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TIME AND ETERNITY

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My recently completed book, *The Nondual Mind*, compares Hindu nondual philosophy to that of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677 C.E.), demonstrating the similarity of Spinoza’s ideas to Kashmiri *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism. In previous editions of *Dogma*, I published several excerpts from that book. The first three articles explain that all things are conscious, and that all consciousness is consciousness of self. The fourth article addresses the difficult problem of what it means to be free in a deterministic universe. The present article discusses two ways of thinking about immortality, one based on the circularity of time, and the other based on eternity. But to better introduce the topic of the present article, I will briefly review some of the ideas about time and divine freedom that appear at the end of my fourth article.

God created a magnificent universe that is an outward expression of God’s own eternal essence. It is constructed in perfect accord with elegant physical laws, and it plays itself out across the time dimension like an ever-turning kaleidoscope, each new configuration necessarily determined by, and every bit as beautiful, as the one that came before. Some people are troubled by that model of the universe. They don’t like imagining time to be a fixed landscape, analogous to one of the spatial dimensions. People imagine that they exist

at the vanguard of time, creating the future by their free choices. Therefore, the only type of freedom most people can appreciate is the freedom they imagine they have to make decisions about the future as they proceed forward through the time dimension. And if God lacks that freedom, most people believe, then God is not free at all, which calls into doubt God’s omnipotence. Reasoning in this way, people insist that God must be able to change creation at any moment, making adjustments (large or small) to what the laws of physics would otherwise demand — even parting the Red Sea when necessary. Thus, they place God inside time. They cannot imagine a God that is outside time, the creator of time, existing changelessly throughout all time. Instead, they imagine a god that, like themselves, is an actor on the stage of time. But by placing God inside time, they make time ontologically prior to the god they are worshiping, thus ignoring the God that is the source of time.

In truth, the ability to make choices in the dimension of time is not the measure of God’s freedom. Rather, the measure of God’s freedom is the ability to actualize every possibility implied by God’s own eternal essence. If God is eternal (i.e., outside time), and if the universe freely expresses, in the dimensions of space and time, God’s eternal unchanging essence,

then the universe needs no temporal interventions from God to make it more God-like, and if somehow it did need such interventions, then God's eternal essence would need to have changed, which is nonsensical. As humans who are subject to time, we equate freedom with choice, but choice would actually limit God's freedom, forcing God to choose one possibility and to reject all the others. Infinity, not choice, is the measure of God's freedom.

At the root of this confusion about divine freedom is the inability of most people to distinguish between "inside time" and "outside time." Time is so seemingly inevitable, so deeply integrated into human thought processes, that we tend to accept it unquestioningly. We treat it as something preexistent, a brute fact, binding on both man and God alike. Thus, it becomes the ground on which we construct our metaphysics. But in truth, the universe can be understood from two perspectives, one temporal, and the other eternal. Each is equally real, and each has something to tell us about our finite human condition.

1. The Circularity of Time

I ask you, my friend, to consider that men are not created, but only generated, and that their bodies already existed before, though formed differently.¹

— Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677 C.E.)

¹ Letter 4 [Gebhardt, Carl (ed.), *Spinoza Opera*, 4 vols. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925), IV/14/15–20]. The translations of Spinoza's writings that appear in this article are from Curley, Edwin (ed. and transl.), *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vols. I & II (Princeton Univ. Press 1988 and 2016), sometimes with minor edits. Spinoza's friend and confidant, Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus (1651–1708 C.E.), asserted that Spinoza believed in "a sort of Pythagorical transmigration." In this article, I show how that belief might be harmonized with Spinoza's theory of mind-body equivalence.

