza’s point of view, we are prone to see nature as a realm of merely ‘sympathetic’ influences between completely discrete beings, each effect a “conclusion” without a “premise”. But Spinoza’s championing of the unity of nature (and in particular his belief that all finite things are just modifications of the one substance) makes him also particularly well-suited to the task of rehabilitating the notion of cosmic sympathy. Here “sympathy” would be understood no longer merely pejoratively in terms of our failure to grasp causes (which is how Spinoza himself uses the term). Cosmic “sympathy” rehabilitated would instead be understood as a doctrine of the fundamental relatedness of all beings, a pervasive and fully intelligible connexio rerum. In short, I want

numerical identity (2p7s). Both conceptual and inherence relations seem to be subject to the closure of kinds of being, such that only mental things can inhere in, and help us cognize, other mental things. It’s not clear that intentional relations can be classified as a case of influence. However, a particular sympathetic relation may have been a way of confusedly recognizing that the mind and body in question are in fact numerically identical. I come back to this in more detail in Section 7 below.

15 See Ethics 1p16, 1p29, 1p34.
16 See Ethics 1p28, 1app (II/78-9); 2p48; 3p7d; 3p9s; 4pref (II/207); 4def7.
17 To be clear, Spinoza would be certainly wary of describing nature as “harmonious”, as some advocates of cosmic sympathy do. According to Spinoza such predicates tell us nothing about things as they are in themselves, only about how they happen to affect us at a particular time or place (see
to suggest that in addition to Spinoza's explicit and negative discussion of sympathetic influences as a mere symptom of our ignorance, there is also in his writings an implicit and positive rehabilitation of this idea as a metaphysical doctrine of a fundamental connection among things.

Spinoza discusses this idea of fundamental connectedness at length in one of the most important (and controversial) passages in the Ethics: 2p7, its corollary and scholium. The passages bear on the relation between being and thought generally, as well as on the relations between different kinds of entities, such as minds and bodies. The passages are usually referred to as Spinoza's “parallelism” doctrine. However, I will avoid this terminology here, for the following reason. As has often been noted, “parallelism” is not a term Spinoza himself employs, and in my view it is at best unhelpfully vague, and at worst outright misleading. This is because the word “parallelism” suggests some sort of correspondence or isomorphism. \(^{18}\) In fact, however, as we shall see shortly, the fundamental

---

\(^{18}\) For a gloss of Spinoza’s “parallelism” as “mirroring”, see Della Rocca, Representation, 22-3; Spinoza, 90; Steven Nadler, Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 125, 128; as “correspondence”, see Jonathan Bennett, A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), §§30.2, 31.4; John Caird, Spinoza (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1902), 192; Della Rocca, Representation, 18, Spinoza, 316; Melamed, “Metaphysics of Thought”, 6; Nadler, Spinoza, 127; Frederick Pollock, Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co, 1880) 168; as “isomorphism”, see Della Rocca, Representation, 18, Spinoza, 90-1; Melamed, “Metaphysics of Thought,” 2, 36; Samuel Newlands,
relations at stake in the passages in question – 2p7,c, s – are relations of identity.¹⁹

This is the first main claim I will make in what follows: that Spinoza's positive reconception of cosmic “sympathy” as a thesis of a fundamental connectedness of things revolves around relations of identity. The second main claim I will make is that to grasp Spinoza's reconception of connexio rerum we need to make use of the Cartesian (and Scholastic) categories of “formal” and “objective” reality. But before I can argue for either of these points in detail, I need to provide us with the necessary background: a very brief outline of the basic building blocks of Spinoza's metaphysics. This will be the task of the next section. Readers familiar with Spinoza's metaphysics should feel free to skip directly to Section 3.

§2 Background

The pillar of Spinoza's ontology is his aforementioned substance-monomism, or the doctrine that there is only one fundamental entity, which Spinoza calls the “absolutely infinite substance” or “God”, and which is

¹⁹ Others have argued that 'parallelism' is misleading because it suggests a single doctrine while in fact 2p7 and associated passages advance two distinct doctrines, one concerned with representation, the other with identity. The two doctrines are often described as a blind (or ontological) parallelism and a representational (or epistemological) parallelism. See Deleuze, Expressionism, 113ff; Della Rocca, Representation, 19, Spinoza, 90ff; Alan Donagan, Spinoza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 180ff; Melamed, “Metaphysics of Thought,” 4ff; Nadler, Spinoza, 124.
defined by existential and conceptual self-sufficiency.\textsuperscript{20} Everything else that exists – and according to Spinoza there necessarily exists an “infinity” of things – is merely a dependent property (or modification) of this fundamental entity, distinct from substance and from one another only in the way that a property is distinct from the thing it qualifies.\textsuperscript{21} This sole possible substance and its dependent modifications (or “modes”) exhaust Spinoza’s ontological inventory: they are the only two metaphysically possible kinds of entities.\textsuperscript{22}

