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Spinoza's Deification of Existence

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*Ego sum qui sum, Ait: sic dices filiis Israel; qui est misit me ad vos* (Exod. III, 14)

God cannot be said to enjoy existence, for the existence of God is God himself<sup>1</sup>

היהא רשא היהאכ יוגהה<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this paper is to clarify Spinoza's views on some of the most fundamental issues of his metaphysics: the nature of God's attributes, the nature of existence and eternity, and the relation between essence and existence in God. While there is an extensive literature on each of these topics, it seems that the following question has hardly been raised so far: What is, for Spinoza, the relation between God's *existence* and the divine attributes? Given Spinoza's claims that there are intimate connections between God's essence and his existence—'God's essence

<sup>1</sup> Spinoza, *CM* II.i (G i. 252/7). Unless otherwise marked, all references to the *Ethics*, the early works of Spinoza, and Letters 1–29 are to Curley's translation (C). In references to the other letters of Spinoza I have used Shirley's translation (S): Spinoza, *Complete Works*, ed. M. L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2002). I have relied on Gebhardt's critical edition (G) for the Latin text of Spinoza. In addition to those given at the front of this volume, I use the following standard abbreviations for Spinoza's works: *DPP* = *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy* [*Renati des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae Pars I & II*]; *CM* = *Metaphysical Thoughts* [*Cogitata Metaphysica*]. I am indebted to Hillel Braude, Myriam Dennehy, Mogens Laerke, Michael LeBuffe, Charles More, Lukas Muehlethaler, Ohad Nachtomy, Dalia Nassar, Kara Richardson, Gabriel Richardson Lear, Michael Rosenthal, Tad Schmaltz, Josef Stern, the three referees for *OSEMP*, and especially, Michael Della Rocca, Warren Zev Hervey, Alan Gabbey, Donald Rutherford, Andrew Youpa and John Morrison for their most helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. Earlier versions of this paper were presented in an invited session of the Pacific APA (2006), and the Atlantic Canada Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy (2007). I am indebted to the participants at these sessions for their helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> 'And All Believe [*Ve-khol Ma'aminim*]' is a poem written by the early medieval Hebrew poet, Yannai. The poem has been incorporated into the liturgy of the High Holy Days.

and his existence are one and the same' (EIP20)—and between God's essence and the attributes—'By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of substance, as constituting its essence' (EID4), we would naturally expect that by transitivity, there is a significant relation between God's *existence* and *the attributes*. Yet, as far as I know, there is little, if any, attempt in the existing literature to explicate such a relation, and it is one of my aims in this study to both raise the question and answer it. Eventually, I will argue that for Spinoza God is *nothing but existence*, and that the divine attributes are just fundamental kinds of existence, or, what is the same, as I will later argue, the intellect's most fundamental and adequate conceptions of existence.

In the first part of the paper I provide some background for Spinoza's brief discussion in the *TTP* of God's name and essence by studying the claims of Maimonides in the *Guide of the Perplexed* that God's true essence is necessary existence, and that this essence is denoted by the ineffable Hebrew name of God, the Tetragrammaton (YHWH). In the second part of the paper I point out similar claims Spinoza presents in the *TTP*, and show how they respond to and echo Maimonides's discussion in the *Guide*. In the third part, I examine Spinoza's apparently conflicting claims in the *Ethics* about the relationship between God's essence and existence. In some places Spinoza claims that God's essence and existence are strictly identical (EIP20: 'God's essence and his existence are one and the same'), but in other passages he makes the apparently much more modest claim that God's essence *involves* existence (EID1, EIP7D and EIP11D), which may lead one to believe that there is more to God's essence than mere existence. I show that Spinoza's understanding of the relation denoted by the Latin '*involvit*' is consistent with the strict identification of essence and existence in God, and that Spinoza identifies God's essence with *self-necessitated existence*, or eternity. Indeed, Spinoza's understanding of eternity (*aeternitas*) as self-necessitated existence (EID8) is one of the very few Spinozistic concepts that has no trace in Descartes. In this part I will also solve the long-standing problem of the sense in which the infinite modes can be called 'eternal'. In the fourth part I turn to the relation between the divine attributes and God's existence and argue that, for Spinoza, the attributes are self-sufficient and adequate conceptions of existence. Finally, I will attempt to explain what brought Spinoza to *deify* existence.

I. 'IN THAT DAY SHALL GOD BE ONE,  
AND HIS NAME ONE'—MAIMONIDES  
ON GOD'S NAME AND ESSENCE

Before we delve into the texts, let me suggest a few distinctions between various views on the issue of the relation between essence and existence in God. The view I suspect both Maimonides and Spinoza subscribe to can be termed the divine essence-existence Identity Thesis.<sup>3</sup>

Identity Thesis (IT): *God's essence is existence and nothing but existence.*

We should distinguish the Identity Thesis from the much more common view according to which God's essence *contains* existence, or (which I take to be roughly the same) that existence is one of the properties or perfections which constitute God's essence.<sup>4</sup> The latter view allows for the possibility (though it does not demand) that there is more to God's essence than bare existence (e.g. God's essence *may* include omniscience, omnipotence, etc.). I will term this view the divine essence-existence Containment Thesis.

Containment Thesis: *God's essence contains existence.*

The Containment Thesis is less strict than the Identity Thesis. If God's essence contains existence, it seems to be equally possible that God's essence contains other elements as well (in which case the Identity Thesis would not obtain), or that it does not contain any such elements (in which case, the Identity Thesis would obtain).

What is common to the Identity Thesis and the Containment Thesis is that they make God's existence due to its own essence. The Identity Thesis is much bolder than the Containment Thesis, since it rejects the

<sup>3</sup> On Spinoza's critical dialogue with Maimonides, see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), and Warren Zev Harvey, 'A Portrait of Spinoza as Maimonidean', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 20 (1981), 151–72. Sections 1 and 2 of my paper are partly adapted from my French article, 'Spinoza, Maïmonide et la signification du Tétragramme', in Frédéric Manzini (ed.), *Spinoza et les scolastiques* (Paris: PU Paris-Sorbonne, 2011), 133–47.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Descartes's Fifth Meditation (AT vii. 66), and Leibniz's claim that 'a subject of all perfections or a most perfect being... exists, since existence is contained in the number of perfections' (L 167).

inclusion of traditional attributes (such as omniscience and omnipotence) in God's essence. Furthermore, the Identity Thesis seems to be on the brink of pantheism. If God *is* existence, it would seem that whatever exists is, in some way, God, or in God.<sup>5</sup> The Containment Thesis, which is more likely to appeal to religious orthodoxy, might run into a different risk. If God's essence includes, in addition to existence, some other attributes, we may have to compromise the *simplicity* of God's essence. For most medieval Islamic and Jewish philosophers, the concern for divine simplicity was of utmost importance insofar as it was also an expression of their opposition to Christianity and the Trinity.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from distinguishing the Identity Thesis from the Containment Thesis, we may also wish to distinguish between different versions of the Identity Thesis. Thus, we may consider:

IT<sub>1</sub>: God's essence is identical with *God's* existence,

as opposed to what may seem to be a stronger claim:

IT<sub>2</sub>: God's essence is identical with existence *per se*.<sup>7</sup>

One way of cashing out this distinction between identity with existence *per se* and identity with *God's* existence would be to suggest that God's existence is *necessary* existence:

IT<sub>3</sub>: God's essence is identical with *necessary* existence.

<sup>5</sup> See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [ST], Ia, q. 3, a. 4:

Since unspecified existence [*esse cui nulla fit additio*] is existence in general [*esse commune*] and belongs to everything, the word 'God' would mean an existent in general, and would name anything. Now this is false, as the book of *Wisdom* shows: *they invested stocks and stones with incommunicable name* (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964–80)).

See the end of the article for Aquinas's response to this objection. One way to block the threat of pantheism (i.e. for those who consider it a threat) would be to identify God's existence with *necessary* existence, while relegating the existence of the world to contingency.

<sup>6</sup> On the simplicity of the divine essence in Maimonides, see *Guide of the Perplexed* [Guide], trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1963), part I, ch. 60; vol. 1, 146–7.

<sup>7</sup> By 'existence *per se*', I have in mind existence without any further qualification. We could similarly distinguish between three equivalent variants of the Containment Thesis, but since in what follows we will hardly make any use in the Containment Thesis, I will not pursue this line.

Strikingly, each of the two philosophers that we are about to study in this paper—Maimonides and Spinoza—endorsed each of the three versions of the Identity Thesis. This may make us think that our threefold subdivision of the Identity Thesis is of no use, but this would be a rash conclusion, since Spinoza's and Maimonides's endorsements of each of the three versions may tell us how they conceived the relation among the three variants of existence.

