The Conception of Immortality in Spinoza's Ethics

A. E. Taylor

Mind, New Series, Vol. 5, No. 18. (Apr., 1896), pp. 145-166.

Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0026-4423%28189604%292%3A5%3A18%3C145%3ATCOIIS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V

Mind is currently published by Oxford University Press.

NEW SERIES. No. 18.] [APRIL, 1896.

MIND

A QUARTERLY REVIEW

OF

PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY.

I.—THE CONCEPTION OF IMMORTALITY IN SPINOZA'S *ETHICS*[1].

BY A. E. TAYLOR.

WE shall find it convenient, in examining the vexed problem of Spinoza's doctrine of the eternity of the mind, to take as our starting-point the brief abstract of his views given in the "Short Treatise of God and Man," which, in all essentials, anticipates the fuller discussion of the *Ethics*. What we are there told (see especially *Korte Verhandeling*, II. 23) amounts to this. The "soul" is an Idea in the "thinking thing" which corresponds to the existence of some object in "Nature," or—as Spinoza would have said at a later stage of his thought—the mind is an Idea in "God" corresponding to and bound up with the presence in Him of a particular modification of the attribute of extension. Consequently, the continued existence of the soul depends in the first instance on the continued existence of the thing or body of which it is, in Spinozistic language, the "Idea"; and it would seem to follow at once that any disturbance of that proper balance of motion and rest which, according to Spinoza, constitutes the identity of a human body sufficiently extensive to put an end to the existence of a human organism, as such, must also terminate once for all the existence of the corresponding soul. With the transformation of the elements which have hitherto combined to form a human

[1] Read (in substance) before the Society of Historical Theology, Oxford, Feb. 6, 1896.

body into some fresh form of extended existence there must necessarily be conjoined the transmutation of the corresponding "Idea in the thinking thing," which has till now been the "soul" of that body, into some new and non-human shape answering to the change in the body. From this general doom of death, however, Spinoza indicates a way of at least partial escape which is open to all who think fit to avail themselves of it. That way of escape is no other than the love of God which arises from true and adequate knowledge. For, with increasing understanding of the nature of God—or, what for the Spinozist is the same, of the Universe and of our own place in it—comes a truer sense of the relative value of things, and a growing freedom from the impotent passions and irrational aims and purposes of the natural man. To understand the order of the Universe aright means to acquiesce in it; to know our own place in it and to estimate rightly our own powers is to be freed from the alternating tyranny of vain hopes and foolish despondencies, and so to be, as far as a man may, happy. Hence Spinoza can maintain that it is by means of true and adequate ideas of the world and of ourselves and the moral freedom they bring in their train that it is possible for the soul to contract a union with God which is no less indissoluble than its original union with that particular mode of extension that we call its body. And so, we learn in the "Short Treatise," while the soul, in so far as its existence depends on that of the body, shares the mortality of the latter, yet in the degree in which it is also at the same time "united with" God who is eternal and unchangeable, it shares His permanence and immutability. In the above *résumé* of Spinoza's doctrine as it appears in the "Short Treatise" we may specially notice the following salient points, all of which will meet us again in the *Ethics*.

(1) The union of the soul with God and its consequent deathlessness in no way interfere with the rigid parallelism of soul and body which requires that in some sense both shall be alike mortal.

(2) The deathlessness asserted by Spinoza, whatever its precise nature, is treated throughout as a kind of life to be entered on and enjoyed here and now, not as something for which we must wait till death or the next world.

(3) It is not conceived of, as in the current belief of Christianity, as equally and originally inherent in all mankind; it has to be acquired by each man for himself, and may be acquired by different men in very varying degrees.

(4) The way to obtain this "Immortality" (onsterfelijkheid) is the formation of true and adequate Ideas.

