

Appearing in *A Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*, edited by Olli Koistinen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009)

## Spinoza on the Essence of the Human Body and the Part of the Mind That Is Eternal

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The second half of *Ethics*, Part 5, presents Spinoza's theory of the participation of human minds in the eternal. Although this theory constitutes the culmination of the *Ethics*, it has often proven opaque to even its most attentive and penetrating readers. Edwin Curley has written candidly, "In spite of many years of study, I still do not feel that I understand this part of the *Ethics* at all adequately" (1988, 84). Jonathan Bennett memorably declared this part of the *Ethics* to be "an unmitigated and seemingly unmotivated disaster" and "rubbish which causes others to write rubbish" (1984, 357, 374).

Spinoza's central doctrines in this portion of the *Ethics* include the following:

1. There is in God an idea of the formal essence of each human body.
2. An idea of the formal essence of the human body remains after the destruction of the human body, and for this reason there is a part of the human mind that is eternal.
3. The wiser and more knowing one is, the greater is the part of one's mind that is eternal.

Each of these three central doctrines seems, on its face, to be inconsistent with the rest of Spinoza's philosophy; in fact, for each of the three doctrines, there are two different *ways* in which it seems inconsistent with the rest of his philosophy. The key

to resolving these apparent inconsistencies lies in understanding Spinoza's theory of *formal essences* and its connection to his theories of intellection and consciousness. Accordingly, this essay takes up these three central claims in order, explaining in each case (i) why the claim must be attributed to Spinoza, (ii) why the claim seems difficult to reconcile with the rest of his philosophy, and (iii) how an understanding of his theory of formal essences can resolve the apparent inconsistencies.

### 1. THE IDEA OF THE FORMAL ESSENCE OF THE BODY

The second half of Part 5 begins with the demonstration of two crucial and contrasting propositions:

The mind can neither imagine anything, nor recollect past things, except while the body endures. (5p21)

The Mind neither expresses the actual existence of its Body, nor conceives the Body's affections as actual, except while the Body endures (by 2p8c); consequently (by 2p26), it conceives no body as actually existing except while its body endures. Therefore, it can neither imagine anything (see the Definition of Imagination in 2p17s) nor recollect past things (see the Definition of Memory in 2p18s) except while the body endures, Q.E.D. (5p21d)

Nevertheless, in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human body, under a species of eternity. (5p22)

God is the cause, not only of the existence of this or that human Body, but also of its essence (by 1p25), which therefore must be conceived through the very essence of God (by 1a4), by a certain eternal necessity (by 1p16), and this concept must be in God (by 2p3), Q.E.D.<sup>1</sup> (5p22d)

It is clear from the demonstrations of these two consecutive propositions that Spinoza is invoking a distinction of some kind between the *actual existence* of a human body and the *formal essence* of a human body. The demonstration of 5p21 appeals to the corollary of 2p8, a proposition concerning the formal essences of “singular things [*res singulares*] that do not exist”:<sup>2</sup>

The ideas of singular things, or of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended in God’s infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of the singular things, or modes, are contained in God’s attributes. (2p8)

“Singular things” are defined in 2d7 as “things that are finite and have a determinate existence,” and these include human beings. (Of course, the metaphysical status of all singular things in Spinoza’s monistic metaphysics is as finite modes of the one substance, God; see 1p25c.) The corollary to 2p8 itself (from which Spinoza concludes that the mind “expresses actual existence” only while the body endures) goes on to contrast what can be said of the ideas of singular things that do *not* exist with what can be said of the ideas of singular things that *do* exist:

From this it follows that so long as singular things do not exist, except insofar as they are comprehended in God’s attributes, their objective being, or ideas,

do not exist except insofar as God's infinite idea exists. And when singular things are said to exist, not only insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, but insofar also as they are said to have duration, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration. (2p8c)

Similarly, the demonstration of 5p22 appeals to 1p25, in which Spinoza sharply distinguishes between the *essence* and the *existence* of things in order to affirm that God is the cause of both:

God is the efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence. (1p25)<sup>3</sup>

This use of the term “essence” (*essentia*) clearly refers to the *formal essence* (*essentia formalis*) of things. For although he later introduces (in 3p7 and 4p4) the separate and specialized notion of an “actual essence” (*essentia actualis*) of singular things – something identical to their striving to persevere in existence (i.e., *conatus* or appetite) – the actual essence of a thing exists only so long as the thing itself does, and is not properly contrasted with the thing's existence.<sup>4</sup>

Spinoza indicates (in 2p8, 2p8c, 1p33s1, and many other passages as well) that the reality or being of the formal essence of a singular thing – such as the formal essence of a human body – does not presuppose or entail the actual existence of that singular thing.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, 2p8s compares nonexistent singular things whose essences are contained in God's attributes (i.e., thought and extension, as well as infinitely many unknown divine attributes) to actually undrawn or undelineated

rectangles that are nevertheless contained within a circle (because points of the circle could constitute or determine their endpoints), even though the rectangles themselves could be said not to “exist” (at least not in the full-blooded sense in which drawn or delineated ones do).<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, he makes it equally clear, in many of the same passages, that the formal essence of a singular thing is *directly related* to the singular thing, and even provides a sense in which the singular thing itself can be said to have a kind of derivative being. (In 2p8c, for example, he writes of “singular things that do not exist, *except insofar as* they are comprehended in God’s attributes. . . .”) Hence, Spinoza appears to regard the formal essence of a singular thing as somehow being or grounding the at-least-sometimes-unactualized *possibility* of the singular thing’s existence – as noted by Alan Donagan (1973, 1988), R. J. Delahunty (1985), and Wallace Matson (1990). In this respect, they resemble Descartes’s “true and immutable natures” of things or Leibnizian essences – unchanging forms that can be instantiated or exemplified by existing things, and without which those things would not even be so much as possible.

