

Spinoza: A Taste of Absolute Infinity - Visions Prelude to Imagination and Intuition

Spinoza sees in his consideration of prophecy with in his *Tractus Theologicus-Politicus* a certain exclusion.

This exclusion is rooted in a perception, a vision, of what is considered common to all men (omnibus hominibus communis est). A perception of something being foreign to the common nature, linked with a certain despising (spernente) of our natural gifts, gives rise to this certain sense of exclusion. “Therefore prophetic knowledge is usually taken to exclude natural knowledge.”¹ This simple movement here is of great interest. For Spinoza, there is a wish in humanity, a desire to exclude the common foundation of knowledge from the prophetic form, through a certain gesture of desiring and giving privilege to an idea of a greater, stranger, nature.² Quickly Spinoza responds, corrects, and guides the implications of this exclusion³,

*Nevertheless, the latter (natural knowledge) has as much right as any other kind of knowledge to be called divine, since it is dictated to us, as it were, by God's nature insofar as we participate therein, and by God's decrees.*⁴

Common knowledge differs little from prophetic knowledge given that they derive from the same source, God, even though there still remains a room of non-accountability, a non-causal situation that this natural knowledge makes apparent, faces in its very nature.⁵ A state within which a certain limit, a limit giving rise to an expanse that is seen in light of its own self-consideration, or even can we say self circumscription,

¹ Spinoza, Baruch. *Theological-Political Treatise*. Hackett Press: Indianapolis, 2001 .P.9 This is arguably the source of superstitious piety.

Spinoza, Baruch. *Tractus Theologicus-Politicus*. Henricum Künraht: Hamburg, 1670 p. 15.

“(P)ropterea, ubi de cognitione prophetica loquitur, hanc exclusam vult.” *Hanc*, that in Latin, which is desired to be excluded from the prophetic form of knowledge refers back to common natural knowledge which is shared foundation of all men. “(Q)uia haec cognitio naturalis omnibus hominibus communis est, dependet enim a fundamentis omnibus hominibus communibus, ideo a vulgo”

² ideo a vulgo, ad rara semper, & a sua natura aliena anhelante, & dona naturalia spernente, non tanti aestimatur, & propterea, ubi de cognitione prophetica loquitur, hanc exclusam vult;

³ The implication of the exclusion you may say negatively provides, opens, the space to see that which it implies through its exclusion. Seeing, space, the vista, the landscape of what is considered appearing is what this consideration implies to move towards. A movement of precision and lying bare the finest quality of its knit, the sense of fabric that is this space.

⁴ “attamen nihilominus aequali jure, ac alia, quaecunque illa sit, divina vocari potest, quandoquidem Dei natura, quatenus de ea participamus, Deique decreta eam nobis quasi dictant, nec ab illa, quam omnes divinam vocant, differt” p.15

⁵ “differt, nisi quod ea ultra limites hujus se extendit, & quod humanae Naturae leges, in se consideratae, non possunt ejus esse causa” p.15 The possible sense of difference between God’s nature and His decrees, not that they are different is central in the sense that they can be possibly marked as different. This possibility of marking is another line of approach that is implicitly moved toward as the nature of intellect.

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contraction? A certainty, a modulation of nature recognizing beyond it, in its inner reflection something it also does not cause.⁶ This works multi-referentially.

This inner reflection, this knowledge, the site of its occurring for us humans, common to men and prophets is very clearly for Spinoza in the countenance of the mind, our mind. The mind contains the nature of God. "Seeing then that our mind objectively contains in itself Gods nature"⁷ This containing, this limiting, in the mind, a certain site of certain happenings allows for the formation of ideas and explanations rooted in this certainty. A certainty beyond words shapes a bold movement in Spinoza's mind, an attempt to express in words, in text, a certain taste of things beyond them. The immanent character establishes in being a cause and exceeds it, in being only of revelation. For Spinoza the mind,

*shares of the same (Divine nature), and has the power by this relation for the formation of certain notions, explaining the nature of things, and of practical teaching, the merit of the nature of the mind conceived as such is that it is the primary cause of divine revelation . . .*⁸

Conceiving the mind as sharing in the same divine nature requires of us to consider what this sharing, this participation (*participat*) is, exactly, can we understand it clearly and distinctly? The mind is the cause of revelation, not the divine. This desire for distinction and clarity brings us back to the text that moves in light of certain taste, a taste that is itself this understanding, a taste that is understanding. How does Spinoza see this; reliance on his words, his text is the means, the medium that certainly opens the possibility to this vision of another, of Spinoza, and a better sense of the taste of vision itself. We are contextualized dually here by the text and what it speaks from and toward.