Spinoza’s conception of substance is perhaps most unorthodox in that he does not take substance to have a single essential nature, despite the fact that it is numerically one.\textsuperscript{23} According to Spinoza, substance – and, derivatively, its modifications – possesses multiple, qualitatively heterogeneous essential natures.\textsuperscript{24} Following Descartes, Spinoza calls these natures substance’s “attributes”.\textsuperscript{25} Attributes are contained in substance without contravening its ontological unity and so giving rise to distinct substances. Spinozistic substance is thus equally essentially a thinking thing and an extended thing. The same is true, derivatively, of all its finite properties: each is at least a mind and a body. (For all we know substance and its modes may very well have still other essential natures, given that it necessarily has all possible natures.\textsuperscript{26} But all we are able to know of being, according to Spinoza, is extension and thought: in his view we are essentially knowers of bodies.)\textsuperscript{27}

Spinoza identifies each of substance’s attributes by means of a principal concept. Each of these concepts represents the property which

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ethics} 1def3, 1def6.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ethics} 1d5, 1p14, 1p16d, 1p18.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ethics} 1p4d.
\textsuperscript{23} See in contrast Descartes, \textit{Principles} 1.53.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ethics} 1def6, 2p1-2, 2p7s.
\textsuperscript{25} See \textit{Principles} 1.53.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ethics} 1def6expl.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Ethics} 2ax5, 2p13, \textit{Letters}, Ep. 66.
all modes under the given attribute presuppose for their intelligibility.\(^{28}\) (For example, all particular ideas, volitions, doubts presuppose the concept of “thought”; all particular bodies, movements, rests, that of “extension”.) As a consequence, different attributes by definition have no common conceptual denominator.\(^{29}\) Given Spinoza’s aforementioned commitment to universal intelligibility, entities under different attributes – for example, a particular body and a particular mind – cannot therefore enter into causal relations.\(^{30}\) This is because such an event would be, Spinoza thinks, fundamentally inexplicable. For this reason, in his eyes it is also metaphysically impossible: all causal connections have to be underwritten by conceptual connections.

### §3 Connexio rerum

With this sketch of Spinoza’s basic metaphysical framework in place, let me turn to his reinterpretation of the sympathetic connexio rerum.

Spinoza’s fundamental statement on the subject of connectedness of things can be found in the following famous passage:

The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things \[ Ordo et connexio idearum idem est ac ordo et connexio rerum \].

Dem.: This is clear from 1ax4. For the idea of each thing caused depends on the knowledge of the cause of which it is the effect. \(2p7\)

---

\(^{28}\) Cf. Descartes, Principles 1.53.

\(^{29}\) It would be more accurate to say that what different attributes have in common they have in common in the wrong way: abstractly of course all attributes have that in common that they can be classed together under universals like “attribute” or “expression”. (For a fuller account of abstraction and universals in Spinoza’s metaphysics see Hübner, “Essences, universals”.)

\(^{30}\) Ethics 1p3, 1p10, 2p5-6.
Spinoza compresses many ideas into these few sentences. Let me take them one by one, starting with the notion of an “order and connection” of things.\footnote{I will not offer here an exhaustive interpretation of 2p7 and related passages; nor is my account the only possible way to read them. Since for Spinoza there seems to be no significant difference between the notions of “order” and “connection” – in 2p7s (II/90) and 3p2s (II/141) for example Spinoza suggests their synonymity – I will use them interchangeably in what follows.}

The demonstration makes clear that the “connection of things” being described in the proposition itself is a connection of things \textit{qua} causes. That is, the \textit{connexio rerum} at stake here is a connection of causes and effects, i.e. of things standing in relations of causal dependence. Now, if we draw on what Spinoza says elsewhere in the \textit{Ethics}, we can both characterize the nature of this causal \textit{connexio rerum} more precisely, and understand why for Spinoza a connection of “things” is reducible to a \textit{causal} connection in particular, as the demonstration implies.

To shed light on Spinoza’s thinking here we should recall, first, that in his view all things (including substance) \textit{have} causes, and, more precisely, all things (including substance) are causally dependent on substance. More precisely, all things are a necessary consequence or implication of divine essence (so not, as for many other philosophers, a consequence of God’s free will to create). All modes, including ourselves, are brought into existence by the essence of substance insofar as it is an absolutely unlimited causal power, and essentially \textit{are determinations} of this power.\footnote{\textit{Ethics} 1def1, 1p16, 1p34, 3p7d. This dovetails with Spinoza’s commitments to the PSR and to his causal conception of knowledge (1ax4): if all things are intelligible, but intelligibility requires reference to causes, all things must have causes.}

Secondly, for Spinoza every “thing” is also ontologically a \textit{cause}
(“Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow”).\textsuperscript{33} This means that all modes are not merely the effects of the one substance; more precisely, all modes are effects by means of which substance brings about still further effects.