According to Maimonides, one of the more radical and consistent exponents of the *via negativa*, we can speak of God adequately in only one of two ways.

Every attribute that we predicate of Him is an attribute of action, or if the attribute is intended for the apprehension of His essence and not of His actions, it signifies the negation of the privation of the attribute in question. (*Guide*, I,58; vol. 1, 136)

We may ascribe to God attributes of action that indicate God's effects, but not his essence (e.g. 'the Creator'), or we can use negative attributes that deny certain qualities to God (such as in saying that 'God is one' to signify the negation of multiplicity), but these negative attributes do not give us any knowledge of God, any more than when we say of a wall that it is not endowed with sight (*Guide*, I,58; vol. 1, 136). In either case, we do not attain any positive knowledge of God's essence, not even by analogy.<sup>8</sup> Yet, for Maimonides, the understanding that certain attributes cannot belong to God's essence is an important intellectual achievement, and thus the philosopher who is able to advance in negating attributes of God is getting closer to the knowledge of God by this negative process (*Guide*, I,59; vol. 1, 137–9). Ultimately, says Maimonides, the most adequate praise for God is silence, as the Psalmist says: 'Silence is praise to Thee' (Psalm LXV, 2).<sup>9</sup>

Yet, in spite of his rejection of the ascription of any positive attributes to God, Maimonides does explicitly indicate his understanding of God's essence:

<sup>8</sup> Thomas develops his account of the divine attributes as analogous to the attributes of created things partly in criticism of Maimonides's more radical position which insists that God and created things have 'nothing in common in any respect' (*Guide*, I,58; vol. 1, 137). See *ST*, Ia, q. 13, aa. 2 and 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Guide*, I,59; vol. 1, 139.

It is known that existence is an accident attaching to what exists. For this reason it is something that is superadded to the quiddity of what exists. This is clear and necessary with regard to everything the existence of which has a cause. . . . As for that which has no cause for its existence, there is only God, may He be exalted and glorified, who is like that. For this is the meaning of our saying about Him, may He be exalted, that His existence is necessary. Accordingly, *His existence is identical with His essence and His true reality, and His essence is His existence*.<sup>10</sup> Thus His essence does not have an accident attaching to it when it exists, in which case its existence would be a notion that is superadded to it. For His existence is necessary always; it is not something that may come suddenly to Him, nor an accident that may attain Him. (*Guide*, I, 57; vol. 1, 132)

Maimonides begins the passage by invoking—‘It is known that . . .’—the Avicennian distinction between the *necessary of existence* and the *possible of existence*.<sup>11</sup> Avicenna defines the necessary of existence as an entity whose non-existence yields impossibility (insofar as its very essence is existence).<sup>12</sup> A possible of existence is an entity whose non-existence does not yield impossibility (but is also not ruled out of existence merely by virtue of its essence or quiddity).<sup>13</sup> Since the necessary of existence exists by virtue of its mere essence, it is uncaused. According to Avicenna, things that are possible of existence are in a state of delicate equilibrium as long as they are considered in isolation. Their quiddities or essences do not suffice to either make them exist or rule them out of existence. Hence, things that are possible of existence need an external cause in order to break the equilibrium and make them exist or not.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> I take this sentence to be an endorsement of IT<sub>1</sub>.

<sup>11</sup> See Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 29–34 (book 1, ch. 6). On the development of Avicenna’s distinction between the necessary of existence and the possible of existence, see Robert Wisnowsky, *Avicenna in Context* (London: Duckworth, 2003), 197–263. On Avicenna’s influence on Maimonides in this issue, see Alexander Altmann, ‘Essence and Existence in Maimonides’, in A. Altmann (ed.), *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 108–27.

<sup>12</sup> ‘The necessary of existence is that existent which cannot be supposed non-existent without the occurrence of an impossibility’. Ibn Sina, *al-najat*, ed. M.S. Kurdi, 2nd ed. (Cairo, 1938), 224, translated in George F. Hourani, ‘Ibn Sina on Necessary and Possible Existence’, *Philosophical Forum*, 4 (1972), 79.

<sup>13</sup> Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, 31.

<sup>14</sup> ‘The Possible of existence enters into existence only by a cause which makes its existence outweigh its non-existence’ (*al-Risala al-arshiyya*, in Hourani, ‘Ibn Sina on Necessary and Possible Existence’, 77, cf. 83–4).

Maimonides follows Avicenna in claiming that in God's case there is no distinction between essence and existence, and hence that unlike all other beings, existence is not an accident which happens to God, or is superadded to his essence. Maimonides stresses that the existence of the necessary of existence is completely alien to the notion of existence with which we are familiar. That the utterly-other-existence of the necessary of existence is the essence of God, becomes clear when Maimonides turns to the issue of divine names, which follows immediately the discussion of negative attributes.

All the names of God, may He be exalted, that are to be found in any of the books derive from actions. There is nothing secret in this matter. The only exception is one name: namely, *Yod, He, Vav, He*. This is the name of God, may He be exalted, that has been originated without any derivation, and for this reason it is called the *articulated name*. This means that this name gives a clear unequivocal indication of His essence, may He be exalted. (*Guide*, I.61; vol. 1, 147).<sup>15</sup>

In the lines that follow Maimonides explains that all the other names of God, even the name that is uttered instead of the Tetragrammaton due to the prohibition on pronouncing the latter (a name which is commonly translated as 'the Lord' or the Latin, 'Dominus'), signify only God's actions, not God's essence. What is then the essence signified merely by the Tetragrammaton (the 'articulated name' [*Shem ha-meforash*])? Maimonides answers,

There can be no doubt about the fact that this great name, which as you know is not pronounced except in the *Sanctuary* by the *sanctified Priests of the Lord* and only in the *benediction of the Priests* and by the *High Priest* upon the *day of fasting*, is indicative of a notion with reference to which there is no association between God, may He be exalted, and what is other than He. *Perhaps it indicates the notion of necessary existence*, according to the [Hebrew] language, of which we today know only a very scant portion and also with regard to its pronunciation. Generally speaking, the greatness of this name and the prohibition against pronouncing it are due to *its being indicative of the essence of Him, may*

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Guide*, I.61; vol. 1, 149: 'Thus it has become clear to you that *the articulated name* is the *name having four letters* and that it alone is indicative of the essence without associating any other notion with it. For this reason the Sages have said of it that is the name *that is peculiar to Me* [*shmi ha-meyuhad li*]'.

*He be exalted, in such a way that none of the created things is associated with him in this indication* (*Guide*, I.61; vol. 1, 148; italics mine)

Maimonides's initial hesitance ('perhaps it indicates') to claim explicitly that the Tetragrammaton indicates existence is overcome at the very end of the sixty-third chapter of the first part of the *Guide* in which he concludes his discussion of the divine names. Here he states briefly and clearly:

He, May He be exalted, has no *name* that is not derivative except the *name having four letters*, which is *the articulated name*. This name is not indicative of an attribute but of *simple existence and nothing else*. Now absolute existence implies that He shall always be, I mean He who is necessarily existent. Understand the point at which this discourse has finally arrived (*Guide*, I.63; vol. 1, 156).

Notice Maimonides's claim that the Tetragrammaton designates 'simple existence and nothing else', which is a plain endorsement of the Identity Thesis.<sup>16</sup> This view of the Tetragrammaton as indicating simple existence has an intuitive grammatical appeal. There is no doubt that this name comes from the Hebrew verb '*Hayah*', whose meaning is being. Indeed, Maimonides points out this linguistic issue explicitly (*Guide*, I.63; vol. 1, 154).<sup>17</sup>

In this context one would expect Maimonides to explain God's response when he is asked by Moses what should Moses say to the

<sup>16</sup> According to the passage just cited, the Tetragrammaton signifies 'simple existence', which I consider as an endorsement of IT<sub>2</sub>. The previous passage claims that the Tetragrammaton signifies 'necessary existence' (endorsing IT<sub>3</sub>). Presumably, an entity whose essence is existence exists necessarily, while an entity whose essence is necessary existence, has necessarily necessary existence. It seems that Maimonides (and we shall later see, Spinoza, as well) did not distinguish between the two statements. Modern modal logic is not sensitive to the distinction between being necessary by virtue of one's essence as opposed to being necessary by virtue of one's external cause, and therefore it cannot give an adequate account for statements of this kind. Still we may note that most modern systems of modal logic (apart from K and T) accept 'Necessarily p → Necessarily Necessarily p' as an axiom, and hence the difference between the two statements may seem insignificant. I doubt Maimonides really meant to stress that God is *necessarily* necessary existent since we have no indication that he considered the notion of merely contingent necessity to be intelligible.

