

Ethics Demonstrated in Geometrical Order

Benedict Spinoza

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. This version contains some awkward repetitions of the word ‘God’. They could be avoided through the use of pronouns, but *they* present us with an unattractive choice. Using ‘he’, ‘him’, ‘his’ etc. of God invites the reader, over and over again, to think of God as a person; while using ‘it’, ‘itself’ etc. pokes the reader in the ribs, over and over again, with reminders that God is *not* a person. The former choice misrepresents Spinoza’s doctrine (his other name for God is ‘Nature’), while the latter misrepresents his style. Writing in Latin, which lacks the distinction between personal and impersonal pronouns, he didn’t have this problem.

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Part I: God

Definitions

D1: In calling something 'cause of itself' I mean that its essence involves existence, i.e. that its nature can't be conceived except as existing.

D2: A thing is said to be 'finite in its own kind' if it can be limited by something else of the same nature. For example, every body counts as 'finite in its own kind' because we can always conceive another body that is even bigger. And a thought can be limited by—i.e. can count as finite because of—another thought that somehow exceeds it. But a body can't be limited by a thought or a thought by a body.

D3: By 'substance' I understand: what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e. that whose concept doesn't have to be formed out of the concept of something else.

D4: By 'attribute' I understand: what the intellect perceives of a substance as constituting its essence.

D5: By 'mode' I understand: a state of a substance, i.e. something that exists in and is conceived through something else.

D6: By 'God' I understand: a thing that is absolutely infinite, i.e. a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, each of which expresses an eternal and infinite essence. I say 'absolutely infinite' in contrast to 'infinite in its own kind'. If something is infinite only in its own kind, there can be attributes that it doesn't have; but if something is *absolutely* infinite its essence or nature contains every positive way in which a thing can exist—which means that it has all possible attributes.

D7: A thing is called 'free' if its own nature—with no input from anything else—makes it necessary for it to exist and causes it to act as it does. We say that a thing is 'compelled' if something other than itself makes it exist and causes it to act in this or that specific way.

D8: By 'eternity' I understand: existence itself when conceived to follow necessarily from the definition of the eternal thing. A thing is eternal only if it is absolutely (logically) necessary that the thing exists; for something to be eternal it isn't merely a matter of its existing *at all times*—it must *necessarily* exist.

Axioms

A1: Whatever exists is either in itself or in something else. As we have already seen, a substance is in itself, a mode is in something else.

A2: What can't be conceived through something else must be conceived through itself.

A3: From a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and, conversely, if there is no determinate cause no effect can follow.

A4: Knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, knowledge of its cause.

A5: If two things have nothing in common, they can't be understood through one another—that is, the concept of one doesn't involve the concept of the other.

A6: A true idea must agree with its object.

A7: If a thing can be conceived as not existing then its essence doesn't involve existence.

Propositions

1: A substance is prior in nature to its states.

This is evident from D3 and D5.

2: Two substances having different attributes have nothing in common with one another.

This is also evident from D3. For each substance must be in itself and be conceived through itself, which is to say that the concept of the one doesn't involve the concept of the other.

3: If things have nothing in common with one another, one of them can't be the cause of the other.

If they have nothing in common with one another, then (by A5) they can't be understood through one another, and so (by A4) one can't be the cause of the other.

4: Two or more things are made distinct from one another either by a difference in their attributes or by a difference in their states.

Whatever exists is either in itself or in something else (by A1), which is to say (by D3 and D5) that outside the intellect there is nothing except substances and their states. So there is nothing outside the intellect through which things can be distinguished from one another except substances (which is to say (by D4) their attributes) and their states.

5: In Nature there cannot be two or more substances having the same nature or attribute.

If there were two or more distinct substances, they would have to be distinguished from one another by a difference either in their attributes or in their states (by 4). If they are distinguished only by a difference in their attributes, then any given attribute can be possessed by only one of them. Suppose, then, that they are distinguished by a difference in their states. But a substance is prior in nature to its states (by 1), so we can set the states aside and consider the substance in itself; and then there is nothing left through which one substance can be conceived as distinguished from another, which by 4 amounts to saying that we don't have two or more substances with a single attribute, but only one.

6: One substance can't be produced by another substance.

In Nature there can't be two substances that share an attribute (by 5), that is (by 2), there can't be two substances that have something in common with each other. Therefore (by 3) one substance can't be the cause of another, or be caused by it.

Corollary: A substance can't be produced by anything else. In Nature there are only substances and their states (as is evident from A1, D3, and D5). But a substance can't be produced by another substance (by 6). Therefore, a substance can't be produced by anything else at all.

This corollary is demonstrated even more easily from the absurdity of its contradictory. If a substance could be produced by something else, the knowledge of it would have to depend on the knowledge of its cause (by A4). And so (by D3) it wouldn't be a substance.

7: It pertains to the nature of a substance to exist.

A substance can't be produced by anything else (by the corollary to **6**), so it must be its own cause; and that, by D1, is to say that its essence necessarily involves existence, i.e. it pertains to its nature to exist.

8: Every substance is necessarily infinite.

[The difficult demonstration of **8** has this at its core: if *x* is finite then it is limited by something of the same kind as itself, i.e. something that shares an attribute with it; but no substance shares an attribute with any other substance, so no substance can be limited in this way, so every substance is infinite.]

First note on 7 and 8: Since finiteness is partly negative, while being infinite is an unqualifiedly ·positive· affirmation of the existence of some nature, it follows from **7** alone that every substance must be infinite; for in calling a substance 'finite' we partly, because of the negative element in finiteness, deny existence to its nature, and according to **7** that is absurd.

Second note on 7 and 8: I'm sure that the proof of **7** will be found difficult to grasp by people who judge things confusedly and haven't been accustomed to understanding things through their first causes. Such people don't distinguish the qualities of substances from the substances themselves, and they don't know how things are produced. This brings it about that they fictitiously ascribe to ·substances the ·sort of· beginning that they see ·natural things to have; for those who don't know the true causes of things confuse everything, and have no difficulty supposing that both trees and men speak, that men are formed both from stones and from seed, and that anything can be changed into anything else! So, also, those who confuse the divine nature with human nature easily ascribe human character-traits to God, particularly

when they are also ignorant of how those traits are produced in the ·human· mind.

But if men would attend to the nature of substance, they would have no doubt of the truth of **7**. Indeed, this proposition would be an axiom for everyone. . . For by 'substance' they would understand ·what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e. that the knowledge of which doesn't require the knowledge of anything else; and by 'quality' they would understand ·what is in something else, something the concept of which is formed from the concept of the thing *in* which it is.

[Spinoza then has an extremely difficult paragraph, omitted here. Its premises are that substances exist and are conceived through themselves, and that qualities or states exist and are conceived through something else. From these Spinoza seems to infer that we can have legitimate thoughts of states or qualities that 'don't actually exist', presumably meaning that nothing actually has them, whereas we can't have the thought of a substance that doesn't exist 'outside the intellect'.]

Hence, if someone said that he had a clear and distinct (i.e. true) idea of a substance, and nevertheless wondered whether such a substance existed, that would amount to saying that he had a true idea and wondered whether it was false. (You'll see that this is right if you think about it.) Or if someone says that a substance has been created, he is saying that a false idea has become true! Of course nothing more absurd can be conceived. So it must be admitted that the ·existence of a substance is an eternal truth, just as its ·essence is.

