

Julie R. Klein

“By Eternity I Understand”: Eternity According to Spinoza

The idea of eternity appears in some of the most important passages of Spinoza's *Ethics*, and it is closely linked to the pivotal notions of necessity and infinity in his philosophy. Spinoza's idea of eternity differs from several familiar conceptions in the history of philosophy. Notably, Spinoza discusses eternity without relating it either to time and duration or to motionless simultaneity. Spinoza's idea of eternity matches neither Platonic unchanging timelessness, nor the Augustinian or Boethian *nunc stans* in which all of time is seen simultaneously. Nor is Spinozistic eternity precisely equivalent to medieval conceptions of sempiternity, though sempiternity does capture something of the Spinozistic sense of eternity as “always,” that is, as without beginning or end. Further, correctly understood, Spinoza's eternity does not involve transcendence, in the sense of ontological separation or difference. Instead, Spinoza depicts eternity, time, and duration as irreducibly different ways of perceiving existing thing(s), and he analyzes cognition in the context of the ontology of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, Nature as unlimited and Nature in its infinite or indefinitely many modes or determinations.

In this article, I approach the issue of eternity first in terms of Spinoza's theory of knowing, relating the notions of time, duration, and eternity to the different modes or kinds of perceiving analyzed in the *Ethics*. “Eternity,” on this account, names God, Nature, or Substance principally as perceived in the third, or intuitive, kind of knowing. I then relate this cognition-centered account to the theme of immanence in Spinoza's philosophy in order to make a metaphysical case for a non-transcendent interpretation of eternity. This portion of the paper clarifies the relationship of eternity and infinity. Finally, I examine the connection between eternity and necessity. Necessity plays a special explanatory role with regard to eternity because it focuses attention

on actual existence and because it is associated with both the second and the third kind of knowing. I argue that Spinoza invokes intuitive understanding in the context of eternity because it is the mode of knowing that apprehends existence and necessary connections in their intrinsic or involved character. Taken together, the parts of this essay propose a non-Neoplatonic, non-idealistic reading of Spinoza's view of eternity.

The strategy of conjoining cognitional and metaphysical issues is suggested by Spinoza's definition of eternity in *Ethics* 1. The text shows both Spinoza's distinctive emphasis on how eternity is understood and his central conception of eternity in terms of necessary connection. The phrase "I understand" orients Spinoza's considerations of eternity less in terms of *what* eternity is — as if it were a thing to be known — and more in terms of *how* it is understood. Specifically, eternity is "existence itself" understood in terms of necessity. This does not involve time or duration:

By eternity I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing. (E1def8)¹

Only the Explanation appended to this terse definition refers to time and duration, and the reference is negative:

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 the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end.

The dissociation of time and duration from eternity seen here is confirmed throughout *Ethics* 1 and again in *Ethics* 5. E1p33s2 restates the Explanation of E1def8 concisely: "In eternity there is neither when, nor before, nor after." *Ethics* 5 underscores the same theme: "eternity can neither be defined by time nor have any relation to time" (E5p23s). Similarly, in the demonstration of E5p30, Spinoza returns us directly to the definition of eternity with which he began: "Eternity is the very essence of God insofar as this involves

¹ Latin texts are from Carl Gebhardt's *Spinoza Opera* (Heidelberg, 1925). I abbreviate the *Ethics* as E and cite it by book, then definition (def), proposition (p), lemma (lem), etc.; the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* is cited as TdIE (paragraph number). Translations are those of Edwin Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), vol. 1, which I have occasionally modified. Translations of the letters are Samuel Shirley's, as presented in Spinoza, *The Letters*, ed. L. Rice et al. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), which I have occasionally modified; hereafter, *Letters*.

necessary existence (by E1def8).” Clearly, for Spinoza, considering time and duration does not help us understand eternity. Whatever “eternity” indicates, it is unlike time and duration, and Spinoza points us instead toward the ideas of necessary connection and involvement. Since for Spinoza everything that happens, happens necessarily, the significance of the invocation of necessity requires clarification. I argue that the necessity at issue is best understood in terms of intrinsic connection or belonging together.

Section I focuses on the significance of the verb *intelligere* for Spinoza’s dissociation of eternity from time and duration and relates it to his account of the different ways (*modi*) or kinds (*genera*) of cognition. Where E1def8 links eternity and intellection, E2p44s comments that “no one doubts but that we also imagine time.” Letter 12 is also crucial to this section, as it shows the correlation of the ways of knowing with the predicates of time, duration, and eternity. In the course of exploring the significance of the ways of knowing for Spinoza’s view of eternity, I introduce the term “modal difference” to indicate the non-ontological but nonetheless irreducible difference among the ways or kinds of knowing. This use of “modal” reflects Spinoza’s taxonomy of knowing in terms of the “ways of perceiving” (*modi percipiendi*) in TdIE §18, and the description of the first kind of knowing as a way of regarding (*modus contemplandi*) things in E2p40s2. Spinoza’s qualifications “under the aspect” (*sub specie*) and “in so far as” (*quatenus ad*) similarly suggest that the same thing can be considered from different perspectives and in different respects. Thought and extension, understood as ways of comprehending substance (E2p7s), exemplify this kind of difference, which might equally well be termed one of perspective. Accordingly, the phrases *sub specie aeternitatis* and *sub specie durationis* turn out to name different ways of experiencing or perceiving the same *Deus sive Natura sive Substantia*. Attending to Spinoza’s emphasis on cognition thus suggests a first reason to think that eternity need not be construed in terms of transcendence or separation. As some form of real separation between the mind and body typically accompanies accounts of eternity as transcendent, I sketch Spinoza’s rejection of Cartesian dualism. Where we might expect an incorporeal intellect to apprehend supra-temporal truths, Spinoza gives us a non-dualistic psychology and a non-transcendent eternity. Section I concludes with an analysis of the distinctive character of intellectual perception. As distinct from the other kinds of perceiving, intellectual intuition apprehends both unity and differentiation, it apprehends

actually existing things, and it apprehends the intrinsic connection that Spinoza calls involvement.

Subsequent sections develop the modal or perspectival interpretation in more explicitly metaphysical ways. Since eternity is linked with Spinoza's *natura naturans* and for that reason often considered foundational or originary, section 2 takes up E1p29s in order to show that *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* can be seen as two ways of considering Nature and thus interpreted without reference to ontological hierarchy or derivation. Accordingly, the eternity of Nature need not be understood in terms of eternity as the origin of time and duration. Section 3 argues that eternity can be no more the *telos* than the origin. Spinoza's rejection of creation, emphasis on the generativity of nature, and his critique of teleology, together with his formulation of existing in terms of conatus, suggest that nature's eternity cannot be understood as totality or a completed set of actualized possibilities. To be, for Spinoza, is to produce, and Nature, defined concisely, is absolute generative activity and absolute affectivity: "Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow" (E1p36). *Ethics* 5, similarly, calls Nature an "infinite connection of causes" (E5p6d). It is perhaps in connection with the impossibility of a distinct beginning or ground and the impossibility of a distinct end or totality that the meaning of eternity as "always" is clearest.

The connection between eternity and necessity has been discussed by a variety of commentators. Pierre-François Moreau, for example, stresses the internally necessary character of the existence of substance and understands eternity on that model.² Following David Savan's nominalist reading, I argue that necessity and existence are the same. Because, as E1p17s suggests, formal laws and natural things are only conceptually distinct, eternity and necessity converge in actually existing things.³ The eternity of Nature and its necessity are thus exhibited in the actual Nature. Fundamentally, then, Spinoza's statement that eternity is "existence itself" means that eternity is nothing outside of or other than Nature. On my reading, to perceive Nature *sub specie aeternitatis* is precisely to see Nature's modes in their immanent involvement. Spinoza's invocation of necessity in connection with eternity

² Pierre-François Moreau, *Spinoza. L'expérience et l'éternité* (Paris: PUF/Epiméthée, 1994).