<sup>17</sup> Salomon Maimon followed Maimonides's reading of the Tetragrammaton. In his 1792/3 *Lenensgeschichte* Maimon claimed 'the greatest of all mysteries in the Jewish religion consists in the name [Tetragrammaton], expressing *bare existence*, in abstraction from all *particular kinds of existence*, which cannot of course be conceived without *existence in general*' (*The Autobiography of Solomon Maimon*, trans. J. Clark Murray [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001], 181; italics in original).



children of Israel were they to ask him what is the *name* of God. God's answer '*Eheye asher eheye*' (Exodus III, 14) is translated in the King James version as 'I am that I am' (probably, following the Vulgate's '*Ego sum qui sum*'), a translation which is somewhat questionable since the verb '*Eheye*' appears to be either in the future or in the conjunctive, rather than in the present.<sup>18</sup> Be that as it may, Maimonides does not fail to seize the opportunity and explain this expression precisely as we would expect him to do: '*Eheye asher eheye*' refers to God simply as 'existence'. It is *existence being predicated of itself*.

[T]he first word is *I am* considered as a term to which a predicate is attached; the second word that is predicated of the first is also *I am*, that is, *identical* with the first. Accordingly, scripture makes, as it were, a clear statement that the *subject is identical with the predicate* . . . This notion may be summarized and interpreted in the following way; the existent that is the existent, or the necessary existent. (*Guide* I.63; vol. 1, 154–5; italics mine)

Maimonides's boldness does not stop with endorsing the claim that God's essence is just 'simple existence and nothing else'. He goes further and argues that the uneasy apprehension of this doctrine is the true meaning of the apocalyptic biblical promise that at the end of days 'God shall be one and His name one' (Zech. XIV, 9). According to Maimonides's reading, the verse 'promises an apprehension that will put an end to the delusion' of anthropomorphic thinking associated with the use of any other names or attributes to refer to God. At the end of days, Maimonides explains, human beings will invoke God by his unique and original name which indicates simple existence 'divested and stripped of all actions' (*Guide*, I.61; vol. 1, 148–9). This is quite an extraordinary reinterpretation of traditional eschatology in terms of the boldest anti-anthropomorphic philosophy.<sup>19</sup>

Let us stop here for a brief summary. We have seen that Maimonides adopts the Avicennian view that God is the only being whose essence is existence. According to Maimonides, the Tetragrammaton indicates God's unique essence, which is 'simple existence and nothing else'.

<sup>18</sup> Jerome's use of the present tense could have meant to communicate eternal existence.

<sup>19</sup> For medieval Christian interpretations of '*ego sum qui sum*', see Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991 [orig. 1936]), 51–3.

From the passages we have studied so far we can, I believe, conclude that Maimonides endorses the Identity Thesis.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. 'ET REVERA': SPINOZA ON THE TETRAGRAMMATON AND GOD'S ESSENCE

The thirteenth chapter of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* aims to show that scripture demands not the acquisition of intellectual knowledge of God, but obedience.<sup>21</sup> In order to support this claim, Spinoza cites Exodus VI, 3, in which God tells Moses that he was not known to the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—by the name *Jehovah*, but only as *El Shaddai*. Spinoza notes the difference between the two names—the former, but not the latter, indicates God's essence. Spinoza argues that the case of the patriarchs shows that piety and obedience are not dependent upon achieving precise knowledge of God, since the pious patriarchs lacked such knowledge. Let us have a closer look at Spinoza's claims about the denotation of the Tetragrammaton.

It should be observed that 'El Shaddai' means in Hebrew 'the God who suffices, because to each man he gives that which suffices to him' . . . . Again, it should be observed that in Scripture no word but 'Jehovah' is to be found to indicate the absolute essence of God [*Dei absolutam essentiam*], as unrelated to created beings. That is why the Hebrews contend that this is, strictly speaking, God's only name, the other names being forms of address; *and it is a fact [et revera]* that the other names of God, whether substantive or adjectival, are attributes belonging to God insofar as he is considered as related to created things, or manifested through them. For example, take El . . . which signifies nothing other than 'powerful', as all agree and belongs to God only through his pre-eminence . . . . The qualities of his potency are explicated by

<sup>20</sup> Since, for Maimonides, there is no analogy between the existence of things which are possible of existence and that of the necessary of existence it is not clear to what extent we can render the latter notion intelligible. There is some indication (see *Guide* I.57; vol. 1, 133) that Maimonides understood the existence of the necessary of existence as atemporal and took such an existence to be beyond the limits of human reason insofar as temporality is an essential feature of human thought.

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of Spinoza's metaphysical views in the *TTP*, see my 'The Metaphysics of Spinoza's *Theological Political Treatise*', in Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Michael A. Rosenthal (eds.), *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 128–42.

additional adjectives, such as the great, the awful, the just, the merciful El (the mighty one) [*ut El magnus, tremendus, justus, misericors*].<sup>22</sup>

Two observations seem to be in order here. First, Spinoza's concurrence ('and it is a fact') with the claim that only the Tetragrammaton indicates God's essence is not demanded by his polemical objectives. His argument would have held even had he not endorsed 'the Hebrews' claim, i.e. had he just showed that *according to the biblical authors* God's essence was not known to the obedient and pious patriarchs. Therefore, I suggest that we should take the '*et revera*' interpolation seriously as communicating Spinoza's genuine agreement with this interpretation of the Tetragrammaton, especially if the ensuing view of God's essence turns out to be in agreement with Spinoza's exposition of his metaphysics in other texts. Indeed, earlier in the *TTP*, Spinoza makes clear that he understands the Tetragrammaton to denote existence in all the three tenses together:

Indeed, if anyone will examine without prejudice what Moses says, he will clearly find that Moses' belief about God was this, that he is a Being who has always existed, exists, and will always exist [*quod sit ens, quod semper existit, existit, et semper existet*]. That is why he gives God the name Jehova, which in Hebrew expresses the three tenses of the verb 'to be' [*quod Hebraice haec tria tempora existendi exprimit*].<sup>23</sup>

If we combine Spinoza's claims in these two passages from the *TTP*, we can conclude that he believed that the Tetragrammaton denotes God's 'absolute essence', which is nothing but a unique kind of existence.

I come now to the second point. Many medieval commentators with whom Spinoza was acquainted (such as Ibn-Ezra, Gersonides, and Aquinas<sup>24</sup>) adopted the explanation of the Tetragrammaton and of

<sup>22</sup> G iii. 169/7–18; S 511.

<sup>23</sup> *TTP* II (G iii. 38/25; S 411).

<sup>24</sup> See Ibn Ezra's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, Exodus III, 14–15; Gersonides's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, Exodus III, 13–15; and Aquinas, *ST*, Ia, q. 13, a. 11; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, book I, ch. 22, sec. 10. Ibn-Ezra dedicated an entire treatise—*The Book of the Name* [*Sefer ha-Shem*]<sup>25</sup>—to the exploration of the 'Secret of the Name'. He also discusses the issue at length in his philosophical work, *The Foundations of Reverence and the Secret of the Torah* [*Yesod Morah ve-Sod Torah*], annotated critical edition by Joseph Cohen and Uriel Simon (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2007), 54–7 and 203–6. Cf. Warren Zev Harvey, 'Spinoza's Metaphysical Hebraism', in Heidi M. Ravven and Lenn E. Goodman (eds.), *Jewish Themes in*

'*Eheye asher Eheye*' as indicating existence, yet there is little doubt that Spinoza responds here primarily to Maimonides's discussion of the name of God in *Guide* I, chapters 59–63. Spinoza's claims that the Tetragrammaton 'is, strictly speaking, God's only name' and that all 'other names of God . . . are attributes belonging to God insofar as he is considered as related to created things' are just restatements of Maimonides's claims in *Guide* I.61 (quoted in section 1 above). In this context, Spinoza also explains that the name '*El Shaddai*' means in Hebrew 'the God who suffices [*Deus, qui sufficit*]' (G iii. 169/4; S 511). Compare this with Maimonides's claim that the meaning of the same name is '*He who is sufficient*' (*Guide* I.63; vol. 1, 155).<sup>25</sup> But if we are not yet convinced, let's consider the string of adjectives—'the great, the awful, the just, the merciful El (mighty one) [*ut El magnus, tremendous, justus, misericors*]'—at the very end of the quote from the thirteenth chapter of the *Theological Political Treatise*. Why does Spinoza pick precisely these adjectives? I am not aware of any discussion of this question in the existing literature, yet I think we can give this question a definitive answer.