This lets us infer in another way that a single nature can be possessed by only one substance—I think the inference is worth presenting ·in the remainder of this Note·.

Four needed preliminaries to the argument:

1. The true definition of each thing neither involves nor expresses anything except the *nature* of the thing defined.

From which it follows that

2. No definition involves or expresses any certain *number* of individuals,

since a definition expresses only the *nature* of the thing defined. For example, the definition of *triangle* expresses only the simple nature of the triangle, not any particular number of triangles. It should also be noted that

3. There must be, for each existing thing, a certain cause for its existing.

Finally, it should be noted that

4. The cause on account of which a thing exists must either •be contained in the very nature and definition of the existing thing (which means that it pertains to the nature of the thing to exist) or •be outside it.

From these propositions it follows that if in Nature a certain number of individuals exists, there must be a cause why just *those* individuals exist and not more or fewer.

For example, if twenty men exist in Nature—and for clarity's sake let's assume that they are the first men to exist and that they all exist at the same time—how are we to explain this? To show why there are exactly twenty men, no more and no fewer, it doesn't suffice to show the cause of human nature in general. For (by **3**) there must be a cause why each particular man exists. But this cause (by **2** and **3**) can't be contained in human nature itself, since the true definition of man doesn't involve the number twenty. So (by **4**) the cause why these twenty men exist—and thus why *each* of them exists—must lie outside each of them.

From that it follows that if something has a nature such that there can be many individuals ·of that nature·, there

must be an external cause of its existing. Now since it pertains to the nature of a substance to exist (already shown in this note), its definition must involve necessary existence, and so its existence must be inferred from its definition alone. But, as we have shown in **2** and **3**, the existence of a number of substances can't follow from a definition. So it follows that there can exist only one substance having a given nature.

9: The more reality or being each thing has, the more attributes belong to it.

This is evident from D4.

10: Each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself.

An attribute is what the intellect perceives concerning a substance, as constituting its essence (by D4); so (by D3) it must be conceived through itself.

Note on 10: From these propositions it is evident that although two attributes can be conceived to be really distinct (each conceived without the aid of the other), we still can't infer from that that they constitute—that is, constitute the natures of, i.e. are possessed by—two different substances. . . . It is far from absurd to ascribe many attributes to one substance. Indeed, nothing in Nature is clearer than that each thing must be conceived under some attribute, and the more reality a thing has the more attributes it has—attributes that express necessity, or eternity and infinity. So it is utterly clear that an absolutely infinite thing must be defined (as in D6) as a thing that consists of infinite attributes, each of which expresses a certain eternal and infinite essence. If you want to know how we can tell when there are many substances, read on: in the following propositions I shall show that in Nature there exists only one substance, which is absolutely infinite. So there is nothing to 'tell'.

11: God, or a substance consisting of infinite attributes each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists.

If God didn't exist, then (by A7) God's essence would not involve existence; and (by 7) that is absurd. Therefore God necessarily exists.

A second proof: For each thing there must be assigned a cause or reason for its existence (if it exists) and for its nonexistence (if it doesn't). . . . This reason or cause must be either contained in, or lie outside of, the nature of the thing. For example, the very nature of *a square circle* indicates the reason why it doesn't exist, namely because it involves a contradiction; and the very nature of *a substance* explains why it *does* exist, because that nature involves existence (see 7). But the reason why [changing Spinoza's example] a coin exists, or why it doesn't exist, does not follow from its nature but from the order of the whole of the physical world. For from this *order* it must follow either that the coin necessarily exists now or that it is impossible for it to exist now.

These things are self-evident. From them it follows that *a thing necessarily exists if there is no reason or cause that prevents it from existing*. So if there is no reason or cause that prevents God from existing or takes God's existence away, it certainly follows that God necessarily exists.

But if there were such a reason or cause, it would have to be either *in* God's very nature or *outside* it and in another substance of a different nature. It couldn't be in a substance of the same nature as God's, for the supposition that there is such a substance is, itself, the supposition that God exists. So it would have to be a substance of a nature different from God's; but such a substance would have nothing in common with God (by 2) and so could neither give existence to God nor take it away. So a reason or cause that takes away God's existence couldn't lie outside the divine nature.

It would, then, have to be in God's nature itself. That would mean that God's nature involved a contradiction, *like the square circle*. But it is absurd to affirm this of a thing that is absolutely infinite and supremely perfect. (That is because *a contradiction must involve something of the form 'P and not-P'*—a 'square circle' would be something that was 'square and not square' because 'not square is contained in the meaning of 'circle'—and *a thing that is infinite and perfect is one whose nature involves nothing negative, so nothing of the contradictory form*.) So there is no cause or reason—either in God or outside God—that takes God's existence away. Therefore God necessarily exists.

A third proof: [slightly expanded from Spinoza's very compact statement of it] To be unable to exist is to lack power, and conversely to be able to exist is to have power (this is self-evident). Now, suppose that God doesn't exist but some finite things do exist necessarily. In that case, these finite things are more powerful than an absolutely infinite thing (because they *can* exist and the absolutely infinite thing *can't*). But this is self-evidently absurd. So either nothing exists or an absolutely infinite thing also exists. But *we* exist, either in ourselves as substances that necessarily exist or as qualities of something else that necessarily exists (see A1 and 7). Therefore an absolutely infinite thing—that is (by D6) God—necessarily exists.

Note on the third proof of 11: In this last demonstration I wanted to show God's existence *a posteriori* (*bringing in the contingent fact that we exist*), so as to make the demonstration easier to grasp—but not because God's existence doesn't follow *a priori* from the same premises. For since being able to exist is power, it follows that the more reality belongs to the nature of a thing the more powers it has, of itself, to exist. Therefore an absolutely infinite thing (God) has of itself an absolutely infinite power of existing. For that

reason, God exists absolutely. Still, there may be many who won't easily see the force of this proof because they have been accustomed to think only about things that flow from external causes. And of *those* things they see that •the ones that quickly and easily come into existence also easily perish. And conversely, they judge that •complicated and intricately structured things are harder to produce, i.e. that they don't exist so easily. I might free them from these prejudices by looking into •what truth there is in the proposition that what quickly comes to be quickly perishes, and considering whether •all things are equally easy in respect to the whole of Nature (•I think they are•). But I shan't go into any of that. All I need here is to point out that I am here speaking not of things that come into existence from external causes but only of substances, which (by 6) can't be produced by any external cause. For things that come to exist from external causes—whether they have many parts or few—owe all their perfection or reality to the power of the external cause; and therefore their existence arises only from the perfection of their external cause and not from their own perfection. On the other hand, whatever perfection a *substance* has is not due to any external cause; so its existence must follow from its nature alone; so its existence is nothing but its essence. So perfection doesn't take away the existence of a thing, but on the contrary asserts it. But imperfection takes it away. So there is nothing of whose existence we can be more certain than we are of the existence of an absolutely infinite thing, i.e. a perfect thing, i.e. God. For since God's essence •excludes all imperfection and •involves absolute perfection, by that very fact it removes every cause of doubting God's existence and gives the greatest certainty concerning it. I think this will be clear to you even if you are only moderately attentive!