For a fuller statement of these doctrines and a more detailed

account of the immortality here promised we must now turn to the text of the *Ethics*. And in doing so we shall at once be struck by a change in terminology which is probably, as Martineau has remarked, significant. In the *Cogitata Metaphysica* Spinoza had spoken, in accordance with ordinary usage, of the proofs of our immortality, and throughout the "Short Treatise" we find him using similar language (de Ziele, Onsterfelijkheid). In the *Ethics* both words have finally disappeared, and we now hear only of the mind and the mind's eternity. It is just possible that the use of *mens* rather than the more familiar *anima* may have no special importance. Spinoza prefers, even in the *Cogitata*, to talk of the mind rather than the soul[1], and though the Dutch version in which the "Short Treatise" has come down to us reverses this usage, the change may, of course, be due to the translator. But there can be little doubt that the substitution of "eternity" for "immortality" indicates a conscious endeavour to avoid misleading associations. For the eternity of the human mind as set forth in Spinoza's *Ethics* is, as we shall see, something very different from what is ordinarily understood by the phrase "immortality of the soul." Our first step towards forming a positive conception of what it is will naturally be to define our terms. We must ask, first, what sense we are to put on the words "eternity," "eternal," and next, what we are to understand by the human mind.

A. Eternal, eternity. Spinoza is careful to warn us that we must not fall into the vulgar error of confusing eternity with indefinite duration. Duration is indeed the direct antithesis to eternity. The account of the latter, as given in the eighth definition of the first part of the *Ethics*, reads as follows. "By eternity I understand existence itself in so far as it is thought of as necessarily following from the mere definition of the eternal thing" (*quatenus ex sola rei aeternae definitione necessario sequi concipitur*); and we are further told in a footnote to this definition that "such existence, as for instance that of the essence of a thing, is thought of as an eternal truth, and consequently cannot be explained in terms of time or duration, even if that duration be conceived of as unbounded in both directions." Eternity is thus for Spinoza identical with scientific necessity, and to think of a thing as "eternal" is to perceive it, not as an inexplicable and isolated event or phenomenon, but in its various intelligible relations to the rest of the Universe as an integral and indispensable factor in the whole. It is in this sense that God (I. 19) and each of the "attributes" of God are said to be eternal. For God—or the

[1] But for the use of "*anima*" cf. *Cog. Met.* II. 12 animam immortalem esse ex legibus naturae clare sequitur.

Universe, is the *causa sui*, the self-existent whole whose supreme reality is the ground and source of all subordinate and derived existence. Again, each of the attributes of God taken singly is eternal. This follows easily enough from the definition of an attribute (I. def. 4) as that which for the perception of the intellect constitutes the essence of a substance. Extension and thought—to take the two attributes which alone are known to us—are eternal, not because, so far as we can tell, both have existed and will exist through an indefinite period of time, but because they are, so to speak, ultimate and irreducible terms in our apprehension of the Universe; (cf. the already quoted definition of "*attributum*,") factors in Reality into which everything else can be resolved, but which cannot themselves be explained in terms of any kind of being still more simple and more universal. (In Spinozistic phrase each of them is infinite *in suo genere*.) Their "eternity" is only another name for the double fact that everything else can be resolved into some combination of modifications of them, while they themselves cannot be resolved into anything else, in short, for the necessity we are under of falling back upon them and their characteristic properties as our sole basis of explanation when we would explain anything whatever. We further learn (I. 21, 22) that not only the divine attributes themselves, that is, the ultimate irreducible terms, be they what they may, to which the understanding can trace the contents of the world (*facies totius universi*), and of which we only know the two already specified, thought and extension, but also any modification of an attribute, the existence of which can be either directly (I. 21) or mediately (I. 22) demonstrated from the general character (*absoluta natura*) of that attribute, may be called eternal. In a word, eternity is for Spinoza, as I have already said, practically equivalent to rational necessity, and to exhibit scientifically the systematic relations in which any aspect of reality stands to other aspects and to the whole system is to establish its eternity. All this becomes if possible even clearer when read in connection with the epistemology of the second part of the *Ethics*, particularly with the famous Spinozistic conception of the knowledge of things "*sub specie aeternitatis*." The way in which this conception is originally introduced is especially instructive. By proposition II. 44 we are taught that it is characteristic of reason (*de natura rationis*) to look on everything as necessary, not as contingent, and the second corollary to the proposition runs "*de natura rationis est res sub quadam aeternitatis specie percipere*." The proof of this is derived from the preceding proposition by the simple expedient of substituting "eternity" for "necessity" as an equivalent term.