In the midst of his discussion of the essence of God and the meaning of the Tetragrammaton, Maimonides quotes at length and pours many

*Spinoza's Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 110 and 114n.23. For Yehuda Helevi's interpretation of the Tetragrammaton, see Warren Zev Harvey, 'Judah Halevi's Interpretation of the Tetragrammaton' [in Hebrew], in M. M. Bar-Asher, S. Hopkins, S. Stroumsa, and B. Chiesa (eds.), *A Word Fitly Spoken*, Studies in Mediaeval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān presented to Haggai Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem: The Ben-Zvi Institute, 2007), 125–32. The view of the Tetragrammaton as indicating God's self-necessitated existence appears also in Avraham ha-Kohen Herrera's *Beit Elohim* [*The House of God*] (Amsterdam: Immanuel Benvenishti, 1755), 33. This is a Hebrew translation (from the original Spanish) by Yitzhak Aboav who was one of the rabbis of the Amsterdam community at Spinoza's time and might have been one of Spinoza's teachers. The question of Herrera's possible influence on Spinoza is still unresolved. Rabbi Saul Mortera, one of the leaders of the Jewish community of Amsterdam and Spinoza's teacher, also cites approvingly Maimonides's interpretation of the Tetragrammaton in *Guide* I.61. See Mortera, *Giveat Shaul* [Hebrew: Saul's Hill] (Warsaw, 1912), 60 (the reference to *Guide* I.81 in this edition of *Giveat Shaul* is an error).

<sup>25</sup> Spinoza adopts Maimonides's interpretation of the name 'Shaddai', while rejecting the more common view suggested by Ibn-Ezra, Kimhi, and Nachmanides who derive the name from the verb 'shadad' (i.e. strong, violent). Notice that in Modern Hebrew the last verb (i.e. 'shadad') has the much more concrete and restricted meaning of 'to robe'. See William Weintraub, *The German Translations of the Pentateuch* (Chicago: The College of Jewish Studies Press, 1969), 111.

praises ('would that all dicta were like it') upon a certain Talmudic story (or dicta):

Someone who came into the presence of Rabbi Hanina said [in prayer]: God the Great, the Valiant, the Terrible, the Mighty, the Strong, the Tremendous, the Powerful. Thereupon [Rabbi Hanina] said to him: Have you finished all the praises of your Master? Even as regards the first three epithets [used by you] we could not have uttered them if Moses our Master had not pronounced them in the Torah (Deut. 10:17), and the Men of the Great Synagogue<sup>26</sup> had not [subsequently] come and established [their use] in prayer. And you come and say all this?<sup>27</sup>

Maimonides, like Rabbi Haninah, strongly protests against the use of anthropomorphic language, and in his discussion of the meaning of the Tetragrammaton in the chapters that follow he invokes this story several times. The string of adjectives used by Spinoza in chapter thirteen of the *TTP* is clearly referring to the story in the *Guide*.<sup>28</sup>

3. 'QUATENUS IDEM CONCIPITUR INFINITATEM ET  
NECESSITATEM EXISTENTIAE, SIVE AETERNITATEM  
EXPRIMERE'—GOD'S ESSENCE AS ETERNAL  
EXISTENCE OR NECESSARY OF EXISTENCE.

In several places in the *Ethics* and his other works, Spinoza asserts that in God's unique case essence and existence are one and the same. Consider, for example,

EIP20: God's existence and his essence are one and the same [*Dei existentia eiusque essentia unum et idem sunt*].

God cannot be said to enjoy existence. For the existence of God is God himself, as is his essence also.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> 'The Men of the Great Synagogue' are the figures who bridged the late biblical period and the very beginning of the *Mishnaic* period (the early Hebrew layer of the Talmud), roughly in the fourth and third centuries BCE.

<sup>27</sup> *Guide* I.59; vol. 1, 140. Cf. *Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot*, 33b.

<sup>28</sup> Though interestingly Spinoza inserts 'justus' and 'misericors' into the string.

<sup>29</sup> *KVII.i* (G i. 252/7). Cf. *KVI.i* (G i. 15/17)—'God's existence is [his] essence', and *CM I.ii* (G i. 238/28)—'in God essence is not distinguished from existence'. In *EIP11S* Spinoza makes a closely related claim: '[God's] existence is nothing but its essence [*nihil aliud est, quam eius essentia*]' (G ii. 54/25). I take this last claim as reducing God's existence to his essence,

On the other hand, the definition that opens the *Ethics* states:

EID1: By *cause of itself* I understand that whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing [*Per causam sui intelligo id, cuius essentia involvit existentiam, sive id, cuius natura non potest concipi nisi existens*].

What does Spinoza mean by saying that the essence of the ‘cause of itself’ *involves* existence? To twenty-first-century ears the claim might imply that the essence of God is *not* strictly identical with existence; it *involves* existence, but it *also involves* other things (or qualities). In other words, the Latin ‘*involvit*’ (through its English cognate ‘involves’) might give us the impression that if  $x$  *involvit*  $y$ , then  $x$  is not identical with  $y$  (or that there is more to  $x$ , than being merely  $y$ ).

The Latin ‘*involvere*’ appears very frequently in the *Ethics* (more than a hundred times). Yet until recently there was hardly any attempt to clarify the semantic field of the term. Presumably, this was so because it did not appear to be a technical term, and it was very tempting to translate ‘*involvit*’ by its English cognate ‘involves’ and leave things at that. In a most valuable note in a recent article, Alan Gabbey points out the centrality and importance of the term and suggests that

Spinoza uses *involvere* to mean ‘to contain necessarily’, that is ‘to imply’ or ‘to entail’, though implication seems closer than entailment to the notion of necessary containment. Moreover, *involvere* was used interchangeably with *implicare* by scholastic writers.<sup>30</sup>

It is also clear that *involvere* is closely related to two other crucial verbs of the *Ethics*. In EIP19D Spinoza explains *involvere*, *pertinere* and *exprimere* in terms of each other.<sup>31</sup>

though probably not as a strict identity claim (which excludes anything else from belonging to God’s essence).

<sup>30</sup> Alan Gabbey, ‘Spinoza, Infinite Modes, and the Infinitive Mood’, *Studia Spinozana* 16 (2008), 47–8n.10. Presumably, ‘necessary containment’ is the relation by which one notion refers to another. For example, a mode involves the essence of substance (EIP45) not by containing the substance as part, but rather by necessarily referring to the essence of the substance, of which it is a mode. Another work which contains some valuable discussion of the *involvere* relation is Julie R. Klein, ‘“By Eternity I Understand”: Eternity According to Spinoza’, *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, 51 (2002), 295–324.

<sup>31</sup> For God (by D6) is substance, which (by P11) necessarily exists, i.e. (by P7) to whose nature it pertains to exist, or (what is the same) from whose definition it follows that he exists; and therefore (by D8), he is eternal. Next, by God’s attributes are to be understood *what* (by

The closest Spinoza comes to defining the *involvere* relation is in EIIIP49D: '[T]o say that A must involve the concept of B is the same as to say that A cannot be conceived without B.' This is not the place for a thorough study of this important term, but as a preliminary clarification, I would suggest that, for Spinoza, for  $x$  to involve  $y$  is a certain asymmetric (though not anti-symmetric) relation, very close to the Spinozist relation of ' $x$  is conceived through  $y$ '.<sup>32</sup>

Now, just as ' $x$  is conceived through  $y$ ' does not imply that  $x$  is conceived through some *non- $y$*  as well,<sup>33</sup> so too ' $x$  involves  $y$ ' does not imply that  $x$  involves anything apart from  $y$ . Indeed, when we check closely Spinoza's use of this verb in the *Ethics*, we find that he uses it frequently to claim that God's (or the substance's) essence involves existence<sup>34</sup> (or necessary existence<sup>35</sup>), but he *never* claims that God's essence involves anything *apart from existence* (or necessary existence). *Had Spinoza thought that God's essence involves anything apart from existence, it would be extremely unreasonable for him to pass over such a crucial issue in silence.* Therefore, I believe we should conclude that Spinoza's claim that God's essence involves existence is perfectly compatible with the strict identity of God's essence and existence.<sup>36</sup>

*D4) expresses an essence of the Divine substance, i.e. what pertains to substance. The attributes themselves, I say, must involve it itself.* But eternity pertains to the nature of substance (as I have already demonstrated from P7). Therefore each of the attributes must involve eternity, and so, they are all eternal.

(My italics.) I will discuss this crucial text shortly.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. EIIIP5D (G ii. 88/30), where Spinoza takes EIP10 ('Each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself') to imply that each attribute 'involves the concept of no other attribute'. Hence, he holds that, if  $x$  is not conceived through  $y$ ,  $x$  does not involve  $y$ , or (by contrapositive), if  $x$  involves  $y$ ,  $x$  is conceived through  $y$ . In E1A5, Spinoza takes ' $x$  is understood through  $y$ ' and ' $x$  involves  $y$ ' as equivalent. Since, for Spinoza, 'to conceive  $x$  through  $y$ ' and 'to understand  $x$  through  $y$ ' are equivalent, it would seem that ' $x$  involves  $y$ ' is also equivalent' to ' $x$  is conceived through  $y$ '.