⁶ "at respectu certitudinis, quam naturalis cognitio involvit, & fontis, e quo derivatur (nempe Deo) nullo modo cognitioni prophetae cedit" p.15 This is very important, the nature of countenance and circumscription. *Ethica* I Propositions 7, 8, 18.

⁷ *Ibid* p. 15. "Cum itaque mens nostra ex hoc solo, quod Dei Naturam objective in se continet . . ."

⁸ *Ibid* p. 15 *potentiam habeat ad formandas quasdam notiones rerum naturam explicantes, & vitae usum docentes, merito mentis naturam, quatenus talis concipitur, primam divinae revelationis causam statuere possumus*

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Contextualized not only dually, but dual in a primary sense of the expression, this primacy being the text, and understanding the text emerges from, this play between the two is central to this development.⁹ This very primary set of coordinates and movement provide one vibrant quality to this palette of Spinoza's taste, to the tongue of his expression. There are others of course, this is a very full-bodied vision, desiring no lack of clarity and distinction in what can seem to generate exclusions and shape ambiguities. A play rooted and resting in words about how we understand this body of text and its vision.¹⁰ A vision he speaks from as he states with clear certain precision that,

*for all things, which we clearly and distinctly understand, the idea of God (as I have just told), and nature dictates to us, not indeed in words, but in a far more excellent way, and in a way that best suits the nature of the mind, that everyone who has tasted (gustavit) this certainty of the intellect, with himself, without doubt experienced.*¹¹

Not only do these precise words make clear that they themselves are not the most excellent way as it also poses a second duality of contextualization.¹² This of idea of God and of nature¹³, these two resituate the coordinates of context and the sense of the words we speak shift along with it. Under the primarily expressed poles of text and understanding the relativity of our consideration and words are situated around a predication of our taste, in words, the text as words and understanding in a word. It is here in these words

⁹ It is this posited movement, play between these two, text and understanding that it emerges from and attempts to move toward in which the space to speak, a certain type of extension, emerges. It is this texture of work, the consideration and its expressions, its words and other mediums that compose the contact we have with Spinoza and his posited vision. We may be ethically required to ask what is the status of this contact in itself. How do we experience and speak of this? In the issue of extension is taking up by Spinoza in a latter part of this work.

¹⁰ It is exactly this play in ambiguity, through words that is so interesting. Spinoza so delicately highlights this in his desire to move past it, to disambiguate make clear. His desire finds this formation and sense, has this type of taste, is this type of experience. Can this be said of every mind, ever person? If so, If not, what are the greater implications and what does this do for Spinoza's vision and our vision of him? It is here also where the question of site, sites, of this intellection also comes into view once again as well.

¹¹ ea enim omnia, quae clare, & distincte intelligimus, Dei idea (ut modo indicavimus), & natura nobis dictat, non quidem verbis, sed modo longe excellentiore, & qui cum natura mentis optime convenit, ut unusquisque, qui certitudinem intellectus gustavit, apud se, sine dubio expertus est. p.15 It is

¹² Incipio igitur a primo lectoresque moneo, ut accurate distinguant inter ideam, sive mentis conceptum, et inter imagines rerum, quas imaginamur. (2.49 Scholium) ETHICA Ordine Geometrico demonstrata et in quinque Partes distincta, in quibus agitur p. 202

¹³ The play of words here posing the Idea of God in contrast with nature is delicate and of great concern. Its implicitly linked as well to our understanding of natura naturans natura naturata. Of most importance, this all will be addressed.

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that Spinoza moves us on to the next set of poles. What is the movement beyond text and words? The tasting, experiencing itself is this, scripted in traces of text here.