³ See David Savan, "Spinoza on Duration, Time, and Eternity," in *Spinoza: The Enduring Questions*, ed. Graeme Hunter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 3–20.

points to the centrality of actual existence in his thought. Picking up arguments about the character of the kinds of knowing from previous sections, section 4 then focuses on the idea of necessary connection. Using three texts from *Ethics 2*, I argue that the idea of necessary connection plays the important role of bridging, to some degree and with undeniable limitation, the difference between the second and the third kind of knowing. Section 4 thus ties the parts of the essay together by relating epistemological and metaphysical issues, and it re-emphasizes that the perspectival approach, while insisting on irreducibility, does not disconnect the kinds of knowing from one another.

In sum, I defend a reading of eternity as a name for thinking about Nature in the third kind of knowing. While the present paper ranges over a number of topics in the course of clarifying Spinoza's idea of eternity, the unifying themes are the idea of modal or perspectival difference and the idea of Nature's immanence. Finally, the present essay deals with the *Ethics*, *Letters*, and the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. Although Spinoza discusses time, duration, and eternity elsewhere, most notably in *Descartes's Principles of Philosophy* and the *Metaphysical Thoughts*, I leave discussion of these texts and their complexities for another occasion. For similar reasons of scope, the question of the eternity of the human mind is also left for another occasion.⁴

1. The Modes of Perceiving and Knowing and the Discourse of the Ethics

Approaching Spinoza's treatment of eternity requires us to take careful account of the order of his discourse about eternity and to examine how what is said expresses different modes of perceiving or knowing.

As David Savan has argued, the *Ethics* takes place in second order, discursive knowing and thus makes possible, though it does not assure, the intuitive apprehensions of the third kind of knowing. Savan emphasizes the

⁴ For a discussion that addresses the *Cogitata Metaphysica* and takes up the eternity of the mind as a central issue, see Savan, "Spinoza on Duration, Time, and Eternity." On Spinoza's arguments in *Descartes's Principles of Philosophy* and the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, see Yannis Prelourentzos, *Temps, durée, et éternité dans les Principes de la philosophie de Descartes de Spinoza*. Groupe de Recherches Spinozistes Travaux et documents, No. 6 (Paris: Presses de l'université de Paris Sorbonne, 1996).

irony of needing to use language and the *mos geometricus* to point beyond themselves.⁵ Alexandre Matheron's approach to *Ethics* I as a text that becomes increasingly intuitive and increases intuitions, strikes a compatible note.⁶ To achieve this, much of Spinoza's discussion is targeted at distinguishing rational concepts from images, for "mind," in contrast to "imagination," names activity. Yirmiyahu Yovel terms this process of distinguishing imagination and mind the "emendation of error" and emphasizes that it is a primary project of the *Ethics*.⁷ Rational concepts, however, are not the measure of knowing in the *Ethics*. Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, echoing Savan's emphasis on the limits of reason and demonstration, suggests paradox and contradiction as principal strategies of a text carried out in multiple orders. What is paradoxical and contradictory from the standpoint of language and reason may nevertheless be intellectually perceivable. Indeed, given the "poverty of words," negative definitions may express intellectual affirmations (TdIE §96).⁸ Every true idea is, of course, intrinsically affirmative. Considered in this framework, "eternity" becomes a name for what is incommensurable with reason, that is, for what exceeds and interrupts the coherence of ratio, deflecting it into negation. For Spinoza, eternity is not discursively thinkable, but it remains intellectually intuitable. Spinoza's texts about eternity, then, need to be read as pointing toward a kind of knowing they cannot fully articulate.

Ethics Idef8, quoted above, is an example of how Spinoza marks the limits of second-order discourse and differentiates it from intellectual or intuitive understanding. When Spinoza defines eternity from the perspective of intellectual understanding, he makes no reference to time and duration and instead focuses our attention on existence. When it is a question of understanding eternity, time and duration are not relevant. Spinoza's claim

⁵ David Savan, "Spinoza on Language," in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Marjorie Grene (New York: Anchor, 1973), 60–72.

⁶ Alexandre Matheron, "Essence, Existence and Power in *Ethics* I: The Foundations of Proposition 16," in *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics* (Spinoza by 2000, vol. 1), ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

⁷ Yirmiyahu Yovel, "The Second Kind of Knowledge and the Removal of Error," in *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind* (Spinoza by 2000, vol.2), ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 93–110.

⁸ Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, "Maimonidean Aspects in Spinoza's Thought," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 17 (1994): 153–174.

“I understand” is linked directly to existence and necessity. Silent about time and duration when speaking from the perspective of understanding, Spinoza is negative about them when speaking from the perspective of reasonable explanation. Reason, when it conceives eternity and so elaborates discursively what the intellect apprehends immediately, denies a relation to time and duration; asked to explain, reason says what eternity is not, not what it is. When Reason resorts to negation, the Explanation becomes self-delimiting and self-undermining. The negativity of the Explanation indicates not only the insufficiency of medieval conceptions of God’s sempiternity or necessary existence, but the insufficiency of such rational, discursive explanations themselves. To use Spinoza’s own idiom, it points up the difference between the second and the third kind of knowing.⁹

To see what this difference means and how conceiving—the rational activity invoked in the explanation of E1def8 and positioned between imagination and intellectual understanding in Spinoza’s theory of cognition—fits into the picture, let us turn to Spinoza’s Letter 12 and related texts in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and the *Ethics*. In Letter 12, Spinoza explains his view of eternity to Lodewijk Meyer by contrasting imagination and intellect:

From the fact that we separate the affections of Substance from Substance itself, and arrange them in classes so that we can easily imagine them as far as possible, there arises Number, whereby we delimit them. Measure, Time, and Number are nothing other than modes of thinking, or, better, modes of imagining [*cogitandi, seu potius imaginandi Modos*]. . . . For there are many things that can in no way be apprehended by the imagination but only by the intellect, such as Substance, Eternity, and other things. If anyone tries to explicate such things by notions of this kind which are nothing more than aids to the imagination, he will meet with no more success than if he were deliberately to encourage his imagination to run mad. Nor again can the

⁹ Jeffrey Bernstein called my attention to a passage in Spinoza’s *Short Treatise* that illustrates the incommensurability at issue. In the “Dialogue between the Intellect, Love, Reason, and Lust,” Love asks whether Intellect has “conceived a supremely perfect being.” Intellect answers: “For my part, I consider Nature only as completely infinite and perfect. If you doubt this, ask Reason. He will tell you this” (*Collected Works*, 73). Intellect answers, in effect, only, “I understand,” and then says nothing further in the Dialogue. Love, desiring explanations, turns to Reason, who presents arguments from the absurdity of limiting Nature by a Nothing. Neither in the *Short Treatise* nor in the *Ethics* is Reason adequate to the task of explicating intuitive understanding.

Modes of Substance ever be correctly understood if they are confused with such *entia rationis* or aids to the imagination. For by so doing we are separating them from substance and from the manner of their efflux from eternity, and in such isolation they can never be correctly understood. (*Letters* 104)

Imagination, according to Spinoza, is characterized by passivity, disorder, and improper connection. According to the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, imagination arises from “certain sensations that are fortuitous and (as it were) disconnected.” These sensations originate in external causes as the body “receives various motions” (TdIE §84). Although all of the motions whose reception produces the impressions that constitute imagination occur by necessity, imagination is a kind of perceiving in which natural necessity is obscure. Oriented by happenstance and discontinuity, imagination apprehends neither the necessity of nature nor its unfolding in causal networks and connections. As such, imaginative thinking separates modes from substance and so obscures the “efflux from eternity.” In so doing, moreover, it represents actually existing modes as merely mental entities and vice versa. As Spinoza presents imagination in the *Treatise*, these incapacities of imagination stem not from the fact that it is bodily (as would be the case on a Cartesian account) but from the fact that it is passive.¹⁰ As passive, imagination does not express the “generativity of ideas” and instead ends in error, whether in the form of false, fictitious, or even contradictory ideas. Only the intellect functions as “a spiritual automaton” (TdIE §85).