Since for Spinoza all things are causes, and all things have causes, we can conclude that in his view only what can enter into causal relations is a being (or, equivalently, has a degree of metaphysical “reality”).\textsuperscript{34} For this reason, a comprehensive characterization of causal relations in nature will encompass all beings without exception. In other words, for Spinoza the “causal order of nature” has the same extension as the “connection of things” or of “beings”. This causal sense of \textit{connexio rerum} is for Spinoza the principal sense in which all things in nature are fundamentally connected.

There is one additional feature of the Spinozistic \textit{connexio rerum} that merits mention in the present context. It has to do with the way that finite things in particular are causally dependent in Spinoza’s view. As I already noted, for Spinoza all things are a necessary consequence of divine essence. But no finite thing is an \textit{immediate} consequence of this essence. Instead each one depends on prior members of an infinite series of finite causes, and it is this whole infinite series that is an immediate consequence of substance’s essential nature.\textsuperscript{35} In other words, a finite thing’s causal dependence on substance is mediated by its dependence on other finite things: every finite thing is causally dependent on an infinite series of prior finite causes which determine that, and how, it exists and what effects it must produce.\textsuperscript{36} Given Spinoza’s aforementioned causal

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[33] \textit{Ethics} 1p36.
\item[34] See \textit{Ethics} 2def6.
\item[36] It is because of the deterministic connectedness of all finite things that Spinoza insists, as we have seen, that there is no such thing as a “free will”, if by “free” we would understand the absence of determination. This is also why Spinoza
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
requirement on knowledge, this also means that no finite thing can be truly known apart from other finite things. In this sense for Spinoza, as for some earlier advocates of cosmic sympathy, things that prima facie appear distinct and distant can be shown to be in metaphysical rigour causally (and hence also explanatorily) related.

§4 Connexio idearum

So much for how Spinoza understands the “connection of things”. But 2p7 also bears on a connection of ideas. More precisely, the proposition describes the connection of ideas as “one and the same” as the connection of things. This raises at least two questions: (i) How are we to understand the notion of a connexio idearum? And (ii), in what sense exactly is this connexio idearum supposed to be “one and the same” as the connexio rerum?

4.1. In response to question (i), it is worth noting first of all that Spinoza understands the nature of “ideas” (“thoughts”, “concepts”, “cognitions”) quite differently from what we might today understand by these terms. In part this is because Spinoza views thought as a universally predictable property: all natural things – pebbles, dragonflies, trees – are in his view “minded” or “animate”, even if the thinking that such different minds engage in is characterized by different degrees of complexity and autonomy.37 As a consequence, what we today may associate with

defines a “finite thing” as what is “limited” by another finite thing of the same attribute kind (Ethics 1def2).

37 See Ethics 2p13s.

This thesis of universal mindedness follows from Spinoza’s (notorious) identification of a thing’s “mind” with God’s idea of this thing. With this identification in place, universal mindedness follows straightforwardly from Spinoza’s entirely orthodox commitment to divine omniscience (2p3). For discussion, see Margaret Wilson, “Objects, Ideas, and ‘Minds’: Comments on Spinoza’s Theory of Mind,” in Wilson, Ideas and Mechanism: Essays on Early Modern Philosophy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 126-40.
“thinking” is from Spinoza’s point of view not the whole of thinking, nor the essence of thinking as such, but instead only our experience of the degree of thinking proper to human beings – the sorts of ideas that we are capable of producing. The properly Spinozistic vantage point requires us to think of thinking as an activity that belongs first and foremost to the infinite first cause, the substance that connects, generates and explains all other things. All other ideas are for Spinoza merely “parts”, more and less fragmented and incomplete, of the idea formed by this infinite thinking subject.

How are we to understand a “connection” of ideas? This connection will be given in the first place by the order of ideas proper to substance’s “infinite idea”, veridically representing all that is (namely, substantial essence and all its implications). One may also want to propose here in addition that Spinoza must have in mind here some purely logical order of ideas, constituted by relations of entailment or inference among propositions. On this reading, 2p7 asserts the existence of some sort of isomorphism or correspondence of the causal order of things with a logical order of ideas. This is in fact a common reading of Spinoza. But there are reasons to demur. In the first place, a rudimentary difficulty for this sort of reading is that Spinoza does not seem very interested in logic, and has nothing to say about the nature of inference in particular. The little he does say on these topics suggests that like many other 17th century

38 Cf. Melamed, “Metaphysics of Thought”, 43.

My account of Spinoza’s view of ideas will be necessarily selective, given limitations of space.

39 See Ethics 2p11c, 2p33-35.

40 This and the next three paragraphs are developed more fully in Hübner, “Significance of formal causes.”

41 See e.g. Bennett’s claim that for Spinoza “a cause relates to its effect as a premise does to conclusion which follows from it” (Study, §8.3); cf. Curley: “Spinoza assimilates the relation of causality to the relation of logical implication” (Edwin Curley, Spinoza’s Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 45-6).

42 Cf. Donagan, Spinoza, 74-5.
thinkers, Spinoza thought of logic as a normative and therapeutic “art” akin to medicine. That is, he did not belong to that philosophical tradition for which logic is concerned with being qua known. So logical relations seem a rather poor candidate for constituting an order capable of being the “same” as the causal order of things.

