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Spinoza's Eternal Mind

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Spinoza's Eternal Mind

Spinoza's Eternal Mind

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Philosophy

by

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Abstract

Spinoza ends the *Ethics* with a series of obscure and seemingly inconsistent statements about the eternity of the mind. Although some scholars hold that Spinoza's statements contradict those in earlier parts, others offer more hopeful interpretations. I put forward a new interpretation. It is my aim to show that Spinoza's views on the eternity of the mind are wholly coherent, consistent, and perhaps even right. In order to do this it is first necessary to understand Spinoza's historical context, other readings of the doctrine, and several key components of Spinoza's system. I will then put forward and defend my interpretation and end with some comments concerning the plausibility of Spinoza's eternity of the mind doctrine.

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A Note on Citations

All translations, unless noted, are from *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, Edwin Curley, ed. and trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

Other translations are either my own or from *Complete Works*, Trans. Sam Shirley, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub Co, 2002).

All references to the Latin are from *Spinoza Opera*, 4 vols., Carl Gebhart, ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925).

The *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* is abbreviated ‘*TdIE*’ and referenced by paragraph number.

The Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well Being is abbreviated ‘*KV*’ and referenced by paragraph number.

The *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* is abbreviated ‘*TTP*’ and referenced by chapter number.

The *Metaphysical Thoughts* is abbreviated ‘*CM*’ and referenced by part and chapter.

The correspondence is abbreviated ‘*Ep.*’ and referenced by letter number.

For the *Ethics*, the roman numerals indicate the part, ‘p’ indicates ‘proposition’, and the number is the proposition number. ‘IIp7’, for instance, means ‘*Ethics*, Part 2, Proposition 7’.

Other abbreviations are as follows:

d- definition
a- axiom
s- scholium
c- corollary
l- lemma
app.- Appendix
pref.- Preface

(All quotations of Spinoza that include reference to other propositions are amended to reflect this style.)

Part I

We hope for immortality and we fear mortality. It is quite common that *mortality*, flanked on either end by infinite darkness, is a troubling thought. Reassurance of something more is a hallmark of major western religions. The typical transcendental argument runs as follows: since life is meaningful, there must be some form of ultimate reward or punishment; and such a thing cannot be supplied in the here and now; without immortality, mortality is a purposeless affair in which everything, in its various shades of gray, is permitted. Therefore we are immortal. We outlive our bodies.

To deny the conclusion is to expose oneself to the pitfalls built into the assumptions that give the argument its intuitive strength. If we outlive our bodies, the body must be detachable from what truly constitutes selfhood—presumably a mind or soul. To deny immortality is to deny that the mind and body are distinct, or to render the distinction trivial. If the body and mind are not really distinct, then what relationship do they have?¹ Perhaps more troubling, by removing the hope of the world to come, the advocate of immortality claims we have aborted all meaning and lasting reward. We are transformed into hedonists, parcels of matter that are nothing more than the minute causal occurrences taking place within them. These conclusions seem thrust upon the denier of immortality by the terms of the debate. But to shirk the conclusion and step clear of the above pitfalls is to shoulder the project of developing an alternative metaphysics of the mind and body and a system of nature in which virtue and meaning are possible without recourse to other worlds. Whose shoulders are broad enough?

In the 17th century Jewish community of Amsterdam, the immortality of the soul was a topic of interest, and it received special attention by the Talmud Torah's highly visible rabbi,

¹ A stumped Descartes turns the question on the critic.

Manasseh ben Israel in his *Nishmat Hayyim (The Soul of Life)*.² Although the importance and centrality of an afterlife doctrine in Judaism is a tricky topic,³ what is certain is that, on the Houtgracht in the mid-1600s, belief in the personal immortality of the soul was a requirement for observant Jews. Uriel da Costa, for example, a convert to Judaism from Christianity, was met with a cherem (one quite gentle compared with one to come) censuring his “numerous erroneous, false, and heretical opinions,” one of which was the denial of immortality.⁴ He believed that the soul was not expressly created by God but rather was a part of the body and consequently died with the body. After a brief return to rectitude, his views devolved into even more extreme heresies, and another cherem arrived; but its punishments could not take full effect, as da Costa killed himself in 1640.⁵ If he was right, his body and soul ended in 1640—but not his ideas, which the Amsterdam rabbis feared might take root in a young mind.

In 1658 a cherem was pronounced on Juan de Prado, a Spanish physician born in 1612. His accusers charged that he denied the divine origin of the Torah, the resurrection of the body, and the immortality of the soul.⁶ Prado was once an advocate for Judaism in a Spain in the grip of the Inquisition.⁷ But he entertained doubts: he wondered whether all religions were equally capable of directing the seeker to truth; he wondered whether the soul died with the body. He had

² See Jacob Adler, “Mortality of the Soul from Alexander of Aphrodisias to Spinoza” in *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 3-4. The topic and its importance was also not confined to the Jewish quarter.

³ And one already covered in detail in Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 42-62.

⁴ Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: a Life*, reprint ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 69.

⁵ Nadler, *Spinoza*, 72. As Della Rocca notes, da Costa very likely suffered from mental illness. Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 17.

⁶ Nadler, *Spinoza*, 145.

⁷ Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 58-9.

an ambivalent mind, as Yovel describes.⁸ Upon his arrival to Amsterdam, what Prado primarily sought was a cohesive Jewish community. He was met instead with a group of rabbis and leaders uncomfortable with his unorthodox and deistic tendencies. Prado's response to the cherem (or two) did not have the finality of de Costa's, but it also did not exhibit intellectual maturity: "Prado displayed neither nobility of spirit nor a pure and unshakeable conscience. He was not a spiritual giant but a rather ordinary man whose fate and vicissitudes did not elevate him above his contemporaries."⁹ Prado fought desperately to remain in the community and prized the community above his convictions, as fickle as they were (for it is a challenge to prize convictions when they are constantly changing). What is certain is that, within the Jewish community of Amsterdam at the time, particular doctrines were considered to be of central importance and failure to adhere required authoritative action. One such doctrine was the immortality of the soul.

Denial of immortality was typically not simple recalcitrance—the sort of hostility towards an idea that is only possible when one is still enslaved by it. Rather, as one might expect, denial and modification of immortality had a long and complex history, and many of the figures that comprised it would not have viewed themselves as denying immortality. Alexander of Aphrodisias—then held to be among the foremost of commentators on Aristotle—used *De Anima* III.5 to suggest a notion of immortality as gained through intellectual exercise. Such a view is encountered in adopted and adapted forms in Averroes, Maimonides, and Gersonides, all of whom, like Alexander, take inspiration from Aristotle's account of the intellect(s). However, Manasseh sharply condemns Alexander's views and anyone who follows them.¹⁰ The notion of an epistemically gained immortality, after all, is risky: it requires that everyone become a

⁸ Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 63.

⁹ Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 71.

¹⁰ See Adler, "Mortality of the Soul from Alexander of Aphrodisias to Spinoza."

philosopher; and the observant and pious but cognitively untalented Jews would lack reward; whereas the nonobservant and heretical but cognitively righteous would reap the rewards that should justly be reserved for those in the correct tradition. It is also difficult—but, as is almost always the case, not impossible—to square an epistemic immortality with Scripture.¹¹ Needless to say, although the above Jewish thinkers often believed themselves to be working within the tradition, and even within the orthodoxy, their views, as recondite as they were, rarely were given the benefit of charity and forbearance by those in power. Being that immortality was cherished and crucial at the time, the slightest improvisation on the theme was viewed with suspicion.

With the stakes surrounding personal immortality so high (the doctrine firmly endorsed by a respected rabbi, the portentous death of a denier, and many other factors not mentioned here¹²), who would dare to deny something of such importance?

The strongest *cherem* ever produced by the Amsterdam Jewish community was pronounced on July, 27, 1656:

By decree of the angels and by the command of the holy men, we excommunicate, expel, curse and damn Baruch de Espinoza, with the consent of God, Blessed by He, and with the consent of the entire holy congregation, and in front of these holy scrolls with the 613 precepts which are written therein. [...] Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night; cursed be he when he lies down and cursed be he when he rises up.¹³

Spinoza was 23 years old at the time. The amount of personal courage required to withstand the ban has only been achieved by a scarce few—certainly not by da Costa or Prado. Having already moved beyond the popular beliefs of his community, he was then removed from the community

¹¹ Of course those who held to innovative immortality doctrines believed that their views received a (more or less) clear endorsement in Scripture. For example, Isaac Arama thought that the epistemic requirement for immortality was knowledge of Torah, and thus non-Jews would remain excluded.

¹² But nonetheless mentioned (and argued for) by Nadler in *Heresy*, 38-66.

¹³ Nadler, *Spinoza*, 120.

itself in a way that offered no legitimate chance of reconciliation. His alleged crimes were “abominable heresies” and “monstrous deeds,” the true meaning of which is impossible to determine with any certainty.¹⁴ The story goes that Spinoza was given the opportunity (and perhaps even the financial enticement) to change his ways—or, as was perhaps taken to be the same thing to him, his *opinions*. But changing one’s views solely for the sake of communal uniformity is not characteristic of a philosopher. So Spinoza accepted his departure with equanimity. He became, as Matthew Stewart describes, a “double exile”: “To the Jews he was a heretic; to the Christians he was, moreover, a Jew.”¹⁵ He flourished on his own, producing a system that, at its dénouement, contains a firm and emphatic (and abominably heretical) denial of personal immortality.

Spinoza talks of immortality in the *Short Treatise* but scarcely mentions it in the *Ethics*. He opens the very brief chapter titled “Of the Immortality of the Soul” in the *Short Treatise* as follows: “If we once consider attentively what the Soul is, and where its change and duration arise from, we shall easily see whether it is mortal and immortal.” (*KV*, 103) It is unclear what precisely Spinoza means by the ‘soul’ here, but we are told to consider it attentively. The

¹⁴ Nadler outlines the various theories in *Spinoza* 129-132 and *Heresy* Ch. 2, and, as is the central thesis of *Heresy*, argues strongly that it is the denial of immortality that was the principal provocation.

¹⁵ Matthew Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World*, Reprint ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 36. Besides being a double exile in his time, posterity has constructed two images of him; as Negri says, there is a “double image” of Spinoza, often made in the image of the reader: he is viewed as satanic, an atheist, a propounder of “chaos impenetrable,” and “un monstre de confusion et de tenebres,” as well as paragon of virtue, an unorthodox but devout Christian, and, in the now famous words of Novalis, “a God-intoxicated man.” But two images of Spinoza is not the same as two Spinozas. Antonio Negri, *Savage Anomaly: the Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics* (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1999), 3-4.

parallelism between body and mind is germinating in the “Appendix II”¹⁶ where Spinoza defines the soul as “an Idea arising from an object which exists in nature,” which clearly foreshadows what in the *Ethics* he calls the mind, i.e. the idea of an existing thing in nature (IIp11). (*KV*, 119) Spinoza prefers to speak of the ‘soul’ in the *Short Treatise*, but it is very likely equivalent to what he later prefers to call the ‘mind’.

The issue of ‘union’ presents further difficulties. Spinoza says, “the Soul can be united either with the body of which it is the Idea or with God, without whom it can neither exist nor be understood.” Can it be united to both? If the soul is the idea of a body, it would appear that the soul and the body must be united. Yet, Spinoza tells us, the soul can only exist and be understood through its union with God. It would appear then that the soul and God must be united as well. However, one might say that although the soul can only be understood and said to exist if it is united with God, it does not follow that it is always united with God; that is, God’s necessary causal role is separate from a constant union with the soul. The “Second Dialogue” is illuminating: “so long as we do not have such a clear idea of God that it so unites us to him as not to let us love anything outside him, we cannot say that we are truly united with God, and so depend immediately on him.” (*KV*, 34) With a true union and concomitant immediate dependence on God, we cannot be said to be united with the body. The union and dependence entails that we love God and only God. For Spinoza in the *Short Treatise* there is a close link between love and union. Elsewhere he talks, for example, of consequences in the soul from its “love and union it has with the body” (*KV*, 96) and defines love by saying, “Love, then, is nothing but enjoying a thing and being united with it. [...] [W]e understand a union such that the

¹⁶ He is certainly not consistent with the nascent parallelism in other parts of the *Short Treatise*. For instance in Ch. 19 he speaks of the soul’s power “to move the spirits” and later says that “these spirits can also be moved by the body.” (*KV*, 92) This inter-attribute causation—as well as any notion of ‘animal spirits’—is long gone in the *Ethics*.

lover and the loved come to be one and the same thing, or to form a whole together.” Yet union and love are not equivalent: a person can unite with something corruptible and be miserable.

(*KV*, 62-3) Awkward as seems, Spinoza appears to be saying that the union of the soul and body is one of love; this is less awkward when considering the consequence, namely, that the soul and body form a whole. However, the soul is only truly united with God when it cannot love anything except God. This requires, given the link between love and union, that the soul cannot be united with the body when it is united with God. Therefore, the disjunction must be exclusive.

With this in mind, we must return to immortality and consider the final lines of Spinoza’s chapter on the subject:

1. if [the Soul] is united with the body only, and the body perishes, then it must also perish; for if it lacks the body, which is the foundation of its love, it must perish with it; but that
2. if it is united with another thing, which is, and remains, immutable, then, on the contrary, it will have to remain immutable also. For through what would it then be possible that it should be able to perish? Not through itself, for as little as it was able, when it did not exist, through itself to begin to exist, so little is it able, now that it exists, [through itself] to change or perish. So what alone is the cause of [the Soul’s] existence [i.e. God] would also, when [the Soul] came to perish, have to be the cause of its nonexistence, but it [i.e. God] changed or perished. (*KV*, 103)

The link of union and love appears in the first disjunct and can reasonably be applied to the second. With the union of the soul and body, when the body perishes, since the soul and body comprise a whole, the soul would perish as well. Yet when the soul is united through love with God, since God is immutable, the soul is immutable. The second disjunct argument functions additionally through the principle that a thing cannot have the cause of its perishing internal to itself (see IIIp4) and concludes that the soul cannot perish without God also perishing, which is

an evident absurdity.¹⁷ The union with God can only be achieved through the intellectual exercise of forming clear ideas of God. When a person unites with God, he/she must then cease to be united with the body. What exactly does the abandonment of the union with the body look like? Although the disjunction is exclusive, is it possible that the union with God is gradual—i.e. the more clear ideas of God one forms, the more one becomes united until finally one is “truly united” with God? More to the point, what sort of picture of immortality does this give? Is it personal or are we simply subsumed into God? It could coherently be both, but clearly what Spinoza *does not* offer is an afterlife in which each person is distinct from God and communing with him in a post-mortem spiritual society. Spinoza’s view, whatever it amounts to, is heresy.¹⁸

It is worth noting that his actual argument in this short chapter in the *Short Treatise* does not specifically concern immortality. The chapter might better be titled “The Potential Immutability of the Soul.” He then begins the next chapter by saying that “our love of God is, and its effect, our *eternal duration*.” (KV, 103, emphasis mine) What he means by “eternal duration” and whether it is distinct from immortality is a question that should be answered only if we can reasonably assume that Spinoza is intentional about his use of these terms and whether they connote specific and philosophically significant meanings. This is an assumption we cannot make. I elect to conclude instead that Spinoza knew that his system included a notion that can broadly be construed as a type of immortality, but at the time of the *Short Treatise* he had not worked it out with any precision, and thus the chapter devoted to it reflects as much perplexity in

¹⁷ How exactly this argument works is subject to some debate. Curley discusses it in his translation. See pg. 141.

