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Pantheism and Panentheism in Spinoza and Kabbalah: Divine Immanence and the Problem of Finitude

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Abstract. This article examines whether pantheism and panentheism adequately distinguish Spinoza's immanence from the accounts of divine manifestation developed by R. Mosheh Cordovero and R. Itshaq Luria Ashkenazi. I argue that the decisive issue is how dependence on an infinite source permits finite differentiation. Spinoza's distinction between natura naturans and natura naturata preserves causal asymmetry within one substance; R. Mosheh Cordovero explains differentiation through ordered emanation, whereas Lurianic contraction introduces withdrawal, crisis, and restoration. These are distinct responses, and not interchangeable versions of Kabbalah. The intensional–extensional distinction helps clarify the explanatory difficulty of deriving determinate finite modes from infinite substance, without purporting to demonstrate a formal contradiction in Spinoza's system. Lurianic Kabbalah offers a different conceptual model for the emergence of finitude through tsimtsum. The comparison is systematic rather than historical.
Keywords: Spinoza, pantheism, panentheism, Kabbalah, divine presence, finitude.

Panteizmas ir panenteizmas Spinozos filosofijoje bei Kabalos tradicijoje: dieviškoji imanencija ir baigtinumo problema

Santrauka. Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjama, ar panteizmas ir panenteizmas tinkamai atskiria Spinozos imanencijos sampratą nuo R. Moses Cordovero ir R. Isaaco Lurios Ashkenazi suformuluotų dieviškosios manifestacijos teorijų. Teigiu, kad pamatinis klausimas yra tai, kaip priklausomybė nuo begalinio šaltinio įgalina baigtinę diferenciaciją. Spinoza atskiria *natura naturans* nuo *natura naturata*, taip išsaugodamas priežastingumo asimetriją vienos substancijos viduje; tuo tarpu R. Moses Cordovero diferenciaciją aiškina per struktūruotą emanaciją, o Lurios Ashkenazi susitraukimo samprata įveda atsitraukimą, krizę ir atstatymą. Tai yra skirtingos interpretacijos, o ne Kabalos versijos, galinčios pakeisti viena kitą. Intensionalinis–ekstensionalinis skirtumas paaiškina semantinę painiavą, glūdinčią Spinozos pozicijoje. Žvelgiant iš kabalistinės perspektyvos, iš čia ir kyla jo klaida, nors šis straipsnis ir nepretenduoja į formalų loginį Spinozos sistemos paneigimą. Intensionalumo–ekstensionalumo skirtis atskleidžia semantinę painiavą, iš kurios, žvelgiant iš kabalistinės perspektyvos, ir kilo sunkumai, su kuriais Spinozai teko susidurti bandant išvesti baigtinius modusus iš begalinės substancijos. Tuo tarpu Lurios Ashkenazi Kabala išvengia šios painiavos. Čia, pasitelkus „tsimtsum", pasiūloma konceptuali baigtinumo iškilimo interpretacija. Šis palyginimas yra sisteminis, o ne istorinis.
Pagrindiniai žodžiai: Spinoza, panteizmas, panenteizmas, Kabala, esatis, baigtinumas

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Introduction

The classification of Spinoza being a pantheist or panentheist concerns more than terminology. It bears on the relation between substance and modes, the meaning of divine causality, and the possibility of distinguishing finite beings within an infinite reality. Comparable questions arise in Jewish Kabbalah, but similarities of vocabulary can conceal differences in what counts as an explanation. To say that everything is in God may express substantial inherence, causal dependence, participation in divine life, or an account of manifestation. These relations cannot be treated as equivalent without argument.

I argue that the value of comparing Spinoza with Kabbalah lies in distinguishing these explanatory relations. Spinoza denies a creator external to nature while preserving the dependence of modes on substance. R. Mosheh Cordovero articulates unity and differentiation through an ordered system of emanation; Lurianic teaching makes contraction and the subsequent drama of rupture and restoration central to its account. The comparison tests whether the terms 'pantheism' and 'panentheism' capture these differences and clarifies what is at stake in deriving the finite from the infinite. It does not attribute Kabbalistic arguments to Spinoza or assume that Kabbalah supplies premises missing from the *Ethics*.

This approach addresses a disagreement within Spinoza scholarship. Edwin M. Curley's emphasis on causal priority, Martial Gueroult's account of immanent unity, and the contrasting classifications advanced by Steven Nadler, Yitzhak Y. Melamed, and Amihud Gilead show why the choice of label depends on the relation assigned to God and the world. The Kabbalistic comparison provides a test of that relation rather than an appeal to a homogeneous Jewish alternative. I retain the critical question raised by the comparison: does affirming the necessary dependence of finite things on an infinite source explain their determination as finite? I distinguish that question from the stronger, and unestablished, claim that Spinoza's system is formally contradictory.