How natural and easy such a substitution is one expression which occurs in the course of this demonstration will shew. In speaking of certain universal properties of things which, as he holds, cannot be thought of other than adequately, Spinoza says that they are conceived "*absque ulla temporis relatione*," and consequently "*sub quadam aeternitatis specie*." The contrast is evidently between such loose personal recollections as make up the content of the average uninstructed man's thinking and the systematic and orderly knowledge of the man of science. For the former each object or phenomenon in nature derives its interest and its place in the body of thought mainly from accidental associations with particular moments of his own experience; in the codified thought of the latter time, as a factor in the universal judgment, has disappeared. Thus a thunderstorm, to take a simple example, reminds the average man of "that terrific storm of three years ago when Mr *A*'s house was struck;" to the scientific mind on the other hand it suggests a series of propositions about the nature and behaviour of electricity with which the temporal relations of before and after, as such, have nothing to do. A typical and familiar case of this knowledge "under the form of eternity" may perhaps be said to be that of pure mathematics as a body of truths whose universal and abiding validity is entirely independent of any considerations of time. And thus Spinoza's appropriation of the term "eternity" to denote rational necessity furnishes at once an interesting parallel with the language of the *Posterior Analytics* and a brilliant anticipation of one of the most characteristic doctrines of modern scientific logic. (Cf. *e.g.* Bosanquet, *Logic*, I. 273. "The order of succession... disappears in the significance of a positive systematic connection." "Time...is not a form which profoundly exhibits the unity of things.")

To this account of eternity I will only append two remarks, to the first of which I would invite special attention, as a due apprehension of it is absolutely essential to the correct understanding of Spinoza's view.

(1) We cannot too carefully lay it down that, though for Spinoza duration is no part of the definition of eternity and cannot of itself constitute it, yet eternity does and must entail as a consequence some kind of endless duration. The proof that this is so for Spinoza is afforded by numerous passages scattered up and down his writings, of which I will here quote only sufficient to establish the general principle, leaving for future consideration those sentences in *Ethics*, Part V. which directly assert its application to the human mind. To begin with then, we read at the end of the "Short Treatise" in set

terms of the proof of the "*eternal* and permanent *duration* of our understanding" ("gelijk wy hier ook mede, en dat op een andere wijze als te vooren, hebben bewezen de *eewwige* en bestandige *duuring* van ons verstand." *Korte Verhandeling*, II. 26 *ad fin.*) Again in a proposition (I. 21) of the *Ethics* of which we have already made some use we are told of the modifications which can be deduced *ex absoluta natura alicuius attributi Dei* not only that they are "eternal" but also that they have *always* of necessity existed (*semper* existere debuerunt), with which we may compare the statement in *Cogitata Metaphysica*, I. 4, that duration *a tota alicuius rei existentia non nisi ratione distinguitur*. That some eminent critics of Spinoza (*e.g.* Martineau) have overlooked this important point is probably due to their transferring to *duration* the language which Spinoza uses of *time*. But we cannot too strongly insist on the persistence with which he distinguishes the two conceptions. It is not *duration*, as such, but *time* of which he says in *Cogitat. Met.* I. 4 that it is a *merus modus cogitandi*; it is relation not to *duration*, but to *time*, which is in the *Ethics* the distinguishing characteristic of imperfect thought[1]. So in the important letter which appears as no. 36 in the Land and Van Vloten edition of Spinoza, duration is recognised as a quality of extended things the defect or brevity of which constitutes a form of imperfection, "*extensio solummodo respectu durationis, situs, quantitatis, imperfecta dici potest; nimirum quia non durat longius, quia suum non retinet situm, vel quia maior non evadit.*" And in the no less important letter to Ludwig Meyer (Land and Van Vloten, 12) we find a distinction clearly drawn between duration itself and the conception of it considered in abstraction *a modo quo a rebus aeternis fluit*. Thus abstractly considered *duration* becomes *time*, just as quantity considered in abstraction from substance becomes abstract *number*; and it is not quantity or duration themselves which are for Spinoza unrealities, but the false or abstract conceptions of the one as *mere* number and the other as *mere* lapse of time. Duration itself, like quantity, is a "*substantiae modus*," that is, a real quality or property of things: what is arbitrary and unreal (*ens rationis seu imaginationis*) is apparently the conception of real duration as made up of *moments* (*ubi quis durationem abstracte conceperit eamque cum tempore confundendo in partes dividere inceperit* etc.) and, I suppose also, the arbitrary selection of one of these moments as a *present* or starting-point from which to reckon in opposed directions. So that Spinoza's view of duration seems to answer to his well-known view of extension, according to which it is