Yet this immediately raises two problems. The first problem arises from the fact that Spinoza endorses *necessitarianism* – that is, the doctrine that whatever is possible is actual, and whatever is actual is necessary (see 1p16, 1p29, 1p33, 1p33s1, and 1p35d).<sup>7</sup> For if necessitarianism is true, then there *are* no genuinely unactualized possibilities for formal essences to be. The second problem arises from the fact that Spinoza endorses *parallelism* – that is, the doctrine that “the order and connection of ideas [of things] is the same as the order and connection of [those] things

[themselves]” (2p7).<sup>8</sup> This doctrine requires at least that, whenever there is a thing that stands in various causal relations to other things, there is *also* an idea of that thing, standing in parallel causal relations to ideas of those other things, and vice versa.<sup>9</sup> It thus seems to entail that a thing and the idea of that thing must share the same status with respect to actual existence and nonactualized possibility: that is, either a thing and its idea must be actualized together or they must be nonactualized together, for otherwise one of the two “orders” – namely, things and their ideas – will fail to be parallel to the other in its ontological and causal structure.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, by the further *mode-identity doctrine* of 2p7s, any mode of extension is really *identical to* the idea of that mode (being merely expressions under different attributes of the same modal being). Yet as 5p22d makes clear, the idea in God that “expresses the essence of this or that human body” is just the idea *of* the essence of the human body; for this idea is described simply as constituting the conception of that essence. Hence, if the essence of this or that human body is merely an unactualized possibility, then so, it seems, is the idea of (i.e., the “idea expressing”) the essence of that human body. Yet Spinoza disparages the idea that God has any “potential,” as opposed to “actual,” intellect (1p31s and 1p33s2), strongly suggesting that he would reject the notion that any mere possibilities of ideas ever remain unactualized in God. In any case, the mere unactualized possibility of an idea seems to be far less than what is required to support Spinoza’s theory of the real eternity of a part of the human mind. Thus, it seems that both Spinoza’s necessitarianism and his parallelism pose serious problems

for the interpretation of formal essences of human bodies as at-least-sometimes-unrealized possibilities.

To resolve these two difficulties, we must clarify the ontological status of the formal essences of singular things and of the ideas that are *of* them. Spinoza strongly implies that formal essences are truly *something* in their own right: for example, 1p25d argues that essences must be conceived through (and hence caused by) God precisely because, by 1p15, “*whatever is*” must be conceived through God. But according to 1p4d, “*there is nothing except substances and their affections*” (emphasis added), and, by 1d3, the “affections” of a substance are simply its modes. Because only God is a substance (1p14), it follows that, in order to be counted among “*whatever is,*” formal essences of singular things must be modes of God. This conclusion – that the formal essences of singular things are modes of God – is supported by the claim of 2p8 that these formal essences are “*contained in the attributes*” of God and by the corresponding claim of 5p22 that the idea of the essence of a human body is “*in God.*” This is because whatever is *in* a substance – other than that substance itself – is by definition (1d5) a mode of that substance.<sup>11</sup>

Every mode (i.e., state, modification, aspect, affection) of God is either (i) *infinite* and eternal, following from God’s “*absolute nature,*” either immediately or via other infinite modes, and so pervasive throughout the attribute of which it is a mode (1p21–p23);<sup>12</sup> or (ii) *finite* and determinate (i.e., limited) in its existence, following with equal necessity from God but only as and when God is modified or affected by another finite mode (1p28d).<sup>13</sup> But if the formal essences of singular

things are modes of God, they can hardly be finite modes. Because they have their own being or existence contained in the attributes of God regardless of when or whether the corresponding singular things themselves exist, it is hard to see why or how they could ever come into or go out of existence, as finite modes do. Their status as infinite modes is strongly confirmed in 5p23s by Spinoza's description of the parallel "idea, which expresses [i.e., is of] the essence of the body" as "a mode of thinking . . . which is necessarily eternal." Outside the *Ethics*, too, Spinoza indicates that (formal) essences are eternal, immutable, and infinite, writing in *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* 1.1.2 that "the essences of things are from all eternity, and will remain immutable to all eternity" (C, 61) and in *Metaphysical Thoughts* I.iii that the "existence" of things depends on the "series and order of causes," whereas the "essence" of things "depends [only] on the eternal laws of nature" (C, 307).

The formal essence of a singular thing is thus not identical to the singular thing itself – for the singular thing, having "a finite and determinate existence" (by 2d7), is a finite mode, whereas its formal essence is an infinite mode. As we have already noted, the being of the formal essence of a singular thing is not alone sufficient for the singular thing's actual existence; instead, the singular thing, as a finite mode, *can* actually exist only – and also *must* actually exist – whenever and wherever there actually exist finite causes with the causal power to bring that singular thing into existence. As we have also noted, however, the formal essences of singular things do somehow ground the actualizability of singular things themselves.