In light of the theory of universal nondual consciousness set forth in the texts of both *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism and Spinoza, what can we say about death? First, the notion of an immortal individual soul that floats away from the dying body and journeys to a new beatified body in heaven or to a new human body on earth is a simplistic fantasy that must be set aside. There is no bubble-like soul that exists independent of matter, steers the ship of the body, and emerges, specter-like, when the body dies. Thought and matter are the same thing; the human soul *is* the human brain, or some component of it. The human brain (or some component of it) is conscious of itself directly, by being itself. It has the thought of itself, and it infers an external world from effects it observes within itself. Therefore, although nondual consciousness is both universal and eternal, the unique characteristics of a specific human mind depend on the complex configuration of a specific human body. The destruction of that body results in a dispersal of the system that gave rise to that human mind, and what remains is only the consciousness of self associated with the dispersed parts.

Nonetheless, the universal nondual consciousness is what one always was. And because that consciousness is the ground of being, nothing can extinguish it. It cannot be extinguished as a whole, and it cannot be extinguished in its parts, for that would imply the theoretical possibility of extinguishing it as a whole. Therefore, the death of a person does not affect that universal consciousness even a bit. The universe was sparkling with consciousness before the person's death, and it continues to do so no less brightly, no less beautifully, after the person's death.

Immortality, according to this way of thought, is a matter of identifying with

an immortal thing. Hive insects sacrifice themselves for the sake of the continuing vitality of the hive, and people sometimes identify so strongly with children, family, or clan that they value the continuing vitality of those social groups over their own individual existence.

Moreover, in all the effects that one's self-expressive actions have had on the course of events in the universe, there is a sort of memory — a “soul print,” one might say — of one's unique character. Kṣemarāja (10th–11th centuries C.E.) says, for example: “It is never witnessed that [(i.e., it never occurs that)] the produced product, such as the [clay] jar, can conceal the nature of the agent, such as the potter, etc.”² Rather, the jar is a *soul print* of the potter, and all one's soul prints contribute to an endless chain of causes and effects, giving rise to a kind of immortality. To limit oneself to a particular thing in that chain — a human body having a particular form at a particular time — is rather arbitrary.

Consider, too, that all things in the universe proceed in cycles, human history being no exception. If so, the impressions one has made in the ripples of time may disperse for a while, but their effects will remain, and the complex forces that previously converged to bring a particular human body into existence will do so again, producing another body in a similar form. And when that occurs, the new body will give rise to an individual soul very much like one's own. And thus, one will be reborn, even though one's individual soul had no continuous existence.

² *Spanda-Nirṇaya*, com. to *Spandakārikā*, verse 1.2 (KSTS, vol. 42, p. 10), translated in Singh, Jaideva (ed. and transl.), *The Yoga of Vibration and Divine Pulsation: A Translation of the Spanda Kārikās with Kṣemarāja's Commentary, the Spanda Nirṇaya* (SUNY Press 1992), p. 28.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* expresses this idea metaphorically, making reference to the roots of a tree:

As a tree of the forest,
Just so, surely, is man.
His hairs are leaves,
His skin, the outer bark.

....

A tree, when it is felled, grows up
From the root, more new again;
A mortal, when cut down by death —
From what root does he grow up?

....

If with its roots they should pull up
The tree, it would not come into being
again.

A mortal, when cut down by death —
From what root does he grow up?³

What this poetic passage tells us by way of metaphor is that, after being “cut down by death,” a person will rise up again, like a new tree growing up from the roots of a felled tree. But the passage adds that this return of the body can only take place if the person has left “roots” in the ground, meaning that it can only take place if the person has left soul prints in the world.

Still, many people are uncomfortable with the idea that at the moment of death, they will disperse into relative oblivion and then form again at some future time with no specific recollection of their former existence. They do not want the “weak immortality” of a future iteration of themselves; rather, they want the “strong immortality” of an individual soul that survives the body's death and proceeds

³ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.9.28, translated in Hume, Robert Ernest, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads: Translated from the Sanskrit, with an Outline of the Philosophy of the Upanishads and an Annotated Bibliography* (Oxford Univ. Press 1921), p. 126. See also *Bhagavad Gītā* 15:1–4.

without interruption to a new existence. In short, they want *continuity of self* from one incarnation to the next, just as they have continuity of self from one day to the next.