¹⁸ For more on this chapter see Ed Curley, "Notes on the Immortality of the Soul in Spinoza's *Short Treatise*." *Giornale Critico della Filosofia Italiana* (October-December 1977), 8:327-336; also Nadler, *Heresy*, 109-10.

the author as in the reader.¹⁹ He ends his early work as follows: “And from all this (as also because our soul is united with God, and is a part of the infinite Idea arising immediately from God) we can see clearly the origin of clear knowledge, and the immortality of the soul. But for the present what we have said will be enough.” (*KV*, 121) Hardly.

As is widely known, the *Short Treatise* provides a valuable glimpse into the early formulations of what would later become the *Ethics*. But it is only a glimpse—and an occasionally misleading one. Because Spinoza abandoned it for a work better suited for the scope of his project, one would expect to find between the two specific doctrines that changed, were abandoned, and plenty more that were added. Spinoza’s idea of the eternity of the mind makes use of all three categories.

There is a clear link between the immortality of the soul found in the *Short Treatise* and the eternity of the mind found in the *Ethics*. In the *Short Treatise* he uses the term ‘immortality’ (*onsterfelijkheid*) explicitly but also employs many of the terms that were to appear in Part 5 of the *Ethics*; both are also clearly unorthodox. Early on Spinoza held that there is some sense in which the mind can partake in the eternity or immutability of God; but the idea was inchoate and problematic. The chapter on immortality is abruptly short and inconclusive, and one would expect it to warrant greater attention. Yet it (or something similar) receives the final 21 propositions of the *Ethics*, exactly half of Part 5. Not only did the doctrine change, but its significance grew.

¹⁹ “[I]t is clear that the *Short Treatise* is an immature work, in the sense that in it Spinoza often seems confused, and certainly had not yet arrived at many of the views characteristic of the *Ethics*.” Curley does not cite examples for this claim, but the chapter on immortality would have been apropos. Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: a Reading of Spinoza's Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), xii.

I contend²⁰ that Spinoza (at least in his mature thought, but perhaps also in the *Short Treatise*) denies any doctrine of immortality, insofar as immortality means the persistence of the self after the death of the body. But if the *Short Treatise* contains an endorsement of immortality (and a half-hearted endorsement it would be), Spinoza flushes his system of it by the time of the *Ethics*. This is most marked by the disappearance of the term ‘immortality’.

And last, the addition of the idea of eternity of the mind has long perplexed commentators. As one paces through the text, its appearance is jolting and, needless to say, confusing. What precisely are his claims? Why does he make them? And granted a satisfactory answer to those questions, is Spinoza right? Does the *Ethics* end with a plausible picture or with a muddle of scholastic and Cartesian terms? Answers to these questions are in high demand in the study of Spinoza, and answers to the question of our eternity are ubiquitous. Before I venture to meet these demands, it is best to catalog some of the other answers on offer and to see what we can learn from them.

There are helpful fault lines that aid in sorting through the numerous interpretative accounts given of Spinoza’s eternity of the mind. The most helpful is a distinction between ontological and epistemological interpretations.²¹ The distinction is not perfectly named. Those who adhere to an ontological view argue that Spinoza maintains a quasi-traditional version of immortality or eternal life in which some personal, and for most commentators, *individual* aspect of a mind outlasts the death of the body. Death is not the end of the individual. The epistemological view, however, suggests that what constitutes Spinoza’s doctrine is the

²⁰ Along with several others, Nadler most notably. See also Daniel Garber, “A Free Man Thinks of Nothing Less Than Death,” in *Early Modern Philosophy: Mind, Matter, and Metaphysics*, ed. Christia Mercer and Eileen O’Neill (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 103-18.

²¹ Steven Parchment classes in this way (though he occasionally classes wrongly). Steven Parchment “The Mind’s Eternity in Spinoza’s Ethics,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38, no. 3 (July 2000): 349-82.

acquisition of an eternal type of knowledge, but it does not include a continuation after death. The imperfection in the names lies in the fact that the aspect that survives death for ontological readers is a mind constituted by a type of knowledge, but unlike the epistemological readers, in general they hold that it persists with individuality after the death of the body. The distinction is helpful in arranging and classifying the available readings, but once this is done, it is best to consider the readings on their own terms. It is yet another ladder to be thrown away.

Such an unwieldy mass of literature requires still further criteria. I propose two more. It is fruitful to delineate between those who say Spinoza has an immortality/eternity distinction and those who do not, whether explicitly or implicitly. That is to say, does Spinoza mean the same thing by immortality and eternity? There are also two differing meanings of eternity ('timelessness' and 'sempiternity') found in the literature, which will be of use in the future.

It is fitting to begin with the view of Harry Austryn Wolfson, who is not only widely influential but also a fitting representative of what is a very common reading of Spinoza's eternity of the mind doctrine.²² His is an ontological interpretation to the utmost: "the immortality of the soul, according to Spinoza, is personal and individual,"²³ meaning there is something that not only outlasts the body but also retains selfhood and individuality for each person. The mind also pre-exists the body, according to Wolfson's reading. Immortality consists in the intellectual union with God and causes a delight and love much akin to the suggestion of numerous medieval thinkers.²⁴ In fact, Wolfson takes Spinoza's project, at least at the conclusion

²² A more common reading could be that Spinoza simply falls into inconsistency as the *Ethics* closes. I need not say more about this view.

²³ Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning, Vol. 2* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 295; cf. 318.

²⁴ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 310.

of the *Ethics*, to be a defense of traditional rabbinic immortality doctrine.²⁵ Wolfson does not distinguish between immortality and eternity of the mind, and although he is certainly aware of the Platonic and Aristotelian senses of eternity (since he classes them as such earlier in the first volume), the distinction strangely does not play a crucial role in his discussion of immortality.²⁶ For Wolfson, Spinoza's immortality doctrine, despite being ontological and hence a style of afterlife, is not supernatural. This is due to the influence Spinoza drew from theories of the acquired intellect as found in Crescas and Ibn Ezra. Wolfson is right that the theory of the acquired intellect is crucial.

Alan Donagan holds as well that Spinoza intends a personal and individual immortality. He, however, finds the key to understanding Spinoza in the concepts of formal and actual essence. The latter exists only when the mind itself exists; but with the destruction of the body—and thus the end of the actual essence—the formal essence, which expresses the individuality of the person, remains in the mind of God.²⁷ Concerning the question of eternity, Donagan argues that the appearance of eternity as timelessness (i.e. eternity in the Platonic sense, as Wolfson says) is an unfortunate illusion.²⁸ Because Spinoza has a restricted meaning of time, what he says about the eternity of the mind is perfectly consistent with sempiternity—or 'omnitemporality', as he calls it.²⁹ Thus a doctrine that posits a mind that can continue to exist in a personal and

²⁵ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 323.

²⁶ It receives mention at pg. 307 while he discusses the intellectual love of God.

²⁷ Alan Donagan, "Spinoza's Proof of Immortality," in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Marjorie Grene (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1973), 255.

²⁸ Donagan, "Spinoza's Proof of Immortality," 242.

²⁹ Donagan, "Spinoza's Proof of Immortality," 243.

peaceful state, according to Donagan, “preserves much of the substance of what plain men have hoped for.”³⁰ Donagan is right that the sort of immortality hoped for by most people is crucial.

A different and often overlooked reading is found in Gilles Deleuze’s *Expressionism in Philosophy*. There is an odd combination of both an ontological and epistemological interpretation in text. He first suggests, contra Wolfson, that Spinoza is an “avowed opponent” of traditional arguments for immortality and says, “We should not imagine that the soul endures beyond the body: it endures while the body itself endures, and it is eternal insofar as it expresses the body’s essence.”³¹ The mind is eternal when there is an “intensive part” that defines its essence, and yet from this we should not imagine a traditional sort of immortality. “To feel and experience that we are eternal, it is enough to enter into the third kind of knowledge, that is, to form the idea of ourselves as it is in God. This idea is just the idea that expresses the body’s essence; to the extent that we form it, to the extent that we have it, we *experience* that we are eternal.”³² It is then possible to experience our eternity, as Spinoza says at Vp23s. What remains is the power of understanding. After death ideas are all adequate and of the third kind, and a person’s essence expresses God’s essence. “*We become completely expressive.*”³³ All of this sounds strangely ontological, but this is not Deleuze’s meaning here. Upon death it is not the case that we express God’s essence, because upon death there is no *I* or *we*; rather God expresses God’s own essence and the adequate ideas we once had continue to exist in the mind of God.

³⁰ Donagan, 256. For another attempt at rescuing the individuality of Spinoza’s doctrine, see Tamar Rudavsky, *Time Matters: Time, Creation and Cosmology in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000).

³¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 1992) 314.

³² Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 314-5.

³³ Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 316.

In responding to Leibniz's objection that Spinoza's eternity of the mind, so construed, offers no motivation to perfect oneself, Deleuze's view becomes more ontological. He says that in death a person is only affected by affections of the third kind, implying that a person still has the capacity to be affected after death: "And it is [that] capacity in its eternal power which remains along with our essence."³⁴ This is only possible if a person achieves a "maximum proportion of active affections" during life.³⁵ The test then is not a moral one, but a physical one: to be expressive is to be active.³⁶ Deleuze is right that what motivates a person to acquire an eternal mind is crucial.

Of all those dealing with Spinoza's eternity of the mind doctrine, Jonathan Bennett is its most outspoken critic. (His calling it an "unmitigated and seemingly unmotivated disaster" is quoted about as often as any single phrase of Spinoza's.) He is a critic of its truth, however, not of its intelligibility within Spinoza's system. Bennett suggests that Spinoza means the following, which amounts to a form of epistemological interpretation: the idea of the eternal essence of my body must be in my mind; a necessary truth about the mind must also be a thought in the mind, which leads to a single thought which is eternal and in the mind.³⁷ The mind must be eternal in virtue of its eternal idea. This is possible because for Spinoza there is no distinction between an eternal truth about a mind and a thought in the mind; i.e. if there is some eternal truth about a mind (namely, its essence as an idea in the mind of God), then that same truth must exist as an

³⁴ Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 316.

³⁵ Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 320.

³⁶ Although her view is not as straightforwardly ontological as Wolfson's, Leslie Armour also argues for an ontological reading. See Leslie Armour, "Knowledge, Idea, and Spinoza's Notion of Immortality," in *Spinoza: The Enduring Questions*, ed. Graeme Hunter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 48-63.

³⁷ Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Hackett Pub Co Inc, 1984), 361.

idea in the mind.³⁸ The conflation of the two, by Bennett's lights, is a mistake. It also entails that everyone (and perhaps *everything*) is equally eternal—even “the most wretched person on earth.”³⁹ Bennett is right that who (or what) participates in eternity, and to what extent, is crucial.

Steven Nadler clearly claims that Spinoza's view is an express denial of immortality. In fact, he argues that this is simply a consequence of Spinoza's system.⁴⁰ This leaves him with an epistemological interpretation, making use of eternity as timelessness. There are two senses in which the mind is eternal, according to Nadler. The first, a “very minimal kind of eternity,” is the idea of the body in the mind of God, meaning that God has an eternal idea of the essence of each human body.⁴¹ Yet, as Nadler notes, this is true of all extended things, not humans especially (thus it being termed “minimal”). This is similar in some ways to Bennett's account above. But if Spinoza's view is limited to this kind of eternity, there is no way to account for the passages in which Spinoza claims that one can have a greater or lesser share of eternity. Nadler's second sense is rooted in the human capacity for adequate ideas: by forming ideas through the second and third types of knowledge, a person's mind is constituted by eternal ideas and is thus eternal insofar as it is made up of them. “[T]he more adequate knowledge we have, the greater is the degree of the eternity of the mind.”⁴² Both of these aspects of eternity are at work at the end of the Ethics, according to Nadler, and neither amount to any semblance of immortality, personal or otherwise.⁴³

³⁸ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 361.

³⁹ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 362.

⁴⁰ “Spinoza did, without question, deny the personal immortality of the soul.” Nadler, *Heresy*, 108. cf. 95

⁴¹ Nadler, *Heresy*, 114.

⁴² Nadler, *Heresy*, 122.

⁴³ For a similar view but discussed in a broader context, see Garber, “A Free Man Thinks of Nothing Less Than Death.” Other epistemological interpreters include John Caird, *Spinoza*, Cheap ed. (London: Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1902), ch. 16; Harold H. Joachim, *A Study*

There are others who share views similar to Nadler's but who do not give the matter lengthy attention. For instance, Henry Allison—who titles his view an “epistemological interpretation”—says, “the eternity of the mind turns out to be equivalent to the mind’s capacity to conceive itself and the essence of its body as eternally necessitated—that is, to understand itself by the third kind of knowledge.”⁴⁴ The eternity of the mind doctrine is about a capacity of the mind and it retains its eternal ideas only while it endures (i.e. Spinoza’s is not a form of traditional immortality). Stuart Hampshire, whose claims have a ring of uncertainty and conjecture, likewise says, “In so far as I achieve perfect intuitive knowledge of God or Nature in individual things the ideas which constitute my mind are identical with the ideas which constitute God’s mind.”⁴⁵ He also affirms Spinoza’s distinction between timelessness and sempiternity and, like Nadler and Allison, claims that Spinoza’s doctrine is not one of a personal afterlife.⁴⁶ In addition, despite his hesitation to pronounce any conclusive position, Ed Curley says that Spinoza cannot be implying that the mind or a part of the mind can exist in any temporal sense after the body dies: “Whatever the doctrine of the eternity of the mind does mean, it does not mean that *I* can entertain any hope of immortality.”⁴⁷ Curley also says, unlike his fellow epistemological interpreters, that the key to understanding Spinoza’s meaning lies in IIP8, a difficult proposition concerning ideas of non-existent modes. Regardless, he is in agreement with

of the Ethics of Spinoza: (Ethica Ordine Geometric Demonstrata) (Classic Reprint) (London: Forgotten Books, 2012), Book III, ch. 4; Leon Roth, *Spinoza*, Hyperion ed. (London: Hyperion Pr, 1980); and A.E. Taylor, “Spinoza’s Conception of Immortality,” *Mind*, 5 no. 18 (April, 1896) 145-66.

⁴⁴ Henry E. Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza: an Introduction*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 171.

⁴⁵ Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism* (OXFORD: Oxford University Press, 2005), 130. Hampshire’s claim that the ideas are identical between a human mind and God is important. Hampshire is also wrongly classed as an ontological interpreter by Parchment.

⁴⁶ Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, 132.

⁴⁷ Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 85.

the others that what Spinoza means by eternity is timelessness and there is no immortality in the sense of a personal afterlife.⁴⁸

No two treatments are exactly the same. Though none of them are completely wrong, none of them are completely right; and some are far closer than others. Given the nature of the *Ethics*, the end is a product of what comes before, hence the final propositions make wide-ranging references to previous parts. If an interpreter has a mistaken view of a proposition or concept found in an earlier part, then propositions built upon on it will be mistaken. If an interpreter overlooks a proposition or concept relevant to the final doctrines of the *Ethics* (which is quite easy to do with Spinoza), the interpretation will be mistaken. One can only hope to achieve a clear and conclusive understanding of the eternity of the mind if one first has a clear understanding of the parts that come together to form the obscure and challenging doctrine. Scholars very rarely proceed from an accurate understanding of the first four and a half parts of the *Ethics* to a mistaken view of its final propositions. And proceeding from an accurate understanding is crucial.