12: No attribute of a substance can be truly conceived from which it follows that the substance can be divided.

Suppose that a substance *can* be conceived as being divisible; then either its parts will also have the nature of the substance or they won't. If they •do, then (by 8) each part will be infinite, and (by 7) will be its own cause; and (by 5) each part will have to consist of a different attribute. And so many substances can be formed from one, which is absurd (by 6). Furthermore, the parts would have nothing in common with their whole (by 2), and the whole (by D4 and 10) could exist without its parts and be conceived without them; and no-one can doubt that *that* is absurd. But if on the other hand the parts •do not retain the nature of substance, then dividing the whole substance into equal parts would deprive it of the nature of substance, meaning that it would cease to exist; and (by 7) that is absurd.

13: A substance that is absolutely infinite is indivisible.

If it were divisible, its parts would either retain the nature of an absolutely infinite substance or they wouldn't. If they did, then there would be a number of substances of the same nature, which (by 5) is absurd. If they didn't, then (as in 12) an absolutely infinite substance could •be divided into such parts and thereby• cease to exist, which (by 11) is also absurd.

Corollary: No substance is divisible, and thus no *corporeal* substance, insofar as it is a substance, is divisible. [This use of 'insofar as' is explained on page 9 just above the start of section V.]

Note on 12–13: That *substance is indivisible* can be understood more simply merely from this: the nature of substance can't be conceived other than as infinite, whereas 'a part of

a substance' can only mean *a finite substance*, which (by **8**) implies a plain contradiction.

14: God is the only substance that can exist or be conceived.

Since God is an absolutely infinite thing, of whom no attribute expressing an essence of substance can be denied (by **6**), and God necessarily exists (by **11**), if there were a substance other than God it would have to be explained through some attribute of God; ·but explanations can flow only within attributes, not from one attribute to another·; and so two substances with an attribute in common would exist, which (by **5**) is absurd. So no substance other than God can exist; and none such can be conceived either, for if it could be conceived it would have to be conceived *as existing*, and the first part of this demonstration shows that to be absurd. Therefore, God is the only substance that can exist or be conceived.

First corollary: God is unique, i.e. (by **6**) in Nature there is only one substance, and it is absolutely infinite.

Second corollary: An extended thing and a thinking thing are either attributes of God or (by A1) states of God's attributes.

15: Whatever exists in God, and nothing can exist or be conceived without God.

14 secures that apart from God there cannot exist (or be conceived) any *substance*, i.e. (by D3) any thing that is in itself and is conceived through itself. But (by D5) *modes* can't exist or be conceived without a substance ·that they are modes of·. So modes can exist only in the divine nature, and can be conceived only through that nature. But (by A1) substances and modes are all there is. Therefore, *everything* is in God

and *nothing* can be or be conceived without God.

Note on 15: [This text follows Curley in numbering sections of this note, and of the note on **17** and the Appendix, as an aid to reference.]

I. Some people imagine a God who is like a man, consisting of a body and a mind, and subject to passions. But how far they wander from the true knowledge of God is shown well enough by what I have already demonstrated, and I shan't talk about them any more. Everyone who has to *any* extent contemplated the divine nature denies that God is corporeal. This is best proved from the fact that by 'a body' we understand *a quantity that has length, breadth, and depth*, • *by some specific shape*. Nothing could be more absurd than to say this about God, i.e. about a thing that is infinite [= •unlimited·.]

In trying to demonstrate this same conclusion by different arguments from mine, some people clearly show that ·as well as denying that God is or has •*a body*· they conclude that the divine nature doesn't in any way involve corporeal or •extended substance. They maintain that the corporeal world, ·rather than being part of God's nature·, has been *created by* God. But by what divine power could it be created? They have no answer to that, which shows clearly that they don't understand what they are saying.

At any rate, I have demonstrated clearly enough—in my judgment, at least—that no substance can be produced or created by any other (see the corollary to **6** and the second note on **8**). Next, I have shown (**14**) that God is the only substance that can exist or be conceived, and from this I have inferred in the second corollary to **14** that extended substance is one of God's infinite attributes. To explain all this more fully, I shall refute my opponents' arguments, which all come down to these two.

II. First, they think that corporeal substance, insofar as it is substance, consists of parts. From this they infer

that it cannot be infinite, and thus cannot pertain to God. They explain this through many examples, of which I shall mention three.

•If corporeal substance is infinite, they say, let us conceive it to be divided into two parts. If each part is finite, then an infinite is composed of two finite parts, which is absurd. If each part is infinite, then there is one infinite twice as large as another, which is also absurd. •Again, if an infinite quantity is measured by parts each equal to a foot, it will consist of infinitely many of them, as it will also if it is measured by parts each equal to an inch. So one infinite number will be twelve times as great as another, which is no less absurd. •Finally, suppose that from one point in something of infinite extent two lines are extended to infinity. Although near the beginning they are a certain determinate distance apart, the distance between them is continuously increased as they lengthen, until finally it stops being determinate and becomes indeterminable; which is also absurd. Since these absurdities follow—so they think—from the supposition of an infinite quantity, they infer that corporeal substance must be finite and consequently cannot pertain to God's essence.

III. Their second argument is also drawn from God's supreme perfection. For, they say, God as a supremely perfect thing cannot be acted on. But corporeal substance, since it is divisible, *can* be acted on; anything that is divisible can be pulled apart by outside forces. So it follows that corporeal substance does not pertain to God's essence.

IV. These are the arguments that I find being used by authors who want to show that corporeal substance is unworthy of the divine nature, and cannot have anything to do with it. But anyone who is properly attentive will find that I have already replied to them, since these arguments are based wholly on the supposition that corporeal substance is composed of parts, which I have already (**12** and corollary to

13) shown to be absurd. Anyone who wants to consider the matter rightly will see that all those absurdities (if indeed that's what they are) from which they infer that extended substance is finite don't at all follow from •the supposition of an infinite quantity, but from •supposing that an infinite quantity might be measurable and composed of finite parts. All they are entitled to infer from the absurdities they have uncovered is that infinite quantity is not measurable and is not composed of finite parts. This is just what I have already demonstrated above (**12**, etc.). So the weapon they aim at me turns against themselves. . . .

Others, imagining that a line is composed of points, know how to invent many arguments showing that a line can't be divided to infinity. And indeed it is just as absurd to say that corporeal substance is composed of bodies, or parts, as it is to say that a body is composed of surfaces, the surfaces of lines, and the lines of points.

This must be admitted by all those who know that clear reason is infallible, and especially those who deny that there is a *vacuum*. For if corporeal substance could be divided into parts that were really distinct, why couldn't one part be annihilated while the rest remained inter-related as before (thus creating a vacuum)? Why must they all be so fitted together that there is no vacuum? If two things are really distinct from one another rather than being different modes or aspects of a single substance, one of them can stay where it is whatever the other does. But there *isn't* any vacuum in Nature (a subject I discuss elsewhere, namely in my *Descartes's Principles*, part 2, propositions 2 and 3); all the parts of Nature *do* have to hang together so that there is no vacuum; so it follows that those parts are not really distinct from one another, i.e. that they are not distinct *things*, which is to say that corporeal substance, insofar as it is a substance, cannot be divided. [Spinoza

means that it isn't subject to divisions that go all the way down, so to speak—divisions that really split it up into separate things. He does allow that corporeal substance—i.e. the entire material world—can be divided into (for example) wet bits and dry bits, soft bits and hard bits; but none of these bits is an independent and self-sufficient *thing*. Its existence consists merely in the fact that *the extended world*—which is God considered under the attribute of extension—has a certain property at a certain location.]

