

How Spinoza establishes that God is the *only* substance.

1. First, establish that no two substances can have a common attribute. (p5)¹
2. Then, establish that God exists and has *all possible* attributes (“infinite attributes”).
3. From these premises, it follows easily enough that God is the only substance.
 - Whatever substance exists would have to have at least one of God's attributes.
 - But (by p5), that substance could only be identical to God.
 - So, whatever substance exists is identical to God. In other words, God is the only substance.

Note: This will also put us in a position to demonstrate proposition 15 (“Whatever exists exists in God, and nothing can exist or be conceived without God.”)

- Everything that exists is either a substance or a mode of a substance.
- So if God is the only substance, then everything else that exists must be a mode in one or another of God's attributes.

So... how do we establish the key premises of the argument for saying that God is the only substance?

Proposition 5 (“There cannot exist in the universe two or more substances of the same nature, i.e., of the same attribute.”)

¹ We'll adopt the following conventions. ‘*pn*’ will stand for proposition *n*, ‘*dn*’ for definition *n*, and ‘*an*’ for axiom *n*.

1. If there could be two substances, they would have to differ either with regard to attribute or with regard to some mode. (p4)

Spinoza thinks that numerical difference must be explained by qualitative difference. (The “*identity of indiscernibles*.”) In the context of his system, attribute and mode are the only qualitative differences there could be.

2. Differing *only* with regard to modes is not possible, because modes are only affections of substance.

A substance is “prior in nature” to its affections. (p1)

Modes are conceived through substance, not substance through modes. (d5)

So we ought to be able to set aside the modes and look at the substance as it is in itself, apart from its modes. To do that, Spinoza says, would be to consider “truly.”

Example: Two balls having different colors all over. Surely color isn’t what makes them two. They can have different colors only because they are distinct individuals. Ditto for their different locations.

Having set aside the modes, we ought still to be able to distinguish the two substances — if they are really two.

3. So if there were two distinct substances they would have differ with regard to their *attributes*.
4. But then they don't have the *same* attribute. QED.

Note: There is a serious flaw in this argument: Suppose substance x has attributes A,B and substance y has attributes B,C. Then x differs from y with regard to its attributes, since it has a different combination of attributes. Nevertheless, x and y share an attribute, viz., B.

How, next, does Spinoza prove that God (“a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence” (d6)) exists?

He offers a version of the Ontological Argument

1. “It belongs to the nature of substance to exist.” (p7)
2. “The essence of whatever can be conceived as not existing does *not* involve existence.” (a7)
3. *So it is impossible to conceive any substance as not existing.*
4. But God is a substance (one having infinite attributes). (d6)
5. *So it is not conceivable that God does not exist – in other words, God necessarily exists. QED*

Preliminary comment:

Why can't we just make up any old thing, call it a substance, and then use Spinoza's “proof” to show that it exists?

And what kind of definition is d6, anyway? Is it merely stipulative? (“Let the term ‘God’ stand for ...”)

Then all we have is something like this “(For any x) (if x is God, then x is a substance having infinite attributes.” But that will only yield the conclusion, “(For any x)(if x is God, then God necessarily exists).”

It must be a “real definition” of one of those “true and immutable essences” that Descartes talks about. That would also explain why you can’t just make up any old thing and use Spinoza’s “proof” to show that it exists.

The next question is: How do we prove p7 (that *it belongs to the nature of substance to exist*)?

First, prove that no substance can be caused by anything other than itself.

Then, since everything has a cause, it will follow that substance must be cause of itself.

But if a substance is cause of itself, then d1 tells us that its essence involves existence. (i.e., it belongs to its nature to exist.)

So how do we prove that *no substance can be produced by anything else*?

First, prove that no substance can be produced *by a substance*.

Then it's an immediate corollary that a substance could not be caused by anything other than itself. That's because substance and its affections are all there is, and no substance could be caused by its affections. (That would get everything backwards.)

So how do we prove that *no substance can be produced by a substance*?

Different attributes (by p5) à nothing in common (by p2) à one can't be the cause of another (by p3).

1. We've already proved that no two substances could have the same attribute. (p5)
2. But “two substances which have different attributes have nothing in common with one another.” (p2)
3. *It follows that two substances have nothing in common (from 1 and 2).*
4. But “of things which have nothing in common with one another, one cannot be the cause of another.” (p3)
5. *So if there were more than one substance, one could not be the cause of the other.*

That leaves propositions 2 and 3

p2 (“two substances have nothing in common if they have different attributes”) follows from d3 (substance is conceived through *itself* – i.e., through its own attributes – and you don't need the concept of another thing to form a concept of *it*)

p3 (“if they have nothing in common then there is no causal relation between them”) follows from a5 (“if they have nothing in common, then they can't be conceived through each other”) and a4 (“knowledge of an effect depends on knowledge of the cause”).