⁴⁸ Other readings include that of Errol Harris, in which he makes the unique claim that consciousness is inherently self-transcendent. See Errol Harris, "Spinoza's Theory of Human Immortality," in *Spinoza: Essays On Interpretation*, ed. Eugene Freeman and Maurice Mandelbaum (LaSalle: Open Court, 1975). James Morrison argues that Spinoza's metaphysics cannot allow for traditional immortality and advocates an epistemological interpretation. James Morison, "Spinoza on the Self, Personal Identity, and Immortality," in *Spinoza: The Enduring Questions*, ed. Graeme Hunter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 31-47. Steven Parchment makes use of McTaggart's A-series and B-series in an attempt to synthesize the virtues of the ontological and epistemological interpretations; his view, however, is epistemological in substance. See Steven Parchment "The Mind's Eternity in Spinoza's Ethics." See also David Savan, "Spinoza on Duration, Time, and Eternity," in *Spinoza: The Enduring Questions*, ed. Graeme Hunter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 3-30; C.L. Harden, "Spinoza on Immortality and Time," in *Spinoza: New Perspectives*, ed. Robert W. Shahan and J.I. Biro (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1978), 129-38; and Barbara Stock, "Spinoza On the Immortality of the Mind," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (Oct. 2000): 381-403.

Part II

Parallelism. What makes the end of the *Ethics* so perplexing is, among other reasons, its apparent conflict with Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism. On first face, if the mind and body are the same thing, it would seem that there can be no afterlife or immortality of any kind. Many readers, upon reaching the end of Part V, rightfully point to the early propositions of Part II as validation of their charge that Spinoza has contradicted himself. And if presented with the question of which doctrine—parallelism or eternity of the mind—is more central and significant to Spinoza's systematic vision, the selection would leave the mind's eternity by the wayside. If Spinoza unwittingly presents us with this dilemma then I see no recourse than to jettison the obscure eternity of the mind doctrine. It is then necessary to make sense of Spinoza's parallelism on its own terms before arriving at Part V. If it is the case that Spinoza falls into inconsistency, so be it.

Paul Kashap calls Iip7 “indeed one of the most important propositions in the *Ethics*.”⁴⁹ Henry Allison calls it “one of the most perplexing, as well as one of the most important, propositions in the entire *Ethics*.”⁵⁰ Yitzhak Melamed says, “The ‘doctrine of parallelism’ is widely acknowledged as one of the most important and innovative doctrines of the *Ethics*.”⁵¹ These claims are difficult to dispute since Spinoza references Iip7 a striking fifteen times throughout Part II. The proposition says, “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.”⁵² In the scholium to the same proposition he says, “thinking

⁴⁹ S. Paul Kashap, *Spinoza and Moral Freedom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 52.

⁵⁰ Henry E. Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza: an Introduction*, 75.

⁵¹ Yitzhak Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 140.

⁵² “*Ordo et connexio idearum idem est, ac ordo et connexio rerum.*” Since *connexio* might also be translated as ‘joining’ or ‘association’, I must note that the notion is *not* that the things

substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that attribute. So also a mode of Extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing [*una eademque*], but expressed in two ways.” This is parallelism. There is one infinite and indivisible substance consisting of infinite attributes (Id6), thought and extension being the two of which we are aware (IIP1 and IIP2). Thinking and extended substance, though conceived from different perspectives, express one and the same substance. Since each attribute expresses the infinite essence of substance (Id4), each particular mode partakes in each attribute. Hence, given a mode of thought, corresponding to it, and *identical* to it (*una eademque*), is a mode of extension (and a mode of the other attributes, ad infinitum). It is impossible to conceive of a mode of thought that is not identical to some mode of extension. Accordingly, one can give a complete causal account of the order and connection of modes of extension, and this will be identical to the corresponding logical account of the order and connection of the corresponding modes of thought. This is because each mode in the sequence is identical to a mode of the other attribute. Such a view has the consequence that, given any motion of a human body, like raising an arm, for example, a complete and self-contained causal explanation exists solely within the attribute of extension—i.e. this neuron fired here, that one there, and so on, causing the shoulder muscle to move here, the forearm there, and so on.⁵³ Spinoza is arguing that an equally complete explanation exists in the attribute of thought—i.e. the idea of the neurons, muscles, tendons, and so on are logically related in such a way as to explain the conclusion of the sequence of those ideas.

become one or unify, but rather that there is a causal and logical sequence between each contiguous mode.

⁵³ See Spinoza’s own example at IIP17c.

This is not a dualism. There are infinite attributes, and our awareness of only two does not make demands of the metaphysical constitution of the world.⁵⁴ What is more, a mode of thought is not a substance. Spinoza's avowed doctrine is substance monism. Allison writes, "As two of the infinite attributes of the one substance, thought and extension are not separate entities, but distinct expressions of the same reality."⁵⁵ Conceiving *the* reality under the attribute of thought, however, is not deficient or fragmentary, but comprehensive; reality can likewise be conceived comprehensively through extension. As Spinoza says in Ip15, the *modes* are merely *modally* distinct from each other, not really distinct, for the latter would entail that they are independent substances, which Spinoza clearly finds to be absurd (Ip2 and Ip4-5). Thus, we find in IIp7 what must be the case given substance monism: modes are distinct from other modes, but a single mode must have a correlate in the other attribute which, owing to the nature of the attributes, will simply be another way of looking at the same thing.

Kashap's language is insightful. He argues that the modes of the different attributes are logically and thus explanatorily distinct and hence unable to influence each other, citing Ia5 and IIp2. He says, "[T]he *order and concatenation* of things considered as modes of Thought, (i.e., as thought-objects) is numerically identical with the order and connection of correlative modes of Extension, but *the nature of explanation* itself is qualitatively distinct, and to that extent not identical, in both instances."⁵⁶ Borrowing from Frege (who unknowingly borrowed from

⁵⁴ "Nature is hindered not by the laws of human reason, which hold only for the true advantage of man and his preservation, but by infinite others, which have regard to the eternal order of the whole of nature, of which man is a small part." *TTP* 16. *[N]atura non legibus humanae rationis, quae non nisi hominum verum utile, et conservationem intendunt, intercluditur, sed infinitis aliis, quae totius naturae, cujus homo particular est, aeternum ordinem respiciunt.* The translation is my own.

⁵⁵ Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza: an Introduction*, 85.

⁵⁶ Kashap, *Spinoza and Moral Freedom*, 58. Emphasis in original.

Spinoza), by a ‘thought-object’ he means an individual mode of thought—i.e. the idea associated with an extended object in the world that can be an idea in the mind. The ‘numerically identical, qualitatively distinct’ language is instructive. This accounts for the ability both to explain a physical event causally and a thought logically without making one more fundamental, which is quite tempting. Spinoza is able to retain both in the nature of substance. It is therefore important, in order to be consistent with his conclusions concerning God in Part I, to maintain that these different *conceptions* of substance do not correlate to different *parts* of substance that can somehow be ontologically isolated in the way traditional eternal life doctrines are often construed—i.e. my body (extension) perishes but my soul (thought) lives on.

The attributes must be conceived in complete isolation from each other; they can share nothing in common (Ip10). It follows from this that the causal and logical accounts that I explained above cannot include a thought causing the motion of a body or a body causing a thought (IIIp2).⁵⁷ Kashap phrases the same idea thusly: “Ideas can be explained only by reference to other ideas that are logically connected with them; and physical changes in the body can be explained only by reference to other physical changes in or outside the body that are causally connected with them.”⁵⁸ The categories of the attributes are distinct and discrete: “For it is of the nature of substance that each of its attributes is conceived through itself [*per se concipiatur*], since all the attributes it has have always been in it simultaneously [*simul*], and one could not have been produced by another; but each expresses the reality or being of substance” (Ip10s). It is important to stress that neither of the attributes is reducible to the other. In fact, such a reduction does not make sense since a mode of thought *is* a mode of extension looked at in another way.

⁵⁷ See n. 16 in Part 1.

⁵⁸ Kashap, *Spinoza and Moral Freedom*, 63.

Mind. Spinoza's conception of mind is both one of the most difficult and one of the most pioneering in the *Ethics*. It follows from his parallelism: for any existing body, whether of a human or book or stone, there must be an idea associated with it; the idea of the human body is the mind, for Spinoza. The two attributes of God, extension and thought, relate to the body and mind respectively. Given the truth of parallelism, the body and mind are the same thing comprehended in different ways. Spinoza talks explicitly about the mind starting in IIp11, saying, "First, that which constitutes the actual being of the human mind is nothing other than the idea of some actually existing singular thing."⁵⁹ An idea—or a mode of the attribute of thought that is a conception of the body—clearly cannot first be of a non-existent thing, for this would mean that the mode of extension that corresponds to that thought does not exist, and hence the "idea itself could not be said to exist." The human body is the *rei actu existentis* that serves as the object of which the human mind is the idea (IIp13). For every affection of the body (i.e., for "whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human mind") there must be an idea in the mind (IIp12). That is, since the body is made up of parts that can be affected in various ways, given any affection, its corresponding idea must be a thought in the mind. The mind will therefore be immensely complicated: "The idea which constitutes the formal being of the human mind is not simple, but composed of very many ideas" (IIp15). The human body is complicated

⁵⁹ "*Primum, quod actuale mentis humanae esse constituit, nihil aliud est, quam idea rei alicuius singularis actu existentis.*" The translation is my own. Curley renders it, "The first thing that constitutes the actual being of the human Mind is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which actually exists." Shirley renders the proposition, "That which constitutes the actual being of the human mind is basically nothing else but the idea of an individual existing thing." The '*primum*' is the most marked difference. Rendering it as 'basically' stretches the Latin and is not Spinoza's meaning, but Curley's translation might lead to the question of 'What is the second or third thing that constitutes the being?' However, Spinoza is not implying a plurality of things that constitute the mind but is calling the existence of a body a fundamental or basic principle of constituting the mind. My translation, by taking *primum* as an adverb, makes this clear. Spinoza uses the same word in the same way in IVp22c ("*Conatus sese conservandi primum et unicum virtutis est fundamentum.*")

and the ideas of each of the parts of the body are necessarily in the mind. This differentiates the idea of the human body from the idea of a stone, book, or any inanimate object: although both exist as modes in the attributes of thought, only one can be called a 'mind' in any meaningful sense. The greater the potential a body has to act and be acted upon (*aptius est ad plura simul agendum vel patiendum*), the greater the mind's potential to act (IIp13s). The body (or brain) conceived materially is not the mind or in the mind. The mind is ideas, and ideas are only conceived under the attribute of thought. The body is numerically identical to the mind, though both are modes of different attributes of God.

It is very important to note that the mind is not united or unified in virtue of being the mind of a single 'self' or 'person', in the metaphysically significant sense. Spinoza, as the Spanish poet passage suggests (IVp39s), is without a robust conception of personal identity. Traditionally and colloquially the mind is thought to be a 'container' of thoughts: the various thoughts and ideas cohere in a mental space that is one's own 'ego', and it is in the ego, not the ideas, that one finds identity or selfhood. In Spinoza this is not the case; there is no such container of ideas. The mind is the ideas and nothing more, for there is nothing else it could be. What could such a 'container theory' amount to in parallelism? Perhaps this is the role of the 'soul'. The soul, if it is understood as something distinct from the mind, either as a container of thoughts or as a nonphysical 'spirit' in all humans, simply does not appear in the *Ethics*. It cannot appear. For Spinoza what comprises the mind is the ideas of the actually existing thing that is the human body with all its parts and affections. If there were some container, there would be a corresponding extended mode that is the container of the body, which is implausible; but since the body is a collection of physical parts, the mind is likewise a collection of ideas. When the parts of the body are arranged in such a way as to give functional organization and thus a

type of unity, the mind will likewise be unified (IId7).⁶⁰ Speaking of the body as a whole and the mind as a whole is a relatively harmless shorthand so long as it is clear that by subtracting all the parts and ideas, there would be no body or mind (and strictly speaking, my phrasing is redundant).

There can be no extended thing without its idea. There can be no functioning human body without the mind. Herein lies the most trouble for an afterlife doctrine. How can the mind persist after the death of the body? The doctrine of parallelism effectively rules out traditional construals of the afterlife: if it is true that the body and mind/soul are united in some way during life, and upon the death of the body, the mind continues (usually in a way that retains individuality and selfhood), then Spinoza is wrong. To put it another way, if Spinoza is right, then the destruction of the body is numerically identical to the destruction of the mind. If the mind continues after death, then the body (or at least part of it) must continue as well. The concept of death would then take on a new and awkward meaning. It is quite difficult to see how one might retain any ontological sense of immortality given these doctrines. Yet this is not a definitive judgment, and I have not discussed what is most relevant to the epistemological readers of Spinoza's eternity of the mind.

Knowledge. By 'ideas' or 'thoughts' Spinoza does not mean *only* what constitutes human minds, but as is implied by the parallelism, human-mind-independent thoughts (though-objects), i.e. the infinite intellect of God or the mind of God. The world of thoughts is one and the same as God's infinite intellect. There is a 'common store' of thoughts, as Frege would say, that accounts for the ability of two people to have the same piece of knowledge. Although people can have

⁶⁰ "*Per res singulares intelligo res, quae finitae sunt et determinatam habent existentiam. Quod si plura individua in una actione ita concurrant, ut omnia simul unius effectus sint causa, eadem omnia eatenus ut unam rem singularem considero.*" (IId7)

subjective experiences and ideas, when two people are both conceiving of the Pythagorean Theorem truly, they both have in their minds the same idea. All ideas in God's intellect agree with the ideas of their corresponding objects, and thus God has perfect knowledge of everything; the totality of thoughts *is* the infinite intellect of God. The ideas in God are the thought-objects themselves.⁶¹ Even the subjective thoughts that make up individual minds exist independently as ideas in the infinite intellect, to be potentially conceived adequately. Because God is never passively affected it is impossible for God to have an idea that does not adequately capture the essence of the object of which it is the idea. God is wholly active (Vp17). *God is substance is nature*, which is the whole of extension and therefore the thought of the whole (Iip4). It is absurd to suggest that a thought in the intellect of Spinoza's God is held in error. Hence, insofar as the ideas in a human mind mirror the ideas of God (i.e. for the mind to be constituted by ideas that are identical to those in the intellect of God), to that extent such knowledge will be perfect and true. But on Spinoza's picture how do we come to acquire this knowledge?

When a person is affected by an external object, there are affections in the human body that result from the interaction with that object, and the affections must involve (*involvere debet*) both the nature of the object and the nature of the human body (Iip16). There exists an independent idea (thought-object) associated with a person—say Peter, to use Spinoza's recurring character—that constitutes the essence of Peter's mind. As Spinoza says at Iip17s, there is a difference between that idea and, on the other hand, the idea formed of Peter by another man, Paul. Paul comes to have beliefs about Peter—most basically, that Peter exists—through a passive causal experience with Peter: Paul's sensory faculties are presented with 'images' (*imagines*), resulting in ideas in his mind. But this is not the thought-object that constitutes

⁶¹ Kashap, *Spinoza and Moral Freedom*, 51.

Peter's essence. It is the product of the imagination, not the intellect. The knowledge is of the "*communi naturae ordine*" and not related to God (IIP29c). The imagination is the only source of falsity (IIP41), for Spinoza, and although ideas resulting from the imagination are not necessarily false, they are necessarily inadequate.⁶² It follows then that all adequate ideas will be true and constitutive of a higher form of knowledge, a form that is not "*mutilatam et confusam*" (IIP29c).

There is a conceptual relation between adequacy and truth. The official definition: "By adequate idea I understand an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to its object, has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations [*denominationes intrinsecas*] of a true idea." (IId4) Adequacy is a property⁶³ of an idea itself, an idea in the infinite intellect without consideration of its relation to its corresponding object. In fact, an adequate idea is known as true without its object at all. He says in the *TIE*, "[T]he form of the true thought must be placed in the same thought itself [*eadem ipsa cogitatione*] without relation to other things, nor does it recognize the object as its cause, but must depend on the very power [*potentia*] and nature of the intellect." (71) What he means here by the "*forma verae cogitationis*" is what shows the idea to be true.⁶⁴ Spinoza does not give a definition of truth—wisely, I suggest.⁶⁵ He says instead, "What can there be which is clearer and more certain than a true idea, to serve as the standard of truth?"

