Spinoza on Finite Causes

Spinoza has only scattered remarks about causal interactions between particulars and nowhere develops a systematic account. Worse still is that in disparate remarks he appears to cast himself as an endorser of competing and seemingly inconsistent positions. Perhaps best known is his claim that any change whatsoever is simply the way in which God's nature unfolds itself in the world – that God is the efficient cause of all things (E1p16cor1).\textsuperscript{1} He elsewhere defers to fixed and unchanging laws as the proper explanation for finite causes (E3pref) despite arguing, again elsewhere, that only finite particulars can function as the causal source of change amidst particulars (E1p28dem). Without an instructive reconciliation of these texts Spinoza's account of finite causation appears to be, at best, an undeveloped confused mess.

The dominant attempt at a reconciliation, what I'll refer to as the 'multiple constituents reading' (MCR), holds that God, laws of nature, and finite particulars are concurrent constituents in a finite cause.\textsuperscript{2} Though promising as a coherent account of finite causes, this view fails to appreciate Spinoza's outright rejection of anything but finite particulars from participating in finite causes. Once we recognize that God and the fixed and unchanging laws are prohibited from participating in finite causes we readily see that the challenge is not to forge an interpretation that includes each of the disparate elements, but rather to explain how finite causes are confined to finite particulars while also being influenced by God and its laws. The dominant reading has misunderstood the problem, and in doing so fails to appreciate the radical and unique nature of Spinoza's understanding of finite causes.

I argue that finite particulars are the only constituents of finite causes and that they do so as finite instances of God and its laws. God's influence sets the model. Because finite particulars are each only God expressed in finite and determinate way, God influences finite causes only because the efficacious particulars in a finite cause are finite instances of God. In the central argument of
this paper I show that Spinoza extends this model to the relation between eternal essences and laws and their instances in finite particulars. I begin by arguing that the durational essences of finite particulars are finite instances of the eternal essences that follow from God’s nature; that God and its eternal essences take on, in addition to their infinity and eternality, a finite mode of existence when instantiated in finite particulars. Because eternal laws follow from God’s nature in the same way that eternal essences do, the relation between eternal laws and finite causes should be the same as the relation between eternal essences and their instances in finite particulars. Just as finite particulars are finite instances of God’s eternal essences, so too are finite causes finite instances of God’s eternal laws. Thus does Spinoza restrict finite causes to finite particulars while capturing the influence of God and its laws.

This is a substantial alternative to the MCR. Instead of simply including God, its laws and finite particulars in finite causes we can now better appreciate the novelty of Spinoza’s view by grounding it in his unique conception of the relation between God’s nature (including its infinite modes) and finite particulars. Just as the essences of particulars are their eternal essence expressed in finite form, so too are finite causes finite instances of eternal laws. I close by identifying an important respect in which Spinoza’s thinking on finite causes was far from complete.

I. The Multiple Constituents Reading

Reading through the early parts of the Ethics one initially finds that God, an infinite and eternal necessary being, is the efficient cause of all things (E1p16cor1).3 This is reiterated in E1p18 where Spinoza writes that “God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things,” meaning that God exists or dwells within all causes rather than existing apart from them. Again, in E1p26, we are told that “A thing which has been determined to produce an effect has necessarily been determined in this way by God; and one which has not been determined by God cannot determine
itself to produce an effect.” Any effect, in other words, is a determination of God. Collectively these passages show that any cause whatsoever is God unfolding itself in the world; that God is the cause of all things.

Spinoza elsewhere announces that nature's fixed and unchanging laws are the true determinants of finite causes. He conceives of the laws of nature as being “always and everywhere the same,” and that “according to which all things happen, and change from one from to another” (E3pref). It is widely acknowledged that these laws of nature are infinite modes, which are the immediate effects of God's nature (E1p23). The story from the preface, then, is that the fixed and unchanging laws that follow from God's nature are the true determinants of causal change amidst particulars.

In yet another permutation of his view Spinoza argues that finite particulars can neither exist nor affect one another unless they are made to do so by other finite particulars. “Every singular thing, or anything which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist not be determined to produce an effect unless it is determine to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence...” (E1p28). In short, only finite particulars can bring about changes in finite particulars. Further on, this time with respect only to bodies, Spinoza writes that “a body which moves or is at rest must be determined to motion or rest by another body, which has also been determined to motion or rest by another [...] and so on, to infinity” (E2p13addl3). These texts aim to restrict finite causes to relations only between finite particulars.