[1] For the indication of the two following passages I am indebted to Mr F. H. Dale of Merton College; I gladly acknowledge the debt.

not the extended, but the abstract conception of extension as composed of *discrete parts* which is unreal (see *Ethics*, I. 15, Scholium). And the connection of eternity with duration can be further upheld by general metaphysical considerations. For it is abundantly clear that, while mere persistence cannot prove necessity, that which does not succeed in persisting somehow has not established its claim to be regarded as necessary. And if it be said that in the end everything is necessary, no matter how transient its existence, it is equally true that in the end, under strange disguises and marvellous transformations, everything persists.

(2) The second remark we have to make is that in the last resort nothing is absolutely eternal in its own right except God or the Universe itself. For by I. 24—a proposition of which I need not supply the proof—"the essence of the things created by God (*a Deo productarum*) does not necessitate their existence" (*non involvit existentiam*). Their essence—as following from and illustrating certain general laws—is a necessary truth (I. def. 8), their existence is not.

B. The Human Mind. The Human Mind (*Ethics*, II. Axiom 1) falls under this head of *res a Deo productae*, and any given individual may consequently have a beginning or end of existence. (*Ex naturae ordine tam fieri potest ut hic et ille homo existat quam ut non existat.*) There is, indeed, a sense (II. 8) in which the Idea, or modification of the attribute of thought, which constitutes the individual's mind, may be said to be existent in God before the individual as such has begun to be, but only in the same way in which the corresponding mode of extension, which we know as the individual's body, may be said to be already contained in the *attribute* of extension, or—to simplify Spinoza's geometrical illustration a little—as each of an indefinite number of diameters may be said to be contained in a given circle before any one of them has been actually drawn (II. 8, Schol.). The actual existence of the individual mind *as such* (II. 11) depends on and begins with that of the corresponding body. For it is part of Spinoza's characteristic doctrine of parallelism that along with the formation of any new modification of extension, or of any other attribute of God, there must always go a corresponding modification of the attribute of thought, or—as he otherwise calls it—an Idea in God of the former modification. Every extended thing is consequently said (II. 13, Schol.) to be, in its own degree, animate, and the prerogative of the Human Mind over the 'minds' of other things consists only in (1) the superior organisation of the body which it inhabits, and (2) consequently, as we shall see, in its greater capability of *adequate* thinking. We

may say, then, (1) (Prop. 11) that the actual existence of an individual human mind, as such, depends primarily on, and consists in, the presence in God of an idea corresponding to some individual thing,—that is, some particular modification of one of His other attributes, and (2) (Prop. 13) that the particular thing in question is that particular mode of extension which constitutes the human body. From this it will further follow, (1) that the more readily a body responds to and reacts on stimuli of every kind, the more easily will the corresponding mind receive and retain perceptions of every kind (Prop. 14), and also (2) that (II. 17 and II. 26) the original perceptions of the human mind indicate rather the effects produced on its body by other things than the veritable nature of those things themselves as they are "in reality" or "in God." Thus, to take Spinoza's own example, Paul's idea of Peter throws more light on the workings of Paul's psychical and physical organism than on the real character of Peter. Or, if one may be allowed to stoop to an illustration which is perhaps a little ridiculous, the views of a 'Primrose Dame' on the character of Mr Gladstone are more important for our estimate of the lady than of the statesman. It also follows (3) that things will group themselves, for the intellect "unpurified by science," not so much according to the systematic causal and other relations which they bear to one another in virtue of their quality, and the places they fill in the general scheme of the world, as according to the external, and—if I may use a slightly inaccurate but highly convenient expression—accidental conjunctions in which they have been presented to the individual in the course of his personal experience. Thus the content of his mind will be, in the main, a body of fortuitous associations and personal reminiscences in which the real character of the things involved only here and there succeeds in shimmering through the clouds of blind prejudice and hazy recollection. This loose conglomeration of disconnected or mistakenly connected observations—grouped for the most part according to the order in time of the individual's experiences—Spinoza regards as the lowest and most imperfect grade in human thinking. He commonly calls it "imagination," and hardly ever mentions it without a reference to "*memoria*"—personal reminiscences—as its basis. At the opposite pole stands that true and intuitive perception of the scientific relations of phenomena and their position in the general order of things which is variously called by Spinoza "the third kind of knowledge," "the knowledge of things under the form of eternity," "the complete agreement of the Idea with its ideatum," "the knowledge of things as they are in themselves," or "in God." Into the details of Spinoza's well-