Spinozism between pantheism and panentheism

Both labels, pantheism and panentheism, postdate Spinoza, and must therefore be used as interpretive categories. Joseph Raphson's *De spatio reali* employs the Latin term 'pantheismus' in 1697 (Raphson 1697: 8, ch. 1, §11). Its components are Greek πᾶν (*pan*, all) and θεός (*theos*, God); it is not derived from the mythological name Pentheus. Joseph Raphson distinguishes the Panthei, who identify all reality with God, from materialists, who explain everything solely in terms of matter (Raphson 1697: 2, 8, ch. 1, §§3, 11). John Toland subsequently used 'pantheist' in the title of his 1705-dated work and developed his account in the *Pantheisticon* (1720) (Toland 1705; Toland 1720). These usages do not justify treating pantheism, materialism, and Spinozism as interchangeable.

The subsequent reception of Spinoza reinforced this ambiguity. The formula Ἓν καὶ Πᾶν, "One and All", associated with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's account, condenses a claim of unity without determining the relation between the one and the many. The resemblance to Heraclitus's affirmation that all things are

one is suggestive, but neither slogan supplies Spinoza's distinctions between substance, attributes, and modes. The history of the designation must therefore be separated from a reconstruction of the doctrine. To call Spinoza a pantheist on the basis of his reception is one thing; to establish what that designation means within the *Ethics* is another (Jacobi 1785; Heraclitus 1908: 146, fr. B50).

Panentheism, associated with Karl Christian Friedrich Krause's nineteenth-century theory, asserts that the world is in God while God is not exhausted by the world. The term occurs in Karl Christian Friedrich Krause's 1828 lectures, well before the posthumous publication of the volume often cited under the date 1869 (Krause 1828: 256; Krause 1869: 313). For the present argument, pantheism designates the divine–natural unity without a creator outside nature. Panentheism adds a divine excess over the world, but the character of that excess must be specified. Causal priority, inexhaustibility by finite things, and the transcendence of a creator are different claims. Classification becomes inconclusive when an author shifts between them.

Spinoza's formula *Deus sive Natura* must be read through his definitions of the substance, attribute, and mode. Substance is conceived through itself; a mode is in another and conceived through that other (Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, defs. 3, 5). Everything is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God (Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, prop. 15). God is the immanent rather than transitive cause of all things (Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, prop. 18). These propositions deny an independently existing created domain outside divine reality, but they do not make a finite mode self-caused or identical with substance as such. Inherence is not, merely by its definition, numerical identity.

The Epigraph to the *Theological-Political Treatise* places a related language of belonging before the reader: "Hereby we dwell in God and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit". This scriptural reciprocity invites comparison with immanence, but its religious meaning cannot simply be treated as a metaphysical demonstration. The argument must come from Spinoza's account of causality. In *Ethics* I, proposition 25, scholium, God is said to cause all things in the same sense in which God is called self-caused: eodem sensu, quo Deus causa sui dicitur, causa omnium etiam dicendus est. The formula connects divine self-existence with productivity. It does not posit two causes, one of God and another of the world, but it preserves the difference between what exists through itself and what follows from it (1 John 4:13; Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, prop. 25, schol.; Mason 1997: 32).

The distinction matters because Spinoza expressly rejects the reduction of God to corporeal matter. In Letter 73 to Oldenburg, he denies that his position identifies God with nature understood as a mass of bodily matter(Spinoza 1925: IV, 307–308, Letter 73). God is an absolutely infinite substance, and not simply the aggregate of bodies accessible to experience. Extension and Thought are attributes, and neither alone exhausts what the definition of God asserts (Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, def. 6; II, props. 1–2). Letter 73 thus clarifies the relation between God and corporeal nature, whereas Letter 43 to Osten addresses a different question: the necessity of divine causation (Spinoza 1925: IV, 223, Letter 43). Spinoza's rejection of a merely corporeal conception of God might appear to

place him closer to Descartes, but this similarity is only superficial. In the Sixth Meditation, Descartes understands nature in general as the order established by God in created things (Descartes 1904: AT VII, 81). God therefore remains ontologically distinct from the created order that depends upon him. Spinoza, by contrast, rejects this separation: finite things follow immanently from the one infinite substance rather than constituting a created nature external to its cause.