It is here where we must pause in the process of tracing this text to experience of Spinoza and of ourselves supposedly sharing this coming source and participation in it, this certainty that we should taste of. A pause consonant with his shift from the consideration of natural light to the expressed purpose of his text the *Tractus Theologico-Politici* will give us the breathing room to digest the actual matter of what we taste, what we would hope to find in his expressions composed of words, of language.¹⁴ A certainty engender in the words he expresses, the language he forms, and the purpose they serve to direct and cultivate clear distinct understanding we can only experience. Although do we not share this expressed and in relation with others, is this not the motivation of the text, its activity, its purpose?¹⁵ Spinoza has a way of seeing expressed in his thinking, a thinking that finds expression in words, that make up sentences and so on, that compose meaning that can be understood; a certain assent to understanding. We will see how his thinking, his vision interlaces with the language, and the thinking, a thinking we hope to contact, in scripture, as he shifts we shift. In this shift remember, that for Spinoza its only in the duality of the idea of God and nature, a natural light, that this can happen, that this contact comes to light in certainty and distinctness. A distinctness that we find in returning to our pause, before we move forward, a pause helps see what composes our taste. Pausing ourselves to consider nature, the site of this understanding. In this pause we look into Spinoza's thinking, its composition, through another means. It is here where this delicate duality will show, reveal a unity, and its modulation, modulations that give expression to this unity.¹⁶

¹⁴ Verum quoniam meum institutum praecipue est, de iis tantum loqui, quae solam Scripturam spectant, sufficit de Lumine naturali haec pauca dixisse.

¹⁵ Letter 32 (XIX)

¹⁶ It is here at this point where latter we will arrive at a center of the consideration of imagination and intellect.

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Other means, no less asserting than the text already considered moves us to a clarity about a certain meaningfulness that both contracts, consolidates his words and in this expands their breath.¹⁷ A certain intake of air, the pause, recaptures the same movement, draws it together in the consideration, in the vision, the taste, re-expands in the cavities of expression and flows anew into an enriched palate. A look at Spinoza's words of consideration in the *Ethica: Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata* draws us into this pause, this overlap that in one sense seems to resist, and in another sense expands our words, our language, how we hear and speak it; the shades, modes, and differentials evoked. Certain awareness giving into expression provides this, Spinoza states in *Propositio 14* of the *Ethica*,

*Besides God no substance can be postulated or conceived. - Demonstration. Since God is a being absolutely infinite, of whom no attribute, that expresses the essence of substance, can be denied it (by the definition. 6.), and he necessarily exists (by Prop. 11.), if any substance besides God were given him, it would have to be explained through some attribute of God, and so the same attribute would exist by two substances, which (by account. 5.) is absurd; no substance apart from God can be given and consequently cannot be conceived.*¹⁸

In this a certain awareness of God is expressed that limits, defines, makes clear the notion of substance. This draws us to something of a core, a heart of the thinking process. What determines conceiving and its postulations is this conception of conceiving. The word substance, clearly and distinctly, is tied to God Alone,¹⁹ there is no other given.

An aloneness that is according to this formulation absolutely infinite, an absolute that should make us

¹⁷ In direct connection with the last footnote, a consideration of transitivity and immanence, contraction and expansion, a contrast linked to very different sense of teleology and at the core of human projecting for Spinoza.

¹⁸ *Ethica: Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata* p.30 *Propositio XIV. Praeter Deum nulla dari neque concipi potest substantia. Demonstratio. Cum Deus sit ens absolute infinitum, de quo nullum attributum, quod essentiam substantiae exprimit, negari potest (per defin. 6.), isque necessario existat (per prop. 11.), si aliqua substantia praeter Deum daretur, ea explicari deberet per aliquod attributum Dei, sicque duae substantiae ejusdem attributi existerent, quod (per prop. 5.) est absurdum; adeoque nulla substantia extra Deum dari potest et consequenter non etiam concipi p. 30*

¹⁹ *Propositio XI. Deus sive substantia constans infinitis attributis, quorum unumquodque aeternam et infinitam essentiam exprimit, necessario existit. Demonstratio. Si negas, concipe, si fieri potest, Deum non existere. Ergo (per axiom. 7.) ejus essentia non involvit existentiam. Atqui hoc (per prop. 7.) est absurdum. Ergo Deus necessario existit. Q. e. d. prop 11 (Propositio 11. God or substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists. Demonstration. If you deny it, conceive, if fieri potest, God does not exist. Therefore (by the axiom. 7.) His essence does not involve existence. But this (by account. 7.) Is absurd. Therefore God necessarily exists. Q. e. d.)*