From these disparate texts we might understandably conclude that finite particulars come to be and act on account of God, laws of nature that follow from God, or other finite particulars. The challenge confronting any coherent interpretation of finite causation in Spinoza is to explain how he might have consistently meant all three.
The MCR understands each of these passages as identifying a different concurrent aspect of a finite cause and sets as its aim an account incorporating all three. Curley’s reconciliation, the most comprehensive MCR, is that God expresses itself through the laws of nature, and that these work in conjunction with the antecedent states of finite particulars to bring about some effect. Breaking from the scholastic tradition in which the formal and efficient causes were housed within the same entity, Spinoza instead endorses the Cartesian notion that laws exist apart from the things whose behavior they determine. Because laws exist apart from particulars and make only general claims we need in addition a set of specific condition upon which they act. This is what finite particulars contribute to finite causes - an antecedent state of specific conditions upon which the laws (as extensions of God) determine a consequent effect. Laws are instances of Spinoza's 'infinite modes' (to be explained shortly) whereas finite particulars are 'finite modes'. As the MCR understands it then, finite causes incorporate both general laws (extensions of God) and finite particulars, that is, Spinoza's infinite and finite modes. Their working together to bring about some effect makes Spinoza a kind of mechanized concurrentist about finite causes.

II. Only Finite Particulars Participate in Finite Causes

The MCR misreads the difficulty: it is not to incorporate the disparate elements into a finite cause but, rather, to explain the influence of God and its laws alongside Spinoza’s explicit restriction of finite causes to relations between finite particulars. In his mature Ethics he nowhere acknowledges that infinite modes are participants in finite causes and, more to the point, argues explicitly and on different occasions for the exclusion of anything but finite modes. If God and its laws are not constituents of finite causes then the MCR fails to appreciate the problem.

For starters, finite modes are sometimes the sole causal source of their behavior. Thus does Spinoza distinguish between our being active and being acted upon by stipulating that we are active
when our behavior follows from our nature alone, and are acted upon when our behavior is the result of something outside us: “I say that we act when something happens, in us or outside us, of which we are the adequate cause, i.e. (by def. 1), when something in us or outside us follows from our nature, which can be clearly and distinctly understood through it alone” (E3def2).12 We are active when our nature is the whole or complete cause of some event, that is, when an event follows from and so may be understood through it alone.13

Our natures, furthermore, are finite. Spinoza conceives the nature of a thing as that “without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing” (E2def2).14 The latter clause ties the existence of the nature of a thing to the existence of the thing itself, meaning that the nature comes to be and perishes alongside it. Since we are decidedly finite things so too are our natures. And since our active behaviors are caused entirely by our finite natures it follows that active behaviors have entirely finite causes.

Nor is this a rare exception. In E1p28 (reiterated in E2p9) Spinoza provides his fullest account of finite causation and does so by explicitly arguing against the inclusion of anything but finite modes. The proposition, recall, states that finite modes come to be and interact only by the causal influence of other finite modes. Let’s look carefully at its demonstration:

Whatever has been determined to exist and produce an effect has been so determined by God (p26 and p24cor). But what is finite and has a determinate existence could not have been produced by the absolute nature of an attribute of God; for whatever follows from the absolute nature of an attribute of God is eternal and infinite (by p21). It had, therefore, to follow either from God or from an attribute of God insofar as it is considered to be affected by some mode. For there is nothing except substance and its modes (by ax1, def3 and def5) and modes (by p25cor) are nothing but affections of God's attributes. But it also could not follow from God, or from an attribute of God insofar as it is affected by a modification which is eternal and infinite (by p22). It had, therefore, to follow from, or be determined to exist and produce an effect by God or an attribute of God insofar as it is modified by a modification which is finite and has a determinate existence... (E1p28dem)

The basic structure is fairly clear: Spinoza considers the three ways in which something can follow from God and concludes that finite modes, since they cannot follow in either of the first two ways,
must follow from the third - they can follow only from other finite modes. Two quick clarificatory notes about this demonstration. First, Spinoza uses 'God', 'the absolute nature of an attribute of God' and 'an attribute of God' interchangeably, so I will ignore the distinctions between them here. Second, I will explain why everything has to follow from God and what Spinoza means by this shortly, but for now am concerned only with whether finite causes include laws of nature, that is, infinite modes.

The demonstration for p28 proceeds through three different respects in which finite modes might follow from God, arguing ultimately that since finite modes can follow neither from God itself nor from its infinite modes, they must follow from the only remaining alternative – God's finite modes. Before we can consider these arguments in detail however we need first briefly to introduce Spinoza's doctrine of infinite and eternal modes ('infinite modes' for short).