V. Why are we by nature so inclined to divide quantity? The answer involves the fact that we have two ways of thinking about quantity: we can think of it •abstractly or superficially, which is how we depict it to ourselves in our imagination; and we can also think of it •*as substance*, which is done by the intellect alone without help from the imagination. If we attend to quantity as it is in the imagination—which we often do, finding it easy—it will be found to be finite, divisible, and composed of parts; but if we attend to it as it is in the intellect, and conceive it insofar as it is a substance—which we don't do often, finding it hard—then (as I have already sufficiently demonstrated) it will be found to be infinite, unique, and indivisible.

This will be clear enough to anyone who knows how to distinguish the intellect from the imagination—particularly if he bears in mind that matter is everywhere the same, and that parts are distinguished in it only through our conceiving it to have different qualities, so that its parts are distinguished only modally but not really. [That is: its parts have different qualities or modes, but are not genuinely and deeply distinct *things*. 'Really' (Latin *realiter*) comes from the Latin *res*, meaning 'thing'.]

For example, we conceive that water is divided and its parts separated from one another—considered as *water*, but not considered as corporeal *substance*, for considered as substance it is neither separated nor divided. Again, water

considered as water can come into existence and go out of existence, but considered as substance it can do neither. When water considered as water goes out of existence, what happens at the level of *substance* is, roughly speaking, that an area in the one extended substance changes from being wet to being dry.

VI. I think this also answers the second argument—the one in III above—because that is based on the supposition that matter, insofar as it is *substance*, is divisible and made up of parts. Even if this reply were not sufficient, the argument would not succeed, because there is no reason why divisibility should be unworthy of the divine nature. For (by 14) apart from God there can be no substance by which the divine nature would be acted on, and so God's being made up of parts would not bring with it a vulnerability to a dismantling attack from the outside, so to speak. All things, I repeat, are in God, and whatever happens does so through the laws of God's infinite nature and follows (as I'll show) from the necessity of God's essence. So it can't be said in any way that God is acted on by something else, or that extension is unworthy of the divine nature—even if it is supposed to be divisible—provided that God is granted to be eternal and infinite.

[In 16 and its appendages, 'unlimited' translates a word that often means 'infinite'.]

16: From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways i.e. everything that can fall under an unlimited intellect.

This proposition must be plain to anyone who attends to the fact that the intellect infers from a thing's definition a number of properties that really do follow necessarily from it (i.e. from the very essence of the thing); and that •the more reality the definition of

the thing expresses, i.e. •the more reality the essence of the defined thing involves, •the more properties the intellect infers. But the divine nature has absolutely infinite attributes (by D6), each of which also expresses an essence that is infinite in its own kind, and so from its necessity there must follow infinitely many things in infinite ways (i.e. everything that can fall under an unlimited intellect).

First corollary to 16: God is the efficient cause of all things that can fall under an unlimited intellect. [An 'efficient cause' is just what we today call a *cause*. It used to be contrasted to 'final cause': to assign an event a final cause was to explain it in terms of its purpose, what it occurred *for*. See pages 18–19 below.]

Second corollary to 16: God is a cause through himself/itself and not an accidental cause.

Third corollary to 16: God is the absolutely first cause.

17: God acts from the laws of the divine nature alone, and is not compelled by anything.

I have just shown (16) that from •the necessity of the divine nature alone, or (what is the same thing) from •the laws of God's nature alone, absolutely infinite things follow; and in 15 I have demonstrated that nothing can be or be conceived without God—that all things are in God. So there can't *be* anything outside God by which God could be caused or compelled to act. Therefore, God acts from the laws of the divine nature alone, and is not compelled by anything.

First corollary to 17: There is no cause, either extrinsically or intrinsically, which prompts God to action, except the perfection of the divine nature.

Second corollary to 17: God alone is a free cause.

God alone exists only from the necessity of the divine nature (by 11 and first corollary to 14), and acts from

the necessity of the divine nature (by 17). Therefore (by D7) God alone is a free cause.

Note on 17: I. Some people think, regarding the things that I have said follow from God's nature (i.e. are in God's power), that God could bring it about that they *don't* happen, are *not* produced by God; from which they infer that God is a free cause. But this is tantamount to saying that God can bring it about that the nature of a triangle *doesn't* require that its three angles are equal to two right angles, or that from a given cause the effect would *not* follow—which is absurd.

Further, I shall show later, without help from 17, that God's nature doesn't involve either intellect or will. I know of course that many think they can demonstrate that a supreme intellect and a free will pertain to God's nature; for, they say, they know nothing they can ascribe to God more perfect than what is the highest perfection *in us*.

Moreover, while thinking of God as actually •understanding things in the highest degree, they don't believe that God can bring it about that all those understood things •exist. For they think that would destroy God's power. If God had created all the things in the divine intellect (they say), then God *couldn't have created anything more*, which they believe to be incompatible with God's omnipotence. So these thinkers prefer to maintain that God has no leanings in any direction, not creating anything except what God has decreed to create by some fundamental free choice.

But I think I have shown clearly enough (see 16) that from God's supreme power or infinite nature infinitely many things in infinitely many ways—that is, *all* •possible• things—*have* necessarily flowed or *do* always follow, with the same necessity and in the same way as from the nature of a triangle it follows from eternity that its three angles equal two right angles. So God's omnipotence has been actual from eternity and will remain actual to eternity. I think that this maintains

God's omnipotence better than does the view that there are things God *could* do but *chooses not to*.

Indeed—to be frank about it—my opponents seem to *deny* God's omnipotence. For they have to admit that God understands infinitely many creatable things which nevertheless God will never be able to create. For creating everything that God understands to be creatable would (according to them) exhaust God's omnipotence and render God imperfect. To maintain that God is perfect, therefore, they are driven to maintaining that God *cannot* bring about everything that lies within the scope of the divine power. I don't see how anything more absurd than this, or more contrary to God's omnipotence, could be dreamed up!

II. I shall add a point about the intellect and will that are commonly attributed to God. If 'will' and 'intellect' do pertain to the eternal essence of God, we must understand by each of these something different from what men commonly understand by them. For the 'intellect' and 'will' that would constitute God's essence would have to differ entirely from *our* intellect and will, not agreeing with them in anything but the name. They wouldn't match one another any more than Sirius the 'dog-star' matches the dog that is a barking animal. I shall demonstrate this.

We have intellect, and *what* we understand through it is either •earlier than the act of understanding (as most people think) or •simultaneous with it; but if the divine nature includes intellect, it can't be like ours in this respect, because God is •prior in causality to all things (by the first corollary to **16**). •So far from its being the case that God's intellect represents something *because* the thing exists, the fundamental nature of things is what it is *because* God's intellect represents it in that way. So God's intellect, conceived as constituting the divine essence, is really the cause of the essence and of the existence of things. Some

writers seem to have realized this—the ones who have said that God's •intellect, •will and •power are one and the same.