<sup>33</sup> For example, an immediate infinite mode is conceived through its attribute, and not through anything else.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, EIP7D and EIP11D.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, EIIIP10D1 ('the being of substance involves necessary existence') and EVP30D.

<sup>36</sup> Another interesting consideration that seems to support the strict identity of essence and existence in Spinoza's God emerges from Spinoza's understanding of essence. Spinoza considers essence as the necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of the thing of which it is the essence:

I say that to the essence of anything belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited and which being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away; or that without

We are coming very close to answering the question ‘What is the essence of Spinoza’s God?’, but we are not quite there. In EVP30D Spinoza claims that

Eternity is the very essence of God insofar as this involves necessary existence [*Aeternitas est ipsa Dei essentia, quatenus haec necessariam involvit existentiam*] (by EID8).

The definition of eternity, invoked in EVP30D, states,

By *eternity* I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing [*Per aeternitatem intelligo ipsam existentiam, quatenus ex sola rei aeternae definitione necessario sequi concipitur*].

And Spinoza explains this definition by the following:

Exp.: For such existence, like the essence of a thing, is conceived as an eternal truth, and on that account cannot be explained [*explicari non potest*] by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end.<sup>37</sup>

In the existing literature there is some debate about Spinoza’s understanding of eternity (*aeternitas*), and particularly, the doctrine of the mind’s eternity, developed at the very end of the *Ethics*.<sup>38</sup> The latter issue is complicated for several reasons, not the least of which is the

which the thing can neither be or nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing (EIID2).

Were the essence of God to be existence plus another element *z*, it would mean that existence being given is not sufficient for God to be posited (as long as *z* does not obtain as well). In other words, it would mean that there could be existence without God, a view Spinoza undoubtedly rejects. On EIID2 and some of the problems involved in Spinoza’s understanding of essence, see Don Garrett, ‘Spinoza on the Essence of the Human Body and the Part of the Mind that is Eternal’, in Olli Koistinen (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza’s Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 284–302, at 286–7n.4.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. ‘I call this infinite existence eternity, which is to be attributed to God alone, and not to created things, *even though its duration should be without beginning or end*’ (CM II.i; G i. 252/17–18; my italics).

<sup>38</sup> Some commentators understand Spinoza’s doctrine of the mind’s eternity to be merely sempiternal (i.e. as indicating everlasting existence). For this view, see Martha Kneale, ‘Eternity and Sempiternity’, in Marjorie Grene (ed.), *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Anchor Books, 1973), 227–40, and Alan Donagan, *Spinoza* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 107–13. The opposite, timeless, reading of the mind’s eternity is supported by Diane Steinberg, ‘Spinoza’s Theory of the Eternity of the Mind’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 11 (1981), 55–65, and Steven Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 262.



religious and political context which would have motivated Spinoza to avoid openly rejecting personal survival, even had he believed in it. Fortunately, we do not have to delve into this thorny issue. It suffices here to register that the primary meaning of *aeternitas* in Spinoza, as expressed in the official definition of the term in EID8E, is *explicitly* contrasted with sempiternity, or in Spinoza's words, with 'duration [that] is conceived to be without beginning or end.'<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Spinoza stresses several times that 'in eternity, there is neither *when*, nor *before*, nor *after*' (EIP33S2),<sup>40</sup> and that in eternity 'all things are at once' (TIE §92). Similarly, Spinoza argues, 'we cannot ascribe future existence to God, because existence is of his essence'.<sup>41</sup>

EID8 clearly rejects any conception of eternity as limitless duration,<sup>42</sup> but we should also pay attention to the positive content of the definition. The definition not only tells us that eternity is *existence*, but it also tells what *kind* of existence it is—'existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing'—i.e. *the existence of a thing whose existence follow necessarily from its own essence*.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, in EIP23S Spinoza relies on his definition of eternity in order to identify eternity with the 'necessity of existence [*necessitate existentiae*]' which each attribute is

<sup>39</sup> Even Kneale who supports the sempiternal interpretation of mind eternity concedes that the definition of eternity at the opening of the *Ethics* is strictly atemporal. It is only 'by the time he came to write Part V', claims Kneale, that Spinoza changed his view and 'was thinking in a more Aristotelian way' ('Eternity and Sempiternity', 238).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. CM I.iii (G i. 243/12), 'In Eternity there is no when, not before, or after, nor any other affection of time', and CM II.i (G i. 251/1).

<sup>41</sup> CM II.i (G i. 252/13).

<sup>42</sup> See further CM II.i (G i. 251/24) for Spinoza's critique of those who consider eternity 'a species of duration', and do not distinguish between God's eternity and the (infinite) duration of created things. I will shortly address the issue of the eternity of infinite modes.

<sup>43</sup> Were we to use Ibn Sina's terminology we should say that eternity is the existence of being which is 'necessary of existence'. For Ibn Sina, a thing that is possible of existence can be 'either everlasting or [it] exists for a time but not all time' (Hourani, 'Ibn Sina on Necessary and Possible Existence', 76). The necessary of existence is timeless. I am not aware of any evidence that shows that Spinoza read Ibn Sina directly. Yet, I do not think this is impossible, since Hebrew and Latin translations of Ibn Sina should have been available in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Many traditional commentators on *Guide* I.57 begin their discussions with a note that Maimonides 'followed the opinion [*nimshach achar*] of Ibn Sina on this matter'. Such common remarks could have made Spinoza curious and sent him to consult Ibn Sina's works. Obviously, this is a mere speculation. What is clear is that Spinoza was exposed to Ibn Sina's view on the necessary and possible of existence at least through his reading of Maimonides and other medieval Jewish and Christian philosophers.

conceived to express,<sup>44</sup> and on two other occasions in the *Ethics* Spinoza uses the phrase ‘eternity or [*sive*] necessity’, presumably referring to his original conception of eternity as self-necessitated existence.<sup>45</sup> Some commentators suggest that Spinoza identifies eternity with necessity or necessary existence,<sup>46</sup> but this qualification is imprecise, since for Spinoza the existence of all things is necessary.<sup>47</sup> What is unique to eternity is its being *self-necessitated* (or necessitated by its mere essence), while all other things are necessary by virtue of their causes.

Letter 12 is one of Spinoza’s most difficult as well as intriguing texts.<sup>48</sup> One of the central topics of the letter is the distinction between eternity (*aeternitas*), duration (*duratio*) and time (*tempus*). In explaining the distinction between the first two, Spinoza claims,

[W]e conceive the existence of Substance to be entirely different from the existence of Modes.

The difference between Eternity and Duration arises from this. For it is only of Modes that we can explain the existence [*existentiam explicare possumus*] by Duration. But [we can explain the existence] of Substance by Eternity, i.e. the infinite enjoyment of existing, *or* (in bad Latin) of being. (G iv. 54/33–55/3)

<sup>44</sup> So if a mode is conceived to exist necessarily and be infinite, [its necessary existence and infinitude] must necessarily be inferred, *or* perceived through some attribute of God, insofar as that attribute is conceived to express infinity and *necessity of existence*, *or* (*what is the same, by D8*) *eternity*, i.e. (by D6 and P19), insofar as it is considered absolutely. (My italics.)

<sup>45</sup> See EIP10S (‘[N]othing in nature is clearer than that each being must be conceived under some attribute, and the more reality, or being it has, the more it has attributes which express necessity, *or* eternity’), and EIVP62D (‘Whatever the Mind conceives under the guidance of reason, it conceives under the same species of eternity, *or* necessity’).

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Kneale, ‘Eternity and Sempiternity’, 235–8, and Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 63. Unfortunately, recent scholarship on early modern metaphysics is mostly insensitive to this distinction between different kinds of necessary existence (i.e. necessary existence by virtue of one’s essence as opposed to necessary existence by virtue of one’s cause). In the very few places where Spinoza seems to equate eternity with necessity *simpliciter* (see the previous note), he is presumably using the term as an abbreviation for ‘self-necessitated existence’.

<sup>47</sup> For Spinoza’s distinction between things which are necessary by virtue of their essence and things which are necessary by virtue of their cause, see EIP33S1. For an insightful discussion of this crucial distinction and of Spinoza’s necessitarianism in general, see Don Garrett, ‘Spinoza’s Necessitarianism’, in Yirmiyahu Yovel (ed.), *God and Nature: Spinoza’s Metaphysics* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 191–218.

<sup>48</sup> From Letter 81 we learn that Spinoza circulated copies of Letter 12 (which was called in Spinoza’s circle ‘The Letter on the Infinite’) among his friends in his last years. This suggests that Spinoza more or less subscribed to the views expressed in this letter even in his late period.