known and important theory of the three (or, following the "Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione," the *four*) degrees of knowledge space and the scope of this paper will not allow me to enter. I will therefore only add one or two remarks on the special characteristics of the highest form of knowledge which may throw some light on the passage from the "Short Treatise" with which the present essay opened, as well as on the propositions from the Fifth Part of the *Ethics* which we shall directly have to examine. We may then just note in passing (1) that the possession of a true or adequate idea—that is, of knowledge of the second or third kind—is always accompanied by the consciousness of its adequacy: *qui veram habet ideam simul scit se veram habere ideam* (II. 42), a point to which we shall have to come back. (2) The highest and most adequate form of knowledge—*i.e.* knowledge of the third kind—is *concrete* and *intuitive*. It consists not in the mere apprehension of abstract general principles,—knowledge of the second kind; that, though also in its way both "true" and "adequate," stands altogether on a lower footing. Thus—to take an example—the ideal of knowledge is only very imperfectly realised in the apprehension of the abstract truth of the Uniformity of Nature, or, let us say, the Omnipresence of Evolution. Our knowledge only becomes fully "adequate" or "eternal" when we perceive *how* each particular department of reality sustains its place in the general scheme, or falls into line with the whole. So again it is not knowledge of the Human Mind "under the form of eternity" to realise merely that it somehow, like everything else, is dependent on and related to God; we must be able to see, as the concluding propositions of the *Ethics* will endeavour to make us see, just *what* the relation is, and in consequence, just what is the real place and significance of our mind in the Universe.

(3) The contrast between the mind possessed of "adequate" ideas and the mind which remains in the half-lights of imagination will give us by anticipation some insight into the meaning of that "Union with God" which we met in the extract from the "Short Treatise" and shall meet again in the Fifth Part of the *Ethics*. One might at first be inclined to suspect inconsistency in a philosophy which begins by deriving the human mind, as well as everything else, as a necessary consequence from the nature of the divine attributes, and then goes on to speak of a "Union with God," peculiar to the mind. which one man may attain more completely than another, The difficulty vanishes, however, when we reflect on the nature of an adequate Idea and on the self-consciousness which, as we have seen, always accompanies it. It is true that everything

and everybody is, in some way, a part of God; but the majority of things and of men are quite unconscious of their high dignity. Spinoza would hardly have gone more than half-way with Shelley (*Epipsychidion*, 128) in his famous saying about "the spirit of the worm beneath the sod." The thinker of adequate Ideas under the form of eternity, on the other hand, sees things "as they are in God"; he rethinks Ideas which may be said to form an integral part and parcel of the eternal "*intellectus infinitus Dei*," and in doing so is fully alive to the fact that he is doing so. Thus, while the ordinary man may be said to be the unconscious and poverty-stricken heir to an unoccupied estate, the man of true and adequate thoughts is in the position of the heir who has come into actual possession and fruition of his own. There are, no doubt, difficulties which may be raised about the consistency of this account with some of Spinoza's other statements about the *intellectus Dei*, and one of these difficulties we shall have directly to face, but on the whole the above exposition seems fairly to represent the meaning of his language about Union with God.