Therefore, since God's intellect is the only cause of things—of their essence as well as of their existence—God *must* differ from other things both in essence and in existence. •I shall explain this•. Something that is caused differs from its cause precisely in what it gets from the cause. For example, a man may be the cause of the existence of another man, but not of his essence—that is, not of the human nature that he has, not of the-possibility-of-being-human—for the latter is an eternal truth. So they can agree entirely in their essence, •having the very same human nature•. But they must differ in their existences: if one of the men goes out of existence, that need not destroy the other's existence. But if the essence of one could be destroyed and become false—that is, if it could become the case that there was no such thing as human nature, no possibility-of-being-human—then the essence of the other would also be destroyed.

So if something causes both the essence and the existence of some effect, it must differ in essence and existence from the effect. But God's intellect is the cause both of the essence and of the existence of our intellect. Therefore God's intellect, conceived as constituting the divine essence, differs from our intellect both in essence and in existence and can't agree with it in anything but in name—which is what I said. It is easy to see that there is a similar proof regarding God's will and our will.

18: God is the in-dwelling and not the going-across cause of all things.

In-dwelling because: everything that exists is in God and must be conceived through God (by **15**), and so (by the first corollary to **16**) God is the cause of all

things that are *in God*. Not going-across because: by **14** there can't *be* anything outside God ·for God to act on·. So God is the in-dwelling and not the going-across cause of all things.

[The expressions 'in-dwelling-' and 'going-across' render technical terms of Spinoza's that are usually translated by 'immanent' and 'transeunt' respectively. The distinction itself is plain: I am the in-dwelling cause of my hand's moving when I move it, and the going-across cause of the fall of the tumbler that I knock off the table.]

19: God is eternal, and all God's attributes are eternal.

God (by D6) is a substance which (by **11**) necessarily exists, that is (by **7**) to whose nature it pertains to exist. . . and therefore (by D8) God is eternal.

Next point: God's •attributes are to be understood (by D4) as •what expresses an essence of the Divine substance. So the attributes partake of the nature of substance, and I have already shown (**7**) that eternity pertains to the nature of substance. Therefore each of the attributes must involve eternity, and so they are all eternal.

Note on 19: This proposition is also utterly clear from my way of demonstrating God's existence (**11**), for that demonstration established that God's existence is an eternal truth just as God's essence is. I have also demonstrated God's eternity in another way in my *Descartes's Principles*, Part I, proposition 19, and there is no need to repeat that here.

20: God's existence and God's essence are one and the same.

God is eternal and so are all of God's attributes ((by **19**), that is (by D8) each of God's attributes expresses existence. Therefore, the attributes of God that (by D4) explain God's eternal essence at the same time

explain God's eternal existence, which is to say that what constitutes God's essence also constitutes God's existence. So God's existence and God's essence are one and the same.

First corollary to 20: God's existence, like God's essence, is an eternal truth.

Second corollary to 20: God is unchangeable, or all of God's attributes are unchangeable.

If they changed as to their existence, they would also (by **20**) change as to their essence, . . . which is absurd.

21: All the things that follow from the absolute nature of any of God's attributes have always had to exist and be infinite, and are through the same attribute eternal and infinite.

[The lengthy and *extremely* difficult demonstration of this is constructed in the form 'Suppose this is false. . .' and then trying to deduce an absurdity from the supposition. For the first part of the proposition it takes an *example* of what the 'something that is finite and has a limited existence or duration' might be supposed to be, and makes the first part of the proposition stand or fall with that example. For the second part of the proposition, it again lets everything rest on an example, indeed *the same* example, of something that might be supposed not to be eternal and infinite. The demonstration also gives trouble by allowing heavy overlap between the first and second parts of the proposition.]

22: Anything that follows from some attribute of God when it is modified or enriched or added to by a quality which that same attribute causes to exist necessarily and to be infinite must itself also exist necessarily and be infinite.

The demonstration of this proposition proceeds in the same way as the demonstration of 21. [21 concerns the likes of: what follows from God's being *extended*. 22 concerns the likes of: what follows from God's involving *motion and rest*; this is not extension as such, extension considered 'absolutely', but it necessarily follows from extension.]

23: Every mode that exists necessarily and is infinite must have followed either from the absolute nature of some attribute of God—that is, some attribute taken all by itself—or from some attribute that is modified, i.e. enriched or added to, by a quality that exists necessarily and is infinite.

A mode is in something other than itself, through which it must be conceived (by D5), that is (by 15) it is in God alone and can be conceived only through God. So if a mode is thought of as existing necessarily and being infinite, it must be inferred from or perceived through some attribute of God that is conceived to express infinity and necessity of existence. It may follow from the absolute nature of the attribute—the unadorned attribute, so to speak—or from the attribute modified or enriched or added to by some mediating quality which itself follows from the attribute's absolute nature and is therefore (by 22) necessarily existent and infinite.

24: The essence of things produced by God does not involve existence.

This is evident from D1. For if something's nature involves existence, is *its own* cause, existing only from the necessity of *its own* nature, and so cannot be caused by God.

Corollary to 24: God is the cause not only of things' beginning to exist, but also of their continuing to exist.

If we attend to the essence of any caused thing—not considering whether the thing actually exists or not—we shall find that this essence involves neither existence nor duration. So such an essence can't be the cause either of the thing's coming into existence or of its staying in existence; and the only cause of both is God (by the first corollary to 14).

25: God is the efficient cause not only of the existence of things but also of their essence.

Suppose this is wrong. Then God is not the cause of the essence of things, and so (by A4) the essence of things can be conceived without God. But (by 15) this is absurd. Therefore God is also the cause of the essence of things.

Note on 25: This proposition follows more clearly from 16, which implies that from the given divine nature both the essence of things and their existence must necessarily be inferred; and, in brief, God must be called the cause of all things in the same sense in which God is said to be *self-caused*. This will be established still more clearly from the following corollary.

Corollary to 25: Particular things are nothing but states of God's attributes, or modes by which [= 'ways in which'] God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.

The demonstration is evident from 15 and D5.

26: A thing that has been caused to produce an effect has necessarily been caused in this way by God; and one that has not been caused by God cannot cause itself to produce an effect.

[The demonstration of this is omitted.]

27: A thing that has been caused by God to produce an effect cannot make itself be uncaused.

This proposition is evident from A3.

28: A particular thing (that is, a thing that is finite and has a limited existence) can't exist or be caused to produce an effect unless it is caused to exist and produce an effect by another cause that is also finite and has a limited existence; and the latter can't exist or be caused to produce an effect unless it is caused to exist and produce an effect by yet another. . . and so on, to infinity.

[Somewhat simplified version of the demonstration:] Anything that follows necessarily from something infinite and eternal must itself be infinite and eternal; so something that is finite and has a limited existence—that is, a finite item that comes into existence, lasts for a while, and then goes out of existence—can't be an upshot or effect of something infinite and eternal. So its source must be of the other sort, that is, must be finite and non-eternal. And that line of thought re-applies to the latter item, and then to *its* source, and so on ad infinitum. Each finite and temporally limited item is to be thought of not as •something entirely other than God, but rather as •God-considered-as-having-such-and-such-attributes-and-modes.