In addition to the determinate and durational expressions of substance, what we typically call 'particulars' and Spinoza labels 'finite modes', are its infinite and eternal expressions, the infinite modes. Infinite modes are propria of substance, meaning that they follow necessarily from its nature alone (E1p21-23). Somewhat more specifically, God's nature is comprised of its attributes (God as a thinking thing and God as an extended thing for example), and these attributes necessitate and are further expressed by their attendant infinite modes. Spinoza distinguishes between two kinds: immediate and mediate. Immediate infinite modes are those that follow directly from the attribute itself - what we might think of as its most immediate consequences or modes of expression (E1p21). Mediate infinite modes are further expressions of other infinite modes, meaning that they further express the attribute only through the medium or logical buffer of mediating infinite modes (E1p22). Collectively these modes comprise the entourage of any attribute.
We can best understand the infinite modes by briefly reflecting on Spinoza's axiom about determinate causes, where he writes that “from a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily” (Elax3). A determinate cause is a complete cause, and is such that it is not only sufficient for but actually necessitates its effect. This is a reflection of Spinoza's commitment to causal rationalism, the claim that there is a reason or cause for whatever is or is not the case. If a complete cause is present whose effect does not follow then there would be an inexplicable fact – the effect following or not from its complete cause. Such inexplicable facts are ruled out by causal rationalism, which is why “from a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily.”

This helps us to understand the respect in which infinite modes are necessary, infinite and eternal features of substance. Infinite modes are the determinate effects of attributes, meaning that they follow from them alone. Attributes, like the substance they comprise, are necessary, infinite and eternal. Because attributes are necessary, infinite, eternal, and the determinate cause of infinite modes, so too must infinite modes be necessary, infinite and eternal. Think of it this way: something that is necessarily existent cannot be the determinate cause of something that is contingent since there would then be an inexplicable fact – the contingency of something whose determinate cause is necessary. Likewise, something that is infinite and eternal cannot be the determinate cause of something that is finite or durational since there would then be an inexplicable fact – the finitude or durationality of something whose determinate cause is infinite and eternal. A bit more precisely, each attribute is the determinate cause of its immediate infinite modes and these in turn are the determinate cause of its mediate infinite modes. At each stage, because the determinate cause is necessary, infinite and eternal, so too are its determinate effects. Thus are the infinite modes propria, meaning necessary, infinite and eternal features of their attributes.

We can now return to Elp28dem and review each of the three possible causes of finite modes, that is, each of the three ways in which something can follow from God. The first way in
which finite modes might follow from God is their following directly from God's absolute nature, meaning that they would follow directly from one of God's attributes. Spinoza, referring us back to E1p21, rejects this as a possible causal source of finite modes by reminding us that any such thing, like its cause, must necessarily be infinite and eternal. He is referring of course to the immediate infinite modes which are infinite and eternal because their determinate cause, God's attributes, are infinite and eternal. Because finite modes are neither infinite nor eternal it is impossible for them to follow directly from the attributes comprising God's absolute nature.

Spinoza then notes that if God's nature cannot be the cause of finite modes and all that exists are God's nature and its modes, then some mode must be their cause. This introduces the second and third possible causal sources for finite modes. The second is that a finite mode might follow from an infinite and eternal mode, just like the mediate infinite modes discussed in p22. The same problem arises though: whatever modes are determinately caused by infinite and eternal modes must also be infinite and eternal (cf. E1p22dem). With God and God's infinite modes out as possible causes for finite modes only the third option – other finite modes – remains. This is the argument of E1p28dem, and as I've shown, it explicitly excludes God's nature and its infinite modes from participating in the causation of finite modes. Since this rationale also applies to causal interactions between existing finite modes, God's nature and its infinite modes are barred from participating in them as well. God and its laws, then, are excluded from finite causes.

A proponent of the MCR might challenge my rejection of the inclusion of infinite modes in finite causes by suggesting that infinite modes are concurrent with finite modes in the cause of a finite mode, and that the presence of finite modes renders the complete cause finite. Were this Spinoza's intention he likely would have indicated as much in the demonstration of p28, or elsewhere for that matter. He additionally would have provided, as is needed, an explanation of the cooperative relation between infinite and finite modes in a finite cause. Even more problematic is
that nothing about a finite mode, not even its essence (E2def2), is infinite or eternal, making it difficult to imagine what if anything an unchanging infinite mode might contribute to its cause. We should take Spinoza at his word in E1p28dem and acknowledge that infinite modes are not participants in finite causes.

The challenge, as should now be clear, is not to explain how God, its laws, and finite particulars are concurrent constituents of finite causes but, rather, to explain how it is that finite particulars, the only constituents of finite causes, bring about behaviors that accord with nature's laws. The MCR, because it does not recognize the need to restrict finite causes to relations between finite particulars, fails to appreciate the nature of the challenge confronting a successful interpretation of Spinoza’s remarks. We need to ask how, if they are not constituents of finite causes, God and its laws influence finite causes.