From these various clues, we can infer what the formal essence of a singular thing must be: it is the omnipresent modification or aspect of an attribute of God that consists in the attribute's general capacity to accommodate – through the general laws of its nature as an attribute – the actual existence of a singular thing of the given specific structure whenever and wherever the series of actual finite causes should actually determine it to occur.<sup>14</sup> Although the singular thing itself can exist only for a limited duration, this general modification of the attribute constituting the thing's formal essence is permanent and pervasive and follows universally, via the general laws of nature, from the “absolute” or unqualified nature of the attribute itself – just as we would expect of an infinite mode. Although the formal essence of a singular thing is not *identical* to the singular thing, it is nevertheless the essence “of” that singular thing, in the sense that the *instantiation of* that essence produces the singular thing itself.<sup>15</sup>

On the interpretation just offered, Spinoza's doctrine of formal essences is perfectly compatible with his necessitarianism. Because each formal essence is itself an infinite mode consisting in a permanent and pervasive feature of an attribute of God, following necessarily from that attribute's necessary nature, each such essence exists necessarily – as does the corresponding idea of that formal essence. Of course, it is true that the existence or nonexistence of a particular singular thing does not follow from the existence of its formal essence alone; and in this sense, the formal essence of a singular thing constitutes its actualizability without necessitating its actual existence. Nevertheless, for each particular point in what Spinoza calls “the

order of nature” (*ordo naturae*), either the existence or the nonexistence of a given singular thing *is* fully necessitated at that point – by the infinite modes (including the formal essences of things)<sup>16</sup> *in concert with* the necessary infinite series of actual finite causes (see 1p33s1). Thus, whatever does not exist at a particular point in the order of nature is not, all things considered, within God’s power to produce *at that point*; the actualization of its formal essence at that particular point is not, all things considered, possible.

The interpretation of formal essences just offered is also compatible with Spinoza’s parallelism. For according to this interpretation, the formal essences of singular things are existing infinite modes in their own right – and so are the ideas of (i.e., the ideas “expressing”) those formal essences. Singular things themselves, in contrast, are finite modes that exist for a limited duration – but so are the ideas of those singular things. In each case, the ontological status of an entity is precisely parallel to that of its corresponding idea.

## A2. THE ETERNAL PART OF THE MIND THAT REMAINS

*Ethics* 5p23 states, “The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal.” According to the demonstration of this proposition, which cites 5p22 and 2p8c, this eternal “something” that remains “pertains to the essence of the human mind” and is “an idea which expresses the essence of the human body.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, according to 5p38d and its scholium,<sup>18</sup> that which *remains* of the mind when the body perishes is also “a part of the human mind,” a part that – as 5p39s and 5p40c reiterate – is eternal. Because, as we have

seen, the idea “expressing the essence of the human body” in 5p22 is simply the idea of the essence of the human body, Spinoza clearly holds that the idea of the essence of a human body remains after the destruction of that human body and that, for this reason, there is a part of each human mind that is eternal.

However, this claim, too, is puzzling, and again in two different ways. First, Spinoza holds that the human mind just is the idea of the human body (2p13); so if there is some eternal part of the human *mind* that remains after the destruction of the *body*, then parallelism seems to require that there should likewise be an eternal part of the human *body* that remains after the destruction of the *mind*.<sup>19</sup> Yet how can there be a *part of the body* that is eternal? Second, it seems that an idea of the essence of the human body should constitute cognition *about* the essence of the human body. The so-called “Physical Digression” following 2p13s strongly suggests that this essence lies in or involves a certain “fixed pattern of motion and rest” that makes an extended singular thing what it is. Now, if an idea of the essence of the human body is the eternal part of the human mind, then it seems that cognition of the essence of the human body should be cognition that is somehow in the human mind. Yet human beings’ cognition of their own distinctive fixed patterns of motion and rest seems highly limited, even for most of the very wise. In fact, according to 5p40c, the part of the mind that is eternal is “the intellect,” which Spinoza identifies with the totality of one’s intellectual ideas (see 2p48s and 2p49s); but it seems that relatively little of one’s intellectual cognition concerns the pattern of motion and rest of one’s own

body. Thus, it seems that an idea of the formal essence of the human body does not have the right content to be or to explain the eternal part of the human mind.<sup>20</sup>

Once we have seen what the formal essence of the human body is, however, we are also in a position to see how that essence *can* constitute an eternal part of the human body, and hence how it can survive the destruction of the actually existing human mind. In order to appreciate this, consider first the part of the *mind* that is eternal. Spinoza states in 5p40c, “the eternal part of the Mind (by 5p23 and 5p29) is the intellect, through which alone we are said to act (by 3p3). But what we have shown to perish is the imagination (by 5p21), through which alone we are said to be acted on.” As this suggests, the imagination consists, for Spinoza, of passive (and also inadequate) ideas (3p53d, 5p28d), which he calls “cognition [*cognitio*] of the first kind,” whereas the intellect consists of active (and also adequate) ideas, which he calls “cognition of the second and third kinds.” Together, the imagination and the intellect can be said to compose the mind, at least insofar as the mind has ideas.<sup>21</sup> In Part 2 of the *Ethics* (2p17–p31), Spinoza explains imagination as awareness of changing modifications (i.e., states or affections) of the actually existing body. Intellection, however, does not consist in the awareness of any changing modification of the actually existing body. Rather, according to 5p29, it occurs only insofar as the mind “conceives the body’s essence under a species of eternity.” Hence, in distinguishing the imagination and the intellect as parts of the mind, Spinoza also distinguishes two different objects of awareness: (i) the changing modifications of the actually existing human body and (ii) the formal essence of the human body. As

his parallelism requires, Spinoza clearly includes among the parts of the human mind its *ideas of individual organs* constituting parts of the human body (2p15). But none of these ideas is itself the intellect or the (entire) imagination, which Spinoza also identifies as parts of the mind; and if the parts of the mind are not limited to ideas of spatially discrete parts of the body, then by parallelism, the parts of the body cannot be limited to its spatially discrete parts either. But if the parts of a body need not be limited to spatially discrete parts, then Spinoza is free to construe the formal essence of the human body as itself a part of the human body. For although it cannot be a spatially discrete part of the human body in the way that a particular organ is – as an infinite mode, it is an omnipresent aspect of extension, not limited in spatial extent – the formal essence of the human body is, nevertheless, *part of what must be present* at a particular time and place in order for the human body actually to exist there. *This* part of the human body, precisely because it is an infinite mode, will necessarily remain – there, and everywhere else as well – after the actually existing human body and its actually existing human mind are destroyed. This provides the solution to the first puzzle, concerning parallelism, about the eternal part of the mind.