The truth is, however, that if we are talking about the individual soul, we don't even have that continuity of self from one moment to the next, and yet we are not bothered by that fact. A thought experiment will help illustrate this point. Suppose a powerful god has the ability to create human beings out of clay and breathe life into them. Further suppose that this god plans to create Peter and Paul, deciding in advance every trait that Peter and Paul will have. This god first creates Peter. Then, after some time, this god says to Peter, "I will kill you and create Paul in your place." Peter immediately objects. Despite the promise regarding the creation of Paul, Peter rightly feels that he is going to die.

But suppose, instead, that this powerful god takes the list of, say, ten thousand Petrine traits and the corresponding list of ten thousand Pauline traits, and after creating Peter, this god slowly, one trait per day, changes Peter's traits into Paul's traits. Yesterday, Peter liked railroad travel; today, he finds that he prefers driving a car. Yesterday, Peter had green eyes; today, they look brown. In this manner, Peter is incrementally transformed, trait by trait, over the course of some twenty-seven years into Paul, and finally, one fine morning during the middle of the twenty-eighth year, Peter says, "I think I'll call myself Paul from now on; I like that name." Peter no longer feels he has been killed and that Paul has been created in his place, and the reason Peter does not object is that the change from Peter to Paul happened slowly, and Peter was given a chance to identify with each new Pauline trait as it arose.

The point here is not to deny that one has some sort of ongoing individual existence;

rather, the point is to show that the continuum of one's individual existence might be quantized, like frames in a movie, rather than an actual unbroken continuum, and ten thousand tiny deaths just don't seem as bad as one big death. The fact is that in each and every moment one is changing, both physically and mentally. Cells die and new cells replace them; one forgets some things and learns others; and even space-time itself might be quantized rather than continuous. So, what then can we say about an individual soul? The continuity of self that one hopes for after the body's death does not exist *before* the body's death. So, if one is not scared to live, then why be scared to die?

Consider another thought experiment, and here we will draw from ideas presented in the *Star Trek* television series. Imagine the existence of a teleportation device like the *Star Trek* "transporter." This device can scan one's body in an instant and determine the precise characteristics of every particle, atom, and molecule (type, spin, charge, relative location, momentum, etc.), thus converting one's entire material existence into data. The scanning process destroys one's body, but because one's exact form is recorded as data, the device can transfer the data to a distant location, and there it can somehow construct one's perfect replica out of the dust of that location. Moreover, because this reconstructed body is a perfect replica of the original scanned body, the new body is alive and conscious with the same memories and thoughts as the original, and it has all the same abilities that the original had. Needless to say, building this device would be no small achievement, but let us assume such a device exists.

If one were to submit to being teleported in this way, one's regenerated self in the distant location would *seem* to be continuous with one's former self, but

there would be no actual direct continuity. In other words, the version of oneself that appeared in the distant location would be materially distinct from one's former self, but one would *feel* subjectively that one was the same person, now teleported to a new location.

And if that is so, then perhaps the continuity of self — the “strong immortality” — that most people desire is actually not as important as having the *feeling* of such continuity. After a few trips in the transporter, noncontinuous existence no longer seems so bad. We are no longer afraid to have our body destroyed, reduced to mere data, and then reconstructed in a distant place, and we no longer worry that the reconstructed body, which has no direct continuity with our former body, constitutes a different person. Thus, after a few trips in the transporter, we no longer cling to the idea of an individual soul that must journey from one body to the next. Intermittent existence, it turns out, is not so bad after all; it just takes a little getting used to. And, of course, the cycles of time that characterize the universe can be thought of as a giant teleportation device that converts a person into data and then reconstructs that person at a future time, albeit with only a nonspecific recollection of the past. Should we want more?