III. God's Involvement in a Finite Cause

Let's first consider God's involvement in finite causes. There can be no doubt that every effect whatsoever is caused by God. God, for instance, is the efficient cause of all things (EIp16cor1). Elsewhere Spinoza states that “A thing which has been determined to produce an effect has necessarily been determined in this way by God...” (EIp26) or, again, that “...all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way” (EIp29). How can Spinoza maintain that finite modes have only finite causes while also clearly stating that God, an infinite being, is the cause of all things? Why does this not render God a concurrent constituent of any finite cause?

We can address this issue by attending carefully to E2p9 where Spinoza, clarifying his argument from EIp28, writes that “The idea of a singular thing which actually exists has God for a cause not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea of a
The 'idea of a singular thing' is just a thing (finite mode) conceived under the attribute of Thought (cf. E2p5), and Spinoza's point is that God is the cause of a finite mode of thought only because the finite mode of thought that causes it is itself a finite (singular) expression of God. God's causality in the finite order, in other words, is restricted to the causal efficacy between finite modes expressing God's nature in finite and determinate ways.

To see this we need first to understand 'God's being affected by a mode of thought', which requires a brief note about how modes relate to substance. Modes relate to substance in the same way in which properties inhere in their subjects; they are ways their substance is. Thus are they defined as “affections of substance,” meaning that they inhere in and are conceived through it (EIdef5). In a later clarificatory passage Spinoza notes that “particular things are nothing but affections of God's attributes, or modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way” (E1p25cor). Since the attributes constitute God's nature (EIdef4), modes are certain and determinate expressions of God's nature. This way of thinking is repeated in the first definition of part 2 of the Ethics which defines a body as “a mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God's essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing.”

That a finite mode of thought has God for a cause insofar as he is affected by another finite mode of thought means, then, that the finite mode of thought is caused by another finite mode of thought which is itself an affection or expression of God's nature. Properly paraphrased and generalized so as to include finite modes of extended substance as well, E2p9 states that God is the cause of finite modes not in the sense of its being an infinite substance, but only in the sense that the proper or actual cause of the finite mode, another finite mode, is itself an expression of God's nature. We can therefore speak of God as the efficient or determinate cause of a finite mode without including anything that is infinite in its cause (as per E1p28dem) so long as we restrict God's
involvement to the finite mode that is its cause being itself a finite and determinate expression of God.\(^{21}\)

**IV. Laws and Finite Causes**

While this shows the respect in which God is involved in a finite cause it does not yet address the role of laws. Spinoza clearly holds that there are laws of nature and that these govern the behavior of finite modes. Recall again the preface to part 3 where he writes that “the laws and rules of Nature, according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are always and everywhere the same.” The problem is that laws are infinite modes, and E1p28dem rejects the inclusion of infinite modes in finite causes. In this section I argue that the relation between God and its finite modes articulated in section III extends to the relation between eternal and infinite essences and laws and their instances in finite particulars.

Let's first review why laws of nature are infinite modes. Laws, as noted in the preface to part 3, are permanent and unchanging constants of nature that regulate and govern the flux within the finite modal order. They do not come into being or expire, and are not susceptible to change. They are also attribute-specific since the laws that govern modes of extension differ from the laws that govern modes of thought (E3p2).\(^{22}\) By this Spinoza means that the laws regulating the interactions between bodies are different from the laws regulating the interactions between ideas. Each attribute, then, carries with it its own set of laws, and since these laws are unchanging constants of nature, that is, features of the attribute that are 'always and everywhere the same,’ they must be among its infinite, not finite, modes.\(^{23}\) Since E1p28dem bars infinite modes from participating in finite causes it follows that laws cannot participate in finite cause. How is it, then, that finite particulars bring about behaviors that cohere with nature's laws?
Though Spinoza nowhere explicitly addresses how laws influence particulars, he did leave an important clue. If we attend to his conception of essences we readily see that he adopts a two-tiered ontology wherein finite particulars instantiate eternal essences that reside amidst the infinite modes. Because laws too are infinite modes it stands to reason that eternal laws bear the same relation to finite nomological behaviors that eternal essences bear to durational essences. Just as durational essences are finite instances of eternal essences, so too are finite nomological behaviors finite instances of nature's eternal laws. In this section I will defend this two-tiered ontology of essences and draw out the analogy for laws and their instances. The resulting picture, I argue, is the best way to reconcile Spinoza's disparate remarks regarding finite causes.