⁶² There is no equivalence between adequacy and truth, contrary to what many commentators suggest (Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: an Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 164; Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza: an Introduction*, 102). We have an inadequate idea of our own bodies but know that the body exists as we perceive it (IIP13c, IIP19); imagination, which is a form of knowledge, is the only source of falsity but not false necessarily, all of which is clearly set out in IIP41.

⁶³ Here I disagree with Bennett when he says that adequacy is a relation. Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 178.

⁶⁴ This passage foreshadows IIP21s.

⁶⁵ Spinoza discusses truth in *CM* I Ch. 6, but it is unclear to what extent Spinoza endorses a positive theory of truth there and whether the earlier work is reliable on this front. Additionally, Ia6 is "A true idea must agree with its object," (*Idea vera debet cum suo ideato convenire*) but this gives no standard for truth itself. It is also an axiom, not a definition.

As light makes both itself and the darkness plain, so truth is the standard both of itself and of the false.” (IIP43s) Truth is its own standard and does not make reference to other putatively more fundamental notions (e.g. coherence or correspondence).⁶⁶ This is not to say that such notions are not germane to true judgments, but only that they do not ground or provide a standard for truth. Spinoza’s claim is phenomenologically plausible: knowing something true is also knowing that it is true.⁶⁷ He says, “[I]t is certain that a true thought is distinguishable from a false one not only by an extrinsic, but chiefly by an intrinsic denomination.” (*TIE*, 69) This accounts, on Spinoza’s view, for the mind’s ability to deduce from true thoughts others that are not determined as true by their agreement with objects; i.e. objects do not cause ideas to be true, and one can reason validly from premises, all of which agree with objects, to a conclusion that is true but not true *because* of an agreement. In sum, there is no need for a higher-level method in assessing truth.⁶⁸

All adequate ideas are true. In *Ep.* 60 Spinoza says, “Between a true and an adequate idea I recognize no difference but this, that the word ‘true’ has regard only to the agreement of the idea with its object [*ideatum*], whereas the word ‘adequate’ has regard to the nature of the idea in itself. Thus there is no real difference between a true and an adequate idea except for this extrinsic relation.” This is surprising. There might appear to be an inconsistency here between this and other of Spinoza’s claims. I suggest the following: Spinoza does not mean that truth is

⁶⁶ It is a mistake to call Spinoza’s view a theory of correspondence (Nadler, *Introduction*, 161) or coherence (Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, 83-4). Allison notices this at *Benedict de Spinoza: an Introduction*, 102. It is likely also a mistake to call Spinoza’s view of ‘theory’ of truth at all, but I will not linger on this claim, as much as I might like to.

⁶⁷ I will not fully analyze Spinoza’s in depth treatment of error, which is relevant here, but I wish merely to call attention to IIP35 in which he says “to be ignorant and to err are different.” See Nadler, *Introduction*, 162-3 and Kashap, *Spinoza and Moral Freedom*, 71-9 for good treatments of Spinoza on error.

⁶⁸ See the clever ‘tools’ argument at *TIE* 29.

generated or recognized through agreement between ideas and objects, only that the word⁶⁹ denotes such an agreement, and there is always such an agreement in the case of a true idea. That the truth is not recognized through the agreement is evidenced further by the fact that the idea can be considered by itself and still recognized as true.⁷⁰ An adequate idea is an idea that is the same as the idea corresponding to its object (*ideatum*) yet seen as true in itself; there is a certainty that comes along with the conception, but the certainty is not itself sufficient for an adequate idea. As Kashap says, “From the fact that one has an adequate idea, it follows that one must also have a feeling of certainty about its truth. From the fact, however, that one feels certain, it does not follow that the idea which is entertained is an adequate idea.”⁷¹ Hampshire says, “it bears the marks of self-evident truth on the face of it, and no comparison with an external reality is required.”⁷² To have an adequate idea is to know that one has an adequate idea. This certainty makes no reference to the object of the idea. If Paul forms an adequate idea of Peter, he at the same time knows that his idea is true because the idea is adequate.

Consider IIp43, where this notion is combined with the broader view of knowledge:

He who has a true idea at the same time knows that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing.

Dem.: An idea true in us is that which is adequate in God insofar as he is explained through the nature of the human mind (by IIp11c). Let us posit, therefore, that there is in God, insofar as he is explained through the nature of the human Mind, an adequate idea, A. Of this idea there must necessarily also be in God an idea which is related to God in the same way as idea A (by IIp20, whose demonstration is universal). But idea A is supposed to be related to God insofar as he is explained through the nature of the human mind; therefore the idea of idea A must also be related to God in the same way, i.e. (by

⁶⁹ Notably, Spinoza uses the word ‘*nomen*’, which can be translated as ‘name’ or ‘title’, and not ‘*verba*’

⁷⁰ In further defense of my view, it is true that all ideas are adequate somewhere, namely in the mind of God. Thus where there exists only adequate ideas, there is no difference between adequacy and truth.

⁷¹ Kashap, *Spinoza and Moral Freedom*, 80.

⁷² Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, 84.

the same IIp11c), this adequate idea of idea A will be in the Mind itself which has the adequate idea A. And so he who has an adequate idea, *or* (by IIp34) who knows a thing truly, must at the same time have an adequate idea, *or* true knowledge, of his own knowledge. I.e. (as is manifest through itself), he must at the same time be certain.

There is an adequate idea in the infinite intellect of every mode (including a human mind's inadequate ideas). In other words, although Paul's ideas of Peter are formed through mutilated images from passive sensory experience, every mode within the causal sequence that resulted in those ideas has an adequate idea corresponding to it in the mind of God. Thus, a human mind, in all its complexity and mix of adequate and inadequate ideas, is necessarily an adequate idea in the infinite intellect. Spinoza has us suppose for the proof an adequate idea in a human mind. By IIp20 there must also be an idea of the adequate idea in God. This second idea (*idea ideae*) will be in the infinite intellect in the same way as the first idea is in the mind, since, by IIp11c, the human mind is an idea in the mind of God. Being that all ideas in God agree completely (*omnino conveniunt*) with their objects and are true, the second idea will necessarily agree with the object because it is in the mind of God; and because this second idea is in the mind of God in the same way as the first idea is in the human mind (for the two are one and the same), the first idea must agree with its object and be true. And it is in the nature of truth that knowing the true idea is to know that the idea is true.

In giving his account of knowledge, Spinoza makes recourse to the puzzling notion of ideas of ideas. The more adequate ideas I have, for instance, the more my mind is made up of ideas that are the same as the ideas in the infinite intellect, and as IIp20 says, the idea of the mind is in God. In other words, there are, and seemingly must be, ideas of ideas. Despite the existence of parallel, discrete, and identical sequences of modes, one consisting of ideas, the other of bodies, there now also exists ideas of ideas, and ideas of ideas of ideas, etc. The troubling

implication is that there is more than one mode of thought ostensibly identical to a single mode of extension.

The familiar conception of parallelism in IIP7 can be schematized as follows:

$$\dots \rightarrow \text{thought}_1 \rightarrow \text{thought}_2 \rightarrow \text{thought}_3 \rightarrow \dots \text{thought}_n$$
$$\dots \rightarrow \text{object}_1 \rightarrow \text{object}_2 \rightarrow \text{object}_3 \rightarrow \dots \text{object}_n$$

Each thought and object pair are one and the same thing, as Spinoza argues. If the object is a human body, the corresponding thought is the mind. A human being is not made up of a comingling of two distinct substances, but rather, “man is constituted by certain modifications of God’s attributes.” (IIP10c) The subscript 1 denotes one modification. But the picture is now more complicated:

$$\dots \rightarrow \text{thought}_{1a} \rightarrow \text{thought}_{2a} \rightarrow \text{thought}_{3a} \rightarrow \dots \text{thought}_{na}$$
$$\dots \rightarrow \text{thought}_1 \rightarrow \text{thought}_2 \rightarrow \text{thought}_3 \rightarrow \dots \text{thought}_n$$
$$\dots \rightarrow \text{object}_1 \rightarrow \text{object}_2 \rightarrow \text{object}_3 \rightarrow \dots \text{object}_n$$

The thoughts continue upwards (though_{1b}, though_{1c}, ad infinitum), but Spinoza does not talk of objects of objects, extending the schema downwards. Thus there is a proliferation of modes of thought, all of which are meant to be identical to a single mode of extension. Is the parallelism broken? Bennett recognizes the issue, saying, “The doctrine of ideas of ideas will ruin Spinoza’s system unless it squares with the parallelism of causal chains.”⁷³ Nadler, by using a distinction between the intentionality of thought and the formal existence of thoughts, seems to break the parallelism,⁷⁴ saying, “[T]he attribute of Thought has a special status relative to the other

⁷³ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, 185.

⁷⁴ That is, parallelism as I have construed it. Nadler does not see his claim as a problem because he has a different view of parallelism, which is troublesome on its own terms. He claims that the modes relevant to the proof in IIP7 are only the mode of extension and its corresponding thought, not the higher-level thoughts. Although this might allow him to give thought its ‘special status’

attributes in Spinoza's system. [...] There are infinitely more modes in Thought than in any other attribute, since each of the infinitely many modes in each of the infinitely many attributes is replicated by a discrete individual mode in Thought."⁷⁵ This is troubling. The potential 'special status' of some attributes would split the monism established in Part I. It also fails to account for the multiple identity claims Spinoza makes about the modes conceived under different attributes. Spinoza employs the same proof in showing that the attributes of thought and extension apply to the one substance (see Iip1 and Iip2). He also claims that the idea of God, meaning the infinite intellect, is one because substance is one (Iip4). There would no longer be one substance viewed in different ways, but certain parts of substance that can only be viewed in one way, which is expressly contrary to Spinoza's claims.⁷⁶

In the demonstration to Iip20, Spinoza is aware of the demand of parallelism on the ideas of ideas doctrine: "But the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things (by P7). Therefore, this idea, *or* knowledge, of the Mind follows in God and is related to God in the same way as the idea, *or* knowledge, of the Body."⁷⁷ Parallelism demands *something* of the doctrine, and he clearly thinks the two doctrines are consistent. After all, why would Spinoza cite a proposition that proves modes of extension to be identical to modes of

as well as retain the parallelism doctrine, parallelism so construed warps the most natural meaning of Iip7. Beyond exegetical issues, it also causes problems for Spinoza's fundamental monism, as I point out.

⁷⁵ Nadler, *Introduction*, 126. Curley reaches a similar conclusion but for slightly different reasons. See Edwin M. Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969). Della Rocca holds the view as well. See Michael Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁷⁶ I argue more fully against what I call the 'prominent interpretation' (that of Nadler, Della Rocca, and Curley) in a paper called "An Old Call for a New Interpretation of Spinoza's Parallelism."

⁷⁷ "Sed ordo et connexio idearum idem est, ac ordo et connexio causarum (per prop. 7. huius). Sequitur ergo haec mentis idea, sive cognitio in Deo, et ad Deum eodem modo refertur, ac idea sive cognitio corporis." The inclusion of "*causarum*" instead of "*rerum*," is a discrepancy in the text noted by Curley.

thought if he is now claiming that there are ideas of ideas somehow not identical to some mode of extension? The passage most relevant is the following:

So the idea of the Mind and the Mind itself are one and the same thing, which is conceived under the one and the same attribute, viz. Thought. The idea of the Mind, I say, and the Mind itself follow in God from the same power of thinking and by the same necessity. For the idea of the Mind, i.e. the idea of the idea, is nothing but the form of the idea [*forma ideae*] insofar as this is considered as a mode of thinking without relation to the object [*absque relatione ad obiectum*]. For as soon as someone knows something, he thereby knows that he knows it, and at the same time knows that he knows that he knows, and so on, to infinity. (IIP21s)

The idea of the mind and the mind itself are one and the same thing, and the mind and the body are one and the same thing. Granting transitivity, the idea of the mind must also be identical to the body. Spinoza's claim, however, does not require that the modes be *used* in the same way or, put differently, expressed in the same way. Although the idea of the mind agrees with its object, the conception of the idea of the idea of the body is done without relation to the body and chiefly concerns the form (*forma*) of the mind itself. This is not to say that the higher-level idea contains new content not corresponding to a mode of extension, but instead that it is one and the same as the object expressed in a different way.

The puzzle might still persist. There are, nevertheless, two modes of thought, both of which are professed to be identical to a single mode of extension. If there truly is *one* thing expressed in ways that differ based on the employment of different attributes, the two ideas must be the same as well, as Spinoza certainly claims. But there are no longer two attributes by which to distinguish them, and thus, strictly speaking, there can only be one thought. One thought, two modes. The problem assumes that the ability to conceive of something under a single attribute precludes the recognition of two identical modes, which is what Spinoza appears to be countenancing. That is, his view is incoherent if the expression of a thing in the attribute of thought can be done in only one way. But this is not the case. The idea of the mind is not really

distinct from the mind itself, rather it is the attribute of thought expressing the same thing in another way.⁷⁸ The distinction that holds between modes in this case is not meant (and is never meant) to be a real distinction.

Spinoza's description of the idea of the idea in this passage is the same as the definition of an adequate idea (IIId4), which, as we have seen, is a true idea attendant with certainty of its truth. From the above proposition we know that the idea of the mind is in God and is therefore an adequate idea. As further evidence of the identity thesis between the modes, Spinoza flips the order of idea and idea of idea between IIp21s above and IIp43 further above. There are ideas of adequate ideas in God's mind just as there are ideas of adequate ideas in a human mind; both are the same thing expressed differently. The key then is recognizing the role of both ideas of ideas and adequate ideas in the explication of knowledge.

Thus we are able to say that if Paul has an adequate idea, then the idea in his mind is identical to an idea in the mind of God—in other words, it is an idea of a thought-object. As Kashap says, “A true idea in a human mind, being the idea of the objective idea or thought-object (i.e., idea related to God) is a manifestation of the nature of God through the nature of the human mind. [...] When I say that I have or possess a true idea, this is the same as saying that a true idea is in my mind.”⁷⁹ When a person has in mind an idea that is the idea of an object (and is therefore identical to the idea of the object) and is related to God (IIp32), the idea is adequate and God constitutes the mind. As Nadler says, “The human mind, then, has an adequate idea of a thing when that idea and its logical and causal relations to other ideas in the mind (all

⁷⁸ It is important to note that the conception of these thoughts (namely, the forming of ideas of ideas) is not the creation of new, previously non-existent modes. Infinite things follow (*sequi debent*) from God in infinite ways (Ip16). Each idea of an idea exists in the mind of God.

⁷⁹ Kashap, *Spinoza and Moral Freedom*, 50-1.

corresponding to the causal relations among the objects of these ideas) mirror the logical and causal relations among the ideas in God or Nature, in the infinite intellect.”⁸⁰ Ideas in the mind would then be the same as the ideas in the mind of God.⁸¹

To complete Spinoza’ theory, the sort of knowledge attained through adequate ideas is called ‘reason’ (*rationem*) and ‘intuition’ (*scientiam intuitivam*), as outlined in the crucial IIp40s2. There is a further trait of this knowledge, especially pertinent to my topic: “It is in the nature of reason to perceive things under a certain species of eternity [*sub quadam specie aeternitatis*].” (IIp44c2) An adequate idea is a conception of a thing as it is in itself, a conception of its essence. Owing to the nature of God, things do not exist contingently, but necessarily (Ip29), resulting from God’s eternal and infinite essence (Id6, Ip19). Hence, an adequate idea will necessarily capture the necessity and eternity of that thing. This is separate from inadequate ideas conceived, as we have seen, through the imagination in a mutilated, confused, and durational manner. It follows that the more one conceives through reason and intuition (i.e. through adequate ideas), the more there will be eternal ideas in one’s mind. God does not conceive things through the imagination because God’s mind is nothing but thought-objects themselves. Everything follows from God’s essence with necessity (Ip29), and those ideas that perceive things truly (i.e. adequate ideas) perceive the necessity of God’s nature, which is eternal (IIp44c2).