Now, just as the formal essence of the human body is part of what must be present at a particular point in the order of nature for the human body to exist, so the idea of that essence is part of what must be present at a particular point in the order of nature for the human mind to exist. For according to 2p46, “the cognition of God’s eternal and infinite essence which each idea involves is adequate and perfect,” so that even the most inadequate imaginative ideas of the present affections of the body

(5p45d, 5d47d) require some adequate cognition of God's attributes. But all "adequate" cognition is cognition of the second or third kind, for Spinoza, and thus constitutes intellection; and as we have seen, Spinoza holds that the existence of the intellect requires the conception of the essence of the body "under a species of eternity" (5p29).

In order to understand *how* Spinoza conceives the essence of the human body as required for all human intellection, however, we must briefly examine his explanations of how the second and third kinds of cognition – the intellectual kinds – are themselves possible. According to 2p40s2, we have cognition of the second kind through the "common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things." As Spinoza explains in 2p38–p40, this means that we can have adequate ideas of properties, shared by our bodies and other bodies, that are "equally in the part and in the whole," and we can also have cognition of what follows from these properties. Cognition of the third kind, according to 2p40s2, "proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate cognition of the essence of things." This third, and highest, kind of cognition is possible because *every* idea necessarily involves an adequate cognition of God's essence (2p45–p46; for example, cognition of what extension or thought is), the very cognition that is required to serve as the starting point for cognition of the third kind. In 5p31d Spinoza elaborates on this process:

The Mind conceives nothing under a species of eternity except insofar as it conceives its Body's essence under a species of eternity (by 5p29), i.e., (by

5p21 and 5p23), except insofar as it is eternal. So (by 5p30) insofar as it is eternal, it has cognition of God, cognition which is necessarily adequate (by 2p46). And therefore, the Mind, insofar as it is eternal, is capable of knowing all those things which can follow from this given cognition of God (by 2p40), i.e., of knowing things by the third kind of cognition. . . .

All of the human mind's ideas, then, whether adequate or inadequate, are ideas of the human body (2p13). When it imagines, the human mind conceives affections or modifications of the body that are transitory and that depend on external causes, as well as on the nature of the body and the nature of its parts (2p17–p28). But all understanding requires some understanding of causes (1a4); hence, in conceiving of these changeable affections of the actually existing body, the mind *also* conceives, though confusedly and inadequately, of the external objects that are among their causes. In order to conceive of these changeable affections at all, however, the mind must also conceive of *something* of the unchanging formal essence of the human body, which is also among their causes and through which, together with more changeable local causal circumstances, they must be understood. Indeed, more generally, *any* human cognition that is not limited to the awareness of any *particular* time or place is cognition of this essence. But in conceiving of something of the essence of one's human body, one conceives *ipso facto* of something of the other infinite modes that are among its causes; and because at least some of these infinite modes – as pervasive modifications of a divine attribute – involve features that are equally in the part and in the whole, the mind's conception

of them serves as the basis for cognition of the *second* kind.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, in conceiving of something of the formal essence of the human body, one *also* conceives of the nature of a divine attribute itself, and one thereby has the basis for cognition of the *third* kind.<sup>23</sup>

In this way, the awareness of one's own formal essence that necessarily results from the instantiation of that essence provides the conceptual materials on which the mind's cognitive power must operate in order to produce all of one's adequate cognition – that is, all the contents of the intellect. A human being's actually realized intellect may not contain highly conscious cognition of everything there is to know about the distinctive character of his or her own pattern of motion and rest – although such cognition is in principle attainable. But cognition “of” the formal essence of the human body is not limited to such cognition, for *all* one's cognition that is not limited to a particular perspective is cognition of pervasive features of nature *as they are manifested in* the formal essence of the human body. Just as all imaginative cognition (cognition of the first kind) constitutes cognition of *other* things only by being *first* cognition of some accidental states of the actually existing body, so all intellectual cognition (cognition of the second and third kinds) constitutes cognition of other things only by being *first* cognition concerning the formal essence of the human body. This constitutes the solution to the second puzzle, concerning content, about the eternal part of the mind.

### A]3. WISDOM AND THE GROWTH OF THE ETERNAL PART OF THE MIND



Spinoza states in 5p39: “He who has a body capable of a great many things has a mind whose greatest part is eternal.” In the scholium to this proposition, he remarks that human beings strive to change – “as much as our nature allows and assists” – from a state in which they do not meet this condition to a state in which they do meet it. He then characterizes the difference between these two states as a difference between having “a mind which considered solely in itself is conscious of almost nothing of itself, or of God, or of things” and having a mind “which considered only in itself is very much conscious of itself, and of God, and of things.”<sup>24</sup> In the final scholium of the *Ethics*, he asserts specifically that the *ignorant* man “lives as if he knew neither himself, nor God, nor things; and as soon as he ceases to be acted on, he ceases to be”; whereas the *wise* man “insofar as he is considered as such . . . is by a certain eternal necessity, conscious of himself, and of God, and of things [and] he never ceases to be . . .” (5p42s; see also 5p31s). Spinoza also indicates in 5p40c that the intellect – which is, by this same corollary, the “eternal part” of the mind – can vary in extent. Thus, it is clear that he regards wisdom as directly correlated in degree with having a mind whose greater part is eternal.