The essences of finite modes are sometimes characterized as having an eternal existence while at other times being characterized as having only a durationally finite existence. E2p8 for instance discusses the essence as it exists at those times during which the individual for which it is the essence does not. “The ideas of singular things, or of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended in God's infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of the singular things, or modes, are contained in God's attributes” (E2p8). The idea of a non-existent thing is an idea in God's infinite intellect in the same way in which the formal essence of a thing is contained in God's other attribute, viz., extension. The formal essence, as we learn from the Short Treatise, is the essence of a thing conceived under the attribute of extension, and this corresponds to the objective essence in the attribute of thought (KVapp2). So the objective and formal essences are correspondent essences of non-existent things in the attributes of thought and extension. These essences are “contained in God's attributes” apart from the actual existence of their particular finite mode, and as such exist independently of them. Better yet, since the comings and goings of finite modes do not affect the existence of these essences, such essences exist independently of the finite modal order.24
The objective essence, a permanent feature of the attribute of Thought, surfaces again in part 5 of the *Ethics*. After noting that certain features of the mind persist only through the durational existence of its finite body (E5p21), Spinoza continues on to note that its essence is nonetheless an eternal mode of thought in God (E5p22). The essence as an eternal mode of thought is of course the objective essence which, again and in distinct contrast to the durational existence of the finite mode, is an eternal mode of thinking substance. In each of these instances Spinoza shows a clear commitment to the essence of a finite mode as an eternal feature of God's attributes.

Other passages take an entirely different tone however. Spinoza defines the essence of a thing, for instance, as “that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing” (E2def2). The latter clause characterizes the existence of the essence of a thing as corresponding precisely to the existence of the thing itself; the essence is conceivable, comes to be and perishes only alongside it. The essence of a finite particular is here cast as but a shadow of its particular's finite existence, and is therefore not eternal.

Spinoza elsewhere identifies this essence with the individual's 'conatus', which is its personal striving toward a continued existence (E3p6-7). This striving for existence can persist only so long as it is successful, meaning that this essence again perishes alongside its individual. Spinoza later explicitly recognizes this implication, writing that the destruction of the individual coincides with the destruction of its essence (E4p39sch). In each of these instances, and in sharp contrast to E2p8, remarks from the *Short Treatise*, and E5p22, the essences of finite particulars shadow their finite existence.

We see, then, that the essences of finite modes are sometimes depicted as eternal or permanent features of God's attributes while at other times being depicted as shadows of their particulars temporary or durational existence. It would seem that the first set of passages are
referring to essences as permanent features of God's attributes whereas the second set are referring to essences as constituent aspects of finite particulars. The former essences, as permanent features of God's attributes, would be among the infinite modes whereas the latter essences, as dependent and durational aspects of particulars, would be among the finite modes.

We can better understand how the two kinds of essence relate to one another by taking a look at the corollary to E2p8, which reads as follows:

[S]o long as singular things do not exist, except insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, their objective being, or ideas, do not exist except insofar as God's infinite idea exists. And when singular things are said to exist, not only insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, but insofar also as they are said to have duration, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration.

Spinoza is drawing a contrast between two ways in which the idea or essence of a singular thing exists. The first regards the objective being or idea (essence) of a thing conceived through the attribute of thought. This essence is a permanent feature of God's attributes; it is a fixed idea in God's infinite intellect. Turning to the durational existence of some thing, the existence of the thing as a durational finite mode, Spinoza writes that its idea (essence) 'also involves the existence through which it is said to have duration'. This essence shadows the durational existence of the thing; it is the durational essence that comes to be and perishes with it.

What is most important to note about this passage is that the eternal and durational essences are depicted as two different ways in which one and the same essence exists. Spinoza is contrasting the essence of a nonexistent singular thing with its essence while the thing does exist, and he is explaining that the essence of the nonexistent thing is a permanent feature of God's attributes and that this same essence, when the singular thing does exist, also involves (etiam involvent) a durational mode of existence. Eternal essence, then, are capable of taking on a durational form of existence. The durational essence is the eternal essence expressed in a different temporal form.
This, as I understand it, is largely an extension of the relationship between God and its finite modes defended in section III. God is an infinite substance that immediately and mediately expresses itself through eternal essences and laws. These essences and laws are propria, meaning that they are the necessary expressions of God’s infinite nature. When God expresses itself through some finite particular it does so not by condensing its entirety into some finite form but, rather, by expressing one of the eternal and infinite propria of its nature in a finite and determinate way. And as the above analysis shows, the finite and determinate expressions are the very same eternal and infinite propria expressed now in finite form. Specifically, a durational essence is another way in which an eternal essence can exist.

This is echoed in E5 where Spinoza writes that “We conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature” (E5p29sch). As before, we conceive one and the same thing either as it exists as a permanent feature of God or in relation to a certain time and place, that is, as an infinite or a finite mode.