Spinoza's identification operates within a different ontology: there cannot be another substance besides God (Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, prop. 14). Similar language about nature thus need not express the same account of divine presence or production.

The identification also connects the immutability of God with the necessity of nature. To clarify this connection, it is useful to turn to Ernst Cassirer, who shows how divine immutability and the invariability of the natural order mutually reinforce one another: nature cannot depart from its laws because its power expresses divine power. This close connection, however, raises the question of whether necessity is thereby explained or merely restated. The appearance of circularity must therefore be assessed in relation to the argument's starting point. The *Ethics* does not infer God's immutability from an empirical survey of regular events; its account of necessity proceeds from substance and essence. The critical question is whether this account adequately explains the determinate order of effects rather than merely reiterating that this order cannot be otherwise. This question becomes especially important when the explanation moves from the infinity of divine nature to the finite conditions of particular things (Cassirer 2009: 57–58; Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, prop. 33 and dem.).

The precise scope of this identification, however, remains interpretively contested, making it necessary to consider how major commentators have understood the relation between God, nature, and finite things. Edwin M. Curley resists identifying God with the collection of finite things and emphasizes instead the explanatory role of divine causality (Curley 1969: 40–44). Steven Nadler, by contrast, examines how the identity of God and nature can sustain a pantheistic interpretation(Nadler 2008: 67–68). Their differing readings thus help clarify what is – and what is not – entailed by Spinoza's identification of God and Nature. The disagreement cannot be settled by insisting that a collection of non-self-caused modes must somehow become self-caused. That would replace the relation of modes to substance with an aggregation that Spinoza does not propose. The issue is whether divine–natural unity allows an ontological distinction within that unity, and what kind of distinction it is.

Martial Gueroult's treatment is instructive because it combines the priority of substance with the inseparability of God and the universe (Gueroult 1968: I, 223, 267, 299–300, 345). Amihud Gilead likewise argues against classifying Spinoza as a panentheist (Gilead 2021: 2041–2051). These interpretations support a conception of pantheism as radical immanence, provided that it is not reduced to the claim that each finite thing is God without qualification. Conversely, calling Spinoza a panentheist because all things are in God is insufficient unless one explains what divine transcendence adds to that inherence.

I therefore use 'pantheism' in the qualified sense of a single divine–natural order with

no transcendent creator. This usage leaves room for the asymmetry between substance and modes. Panentheism remains a possible comparative category where divine excess receives a determinate meaning; it is not inherently incoherent. The difficulty is to show that the excess invoked in interpreting Spinoza amounts to more than the priority and infinity already attributed to immanent substance. The historical labels organize this question but cannot replace its analysis.

This is also why the dispute should not be settled by equating pantheism with atheism or idolatry. Such judgments depend on a prior conception of what God must be or how divine reality may properly be approached. They can be significant in the reception of Spinoza without functioning as neutral descriptions of his ontology. The present comparison asks whether divine unity leaves a determinate place for difference. It does not infer that identifying God and nature necessarily entails worshipping each natural object as a separate deity (Yovel 1989: 157–158, 273; Cooper 2006: 25–35).

Substance modes and the question of finitude

The distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* makes the issue precise. In *Ethics* I, proposition 29, scholium, the former denotes what is in itself and conceived through itself, or God considered as a free cause; the latter comprises everything following from God's nature, including all modes of the attributes (Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, prop. 29, schol.). They are not independent substances or successive stages in time. Nevertheless, their inseparability does not erase the difference between productive source and dependent effect. Substance is prior in nature to its affections (Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, prop. 1), and that priority is ontological as well as explanatory.

The *Short Treatise* offers an important antecedent. Before distinguishing the two natures, Spinoza speaks of the whole of nature, gheel de Natuur. *Natura naturans* is understood through itself, whereas *natura naturata* is divided into universal and particular modes. This arrangement supports the view that productive nature and produced nature belong to one reality. It also shows why Edwin M. Curley's emphasis on causality need not entail the exclusion of modes from divine nature. The modes cannot subsist elsewhere, since an independent outside would contradict the monism under consideration. Nevertheless, the unity of the order does not make its explanatory relations symmetrical. The whole-of-nature formulation supports inseparability, but the priority of what is conceived through itself remains indispensable to understanding why a mode depends on God (Spinoza 1925: Short Treatise I, chs. 8–9, I, 47–49; Curley 1969: 40–44; Gueroult 1968: I, 299).