Yet this final doctrine is puzzling as well, and again for two reasons. First, Spinoza regards human beings as more virtuous and hence (given his identification of virtue with understanding) as wiser than lower animals.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, he must surely regard human beings as wiser than other singular things, such as rocks and trees. As we have seen, 5p23d claims that an idea of the formal essence of the human body is “the part of the human mind that is eternal.” Yet there exists a formal essence for

each singular thing, whether human or not; and hence, by the parallelism of 2p7, there also exists for each singular thing an idea *of* this essence. Because all singular things are equal in respect of having such an idea, it seems puzzling that they can differ in the extent to which a greater part of their minds is eternal.<sup>26</sup> Second, it seems that the formal essence of the human body, as an infinite mode, must be unchanging; and hence in the light of parallelism, it seems that an idea of the formal essence of the human body must remain exactly as unchanging as the formal essence of the human body itself. Thus, it seems hard to see how the part of the mind that is eternal could become greater or less even when one's wisdom increased or decreased.

To resolve these two difficulties, it is useful to draw two related distinctions. First, we must distinguish between (i) having an adequate idea of something by having an adequate idea of *some* feature (i.e., attribute, property, or affection) of the thing and (ii) having an adequate idea of something by having an adequate idea of *all* of its features. For example, Spinoza holds, as we have seen, that each human being has an adequate idea of God's essence insofar as God is extended;<sup>27</sup> and simply in having such an idea, each human being has *an* adequate idea of God. In fact, *any* adequate idea can be truly said to be an adequate idea "of God" at least in the sense that it adequately represents something about God. But no human idea represents God in all of God's aspects; for no human being has an idea of any divine attribute other than extension and thought, and it seems unlikely that any human being represents *all* of God's infinitely many finite modes.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, 5p4 affirms that "there is no affection of the Body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct

concept” by conceiving properties that the affection shares with other things (5p4d), even though we as finite beings cannot understand any changing affection of the body in detail and completely through its specific causes.

Second, because the human mind is the idea of the human body and is itself in God, we must distinguish between the features of an idea *as it is in God* and the features of what is literally that very same idea *as it is in the mind of a singular thing* – that is, as Spinoza puts it, between ideas as they are in God *simpliciter* and as they are in God insofar as God has or constitutes the mind of a singular thing (2p11c). In particular, we must apply this distinction to an idea’s degree of “power of thinking” (*cogitandi potentia*)<sup>29</sup> or “consciousness” (*conscientia*) – which Spinoza treats as identical, or at least coextensive.<sup>30</sup> Thus, an idea exists *in God* as part of God’s infinite intellect, with sufficient power of thinking to produce, in fully conscious reality and perfection, all of the ideas that are its effects. In contrast, an idea actually exists *in the mind of a singular thing* only for as long as the singular thing exists, and it exerts within that mind a limited degree of power of thinking that reflects the singular thing’s finite share of divine power (4p4d).

Because God’s power of thinking is infinite, God’s idea of every formal essence of every singular thing represents every aspect or property of that essence with a high degree of power of thinking. But it does not follow from this that a given singular thing will have sufficient power of thinking to possess, in full completeness, a similarly highly conscious idea of its own formal essence. On the contrary, a singular thing has power expressed under *any* attribute – including the attribute of

thought – only to the extent that the singular thing approximates to the condition of causal self-sufficiency that is characteristic of a substance. (It has this self-sufficiency by having power to preserve itself – see 3p6 and the propositions that immediately follow it.<sup>31</sup>) Because some kinds of singular things necessarily approximate to this causal self-sufficiency less fully than do others, they necessarily also have less power of thinking.<sup>32</sup> The mind of a lower animal, for example, has ideas of imagination, and hence it has some intellectual cognition as well. Like a human being, it achieves this intellectual cognition by conceiving the essence of its body in the course of imagining. However, there is no reason to suppose, and every reason to deny, that the mind of an animal will attain a very highly conscious or complete cognition of the essence of its own body. And although Spinoza allows that all “things” have “minds” (3p1d), rocks and trees will have even less power of thinking than lower animals. Rocks, trees, animals, and humans can differ in the extent to which the greater parts of their minds are eternal, then, because they conceive the formal essences of their bodies more or less fully with greater or lesser power of thinking – that is, consciousness.

Very rudimentary singular things, such as rocks, may not undergo any significant increase or decrease in their power during the period of their actual existence. Human beings, in contrast, do undergo such changes, according to Spinoza (see 3po1): an increase in power is joy (*laetitia*), and a decrease in power is sadness (*tristitia*) (3p11s). Accordingly, a human mind’s overall power to produce highly conscious adequate ideas from other adequate ideas can easily vary through time, as

can the specific degree of power and consciousness of any individual idea within that mind (4p5–p18). Hence, the “proportion” of a human mind comprised by the intellect – that is, by the part of the mind that is eternal – can vary as well. The human intellect is eternal, for Spinoza, because whatever the human mind conceives adequately, it conceives by conceiving an eternal idea of the eternal formal essence of the human body, thereby incorporating an eternal idea into the human mind.