With these passages we ought readily to recognize that Spinoza intends for the propria of substance to be open to both eternal and durational modes of existence. But since the eternal essence exists across all moments in time whereas the durational essence exists only over some subset, they cannot be numerically identical. Spinoza must mean instead that the content of the eternal essence, whatever it may be, is something that exists eternally and infinitely and that is capable, in addition, of taking on a finite and durational form of existence. Essences, then, are capable of existing in two different respects. The finite and determinate essence, the durational essence, just is the eternal essence expressed through some finite particular.

The implication for laws and their instances is clear. Laws, like eternal essences, are infinite modes and ought thereby to bear the same relation to their finite instances as eternal essences bear
to theirs. While Spinoza nowhere explicitly addresses this issue, we have seen that he does address the relation between eternal essences and their finite instances, and since eternal laws and eternal essences occupy the same ontological status it stands to reason that eternal laws relate to finite nomological behaviors in the same way in which eternal essences relate to their finite instances. In sum, just as durational essences are finite instances of eternal essences, so too are finite causes finite instances of eternal laws.

The eternal law, then, is not a constituent of a finite cause. Rather, the law itself takes on, in addition to its eternality, a finite mode of existence, and it is this finite instance of the law that participates in the finite cause. Rather than construing God, its laws and finite modes as occupying different participatory roles in finite causes we should instead regard only the efficacy of finite modes whilst recognizing their efficacy, like the finite mode itself, as a finite instance of God and its laws. Thus do we reconcile Spinoza’s remarks about God and its laws determining finite causes with his elsewhere restricting finite causes to finite particulars.

V. Concluding Remark

Though this may provide a stronger reconciliation of Spinoza’s remarks about finite causes it is not yet an adequate account of finite causation. Specifically, it is unclear what it might mean exactly for eternal essences and laws to be instantiated in finite particulars. We have a rough picture of the way in which finite modes are finite expressions of an infinite substance since we can readily conceive of a wrinkle as a finite and determinate expression of a rug. Since modes are recognizable as the same stuff of substance the wrinkle in the rug is easily conceived as the rug-wrinkled.

The case is different with eternal essences and laws however. These are infinite and eternal features of their attribute meaning, in part, that wherever we find the attribute so too must we find its essences and laws. The eternal essences and laws of extended substance are spread across the
expanse of extended substance. It is difficult to understand how these features of substance might also, in addition, assume a finite and determinate mode of existence. A rug assumes a wrinkle by being kicked up in some section or other, and loses a wrinkle simply by being pulled from one location or another. But it is not yet clear, and Spinoza nowhere explicitly addresses, how an infinite and eternal feature of substance, something like the shag or color of a rug, could both express itself across the entirety of the rug for the duration of its existence while also, in addition, being instantiated in only a subsection of the rug for only a temporary amount of time. How is it that an essence is both pervasive across extended substance and also, in addition, found specifically at some finite and determinate point? Spinoza may have an account of the precise relation between a pervasive proprium of substance and that same proprium expressed as a finite and durational feature of it but he nowhere, to my understanding, attempts to articulate it. So while it is certainly progress to recognize that the finite cause is intended as a finite and durational instance of an eternal law, until the details of this relation can be filled in Spinoza will not yet have provided us a defensible or even complete account of finite causes.

1. References to the *Ethics* and earlier works of Spinoza are from Edwin Curley (1985). I use the following standard abbreviations: E – *Ethics*, KV - *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being*, Ep. - *Letter*. Passages in the *Ethics* will be referred to as follows: def (definition), ax (axiom), p (proposition), dem (demonstration), cor (corollary), lem (lemma) and add (addendum). E2p13addax1, for instance, refers the reader to book two, proposition thirteen addendum, axiom

2. This interpretation was first articulated by Edwin Curley (1969, pp. 55-74 and 1988, pp. 47-48). It has since been adopted or only slightly modified by A.J. Watt (1972); Jonathan Bennett (1984, pp. 112-113); Richard Mason (1986 and 2007, pp. 75-86); Yirmiyahu Yovel (1992, pp. 157-164); Kenneth Clatterbaugh (1998, pp. 132-141); Michael Della Rocca (1996, pp. 6-7) and Steven Nadler (2006, pp. 99-102).

3. “Deum omnium rerum, qua sub intellectum infinitum cadere possint, esse causam efficientem.”
4. “Deus est omnium rerum causa immansens, non vero transiens.”

5. “Res, quae ad aliquid operandum determinata est, a Deo necessario sit determinata; & quae a Deo non est determinata, non potest se ipsum ad operandum determinare.” See also E1p33, “Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced.”

