Key Concepts and Propositions in Spinoza's *Ethics*

The following are some key concepts and propositions in Spinoza's *Ethics* which are discussed by Nadler in his SEP essay. Our goal is to understand these concepts and propositions well enough so that we can restate them in our own words.

If you are interested in a more comprehensive account of the ethics, I would recommend a short book by Steven Nadler entitled *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction*. My references below marked “SE” are to passages in that text.

---

**Concepts**

1. substance
2. attribute
3. God
4. essence
5. natura naturans (“naturing nature”)
6. natura naturata (“natured nature”)
7. affection
8. affect
   8.1. passive affect
   8.2. active affect
9. modes
   9.1. finite modes
   9.2. infinite modes
10. idea
   10.1. inadequate idea
   10.2. adequate idea
11. knowledge
   11.1. from sense experience
   11.2. from reason
   11.3. from intuition
12. conatus

**Propositions**

1. Substance has ontological independence, necessarily exists, and is infinite. (SE, 63f)
2. "[E]xistence follows from the nature of substance just as having three angles follows from the nature of a triangle". (SE, 66)
3. Spinoza's God is "the universal, immanent and sustaining cause of all that exists". This is a "God" which exists only in a philosophical sense. (7f)
4. The existence of the world is necessary. (8;10)
5. On determinism, see also Nadler, SE, 107: "Everything that happens had to happen, in the strongest possible sense: not just because its causes..."
happened (this would be mere determinism), but because its causes themselves had to happen."

6. "There is nothing outside nature." (10)

7. "Everything that is extended follows from the attribute of extension alone."
The same reasoning applies to the attribute of thought and to all other attributes. (17)

8. Parallelism: "[A] mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways (IIp7s)." (17; emphases added.)

9. There is no freedom of the will. (21)

10. Freedom comes from an increase in our adequate ideas and decrease in our inadequate ideas. (23)

11. "[V]irtue...consists in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding, of adequate ideas." (25)

12. Knowledge of the essences of nature is the greatest good and the highest virtue for human beings. (26)

--------

Timothy Quigley, revised 15 Sep 15