However, the real problem with such purely logical interpretation of the Spinozistic *connexio idearum* lies elsewhere. It has to do with the “sameness” of the causal order of things and the order of ideas asserted in 2p7. Let’s assume, as most scholars do, that this “sameness” of the two orders amounts to some sort of isomorphism or mirroring of causal dependence relations on the one hand, and entailment relations between propositions on the other. The problem is that classical models of inference fail to mirror the relations of causal dependence that Spinoza accepts as possible in his metaphysics. That is, if we assume that effects in Spinozistic nature “follow” from their causes along the lines of either material or strict implication, we end up attributing to Spinoza causal views he cannot hold.

Take, for example, the proposition “God exists”. For Spinoza this is a necessarily true proposition. As a true proposition, it is materially implied by any proposition; as a necessary proposition, it is strictly implied by any proposition. So if either of these models of inference reflected how Spinoza understood relations of causal dependence, he would have to be committed to the view that God’s existence is caused by the existence of *any* thing. But it is a fundamental tenet of Spinoza’s system

---

43 See *Ethics* 5pref (II/277); CM1 (I/233).
44 Cf *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* [91].
45 See my note 18.
46 To my knowledge Don Garrett was the first to point out this difficulty; his own solution to the problem is to appeal to relevance logic (Don Garrett, “Spinoza’s necessitarianism,” in *God and Nature: Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel, 97-118 (Leiden: Brill, 1991):194). Cf. also Della Rocca “Manifesto”, 81, 92n12.
that God is *causa sui*: his existence follows from his essence alone.\(^{47}\)

So there are reasons to hesitate before identifying the Spinozistic *connexio idearum* simply with entailment or inference among propositions as classically understood. Clearly, minimally, it is necessary to restrict in some way the set of relevant entailment relations, so as to exclude what for Spinoza are metaphysically impossible causal dependencies. (We may also be unhappy with glossing the “sameness” of the two orders in terms of an isomorphism or a mirroring, but let’s put that aside for the moment.) Elsewhere I have argued that to adequately model logically the relations of causal dependency in Spinoza’s metaphysics we must restrict the set of conceptual relations under consideration to entailment relations connecting the definition of a thing’s essence with the properties implied by that essence.\(^{48}\) This supplies the missing metaphysical constraint on which relations of conceptual dependence, among all those possible on classical models of inference, are genuinely metaphysically possible for Spinoza: namely, only those that hold between the divine essence or definition and the properties this definition analytically contains, and between the essences of those properties and *their* properties. To return to our earlier example, this prior metaphysical constraint rules out the possibility of inferring from truths about modes to the truth of divine existence.

4.2. We have then the beginnings of an answer to our first question about 2p7 – the question of how to interpret the notion of a “connection of ideas” within Spinoza’s metaphysical framework: the ideas being ordered are in the first place ideas produced by God as a thinking thing; the order is the logical order of entailments from the essences of things to their properties.

Let us tackle the second question then: in what sense exactly is this *connexio idearum*, now understood in terms of essence-to-property entailment relations, “one and the same” as the causal *connexio rerum*, as

\(^{47}\) See *Ethics* 1def1.

\(^{48}\) Hübner, “Significance of formal causes.”
Spinoza claims in 2p7? In particular, is this sameness indeed, as many believe, a matter of some sort of isomorphism or correspondence?

The way Spinoza demonstrates 2p7 suggests that this “sameness” follows immediately from the causal requirement on knowledge, set down in 1ax4: knowing a thing requires us to know its causes. The general line of thought here seems clear enough.\(^{49}\) Namely, if to know a thing requires us to know its causes, then an adequately knowing intellect must represent in its ideas the causal order of things that in fact obtains in nature.\(^{50}\) This might indeed lead us to conclude that when Spinoza asserts that ideas depend on one another in “one and the same” way as things do, he is saying that substance as as an unlimited thinking thing, and so an omniscient and perfect knower, reproduces or mirrors in the relations among its ideas the relations of causal dependence that obtain among things in nature.\(^{51}\) That is, we could read Spinoza’s claim as an implicit

\(^{49}\) If little more than the general line of thought: the brevity and purported self-evidence of this demonstration have caused much consternation among scholars. For discussion see e.g. Bennett, Study, 127ff, Della Rocca, Representation, 22ff; Wilson, “Causal axiom”, 153ff.

As has often been noted, for the demonstration of 2p7 to go through we must arguably assume also 2p3, i.e. the existence of ideas of all things. See e.g. Edwin Curley, Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza’s Ethics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) 64; Deleuze Expressionism, 114-5, Della Rocca, Representation, 22-3, Wilson, “Causal axiom”, 154.

\(^{50}\) This is not to imply that Spinoza’s use of 1ax4 is always restricted to cases of adequate knowledge. See Wilson, “Causal axiom”.