The vocabulary has a pre-Spinozist history, including Jewish discussions of nature and divine causation (Idel 2000: 87–110). That history makes comparison legitimate but does not establish continuity of doctrine. In Spinoza, divine freedom means determination by the necessity of one's own nature, not a choice between possible creations (Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, def. 7 and prop. 17). God's power is identical with God's essence (Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, prop. 34). It is therefore misleading to conceive divine power as a mere potential that becomes actual only through the modes. Rather, the modes express an already fully

actual divine activity; they do not actualize a power that would otherwise remain unrealized.

In the Jewish background examined by Moshe Idel, the relation between divine action and natural action is already a philosophical problem before Spinoza. R. Yosef Gikatilla (1248–1325) distinguishes the productive source from the natural order receiving its determination. Such language provides a basis for comparison without proving that the same metaphysics is present in every author. Likewise, the scholastic vocabulary of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* acquires different functions when transferred into a monist system. The relevant historical continuity is a question and a vocabulary; the substantive transformation concerns whether production establishes a distinction between Creator and creatures or expresses the necessity of one substance (Idel 2000: 87–110; Gikatilla 1989: 85).

The main explanatory problem concerns finite determination. *Ethics* I, propositions 21–23, relates what follows from an attribute's absolute nature to infinity and eternity. Proposition 28, however, explains each finite and determinate thing through another finite and determinate cause, which is itself determined by a further finite cause, and so on without a first finite cause. Spinoza therefore does not derive a particular finite thing directly from the absolute nature of a divine attribute. Instead, he explains finite things through an indefinitely extended series of finite causes, while maintaining that the entire causal order depends on God (Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, props. 21–23, 28).

The definitions of self-causation and substance sharpen the difficulty. *Causa sui* denotes that whose essence involves existence, and existence belongs to the nature of substance. A finite thing, however, does not exist through the necessity of its own essence. One cannot explain this contrast by saying simply that everything exists and therefore everything is God. That statement omits the different ways in which existence belongs to substance and to its affections. The original force of the pantheistic interpretation is better preserved by maintaining that every finite existent expresses divine reality, while asking how this expression acquires a determinate form. The distinction is internal to nature, but it remains necessary for understanding nature's production (Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, def. 1, props. 7, 24; Melamed 2012: 96–97).

This structure can be assessed in two different ways. First, a defender of Spinoza may argue that the demand for a first finite effect misconstrues the nature of an eternal and immanent order. Proposition 28 explains determinate things through other determinate causes, while Propositions 15–16 ground the entire order in God. Second, a critic may argue that this account still leaves unexplained how finite determination itself follows from infinite substance: explaining one finite thing through another does not yet explain why finite modes exist at all. This second question guides the comparison pursued here. It identifies a specific explanatory difficulty without assuming in advance that the Ethics cannot resolve it or that a temporal account of creation would provide the solution.

The distinction between these assessments also specifies the standard by which the comparison should be judged. An explanation of a particular event asks which determinate causes account for its occurrence. An explanation of finitude asks how being limited is compatible with dependence on an unlimited source. The second question does not dis-

appear when the first receives an answer, although a defender of Spinoza may deny that it requires an additional principle. My objection concerns the adequacy of that denial. If finite determination is intelligible only through other finite determinations, the causal sequence explains relations within the finite order while leaving its general character to be understood through the system as a whole. This is the point at which alternative accounts of manifestation become philosophically relevant.

The distinction between intension and extension can clarify that demand if used cautiously. In semantics, intension concerns meaning or determining content, whereas extension concerns the things to which an expression applies. I use the distinction analogically: *natura naturans* concerns the essence and productive intelligibility of reality, while *natura naturata* concerns the differentiated effects following from it. This semantic use of 'extension' must not be confused with Spinoza's attribute of extension, and intensional content is not the same as intensive power. Nor does the analogy identify substance with a concept or modes with a set in a modern mathematical sense.

The analogy shows why describing a source's productive nature and identifying its effects are different explanatory tasks. Even if the same reality is considered under both descriptions, their equivalence requires an account of determination. However, no formal contradiction follows merely from calling one description intensional and the other extensional. Spinoza does not thereby change immanent causality into transitive causality. The defensible criticism is narrower: an assertion of divine–natural unity cannot substitute for explaining how particular effects are differentiated within it. Kabbalistic theories are relevant insofar as they make differentiation itself a thematic object of explanation.