The foundation for a proper understanding of the eternity of the mind is coming into view. There is an eternal type of knowledge in Spinoza’s system and it will assuredly be integral

⁸⁰ Nadler, *Introduction*, 166.

⁸¹ As Deleuze says, “An adequate idea is an idea that expresses its own cause and is explained by our own power.” Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 151. See *TIE* 71 above for confirmation of this view. Deleuze’s reading of adequate ideas is compelling and persuasive. See also 133-5, 139-40, 148-50.

to the final propositions of the *Ethics*. However, although adequate ideas are conceived *sub quadam specie aeternitatis*, it is still unclear what precisely Spinoza means by eternity, a notion which, besides filling out his theory of knowledge, will be indispensable in understanding our ‘eternity’, in whatever form we might possess it.

Eternity. The debate over Spinoza’s theory of eternity is concentrated around two distant poles: *timelessness* and *sempiternity*. Martha Kneale, for instance, argues that Spinoza advocated for eternity as timelessness only at the beginning of his career, and when he finally came to composing Part V of the *Ethics*, by starting with a “theological premiss [...] deeply ingrained by his religious and philosophical training,” he switched to a sempiternity model.⁸² Quite the psychoanalysis!⁸³ Spinoza, she concludes, presents a traditional afterlife doctrine in the concluding propositions. Kneale admits that eternity as timelessness is present in Spinoza’s work, even if he ultimately abandons it out of his subconscious desire to retain immortality (albeit in a form that suffers from “ineradicable flaws”).⁸⁴ Donagan endorses much of Kneale’s position and says that the appearance of eternity as timelessness in Spinoza is an illusion. Because of Spinoza’s restricted meaning of time (IIP44s and *CM* I, 4 are meant to be evidence of this), what Spinoza says is perfectly consistent with sempiternity.⁸⁵ Donagan says, “[E]ternity, as he conceived it, is equivalent to necessarily omnitemporal existence, understanding ‘omnitemporal’ as meaning ‘at all moments in the passage of time.’”⁸⁶ Eternity is about the

⁸² Martha Kneale, “Eternity and Sempiternity” in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Marjorie Grene, (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1973), 239.

⁸³ One would assume that Spinoza’s earlier thinking would be more prone to the influence of his religious education, not the later work.

⁸⁴ Kneale, “Eternity and Sempiternity,” 239.

⁸⁵ Alan Donagan, *Spinoza* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), 242-3.

⁸⁶ Donagan, *Spinoza*, 244.

necessity of existence as opposed to contingent existence.⁸⁷ Due to this limitation, Spinoza cannot have in mind eternity as timelessness.⁸⁸

This is a mistake, and most scholars agree. Spinoza's own words in the *TTP* diagnose the problem: "what name shall we apply to those who foist into [scripture] their own fancies, who degrade the sacred writers till they seem to write confused nonsense, and who deny the plainest and most evident meanings?"⁸⁹ Surely Spinoza would never consider himself a sacred writer, and Kneale and Donagan's "fancies" have philosophical and not dogmatic roots; nevertheless, the principle of exegesis, one that guided Spinoza's treatment of scripture, is abandoned by those who assign to him a theory of sempiternity. Numerous parts of the *Ethics*, not only the end of Part V, become "confused nonsense" as a result.

Let us not deny the plainest meaning. For instance, the definition of eternity in Id8:

By eternity I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing.

Exp.: For such existence, like the essence of a thing, is conceived as an eternal truth, and on that account cannot be explained by duration or time, even if duration is conceived to be without beginning or end.

Spinoza clearly intends his notion of eternity to be wholly separate from time, even time considered as sempiternal or omnitemporal. This intention is manifest numerous times in the *Ethics*, leaving the reader with the idea that it is a point Spinoza wished to stress. In Ip33s2 he says, "in eternity, there is neither *when*, nor *before*, nor *after*"⁹⁰ and Vp23s, a pivotal proposition, "we nevertheless feel that our mind, insofar as it involves the essence of the body under a species of eternity, is eternal, and that this existence it has cannot be defined by time *or* explained

⁸⁷ Donagan, *Spinoza*, 245.

⁸⁸ Bennett holds a similar view as well. See Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 204-7.

⁸⁹ *TTP*, Ch. 10.

⁹⁰ "At cum in aeterno non detur quando, ante, nec post."

through duration.”⁹¹ Eternity in the *Ethics* is meant to denote something timeless—something to which *no* temporal ascription applies. Substance is immune to change and is, at every moment, utterly entire and partless. Although duration can apply to modes through the perceived motion of images, it is impossible to conceive of substance as within time. This is because substance does not exist “*communi naturae ordine et rerum constitutione*,” but is *natura* and *constitutio* itself considered as a totality (IIP30). Spinoza makes the same argument in the *CM*:

The chief attribute, which deserves consideration before all others, is God’s *Eternity*, by which we explain his duration. Or rather, so as not to ascribe to any duration to God [*ut nullam Deo durationem tribuamus*], we say that he is eternal. [...] Again, since duration is conceived as being greater or lesser, *or* as composed of parts, it follows clearly that no duration can be ascribed to God: for since his being is eternal, i.e., in it there can be nothing which is before or after, we can never ascribe duration to him, without at the same time destroying the true concept which we have of God. [...] I call this infinite existence *Eternity*, which is to be attributed to God alone, and not to any created thing, even though its duration should be without beginning or end. (*CM Ap. Part 2, Ch. 1*)

Substance exists necessarily from its own essence: “For God is substance, which necessarily exists, i.e. to whose nature it pertains to exist, or (what is the same) from whose definition it follows that he exists; and therefore, he is eternal.” (Ip19) God’s existence is hence an eternal truth, and one that can be conceived only adequately.⁹²

Spinoza makes clear that eternity is opposed to duration, which is defined at IId5:

Duration is an indefinite continuation of existing.

Exp.: I say indefinite because it cannot be determined at all through the very nature of the existing thing, nor even by the efficient cause, which necessarily posits the existence of the thing, and does not take it away.

Duration is intelligible only when applied to those things whose existence is not the same as their essence—i.e. not on the level of substance itself. It is conceived as a species of quantity

⁹¹ This is convincing evidence that even in Part V, Spinoza’s conception of eternity is consistent.

⁹² God’s essence and existence are one and the same. An essence is an eternal truth. Therefore, God’s existence is an eternal truth.

(*quaedam quantitatis species*) that arises from the imagination (IIP45s). He says at IIP44s, “In addition, no one doubts that we also imagine time, namely from the fact that we imagine that some bodies are moved by others more slowly or more quickly, or with equal speed.”⁹³ A single mode can be said to have a delimited existence not through the contemplation of the mode’s nature, but only through its interaction with other modes, all of which is perceived as happening among independent objects. Arising from this inadequate knowledge are the concepts of “contingency of things” and “possibility of their corruption” (*rerum contingentiam et corruptionis possibilitatem*) (IIP31c).⁹⁴ There are no such concepts on the level of substance—which is the level of eternity. Spinoza says this in *Ep.* 12:

[W]hen we attend only to the essence of Modes (as very often happens), and not to the order of Nature, we can determine as we please their existence and Duration, conceive it as greater or less, and divide it into parts—without thereby destroying in any way the concept we have of them. But since we can conceive Eternity and Substance only as infinite, they can undergo none of these without our destroying at the same time the concept we have of them. Hence they talk utter nonsense, not to say madness, who hold that Extended Substance is put together of parts, *or* bodies, really distinct [*realiter distinctis*] from one another.

A thing can be conceived through its essence or through the order of nature (*ordinem Naturae*).

The former is adequate and eternal, the latter fragmentary and durational.

⁹³ “*Praeterea nemo dubitat, quin etiam tempus imaginemur, nempe ex eo, quod corpora alia aliis tardius vel celerius, vel aequae celeriter moveri imaginemur.*” The translation is my own. Curley renders it awkwardly: “Moreover, no one doubts but what we also imagine time, viz. from the fact that we imagine some bodies to move more slowly, or more quickly, or with the same speed.” Shirley renders it in a more readable way, perhaps at the expense of the literal Latin: “Furthermore, no one doubts that time, too, is a product of the imagination, and arises from the fact that we see some bodies move more slowly than others, or more quickly, or with equal speed.”

⁹⁴ Shirley translates this phrase as “contingency and perishability.”

Commentators have deftly analyzed Spinoza's concept of eternity.⁹⁵ More rare, however, is an analysis supplemented by the consideration of philosophers with the same view. Besides serving as an aid in understanding Spinoza's claims, a genealogy of this sort would also be invaluable in answering those who accuse Spinoza of using eternity in an abnormal or illicit way. It is likely that the charge is rooted in a contemporary habituation to particular religious traditions and their vocabularies more than knowledge of a school of thinkers who hold non-theistic models of eternity. Wolfson, for instance, sets up the distinct meanings of eternity by calling sempiternity ("endless time") Aristotelian and timelessness ("the antithesis of time") Platonic.⁹⁶ The sharpness with which these discrete notions are opposed is not commensurate with whether, historically speaking, the two Greeks univocally advocated for their respective theories. Regardless, Spinoza's view of eternity has a powerful pedigree: Plato and Plotinus.⁹⁷ Considering them will illuminate Spinoza's meaning and help to demonstrate that Spinoza does not use the term illicitly but instead coherently and productively.

Consider Plotinus, whose view of eternity is mainly confined to his tractate, "Time and Eternity" (III.7).⁹⁸ In it there are several definitions:

Thus we come to the definition: the life—instantaneously entire, complete, at no point broken into period or part—which belongs to the Authentic Existent by its very existence, this is the thing we were probing for—this is Eternity. (3)

Thus a close enough definition of Eternity would be that it is life limitless in the full sense of being all the life there is and a life which, knowing nothing of past or future to shatter its completeness, possesses itself intact for ever. (5)

⁹⁵ See Parchment, "The Mind's Eternity in Spinoza's Ethics," 364-8; Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, 130-3; Joachim, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 296-8.

⁹⁶ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza Vol.1*, 358.

⁹⁷ Boethius and Proclus can also be included in the heritage, but I will not treat them.

⁹⁸ Plotinus, *The Enneads* (London: Penguin Books, 1991). All parentheticals reference the sections in III.7.

The similarities with Spinoza are immediately striking: eternity is linked with life and being as such, not with a span of existence. In fact, eternity must be understood as the express denial of such temporal attempts at explanation: what is not eternal is temporal, and the existence of being itself, when conceived simply as being, must be eternal. There is in Spinoza and Plotinus a command: abandon an understanding of eternity through time in favor of an understanding through being. Plotinus says, “That which neither has been nor will be, but simply possess being; that which enjoys stable existence as neither in process of change nor having ever changed—that is eternity.” (3) There can be no conception of an eternal thing that persists through time or is generated or annihilated; rather, eternity entails the complete and entire existence of something unlimited by notions of before and after. What is eternal is the whole, changeless and motionless, inherently entire, impervious to development. It is not subject to growth or decay but is always all of itself, concentrated at one point, as Plotinus says. (3) Spinoza means something very close to Plotinus: eternity is not explicated through duration, but is instead the eternal truth of the existence of the whole. To use Spinoza’s language, the existence, essence, and eternity of the whole are all one and the same. “There is, of course, no difference between Being and Everlasting Being,” Plotinus says. (6)

Plato is certainly without the strong monisms of Plotinus and Spinoza, but he speaks similarly about eternity when he considers the forms. He calls them “changeless” (*Tim.* 28a), “ever the same and in the same state” (*Phaedo* 78d), “uniform,” and “indissoluble.” (80b)⁹⁹ Plato’s theory is not as clear and developed as those who followed him, and, as I stated at the outset, he is not an undeviating propounder of the timelessness idea one discovers more directly in Plotinus or Spinoza. The model of the world—namely, the forms—is “an everlasting living

⁹⁹ Plato, *Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997).

thing.” (*Tim.* 37d) If it is uniform and everlasting, it clearly cannot be thought of as in development, growth or decay, or in any way bound to temporality. The world, however, being subject to change, process, and variation, does not share in these qualities of the forms, and in fact cannot due to the separation: Plato says, “[I]t was the Living Thing’s nature to be eternal, but it isn’t possible to bestow eternity fully upon anything that is begotten.” (*Tim.* 37d)

Plotinus’ tractate begins with the dichotomy of the essay’s title: time and eternity are discrete and mutually exclusive categories (“two entirely separate things” [1]), and thus there can be nothing, when conceived in a particular way, that can be eternal *and* temporal. The relevance of ‘conception’, as I phrase it, is both important and vague. For Spinoza, for instance, it is through an act of the intellect—namely, ‘reason’ (IIP40s2)—that enables the perception of something no longer bound within a temporal sequence (IIP44c2). Similarly in Plotinus, although the categories are discrete, the membership of a thing to one class or the other is not a question of a neutral, ontological sorting process (i.e. *this* object is temporal and *that* one is eternal), but it depends on how the thing is conceived according to the unity of being; and the manner of this conception naturally depends on an act of intellect. Plotinus and Spinoza certainly wish to retain the normal way of speaking about particular and separate things existing in time while also maintaining the eternity of the unified whole. How can they maintain this when the categories are utterly discrete and yet everything is part of the whole?

The answer lies in the role humans play in the creation of time. Spinoza says that we imagine time—meaning the imagination is at work (IIP44s). Time then, being a product of the fragmentary perception of the succession of objects presented to the senses, only exists insofar as humans perceive images in succession. Plotinus makes the same point, saying, “Time [is the] Life of the Soul in movement as it passes from one stage of act or experience to another.” He

continues, “Time, however, is not to be conceived as outside of the Soul,” expressing the necessary role the Soul plays in the creation of time. (11) Plotinus even makes the claim that time would cease to exist without an ‘imagining’ soul: “If, then, the Soul withdrew, sinking itself again into its primal unity, Time would disappear.” (12)¹⁰⁰ This, however, is not the claim that time would disappear with the disappearance of Soul. Like Spinoza, humans can conceive of things adequately and thus eternally. If the soul is united with the Unity, for Plotinus, or if the mind attains knowledge that proceeds from adequate ideas of the essence of God, for Spinoza, it will then understand the whole *sub quadam specie aeternitatis*. This form of knowledge is the understanding of things as necessary insofar as they follow from the essence of the whole. Since the whole is eternal and not subject to change, the ideas of the whole, when adequately conceived, are eternal and not subject to change.

Spinoza’s doctrine of the eternity of the mind makes use, quite obviously, of his notion of eternity, as well as the notions of parallelism, mind, and knowledge. Although I have not yet explicitly dealt with the most relevant Part V propositions, it is necessary to bring to those propositions an accurate understanding of the antecedent components of Spinoza’s thought. It should be clear to anyone who is acquainted with the *Ethics* that it is a highly systematic and interdependent work; when examining a proof that uses previous propositions as premises, if the earlier propositions (and the ones used in their proofs) are not understood, the conclusion of the proof will be flawed, and perhaps as much as invalid or incoherent. Because Spinoza’s eternity

¹⁰⁰ Because Spinoza holds that humans are necessarily a part of nature and thus necessarily passive at times, there is no such thing as a ‘non-imagining’ mind. Although a person can work to conceive of more things *sub quadam specie aeternitatis* (and this is virtue itself), he/she can never conceive everything in this way. Plotinus has a similar view, making his point more theoretical.

of the mind is often viewed as invalid and incoherent, I saw fit to check the premises. Now that this is done, we can evaluate the proof.