\(^{51}\) Note that this does not require us to assume that there is a one-to-one relation between causes in nature and ideas representing these causes (pace Bennett Study, §31.1; Curley, Behind the Method, 63, 67; Michael Della Rocca, “Spinoza’s Argument for the Identity Theory,” The Philosophical Review 102:2 (1993):198; Representation, 18; Melamed, “Metaphysics of Thought”; Wilson, “Causal axiom”, 153). All that is required is that for each effect its complete cause be represented. How many ideas it may take to do that can vary from case to case. For example, God’s infinite idea which represents all things is presumably simple (see Ethics 2p8s, Metaphysical Thoughts 2.7). Likewise, in
endorsement of a version of the correspondence theory of truth.

Whatever its other merits, this gloss of 2p7 does not genuinely answer our second question. For it hardly clarifies matters to say that the connexio rerum and the connexio idearum are “one and the same” in the sense that they “correspond to” or “mirror” one another. This merely pushes the question back, without shedding much light on how two, prima facie entirely heterogeneous sorts of relations – relations of causal dependence on the one hand and relations of essential implication on the other – could be compared, not to mention judged, to have the “one and the same” order.

Fortunately, this correspondence-theory reading is not the only way to gloss the unity and sameness asserted in 2p7. Alternatively we could opt for example for a thoroughly idealist reading, on which the connexio rerum and the connexio idearum would be “one and the same” just in the sense that there would really be only one order, that of ideas. Here to be a “thing” would be reducible to being conceived. This kind of reading could potentially offer a more precise gloss of “unity” and “sameness”, provided we can avoid the above-mentioned pitfalls associated with reducing Spinoza’s order of ideas to purely logical relations. But the

“reasoning”, which involves forming adequate general notions, a mind can adequately represent infinitely many particulars by means of a single idea (see Ethics 2p40s2 (II/122), and Hübner, “Essences, universals”).

Wilson for example glosses the “sameness” in terms of a single “relation of necessary determination” that obtains between “physical things” and “cognitiones” alike; however she also concludes that this doesn’t tell us much about the nature of this relation (“Causal axiom”, 155). Della Rocca suggests the sameness in question boils down to a “structural similarity”, such as having the same “number of immediate effects” (Representation, 18). An Aristotelian in turn would presumably interpret this “sameness” as the adequatio, or formal identity, of the object being known and of the intellect which receives the intelligible form of the object.

For this interpretative approach to Spinoza’s metaphysics generally see Della Rocca, “Manifesto”, Spinoza.
reading also seems inconsistent with Spinoza’s explicit commitment to multiple kinds of beings, including an “extended” nature conceivable “through itself”, and thus it would seem precisely not in terms of thought.54

Another interpretative possibility is to opt for a reductive reading of “unity” and “sameness” of the two orders that operates in the opposite direction, so to speak, than the idealist one. On this reading, the order of causes and the order of ideas are “one and the same” just in the sense that all relations of ideas reduce to causal relations between things.55 This reading is certainly encouraged by the fact that for Spinoza “thing” is a perfectly general ontological category, and as such it includes “idea” in its scope. It is also suggested by a passage in which Spinoza himself seems to infer from the “sameness” of the two orders that ideas are subject to the causal order proper to things:

the order and connection of ideas (by [2]p7) is the same as the order and connection of causes. Therefore, the cause of one singular idea is another idea, or God, insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea; and of this also [God is the cause], insofar as he is affected by another, and so on, to infinity.56

On this reading, the “connection” of ideas is simply the order of their causal dependence. I.e., there is nothing more to the ordering of ideas than their causal dependence as “things”. From this vantage point, it becomes self-evident that relations between ideas are must be “one and the same” as relations between “things”: an “idea” is just a certain kind of “thing”.

55 This seems to be the view in Melamed, “Metaphysics of thought”, 8.
56 Ethics 2p9d; emphasis added.
However, other passages in Spinoza’s writings suggest that neither version of the reductive reading of 2p7 can be correct, and that *connexio rerum* and the *connexio idearum* should instead be viewed as irreducible and of equal metaphysical weight. This seems to be the upshot of the following passage for instance:

The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things (by 2p7), and vice versa, the order and connection of things is the same as the order and connection of ideas (by 2p6c and [2]p7).\(^{57}\)

The picture painted here seems to be of two autonomous orders, standing in a perfectly symmetrical relationship. (2p6c states that non-mental “things” are generated according to a principle that is independent from thought: “the formal being of things which are not modes of thinking does not follow from the divine nature because [God] has first known the things”. For our purposes, Spinoza’s reference to this corollary means that the order of things cannot be the “same” as the order of ideas because things depend on ideas, as on theologies according to which God models the world on preexisting ideas in his intellect).\(^{58}\)

---

\(^{57}\) *Ethics* 5p1d.