Spinoza's use of the verb '*explicare*' in this passage may seem a bit odd. It does not imply that there is an existence that is neither eternal nor durational, but rather that existence can be explicated either as duration or as eternity. Eternity is the existence of substance, or of the thing whose essence and existence are one and the same, while duration is the existence of modes, or things whose existence is different from their essence.<sup>49</sup> Spinoza states the very same understanding of the nature of duration in a critical note addressing certain opponents:

[T]hey have erred because they have ascribed duration to things only insofar as they judged them to be subject to continuous variation and not, *as we do, insofar as their essence is distinguished from their existence.*<sup>50</sup>

Whether modes are *in some sense* eternal (in the strict, atemporal, sense of E1D8) is an interesting question,<sup>51</sup> but it is, I think, clear that God's essence falls under the eternity defined in EID8 (see EIP20D and its reliance of EID8).

Before we can conclude this section, let me address one crucial problem. In EIP21 Spinoza states and proves that:

All things which follow from the absolute nature of any of God's attributes have always had to exist and be infinite, or are through the same attribute, eternal and infinite.

The immediate infinite modes—as these entities are commonly called<sup>52</sup>—are described here as 'eternal', but this seems to contradict Spinoza's claim that the existence of modes is duration while eternity is the existence of substance.

<sup>49</sup> A similar formulation appears in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* in a paragraph whose title is 'What eternity is; What duration is': 'From our earlier division of being into being whose essence involves existence and being whose essence involves only possible existence, there arises the distinction between eternity and duration' (CM Liv; G i. 244/13–15).

<sup>50</sup> CM II.i (G i. 251/17–19; my italics).

<sup>51</sup> Modes can be conceived '*sub specie aeternitatis*', and it is this conception which allows Spinoza to speak of attributing 'the very nature of existence' (i.e. eternity), not duration, to singular things, or modes, as long as one conceives them as flowing from the necessity of God's essence. See EIP45S and the end of Part V of the *Ethics*. Such a conception is in fact a conception of substance.

<sup>52</sup> On the infinite modes, see Tad M. Schmaltz, 'Spinoza's Mediate Infinite Mode', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 35 (1997), 199–235.

Though the last point may at first appear as a blunt contradiction, we can sort it out if we pay attention to the following observations. Firstly, the phrase in *EIP21* which asserts that infinite modes ‘have *always* had to exist [*semper . . . existere debuerunt*]’ is far more consistent with everlasting, as opposed to atemporal, existence.<sup>53</sup> Secondly, the demonstration of *EIP21* does not show that infinite modes are eternal in the strict, atemporal, sense, but only that these modes ‘cannot have a *determinate* duration’ (G ii. 66/13; my italics). This obviously allows for the infinite modes to have *indeterminate* (or infinite) duration. Nowhere in this demonstration does Spinoza prove, or even attempt to prove, that infinite modes are atemporal. Since Spinoza was acutely aware of the distinction between endless duration and atemporality (see *EID8E*), it would be very odd for him to state one thesis and prove the other. Thirdly, in *EIP21D* Spinoza does not at all mention his definition of eternity as atemporal self-necessitated existence (*EID8*). Were Spinoza to argue that the immediate infinite modes are eternal in the strict sense of *EID8*, the first thing he should have done is appeal to *EID8*.<sup>54</sup> Now, Spinoza does mention *EID8* in his discussion of the infinite modes in *EIP23D*, and one might be tempted to consider this as evidence that the infinite modes are eternal in the strict sense of *EID8*. Yet, upon closer examination we may notice that in *EIP23D*, when Spinoza invokes *EID8*, he does so in order to identify eternity with ‘an attribute of God . . . insofar as it is considered *absolutely*’ (my italics), but this last characterization is clearly *not* true of the immediate infinite modes. The latter ‘follow from the absolute nature of any of God’s attributes’, but they are not this absolute nature itself.

Finally, we have clear evidence that Spinoza recognized another notion of eternity—eternity as everlastingness—as long as it is not applied to God (who is eternal in the strict, atemporal, sense). Consider the following passage from the *Cogitata*:

<sup>53</sup> This point is also stressed by Wolfson (Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 2 vols. [New York: Schocken, 1969], I, 377). Two other commentators who qualify the eternity of infinite modes in *EIP21* as mere everlastingness, in contrast to the eternity of substance, are Appuhn (Spinoza, *Œuvres*, ed. and trans. Charles Appuhn [Paris: Flammarion, 1965], III, 347), and Gueroult (Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza 1. Dieu. (Éthique, 1.)* [Spinoza] [Paris: Aubier, 1968], 309).

<sup>54</sup> Spinoza invokes *EID8* in almost all places where he proves the eternity of anything.

So we pass to the second question and ask whether what has been created could have been created from eternity.

*What is denoted here by the words: from eternity*

To understand the question rightly, we must attend to this manner of speaking: *from eternity*. For by this we wish to signify here something *altogether different from what we explained previously when we spoke of God's eternity*. Here we understand nothing *but a duration without any beginning of duration*, or a duration so great that, even if we wished to multiply it by many years, or tens of thousands of years, and this product in turn by tens of thousands, we could still never express it by any number, however large. (CM I.x; G i. 270/17–25; my italics).

In this passage Spinoza introduces a certain 'second best' eternity, that is 'altogether different' from God's eternity. Unlike God's timeless eternity, the 'second best' eternity which belongs only to created things, is identified with unlimited duration. Notice the expression 'from eternity' that Spinoza associates with this kind of eternity. In the following passage from the *Short Treatise* Spinoza applies it explicitly to the immediate infinite modes:

Turning now to universal *Natura naturata*, or those modes or creatures which immediately depend on, or have been created by God . . . we say, then, that these have been created *from all eternity* and will remain *to all eternity*, immutable, a work as great as the greatness of the workman. (KV I.ix; G i. 48/3–9; my italics)<sup>55</sup>

We have, I believe, very strong evidence showing that the eternity of the infinite modes (even of the immediate infinite modes) is, unlike God's

<sup>55</sup> Similarly, in EIP17S, Spinoza claims:

[F]rom God's supreme power, or infinite nature, infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, i.e. all things, have necessarily flowed, or *always [semper]*, follow by the same necessity and in the same way as from the nature of a triangle it follows, *from eternity and to eternity [ab aeterno et in aeternum sequitur]*, 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*.

(My italics.) Notice the equivalence of *semper* and *ab aeterno et in aeternum*, which is perfectly consistent with Spinoza's claim in the *CM* that the expressions 'from eternity' and 'to eternity' indicate boundless duration. I take the actualization of God's omnipotence to be the causation of the infinite modes by God's essence (see the next section for a brief discussion of God's power). Indeed, for Spinoza, triangles and their properties are merely everlasting. For a discussion of Spinoza's strong anti-Platonist view of the nature and existence of numbers, see Yitzhak Y. Melamed, 'The Exact Science of Non-Beings: Spinoza's View of Mathematics', *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, 49 (2000), 3–22.

eternity, merely everlastingness (i.e. infinite duration).<sup>56</sup> Indeed, in Letter 12 Spinoza stresses that duration flows from eternity (G ii. 57/18). Spinoza stresses in several places that eternity truly belongs *only* to God.<sup>57</sup> Arguably, in all these places he is speaking of eternity in its strict sense which completely excludes duration and time.

In this part we have studied closely Spinoza's identification of essence and existence in God. At this point we should take up a question which may have been lurking in our minds for quite a while: what version of the Identity Thesis does Spinoza endorse? Oddly enough, Spinoza seems to endorse each of the three versions of the Identity Thesis, presented at the beginning of this paper.<sup>58</sup> In some places Spinoza identifies God's essence with God's existence (IT<sub>1</sub>).<sup>59</sup> In other places he claims that God's essence involves 'existence', without any qualification of the term (IT<sub>2</sub>),<sup>60</sup> and, finally, in further cases, Spinoza identifies God's essence with 'necessary existence', or rather, self-necessitated existence, or eternity (IT<sub>3</sub>).<sup>61</sup> Spinoza's endorsement of all three variants can be rendered consistent, if we understand IT<sub>1</sub> and IT<sub>3</sub> as elaborations of IT<sub>2</sub>. In other words, the essence of Spinoza's God is nothing but existence, but when we consider Spinoza's bifurcation of existence into eternity and duration,<sup>62</sup> there is no doubt that God's

<sup>56</sup> Cf. H.F. Hallett, *Aeternitas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), 70, who similarly stresses that the expressions 'from all eternity' and 'to all eternity' 'imply not *aeternitas* but *semper aeternitas*'. We have seen earlier (note 50) that there is a unique sense in which even finite modes can be conceived as strictly eternal, i.e. as having 'the very nature of existence' (EIP45S). Are infinite modes eternal in this limited sense? Unlike finite modes, infinite modes cannot be 'only comprehended in God's attributes' without having duration (EIP8C), since there is nothing that can rule out the actualization of the essence of an infinite mode. Yet, insofar infinite modes, just like finite modes, persevere in existing by a force 'which follows from the eternal necessity of God's nature' (EIP45S; G ii. 127/3), they seem to qualify for the aforementioned sense of eternity. I am indebted to Andrew Youpa for pressing me on this point.