Part III

[I]f an able writer who has a clear mind and a perfect knowledge of the orthodox view and all its ramifications, contradicts surreptitiously and as it were in passing one of its necessary presuppositions or consequences which he explicitly recognizes and maintains everywhere else, we can reasonably suspect that he was opposed to the orthodox system as such and—we must study his whole book over again, with much greater care and much less naïveté than ever before.¹⁰¹

Spinoza begins his full treatment of the eternity of the mind by saying, “So it is time now to pass to those things which pertain to the Mind’s duration [*durationem*] without relation to the body [*sine relatione ad corpus*].” (Vp20s) The phrasing appears straightforward and insinuates that an orthodox view is coming. Some commentators see this as the beginning of the demise of an otherwise great work. First, how can Spinoza countenance something like the mind existing without relation to the body? Although this is the most evident worry, one finds Spinoza speaking regularly of features of the mind without relation to the body (and vice-versa) throughout Part III and IV. For instance, will (*voluntas*) relates only to the mind, whereas appetite (*appetitus*) relates both to the body and mind (IIIp9s). At the end of IIIp59s Spinoza mentions affects that relate to the body only (and uses the same language: “*ad mentem relatione*”). If there is an inconsistency here, it runs deep and through numerous concepts in the *Ethics*. Spinoza is happy to speak differently about the mind and body, though this need not indicate some form of ontological or quantitative distinction. There is, however, as is central to Spinoza’s metaphysics, a clear qualitative distinction between thought and extension.

With respect to the above passage, it is important to note that Spinoza, in introducing the transition, is not claiming that the mind in fact *does* have duration without relation to the body; rather, he will cross over (*transeam*) to that which is related to (*pertinet*) a topic that resembles

¹⁰¹ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, University ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1988), 32.

immortality. Note also that the term he uses in his introduction is *duratio*, not *aeternitas*, and the bright distinction between these receives constant emphasis in the *Ethics*, especially in its closing propositions. However, although duration and eternity are opposed, and Spinoza focuses on the mind's eternity, not its immortality, the topics would be conceptually related in the minds of his audiences. As we have seen, immortality of the soul was a significant topic at the time in Amsterdam. There is a hint of truth, for Spinoza, in typical afterlife beliefs, though they have fallen into wishful thinking and imagination. Spinoza is far more interested in truth and proper understanding than in aligning his system with popular doctrine or religious tradition. It was necessary then for Spinoza to phrase the final propositions very carefully, even in ways that might appear on the surface to be either orthodox or contrary to previous parts of the system. This tactic—which is unquestionably present in the *Tractatus*, for instance, as well as in the *Short Treatise*—is also found in the pages of the *Ethics*. Thus one must read between the lines, as Strauss says. Spinoza was no stranger to persecution.¹⁰² One must be careful, as he was. It is perhaps best to consider the relevant propositions in turn, as Spinoza suggests: “continue on with me slowly, step by step.” (Iip11s)

In Vp21 Spinoza argues that the mind cannot imagine except while the body exists; i.e. there can be no knowledge of the first and lowest kind without a body. Following from Iip26, if the body is not affected by external bodies, it cannot perceive external bodies. Since memory is the connection of ideas of things outside the body, there can be no recollection (*recordari*) of past things except while the body endures (*nisi durante corpore*). Recalling Spinoza's conception of mind at Iip13, because the mind is the idea of the body, there is nothing to constitute the mind after the body perishes; the mind and body are the same thing conceived

¹⁰² Consider, for instance, the fates of the Koerbagh brothers. See Nadler, *Spinoza*, 264-9.

under different attributes. He says at IIIp11s, “the present existence of our Mind depends only on this, that the Mind involves the actual existence of the Body.” Immortality construed as the mind durationally outliving the body, as will soon become clear, is not Spinoza’s concern. Since there is no mind without the body, no immortality of this kind is possible. Parallelism demands that the death of body requires the death of the mind when both are conceived under a species of duration. Quite simply, the mind does not and cannot have any *duration* without reference to the body. The issue in question, rather, is the *eternity* of the mind.

In the next proposition, Spinoza says,

Nevertheless, in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that [*huius et illius*] human Body, under a species of eternity.

Dem.: God is the cause, not only of the existence of this or that human body, but also of its essence (by Ip25), which therefore must be conceived through the very essence of God (by Ia4), by a certain eternal necessity (by Ip16), and this concept must be in God (by IIp3).

The reference to a species of eternity evokes the types of knowledge in IIp40s2, here indicating that there is an adequate idea in God of the essence of each human body. Because there is necessarily an adequate idea of everything in God, it follows that there is an adequate idea of each human mind.¹⁰³ Why the idea Spinoza uses is the essence of the human body will become clearer in Vp29. Here he is claiming that, although Vp21 shows that ideas of affections of a human body (i.e. what constitutes the human mind) perish along with the body, the idea of the essence of the human body is adequate in the mind of God. This idea—which requires a self-conscious reflection—is crucial for our eternity. By regarding things as necessary and not contingent, it is possible for a human mind to mirror and share in the mind of God (IIp44). The

¹⁰³ Nadler and Garber recognize that everything, human or otherwise, partakes in eternity in this way. However, Spinoza’s doctrine is the eternity *of the mind*, and thus concerns things that have minds. See my discussion of mind in Part 2.

more passive a human being is, the more the mind perceives under a species of duration (*ex communi naturae ordine*), and by Vp21, these ideas (*imagines*) will perish along with the body. But God does not conceive of things in this way. We need not either.

Spinoza's surprising claim is made explicit in the next proposition, Vp22: "The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it [*eius aliquid*] remains which is eternal." Religious eyes see a religious doctrine, but as should come as no surprise, Spinoza's meaning is more subtle. His phrasing perhaps would have fooled the careless reader or those looking to see a widely accepted dogma in the work. The more liberal of the Jewish leaders who banned him might even have seen something acceptable here. Spinoza is describing the doctrine in the terms known to his contemporaries. But we must not mistake terminology for doctrine. In fact, Spinoza is being quite subversive and heretical, as befits his reputation. What lies between the lines? His argument makes no reference to an afterlife, resurrection, or immortal soul. It is instead phrased wholly in epistemological terms:

In God there is necessarily a concept, *or* idea, which expresses the essence of the human Body (by Vp22), an idea, therefore, which is necessarily something that pertains to the essence of the human Mind (by IIp13). But we do not attribute to the human Mind any duration that can be defined by time, except insofar as it expresses the actual existence of the Body, which is explained by duration, and can be defined by time, i.e. (by IIp8c), we do not attribute duration to it except while the Body endures [*nisi durante corpore*]. However, since what is conceived, with a certain eternal necessity, through God's essence itself (Vp22) is nevertheless something, this something that pertains to the essence of the Mind will necessarily be eternal.

The idea of the body is the mind, and thus the idea of the essence of the body will pertain to the essence of the mind. There is one human essence expressed in different ways. There is also an eternal and adequate idea of this essence in the mind of God. As we find in Ip17s, an essence is an eternal truth. Thus an adequate idea of an essence is to have an eternal truth in the mind. But the issue is the eternity of the *human* mind, not the trivial eternity of God's mind. Every idea in

the mind of God is adequate and eternal. This is not true of human beings. Our eternity, Spinoza is saying, requires the adequate conception of our own essences. Again he admonishes that he does not mean eternity as everlasting duration (and spends most of the proof on this point). The idea of the essence of the body, when related to God (i.e. when adequate), is eternal, meaning it is conceived without relation to time.¹⁰⁴ The essence in question is the *conatus*: that by which we endeavor to persist in our being (IIIp7). Our conatus, quite simply, consists in the pursuit of knowledge. What precisely Spinoza means by the idea of the essence, and why we must have an adequate idea of it, will become clearer in Vp25. But first let us consider the lengthy and obscure Vp23s, which says,

There is, as we have said, this idea, which expresses the essence of the body under a species of eternity, a certain mode of thinking [*certus cogitandi modus*], which pertains to the essence of the Mind, and which is necessarily eternal. And though it is impossible that we should recollect that we existed before the body—since there cannot be any traces of this in the body, and eternity can neither be defined by time nor have any relation to time—still, we feel and know by experience that we are eternal. For the Mind feels [*sentit*] those things that it conceives in understanding no less than those it has in the memory. For the eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes things, are demonstrations themselves [*Mentis enim oculi, quibus res videt observatque, sunt ipsae demonstrationes*].

Therefore, though we do not recollect that we existed before the body, we nevertheless feel that our mind, insofar as it involves the essence of the body under a species of eternity, is eternal, and that this existence it has cannot be defined by time or explained through duration. Our mind, therefore, can be said to endure [*durare*], and its existence can be defined by a certain time, only insofar as it involves the actual existence of the body, and to that extent only does it have the power of determining the existence of things by time, and of conceiving them under duration.

Spinoza's famous claim that we feel ourselves to be eternal warrants explanation. The ideas of memory, which are in the class of imagination, and the eternal ideas, which are in the class of reason or intuition (as follows from Vp22), share the fact that they are *felt*. Since what marks an

¹⁰⁴ There is something paradoxical in saying “*aliquid remanet quod aeternum est.*” However, Spinoza's meaning of ‘eternity’ is clear through numerous passages. It would be a mistake to infer that Spinoza smuggles in temporal language with *remanet*. He may have intended some to make such a mistake.

adequate idea is the *way* in which it is conceived, all ideas have a corresponding mode in extension, even adequate ideas, as is required by the parallelism. An adequate idea is the same as an idea of an affection of the body, simply conceived without relation to its object (IIp21s). This does not mean that the adequate idea does not have a mode of extension as its object. The ‘feeling’ of an idea is understood through the fact that every idea is an affection of the body. Thus, although it follows that one quite literally feels both ideas of imagination and ideas of reason and intuition, it also follows that, without a body, no ideas, either of imagination or understanding, are felt at all. Conceived temporally, there is no mind, which is equivalent to saying there are no ideas. Spinoza’s claim that we feel that we are eternal, although perfectly sensible within his epistemology, also amounts to the claim that there is no durational afterlife or immortality. The mind can be said to endure, as Spinoza says in the final sentence of the scholium, only insofar as the body exists. Although we feel ourselves to be eternal, we would be mistaken to infer from this that we are immortal. The question then focuses on *what* cannot be destroyed along with the body.

There is a puzzle in the scholium. Spinoza sets ‘feeling’ our eternity in opposition to the Platonic notion of recollecting past lives (or at minimum, a pre-embodied state). Some commentators have taken this passage to mean that Spinoza straightforwardly endorses some form of preexistence, though he denies the possibility of recollecting such an existence.¹⁰⁵ Yet on a careful look at the phrasing, it is clear that Spinoza is not in fact endorsing any pre-existence view. It is strange then that he mentions it (and then does not mention it again). Given his view of the mind, the parallelism between the attributes, and the supreme importance of these two doctrines in the *Ethics*, the mind cannot pre-exist the body in any ontological or durational sense.

¹⁰⁵ See Curley, 608 in his translation. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, Vol. 2, 293.

If we do pre-exist, arguments that we post-exist would not be far off. It would be unthinkable to find Spinoza claiming that our minds do exist *before* our bodies at the end of a proof which entails that our minds do not exist *after* our bodies. Why Spinoza mentions it and what he might mean becomes clearer when his view is more fully developed.

Vp24 states, “The more we understand singular things, the more we understand God.” Although the proposition appears radical on its face, within Spinoza’s system the claim is perhaps true by definition. The proof of the proposition is a simple reference to Ip25c, which states, “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.”¹⁰⁶ Spinoza’s monistic *Deus sive Natura* requires that each thing be a part of God—or more precisely, each thing is a definite modification of the attributes of the single substance. However, the above proposition is epistemological, and the ‘understanding’ Spinoza has in mind is ‘intuition’ (*scientiam intuitivam*), the highest type of knowledge: when we understand *res singulares*—i.e. when we form adequate ideas—we are understanding God; our ideas are the same as ideas in the infinite intellect of God, which perfectly captures the essences of objects. Through the conception of adequate ideas, our minds share in the mind of God.¹⁰⁷ We understand the relation of each thing to substance. And substance is eternal.

In Vp25 Spinoza links the preceding proposition to the human *conatus*:

¹⁰⁶ “*Res particulares nihil sunt nisi Dei attributorum affectiones, sive modi, quibus Dei attributa certo et determinato modo exprimuntur.*”

¹⁰⁷ Vp24 above: “*Quo magis res singulares intelligimus, eo magis Deum intelligimus.*” Curley notes that the end of this proposition in the *NS* might be translated as “or the more we have God’s intellect.” Although linguistic support for the translation is not strong, the idea is better in line with Spinoza’s meaning than the broader and more theological rendering of the Latin, which one cannot avoid translating as Curley does (“the more we understand God”). Gebhardt says the alternate phrasing aids in making sense of the “much debated and obscure proposition.” Although he is right and understood Spinoza’s meaning, he is overstepping his editorial bounds.

The great striving [*conatus*] of the mind, and its greatest virtue is understanding things by the third kind of knowledge.

Dem.: The third kind of knowledge proceeds from an adequate idea of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things (see its Def. in IIp40s2), and the more we understand things in this way, the more we understand God (by Vp24). Therefore (by IVp28), the greatest virtue of the Mind, i.e. (by IVd8), the Mind's power, *or* nature, *or* (by IIIp7) its greatest striving, is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge.¹⁰⁸

The mind strives to be active like God, which it accomplishes through adequate ideas. Adequate ideas are ideas in the intellect of God. Thus, the mind strives to have ideas that are the same as ideas in the intellect of God. Virtue consists in this knowledge: “the greatest virtue of the Mind is to understand, *or* know, God.” (IVp28) We are motivated to acquire this knowledge because it is blessedness itself (Vp42). It is its own reward, for Spinoza. The more we understand God, the more we desire to understand, and the more virtuous and blessed we become (see Vp26). We take pleasure in ideas of God—i.e. we take pleasure in knowledge (Vp32). Activity leads to more activity and adequate ideas follow from adequate ideas (IIp40). The eternal knowledge of God gives rise to an active emotion—*amor Dei intellectualis*. The pleasure of understanding is accompanied by the idea of God as its cause since the content of the understanding *is* the idea of God. All knowledge of God is adequate (IIp47) and the intellectual love of God is the only eternal form of love (Vp34c). It is a love that holds a chief place in the mind (*maxime occupare debet*) (Vp16). By our given nature we strive to understand God: “whatever we strive for from reason is nothing but understanding.” (IVp24). The very essence of the human mind is to conceive things under a species of eternity. This is the “first and only foundation of virtue.” (IVp26) The mind conceives nothing as good except what contributes to its understanding of

¹⁰⁸ I prefer Shirley's (lack of a) translation: “The highest conatus of the mind and its highest virtue is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge.” “*Summus mentis conatus summaque virtus est res intelligere tertio cognitionis genere.*”

God. If one's eternity consists in understanding God, there is clear motivation to attain it. The objection that Spinoza does not provide us with a desirable picture of eternity signals a failure to understand the picture in the first place. In fact, someone lacking motivation would be lacking his/her own essence. That is, we endeavor and strive and *conamur* to share in the eternal, infinite intellect of God. Our eternity is our flourishing. The greatest satisfaction of the Mind (*summa mentis acquiescenti*) arises from understanding God through intuition, the highest kind of knowledge (Vp27).