The distinction can be illustrated under the two attributes known to human beings. Under the attribute of Extension, bodies are distinguished through motion and rest and through the relations that compose individuals. Under the attribute of Thought, ideas have their own causal explanation under that attribute; the human mind is the idea of an actually existing body. Neither account introduces a second substance, and neither treats ideas as reducible to material objects. Spinoza thus explains finite difference through determinate relations within each attribute. My criticism concerns how distinct bodies, ideas, and relations are produced. Simply listing bodies or ideas does not explain their production. Likewise, invoking a productive power leaves the explanation incomplete unless one explains how that power gives rise to these particular effects and relations (Spinoza 1925: Ethics II, props. 5–7, 13 and physical discussion; Deleuze 1968: 181–182).

The same caution applies to transcendence. God's infinity cannot be measured by the range of human knowledge, but being more than humans can know does not by itself establish a creator outside nature. Harry Austryn Wolfson's account of Spinoza's divine–world relation and Yitzhak Y. Melamed's discussion of pantheism show the importance of distinguishing divine infinity from the finite standpoint (Wolfson 1934: I, 74–75; Melamed 2018: 171–180). My objection concerns the inference from epistemic limitation to creator–creature transcendence, not the infinity of the attributes. A comparison with Kabbalah should ask which sense of transcendence each text supports rather than presupposing a single meaning.

R. Mosheh Cordovero and the differentiation of divine manifestation

The comparison has a limited textual point of departure in Spinoza himself. Letter 73 states that "all things are in God and move in God", thus connecting immanent causality with Paul, and tentatively with ancient Hebrew traditions, while qualifying what can be inferred from their transmission (Spinoza 1925: IV, 307–308, Letter 73). This is evidence that Spinoza recognized a possible affinity; it is not evidence that he accepted a specific Kabbalistic system. The letter names neither R. Mosheh Cordovero (1522–1570) nor R. Itshaq Luria Ashkenazi (Arizal, 1534–1572) and contains no argument from contraction. Its cautious reference cannot establish direct borrowing. The present comparison therefore concerns the explanatory structures of the texts, while questions of transmission require separate historical evidence.

Kabbalah encompasses diverse and sometimes conflicting accounts of divine life. Here, the analysis distinguishes R. Mosheh Cordovero from the Lurianic teachings associated with R. Itshaq Luria Ashkenazi and transmitted by his disciples. R. Mosheh Cordovero's account emphasizes the articulation of emanation through an ordered system. Lurianic teaching reorganizes the problem around withdrawal, rupture, and restoration. Their shared setting and vocabulary explain why comparison is productive; neither circumstance makes their doctrines interchangeable. The two systems will accordingly yield different conclusions in relation to Spinoza.

The Zoharic conjunction of divine filling and surrounding helps identify their shared problem. The Infinite both fills the worlds and exceeds their determinate manifestations. The verbs 'fills' and 'surrounds' should not be read as measurements of a body distributed through space. They join intimacy with non-exhaustion: the world depends throughout on the divine, yet does not furnish an adequate measure of its source. This conjunction is relevant to panentheistic readings, but it cannot establish that every Kabbalist gives the same account of transcendence. Its particular articulation through emanation or contraction must still be examined (Zohar 1558–1560: III, 225a; Melamed 2018: 179). Kabbalah refers here to the traditions under discussion, not to a single metaphysical position. The Infinite, 'Eyn Sof, is distinguished from its articulated manifestations through the sefyrot (singular sefyrah). References to the Zohar give the volume and folio; the letters 'a' and 'b' indicate the *recto* and *verso* of the folio.

Gershom Scholem's discussion of R. Mosheh Cordovero turns on the formula "God is all that exists, but all that exists is not God" (Scholem 1978: 149–150; Cordovero 1974: 24b–25a; Beltrán 2016: 331). Its asymmetry is essential. The first clause affirms the radical dependence of existence on its divine source; the second resists simply reversing that affirmation into an identification of every existent with God. The formula can therefore support a panentheistic reading, provided that "in God" does not imply spatial containment. It does not establish reductive identity, but neither does its denial of reductive identity suffice to exclude panentheism.

R. Mosheh Cordovero develops this distinction through emanation, 'açylut, and the relation of divine light to finite vessels, kelym. The first emanation, Crown, Keter, me-

diates between the Infinite and the ordered series of manifestations. The question is how finite and differentiated forms receive their existence without making the source finite or divided. R. Mosheh Cordovero's distinction between the unlimited source and limited manifestation resists assimilating their properties (Cordovero 1780: gate 2, ch. 6). His language of divine clothing should consequently be read as an account of manifestation and dependence, not as an unqualified transfer of the properties of finite vessels to the Infinite. The same concern appears in his warning that "the Emanator is not found within the emanated beings, God forbid" (Cordovero 1964: III, 151). Read together with his assertions of unity, this warning resists the reduction of the source to its articulated effects. The apparent tension is precisely what a contextual reading must explain. References to Pardes Rimonim give the gate and chapter.