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pause, is here. It is here in this infinity, and how it is to be understood, that Spinoza has a very certain conception, understanding of it, in which a certain fullness²⁰ resides. It is in this infinite substance that rests, contracts, in what cannot be doubted. This assertion that something cannot be doubted is fundamental to Spinoza's vision of what conception is, and how it actually occurs. If we are to use his expressions, his words, to see for ourselves the taste of certainty, it is in formulations like the following that evoke this. In commenting on the conceiving of substance itself in relation to attributes, Spinoza speaks of an absurdity that cannot be doubted. This pause draws us into book I proposition 12, "No attribute of substance can be truly conceived from which it follows the substance can be divided." There is something that cannot be truly conceived, this is a core ground to Spinoza's thinking. The demonstration continues,

For the parts into which the substance can be conceived would be divided will retain the nature of substance or it wont. If in the first case then (by account. 8.) each part must be infinite (by account. 7.) and also be the cause of itself (by account. 5.) each part consist of a different attribute so that many substances will formed from the one, that this comes about (by the account. 6.) is absurd. In addition to this the parts (by account. 2.) would have nothing in common with its whole and the whole (by the definition. 4. And on account of. 10.) would be conceived without its parts; a thing which would be absurd and no one will be able to doubt.²¹

Drawing like air into the heart of this genesis, scribing a certain limit to doubt, we cannot doubt a singular substance. Spinoza's sees such a type of thinking that certain things cannot be truly thought. It is this conception of a non-doubtable that is primary determination of mind, of thinking the seen, what is this seeing? A thinking that plays, modulates, a certain question of reality beyond retention. What would this beyond be, what would it look like? With a swift simplicity and clarity this comes to light if we understand Spinoza notion of relation between substance and attribute; essence and intellects perception of it is rooted in

²⁰ *Propositio IX. Quo plus realitatis aut esse unaquaeque res habet, eo plura attributa ipsi competunt.*

Demonstratio. Patet ex defin. 4. (Per attributum intelligo id, quod intellectus de substantia percipit tanquam ejusdem essentiam constituens.) pgs. 19,4

²¹ *Demonstratio . Partes enim, in quas substantia, sic concepta, divideretur, vel naturam substantiae retinebunt, vel non. Si primum, * tum (per prop. 8.) unaquaeque pars debet esse infinita et (per prop. 7.)* causa sui et (per prop. 5.) constare debet ex diverso attributo, adeoque ex una substantia plures constitui poterunt, quod (per prop. 6.) est absurdum. Adde, quod partes (per prop. 2.) nihil commune cum suo toto haberent et totum (per defin. 4. et prop. 10.) absque suis partibus et esse et concipi posset, quod absurdum esse nemo dubitare poterit p. 28*

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a notion of conception that gives clarity to this questions.

Recessing a bit farther, pausing a bit longer book 1 Proposition 10 states “Each attribute of one substance must be conceived through it self.”²² What is this conception through itself, we must pass through perception, quite simply the meaning of this may be the heart of question, and in this passing through a constituting comes about. Before this constitution lets pass through Spinoza’s words a bit further, or have his words pass through us. The demonstration adds, “An attribute is that which the intellect perceives of a substance as constituting its essence (by the definition. 4.) and so (by the definition. 3.) must be conceived through itself.”²³ This conceiving through itself should draw our attentions breath; contracting in these moments which should only show this, that substance itself is conceived through itself. Language comes undone, here, can it speak this conception and even in the definitions and axioms that frame, or plate it, give it a certain context of thinking itself, there is a resistance, and in this language gains a certain solidity of strength when constituted truthfully. Perception perceiving itself gives a space between,²⁴ and language carries this.