\(^{58}\) One might think that Spinoza’s habit of modeling causal relations in nature on relations of ideas – in particular, modeling substantial causality on relations of inference of properties from the essences of geometrical figures (see e.g. *Ethics* 1p17s) – also counts against the second reductive reading of 2p7, insofar as it suggests that the order of ideas constitutes an independent standard by which we can determine how things in nature depend on each other causally. But in fact the most passages like 1p17s entitle us to conclude is that this is how in Spinoza’s view *we* can grasp the nature of causal relations. This is a matter of the order of knowing, and perhaps even solely of Spinoza’s pedagogical strategy.

On the meaning of Spinoza’s geometric causal analogies see e.g. Bennett, *Study* §8.3; Carriero, “Spinoza on final causality”, 61-5; Curley, *Spinoza’s metaphysics*, 45-6; Gueroult, *Spinoza*, 246-97; Viljanen, “Essentialist Model”;
§5 Connexio as identity

We seem then to be at an impasse: it appears possible to read the unity and sameness of the causal/real and conceptual orders asserted in 2p7 in at least three different ways (as correspondence, and as two kinds of reduction). But there seem to be problems with each reading, and no decisive evidence in favor of any of them. I propose that we look elsewhere for a solution.

5.1. It seems to me that a more fruitful way to approach the question of the relation between the “connection of things” and the order of ideas may be to draw on the Scholastic and Cartesian distinction between “formal” and “objective” reality. This approach is suggested by the corollary Spinoza appends to the proposition, which again reiterates the sameness of two orders:

From this [i.e., from 2p7] it follows that God’s [NS: actual] power of thinking is equal to his actual power of acting. I.e., whatever follows formally from God’s infinite nature follows objectively in God from his idea in the same order and with the same connection. (2p7c, emphasis added)

Let me first clarify the terminology. On this dual conception of metaphysical “reality”, the “formal reality” of a thing picks out what this thing is in its intrinsic nature – for example, as an extended thing, or a thinking one. “Objective reality” refers in turn to what a thing is insofar as it is represented in thought. For example, the sun as a thing existing in nature possesses certain physical properties, a certain mass and size among them. But on this conception of reality, the sun exists not only in nature, as a particular, formally-real body, but also in thought whenever some intellect represents it. This objectively-real sun also has a certain

Hübner, “Formal causes”.

22
reality, one proper to the being of intentional objects. To quote Descartes, “the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect”, “in the way in which objects normally are in the intellect”.  

The twist Spinoza puts on this conception of “reality” is that in his view formal reality comes in infinite, or all possible, kinds, rather than only the two – extension and thought – acknowledged by Descartes. And the corollary Spinoza appends to 2p7 clarifies the nature of the relation between this infinitely varied whole of formal reality (i.e. substance and its modes under all the attributes as things in nature) on the one hand, and the objective reality of substance’s “infinite idea” (i.e. the objective reality of substance’s perfect representation of its own essence and of its modes) on the other. As an unlimited thinking thing substance adequately represents whatever formally-real effects it gives rise to. So whatever has formal reality in nature also has objective reality in God’s idea of nature – or, whatever has reality at all has at the same time both formal and objective reality. This is the sense in which substance's two fundamental causal “powers” – the power to think or produce representations, and the power to “act”, or to produce formally-real things can be described as “equal”: the order of ideas (what is represented by substance as an omniscient thinking thing) and the order of things (what is produced by substance qua first and universal cause) are “equal” in their respective degrees of reality. For Spinoza it is a matter of two different but equal ways of having reality – just as substantial attributes are different but

59 *First Replies*, AT 7.103.

60 For Spinoza the existence of objective reality presumably belongs to the nature of thought as such, and so to the essence of substance qua thinking, and so is not further explicable with the help of some other, more basic concepts.

61 Cf. “A true idea must agree with its object (by [1]ax6), i.e. (as is known through itself), what is contained objectively in the intellect must necessarily be in nature” ([Ethics 1p30d). Cf. *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* [91].

In asserting this equality Spinoza departs from Descartes who treats objective reality as a “mode of being...much less perfect than that possessed by things which exist outside the intellect” (AT 7.103).
equally adequate ways of conceiving of substantial essence.

The “sameness” of the orders of being and thought, of the *connexio rerum* and the *connexio idearum*, asserted in the passages we have been examining is thus, I suggest, not a mere correspondence or a reduction of one order to the other but instead an *identity*; more precisely, an *identity of one and the same thing* – the absolutely infinite substance and its modes – *existing in two different ways*, i.e., *with two different kinds of reality*, just as Descartes’s sun exists both in nature and in the intellect.⁶² On this reading, whatever other relations the things and ideas may enter into (such as having ‘structural’ similarities: for example, the same number of immediate effects) these can be adequately explained as consequences of this fundamental relation of identity.⁶³

I do not wish to deny here that Spinozistic things can be

---


⁶³ Although the corollary asserts this sameness of order only of the objective reality of ideas (rather than of ideas tout court), I think this is an insignificant difference from the proposition, since in the corollary the order of objective realities is also supposed to be a gloss on substance’s “power of thinking” as a whole.