From the natural reflexivity of an adequate idea (IIP43s), it follows that sharing in the infinite intellect of God entails that the mind will conceive the essence of the Body under a species of eternity. Spinoza argues this in Vp29.¹⁰⁹ The eternal truth of the essence (*conatus*) of the body is not conceived through passive affections of the existence of the body, which require the conception of duration (IIP24). Rather, the mind will form an adequate idea of its own *conatus* as a self-conscious condition for the possibility of understanding God: “this power of conceiving things under a species of eternity pertains to the Mind only insofar as it conceives the Body's essence under a species of eternity.” (Vp29) Nadler, for instance, recognizes this: “an essential constituent of the human mind is a knowledge of the essence of the body; and this knowledge, like the essence that is its object, is eternal and survives a person's death.”¹¹⁰ Not only do we feel that we are eternal, but we *know* it insofar as the mind is constituted by adequate ideas. To have an adequate idea is to know reflectively that one has a true idea, and Spinoza believes that all higher knowledge requires knowledge of oneself; higher knowledge is knowledge of oneself and knowledge of God (Vp30). Spinoza says in Vp31s, “Therefore, the more each of us is able to achieve in this kind of knowledge [i.e. eternal knowledge], the more he

¹⁰⁹ Recall also IIP43 and the notion that truth is its own standard.

¹¹⁰ Nadler, *Introduction*, 265.

is conscious of himself and of God, i.e., the more perfect and blessed he is.” The idea of the essence of the body represents a fundamental eternity of the mind and a precondition for the conception of other adequate ideas. To understand God one must also understand oneself—i.e. one must have an adequate idea of the essence of the body. It is our very essence to strive for this higher knowledge.

Spinoza then says that we are certain that the mind is eternal “insofar as it conceives things under a species of eternity.” (Vp31s) That is, the eternity of the mind consists in an eternal type of knowledge. The mind, for Spinoza, is ideas. If those ideas are eternal, the mind is therefore eternal. As Spinoza says in Iip47, “The human mind has an adequate knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence.” And in the proposition’s scholium, “From this we see that God’s infinite essence and his eternity are known to all.” It follows that every human mind partakes in eternity; we all feel and know it. Only human minds are able to understand this reflectively. But this truth is often warped: “If we attend to the common opinion of men, we shall see that they are indeed conscious of the eternity of their Mind, but that they confuse it with duration, and attribute it to the imagination, *or* memory, which they believe remains after death.” (Vp34s) As we have seen, Spinoza stresses the sharp distinction between eternity and duration numerous times in the preceding propositions. The adequate ideas in the mind are the same as the ideas in the intellect of God. Ideas in the intellect of God cannot be destroyed. Thus there are ideas in a human mind that cannot be destroyed. They are immune to destruction in the sense that they exist and cannot transition into nothing since this would require time.¹¹¹ And the existence of substance is eternity. The ideas make no reference to time. It does not follow from this that there is any immortality or any afterlife. In fact, recalling Vp21 and Vp23s, with no body there is

¹¹¹ It would be tantamount to substance ceasing to exist, which would require the existence of another substance to destroy it. These are the arguments that begin the *Ethics*.

no mind. The two are one and the same. The mind is capable of conceiving of things both under a species of duration and under a species of eternity only insofar as the body exists. The eternity of the mind is not durational, as Spinoza admonishes repeatedly. Thus he is able to hold simultaneously that the mind is both eternal and not immortal. Our eternity is not an eternal *life*. In fact, as we see, the issue is not life at all but the nature of ideas. The concern is with knowledge. Life perhaps implies *duration*. Eternal life would then be quite paradoxical, for Spinoza. Ideas are not the sorts of things that can be destroyed. We must heed Spinoza's warnings. The eternity of the mind, rather, consists in the conception of eternal ideas—i.e. ideas that are identical to the ideas in the infinite intellect of God. These ideas capture the essences of their objects perfectly, with no dependence on passive emotions or affections. By conceiving of things through reason or intuition we share in the mind of God, and thus the mind—which is nothing more than ideas—will be eternal. Therefore, for the eternity of the mind we need look no further than the nature of the ideas in the mind. If they are eternal, the mind is eternal.

Each human mind participates in eternity, which is to say that each human mind has eternal ideas. The human mind is part of the mind of God (IIP11). But Spinoza also maintains that the mind can have a greater or lesser share of eternity. The mind can have a larger part that is eternal. He says in Vp38:

The more the Mind understands things by the second and third kind of knowledge, the less it is acted on by affects which are evil, and the less it fears death.

Dem.: The Mind's essence consists in knowledge (by IIP11); therefore, the more the Mind knows things by the second and third kind of knowledge, the greater the part of it that remains (by Vp23 and Vp29), and consequently (by Vp37), the greater the part of it that is not touched by affects which are contrary to our nature, i.e., which (by IVp30) are evil. Therefore, the more the Mind understands things by the second and third kind of knowledge, the greater the part of it that remains unharmed [*eo maior eius pars illaesa manet*], and hence, the less it is acted on by affects, etc.

There is a close relation between being active and forming adequate ideas (see IIIp3). The ideas of higher kinds of knowledge are not a result of passive sensory experience. A mind is active insofar as it has adequate ideas. The eternal knowledge of God is the highest good of the mind. “[T]he essence of our Mind consists only in knowledge, of which God is the beginning and the foundation.” (Vp36s) An adequate idea is conceived under a species of eternity, not duration; the latter is the only source of passivity and thus the only source of pain. Focusing on the eternal is to be unaffected by passive emotions like fear of death (see the often quoted IVp67). As the demonstration above says, adequate ideas are not touched by passive affects. So the greater the number of adequate ideas and the more we focus on the eternal, the less subject we are to passive affections. By focusing solely on the eternal, we arrive at the Stoic point that a person cannot be harmed (we are *illaesa*: ‘uninjured’ or ‘inviolable’). God is not subject to passive affections. If the mind shares in and mirrors the mind of God, it likewise cannot be passively affected. Our blessedness and virtue consists in exactly this: the greater our activity, the greater our eternity and the less subject we are to pain.

Spinoza, in outlining the doctrine, speaks of both the body and mind, again reminding the reader that they are one and the same as well as straining any ontological reading of the eternity of the mind. Although thought and extension are qualitatively distinct, they are numerically identical. The reminder, coupled with the reader’s conditioned search for a traditional afterlife doctrine in Spinoza, makes Vp39 appear quite strange. The proposition is a Straussian signpost.

He who has a Body capable of a great many things has a Mind whose greatest part is eternal.

Dem. He who has a Body capable of doing a great many things is least troubled by evil affects (by IVp38), i.e. (by IVp30), by affects contrary to nature. So (by Vp10) he has a power of ordering and connecting the affections of his Body according to the order of the intellect, and consequently (by Vp14), of bring it about that all the affections of the Body are related to the idea of God. The result (by Vp15) is that it is affected with a Love of

God, which (by Vp16) must occupy, *or* constitute the greatest part of the Mind. Therefore (by Vp33), he has a Mind whose greatest part is eternal.

The eternity of the mind consists in the activity of the mind—i.e. the conception of adequate ideas. The activity of the mind is one and the same as the activity of the body: the greater the activity of the body, the greater the activity of the mind, and thus the greater proportion of adequate ideas in the mind (see IVp38). This means that the ideas in the mind are ordered in the same way as the ideas in mind of God. The “idea of God” [*Dei ideam*] in the proposition is *the idea that God has*—i.e. the infinite intellect of God.¹¹² The intellectual love of God follows necessarily from this higher knowledge (Vp37). The greater the intellectual love of God, the greater the mind shares in the intellect of God, and thus the greater part of the mind that is eternal. The more a mind shares in the idea of God, the more it shares in the essence of God, which is eternity (Ip20). An ideal comes into view:

Because human bodies are capable of a great many things, there is no doubt that they could be of the nature that they are related to minds which have a large knowledge of themselves and of God, and of which the greatest or principal part is eternal, and so therefore they scarcely fear death. (Vp39s)¹¹³

No one knows all that a body can do (IIIp2s).¹¹⁴ Spinoza’s epistemic optimism shines through not only in his statement that we can achieve eternal knowledge, but also in the fact that it is possible for the chief part [*praecipua pars*] of our mind to be eternal. However, we are a part of nature and thus necessarily passive at times (IVp2). It is nonetheless possible in principle to

¹¹² See Ip21 for the same usage.

¹¹³ The translation is my own. Curley renders it awkwardly: “Because human Bodies are capable of a great many things, there is no doubt but what they can be of such a nature that they are related to Mind which have a great knowledge of themselves and of God, and of which the greatest, *or* chief, part is eternal. So they hardly fear death.” “*Quia corpora humana ad plurima apta sunt, non dubium est, quin eius naturae possint esse, ut ad mentes referantur, quae magnam sui et Dei habeant cognitionem, et quarum maxima seu praecipua pars est aeterna, atque adeo ut mortem vix timeant.*”

¹¹⁴ One would expect this claim to be anachronistic by now.

conceive of anything adequately. The more the mind conceives of things adequately, the greater proportion of it is eternal; the more active a mind is, the more perfection it has (Vp40); the more eternal, the less pain it suffers. However, although sharing in the mind of God is described within the attribute of thought, a corresponding description exists within the attribute of extension, as the proposition illustrates. The conception of adequate ideas is the same as activity of the body, looked at in another way. It follows that when there is no body, there can be no conception of adequate ideas at all. Although this again highlights his consistency, it is not Spinoza's central point. We are not centrally concerned with an afterlife. We are interested in eternally true ideas. The two, as Spinoza notes, are often conflated and warped.

The conflation is appealing, but it is a result of the passive emotions of hope and fear (the cornerstones of dogmatic religion). Spinoza's picture appears less satisfying in comparison, and he is occasionally criticized for offering a picture that is minimal or weak.¹¹⁵ The criticism is meant to give the reader reason to suppose that Spinoza must be meaning something more extravagant. This conclusion is a failure at exegesis. Acclimation to a particular idea does not show another to be weak; it merely shows one's conditioned acceptance of one idea against which others must compare. Should this be how one assesses ideas? If one does not find the truth interesting, is that a fault of the truth? Holding one to be more captivating than another is not a matter of the tenability of the ideas themselves; it is instead a testament to one's biases and a flawed way of reading this text and any other. If Spinoza's eternal life is not as tasty or personally satisfying, this is not to be counted as a fault. Never should the truth be questioned due only to its lack of appeal to the traditions. We need not ask any more of Spinoza than what he gives us.

¹¹⁵ See Stock, "Spinoza On the Immortality of the Mind," 385.

The objection is also mitigated by the fact that Spinoza's doctrine, though innovative in many ways, falls within a tradition. One is simply comparing the wrong ideas. Looking to the tradition will be helpful in better understanding Spinoza's meaning. Although the *Ethics* is a self-contained work and does not include many references, Spinoza at times alludes to other thinkers. Not noticing or following the allusions has led many interpreters astray. The link to the tradition with which I most concerned is seen most clearly in Vp40c:

For the eternal part of the Mind (by Vp23 and Vp29) is the intellect, through which alone we are said to act (by IIIp3). But what we have shown to perish is the imagination (by Vp21), through which alone we are said to be acted on (by IIIp3 and the gen. Def. Aff). So (by Vp40), the intellect, however extensive it is, is more perfect than the imagination.

When the mind is eternal, it understands, at which point it is the same as the mind of God. That by which a human is passively affected (imagination) passes away, and what is more perfect (*perfectior*) remains since it cannot coherently be said to be destroyed. Here Spinoza is referencing the doctrine of the acquired intellect.¹¹⁶ His reference to the 'intellect through which we act [*agere*]', and his claim that this intellect is more perfect than imagination, makes the intimation clear.

The pages of the *Tractatus* show that Spinoza was clearly influenced by Maimonides, the 12th century Jewish thinker. Maimonides, a master of making his audience read between the lines, cryptically held that immortality (which is not something miraculous) consists in a type of intellectual perfection, not in a resurrection of the body or a sempiternal existence of the soul. Rather, by conceiving the essence of God through contemplation, the soul can reach a type of union with God.¹¹⁷ The intellect *acquires* immortality. In the acquired intellect lies the highest virtue and the greatest good of a human being. Maimonides also argues that to know an object is

¹¹⁶ Relevant also is the 'active' or 'agent' intellect, though it is conceptually distinct, as we will see.

¹¹⁷ Recall the chapter on immortality in the *KV*.

to have the *form* of the object in the one's soul.¹¹⁸ He says, "For intellect is nothing but the thing that is intellectually cognized."¹¹⁹ It follows that when the object in the soul is the essence of God, the soul *acquires* the divine intellect. Again, like Spinoza, the eternity of the mind is expressed by an intellectual activity, the highest object of which is God.

This is similar to the view held by the 14th century thinker Gersonides, whom Spinoza also knew. The acquired intellect, for Gersonides, is a mind-independent body of knowledge that can be shared by the human intellect. God's knowledge (or the intellect of God) is identical to this body of knowledge. Although a human mind cannot grasp the whole, it can share in parts and thus mirror the mind of God. Immortality then *is* the acquired intellect: when we share in and thus acquire the intellect of God, there is a part of us that cannot be destroyed. What is immaterial and divine cannot be destroyed.

Instead of further assessing Spinoza's relation to Maimonides and Gersonides¹²⁰—which has already been done adeptly¹²¹—I will look to the origin of the broad tradition. Aristotle's short and vastly perplexing *De Anima* III.5, as I mentioned in Part 1, lays the foundation for the theory of the acquired intellect. It was also influential in Spinoza's thinking. Although most who have written on *Ethics* V notice the connection between Spinoza and the acquired intellect tradition, what is missing is a treatment of exactly how the connection is manifest with reference to Aristotle. This might also help in understanding Aristotle himself. Instead of looking to the

¹¹⁸ Form is meant in the hylomorphic sense. The view is Aristotelian. Although Spinoza rejects hylomorphism along with all of the early moderns, the similarities in the epistemology between Maimonides and Spinoza are striking.

¹¹⁹ Nadler, *Heresy*, 79.

¹²⁰ One could also include Alexander of Aphrodisias (whom I have already mentioned; see Adler, "Mortality of the Soul from Alexander of Aphrodisias to Spinoza"), Themistius, Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Crescas, Ibn Ezra, and to a lesser extent, Aquinas. Maimonides and Gersonides, however, are the proponents of the acquired intellect with whom Spinoza was most familiar. The list should underscore the point that there is a tradition.

¹²¹ See Nadler, *Heresy*, ch. 4.

Jewish philosophers that influenced Spinoza, what does one find at the source?

Therefore, in lieu of covering old ground, I will go back to the new ground. With the theory of the eternity of the mind in hand, I propose a reading of *De Anima* III.5 through Spinoza's eyes. The passage has been interpreted in extremely varied ways over a very long history and spurred a tradition that stretches over three major world religions. Although I will not collate all of these readings, along with their strengths and weakness, I nevertheless propose that my reading (which is Spinoza's reading) is plausible in itself.