The *Ethics* expands this picture of imaginative passivity and disconnection, linking it explicitly to what the *Treatise* terms perception *ex auditis et signis* and *experientia vaga* (TdIE §19). The more pressing issue is *experientia vaga*, namely, bodily affection, and it plays a larger role in Spinoza’s exposition of imagination in the *Ethics*. Words and signs are abstractions derived from

¹⁰ “Take imagination any way you like here, provided it is something different from the intellect, and in which the soul has the nature of something acted on. For it is all the same, however you take it, after we know that it is something random, by which the soul is acted on, and at the same time know how we are freed from it with the help of the intellect. So let no one be surprised that here, where I have not yet proved that there is a body, and other necessary things, I speak of the imagination, the body, and its constitution. For as I have said, it does not matter what I take it to be, after I know that it is something random, etc.” (TdIE §84). The passage is typically dismissive of Cartesian problems. Spinoza’s emphasis on the origin of ideas in physical things in TdIE §99 strikes a similar theme.

experientia vaga, then related by or to another knower. Thus twice removed from encounters with actual things, they are less productive for thinking because the affects from which the words and signs derive or whose existence they suggest are not actually experienced by the hearer or viewer. In *Ethics* 2, Spinoza defines images as “the affections of the human Body, whose ideas present external bodies as present to us.” Imagining occurs “when the Mind regards bodies in this way,” i.e., as present (E2p17s). The details of Spinoza’s account of imagination are presented in a series of propositions immediately following the definition. Spinoza describes imaginative knowing in terms of misconstrued causal relations, disconnection from causal networks, and consequent confusion. In its inadequacy, particularly as it is related only to the mind, the imaginative idea is like a conclusion without premises (E2p28dem).¹¹ In E2p29s, the *Treatise* language of active and passive becomes the language of internal and external determination:

I say expressly that the Mind has, not an adequate, but only a confused knowledge, of itself, of its own Body, and of external bodies, so long as it perceives things from the common order of nature, i.e., so long as it is determined externally, from fortuitous encounters with things, to regard this or that, and not so long as it is determined internally, from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions. (E2p29s)

Measure, Time, and Number arise from confusion, and, taken uncritically (whether naively or dogmatically), perpetuate it. They do so by failing to see the constitution of nature in terms of agreements and differences. Moreover, mistaking the *entia rationis* of cognitive life for real beings would consign us to thinking about duration in terms of wholes and parts. Thinking about duration in such an abstracted and disconnected way leads, Spinoza says in Letter 12, to “extraordinary knots” from which maladroit thinkers have been “unable to extricate themselves” “without the grossest absurdities.” How, indeed, would we choose between Scylla and Charybdis? (*Letters* 104) Failure to distinguish between understanding the whole and

¹¹ Insofar as imagination arises from *experientia vaga* and not merely *ex auditis et signis*, there is something to be emended. For two perspectives on this issue, see Yirmiyahu Yovel, “The Second Kind of Knowledge and the Removal of Error,” cited above, and Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, “The Ambivalent Role of Imagination in Maimonides and Spinoza,” in *The Sovereignty of Construction: Essays in Memory of David Lachterman*, ed. Daniel Conway and Pierre Kertszberg (State College, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, forthcoming).

undergoing the passage of parts leads to familiar ancient paradoxes of time.

Letter 12 speaks of imagination and intellect. What of reason? Spinoza links reason both to imagination and to intuition. He also distinguishes reason from each of them. Let me briefly sketch the connection between imagination and reason, then turn to the relation between reason and intuition. Spinoza distinguishes reason from imagination without relying on a real or ontological distinction; the same is true of how intuitive understanding is distinguished from the other kinds or modes of perceiving. While it is not possible to defend these claims conclusively here, a few indications should make the outline of the case clear. The key sources for such a non-dualistic interpretation are found in Spinoza's well-known claim that the order and connection of things is the same in the attributes of thought and extension (E2p7s) and the claim in E2p13 that the human mind is the idea of the actually existing human body. Unlike Descartes, Spinoza does not posit a self-subsistent rational soul or mind in these passages.¹² The association or linkage between imagination and reason is suggested in

¹² Letter 32, to Oldenburg, provides a proof-text for naturalist readers: "I hold that the human body is a part of Nature. As regards the human mind, I maintain that it, too, is a part of Nature" (*Letters* 194). In the Latin Christian tradition, a subsistent, incorporeal element in the soul is the seat of immortality. Contrary to what some interpreters have proposed, interpreting the *vis nativa* mentioned in TdIE §31 as an incorporeal power is in my view ruled out by the overwhelmingly anti-Cartesian, anti-dualistic tenor of the text. The better way to interpret TdIE §31 and similar passages is to construe Spinoza as provisionally adopting the language of Cartesianism in order ultimately to overturn its central claims. Similarly, I do not interpret E5p23 and related passages to refer to a real part of the mind that remains in anything like the sense intended in traditional accounts of individual immortality. For interpretations of Spinoza which emphasize his anti-Cartesianism and materialism, see David Lachterman, "The Physics of Spinoza's *Ethics*," *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 8 (1977):71–111; reprinted in R. Shahan and J. Biro, (eds.), *Spinoza: New Perspectives* (University of Oklahoma, 1978) and Genevieve Lloyd, *Part of Nature: Self-Knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics* (Cornell University Press, 1994). Lachterman pushes Spinoza toward a reductive physicalism, but effectively refutes Cartesianizing and idealizing interpretations. Lloyd reads Spinoza as a Stoic. On thinking about Spinoza in the context of the Averroistic Aristotelian tradition, particularly as it is mediated via Gersonides, see Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, "Gersonides' Radically Modern Understanding of the Agent Intellect," in *Meeting of the Minds*, ed. Stephen F. Brown, *Rencontres de Philosophie Médiévale* 7 (Tournhout: Brepols, 1998).

Spinoza's treatment of the three kinds of perceiving at E2p40s. The first kind of knowing is "opinion or imagination." Reason, the second kind of knowing, involves "common notions and adequate ideas." The third kind, intuitive knowing, is distinguished from the first two:

In addition to these two kinds of knowledge, there is (as I shall show in what follows) another, third kind, which we shall call intuitive knowledge. And this kind of knowing proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things.

What do reason and imagination have in common here? The propositions immediately preceding this second scholium to E2p40 link reason to imagination through the common notions, which are derived from the common order of experience and form "the foundations of our reasoning" (E2p40s1). Actual bodily encounters undergone by an individual make manifest the commonalities of bodies, and these come to be expressed in rational cognition. The argument is as follows. Those things that are equally in the whole and in the part are common to all bodies and therefore can only be conceived adequately (E2p38). From this, it follows that there are ideas or notions common to all men (E2p38c). These common adequate ideas constitute "the foundations of our reasoning" (E2p40s1). Other notions, including, for example the transcendentals and universal notions, in contrast, involve confusion and the common order of nature: "each will form universal images of things according to the disposition of his body" (E2p40s1). How, then, is reason distinguished from imagination? As distinct from transcendentals and universals, which are essentially composite images of images, reason apprehends things through a kind of formalization and under the aspect of systematicity, necessity, and causal connections. As distinct from *entia imaginationis*, *entia rationis* thus involve an element of comparison and rational order. In fact, as we saw above in connection with E2p29s, Spinoza articulates the difference between imagination and reason in terms of external and internal determination, passivity, and activity. Reason and imagination are, in essence, different ways (*modi*) of undergoing the same experience: differently put, the mind and the body are the same thing, viewed under different attributes.