<sup>57</sup> 'And I call this infinite existence Eternity, which is to be attributed to God alone, and not to any created thing, even though its duration should be without beginning or end' (CM II.i; G i. 252/17–19). Cf. Spinoza's critique of those who think that eternity is 'something beyond the divine essence' (CM II.i; G i. 252/11).

<sup>58</sup> See §1 above.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, EIP20 and EIP11S (G ii. 54/25).

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, EIP7D, EIP11D, and Spinoza's claim in EIP19D that existence pertains to God's essence.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, EIP10D1 and EVP30D. Similarly, see Spinoza's claim in Letter 35 that God's nature of essence 'involves necessary existence'.

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of the implications of this fundamental bifurcation, see my 'Inherence, Causation, and Conceivability in Spinoza', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, forthcoming.

existence is of the former kind. In fact, it is precisely  $IT_2$  itself, which demands that duration cannot be ascribed to God insofar as duration is the existence of things whose essence is distinct from their existence. Thus, the identification of God's essence with self-necessitated existence ( $IT_3$ ) is the immediate result of the more general identity of essence and existence *per se* in God ( $IT_2$ ).

We have arrived at the conclusion that God's essence is nothing but self-necessitated existence, or eternity. What remains for us to do is to see how this new understanding of God's essence illuminates Spinoza's view of the divine attributes, but before we turn to this climactic part of the paper, let me address another issue which might trouble some readers.

In contemporary scholarship, especially in France, there is a tendency to identify God's essence with power (*potentia*), based on Spinoza's claim in *EIP*<sub>34</sub> that 'God's power is his essence itself [*Dei potentia est ipsa ipsius essentialis*]'.<sup>63</sup> This claim does not necessarily conflict with my claim that Spinoza identifies God's essence with existence, since God's essence could be identical with both power and existence. That being said, let me note that I tend to think that *EIP*<sub>34</sub> does *not* tell the reader what God's essence is. As far as I can see, *EIP*<sub>34</sub> simply states that God's power (i.e. his causality) is not distinct from, or supplementary to, his essence. In other words, *EIP*<sub>34</sub> asserts that it is God's essence – eternity – which is the cause of all things (himself included<sup>64</sup>), and one need not posit any additional element (such as divine will) to explain God's efficacy. God's essence cannot be durational and thus it must exclude any notion of power that is temporalized. When one purifies the notion of power from any temporal elements little is left beyond efficient causality.

That, for Spinoza, power is nothing over and above being a cause we can learn from the following passage from the *Cogitata Metaphysica*: 'By a power of doing each one . . . nothing else can be understood than a cause sufficient for each one.'<sup>65</sup> This is consistent with Spinoza's repeated warnings that one should not confuse his notion of power with the manner in which this concept is commonly conceived.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *TTP* VI (G iii. 83/8; S 446). This reading is developed nicely by Sherry Deveaux in her recent book, *The Role of God in Spinoza's Metaphysics* (London: Continuum, 2007).

<sup>64</sup> See *EIP*<sub>11S</sub>, where God's self-caused existence is cashed out in terms of having 'an absolutely infinite power of existing'. I am indebted to an anonymous referee for stressing this point.

<sup>65</sup> *CM* II.xii; G i. 280/25.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, *EIIP*<sub>3S</sub>.

Notice that the demonstration of *EIP*<sub>34</sub> simply relies on the claims that God's essence is the cause of his own existence (*EIP*<sub>11</sub>) and of the existence of all things (*EIP*<sub>16</sub> and *EIP*<sub>16C</sub>). In *EIIP*<sub>3S</sub>, Spinoza provides a brief summary of his aim in *EIP*<sub>34</sub>: '[W]e have shown in *EIP*<sub>34</sub> that God's power is nothing except God's active essence.' All these passages seem to say nothing over and above the claim that God's essence is the cause of all things. In several places in his early works, Spinoza stresses that God's power, intellect, and will are not distinct from his essence (see, for example, *DPP*<sub>IP</sub><sub>17C</sub>; G i. 177/20). In all of these places, Spinoza is simply asserting that God's essence suffices to perform the functions of will, intellect, and power, and hence that there is no need for such independent faculties in God (which would compromise his simplicity).<sup>67</sup> These passages do not suggest that the will is the essence of God, but only that the functions of what we call 'will' are performed by God's essence. The same I believe is true about the relation of power to God's essence. Indeed, one should remark that Spinoza has a typical expression to indicate strict identity ('be one and the same [*unum et idem esse*]'),<sup>68</sup> and that he does *not* use it in *EIP*<sub>34</sub> or in any other discussion of the relation between God's power and essence.<sup>69</sup>

#### 4. THE ATTRIBUTES AS SELF-CONCEIVED EXISTENCE

According to Spinoza, God has infinitely many attributes (*EID*<sub>6</sub>), but only two attributes—Extension and Thought—are accessible to the human mind (*EIIA*<sub>5</sub>). Even these two attributes do not resemble the traditional divine attributes. Spinoza replaces the traditional attributes of omnipresence and omniscience by infinite Extension and infinite Thought.<sup>70</sup> Why does Spinoza make this shift? One clear difference between the traditional

<sup>67</sup> In his late work Spinoza changed his mind and denied that will or intellect pertain to God's essence.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, *EIP*<sub>20</sub> and *EIIP*<sub>7S</sub>.

<sup>69</sup> Another consideration against the identification of God's essence with power is that in *EIVP*<sub>4D</sub> Spinoza refers to 'the universal power of the whole nature' as an aggregate, while *natura naturans* is supposed to be indivisible (Letter 12; G iv. 55/4–12).

<sup>70</sup> Spinoza seems to allude to this intentional re-conception of the divine attributes when claiming that for matters of faith it does not matter 'whether one believes that God is omnipresent in essence or in potency' (*TTP* XIV; G iii. 178). I believe that by 'omnipresence in essence' he has in mind his own pantheism, while 'omnipresence in potency' is a reference to the traditional conception of divine omnipotence.



and Spinozist attributes is that the former relate to God as a *person* or subject who has the qualities of being omniscient and omnipresent. Spinoza avoids this anthropomorphic language by depersonalizing the attributes.<sup>71</sup> This would only be natural for someone who thinks that the main problem of traditional religion is that it casts God in its own, human, image.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, as I will shortly argue, Spinoza's identification of God's essence with self-necessitated existence should be seen in this light as well; it is an attempt to avoid anthropomorphism without embracing the religion of ignorance advanced by negative theology.

If God's essence is eternal existence, and an attribute is defined as 'what the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence' (*EID4*), how are we to understand the relation between the attributes and God's eternity (i.e. self-necessitated existence)? I would like to suggest that for Spinoza the attributes are adequate self-explanatory conceptions of self-necessitated existence (and at the same time, the aspects of self-necessitated existence which are reflected by these conceptions).<sup>73</sup> They are *adequate* conceptions since the perceptions of the intellect (in *EID4*) cannot be illusory. They are self-explanatory insofar as each attribute cannot be conceived through another (*EIP10*), and they indicate self-necessitated existence since they share this essential nature of substance: eternity.

In order to support the last claim, let us have a close look at *EIP19*. Here Spinoza proves that the attributes are eternal, i.e. that they exist by their own self-necessity. Notice how Spinoza begins by (1) showing that substance is self-necessitated or eternal, then (2) claiming that the definition of attribute entails that the attributes must share the essence of substance, and hence (3) that just like substance, the attributes too 'involve eternity, and so, they are all eternal'.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. P. T. Geach, 'Spinoza and the Divine Attributes', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures*, 5 (1971), 15–27.

<sup>72</sup> See the appendix to part 1 of the *Ethics* and *EIP10S2* (G ii. 94/1–2).

<sup>73</sup> I develop and defend my interpretation of the attributes in part two of my forthcoming article 'The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance, Attributes, and Modes', in Michael Della Rocca (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). In that work I suggest that the distinction among the attributes (and between the substance and the attributes) is roughly a distinction of *reasoned reason*, i.e. that there must be features in the substance that are reflected by the attributes. Here I can provide only a brief outline.

P19: God is eternal, or all God's attributes are eternal.

Dem.: For God (by D6) is substance, which (by P11) necessarily exists, i.e. (by P7), to whose nature it pertains to exist, or (what is the same) from whose definition it follows that he exists; and therefore (by D8), he is eternal.