So it seems inaccurate to say that the corollary is concerned solely with a “representational parallelism” and epistemological relations, but *not* with identity, which becomes a topic of concern only in the scholium that follows (for this view see e.g. Melamed, “Metaphysics of Thought” 6, 16). In fact for Spinoza the epistemological and ontological concerns are inseparable, insofar as being represented is a certain kind of being or reality. To be sure, in the corollary there is no question of identity of the relata qua *formally* real: the whole of formal reality – which includes the “absolutely infinite” substance – cannot, qua formally real, be numerically identical with an *idea* representing this substance’s essence, since like any idea, this idea is merely a mode (cf. Melamed, “Metaphysics of Thought”, 6). Nonetheless, the corollary asserts the identity of the formal reality of all that is with the *objective* reality of substance’s idea: both are absolutely infinite, or, it is one and the same absolutely infinite object taken first in its formal reality and then in its objective reality.
understood to be ordered or have a “connection” also in a causal sense. But my suggestion is that it is connexio rerum as identity that is explanatorily primary, and grounds the causal sense of this connexio. This is because within Spinoza’s framework things that are known to be identical will also have to have the same causal orderings. In the first place, this will be true of substance (and its modifications) as formally real on the one hand and as objectively real on the other: their identity means that substance as adequately represented in the infinite idea will manifest the same causal dependencies as substance in nature. But, secondly, this will also be true of the numerical identity of formally-real things under different attributes (at topic to which I will return below): if a given mind and a given body are numerically identical, then their causes will also have to be numerically identical. (Indeed, Spinoza confirms this priority of the identity-sense of connexio rerum in relation to this second scenario in the following passage:

These things are more clearly understood from what is said in 2p7s, viz. that the Mind and the Body are one and the same thing, which is conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension. The result is that the order, or connection, of things is one.  

Della Rocca in contrast proposes that the identity at least in the case of modes is instead grounded by the PSR, insofar as there is (1) significant pressure toward the identity of a body and the mind representing this body, given their same causal “order and connection”; and (2) the lack of a possible explanation for their non-identity – the difference of attribute cannot ground non-identity given the explanatory closure of each attribute (Spinoza, 100-1).

Of course it is also true for Spinoza that my mind and my body are not merely numerically identical as formally-real things, but my mind is also my body existing with objective reality (Ethics 2p11-13). However, this overlap of the two senses of identity does not hold true universally: that is, not all things that are numerically identical are also one and the same thing existing with two different kinds of reality. So for example, my mind is also numerically identical to some thing in the third, unknown attribute, but it is not that thing
5.2. Let me add here one more general remark. This is that the corollary to 2p7 offers us a unique vantage point onto Spinoza's metaphysics as a whole. Typically this metaphysics gets introduced – as I have done above – by asserting that there are three fundamental building blocks to this metaphysics (substance, modes, attributes), defined so and so, and relating to each other in specific ways. This approach to understanding Spinoza's metaphysics is certainly correct; moreover, it is encouraged by Spinoza's own manner of presentation in the *Ethics*, which opens with definitions of such terms. But to consider Spinoza's metaphysics from this perspective is to consider it – to misapply a Heideggerian term – merely 'ontically', that is in terms of what this metaphysics says about *entities.* But there is another, equally valid but neglected, road to take when thinking about the core of Spinoza's metaphysics: not in terms of the kinds of *entities* it allows but rather in terms of the kinds of *being or reality* it posits and how it relates them. And seen from this latter point of view, the crux of Spinoza's metaphysical framework as a whole is the claim that the fundamental 'structure' (for a lack of a better word) of all that is is given by the fundamental distinctness, but also the unity or inseparability, of formal and objective reality.

2p7c is a place in Spinoza's writings in which this metaphysical picture emerges with particular clarity. But this same picture underlies Spinoza's fundamental definitions – of *causa sui*, substance and mode: all of them are articulated first of all in terms of what essentially belongs to the definiendum in its formal reality and secondly in its objective reality (rather than in terms of conception or thought more broadly, as some suggest\textsuperscript{67}).

To be clear, the interpretation I have sketched here is not intended


\textsuperscript{67} E.g. Melamed, “Metaphysics of Thought”, 43.
to suggest that at the core of Spinoza's metaphysics there is a dualism of being and thought. For as we saw the corollary suggest that we draw the dividing line elsewhere: between formal and objective reality, not between being and thought. And these two dualisms are orthogonal to each other: “thought” includes both the objective reality of the ideas’ representational content, and the formal reality specific to thought.

§6 Attributes

Read in the manner proposed above, 2p7 does not sit very well with the standard gloss of Spinoza’s ‘parallelism doctrine’ as a doctrine bearing on inter-attribute relations between things, i.e. on how things under one attribute (e.g., thought) relate to things under another attribute (e.g., extension). However, attributes do become a key reference point in the scholium to 2p7: it is there that the problem of inter-attribute relations between things indeed becomes a central concern; and the phrase connexio rerum acquires a new, attribute-relative, sense. Here is the crucial section of scholium:

we must recall here what we showed [NS: in the First Part], viz. that whatever can be perceived by an infinite intellect as constituting an essence of substance pertains to one substance only, and consequently that the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that. So also a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing,

68 For this kind of reading see e.g. Melamed, “Metaphysics of Thought”, 42-3.
69 Cf. Deleuze Expressionism; Melamed “Metaphysics of Thought”.