Yitzhak Y. Melamed draws attention to R. Mosheh Cordovero's strong language of unity: "All is one and there is nothing separate from him" (Melamed 2018: 179, citing Cordovero 1883). This evidence cannot be dismissed merely because R. Mosheh Cordovero is a Jewish theist. In the passages discussed in chapters XXII and XL, however, unity is articulated through differentiated relations between the divine source, the emanations, and religious activity (Cordovero 1883: chs. 22, 40, fols. 16b, 49b). I read the language of inclusion together with those relations. It expresses inseparability from the source without automatically abolishing the distinctions through which manifestation becomes intelligible. This is a contextual interpretation of R. Mosheh Cordovero's unity, and not a denial of the passages that motivate Yitzhak Y. Melamed's reading.

More specifically, chapter XXII connects the descending communication of divine influence with the ascending effect of prayer, blessings, Torah study, and religious practice. The claim that everything is united with its source occurs within this account of reciprocal relations. Chapter XL places the inclusion of beings in the perspective of thought, mahshavah, while maintaining the concealment of the Infinite with respect to differentiated existence. Crown is associated with primordial thought, mahshavah qedumah, in which manifestation is rooted. I therefore interpret inclusion as inseparability from an intelligible source, not as the elimination of every distinction expressed in the account. The finite is sustained by the Infinite without becoming unlimited in the same respect. This reading preserves the force of the unity formula while resisting its translation into an identity between the source and every determinate expression (Cordovero 1883: chs. 22, 40, fols. 16b, 49b).

Yosef Ben Shlomo also identified some panentheistic elements in the works of R. Mosheh Cordovero (Ben Shlomo 1965: 296). However, R. Mosheh Cordovero distinguishes the Infinite from the chain of causes that unfolds through Crown (Keter) (Cordovero 1974: 5b). This distinction suggests that the Infinite is the source of the causal chain, rather than one of its members. It does not require construing the Infinite as a spatially separate object. Nor should the distinction between divine light, essence, and vessels be translated directly into Spinoza's substance–mode vocabulary: the terms have different explanatory functions within their respective systems.

The passage on causal sequence deserves particular emphasis. What proceeds from one level to another belongs to the chain of manifestation; the Infinite is its origin with-

out being another determinate link within it. This is the significance of hishtalshelut, the unfolding or concatenation of levels. If the source were simply included in the sequence as its first member, it would acquire the determinations of what it explains. R. Mosheh Cordovero's distinction therefore concerns the relation between the condition of a series and its differentiated members. It does not provide a spatial outside, but it does prevent the language of unity from making mediation superfluous (Cordovero 1974: 52b; Ben Shlomo 1965: 296).

The conclusion drawn from this first comparison therefore requires some qualification. R. Mosheh Cordovero's ordered emanation offers a model of differentiated manifestation that can preserve the source's transcendence of its determinate expressions. Spinoza, by contrast, explains modes through immanent necessity and rejects a creator external to nature. Both accounts hold that created beings depend on their source for their existence. They differ in how they explain this dependence and how distinct beings arise from that source. It concerns the mediation through which dependence and differentiation are articulated.

One consequence of this reading is that the language of inclusion cannot decide the classification by itself. To be included in a source may mean that nothing possesses independent existence; it need not mean that the source possesses every limitation of its effects. Conversely, distinguishing the source from its manifestations does not necessarily place it beyond all relation to them. R. Mosheh Cordovero's account must sustain both claims together. The vessels and the differentiated levels give content to their conjunction: unity concerns the dependence of manifestation, whereas differentiation concerns the form under which manifestation is received. In this respect, the comparison asks what mediation explains that the bare assertion of unity leaves unspecified. Its force depends on these relations, rather than on the isolated occurrence of a formula resembling pantheism.

Lurianic contraction and the limits of the comparison

Lurianic teaching changes explanatory emphasis. In the account transmitted by R. Ḥayyim Vital (1542–1620) at the beginning of *The Tree of Life*, divine light initially fills reality; contraction makes room for the differentiated worlds, and a measured line of light enters the resulting space (Vital 1910: palace 1, gate 1, branch 2). Contraction, tsimtsum, thus addresses the possibility of finitude through withdrawal and bounded manifestation. The spatial imagery describes a cosmological problem; it should not simply be converted into a physical movement occurring within an already existing space. References to 'Eç Ḥayyim give the palace, gate, and branch.