This space between, pauses in respiration, is what exactly? At this point of the texts movement it is the space between perception and conception, a certain breath of possible expressions. What can give more expanse to this palate of considerations? As it contracts to this unity, this singularity of substance it opens a different dimension of conception. Different dimensions of conception, not only is the substance conceived in itself, so also attributes can be conceived, we can perceive this, these various conceptions. It is now, here, that we see the contracting of this certain nature begins to expand in a certain way. The perception of

²² Ibid p. 20 *Unumquodque unius substantiae attributum per se concipi debet.*

²³ Ibid p.20 *Attributum enim est id, quod intellectus de substantia percipit tanquam ejus essentiam constituens (per defin. 4.); adeoque (per defin. 3.) per se concipi debet. Definition 3 Per substantiam intelligo id, quod in se est et per se concipitur; hoc est id, cujus conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei, a quo formari debeat. (By substance I understand that which is in itself and conceived through itself: that, which does not need the concept of the conception of another thing, in order to be formed). And definition 4 Per attributum intelligo id, quod intellectus de substantia percipit tanquam ejusdem essentiam constituens.(By attribute I mean that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence.)* Ibid p. 5

²⁴ Space, extension, and proximity not now, will become a key consideration in light simultaneity.

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perception shows this, perception that is rooted in seeing a double sense of conception. The scholium of

Proposition 10 passes this on to us, Spinoza continues,

From this (proposition 10 and its proof) it is clear that although two attributes be conceived as really distinct, that is one without the help of the other, still we cannot deduce therefore that they constitute two entities, or two different substances.²⁵

Conception on the level of attribution and differentiation, present in our perception, is not such that it constitutes a substance. There is a form of conception that constitutes a substantial reality, this is the unity of God, and there is a conception that forms no substantial differentiation. These are one. The contraction to unity in substance conceives and gives birth to conceptions of attributive dimension. The scholium shows each attribute is differentiated,

For it is of the nature of that substance that each one of his attributes is conceived through itself, since all things, of substance, in the very attributes have always been at the same time, could not be produced from one another, but each expresses the reality or being of substance.²⁶

These attributes express aspects of the oneness of substance a substance that contains all attributes simultaneously.²⁷

This sense of expression, a sense of attribution that gives light to this simultaneity in various, infinite

²⁵ Ibid p. 20 *Ex his apparet, quod, quamvis duo attributa realiter distincta concipiuntur, hoc est unum sine ope alterius, non possumus tamen inde concludere ipsa duo entia sive duas diversas substantias constituere.*

²⁶ Ibid p. id enim est de natura substantiae, ut unumquodque ejus attributorum per se concipiatur; quandoquidem omnia, quae habet, attributa simul in ipsa semper fuerunt nec unum ab alio produci potuit, sed unumquodque realitatem sive esse substantiae exprimit.

²⁷ This must be linked to Proposition 7 of book 1 as it leads to a definition of infinite existence as is shown particularly in the Scholium 1 of following proposition 8. It is clear this infinite existence is one, one substance, and it is here again we reach the line of what cannot be doubted. It can be seen that this gesture of simultaneity is linked with the notion of infinity. It is out of this simultaneous infinity, a self-causing reality (causa sui) that nature contains existence. This continence of nature has a very certain infinite reality that excludes any other reality (or substance Prop. 2) that would be asserted to hold a certain common attribute. Proposition 6 articulates the early Axiom 4 and Definition 3, this paring giving us a core composition at the center of Spinoza's thought and expression. The appropriate configuration of cause, effect, and knowledge is for Spinoza the prelude to all other truthful expressions. It is here where the intellect emerges in its possibility to see and form as it does. It is here where the play between imagination and intuition can only come through the perception that gives us a taste of this simultaneous infinity of unqualified affirmation. Unqualified affirmation being a very powerful expression to address.

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ways, constitutes our sense, our perception of this unity. It is this very simultaneity that exceeds the boundaries of a so-called finitude and wraps substance in the contraction of a differentiable unity.²⁸

Differentiable within itself, but not from another substance and is therefore infinite in every respect, even necessarily so according to Proposition 8 of book 1 as it shows this unqualified affirmation. “Every substance is necessarily infinite”²⁹ This necessity stems from a very certain understanding of limitation, a understanding that is also rooted in the conception of substance as a self caused unity and draws back even fuller into the undoubtable, and therefore expressible. The Proof Proposition 8 continues in its consideration of the finite and infinite as it articulates the nature of substances’ existence.