Reason's characteristic adequacy apprehends nature in terms of order and connection, and as systematic and structured by necessity rather than contingency. In reason, the common order of nature is seen as a set of causally interconnected, lawfully structured and determinate, necessary

events. As such, reasoning surpasses the temporal vicissitudes and confused compositions of imagining, and it approaches the third kind of knowing. Reason's appreciation of necessity is a preparation—necessary but not sufficient—for intuitive knowing. Spinoza argues this at E2p47, and he reiterates it at E5p28, emphasizing that one cannot proceed directly from the first to the third kind of knowing. These texts form a counterpoint to the so-called Physical Digression and the propositions that follow it in *Ethics* 2; where first Spinoza emphasizes the role of imagination, subsequently he stresses the role of reason. Reason is thus no less associated with intuition than with imagination. Toward the end of *Ethics* 2, Spinoza writes that reason's apprehension of necessity achieves a kind of perceiving under the aspect of eternity: "It is of the nature of Reason to perceive things under a certain species of eternity [*sub quadam aeternitatis specie percipere*]" (E2p44c2). The reason for this is that "the necessity of things is the very necessity of God's eternal nature" (E1p16). Reason cannot be ontologically separated from imagination, and this does not interfere with reason's proximity to intuition.

Reason's eternity, however, is not without some qualification. Because "the foundations of Reason are notions (by [E2]p38) which explain those things common to all, and which do not explain the essence of any singular thing," "they must be conceived without any relation to time, but under a certain species of eternity" (E2p44c2). Reason's specific eternity is that of timelessness and of abstraction from the essence of a singular thing. This timelessness is essentially the eternity of universals. While such universal notions may differ from the universals frequently criticized by Spinoza in that the former are explicitly thought in relation to singular things, Spinozistic universals are nevertheless abstract. Even absent a framework of real universals and particulars as instantiations, universals remain divorced from the singularities of time, manner, and place. *Entia rationis* are not singular things, and Reason does not yield knowledge of the actual existence of a singular thing. What is common, Spinoza argues, "does not constitute the essence of any singular thing" (E2p37) and "does not explain the essence of any singular thing" (E2p44c). As a result, as much as reason's specific eternity is counterposed to imagination, fantasy, and confusion, reason is also counterposed to third-order knowing. E5p36s underlines the difference: "I thought this worth the trouble of noting here, in order to show by this example, how much the knowledge of singular things I have called

intuitive, or knowledge of the third kind (see E2p40s2), can accomplish, and how much more powerful it is than the universal knowledge I have called knowledge of the second kind.” Inasmuch as reasoning under an aspect of eternity does not explain the essence of any singular thing, it is unlike the third kind of knowing.

What, then, does “correct understanding,” that is, intellection, apprehend of eternity? Letter 12 stresses three characteristics of intellection:

- (1) Intellection apprehends the configurations and reconfigurations of Nature’s efflux of modes;
- (2) Intellection apprehends natural things and events in their immanent, involved belonging-together;

and

- (3) Intellection apprehends existing things.

With respect to the first characteristic, where reason articulates Nature’s flux in terms of determinations, proximate and distant relations, parts, and propositions, intellect apprehends flux, that is, something like — with due respect to Spinoza’s critique of mechanistic physics and for lack of a better term — flowing, involved movement. Similarly, with respect to the second characteristic, where reason thinks in terms of the concatenation of chains of discrete, determinate causes and effects, intellection apprehends causes and effects as immanently involved, that is, as intrinsically or expressively connected. Intellect, Spinoza writes in Letter 12, apprehends an infinity that “cannot be divided into, or possess any, parts” (*Letters* 103). Intellection, in other words, overcomes separation inasmuch as it apprehends Modes as immanently connected to Substance, that is, in “their efflux” (*Letters* 104). Thinking in terms of measure, time, and number, in contrast, separates Modes from the infinite, immanent productivity of Substance. With respect to the third characteristic, attunement to actual existents, Spinoza understands Substance as involving “infinite enjoyment of existence or — pardon the Latin — being” (*Letters* 102). E1p15s articulates these themes in a discussion of quantity and matter:

If someone should ask now why we are, by nature, so inclined to divide quantity, I shall answer that we conceive quantity in two ways: abstractly, *or* superficially, as we imagine it, or as substance, which is done by the intellect alone. So if we attend to quantity as it is in the imagination, which we do often and easily, it will be found to be finite, divisible, and composed of parts; but if we attend to it as it is in the

intellect, and conceive it insofar as it is substance, which happens with great difficulty, then (as we have already sufficiently demonstrated) it will be found infinite, unique, and indivisible.

Spinoza concludes this discussion by noting that the point will be sufficiently plain to everyone “who knows how to distinguish between intellect and imagination” and who knows that the parts of matter are distinguished “only modally, not really” (E1p15s). The texts from Letter 12 and *Ethics* 1, in other words, challenge us to understand unity and division into parts by assigning them to different kinds of cognition.

What Letter 12 calls “correct understanding” is termed the fourth kind of perception in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and third kind of knowing or intuitive knowing in the *Ethics*. For the sake of economy, I shall use “intuition” to refer to both the fourth kind of the *Treatise* and the third kind of the *Ethics*.¹³ In these texts, what is at issue is apprehending a singular thing in its causal involvements and as expressive of nature’s generativity. The *Treatise* account stresses that the fourth kind of perception involves perceiving a thing “through its essence alone, or through knowledge of its proximate cause” (§18). In the *Ethics*, this is recast in terms of perceiving a thing as an immanent effect of God. In *Ethics* 2, Spinoza writes: “And this [third, intuitive] kind of knowing proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things” (E2p40s2). *Ethics* 5 underscores the reciprocity between singular and God: The more we know singular things, the more we know God (E5p24). To have an adequate idea of a thing is precisely to know it in relation to Nature or God or Substance.

Both the *Treatise* and the *Ethics* offer the example, drawn from Euclidean mathematics, of the fourth proportional to illustrate intuition. The reference

¹³ Although not mentioned in Letter 12 and so outside the scope of this article, the immediacy and affective implications of intuition (i.e., *amor dei intellectualis*) distinguish it from reason. Where reason reflects on nature as an object, intellection is immediate. Spinoza follows the Aristotelian paradigm in which the knower and known are one in the knowing. This is one of the key considerations in Spinoza’s rejection of theories of intellection as representation, creativity, or autonomous production: for Spinoza, all of these paradigms assume a separation between nature as an object and a discrete knowing subject. This is one of the reasons for Spinoza’s ongoing polemic against the will as a faculty. For Spinoza, intellection involves “union with the whole of Nature” (TdIE §13).

to proportion, particularly to the nature of proportion itself, provides a key to these difficult texts. In each instance, Spinoza presents the fourth proportional as accessible through the various kinds of perception or knowing. Presented with the numbers 1, 2, and 3, some individuals adduce 6 as the fourth by means of procedures “they simply heard from their teachers, without any demonstration” (TdIE §23). Having acquired a procedure *ex auditis et signis*, these calculators merely imitate knowing. *Ethics 2* illustrates this mimetic procedure with the example of merchants’ rote calculation. Other perceivers “will construct a universal axiom from an experience with simple numbers” and infer its applicability in subsequent instances; this inductive conclusion is the second kind of perception. Mathematicians themselves fall into two groups. There are those who know which numbers are proportional because they know “the nature of proportion and its property”; this knowledge, which is acquired “by the force of the demonstration of Proposition 19 in Book VII of Euclid,” does not, however, enable them “to see the adequate proportionality of the given numbers.” Unlike the demonstrative mathematicians, intuitive mathematicians apprehend the adequate proportionality of the given numbers, and do so without any procedures, i.e., any mediation (TdIE §24). The intuitive mathematician, according to this passage, sees the nature of proportion — i.e., proportionality and its properties — as it is exhibited by, in, and as the given numbers. In the language of the *Treatise*, the intuitive mathematician sees the essence of a singular thing through “the fixed and eternal things, and at the same time from the laws inscribed in these things, as in their true codes, according to which all singular things come to be” (TdIE §101). *Ethics 2* offers a similar depiction of apprehending both relation and singularity, differentiation and unity:

Given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth proportional number is 6 — and we see this much more clearly because we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance, we see the first number to have to the second. (E2p40s2)

Succinctly stated, what the intuitor apprehends is differentiated unity and unified differentiation. The intuitor apprehends the ratio in the variables which instantiate it.¹⁴

¹⁴ On these passages and Spinoza’s use of Euclid, see Alexandre Matheron, “Spinoza and Euclidean Arithmetic: The Example of the Fourth Proportional,” tr. D. R. Lachterman, in *Spinoza and the Sciences*, ed. Marjorie Grene (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1986), 125–150.

In the *Ethics*, as in the *Treatise*, the model of intuitive apprehension enables us to describe the immanence of singular modes as expressions of God or Nature or Substance. Intuition, in other words, apprehends Nature's efflux, neither totalizing into an undifferentiated whole nor dividing into disconnected parts.¹⁵ In the second-order, geometrical discourse of the *Ethics*, Spinoza marks the complexity of thinking this way with the qualifier "insofar as" (*quatenus ad*). Thus Spinoza can say that "the human Mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God" without presupposing a relation of wholes and parts. Indeed, to say that the human Mind participates in Nature's infinite understanding is to say "that God, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is explained through the nature of the human Mind, or insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human Mind, has this or that idea" (E2p11c). A similar analysis follows with regard to the human Body. *Amor dei intellectualis*, in this light, is thus both God's love of himself and the human Mind's love of God: "The Mind's Intellectual Love of God is the very love of God by which God loves himself, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explained by the human Mind's essence, considered under a species of eternity; i.e., the Mind's intellectual love of God is part of the infinite Love by which God loves himself" (E5p36). For Spinoza, to envision things "in" God is not to make them dependent on God in the manner of creationist ontologies, but rather to speak of them as expressions of God's limitless productivity or power (E1p34). We can think of them "insofar as" or with respect to this or that. Accordingly, to see a thing *sub specie aeternitatis* or as immanently caused by God yet also as finite and determinate in its duration is to see something like a participation which does not collapse into wholes and parts, dependent and independent beings. It is also to see a kind of belonging together which does not collapse into simple identity.

The primary result of this inquiry into the modes of knowing or perceiving in their relation to Spinoza's idea of eternity is to see that, while it is distinctively intellectual, this intellectual character does not depend on a real separation from other modes of knowing. Time, duration, and eternity are expressions correlated with ways of thinking, not types of being. Imagination, reason, and intellect do not "see" different things: rather, the

¹⁵ Letter 9 makes clear that intuitive understanding neither adequates the whole of *natura naturata* nor apprehends *natura naturans* in its absolute infinity. I discuss this in section 4 below.

faculties denote ways of encountering the same thing differently. Temporal predicates, the language of having done this now and that at another time, of motions made and motions received, bespeak imagination or what Spinoza calls the first kind of perception (E2p40s2). As numerous passages attest, time is an *ens imaginationis*. Reason, the second kind of perception, experiences time as duration, that is, in a unified way, and thinks about events in causally connected, though not intrinsically involved, ways. This brings reason closer to eternity, albeit in an abstract way, for reason experiences duration, “an indefinite continuation of existing” (E2d5), as “a certain species of quantity” (E2p45s). Only in the third, intuitive, kind of knowing do we perceive Nature in its unlimited, infinitely or indefinitely many causal connections (E1p28) as immanently involved, i.e., as flux or flow. These unusual formulations reflect the difference between intellection and reason. Reflecting on these distinctions, then, we can say that Nature is eternal, durational, and temporal. Spinoza’s position does not require us to eliminate talk of time and duration as fundamentally illusory or imperfect. Indeed, eliminating time and duration would turn Spinoza’s perspectival, modally articulated immanence into a dualism; intellection would be the order of the real, and imagination and reason those of the less real. While imagination can give rise to fabrications, imaginative cognition is nonetheless an occurrence of nature. Hence E2p17s refers to it as a cognitive virtue and attributes error to mind’s judgments rather than its imagination. Eternity, then, is not really distinct from duration and time. To put this point another way, intuitive understanding apprehends Nature differently from the other modes of knowing but does not apprehend a separate object.

2. *Natura Naturans and Natura Naturata: Why Eternity is Not the Origin*

In this section, I apply the modal or perspectival approach to E1p29s in order to show how Spinoza’s expressions of respect, aspect, and perspective replace the language of derivation and origination. Section 1 showed that Spinoza’s treatment of cognition does not obligate us to assign a separate object for eternity. The present section shows a similar result with regard to the relationship between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.

In E1p29s, Spinoza articulates the relationship between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* in terms of aspectival or perspectival difference. E1p29s

follows on (a) Spinoza's proof that God (or Nature or Substance) is the single, immanent, necessary cause of all things in the same way that he is the cause of himself and (b) Spinoza's complex account of infinite and finite modes. A thorough treatment of these arguments would take us far afield, so discussion of the scholium will have to indicate the outlines of a reading. As a transitional point that gathers together what has come before and gives direction to what is to come, the scholium lends itself to such an approach. Spinoza writes:

Before I proceed further, I wish to explain here — or rather to advise — what we must understand by *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. For from the preceding I think it is already established that by *natura naturans* 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. (by p14c1 and p17c2), God, insofar as he is considered a free cause.

But by *natura naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, or from any of God's attributes, i.e., all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God.

This passage juxtaposes Nature understood as infinite and eternal with nature understood in its singular determinations. *Natura naturans* is here defined via the definition of Substance in E1def1, as that which is in itself and conceived through itself, and in terms of God's freedom as unlimited expressivity. This freedom is the expression of God's essence, that is, God's power or actuality (E1p34–36). *Natura naturata*, as what follows from God, is substance conceived in terms of the modal affections or determinations. These modal determinations are describable in terms of time and duration.

While it might be tempting to interpret this passage to say that *natura naturans* would be the ground or origin of *natura naturata*, it is important to emphasize that the text offers no basis for viewing the causal ground as separate from the effects; Spinoza specifies neither temporal priority nor ontological separation in describing *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, Substance as unlimited, and Substance as modally determinate or delimited.¹⁶ In this respect, E1p29s works out the implications of a series of propositions about immanence that begin with E1p16 and hinge on the

¹⁶ Antonio Negri comments, "The one and the multiple are equivalent and indistinguishable forces" (*The Savage Anomaly*, tr. Michael Hardt [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991], 212).

meaning of “follows.” Throughout *Ethics* I, Spinoza’s causal language is non-hierarchical and non-linear, and it is elaborated around the concept of involvement: “The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause” (E1a4).¹⁷ Immanently acting causes act by remaining in themselves, and causes and effects are conjoined (E1p28s). When we interpret “follows” in terms of involvement, not derivation, the proposition argues that Nature’s generative power is articulated in discrete singulars and so comes to be understood in a similar way. As is often the case, the issues are stated especially clearly in the scholia. E1p17s states that God “is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of Nature” (E1p17s). E1p25s, spelling out the implications of immanence, precludes the hypothesis of derivation and ontological hierarchy even more decisively: “God must be called the cause of all things in the same sense in which he is called the cause of himself.” Finally, E1p28s treats God as the proximate, not the remote, cause of singular things, inasmuch as all things that are, are in God and are conjoined with him. Read together, this series of scholia says that God’s causal productivity occurs in and as modes and attributes, and vice versa. God is neither outside the modes and attributes, nor does He act on them from the kind of real difference or remove posited by transitivity and analogical relations. Spinoza’s phrases *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* can accordingly be understood as two ways of speaking about nature. Indeed, the challenge of the “advice” presented in the scholium to E1p29 is to understand that the names of Nature speak about the same thing in different ways. *Natura naturans* and *natura naturata* name Nature in, respectively, its infinite or unlimited power and its infinite unfolding and determinations. Insofar as this irreducible, non-identical sameness is what must be understood rather than conceptualized or imagined, this scholium, like many others, points toward intuitive knowing.