On the ethical effects of adequate thinking as the source of freedom from the domination of the passions and consequent happiness there is no need for me to dwell here. Important as those results are, they are, as such, confined to this life and concern the soul only in so far as it is considered in connection with the body. For my purpose—which is to examine the theory of the "duration of the Mind out of relation to the body"—the main results of *Ethics*, Parts III. and IV., may be taken pretty much for granted. I will therefore pass without further delay to the group of propositions in Part V. where the mind's eternity is affirmed and established in detail. These propositions (v. 21–v. 41) form a section by themselves in Spinoza's work, and present, perhaps, more difficulty than any other part of the treatise. Space alone—to say nothing of other limitations—will prevent my doing more now than indicating in a rather general way what I take to be the purport of them. In doing this there are two opposing views, against both of which I have something to urge. The first of these views is that which sees in these propositions something like a promise of what is ordinarily understood by conscious personal immortality. Though this view has in the past been held by competent authorities, it has, I think, been finally disposed of by the investigations of Martineau and Pollock. If any direct refutation is needed from me, it should be enough to refer to the whole tenor of Spinoza's thought in general, and, in particular, to Prop. v. 21, by which "imagination" and memory are shewn to be possible only so long as the body

continues in existence. This is, indeed, no more than we could have inferred for ourselves from the contrast already established between imagination and memory, which contemplate things and events "*cum relatione ad tempus*," and adequate scientific thought, for which things appear as they are, "*sine ulla temporis relatione*." But without imagination and without the least vestige of personal recollection, how much individuality is left? And when we further add Prop. v. 34, by which it is shewn that all emotions other than the eternal 'intellectual love of God' also cease with the body, it becomes abundantly clear that, whatever survives of us after death, all that now makes *personal* character or idiosyncrasy and distinguishes one man from another has vanished. Hence it is not surprising that able critics have gone to the other extreme and constructed a theory of Spinoza's meaning on the assumption that his "eternity of the mind" has nothing at all to do with any kind of continued existence after death. From their point of view, the strongest emphasis must be attached to the passages which dwell on the difference—which they commonly exaggerate, as I have already pointed out, between eternity and duration, and the difference between the man of adequate and the man of imperfect ideas will consist entirely in the qualitative superiority of the one over the other,—*while his life lasts.* I propose, however, to shew that this view also, though nearer the truth than the former, yet overshoots the mark. While it is most indubitably true that the essential and fundamental characteristic of the "eternal" life, with Spinoza, is its *quality*, yet there is abundant evidence that its attainment somehow entails consequences as to the duration of the mind after death. For, not to recur to the general connection which I believe I have established between eternity and duration, we may note (1) that more than one reference is made to the effect of adequate thinking as freeing us from the fear of *death* (cf. IV. 67) *Homo vere liber nulla de re minus quam de morte cogitat.* v. 38, *quo plures res secundo et tertio cognitionis genere Mens intelligit...eo mortem minus timet.* (2) Further, the language with which Spinoza introduces the section on the Mind's eternity, *tempus est...ut ad illa transeam quae ad Mentis durationem sine relatione ad Corpus pertinent*, and his repeated use of the word "*remanere*" in this connection either mean continued duration of some sort, or they mean nothing. What this language actually means and what it does not we may now learn from a brief survey of the chief propositions on the subject in the order of their occurrence. To begin with then, Prop. 21, by which memory and imagination are excluded from continuance after the death of the body, by itself, as we have