But it (substance and its nature which existence belongs to) is not finite, for by (Def. 2) it would have to be limited by a substance of another nature which also would have to exist. And so two substances should be given the same attribute, which is absurd (by account. of 5.). Therefore it exists as infinite.³⁰

There is something amazing at work here, a certain non-limiting circumscription, contraction into an infinite eternal simultaneity. A simultaneity that modulated its self such that the attributes of its simultaneity can be expressed, therefore also have been seen, effected. Expressed and seen through a certain absolute non-deniability. Scholium 1 of 8 articulates this, “When finite is in fact part of the denial of absolute and infinite affirmation of the existence of any nature, it follows, therefore, from the mere account of Proposition 7 all substances must be infinite.”³¹

It is here in this necessity of divine nature, of this unity of substance that infinite ways, modes, comes out and finds relative distinction. The relativity of this distinction comes through a commonality; difference is only seen through the commonality. Pausing a bit further and finding a grounding in the earliest propositions of Book 1 we will be able to spring forward in our rest to certain infinite intellectual scopes brought into

²⁸ This exceeding is in reference to a paritucalr diemansion, aspect, evern modulation of the infinity.

²⁹ Ibid p. 13 *Omnis substantia est necessario infinita.*

³⁰ Ibid p. 13,14 *At non finita. Nam (per defin. 2.) deberet terminari ab alia ejusdem naturae, quae etiam necessario deberet existere (per prop. 7.); adeoque darentur duae substantiae ejusdem attributi, quod est absurdum (per prop. 5.). Existit ergo infinita.*

³¹ Ibid p.14 *Cum finitum esse revera sit ex parte negatio et infinitum absoluta affirmatio existentiae alicujus naturae, sequitur ergo ex sola prop. 7. omnem substantiam debere esse infinitam.* It is also here in second Scholium of book I Proposition 8 that we find some of the most important articulations of the nature of definition. These are to be considered at length latter.

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vision. Proposition 4³² takes up the consideration of distinct things and it is also here in its Demonstration where the issue of the intellect arises also, it states,

*All existing things, are either in itself, or in something else (by the axiom. 1.), That is (by definition. 3. And 5.), there is nothing outside the understanding (the intellect) which is given in addition to substances and their affections. Nothing, therefore, outside the understanding (the intellect) of it (substance) is given, by which a number of things that can be distinguished from each other, except substances, or what is the same thing (by definition 4.) are its affections and attributes.*³³

The intellect has a very certain limit, understanding can only receive, be given, that which is of the substance, intellect is bound to the play between what is common. This relativity of the common constitutes the reality of understanding, intellect it self. There is certain logic of priority here. The nature of the situation is such that the reality we call substance precedes it affections.³⁴ It is quite profoundly here that this priority, amidst what will be seen in the light of a very certain infinite simultaneity poses a very brilliant contrast. Priority in, and amidst simultaneity, infinite and eternal, is this only for our language, our words, and the vision they flow from. What is this priority, a priority simply of the absolute affirmation found in and through expression? It is in this, this un-doubt ability of the question, that we need to taste of and therefore see. This establishes and begins to open a ground that springing forward in this simultaneity to a more full understanding of intellect and the infinite. It is only after having come to clear terms of this absolute affirmative reality that one finds articulation in Spinoza's palate in a very certain taste of what he sees, this absolute infinity he expresses. It is from here that the intellect(s) can be seen in the right light, such that we can understand its space of perception. A space that gives light to the reality of conceptions conceiving and gives for the expression of it as such; vistas of imagination and intuition come to clarity here.

³² Ibid p. 10 *Duae aut plures res distinctae vel inter se distinguuntur ex diversitate attributorum substantiarum, velex diversitate earum affectionum.* (Two or more distinct things are distinguished from each of the attributes from the diversity of substances, or by the diversity of their affections.)

³³ Ibid p. 10 *Omnia, quae sunt, vel in se, vel in alio sunt (per axiom. 1.), hoc est (per defin. 3. et 5.), extra intellectum nihil datur praeter substantias earumque affectiones. Nihil ergo extra intellectum datur, per quod plures res distingui inter se possunt praeter substantias sive, quod [48] idem est (per defin. 4.), earum attributa earumque affectiones*

³⁴ Ibid p.9 Proposition I. *Substantia prior est natura suis affectionibus.*

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