The same sort of irreducibility is evident in E5p24: “The more we understand singular things, the more we understand God,” which refers to E1p25c: “Particular things are nothing but affections of God’s attributes, or modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in certain and determinate ways.” Spinoza is not saying that knowledge of a greater number of

¹⁷ For a helpful discussion of the non-linear character of causal relations in Spinoza, see Amihud Gilead, “‘The Order and Connection of Things’: Are They Constructed Mathematically-Deductively According to Spinoza,” *Kant-Studien* 76/1 (1985): 72–78, especially the discussion of causal networks and dependence on pp. 75–76.

singulars will “add up” to knowledge of God’s absolute infinity. Instead, his point is that understanding singular things is the same as understanding God; singular things, as E1p25c indicates, are expressions of Nature’s power, such that understanding them constitutes knowledge of Nature. Nature, in other words, never appears as such, that is, as a discrete or whole object present to the mind. Rather, nature shows itself in and as modal determinations. Crucially, the key theme here is not the quantity of connection but the manner in which they are known; the “how” of knowing is more important than “what” is known. E5p29s clarifies the two ways of conceiving a thing:

We 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 the aspect of eternity, and to that extent they involve the eternal and infinite essence of God (as we have shown in E2p45 and p45s).

These two ways conceive the same thing, first, under the aspect of duration, isolating Nature in a determinate time and place, second, under the aspect of eternity, that is, as immanent effects of God. Conceiving things according to or in the manner of duration structures them as discrete and related entities whose character is explained by the infinite regress of determinate causes (E1p28; E2p9). Conceiving them as “contained in God” and “under the aspect of eternity” (*sub specie aeternitatis*) moves in the direction of involvement and infinity. In the end, however, we are conceiving the same thing in two ways.

3. *Eternity and Totality: Why Eternity is Not a Telos*

Several considerations mitigate against viewing eternity as a telos. First, Spinoza’s emphasis on Nature’s limitless generativity, and his idea of conatus or conative movement in Nature, mitigates against the viewing of Nature as complete; its very boundlessness seems incompatible with completion. Second, Spinoza’s critique of teleology entails a non-totalizable Nature, inasmuch as there is no single, univocally expressible aim that organizes Nature (E1app). The net effect of these factors is that Spinoza’s eternity is not a telos, and in two ways: it is neither a stable quantity nor an achieved totality.

The arguments of *Ethics* 1 demonstrate that nothing limits God or Substance or Nature. The various propositions about the productivity of Nature thus depict beginning-less and endless or unending generativity. E1p16, “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect),” is crucial, for it announces the infinity of causal networks articulated in and as modes. E1p36 evokes the same theme, identifying existing with producing effects: “Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow” (E1p36). *Ethics* 5 can then describe Nature as an “infinite connection of causes” (E5p6d). Nature’s infinite generativity is discussed as an open series, not a totalizing self-actualization. In this sense, causes and effects are always occurring. Nowhere do these texts invoke the language of closure, completion, or telos. Indeed, such language is specifically censured in the critique of teleology in the Appendix to *Ethics* 1, which rejects the imposition of a single measure or standard. In this second line of evidence, Spinoza describes talk of ends and values as conventions and anthropocentric projections. For this reason, it is important to stress the anti-teleological, anti-theological impetus in an important passage in E1p17s that might otherwise be thought to conflict with the interpretation of eternity in the present paper. Spinoza writes:

from God’s supreme power [*potentia*], or infinite nature, infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, i.e., all things, have necessarily flowed, or *always* follow, by the same necessity and in the same way as from the nature of a triangle it follows, from eternity and to eternity, that its three angles are equal to two right angles. So God’s omnipotence *has been* actual from eternity and *will remain* in the same actuality to eternity. (E1p17s; emphasis added)

In this ironic, even sarcastic text, the language of infinite flowing and following is in tension with traditional understandings of divine eternity as a source and end. The context is clearly a critique of the Cartesian doctrine of created eternal truths and, more generally, the idea of divine volition. Spinoza uses the perpetuity of the mathematical to make the “always” of eternity visible: just as the definition of a triangle does not depend on this or that knower, and in that sense “has been” and “will remain” actual, so too the flowing and following of divine productivity “always” occur. Spinoza does sometimes speak about Nature in terms of the preservation of a ratio (e.g., E2lem7, discussed below in section 4). As Balibar has emphasized, however, Spinoza’s idea of preserving ratios stands as a counterpoint to the

Cartesian model in which the total quantity of motion is preserved.¹⁸ Persevering in a ratio of motion and rest, in other words, is not incompatible with transformation and reconfiguration, i.e., with expression in and as an infinity of modes and attributes.¹⁹ The “always” of eternity is the perpetuity of expression or efflux.

A second and more complex reason to resist the idea of eternity as a telos emerges from Spinoza’s ideas of efflux and conatus. Thus far, I have suggested that Spinoza distinguishes the language of eternity from that of time and duration in tandem with the distinctions among the kinds of knowing. Accordingly, time, duration, and eternity have been treated as irreducibly different ways of perceiving the same Nature or God or Substance. Nature can be thought *sub specie aeternitatis* or *sub specie durationis*. Metaphysically speaking, eternity and motion are concurrent because an unlimited Nature does not occur as a whole; Nature’s eternity is precisely its absolutely infinite character, which we know as its numerically infinite (or indefinite) production of modes; multiplicity and variation, in other words, express Nature. The impossibility of knowing Nature as a whole reflects not merely the limits of knowing but the character of Nature. As Macherey remarks, Substance or God or Nature must be thought as “the complex reality of an absolute movement that includes all its determinations.”²⁰ This movement is not, moreover, adequately conceived on a temporal or kinetic model, principally because Substance is not really divisible. In Letter 35, to Hudde, Spinoza explains that substance “is simple, not composed of parts.

¹⁸ Etienne Balibar, “Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuation,” *Mededelingen vanwege het Spinozahuis* 71 (Delft: Eburon, 1997).

¹⁹ Though I cannot defend the claim here, I take Spinoza to be relatively unconcerned with the question of individuation as it is typically addressed in early modern philosophy. Inasmuch as the ratios of modes are interrelated and communicative, no mode is really discrete or singularized.

²⁰ Pierre Macherey, “The Problem of the Attributes,” in *The New Spinoza*, ed. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), 85; this article is a translation of Macherey’s *Hegel ou Spinoza* (Paris: Maspero-La Découverte, 1979), ch. 3. Dobbs-Weinstein argues in “Maimonidean Aspects of Spinoza’s Thought” (n. 8 above) that Spinoza’s nominalism is equivocal, i.e., ontological as well as linguistic, and thus makes a similar point from a different perspective. When Spinoza refuses Cartesian concepts of method and truth, he also refuses certain Cartesian metaphysical themes. A correspondence theory of truth, for example, requires a stable nature as a referent.