Many people find comfort in the models of immortality taught by the major world religions. Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, and non-canonical Christian scriptures suggest that the consciousness of a person can reincarnate in a new mortal body in this world.⁴ And Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures add that the soul can

4 For Hinduism, see *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5:3–10; *Bhagavad Gītā* 2:11–53, 4:5. For Buddhism, see *Majjhima Nikāya* 136. For Judaism, see Isa 26:19; Ezek 37; Job 19:25–26, 33:22–30; Eccles 1:9–10. For Christianity, see 1 Clem 24–26.

also acquire an immortal body.⁵ But these scriptural discussions of the afterlife are often quite vague about the newly embodied soul's recollection of the past. In the case of reincarnation, for example, it is generally understood that the soul retains the *wisdom* it gained from past experiences, but no specific memories.⁶ And if that model of immortality is comforting for those who are attracted to traditional religion, then the memory of every detail of one's past life is not an essential feature of the immortality we are seeking. Indeed, even during the life of one's present body, memory is a relatively low-resolution sketch of what has actually transpired, and over the long term, what one primarily carries into the future is a set of accumulated values and convictions. And there is no reason why a record of those values and convictions cannot somehow survive one's bodily death, ready to be accessed in a future time.⁷

In summary, the cycles of time (*samsāra*) offer us a perfectly acceptable form of immortality. The complex forces that previously converged to bring a par-

5 For Judaism, see Pss 23:6, 49:15–16, 73:23–28; Dan 12:1–3. For Christianity, see 1 Cor 15:35–58; 2 Cor 5. For Islam, see *Qur'an* 2:82, 4:122, 41:8, 64:9, 98:7–8.

6 See *Bhagavad Gītā* 4:5.

7 The Sanskrit term *apūrva* literally means “unprecedented,” but in Hindu philosophy, the term is used to refer to a super-sensible thing which comes into existence when one does an action, thus enabling the action to produce an effect across space and time. See Halbfass, Wilhelm, “Karma, *Apūrva*, and ‘Natural’ Causes: Observations on the Growth and Limits of the Theory of *Samsāra*,” in O’Flaherty, Wendy Doniger (ed.), *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions* (Univ. of California Press 1980), pp. 268–302; Potter, Karl H., “The Karma Theory and Its Interpretation in Some Indian Philosophical Systems,” in O’Flaherty, *Karma and Rebirth*, pp. 241–267.

ticular human body into existence will do so again. In metaphorical terms, a new tree will grow up from the roots of the felled tree. That is the immortality we get, and it is enough. We need not insist on the “strong immortality” of a soul that travels from body to body; instead, the “weak immortality” of cyclical time will do the job just fine. Beings arise and subside in the universal nondual consciousness. Each has its natural arc of life. Perpetuating what has reached its natural end serves no purpose. But the universal nondual consciousness is eternal. The only thing that dies is the narrative one has authored about a person who lived in a particular place at a particular time. But not to worry. There will be other narratives — unless, that is, one has gone *outside* time.

2. Eternity

There are, assuredly, two forms of Brahman: Time and the Timeless. That which is prior to the sun is the Timeless (*a-kāla*), without parts (*a-kala*). But that which begins with the sun is Time, which has parts[, for the sun metes out time]. Verily, the form of that which has parts [(i.e., time)] is the year [(i.e., the solar cycle)]. From the year, in truth, are these creatures [(i.e., living organisms)] produced. Through the year, verily, after having been produced, do they grow. In the year they disappear. Therefore, the year, verily, is Prajāpati, is Time, is food, is the Brahman-abode, and is *Ātman* [(“Soul”)]. For thus has it been said: —

’Tis Time that cooks created things,
All things, indeed, in the Great Soul.
In what, however, Time is cooked —
Who knows that, he the Veda knows!⁸
— *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad*

8 *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad* 6.15, translated in Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, p. 434.