For a gloss of Spinoza ‘parallelism’ in such inter-attribute terms see e.g. Henry Allison, Benedict de Spinoza: An Introduction (New Haven:Yale University Press, 1987), 91-92; Della Rocca, Spinoza, 316; Nadler, Spinoza, 123, 127; Newlands, “Thinking”, 35.
70 Cf. Deleuze Expressionism; Melamed “Metaphysics of Thought”.

I don’t think that we should see 2p7s as the “more general” formulation of parallelism, as suggested e.g. by Della Rocca (Spinoza, 91).
but expressed in two ways...Therefore, whether we conceive nature under the attribute of Extension, or under the attribute of Thought, or under any other attribute, we shall find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes, i.e., that the same things follow one another. (2p7s)

Like the corollary, this scholium is concerned with identity. But it is no longer a question of identity of things that differ in kinds of reality. Rather, as has often been pointed out, the scholium asserts the numerical identity of things (again, both substance and modes) that differ in attribute, i.e. identity of things known by means of different fundamental concepts. So for example, although to cognize a particular “body” we have to draw on the notions of “extension” or “motion”, and to cognize a given “mind” we have to make use of the concepts “thought” and “affirmation”, nonetheless according to Spinoza this body is numerically identical to some mind, and vice versa.

The point that the scholium to 2p7 is concerned with rather different issues than the proposition and corollary has often been made before (in opposition to those who would see 2p7, corollary and scholium as expressing a single and uniform doctrine of ‘parallelism’). But those who favour such a disjunctive reading rarely attempt to explain why Spinoza would append the scholium to the corollary if, ex hypothesi, the two make such distinct claims. So let me suggest one possible reason for the existence and placement of the scholium.

I propose that we view the scholium as Spinoza’s attempt to clarify

---

71 Cf. Deleuze *Expressionism*, 113; Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 91; Melamed, “Metaphysics of Thought”. As Gueroult points out, this identity is already asserted in 1p16d (*Spinoza*, 339); cf. Melamed, “Metaphysics of Thought”, 15.

72 This creates the well-known problem that if (i) some mind is F, although (ii) some body is identical to this mind, nonetheless we cannot in Spinoza’s view conclude that (iii) this body is F. For discussion see e.g. Della Rocca, *Representation*.

73 See e.g. Deleuze, *Expressionism*; Melamed, “Metaphysics of Thought”. 

28
how the two ways of conceiving of things in nature in general proposed in the *Ethics* fit together: namely, how the framework of formal and objective reality, foregrounded in the corollary, fits with the more familiar framework of the attributes, introduced on the first page of the treatise. So, in the first place, the scholium clarifies that what we are conceiving in the various, attribute-specific ways (as a thinking substance, as an extended substance, as a mind, as a body, etc) is from the point of view of formal reality just a single order of things or *connexio rerum*: “one and the same connection of causes”. Spinoza is cautioning us here about what conclusions about the “connection of things” we are entitled to draw on the basis of the *connexio idearum*. The infinite substantial idea discussed in the corollary contains and grounds all metaphysically possible representations (of extended substance, thinking substance, minds, bodies, other kinds of modes which we, as knowers essentially of extension, cannot represent). The scholium cautions us that the infinitely diverse objective reality of this idea is not a sufficient ground to conclude that this idea refers to a numerical plurality of formally-real, and “really distinct”, or substantial, things. In other words, even if according to Spinoza we represent “thinking substance” and “extended substance” and their modifications with the help of concepts that have nothing in common in the relevant sense, if we also grant Spinoza his earlier proof that there can be only one substance, then we also must refer all these representations to one and the same formally-real entity in nature.

§7 Conclusion

Let me summarize.

In this paper I argued that the ancient idea of cosmic “sympathy” offers a fruitful way to approach Spinoza’s early modern metaphysics, and in particular his notorious ‘parallelism doctrine’. I described how Spinoza reinterprets the idea of sympathetic influence so as to accommodate it within a metaphysics dedicated to universal intelligibility. I also proposed that two concepts in particular are central to the Spinozistic reconception of the *connexio rerum*: first, the Cartesian and
Scholastic categories of “formal” and “objective” “reality”, and, secondly, the notion of identity. More precisely, I argued that for Spinoza the connexio rerum, or the order of things in nature, consists first and foremost in the identity of things existing with two different kinds of reality – formal reality as products of substance's power to act, objective reality as products of substance's power to think.
References


----------. “Spinoza on essences, universals and beings of reason”, Pacific Philosophical Quarterly, forthcoming.


---------, *Opera*. Edited by Carl Gebhardt. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1925.