Thus, although the idea of the formal essence of the human body, *as it is in God*, is a comprehensive and highly conscious idea that undergoes no change, the intellectual life of a human being is a struggle to actualize within that human being’s mind, as consciously as possible,<sup>33</sup> as much adequate cognition as possible of the formal essence of his or her body and of other things as they relate to, and are involved in, that formal essence. Fully achieving a complete and highly conscious cognition of everything that can be known about the essence of the human body would require that the formal essence of the human body be instantiated with very great power indeed.<sup>34</sup> How much power of thinking a person can actually exert on a particular occasion depends in part on favorable or unfavorable external circumstances. But to whatever extent human beings achieve more conscious adequate ideas, they have, to that extent, more fully appropriated into their own minds divine ideas that are eternal – and thereby made a *greater* part of their minds eternal.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSION

On the interpretation that I have proposed, the formal essence of a human body is a real infinite mode: the omnipresent (i.e., pervasive and permanent) modification of the attribute of extension that consists of its general capacity to accommodate and sustain – through the general laws of extension expressible as the laws of physics – the actual existence of a singular thing possessing a specific structure or nature whenever and wherever the series of actual finite causes mandates it. The formal essence of the human body thus *grounds* the actual existence of the finite human body, but it *necessitates* that existence only in concert with the infinite series of actual finite modes. Because the presence of the formal essence of a human body is required for the actual existence of a human body, this formal essence can be understood as a nonlocalized part of the human body. Furthermore, all intellection may be understood as deriving from the mind's idea of this formal essence – an idea that, as an infinite mode of thought, has an ontological status entirely parallel to that of the formal essence of the body. Although the idea expressing the essence of the human body exists as a complete and highly conscious idea in God, human beings must struggle, with limited but varying power, to incorporate the various aspects of this idea into their actually existing minds with greater power and consciousness, just as they must struggle to instantiate more fully and powerfully the formal essence of their bodies. No matter what they do, of course, they cannot achieve *personal* immortality, with continuing sensation or memory. Their minds perish with their bodies – because these are identical – even though a *part* of each remains. But to the extent that they are successful in their struggle, Spinoza holds, human beings

understand in the same way that God does. Indeed, they literally participate – for a period of duration – in God’s own eternally conscious cognition, and they thereby achieve a mind the greater part of which is eternal.<sup>36</sup>

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[FN]<sup>1</sup> All translations of Spinoza’s writings are from C. However, I have employed “cognition” rather than Curley’s “knowledge” as a translation for “*cognitio*,” Because Spinoza recognizes *cognitio* that is false and inadequate.

<sup>2</sup> Given the reference to “existence” in this definition, some explanation is needed of how Spinoza can then refer to “singular things that do not exist.” Presumably, 2d7 is meant to indicate what kind of existence singular things have *if* they exist.

<sup>3</sup> The demonstration of 1p25 reads,

[FNEXT]If you deny this, then God is not the cause of the essence of things; and so (by 1a4) the essence of things can be conceived without God. But (by 1p15) this is absurd. Therefore God is also the cause of the essence of things, Q.E.D.

<sup>4</sup> *Ethics* 2d2 states that “to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing.” Because the *Ethics* specifically mentions two kinds of essences – *formal essences* and *actual essences* – there are two main interpretive alternatives with respect to 2d2. First, we may suppose that it defines only *one* of these two kinds of essences. Second, we may suppose that there is some generality or ambiguity in the definition that allows *both* kinds of essences to be different *species* of essence in accordance with the definition. The second option seems preferable. (Compare Locke 1975, who gives a general characterization of “essence,” the specification of which allows things to have both a “real essence” and a “nominal essence.”) For an essence can be given, and a thing can be “posited,” in more than one way. Thus, an *actual essence* is something such that, when it is given as existing, the thing itself actually exists (i.e., is posited as existing). A *formal essence*, in contrast, is something such that (i) when it is given as existing, the thing itself is *possible* (i.e., is posited as possible); and (ii) when it is given *as instantiated*, the thing itself is posited as actual. Because a singular thing actually exists if and only if its actual essence does, we may also think of the actual essence of a singular thing as the *actualization* or instantiation of its existing formal essence, rendering the thing itself actual. Thus, the instantiation of the formal essence of a singular thing produces the singular thing *by* producing that singular thing’s actual essence.

Spinoza’s *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and his *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* also use the term “objective essence” (*essentia objectiva*), a term that does not occur in the *Ethics*. An objective essence is simply the idea of an essence (specifically, it seems, a formal essence), so that when an

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objective essence is given as existing, the formal essence of the thing is posited “objectively” – that is, in thought.