Albert Einstein is reported to have defined time by saying that “time is what a clock measures,”⁹ and likewise according to the *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad*, time exists in relation to the periodic change of some observed object — and the movement of the sun relative to earth, because of its unmistakable prominence in our lives, expresses that principle metaphorically. Moreover, time, according to the *Upaniṣad*, is circular, unfolding in planetary cycles that realign in ever-new ways. The *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad* uses the word *saṃsāra* (from the Sanskrit root *saṃsṛ*, meaning “to revolve,” “to cycle”) to describe this circularity of time (see *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad* 1.4), and knowledge of the highest truth (*jñāna*) is presented as the means by which *one can escape the cycle*.¹⁰

For most of us, a lifetime of 90 years seems far too short, but for an elderly person with a weak, pain-ridden body, a lifetime that continues forever might seem almost wearisome. In our quest for immortality, “forever” is not really what we are seeking; rather, what we are seeking is to transcend time. It is *time* that we need to overcome, not death. We need a new perspective that allows us to feel that time does not contain us — rather, that we contain time. Then, there is no “90 years,” and there is no “forever.” Then, there is only existence, consciousness, and bliss (*saccidānanda*). But how do we “transcend time”?

Some religious-minded people imagine that there was once a vast expanse of empty space and that, at a particular point in time, God created a universe in that

9 Cf. Einstein, Albert, “Zur Elektrodynamik bewegter Körper,” in *Annalen der Physik*, vol. 322 (1905), p. 893.

10 See also *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.2; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.3–10.

space, and it has existed ever since, evolving into what we find before us today. But according to the field theory of physics, how can space exist without matter, and how can time exist without a change in the relation between two things? Space and time are relative. They exist only if matter exists, and they vary depending on one's point of observation. Therefore, without a created universe, there is no space or time, which means that God must be doing all this creating *outside time*.

Of course, once a universe exists, we can measure time from that moment forward. And, from the perspective of modern physics, we can also unwind the progression of time and imagine a "beginning" — a "Big Bang" — when all matter was confined to a single point so small that the laws of physics become meaningless.¹¹ But even if we declare the Big Bang to be "time zero" and conjecture a God that created the universe (and time) by way of that Big Bang, we still have the problem that God is doing all this creating *outside time*, and if so, then God didn't just create a universe way back when; God also created one right now and always (i.e., at all times and at no time).¹²

11 Cf. Hawking, Stephen W., *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (Bantam 1988), pp. 136–141 [discussing the "no boundary" theory].

12 Several classical discussions of time and how it relates to God's creative act have made a similar point. See Plato, *Timaeus*, 37C–39E [e.g.: "Now the nature of that Living Being was eternal, and this character it was impossible to confer in full completeness on the generated thing. But he took thought to make, as it were, a moving likeness of eternity; and, at the same time that he ordered the Heaven, he made, of eternity that abides in unity, an everlasting likeness moving according to number — that to which we have given the name Time. For there were no days and nights, months and years, before the Heaven came into being" (transl. by Francis MacDonald Corn-

We read in the book of Psalms: "This is the day that YHVH made; let us be glad and rejoice in it." (Ps 118:24.) God (YHVH) created *this* very day, this very moment, whatever it may hold. And Spinoza makes a similar point. He asserts:

God is not only the cause of things' beginning to exist, but also of their persevering in existing, *or* (to use a Scholastic term) God is the cause of the being of things." (*Ethics*, IP24, Cor.)