Note on 28: Certain things had to be produced by God immediately, namely those that follow necessarily from God's nature alone, and others. . . had to be produced through the

mediation of these first things. From this it follows:

I. That God is *absolutely* the proximate cause of the things produced immediately by God, and not a proximate cause *in God's own kind*, as they say. For God's effects can neither be nor be conceived without their cause (by **15** and **24C**).

II. That God cannot properly be called the 'remote' cause of singular things (except perhaps to distinguish them from things that God has produced immediately, i.e. that follow from God's absolute nature). A 'remote' cause is one that isn't conjoined in *any* way with its effect; but every existing thing is in God, and depends on God in such a way that it can't exist or be conceived without God.

29: In Nature there is nothing contingent; all things have been caused by the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.

Whatever exists is in God (by **15**); and (by **11**) God exists necessarily, not contingently. Next, the modes of the divine nature—the *ways* in which God exists—have also followed from that nature necessarily (by **16**)—either •following from the divine nature just in itself (by **21**) or •following from it considered as caused to act in a certain way (by **28**). Further, God is the cause not only of the existence of these modes (by corollary to **24**) but also of their having such-and-such causal powers. For if they hadn't been caused by God, then (by **26**) they could not possibly have caused themselves. And conversely (by **27**) if they have been caused by God, it is impossible that they should render themselves uncaused. So all things have been caused from the necessity of the divine nature not only to exist but to exist in a certain way, and to produce effects in a certain way; and all of this is necessary, not contingent. There is nothing contingent.

[At this point Spinoza inserts a note explaining in terms of his philosophy a pair of mediaeval technical terms, the Latin of which can be translated as ‘naturing Nature’ (Nature as a cause) and ‘natured Nature’ (Nature as an effect) respectively. The distinction has attracted much attention from scholars, but in itself it is fairly trivial, and it has no structural role in the *Ethics*. Spinoza uses the terms only in **31**, to which he makes no further reference anywhere in the work. The note and that proposition are omitted from the present version, and along with them **30**, which has almost no role except in **31**.]

32: The will cannot be called a free cause, but only a necessary one.

The will, like the intellect, is only a certain mode or way of thinking. And so (by **28**) each volition—each act of the will—can exist and be fit to produce an effect only if it is caused by another cause, and this cause again by another, and so on, to infinity. So the will requires a cause by which it is caused to exist and produce an effect; and so (by D7) it cannot be called a ‘free’ cause but only a necessary or compelled one.

That was based on the will’s being a finite entity to which **28** applies. Suppose it is infinite, making **28** irrelevant to it. Then it falls under **23**, which means that it has to be caused to exist and produce an effect by God—this time by God-as-having-the-infinite-and-eternal-essence-of-thought rather than God-as-having-this-or-that-temporary-and-local-quality. So on this supposition also the will is not a free cause but a compelled one.

Corollary to 32: God doesn’t produce any effect through freedom of the will.

Second corollary to 32: *Will and intellect* are related to God’s nature as *motion* and *rest* are, and as are absolutely all natural things, which (by **29**) must be caused by God to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.

The will, like everything else, requires a cause by which it is caused to exist and produce an effect in a certain way. And although from a given will or intellect infinitely many things may follow, God still can’t be said on that account to act from freedom of the will, any more than God can be said to act from ‘freedom of motion and rest’ on account of the things that follow from motion and rest! So will doesn’t pertain to God’s nature any more than do other natural things; it is related to God in the same way as motion and rest. . . . In short: acts of the will, such as human choices and decisions, are natural events with natural causes, just as are (for example) collisions of billiard balls. And to attribute will to God, saying that because the cause of each volition is God (= Nature) therefore God has choices and makes decisions, is as absurd as to suppose that God is rattling around on the billiard table.

33: Things could not have been produced by God in any way or in any order other than that in which they have been produced.

All things have necessarily followed from God’s given nature (by **16**), and have been caused from the necessity of God’s nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way (by **29**). To think of them as possibly being different in some way is, therefore, to think of God as possibly being different; that is to think that there is some other nature that God could have—some other *divine* nature—and if such a nature is possible then

it is actually instantiated, which means that there are two Gods. But it is absurd to suppose that there could have been two Gods. So things could not have been produced in any other way or in any other order than they have been produced.

Note on 33: Since by these propositions I have made it as clear as day that there is absolutely nothing in things on the basis of which they can be called contingent, I wish now to explain briefly what we *should* understand by ‘contingent’—but first, what we should understand by ‘necessary’ and ‘impossible’. A thing is called ‘necessary’ either •by reason of its essence or •by reason of its cause. For a thing’s existence follows necessarily either from its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause. And a thing is also called ‘impossible’ for these same reasons—namely, either because its essence or definition involves a contradiction, or because no external cause has been caused to produce such a thing •in which case the external causes that *do* exist will have been enough to prevent the thing from existing•.

A thing is called ‘contingent’ only because of a lack of our knowledge. If we don’t know that the thing’s essence involves a contradiction, or if we know quite well that its essence *doesn’t* involve a contradiction, but we can’t say anything for sure about its existence because the order of causes is hidden from us, it can’t seem to us either necessary or impossible. So we call it ‘contingent’ or ‘•merely• possible’.

Second note on 33: From this it clearly follows that things have been produced by God with the highest perfection, since they have followed necessarily from a most perfect nature. God’s producing everything there is doesn’t mean that God is in any way imperfect. The suggestion that God *could have* acted differently is, as I have shown, absurd. . . .

I’m sure that many people will reject my view as absurd, without even being willing to examine it. Of course they

will! because they have been accustomed to credit God with having an *absolute will*—that is, with just non-causally *deciding* what to do—which attributes to God a ‘freedom’ quite different from what I have taught (D7). But I am also sure that if they would consent to reflect on the matter, and pay proper attention to my chain of our demonstrations, they would end up utterly rejecting the ‘freedom’ they now attribute to God, not only as futile but as a great obstacle to science. I needn’t repeat here what I said in the note on 17.

Still, to please them •or at least meet them half-way•, I shall argue on the basis that God’s essence *does* involve *will*, and shall still prove that it follows from God’s perfection that things could not have been created by God in any other way or any other order. It will be easy to show this if we consider •two things•. First, as my opponents concede, it depends on God’s decree and will alone that each thing is what it is; for otherwise God wouldn’t be the cause of all things. Secondly, all God’s decrees have been established by God *from eternity*; for otherwise God would be convicted of imperfection and inconstancy. But since in eternity there is neither *when*, nor *before*, nor *after*, it follows purely from God’s perfection that God could never have decreed anything different. It is a mistake to think of God as having existed for a while without making any decrees and *then* making some.

The opponents will say that in supposing God to have made another nature of things, or supposing that from eternity God had decreed something else concerning Nature and its order, one is not implicitly supposing any imperfection in God.

Still, if they say this, they will •have to• concede also that God’s decrees *can* be changed by their maker. Their supposition that God *could have* decreed Nature and its order to be different from how they actually are involves supposing that God *could have* had a different intellect

and will from those that God actually has; and they—the opponents—hold that *this* could have been the case without any change of God's essence or of God's perfection. But if that is right, why can't God *now* change God's decrees concerning created things while remaining just as perfect? It is absurd to suppose that God can do this—e.g. that from now on the laws of physics will be slightly different every second Tuesday—but my opponents have left themselves with no basis for ruling this out as the absurdity that it really is. . . .