Here the role of withdrawal differs from an undifferentiated appeal to emanation. In an account of successive degrees, the question concerns how the higher communicates itself to the lower. In the Lurianic opening, the initial question concerns how there can be a field of differentiated manifestation at all when the infinite light leaves no vacant place. The line, qav, subsequently relates this field to its source. Contraction and communication are consequently linked: finite existence requires both limitation of manifestation and continued reception. This conjunction gives the comparison its philosophical interest,

even when the imagery is not accepted as a demonstrative explanation (Vital 1910: palace 1, gate 1, branch 2).

This opening cannot stand for the whole Lurianic system. The differentiation of worlds leads into the breaking of the vessels, shevirat ha-kelym, and their restoration, tiqqun. These themes connect cosmology with religious practice and the repair of disordered relations. Gershom Scholem's account of Lurianic Kabbalah situates the initial withdrawal within this larger drama (Scholem 1961: lecture 7, 260–263). In comparison with R. Mosheh Cordovero's ordered articulation of emanation, the distinctive explanatory weight falls on discontinuity and reconfiguration. This contrast identifies dominant structures; it does not imply that R. Mosheh Cordovero lacks dynamic relations or that Lurianic teaching lacks systematic order.

Withdrawal nevertheless does not unambiguously establish absolute separation between God and the world. A literal account raises the problem of how an infinite and omnipresent source can withdraw. A nonliteral account treats withdrawal as concealment or limitation of manifestation, leaving a different question about the status of finite otherness. R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745–1812), explicitly rejects a literal removal of God's essence from the world in the later reception of this doctrine (Schneur Zalman of Liadi n.d.: II, ch. 7). His interpretation is not simply R. Itshaq Luria Ashkenazi's own voice; it demonstrates why contraction cannot be cited as an uncontested guarantee of transcendence.

The contrast with Spinoza is now sharper. The *Ethics* locates finite determination within necessary immanent causality; the Lurianic narrative introduces withdrawal and renewed manifestation to explain how differentiated worlds can emerge. It therefore offers a different explanatory model, not a deduction of finite modes from Spinoza's definitions. A Spinozist can reject the appeal to divine withdrawal because it introduces premises incompatible with the necessity and immutability of divine nature. Conversely, the Lurianic model makes explicit the problem of room for otherness that the critic of Spinoza wishes to emphasize.

The Lurianic alternative explains how distinct beings emerge through the process of divine manifestation, rather than explaining their differences only through relations among beings that are already distinct. The Kabbalistic accounts of R. Mosheh Cordovero and R. Itshaq Luria Ashkenazi offer distinct alternatives that highlight a limitation in Spinoza's explanation of how differentiated beings arise. They are presented as independent frameworks for addressing this problem, rather than merged into a single solution or incorporated into Spinoza's ontology.

The question can also be stated in terms of the status of limitation. For Spinoza, the finitude of a thing is considered within an order of determinate causes; limitation does not require a withdrawal of substance from itself. In the Lurianic comparison, limitation is introduced into the account of how manifestation becomes possible. These approaches therefore assign explanatory work to different moments of their respective accounts. This difference should not be disguised by translating contraction into an ordinary causal restriction or by treating a finite mode as an empty space awaiting illumination. Either translation would remove the feature that makes the comparison instructive. What is

shared is the problem of dependence and difference; what remains disputed is the kind of mediation that an adequate explanation requires.

Divine presence and the scope of the analogy

The contrast also concerns divine presence. In rabbinic usage, Shekhinah expresses divine nearness without simply identifying God with a visible object (Urbach 1969: 29–59). In Kabbalistic configurations it is associated with the tenth emanation, Kingship, Malkhut, and with the religious relations organized around that manifestation (Cordovero 1780: gate 6, ch. 5). These associations belong to particular symbolic and ritual structures. They should not be treated either as a uniform doctrine of all Jewish thought or as proof that every form of pantheism excludes presence.

Spinoza's account of intellectual love offers a more precise contrast. *Ethics* V, proposition 32, corollary, grounds this love in understanding God as eternal rather than imagining God as present (Spinoza 1925: Ethics V, prop. 32, cor.; Rovere 2010: 342). The Kabbalistic conception of divine presence offers a richer account than a simple affirmation that God is present, since it explains how divine presence becomes manifest through imagination, symbolic representation, and religious practice.