Next, by God's attributes are to be understood what (by D4) expresses the /an essence of the Divine substance, i.e. what pertains to substance. *The attributes themselves, I say, must involve it itself.* But eternity pertains to the nature of substance (as I have already demonstrated from P7). Therefore each of the attributes must involve eternity, and so, they are all eternal, q.e.d. (my italics)

In the proposition that follows Spinoza proves that 'God's essence and his existence are one and the same'. To prove this point Spinoza begins with the claim that (1) 'each of the attributes expresses existence' (proven in EIP19). Then, Spinoza recalls the definition of attribute (EID4) in order to assert that (2) 'the attributes explain [*explicant*]<sup>74</sup> God's eternal essence'. Relying on (1), Spinoza states (3) 'the attributes explain God's eternal existence'. He then points out (4) 'that itself [i.e. the attributes] which constitutes God's essence at the same time constitutes his existence', and concludes, (5) 'God's essence and his existence are one and the same'.<sup>75</sup>

The claim that the attributes 'constitute God's *existence*' is crucial for our purposes, since it reveals an undeniable and intimate relation between the attributes and God's *existence*. Spinoza asserts the very same point several times both in the *Ethics* and his other writings. Consider, for example, Spinoza's claim in Letter 10 that 'the existence of the attributes does not differ from their essence' (G iv. 47/15).<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> 'Explicate' (or 'unfold') could have been a better translation.

<sup>75</sup> 'Constitutes' cannot mean here 'be part of', since  $x$  can be part of both  $A$  and  $B$ , while  $A$  is not identical to  $B$ . This is not the place to elaborate on Spinoza's use of '*explicant*', but in order for the above proof to be valid it must be such that if  $x$  explicates  $A$ , and  $x$  explicates  $B$ , then  $A=B$ .

The complete demonstration runs: 'EIP20: *God's existence and his essence are one and the same.* Dem.: God (by P19) and all of his attributes are eternal, i.e. (by D8), each of his attributes expresses existence. Therefore, the same attributes of God which (by D4) explain God's eternal essence at the same time explain his eternal existence, i.e. that itself which constitutes God's essence at the same time constitutes his existence. So his existence and his essence are one and the same, q.e.d.'

<sup>76</sup> In EIP10D, and later again in EIP23D, Spinoza claims that the attributes express eternity (i.e. God's existence). In Letter 4, he argues, 'existence follows only from the definition, or idea, of some attribute, i.e. of a thing which is conceived through itself and

Do the attributes constitute separate essences of the substance? Or are they *parts* of self-necessitated existence that is the sole essence of substance? I believe that the answer to both questions should be negative. We cannot discuss here the issue in detail, but the outline of the view I would like to suggest is rather simple. Since substance is indivisible (EIP<sub>12</sub> and EIP<sub>13</sub>), the attributes cannot be parts of God's essence. God's indivisible essence is nothing but *self-necessitated existence*; and this essence has infinitely many aspects which are adequately discerned and conceived by the intellect. Let me explain this point briefly.<sup>77</sup>

Spinoza's famous definition of attribute (EID<sub>4</sub>) reads:

By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence [*Per attributum intelligo id, quod intellectus de substantia percipit, tanquam ejusdem essentiam constituens*].

Over a decade ago, Michael Della Rocca convincingly argued that though Spinoza's departure from Descartes's concept of principal attribute, and particularly Spinoza's introduction of the role of the intellect's perception into this concept, are significant,<sup>78</sup> the attributes cannot be illusory, since, for Spinoza, the intellect (either finite or infinite) does not err.<sup>79</sup> According to Della Rocca, the reason for Spinoza's departure from Descartes's definition of attribute is not that there is any error involved in the intellect's perception of the essence of substance, but rather that the essence of substance can be adequately conceived under infinitely many, and radically heterogeneous (having 'nothing in common'), descriptions. Hence, Della Rocca suggests a reformulation of Spinoza's definition of attribute as stating:

in itself' (G iv. 13/4–7). Finally, it is noteworthy that in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* Spinoza (being at the time, more or less, a good Cartesian) denies that Extension has 'of itself power to exist' (G i. 237/26), but this is because at this time he believes that Extension is *not* a divine attribute (G i. 237/35). Spinoza might have the same point in mind when he criticized Descartes's understanding of matter and extension in Letter 83, demanding that matter 'must be explicated through an attribute which expresses eternal and infinite essence'. I am indebted to an anonymous referee for the very last point.

<sup>77</sup> For a detailed elaboration and defense of this view, see the second part of my forthcoming article, 'The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics'.

<sup>78</sup> For Descartes's concept of principal attribute, see *Principles*, I.53 and 64.

<sup>79</sup> Michael Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* [Representation] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 157–71.

By attribute I understand that which constitutes the essence of substance under some description or way of conceiving that substance.<sup>80</sup>

Apart from a negligible worry about the use of the expression ‘way of conceiving’ (which is lexically too close to Spinoza’s *modus*), I agree with this reading. But since the attributes are not illusory there must be an infinite plurality of features or aspects of the substance itself which are discerned by the intellect as infinitely many attributes.<sup>81</sup> We have seen earlier that the attributes constitute God’s *existence* (which is identical with his essence). Therefore, I believe we can conclude that each attribute is an adequate conception (and at the same time, an aspect) of God’s existence. Each conception (or aspect) of the self-necessitated existence (i.e. God’s existence) is causally and conceptually independent from every other, but these are (isomorphic) conceptions (and aspects) of one and the same *res*. There is no relation of aggregation between these various facets of existence, because self-necessitated extension (the extended substance) and self-necessitated thought (the thinking substance) are numerically identical (See *EIP14&D* and *EIIP7S*), and they do not constitute separate worlds (Letter 64). This strict and indivisible unity of existence is the object of a radical plurality of infinitely many, self-explanatory, conceptions or aspects.<sup>82</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the paper we studied the Avicennian and Maimonidean notion of the necessary of existence. We saw that the necessary of existence is a simple being whose essence is nothing but existence. We also studied the Maimonidean interpretation of the Tetragrammaton as indicating God’s essence qua existence. A close

<sup>80</sup> Della Rocca, *Representation*, 166.

<sup>81</sup> If the infinite plurality of the attributes were generated by the intellect alone while the substance itself had no plurality of aspects, the plurality of the attributes would be illusory (or to use contemporary terminology, the distinction among the attributes would be a distinction of reasoning reason). Notice that the plurality of aspects does not compromise the indivisibility of substance, since aspects are not parts.

<sup>82</sup> The attributes are also the adequate conceptions of existence that is not self-necessitated, i.e. of things whose essence is distinct from their existence, or the modes. This is because the modes are in the substance and caused by the essence of the substance. Indeed, as Moreau suggests, eternity (the existence of *natura naturans*) seems to cause duration (the existence of *natura naturata*). See Pierre-François Moreau, *Spinoza. L’expérience et l’éternité* [*Spinoza*] (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), 507.

reading of a marginal passage in the *TTP* showed that Spinoza endorsed the view of the Tetragrammaton as indicating God's true essence, i.e. existence. We turned then to the *Ethics* in order to show that Spinoza also accepts the identification of God's essence with existence (particularly, self-necessitated existence, or eternity) in his major work. Our study clarified Spinoza's enigmatic definition of eternity as self-necessitated existence (a definition which has been commonly criticized as circular).<sup>83</sup> As it turned out, the circularity of this definition was not a crude methodological error, but a genuine conception of eternity. I have also untangled the stubborn and long-standing problem of the eternity of the infinite modes. Finally, we have shown that Spinoza ascribes the same feature of self-necessitated existence (or eternity) to the attributes, and that the attributes are just adequate, heterogeneous ('having nothing in common'), and self-explanatory conceptions of existence.

What motivated Spinoza to identify God with existence? One obvious answer is that the notion of existence is relatively free from anthropomorphic thinking.<sup>84</sup> But this answer needs to be deepened. Let me suggest one last hint in that direction. Spinoza accepts the radical epistemological view according to which the knowledge of God's essence is both *trivial* (EIP47) and the *sole beginning* of knowledge of all things (EIP10S2). The concept of existence seems to fit both characterizations. Indeed, Spinoza openly proclaims: 'what do we understand more clearly than . . . what existence is'.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> On the problem of the circularity of EID8, see Gueroult, *Spinoza*, 78, and Moreau, *Spinoza*, 503.

<sup>84</sup> On this issue, see my article 'Spinoza's Anti-Humanism: An Outline', in Carlos Fraenkel, Dario Perinetti, and Justin Smith (eds.), *The Rationalists: Between Tradition and Innovation* (Dordrecht and New York: Springer, 2011), 147–66.

<sup>85</sup> *CM I.ii* (G i. 239/27). Similarly, Avicenna claims that the idea of existence is one of the three primary ideas which do not require any other knowledge. See *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, 22 (book 1, ch. 5).