- <sup>5</sup> In the unique case of God – who is of course infinite, and hence not a singular thing – essence alone *is* sufficient for existence, according to Spinoza. Indeed, God’s essence and his existence are one and the same thing (1p20), for both are constituted precisely by the divine attributes themselves.
- <sup>6</sup> Spinoza makes it clear that he intends this comparison only as a rough analogy, introducing it as follows: “If anyone wishes me to explain this further by an example, I will, of course, not be able to give one which adequately explains what I speak of here, since it is unique. Still I shall try as far as possible to illustrate the matter. . . .” Curley’s footnote to the scholium in Spinoza 1985 provides a helpful explanation of the example and its accompanying diagram.[Author: Please supply Bibliography entry for Curley 1985 or delete citation]
- <sup>7</sup> For a discussion of Spinoza’s necessitarianism, see Garrett 1991.
- <sup>8</sup> See Della Rocca 1996 for an excellent discussion of this central Spinozistic doctrine.[Author: 1996a or 1996b?]
- <sup>9</sup> It should be noted, of course, that for Spinoza the idea that is “of” a human body, in this sense, is its mind, and that the idea of any other singular thing is the “mind” of that singular thing. The sensory or imaginative idea that a human being has “of” an external object is not *the* idea of the object, in this sense, but is rather an idea of a state of the human being’s own body, a state partially caused by the external object. See the *Ethics*, Part 2.
- <sup>10</sup> Donagan (1973 and 1988, 194–200) argues that 2p7 must allow real ideas to correspond to merely possible things, and Matson (1990) agrees. Bennett (1984, 357–8) holds that this would violate the parallelism, and Delahunty (1985, 294–300) offers persuasive support for Bennett’s verdict.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ethics* 1d5 states, “By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived.” This relation of being “in” – *inherence*, we might call it – is absolutely central to Spinoza’s metaphysics. As 1p4d and many other passages make clear, he regards “being in” and “being conceived through” as necessarily coextensive where inherence in a substance is concerned.
- <sup>12</sup> Of course, even every infinite mode of an attribute is “limited” in one respect: it is not the attribute itself, nor is it identical to any other infinite mode of that attribute. I take it that this kind of “limitation” is perfectly compatible with the kind of eternity and pervasiveness that characterizes infinite modes. The infinity of infinite modes lies not in there being no *other* modes of the same attribute (because there obviously are), but rather in there being (as 1p21d puts it in application to the attribute of thought) “no Thought that does not constitute” the infinite mode – that is, in its pertaining pervasively to *all* of the attribute in question at all times, wherever it is found.
- <sup>13</sup> For further discussion of the nature of infinite modes and of the way in which they follow (unlike finite modes) from “the absolute nature” of the attributes, see Garrett 1991.
- <sup>14</sup> Matson (1990) rightly states that for Spinoza the “essences of ‘nonexistent things’” must be “perfectly real, actual items” on the ground that “Spinoza has no truck with *mere* possibilities” (88); and he suggests, as I have here, that the “containment” of a thing’s essence in an attribute is equivalent to the attribute’s laws not ruling out the actual existence of the thing (89). He does not, however, propose that formal essences are infinite modes; and he goes on to treat the idea “expressing” the essence of the body as an *actual* idea strictly corresponding to a merely *possible* thing (89–90).



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<sup>15</sup> By treating formal essences as infinite modes, Spinoza accounts for their being within the constraints of substance/mode metaphysics, according which everything that is, is either a substance or the mode of a substance; this is something that Descartes arguably failed to do with “true and immutable natures,” which are not easily construed either as modes of extension or as modes of God’s thought.

<sup>16</sup> Although formal essences are among the infinite modes, they do not exhaust them. Surely general and more specific laws of nature will also be infinite modes (Curley 1969; 1988, 47–8). It is also plausible to suppose that there will be more and less generic formal essences – e.g., a formal essence of mammal, a formal essence of human, and a formal essence of a particular human being, for the capacities of the attributes to support such beings are all different but omnipresent aspects of those attributes. Spinoza recognizes causal (i.e., explanatory) relations among infinite modes, and it is natural to suppose that laws of nature are prominent among the causes of formal essences, that more general laws are among the causes of more specific laws, and that more generic formal essences are among the causes of less specific formal essences. On the other hand, whatever violates the general laws of nature – for example, a perpetual motion machine, or a talking tree – will have no formal essence at all. It is not obvious that the formal essence of a particular individual could ever be so specific that another individual – say, a genetically identical twin – could not possibly coinstantiate it; however, nothing argued here depends on this.

<sup>17</sup> The full demonstration reads as follows:

[FNEXT]In God there is necessarily a concept, or idea, which expresses the essence of the human Body (by 5p22), an idea, therefore, which is necessarily something that pertains to the essence of the human Mind (by 2p13). But we do not attribute to the human Mind any duration that can be defined by time, except insofar as it expresses the actual existence of the Body, which is explained by duration, and can be defined by time, i.e. (by 2p8c), we do not attribute duration to it except while the Body endures. However, since what is conceived, with a certain eternal necessity, through God’s essence itself (by 5p22) is nevertheless something, this something that pertains to the essence of the Mind will necessarily be eternal, Q.E.D. (5p23d)

Just as a human mind is the idea of a human body, for Spinoza (2p13), so the idea of the formal essence of a human body is itself the formal essence of a human mind; this explains the reference in 5p23 itself to the eternal part of the mind as “pertaining to the essence of the human mind.”

<sup>18</sup> These read,

[FNEXT]The Mind’s essence consists in cognition (by 2p11); therefore, the more the Mind knows things by the second and third kind of cognition, the greater the part of it that remains (by 5p23 and 5p29), and consequently (by 5p37), the greater the part of it that is not touched by affects which are contrary to our nature, i.e., which (by 4p30) are evil. Therefore, the more the Mind understands things by the second and third kind of cognition, the greater the part of it that remains unharmed. . . . (5p38d)

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From this we understand what I touched on in 4p39s, and what I promised to explain in this Part, viz. that death is less harmful to us, the greater the Mind's clear and distinct cognition, and hence, the more the Mind loves God.

Next, because (by 5p27) the highest satisfaction there can be arises from the third kind of cognition, it follows from this that the human Mind can be of such a nature that the part of the Mind which we have shown perishes with the body (see 5p21) is of no moment in relation to what remains. But I shall soon treat this more fully. (5p38s)

<sup>19</sup> Bennett (1984, 358–9) makes this point clearly.

<sup>20</sup> Bennett (1984, 359–63) and Allison (1990, 170–72) raise this objection.

<sup>21</sup> See 2a3 and 2p11 on the primary role of ideas in constituting the mind.