R. Elie Benamozegh's nineteenth-century interpretation offers an example of a Kabbalistic critique of Spinoza (Benamozegh 1864; Guetta 1998: 56; Abensour 2017). Understanding (Binah), the third emanation, corresponds to Thought, whereas Kingship (Malkhut), the tenth emanation, corresponds to Extension.

He thus identified what he regarded as Spinoza's pantheistic error: placing Thought and Extension on the same ontological plane, as two equally infinite attributes of the one divine substance. Although Spinoza genuinely distinguished between them, he established no hierarchy between them. From a Kabbalistic perspective, however, the spiritual and the corporeal correspond to distinct and hierarchically ordered degrees of divine manifestation and therefore cannot be assigned an equivalent ontological status (Spinoza 1925: Ethics I, prop. 10; II, prop. 7).

The semantic categories of intension and extension are relevant here because they distinguish between the internal determination of a content – what specifies its intelligibility – and the domain in which that content is instantiated or manifested. Operationally, this distinction provides a model for the asymmetrical relation between Thought–Binah and Extension–Malkhut: Binah represents differentiated intelligibility, whereas Malkhut represents its determinate manifestation. The distinction thus clarifies how a single content can pass from intelligible determination to manifestation without reducing these two levels to the parallel and ontologically equivalent attributes posited by Spinoza. The analogy should nevertheless be understood as a structural application of semantic categories to a Kabbalistic ontological framework: the intensional–extensional distinction elucidates the relation between Binah as a level of differentiated intelligibility and Malkhut as the level at which such determination becomes manifest, without reducing the sefirotic structure to a theory of semantic reference. R. Elie Benamozegh's critique is best understood as con-

testing the absence of the hierarchy required by his own account, rather than discovering a mistranslation within Spinoza. Its comparative value lies in showing how different ontologies organize the relation between intelligible determination and manifested plurality. It is not historical evidence that Spinoza adopted, and then misapplied, a Kabbalistic scheme.

The symbolism of Understanding and Kingship gives this criticism a more specific content. Understanding differentiates what is initially concentrated in Wisdom, Hokhmah, whereas Kingship concerns manifestation and reception. Describing the first function as intensional and the second as extensional brings out the movement from articulated intelligibility to differentiated expressions. The comparison remains an analogy because the emanations are not merely logical operations. For R. Elie Benamozegh, the question concerns the order of divine manifestation itself. His objection to Spinoza is that the horizontal relation of attributes cannot perform the work assigned to hierarchical mediation in this account. The disagreement is therefore substantive: the Kabbalistic hierarchy provides a genuine alternative to Spinoza's ontology, even though it cannot be used as an internal principle for interpreting or reconstructing Spinoza's own philosophical system (Zohar 1558–1560: III, 2a; I, 3b, 223a–b; Benamozegh 1864; Guetta 1998: 56).

The disagreement remains meaningful even without any historical dependence. It places two standards of intelligibility alongside one another and asks what each can explain in its own terms.

Conclusion

Pantheism and panentheism help frame the relation between Spinoza and Kabbalah only when their criteria are explicit. Spinoza's radical immanence supports a qualified pantheistic interpretation: God and nature form one order, but substance retains priority over its modes. Neither that priority nor the inclusion of everything in God independently establishes creator–creature transcendence. The distinction between natura naturans and natura naturata therefore leaves unresolved a fundamental difficulty in Spinoza's ontology: how finite and determinate modes can be derived from an infinite and indivisible substance. Merely distinguishing these two orders does not explain the transition from infinite being to finite determination. This article has examined two Kabbalistic models that offer distinct accounts of how finite differentiation emerges from the infinite. R. Mosheh Cordovero explains this differentiation through an ordered process of emanation while preserving the distinction between the divine source and its manifestations. Lurianic Kabbalah proposes a different framework, in which contraction or withdrawal (tsimtsum), rupture (shevirat ha-kelim), and restoration (tikkun) play a constitutive role in explaining the emergence and differentiation of finite reality. Both illuminate the relation of infinity to finitude, but neither should be attributed to Spinoza or treated as a completed correction of his system. The intensional–extensional analogy identifies the difference between explaining a productive source and explaining its differentiated effects. The article's contribution is to make that difference a criterion of comparison while preserving the limits of historical inference and philosophical criticism. The resulting question is whether dependence alone

supplies an adequate account of difference. The comparison suggests that the answer requires attention to the specific relations through which unity is expressed. This is the philosophical issue that remains after the historical classifications have been clarified.

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