Things have no being, no persevering in existence, without God as their cause in every moment, and that fact makes God's act of creation an eternal act. And "in eternity, there is neither *when*, nor *before*, nor *after*" (*id.*, IP33, Schol. 2), because "eternity can neither be defined by time nor have any relation to time" (*id.*, VP23, Schol.). In eternity, there is only God's unchanging essence and all that it eternally implies. As Spinoza says,

[w]e conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature. But the things we conceive in this second way as true, or real, we conceive under a species of eternity, and to that extent they involve the eternal and infinite essence of God. (*Id.*, VP29, Schol.)

ford)]; Augustine, *Confessions*, book XI, secs. 12–16 [e.g.: "Your years[, God,] do not come and go. Our years pass and new ones arrive only so that all may come in turn, but your years stand all at once, because they are stable Your years are a single day, and this day of yours is not a daily recurrence, but a simple 'Today,' because your Today does not give way to tomorrow, nor follow yesterday. Your Today is eternity" (transl. by Maria Boulding)].

This principle that the world we live in is an expression, in the dimensions of space and time, of God's eternal essence is critically important because it means — in contrast to what Śaṅkara (8th century C.E.) taught — that the world is *real*, as real as God is real. *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy describes God's eternal essence using the metaphors of "Speech" (*vāc*) and "Word" (*śabda*), and it asserts that this eternal Speech/Word spreads forth in the dimensions of space and time as the diverse and changing world we know.¹³ Abhinavagupta (10th–11th centuries C.E.), for example, writes about the highest level of emanation, from which all the phonemes of speech emerge. About that highest level, he says:

Of these phonemes, the [highest] plane that has just been described is that of the supreme Word where they are in the form of pure consciousness, non-conventional, *eternal, uncreated*. . . . In effect, everything moving or unmoving abides [first] in a supreme and *invariable form*, the essence of pure power, in Consciousness: the Self of the venerable Lord Bhairava — as is shown by all that is to be perceived of the infinite diversity of the world manifested in Consciousness in a manner first indistinct, then progressively more distinct.¹⁴

And Kṣemarāja makes a similar point, invoking the concept of *spanda*. The Sanskrit word *spanda* means a "stirring" or a

13 See Isayeva, Natalia, *From Early Vedanta to Kashmir Shaivism: Gaudapada, Bhartrhari, and Abhinavagupta* (SUNY Press 1995), pp. 133–145; Padoux, André, *Vāc: The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras* (SUNY Press 1990), pp. 78–85, 172–188.

14 *Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa*, KSTS, vol. 18, pp. 102–103, translated in Padoux, *Vāc: The Concept of the Word*, p. 306, italics added, second textual emendation by the translator. Similar ideas appear in chapter 3 of the *Tantrāloka*.

"slight movement," but in the context of Kṣemarāja's *Spanda-Nirṇaya*, it means an "oscillation," a "vibration," or a "pulse," and the *Spanda-Nirṇaya* explains that this "pulse," despite appearing to be a succession (*krama*) of different phases, is actually eternal and unchanging:

In reality, however, nothing arises and nothing subsides. We shall show that it is only the divine *spandaśakti* (the divine creative pulsation) which, though free of succession, appears in different aspects as if flashing in view and as if subsiding.¹⁵

If one considers the matter deeply, one realizes that temporal periodicity (*spanda*) is merely a way of describing a circle with time as one of the circle's two dimensions, and outside time, that same periodicity is just the eternal idea of a circle. And because God's eternal essence includes an infinite number of such circles (or ellipses, perhaps), each slightly different in character, there is no phase synchronicity among the countless periodic things that populate the universe. And from that absence of phase synchronicity arises the forward progression of linear time — cycles of time that constantly realign in new ways.

There is, therefore, no point in speaking of a particular moment in linear history when God created the universe. Instead, we would do better to refer to God's eternal essence and its actualization. God's eternal essence is nothing other than the unchanging principles — the mathematics — from which everything in the universe is logically derivable. And the actualization of that eternal essence is the unfolding, in the dimensions of space and time, of all that is logically implied by those unchanging principles. As Spinoza explains,

15 *Spanda-Nirṇaya*, com. to *Spandakārikā*, verse 1.1 (KSTS, vol. 42, p. 5), translated in Singh, *The Yoga of Vibration*, p. 13.

by *Natura naturans* [(“nature natur-ing”)] we must understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, or such attributes of substance as express an eternal and infinite essence, i.e., God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause. [¶] But by *Natura naturata* [(“nature natured”)] I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God’s nature, or from any of God’s attributes (*Ethics*, IP29, Schol.)