6. “…naturae leges et regulae, secundum quas omnia fiunt et ex unis formis in aliam mutatur, sunt ubique et semper eadem…”

7. “Quodcumque singular, sive quaeveris res, quae finita est, & determinatam habet existentiam, non potest existere, nec ad operandum determinari, nisi ad existendum, & operandum determinetur ab alia causa, quae etiam finita est, & determinatam habet existentiam: & rursus haec causa non potest etiam existere, neque ad operandum determinari, nisi ab alia, quae etiam finita est, & determinatam habet existentiam, determinetur ad existendum, & operandum, & sic in infinitum.”

8. See also E2p9, “The idea of a singular thing which actually exists has God for a cause not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea of a singular thing which actually exists…”

9. What follows is a brief statement of Curley’s well-known view, which other commentators have endorsed or only slightly modified. Though commentators might attempt to place more weight on the role of God (Mason 2007, pp. 75-86) or particulars (Yovel Heretics, pp. 157-158), there is otherwise, to my knowledge, no notable dissent in the literature to Curley’s claim that all three participate in a finite cause. One exception is Valteri Viljanen (2008). Viljanen argues that Spinoza’s thinking about finite causes was heavily influenced by Suarez’s emanative causality, meaning that causal efficacy flows from the essences of individual finite modes. While I think Viljanen is right to put greater emphasis on particulars in finite causes, his account does not yet explain the influence of nature’s laws. I understand my argument here to complement and advance Viljanen’s.

10. An interesting variant on this aspect of the standard model is Yovel, who suggests that laws work through the preceding finite modes. The point, I take it, is to locate the nomological and efficacious source of finite causation in the same event – the preceding finite modes. Yovel in my opinion accurately captures the import of locating causal efficacy wholly within the finite particular, a feature I’ll argue for in my interpretation as well. See Yovel (1992, pp 157-158).

11. Curley (1969, p. 61) rightly points out that a passage in the Short Treatise (KV I, viii) briefly characterizes universal modes (apparent predecessors for the infinite modes of the Ethics) as causally responsible for particulars (the finite modes). It is unclear whether Spinoza means to say that the totality of particulars follow from the universal modes, or that universal modes participate directly in the cause of individual particulars. If Spinoza intended the latter while working on the Short Treatise, I am convinced that he gave this view up while completing the Ethics, cp. E1p28dem.
12. *Nos tum agera dico, cum aliquid in nobis, aut extra not fit, cujus adequata sumus causa, hoc est cum ex nostra natura aliquid in nobis, aut extranos sequitur, quod per eandem solam potst clare, & distincte intelligi.* In the preceding definition Spinoza defined an adequate cause as a cause “whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it” and a partial or inadequate cause as a cause whose effect “cannot be understood through it alone” (E3def1). If some action can be understood through our nature alone, as in E3def2, then our nature is its whole or complete cause.

13. Spinoza is referring to what we might call the action's immediate cause. It is unclear whether such actions further require that the cause's cause, or that cause's cause and so forth be included in the finite nature. God's involvement in such causes will be addressed in the next section.

14. Spinoza uses 'essence' instead of 'nature' here, but as I'll point out further on, he uses 'nature' and 'essence' interchangeably. I use 'nature' only for the sake of consistency. There is additionally some confusion about this definition as it is unclear what, exactly, Spinoza is defining. “*Ad essentiam alicujus rei id pertinere dico...*” It is unclear whether he is defining the essence itself or, rather, the parts that compose or belong to it. If the latter, it is still the case that the essence is finite since the parts that compose or belong to it (*perinere*) are finite. I believe, as will be explained further on, that Spinoza is defining the durational essence as an instance of the eternal essence – the eternal essence is such that the durational essence, which comes to be and perishes with its finite particular, pertains or belongs to the eternal essence.

15. The distinctions are important elsewhere in the text, particularly when discussing the relation God bears to its attributes. For our purpose of understanding how different things follow from God however, we can safely ignore the distinction here.

16. See E1p11dem2: “For each thing there must be assigned a cause, or reason, both for its existence and for its nonexistence,” as well as E1a2: “What cannot be conceived through another, must be conceived through itself.” This, of course, is Spinoza's way of understanding what Leibniz would later label the 'Principle of Sufficient Reason'. For more on Spinoza's understanding and application of this principle see in particular Michael Della Rocca (2003).

17. “… *omnia ex necessitate divinae determinata sunt ad certo modo existendum, & operandum.*” (E1p29)

18. “*Idea rei singularis, actu existentis, Deum pro causa habet, non quatenus infinitus est, sed quatenus alia rei singularis actu existentis idea affectus consideratur...*” (E2p9).