<sup>22</sup> *Ethics* 2p37 states that “What is common to all things and is equally in the part and in the whole, does not constitute the essence of any singular thing.” As Antony Dugdale has pointed out to me, this raises the question of whether formal essences, even when conceived as infinite modes, can themselves be “common to all things and equally in the part and in the whole.” But there is no requirement that *all* infinite modes be “common to all things” in the sense employed in Spinoza's account of the second kind of cognition. For although infinite modes are omnipresent, those that constitute the formal essences of singular things are not parts of or “common to” the actual existences of *other* singular things in addition to those whose formal essences they are.

<sup>23</sup> A very helpful account of the interrelation between the second and third kinds of cognition has recently been provided in Malinowski-Charles 2003.

<sup>24</sup> The complete scholium reads:

[FNEXT]Because human Bodies are capable of a great many things, there is no doubt but what they can be of such a nature that they are related to Minds which have a great cognition of themselves and of God, and of which the greatest, or chief, part is eternal. So they hardly fear death.

But for a clearer understanding of these things, we must note here that we live in continuous change, and that as we change for the better or worse, we are called happy or unhappy. For he who has passed from being an infant or child to being a corpse is called unhappy. On the other hand, if we pass the whole length of our life with a sound Mind in a sound Body, that is considered happiness. And really, he who, like an infant or child, has a Body capable of very few things, and very heavily dependent on external causes, has a Mind which considered solely in itself is conscious of almost nothing of itself, or of God, or of things. On the other hand, he who has a Body capable of a great many things, has a Mind which considered only in itself is very much conscious of itself, and of God, and of things.

In this life, then, we strive especially that the infant's Body may change (as much as its nature allows and assists) into another, capable of a great many things and related to a Mind very much conscious of itself, of God, and of things. We strive, that is, that whatever is related to its memory or imagination is of hardly any moment in relation to the intellect (as I have already said in 5p38s). (5p39s)

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- <sup>25</sup> Thus, for example, he writes at 4p37s1, “Indeed, because the right of each one is defined by his virtue, or power, men have a far greater right against the lower animals than they have against men.”
- <sup>26</sup> See Garber 2005, which draws attention to this difficulty and concludes that Spinoza is discussing two different kinds of eternity. It is significant in this regard that 5p23d cites 2p13 to show that “the idea expressing the essence” of the human body “pertains to the essence of the human mind.” But the scholium to 2p13 notes that “the things we have shown so far are completely general and do not pertain more to man than to other individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate.”
- <sup>27</sup> Similarly, each human being, in conceiving of thought, has an adequate idea of the essence of God insofar as God is thinking.
- <sup>28</sup> An idea that did so would be “the idea of God” described in 2p3 and 2p4.
- <sup>29</sup> “Power of thinking” is a fairly common term in Spinoza’s writings, including the *Ethics* (2p1s, 2p7c, 2p21s, 2p49s, 3p2s, 3p11, 3p12d, 3p15d, and 3p28d). It designates “power of action” insofar as that power is expressed under the attribute of thought. Power of thinking is thus the power by which ideas produce other ideas.
- <sup>30</sup> I argue for this conclusion in Garrett 2008. One key piece of evidence is the strikingly parallel treatments of degrees of “excellence and reality” (which Spinoza regards as equivalent to power) at 2p13s and “consciousness” in 5p39s.
- <sup>31</sup> For more discussion of the ways in which singular things constitute finite approximations to a genuine substance, see Garrett 2002.
- <sup>32</sup> Singular things that less closely approximate a substance also have less of a genuine essence; and indeed, Spinoza writes of some things as having “more essence” than others (e.g., *Short Treatise* 1.2 and 2.26 and Ep19). See Garrett 2002 for further discussion of degrees of essence.
- <sup>33</sup> As 5p31s, 5p39s, and 5p42s all indicate, Spinoza thinks of intellectual progress in terms of achieving *consciousness* “of oneself, and of God, and of things.” The order in which these objects are listed is no coincidental: because all intellection requires conceiving the essence of the human body, one becomes conscious of God and other things *through* becoming conscious of oneself; and because all adequate cognition of other things requires an adequate idea of the essence of God, one becomes conscious of other things through becoming conscious of God.
- <sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the complete idea of the essence of the human body may be said to be already potentially in the human mind – indeed, to constitute a kind of human potential intellect. Descartes famously held that certain ideas are already in the intellect innately even when they have not yet been consciously thought, on the ground that their content cannot be derived from the senses but only elicited from the intellect by thinking. Spinoza’s view is in many ways similar, for he regularly implies (5p23d together with 5p38d and 5p38s) that *the* idea of the essence of the human body is already a part of the human mind, and he maintains that the various adequate ideas that this idea would involve can be *more* consciously actualized in the actually existing human mind through a sufficient exertion of power of thinking.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ethics* 5p40s states that “our Mind, insofar as it understands, is an eternal mode of thinking, which is determined by another eternal mode of thinking, and this again by another, and so on, to infinity; so that

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together, they all constitute God's eternal and infinite intellect." I take this to mean that the human mind – like the "mind" of any singular thing – is a mode of thinking that is eternal *just insofar as* it understands, although the *inclusion* of this mode of thinking in the mind of an actually existing thing depends on the infinite chain of thinking causes producing the actually existing idea of that actually existing thing. The understanding contained in the ideas of all modes and their causes taken together constitutes the infinite intellect of God, as described in 2p4d, 2p11c, and 2p43s.

<sup>36</sup> I am grateful to Antony Dugdale, Charles Jarrett, Michael Della Rocca, Lee Rice, Alison Simmons, and Jonny Cottrell for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.