For in Nature and in our knowledge the component parts of a thing must be prior to that which is composed of them. This is out of place in that which is by its own nature eternal" (*Letters* 203). This non-numeric sense of Nature can be described as the perpetuity, or the "always" of nature's expression in and as modes.

When Spinoza stresses the importance of conceiving existence in terms of existing, that is, as a verbal participle rather than as a noun, he emphasizes that Nature's power is expressed as, but is not reducible to or totalizable as, physical motion. Spinoza clearly criticizes the idea of existence in general as an abstract, confused notion, one that tends to become separated from and to obscure real beings (E2p40s1), and various passages remind us that universals are not genuine beings.²¹ In the *Ethics*, the identification of perseverance and "the being of beings" is clearly evident at E1p24c and restated succinctly at E3p6: "Each thing, insofar as it is, strives to persevere in its being." The idea of conatus, activity and affectivity, or conative movement, in short, replaces the idea of stability in Spinoza's ontology. To be faithful to Spinoza's prohibitions against abstracting and hypostasizing, we must think what has been called "being" as persevering, i.e., as acting and being affected, and not as a stable entity or substratum. *Ethics* 5 confirms that intuitive understanding, as distinct from ratiocination, apprehends the "persevering in existing" of singular things (5p36s). While imagination and reason tend to abstract Nature's motion and so to stabilize or regiment its variation under categories, universals, and discrete identity, understanding existing involves understanding Nature's motion in and as the activity of existing. Rather than hypostasizing or reifying striving and persevering, the third kind of knowing apprehends Nature's efflux in and as modes. As Letter 12 suggested, perceiving *sub specie aeternitatis*, as distinct from perceiving *sub specie durationis*, need not freeze the movement of

²¹ TdIE §55 is blunt: "The more generally existence is conceived, the more confusedly also it is conceived, and the more easily it can be ascribed fictitiously to anything. Conversely, the more particularly it is conceived, then the more clearly it is understood, and the more difficult it is for us, when we do not attend to the order of Nature, to ascribe it fictitiously to anything other than the thing itself." In E2p48s, the faculties are "either complete fictions or nothing but metaphysical beings, or universals, which we are used to forming from particulars. So intellect and will are to this or that idea, or to this or that volition as 'stone-ness' is to this or that stone, or man to Peter or Paul."

existing into the impossible structure of parts and wholes, succession and duration. At the same time, the intuitor also apprehends the ratio of the movement.

4. *Necessity, "Existence itself," and the Orders of Knowing*

E1def8 associates necessity and eternity, and the link is reiterated at various points. The opening of the demonstration of E5p30, for example, states: "Eternity is the very essence of God insofar as this involves necessary existence (by E1def8)." In this section, I consider necessity and show that it is another name for actual existence. Spinoza's reference to necessity thus echoes his remarks on intuitive knowing as apprehending existence, and it provides a further reason to think that eternity is immanent rather than transcendent. The main focus of this section is the idea of necessary connection. Just as in section 1 reason's kind of eternity was distinguished from intellectual eternity, here reason's necessity is distinguished from intellectual necessity. The idea of necessary connection nevertheless provides something of a link between second- and third-order knowing and so explains how the second kind of knowing is a necessary but not sufficient condition of the third.

Spinoza's critique of conventional notions of possibility and contingency as forms of ignorance and his dismissal of all varieties of a metaphysics of real possibility (such as is found in, e.g., Suarez, Descartes, and Leibniz) are familiar from *Ethics* I. Parallel discussions appear in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. Granting Spinoza's critique of possibility and contingency as forms of ignorance, let us focus on Spinoza's own assimilation of necessity to actual existence and his redefinition of causal connection in terms of involvement. Both moves reveal the connection between eternity and necessity. Given his position that Nature's essence is its existence, Spinoza can assimilate necessity to actual existence.²² In *Ethics* I, Spinoza's argument that God's essence is his existence leads to the conclusion that God has no limits and so includes all existents. Whatever exists, then, is of Nature, and there is no outside agent capable of affecting

²² For a detailed demonstration of how Spinoza treats formal laws, such as those of mathematics, physics and logic, in the same manner as empirical physical events, see David Savan, "Spinoza on Duration, Time and Eternity," 20 (n. 3 above). E1p17s is a crucial text for this nominalist reading.

Nature. Nature is entirely self- or internally-determined — indeed, there is nothing else — and Spinoza defines this state as freedom. Nature’s necessity, in other words, coincides with freedom precisely as intrinsic action. God or Nature acts “from the laws of its own nature alone...compelled by no one” (E1p17), such that whatever is in God’s power necessarily exists (E1p35). There is, and could be, no God or Nature or Substance other than this one. What is, exists necessarily, and the laws of Nature refer exclusively to Nature. The same kind of argument explains Nature’s infinity. There is nothing else, i.e., nothing else that could limit, determine, or structure, Nature. Nature thus expresses itself infinitely in the sense of being “not-finite,” i.e., without limitation. Seen in this light, Spinoza’s positive definition of eternity as “existence itself” (E1d8), means that eternity is nothing other than Nature. Nature is eternal in and as modes, and this means that eternity is nothing other than Nature’s occurrence in and as modes.

In section 1, I argued that the second kind of knowing could be said to apprehend Nature as an aggregate of singular things connected by deductively comprehensible relations. Viewed this way, Nature would accordingly appear to have parts. Invoking intellectual understanding, Spinoza specifically rejects this depiction of Nature in Letter 12, for only intellectual intuition apprehends Nature’s flux in and as modes. The idea of the whole of Nature, indeed, is given intellectually, not constructed by rational deduction (*Letters* 101–102). Just as eternity is not a quantity of time, the infinite is not a number. The perspectival approach to cognition tends to emphasize the incommensurability of reason and intellect discussed in Letter 12. In key passages in E2p40s and E5p28, however, Spinoza notes that the second kind of knowing approximates the third kind and is in fact a precondition for it. The affinity of the second and third kinds of knowing is indicated, as well, in E2p44c2, which grants reason some perception of eternity: “It is of the nature of Reason to perceive things under a certain species of eternity” (*sub quadam aeternitatis specie percipere*). Discussing this passage in section 1 above, I argued that reason’s eternity is different in character from intuition’s eternity in virtue of the former’s abstract timelessness. Viewed in terms of reason, the eternity of a mode would be thought on the model of the timelessness or endless duration of universals such as the mathematical. Viewed from the third kind of knowing, the eternity of a mode would be thought in terms of the flowing connections of modes as they express substance. Because this conative movement can be

distinguished from mechanistic models of motion, it does not entail the invocation of time and duration, which Spinoza specifically excludes from eternity.

The difference between the kinds of knowing notwithstanding, Spinoza uses necessity, in the sense of necessary causal connection, as a way from the idea of singular modes to the idea of Nature as a singular existent. The reason for this is that, in the first and second kind of knowing, Nature appears as discrete modes. *Ethics* 1 and Letter 12 used the language of flowing and following to express necessary connection. In *Ethics* 2, Spinoza introduces the language of concurrence, composition, and interaction. E2def7 reads:

By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of Individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, *to that extent*, as one singular thing. (Emphasis added)

According to this definition, causal connection is a way of conceiving the links between singular things so that they begin to appear, to the extent possible, as one singular thing. The discursive process of connecting causes and effects can become the intuitive apprehension of intrinsic relatedness. Causal concurrence, then, reflects an increasingly intuitive understanding of the relations of modes and so points toward the possibility of moving from the second to the third kind of knowing. Second-order senses of connection, particularly deductive connection, are a necessary but not sufficient condition for the intuitive apprehension. Understood in terms of intrinsic causal connection, that is, the belonging together of involved causes and effects, Nature is thus one and many. We can conceive the singularity of Nature and the singularity of each existing mode.²³