Therefore, since things could not have been produced by God in any other way or any other order, and since the truth of this follows from God's supreme perfection, we have to accept that God willed to create all the things that are in God's intellect, with the same perfection with which God understands them.

The opponents will say that there is no perfection or imperfection in things: what is to count in things as making them perfect or imperfect, and thus called 'good' or 'bad', depends only on God's will. So God could have brought it about, simply by willing it, that what is now perfection would have been the greatest imperfection, and conversely that what is now an imperfection in things would have been the most perfect. Thus the opponents. But God necessarily understands what God wills; so what the opponents say here is tantamount to saying outright that God could bring it about through an act of will that God understands things in a different way from how God does understand them. And this, as I have just shown, is a great absurdity. . . .

I confess that •this opinion that subjects all things to a certain unguided will of God and makes everything depend on God's whim is nearer the truth than •the view of those who maintain that God does all things for the sake of the good. For the latter seem to suppose something outside God,

something not depending on God, to which God in acting attends as a model and at which God aims as at a goal. This is simply to subject God to fate [Latin *fatum*, here = 'something independently fixed and given']. Nothing more absurd can be maintained about God—shown by me to be the first and only free cause of the essence of all things and of their existence. I shan't waste any more time refuting this absurdity.

34: God's power is God's essence itself.

It follows purely from the necessity of God's essence that God is the cause of God (by **11**) and (by **16** and its corollary) the cause of all things. So God's power, by which God and all things exist and act, is God's essence itself.

35: Whatever we conceive to be in God's power, necessarily exists.

Whatever is in God's power must (by **34**) be so related to God's essence that it necessarily follows from it, and therefore necessarily exists.

36: Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow.

Whatever exists expresses the nature, or essence of God in a certain and determinate way (by the corollary to **25**), that is, whatever exists expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God, which is the cause of all things. So (by **16**) from everything that exists some effect must follow.

Appendix

With these demonstrations I have explained God's nature and properties:

- God exists necessarily;
- God is unique;
- God exists and acts solely from the necessity of the divine nature;
- God is the free cause of all things (and I have shown how);
- all things are in God and depend on God in such a way that without God they can't exist or be conceived;
- all things have been pre-caused by God, not from freedom of the will or absolute whim or good pleasure, but from God's absolute nature or infinite power.

Further, I have taken care, whenever the occasion arose, to remove prejudices that could prevent my demonstrations from being grasped. But because many prejudices remain that could—that *can*—be a great obstacle to men's understanding my way of explaining how things hang together, I have thought it worthwhile to consider those prejudices here, subjecting them to the scrutiny of reason. All the prejudices I here undertake to expose depend on the common supposition that *all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end*. Indeed, people maintain as a certainty that *God directs all things to some definite end*, this being implicit in their view that God has made all things for man and has made man to worship God.

So I shall begin by considering this one prejudice, asking first •why most people are satisfied that it is true and so inclined by nature to embrace it. Then I shall show •its falsity, and finally show •how from this prejudices have arisen concerning good and evil, merit and wrong-doing, praise and blame, order and confusion, beauty and ugliness,

and other things of this kind. [Spinoza uses the word *malum* equivalently to our adjective 'bad' and the noun-phrases 'thing that is bad'. We don't have one word for both roles, except 'evil'—'That was an evil act'—'He did a great evil'—but in our senses of it 'evil' is really too strong in many of Spinoza's contexts. In this text, as a compromise, 'evil' is used for the noun and 'bad' for the adjective.]

I. Of course this is not the place to derive my explanations from the nature of the human mind. It will suffice here to build on two things that everyone must admit to be true: that •all men are born ignorant of the causes of things, and that •all men want to seek their own advantage and are conscious of wanting this.

From these premises it follows that men think themselves free, because they are conscious of their choices and their desires, are ignorant of the causes that incline them to want and to choose, and thus never give the faintest thought—even in their dreams!—to those causes. It follows also that men act always on account of a goal, specifically on account of their advantage, which they seek. Putting these two together, men are in a frame of mind from which •efficient causes—that is, *real* causes—are almost totally absent, and which is saturated by thought about •final causes, goals or ends or purposes. So the only explanations they look for are ones in terms of final causes—in asking 'Why did that happen?' they are asking 'For what purpose did that happen?'—and when they have heard *that* they are satisfied, having nothing more to ask. But if they can't get such explanations from others they have to turn to themselves, and to reflect on the ends by which *they* are usually led to do such things; so they necessarily judge the temperament of other men from their own temperament.

Furthermore, they find—both in themselves and outside themselves—many means that are very helpful in seeking their own advantage: eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing,

plants and animals for food, the sun for light, the sea for supporting fish, and similarly with almost everything else whose natural causes—that is, whose *efficient* causes—they are not curious about. This leads them to consider all natural things as means to their own advantage. And knowing that they had *found* these means, not *provided* them for themselves, they had reason to think there was someone else who had prepared these means for human use. . . . So they inferred that one or more rulers of Nature, endowed with human freedom, had taken care of all things for them, and made all things for their (·human·) use.

And since they had never heard anything about the character of these rulers, they had to judge it from their own characters; so they maintained that the Gods direct everything for the use of men in order to bind men to them and be held by men in the highest honour! So it has come about that each man has thought up—on the basis of his own character—his own way of worshipping God, so that God might love him above all the rest, and direct the whole of Nature according to the needs of his blind desire and insatiable greed. Thus this *prejudice* changed into *superstition*, and struck deep roots in men's minds. This is why everyone tried so hard to understand and explain the final causes—the purposes—of all things.

But while trying to show that •Nature does nothing in vain (meaning: nothing that isn't useful to men), they seem to have shown only that •Nature and the Gods are as mad as men are! Look at how they ended up! Along with many conveniences in Nature they couldn't avoid finding many inconveniences—storms, earthquakes, diseases, etc. They hold that these happen because the Gods—whom they judge on the basis of themselves—are *angry* with men for wronging them or making mistakes in their worship. And though their daily experience contradicted this, and though countless

examples showed that conveniences and inconveniences happen indiscriminately to the pious and the impious alike, that didn't lead them to give up their longstanding prejudice. It was easier for them to •put ·the Gods' reasons for· this among the other unknown things whose uses they were ignorant of, thus remaining in the state of ignorance in which they had been born, than to •destroy that whole construction and think up a new one.

So they maintained it as certain that the Gods' judgments far surpass man's grasp. This alone would have caused the truth to be hidden from the human race for ever, if mathematics hadn't shown them another standard of truth. ·It could do this because it isn't involved in the final-causes muddle, because· it is concerned not with •ends but only with •the essential properties of figures. In addition to mathematics there have also been a few other things (I needn't list them here) which have enabled a few men to notice these common prejudices and be led to the true knowledge of things.

II. That is enough on what I promised in the first place, ·namely, to explain why men are so inclined to believe that all things act for an end·. I don't need many words to show that Nature has no end set before it, and that all final causes are nothing but human fictions. I think I have *already* sufficiently established it, both by my explanation of the origins of this prejudice and also by **16**, the corollaries to **32**, and all the propositions by which I have shown that everything happens by a certain eternal necessity of Nature and with the greatest perfection.