My previous article for *Dogma*, which discusses what it means to be free in a deterministic universe, refers to the “essential nature” of a person, arguing that a person’s essential nature determines his or her actions when the person acts autonomously. But in that context, the person’s essential nature is presented as being a changeable thing, qualitatively constant but quantitatively variable, now a bit stronger, now a bit weaker, depending on shifting external circumstances. Spinoza explains, however, that a person also has an eternal essence that transcends the changes imposed by time. That eternal essence never changes, never comes into existence, and never ceases to exist. Thus, it can be likened to a mathematical definition. Spinoza gives the example of a triangle. Whether or not an actual material triangle exists in a certain place at a certain time, triangles are consistent with the laws of physics, and from the mathematical definition of a triangle of a certain size, all the properties of that triangle can be logically derived. Thus, the definition of the triangle is an eternal thing, whereas the actual material existence of the triangle is a temporal thing. In the same way, all things that arise in the dimension of time have an eternal essence from which all their properties can be logically derived.

Inside time, new iterations of one’s body and mind will appear and disappear, but they can do so only if they also exist as an eternal essence outside time, unaffected by the changes time implies. Hence, Spinoza says, “we . . . feel that our mind is . . . eternal.” More specifically, he says:

[I]n God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human Body, under a species of eternity. (*Ethics*, VP22.)

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. (*Id.*, VP23, Schol.)

Spinoza also explains that through the power of reason, we come to know the world as God knows it, and our mind partakes of God’s own mind. But God knows all things as the logical and necessary implications of eternal principles, and thus all God’s thoughts are eternal. So, when our mind partakes of God’s own mind, our mind also partakes of God’s eternity, giving rise to a form of human immortality. (See *Ethics*, VP29, with Dem. and Schol., VP30, with Dem., VP38, with Dem. and Schol., and VP40, Cor. and Schol.) But this immortality is not a sempiternity of the person conceived as an actor on the stage of time. Rather, it is a merging of the person into God’s eternal essence.¹⁶

16 Despite this merging into God, there is one sense in which the person’s individuality remains. Spinoza explains that a person’s eternal mind is the idea (i.e., a mode of thought) that corresponds to the eternal essence of the person’s body (i.e., a mode of extension). (*Ethics*, VP22 and VP23, with Schol.) Therefore, one person’s eternal mind is distinguishable


Death can affect a mind that contemplates temporal things, but death cannot affect a mind that contemplates only eternal things. (See *Ethics*, VP42, Schol.) Therefore, to the extent that one is self-directed and deliberative, guided by reason, and virtuous in one's relations, fostering harmony and understanding in society, one is, to that same extent, *eternal*. Indeed, because a person's "force of existence" determines his or her ability to act and not merely to react, and because a person's power of acting enables the person to express his or her inner rational nature, and because a person's rational nature is the foundation of his or her virtuous conduct, it follows that for a human being, virtuous conduct is eternal existence itself. Virtue and eternal existence are the same thing. In Hebrew scripture (Mal 3:6), we read: "For I, YHVH, I have not changed" — God (YHVH) is outside time, changeless, and eternal — "and you, the sons of Jacob, you have not been consumed" — you, too, are outside time, changeless, and eternal.

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from another person's eternal mind by the unique reasoning capacities achieved by that person's body (i.e., brain) during the person's lifetime. (See *id.*, VP31, Schol., VP39, with Schol., and VP42, Schol.) But despite retaining this remnant of individuality, one's eternal mind is not an independent being; rather, one's eternal mind is a part of God's eternal mind. (See *id.*, VP40, Schol.)

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