E2lem7 and its scholium in the so-called Physical Digression, which discuss how a composite individual retains its nature in motion and rest,

²³ Letter 50, to Jelles, emphasizes the non-numeric character of God or Nature or Substance and so underscores the complexities of the idea of singularity. God, Spinoza writes, “can only improperly be called one or single” because to conceive things “under the category of numbers” presupposes classes and commonalities: “Hence it is clear that a thing cannot be called one or single unless another thing has been conceived which, as I said, agrees with it. Now since the existence of God is his very essence, and since we can form no universal idea of his essence, it is certain that he who calls God one or single has no true idea of God, or is speaking of him very improperly” (*Letters* 259–60).

elaborate the model suggested in E2def7. Most important, Spinoza's treatment of individuality in the Physical Digression rests on the idea of ratio that admit of infinite variation. The scholium, in particular, expands Spinoza's discussion of motion, exploring "how a composite individual can be affected in many ways and still preserve its nature." The scholium proceeds from the explanation of apparently simple bodies whose internal relations are determined by motion and rest to considering bodies which are "composed of a number of Individuals of a different nature." Individuals composed of heterogeneous combinations of individuals can be affected in a great number of ways and still preserve their natures. The heterogeneity of such individuals is advantageous because it increases their capacity for interactions and communication. To the extent that modes are interactive or communicative, of course, the idea of a bounded or discrete individual is discarded. Spinoza then introduces a third kind of Individual, "composed of this second kind." Such a body is capable of being affected in many ways without changing its form. Spinoza concludes:

And if we proceed in this way to infinity, we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one Individual. Whose parts, i.e., all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole Individual. (E2p17s)

Spinoza suggests that we think simultaneously of Nature's infinite varying and its wholeness, and he suggests that we think of infinite individual as a complex of interacting individuals. Where the world as a mode is composed of indefinitely many such individuals, Nature is the infinite individual, infinitely complex in its ratios.

Spinoza's idea of the infinitely varying single individual depends on a sense of causation that does not presuppose ontological differentiation into parts. In the Physical Digression, the notions of interaction and communication speak to this requirement in Spinoza's physics, casting doubt on the adequacy of a mechanistic construal of his physics. In metaphysical terms, the movement at issue is conative movement, and the causal relations are expressed in terms of involvement. Succession presumes the discrete identity of causes and effects. Involvement, by contrast, resists the separation of causes and effects. When "The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause" (E1a4), causes and effects are not distinct and so cannot be neatly assigned to a successive order. Indeed, causes act by remaining in themselves, and causes and effects are conjoined

(E1p28s). Where the deductive necessity perceived in the second kind of knowing grasps relations of discrete, rather than communicative- interactive or involved, modes, intuitively understood necessity apprehends involvement as an intrinsic connection, that is, as relations of flowing and following. Spinoza's idea of concurrence in E2d7 and the ideas of interaction and composition in the Physical Digression are ways of extending the second-order concept of connection toward the third-order idea of involvement and conative movement or efflux.

E2p45s, one of the culminating texts in Spinoza's treatment of human knowing, displays the issues in their full complexity. The text adduces the links between eternity, necessity and infinity, and it situates the discussion within the difference between reason and intellect, second- and third-order knowing. E2p45s also explicitly introduces the question of singularity. E2p45 states that "Each idea of each body, or of each singular thing which actually exists, necessarily involves the eternal and infinite essence of God." In the scholium, Spinoza explains existing in terms of understanding, and he distinguishes it from the rational abstraction of duration:

By existence here I do not understand duration, i.e., existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly, and as a certain species of quantity. For I am speaking of the very nature of existence, which is attributed to singular things because infinitely many things follow from the eternal necessity of God's nature in infinitely many modes (see E1p16). I am speaking, I say, of the very existence of singular things insofar as they are in God. For even if each one is determined by another singular thing to exist in a certain way, still the force by which each one perseveres in existing follows from the eternal necessity of God's nature. Concerning this, see E1p24c. (E2p45s)

Speaking of "the very nature of existence," Spinoza juxtaposes the perspective of Nature's infinite, necessary, and eternal expression and the perspective of singular things in a series of necessary relations. Spinoza contends that the determination of singular things—finite modes, for example—must be understood through relations of singular things. These determinations, in turn, express necessary connection in Nature. Put another way, what "follows" here expresses Nature's limitless generativity. E1p24c makes the point in the language of expression and so stresses the immanent character of the relationship of substance and modes: "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." The force of expressing all of this in terms of the eternal necessity of God's nature is to

emphasize that, where reason might conceive necessity abstractly, intuition apprehends intrinsic causal interconnection, i.e., involvement. The third kind of knowing apprehends the conative flow of substance in and as modes.

Such an intuitive apprehension of concurrence as intrinsic connection is of course limited by the fact that the intellect belongs to *natura naturata*. Like E1p31, Letter 9 stresses that even an infinite intellect is only infinite in kind, not absolutely infinite: “the intellect, even though infinite, belongs to *Natura naturata*, not to *Natura naturans*” (*Letters* 93). Letter 32, to Oldenburg, makes the same point. The human intellect, moreover, is in fact finite, according to Letter 12 (*Letters* 194–95). For this reason, Spinoza’s discussions of the possibility of recognizing our union with Nature prominently invoke qualifications of striving and extent (e.g., TdIE §14), and his discussions of knowing God or Nature or Substance use a similar idiom of increase (e.g., E5p24). Spinoza’s texts on social and political community use the same language of striving and degree:

Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the Minds and Bodies of all would compose, as it were, one Mind and Body; that all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all. (E4p18s)

The magnitude of the affective transformations made possible by the apprehension of involvement and the project of shared striving is summarized strikingly in the demonstration of E5p18, “No one can hate God.” Spinoza writes: “insofar as we understand God to be the cause of Sadness, we rejoice.” Spinozistic *amor fati* originates in knowing the involved, expressive connectedness of Nature. Spinoza’s doctrine of the eternity of the mind would have to be worked out in this framework of eternity as an intellectual understanding of connection.

5. Conclusion

Following Spinoza’s reference to the intellect in defining eternity, I have focused on eternity as a name for Nature perceived intuitively and argued that the intuitive perception at issue involves a perception of intrinsic, involved, fluid connection. Two features of intuitive understanding prove especially important for understanding eternity. First, intuitive knowing apprehends generativity or conative movement without imposing stability

and totality. Nature thought as eternal is thus actually *existing* nature thought in terms of immanent involvement. As a consequence, Nature's eternity need not be conceived in ways that violate Spinoza's rejection of creation and teleology. Second, intuitive knowing is able to perceive both differentiation or multiplicity and singularity; intuitive knowing apprehends ratios admitting infinite variation. The mathematical examples Spinoza gives to elucidate the ways of knowing suggest that, in perceiving relations, intuition grasps both the singular character of the *relata* and the singular character of the relation. Duration and time, in contrast, reflect existing things through abstraction and delimitation, imposing stasis, separation, and extrinsic relations.

From a metaphysical standpoint, the ideas of necessity and necessary connection point to the centrality of actual existents in Spinoza's philosophy. These ideas also stand out for their positivity and their link to the second kind of knowing. Intuitive knowing, likewise, is distinguished by reference to existing things. At the same time that Spinoza's insistence on an intellectual definition of eternity and his negation of rational and imaginative analogues in time and duration underscore the limits of the second kind of knowing, the idea of necessary connection nevertheless suggests a way of understanding how the second kind may prepare for the third. Reason, in contrast to imagination, exhibits necessary connections. This is no doubt a significant part of the power of the *mos geometricus* of the *Ethics*, but it must stand as preparation for intuitive apprehension. The idea of eternity, in sum, exhibits central features of Spinoza's theory of cognition and his metaphysics.²⁴

Villanova University

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