19. Though Curley does not hold this reading of the substance-mode relationship (1969, pp. 36-43), the case in support of it is quite strong. For some of the more persuasive defenses of this reading see Bennett (1984, pp. 92-103); John
Carriero (1995); Martin Lin (1996); Charles Huenemann (2004); Steven Nadler (2008); and Yitzhak Melamed (2009).

20. “By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived” (Eldef5).

21. Though I will not attempt to address every such passage where God is referred to as playing a role in the causality of finite modes (cf. E1p16c1, p18, p25s, p26&27, and p29s), the interpretive model defended here should suffice to help the reader see his/her way through each of these passages without including an infinite entity in a finite cause.

22. “The body cannot determine the mind to thinking, and the mind cannot determine the body to motion, or rest, or to anything else (if there is anything else).” The demonstration argues roughly as follows: To suggest otherwise would imply that modes of extension could be altered in accordance with laws that pertain also to modes of thought, which would mean that modes of extension would therefore be conceived through thinking substance (Elia4), which is prohibited by Spinoza's conceptual barrier between the attributes (E2p5-6, E1p10, & E1p10 sch). For a particularly helpful and thorough analysis of the issues involved in this proposition see Della Rocca (1996 pp. 141-156).

23. There are several other routes to this conclusion. I've taken the shortest here, as this point is well agreed upon in the literature. For further corroboration see Yirmiyahu Yovel (1989, pp. 161-164 and 1991, p. 88); Curley (1969, pp. 47-49 and 59 and 1988, pp. 42-47). Curley's position differs from Yovel and myself in that he maintains a distinction with the fundamental laws, which he identifies with God's essence or power, and the derivative laws, the set of which is an immediate infinite mode. See also Emilia Giancotti (1991) and Nadler (2006, pp. 94-97).

24. Since infinite modes are infinite and eternal unchanging aspects of nature, by locating essences amidst the infinite modes we are ascribing a kind of platonism to Spinoza. While Spinoza does reject talk of transcendentals (E2p40sch1) and concepts such at 'good', 'bad' and 'ugly' (Elapp), we should not conclude therefrom that he rejects platonism of any kind. His rejection of transcendentals terms is not directed at their content but rather the method through which they are arrived at. Elsewhere he praises our acquisition of certain common notions so long as they are arrived at via reason (E2p38-39), and implies yet elsewhere that humanity and other such concepts are among them (E1p8sch2 & p17sch). For further discussion and defense of this issue see Christopher Martin (2008) and Don Garrett (2009).

25. “Nevertheless, in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human body, under a species of eternity” (E5p22). The precise content of the eternal essence is a complicated and messy affair, with some arguing even that the essence is not a personal essence. I will refrain from entering into this difficult dispute here, as I hope only to secure that this eternal essence differs from the essence that perishes with the individual. For some helpful
discussion of the content of the eternal essence see Bennett (1984, pp. 357-363); Wallace Matson (1990); Steven Nadler (2001, pp. 94-131); Martin (2008) and Garrett (2009).

26. “Ad essentiam alicuius rei id pertinere dico, quo dato res necessario ponitur et quo sublato res necessario tollitur; vel id, sine quo res, et vice versa quod sine re nec esse nec concepi potest.”

27. Don Garrett (2009, p. 286n4) argues that E2def2 should be read as a definition of both the durational and eternal essence. If we attend to the last clause of the definition, however, we readily see that the destruction of the individual carries with it the destruction of the essence, so that if E2def2 includes the eternal essence then the eternal essence would perish with the destruction of the individual, which it clearly does not. E2def2, then, defines an individual’s durational but not eternal essence.

28. “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being” (E3p6) and “The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing” (E3p7).

29. “…I understand the body to die when its parts are so disposed that they acquire a different proportion of motion and rest to one another” (E4p39sch). From the digression on bodies (E2p13add) we learn that a body’s proportion of motion and rest is its essence (at least as conceived under the attribute of extension), showing that Spinoza’s point in E4p39sch is that a body dies when its essence (proportion) is replaced by some other essence (proportion).

30. “...earum ideae etiam existentiam, per quam durare dicitur, involvent” (E2p8cor).

31. See also E2p45sch, “By existence here I do not understand duration, that is, existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly, and as a certain species of quantity ... I am speaking, I say, of the very existence of singular things insofar as they are in God. For even if each one is determined by another singular thing to exist in a certain way, still the force by which each one perseveres in existing follows from the eternal necessity of God’s nature.” Spinoza is again distinguishing between two different senses in which a thing exists – one refers to its being an eternal necessity of God’s nature, the other to its being determined to exist and act by other particulars.