Still, I shall add this: this doctrine about *ends* turns Nature completely upside down. •For what is really a cause it considers as an effect, and conversely what is an effect it considers as a cause. •What by Nature comes first it makes follow. And finally, •what is supreme and most perfect it makes imperfect.

The first two points are self-evident. [Spinoza then offers an obscure explanation of the third; omitted.]

Again, this doctrine takes away God's perfection. For if God acts for the sake of an end, it must be that God •wants something and therefore •lacks something. And though the theologians and metaphysicians distinguish different kinds of ends, •that doesn't help them with the present difficulty•. They say that God did everything for God's own sake and not for the sake of the things God was going to create. For before the creation •that they believe in• they can't find anything for the sake of which God could act—except God! And so they have to admit that God willed to make things happen as means to things that God wanted *and lacked*. This is self-evident.

I should also mention that the followers of this doctrine •about ends•, wanting to show off their cleverness in saying what things are *for*, have called to their aid a new form of argument: instead of reducing things to the impossible, they reduce them to ignorance! [This is a joke. One traditional kind of argument takes the form: 'If P were false, Q would be the case; Q is absurd or impossible; so P is true.' Spinoza is crediting his opponents with an argument of the form: 'If P were false, we would be wholly ignorant of the answers to a large range of questions; so P is true', perhaps with the added premise 'It would be intolerable to admit that much ignorance'.] Their resorting to *this* shows that no other way of defending their doctrine was open to them.

For example, if a slate falls from a roof onto someone's head and kills him, they will argue that the slate fell *in order to kill* the man. Here is how their argument goes:

If it *didn't* fall for that purpose because God wanted the man to be killed, how could so many circumstances have come together by chance? You may answer that it happened because the wind was blowing hard and the man was walking that way. But why

was the wind blowing hard just then? Why was the man walking by just then? If you answer that the wind arose then because on the preceding day, while the weather was still calm, the sea began to toss, and that the man had been invited somewhere by a friend, then we will ask: Why was the sea tossing? Why was the man invited at just that time?

And on it goes! They won't stop asking for the causes of causes until you take refuge in *the will of God*, which is the haven of •unacknowledged• ignorance.

Similarly, when they see the structure of the human body, these people are struck by a foolish wonder; and because they don't know the causes of this elaborate structure they conclude that it is constructed not by mechanical processes but by divine or supernatural skill, and constituted as it is *so that* the parts won't injure another.

So it comes about that someone who seeks the true causes of 'miracles' and is eager (like an educated man) to •understand natural things, not (like a fool) to •wonder at them, is denounced as an impious heretic by those whom the people honour as interpreters of Nature and of the Gods. For the denouncers know that if ignorance is taken away •and replaced by real knowledge of mechanical processes•, then foolish wonder is also taken away, depriving them of their only means for arguing and defending their authority.

Enough of this; I now pass on to what I decided to treat here in the third place.

III. After men convinced themselves that whatever happens does so on their account, they had to judge as *most important* in each thing whatever is *most useful* to them, and to rate as *most excellent* all the things by which they were *most pleased*. So they had to develop the notions:

good, bad, order, confusion, warm, cold, beauty, ugliness,

in terms of which they ‘explained’ natural things. I shall briefly discuss these here. (Because men think themselves *free*, they have also formed the notion of *praise and blame* and *sin and merit*. I’ll explain these after I have treated human nature.)

Whatever contributes to health and to the worship of God they have called ‘good’, and what is contrary to these they call ‘bad’.

Those who don’t understand the real nature of things, and have only a pictorial grasp of them, mistake their own imaginings for intellectual thought; they really have nothing to say about things, but in their ignorance of things and of their own natures they firmly believe that there is *an order* in things. When a number of items are set out in such a way that when they’re presented to us through the senses we can easily imagine them—can easily depict them to ourselves—and so can easily remember them, we say that they are ‘orderly’; but if the opposite is true we say that they are ‘disorderly’ or ‘confused’.

And since the things we can easily imagine are especially pleasing to us, men prefer ‘order’ to ‘confusion’, as if order were something in Nature more than a relation to our imagination! They also say that God has created all things to be orderly (thus unknowingly attributing imagination to God, unless they mean that God has disposed things so that *men* can easily imagine them). Perhaps they won’t be deterred—though they should be—by the fact that we find infinitely many things that far surpass our imagination, and many that confuse it on account of its weakness. But enough of this.

The other notions are also nothing but various •states of the imagination; yet ignorant people consider them to be chief •attributes of things. This is because, as I have already said, they believe that all things were made for

their sake, and call the nature of a thing ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘sound’ or ‘rotten’ and ‘corrupt’, according to how it affects *them*. For example, if the motion the nerves receive from objects presented through the eyes is conducive to health, the objects that cause it are called ‘beautiful’; those that cause a contrary motion are called ‘ugly’. Those that move the sensory apparatus through the nose they call ‘pleasant-smelling’ or ‘stinking’; through the tongue, ‘sweet’ or ‘bitter’, ‘tasty’ or ‘tasteless’; through touch, ‘hard’ or ‘soft’, ‘rough’ or ‘smooth’, etc.; and finally those that affect us through the ears are said to produce ‘noise’, ‘sound’ or ‘harmony’. Some men have been mad enough to believe that God is pleased by harmony! . . .

All these things show well enough that each person has judged things according to the disposition of his own brain; or rather, has accepted •states of the imagination as •things. So it is no wonder (I note in passing) that we find so many controversies to have arisen among men, and that they have finally given rise to scepticism. For although human bodies are alike in many ways, they still differ in very many. And for that reason what seems good to one seems bad to another; what seems ordered to one seems confused to another; what seems pleasing to one seems displeasing to another, and so on.

I pass over the other notions here, both because this is not the place to treat them at length and because everyone has experienced this variability sufficiently for himself. That is why we have such sayings as ‘So many heads, so many attitudes’, ‘Everyone is well pleased with his own opinion’, and ‘Brains differ as much as palates do’. These proverbs show well enough that men judge things according to the disposition of their brain, and •imagine things rather than •understanding them. For if men had *understood* natural things they would at least have been *convinced* of the truth

about them, even if they weren't all *attracted* by it. The example of mathematics shows this.

So we see that all the notions by which ordinary people are accustomed to explain Nature are only states of the imagination, and don't indicate the nature of anything except the imagination. . . .

Many people are accustomed to arguing in this way:

If all things have followed from the necessity of God's most perfect nature, why are there so many imperfections in Nature? why are things so rotten that they stink? so ugly that they make us sick? why is there confusion, evil, and wrong-doing?

I repeat that those who argue like this are easily answered. For the *perfection* of things is to be judged solely from

their nature and power; things are not more or less perfect because they please or offend men's senses, or because they are useful or harmful to human nature.

But to those who ask 'Why didn't God create all men so that they would be governed by the command of reason?' I answer only: 'Because God had the material to create *all* things, from the highest degree of perfection to the lowest'; or, to put it more accurately, 'Because the laws of God's nature have been so ample that they sufficed for producing all things that can be conceived by an unlimited intellect' (as I demonstrated in **16**)—that is, producing everything that is conceivable or possible. . . .