The chapter is very short, and in it Aristotle introduces the 'active' or 'agent' intellect (νοῦς ποιητικός). Taking from Lloyd Gerson,¹²² I will divide the chapter into natural divisions for purposes of exegesis.¹²³

[A] But since, as in the whole of nature, to something which serves as matter for each kind (and this is potentially all the members of the kind) there corresponds something else which is the cause or agent [αἴτιον καὶ ποιητικόν] because it makes them all, the two being related to one another as art [τέχνη] to its material, of necessity these differences must be found also in the soul. [B] And to the one intellect, which answers to this description because it becomes all things, corresponds the other because it makes all things, like a sort of definite quality such as light. For in a manner light, too, converts colors which are potential into actual colors. [C] And it is this intellect which is separable and impassive¹²⁴ and unmixed [χωριστὸς καὶ ἀπαθὴς καὶ ἀμιγῆς], being in its essential nature an activity. For that which acts is always superior to that which is acted upon, the cause or principle to the matter. [D] Now actual knowledge is identical with the thing known, but potential knowledge is prior in time in the individual; and yet not universally prior in time. [E] But this intellect has no intermittence in its thought.¹²⁵ [F] It is, however, only when separated that it is its true self, and this, its essential nature, alone is

¹²² See Lloyd P. Gerson, "The Unity of Intellect in Aristotle's 'De Anima'", *Phronesis* 49, no. 4 (2004): 349.

¹²³ Translation from Aristotle, *De Anima: With Translation, Introduction, and Notes*, trans. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907). Other texts used: Aristotle, *On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, On Breath*. Edited by Jeffrey Henderson. Translated by W.S. Hett. Loeb Classical Library. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. H. Rackham. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934).

¹²⁴ Or "unaffected."

¹²⁵ Or "But [intellect] is not at one time thinking and another time not thinking." This is Gerson's rendering.

immortal and eternal [ἀθάνατον καὶ αἰδίων]. [G] But we do not remember because this is impassive,¹²⁶ while the intellect which can be affected is perishable [H] and without this does not think at all.¹²⁷

In [A] Aristotle draws a distinction between the matter of a kind and the cause that brought it about.¹²⁸ The analogy he offers is that of art [τέχνη] and its material, due to the conceptual difference between (1) the maker's producing of a product out of (2) raw material. What we learn from [A] is that this distinction also applies to the soul. Michael Wedin suggests Aristotle is arguing that the mind can serve as the cause of thoughts, but since thoughts themselves are within the soul, the distinction gives rise to parts (or different faculties) of an individual soul through a reflexivity.¹²⁹ The soul is that of an individual with a mind, and the mind has two parts: passive and active. Although there are no ontologically distinct parts in the mind, according to Spinoza, the distinction between active and passive is quite obviously present. In III.4 we also learn that thinking is an affection (429a13-5) and the mind is the same as its thoughts (430a3-5)—Spinoza's clear position.¹³⁰

The cryptic analogy in [B] is between the active and passive mind on the one hand, and light and color on the other. Presumably, an object has color potentially, but with light the color becomes actualized. Since “the intellect is in a way potentially the objects of thought” (429b30), in order for the mind to be more than undirected affections, there must be a faculty by which the

¹²⁶ Or “unaffected,” as above.

¹²⁷ Or “Without this it thinks nothing.”

¹²⁸ As Michael Wedin points out, since the text states “each kind” rather than the stronger “each thing,” Aristotle does not have in mind the unmoved mover. Michael Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle* (New Haven: Yale University, 1988), 173.

¹²⁹ Wedin draws on *De Generatione et Corruptione* (324) for this view. Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle*, 173-4.

¹³⁰ See Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle*, 163-4 for a discussion of these features of the mind.

mind thinks *particular* thoughts.¹³¹ There is a sort of creative force to thought that cannot be accounted for if the mind is merely affections: with affections there is the material in potentiality, but not the cause to actualize it. On this view the active mind is a necessary condition for thought, requiring the reflexivity. There is a self-conscious precondition for further knowledge. The passive intellect, when considering a particular type of knowledge, however, plays a necessary role since, to use the light analogy, if there is no potential for color, no amount of light can create it. All knowledge, for Spinoza, begins with an affection of the body (IIp19). There is a relation: the passive intellect becomes the material of thought, and the active intellect causes (actualizes) thought. Although the mind *is* these thoughts, the thoughts require potentiality *and* actuality.

The active intellect, when conceived in itself, is actuality in its essence and, being that its role is one of activity, cannot be altered. In [C] we learn that the active mind is superior—or “*perfectior*,” as Spinoza says. This comes to the forefront when we consider how the active intellect is separable (*χωριστὸς*), though this is not meant in a strong ontological sense. Gerson interprets the passage saying, “Intellect is always [...] engaged in self-reflexive activity. This is the case when intellect is ‘in the soul’ and when intellect is separate. But when it is in the soul—when it is accessed by that which operates in nature—that access is always via images.”¹³² The potential for thought is supplied through the soul’s capacity for sensation, which is done paradigmatically through images. This passive sensory sensibility does not possess the reflexive capacity characteristic of the active mind. It merely supplies images. The active mind does not operate through images; and thinking in general does not require images (God being the

¹³¹ Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle*, 175.

¹³² Gerson, “The Unity of Intellect in Aristotle's 'De Anima',” 365.

paragon).¹³³ In knowing something through the active mind, there is no material (i.e. no sensory appearance) through which to conceive of an object as existing ‘out there’, but instead, as pure actuality, the knowledge is identical to the thing it knows; and God knows everything in this way. A true idea, which universally exists as knowable, *is* in the active mind, unmediated by appearances. This is how [D] can be understood.¹³⁴ While the mind is the same as its thoughts, if the material of a thought is given through sensory appearance, the thought which the active mind actualizes from the material is not identical with the object of the thought ‘out there’. It is “episodic,” as Gerson phrases it;¹³⁵ such thought conceives of things passively. This might well be considered a distinct form of knowledge. The most fitting term for it is ‘imagination’, as it is based on images. But thought of the active mind (i.e. thought not through images) is identical to its object. It adequately captures the essence of its object. Potential knowledge is prior when conceived through imagination, but what is knowable potentially can also be known apart from the passive mind—that is, it can be known actively, conceived in itself. It can be known *adequately*. In this regard, the active mind emulates the divine mind, the latter of which always conceives things actively and hence truly. Clearly God does not have false thoughts. The most fitting term for this type of knowledge is ‘intuition.’

But God’s mind is wholly active, whereas the human mind is not. So Aristotle must account for the fact that, unlike God, humans do not always conceive of things eternally. In other words, episodic thinking is “intermittent”: the soul is not constantly supplied with images that serve as the material for the imagination. But the active mind, conceived through its activity, so long as it is operating, is not episodic but always active. This is the meaning of [E]. As Wedin

¹³³ Gerson, “The Unity of Intellect in Aristotle's 'De Anima',” 365.

¹³⁴ Gerson, “The Unity of Intellect in Aristotle's 'De Anima',” 366.

¹³⁵ Gerson, “The Unity of Intellect in Aristotle's 'De Anima',” 366.

points out, light is active not only occasionally, but always active when it operates: “It just is a sort of activity and, hence, is either active or simply nonoccurrent.”¹³⁶ But the activity of the active mind is its true self and essential nature, as it says in [F]. When this essence is separated and conceived only in itself, it is immortal and eternal (ἀθάνατον καὶ αἰδίον). It might also be possible for it to be nonoccurrent. Since the mind is the same as its thoughts, whatever suffices for the distinction between active and passive mind is sufficient for the ascription of immortality.¹³⁷ Intuition is necessarily characteristic of God, whose conception of everything is true in virtue of the lack of mediation between God and the object of thought. The terms used in [F] are not meant to be ascriptions of a sempiternal mental existence as the afterlife is traditionally construed, but instead the nature of the thoughts of the active mind are eternal in virtue of the nature of the active mind itself, which conceives of things through intuition. When the mind conceives things through intuition, it is eternal.

God is *wholly* eternal, whereas we are not. The eternal part of the mind is a demonstration of that faculty shared between the deity and human beings. The distinction between faculties allows for the passive mind to be perishable, as in [G]. We can also now make sense of the allusion to memory in [G] (and in Vp23s) where Aristotle says that we do not remember the impassive mind. “[I]t is impossible that we should recollect that we existed before the body.” (Vp23s) Memory requires episodic knowledge, and this is only available through the imagination; the alternative is the knowledge of the active mind, which makes no reference to time. The notion of memory in the active mind is simply incoherent. For Aristotle, “we do not remember” the active mind not because we have forgotten, but because these notions are inapplicable. If we separate the active mind from the faculty of imagination (which is responsible

¹³⁶ Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle*, 190.

¹³⁷ Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle*, 190.

for the linking [*concatenatio*] of images of sensory appearance) and there are no images for the active mind, there is no place for memory to enter (see *IIP18s*). The passive mind is perishable and the active mind is eternal. With the perishing of the body, the passive mind perishes, and in fact there is no thinking at all, as [H] says. Crucially, although the active mind can think without the passive mind, this does not imply that the active mind exists without the passive mind, or will exist when the passive mind perishes. In [A] we learn that the mind is singular but with different faculties. The active mind is eternal insofar as it has adequate and true thoughts and, in this respect, emulates God. But it can be nonoccurrent.

The human mind then is akin to the divine mind through the faculty of intuition. Aristotle stresses this at length in *Nicomachean Ethics X* where he treats the contemplative life:

Whether then this be the intellect, or whatever else it be that is thought to rule and lead us by nature, and to have cognizance of what is noble and divine, either as being itself also actually divine, or as being relatively the divinest part of us, it is the activity of this part of us in accordance with the virtue proper to it that will constitute perfect happiness. (1177a18-23)

Such a life as this however will be higher than the human level: not in virtue of his humanity will a man achieve it, but in virtue of something within him that is divine; and by as much as this something is superior to his composite nature, by so much is its activity superior to the exercise of the other forms of virtue. If then the intellect is something divine in comparison with man, so is the life of the intellect divine in comparison with human life. [...] [W]e ought so far as possible to achieve immortality, and do all that man may to live in accordance with the highest thing in him. (1177b27-1178a1)

For Aristotle, the active mind is that which humans share with the divine; and the divine nature of the mind is the extent to which a human mind gains knowledge through intuition. We become like God through the conception things through intuition: adequate ideas of essences, first of ourselves then of other things. The emulation of God is the best part of us, and through it we acquire eternity by the conception of things that are not mediated through the perishable passive mind. The thoughts of intuition are “noble and divine” because they are the thoughts of God. The

mind is its thoughts, and if these thoughts are conceived with the same faculty by which God conceives, the thought and hence the mind is divine and eternal. The mind that conceives the most through its active faculty is the most eternal. Because there is no inconsistency in saying that the human mind conceives through both imagination and intuition, the greater the proportion of thoughts that are conceived under a form of eternity, the greater share of eternity the mind has. An ideal comes into view: we should seek to live according to the divine nature to the greatest extent possible; and by sharing in the divine mind, we ensure that our thoughts will be the same as God's thoughts. These thoughts are eternally true, as they are the result of the pure activity of the mind. If a human mind has a thought that is eternally true, the mind itself is eternal. Humans possess a divine faculty through the active mind of III.5 and by its use emulate God and achieve eternity of the mind.

Critiques of Spinoza's view may come from inside his system—arguing that later propositions conflict with earlier propositions—or they may come from the outside. The claim that Spinoza's doctrine of the eternity of the mind is coherent and consistent is quite different from the claim that Spinoza is right. It is my hope that the former—which is my central focus—is now settled. It is then fitting to end with a brief consideration of the latter. A full defense of Spinoza's doctrine would be a massive undertaking and require defense of almost every part of Spinoza's system, not simply the final propositions. I cannot offer that here.

Part V of the *Ethics*, as well as my exposition, are rife with terminology unfamiliar to the contemporary audience. The jargon of philosophy has changed (by and large). Spinoza expects his reader to work through the proofs and mind the definitions. This requires extreme care, but the result is satisfying, even for a contemporary audience. However, false premises can entail a true conclusion. It is not necessary to adopt all of the doctrines of the *Ethics* to believe that

Spinoza's eternity of the mind doctrine is true. I aim only to describe the obscure doctrine in a new way, one that I hope highlights the fact that Spinoza had in mind something we all can (and perhaps *should*) believe.

In learning a truth—one as simple as, say, the Principle of Non-Contradiction or the Pythagorean Theorem—there is a feeling that we are not generating something new; the fact did not originate in my mind. We are discovering and learning, not inventing. It is something shared among all minds: Paul's Principle of Non-Contradiction is not different from Peter's. We take the principle to have a right to our thinking, as Husserl would say; one and the same principle has a right to everyone's thinking. It might even have a right to everything in the world (indeed Spinoza believes it does). We are conceiving of something that was here before us and will be here after us. We know and feel this. The world has a certain permanence insofar as the Principle of Non-Contradiction is a notion common to all things. We cannot remember any pre-embodied state, and we might hope for a future afterlife of some kind, but the idea that there are bits of knowledge that are not transient or destructible could easily give rise to both types of belief. Spinoza argues that these are false steps: we do not pre-date our births and we do not survive our deaths, but all human beings are capable of a type of knowledge that is fixed and unchanging. More precisely, the Principle of Non-Contradiction makes no reference time. We cannot conceive of it one day passing into falsity.¹³⁸ It is eternal.

The concern is not in instilling hope and assuaging fear, but with promoting understanding. When we attend to these ideas with precision and discipline, any desire to align ideas with religious dogma falls away. The *Ethics* is driven by an epistemic optimism: the world is fundamentally understandable. Spinoza believes this for the deeply metaphysical reason that,

¹³⁸ A thought like this, Aristotle would say, requires and thus reinforces the Principle.

simply put, everything is made of the same thing; laws operate on everything equally, whether the laws are logical or causal. Human beings are a part of nature, not dominions within a dominion, and can, in principle, understand themselves and the things they interact with. We are not different. Substance is everywhere the same, indivisible, and eternal. Spinoza is not only optimistic in the sense that we can *potentially* understand any given thing, but, what is more, he holds that there are many things we understand *now*. There are facts about the world and we can know them. This is true because we know some of them. For Spinoza, the Principle of Non-Contradiction is an adequate idea in the mind of everyone. Yet it is possible to understand more. There are truths greater than basic logical principles. We simply need to amend our intellects. Our virtue and blessedness is identical to the emendation of the intellect.

The correct approach to take towards nature is not one of worshipful awe, but one of scientific and philosophical examination. We are all (though some more than others) familiar with the experience of discovering a truth about the world. The philosophical life is one devoted to this pursuit. Coming to understand something about the world is not a truth *relative to the individual* (if it was, it would be the lowest type of knowledge and not understanding), but it is a truth about the world, full stop. The mind has an idea that is the same as another idea, one that is independent of the mind. It carries with it necessity and can be understood by others who are active in the same way. Others can have the same idea. All are participating in the same world. And when the idea is one that is eternally true and describes the nature of the world conceived apart from duration, those who hold the belief are participating in eternity. Spinoza believes that we all do this. And he argues that we should all do it more.

There is a simple argument in favor of the doctrine: Spinoza has unquestionably achieved a type of immortality. There is a very real sense in which Spinoza is, along with Plato and

Aristotle and Frege, alive today. But this is ambiguous. Spinoza the man is not immortal. On the contrary, what is eternal are his ideas—which is to say, parts of his mind. Yet this is true only because the ideas are not properly his. They did not originate in his mind, but because he had a body capable of acting and being acted on in many ways (IIp13s), he was able to conceive of more things adequately, as following necessarily from the nature of God. If readers follow the proofs, they can share in the same adequate ideas. And there are infinitely more than those expressed in the book. The *Ethics* is Spinoza, as it were, leading us by the hand, as he says (IIpref.). Ideas are not the sorts of things that can be destroyed. A true idea does not wither away in time. It can be conceived adequately under a form of eternity. In acquiring a mind whose chief part is eternal, we share in the infinite intellect of God—and we share in Spinoza's eternal mind.

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