already seen, proves that Spinoza cannot be thinking of anything that can properly be called "personal" immortality. Prop. 22 takes us a little way, though only a little way, towards a positive conception of his meaning. "Still," he says, "there is necessarily in God an idea which expresses the essence of this and that man's body under the form of eternity." The proof of this is as follows. The essence of the individual's body is a necessary consequence of the nature of God; the body must therefore of necessity be conceived of, if it is to be adequately conceived of, "*per ipsam Dei essentiam.*" There will therefore, in accordance with the doctrine of the parallelism between the divine attributes, necessarily exist in God, in so far as He is conceived of under the attribute of thought, an Idea which expresses the essence of the individual's body—as indeed there will be a similar Idea of everything else which follows from His nature. (See *Ethics*, II. 8.) That is, in other words, everything, when conceived of as a necessary element in the Universe as a whole, is, in that relation, eternal, and the human mind is no exception. (Compare Green, *Works*, Vol. III. p. 159, Fragment on Immortality.) In Prop. 23 with its important scholium we come to the special application of this important doctrine to the case of the mind. "The human mind cannot be entirely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal." For the Idea which is eternally present in God of the essence of the human body is just what, on Spinozistic principles, constitutes the special and peculiar *essence* of the human mind. Thus, even after death, there still remains something "in God" which belongs to the inmost essence of the individual human mind; and, as no finite duration (*duratio quae tempore definiri potest*) can be attributed to the Mind except in so far as it is actually conjoined with the body and consequently subject to the category of *time*, this "something" must be thought of, not under the form of time or duration, but, since it represents a necessary ingredient in the nature of God, as something *eternal*. So that, in some sense or other, there is about every man something deathless and eternal. But this demonstration still leaves the two most important questions which this subject gives rise to without an answer. We still want to know (1) how far we can attribute to the Mind an eternity which cannot with equal reason be asserted of the body, or of any other thing; (2) exactly what the *aliquid aeternum* which survives after our death must be taken to be.

(1) The answer to the first question is already indicated by the most important note which is appended as a scholium to our proposition. Briefly stated, it is this. The special and

peculiar prerogative of the human mind over all other things is that it alone can *know and enjoy* its own deathlessness. Other things, no doubt (I. 21, I. 22, compared with I. 15), as following of necessity from the attributes of God, or—if we prefer to express ourselves otherwise—as necessary "stages" in the world-process, are equally eternal, but their eternity is unknown to and unenjoyed by themselves. We, on the other hand, as the scholium says, "*sentimus experimurque nos aeternos esse.*" And by our consciousness of our own eternity Spinoza does not mean those vague and only half-rational yearnings and impulses towards the "Infinite"—or rather, the "Indefinite"—to which some attach such importance. A sound philosophy, indeed, cannot be expected to set much store by sensations so ill-defined and misty. What is meant here is something much more intelligible as well as more simple. Our consciousness of our own eternity, in fact, means our capacity for contemplating things in their systematic connections with one another, apart from merely temporal relations, and particularly our ability in our science to work into the fabric of our knowledge things vanished and gone before our birth and things yet to come equally easily with the events of yesterday. "The mind," says Spinoza, "perceives the things which it conceives by the understanding no less vividly than those which it remembers. For the eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes, are nothing else but demonstrations themselves. And therefore, though we have no recollection of existing before the birth of our bodies, still we feel (*sentimus*) that our mind, in so far as it involves the essence of the body under the form of eternity, is eternal, and that this its existence cannot be defined temporally nor explained in terms of duration." It is thus no ill-defined sentiment but the capacity of becoming what Plato magnificently calls (*Rep.* p. 486) the "spectator of all time and all existence" that constitutes the earnest and certitude of our eternity and gives it its characteristic superiority over such eternity as may be reasonably asserted of a part of inorganic nature, a brute, or even of our own body.

(2) The other question "what exactly is the *aliquid* which survives," is perhaps not answered by Spinoza in so many words, but a review of the remaining propositions of this section of the *Ethics* will, I think, enable us to advance a solution with some confidence. First, then, we have to gain a clearer conception of eternity and the "eternal part" of the mind as they manifest themselves in this present life, and next, on this basis, bearing in mind what has already been established as to the perishability of certain elements of our psychical nature, we ought to

be able to form a pretty shrewd conjecture as to what is left. Now we find in the series of propositions 24–39 the old doctrine of the "Short Treatise" restated and developed. In the "Short Treatise," it will be remembered, the qualitative characteristics of the Immortal part were two, (*a*) its possession of true and adequate ideas, (*b*) its union, by means of love, with God. The propositions before us aim at establishing the same two points with a further difference in each case. We learn now that the basis of that contemplation of things as they are "in God" in which "standeth our eternal life" is a knowledge of our own *body* "*sub specie aeternitatis*," and that the love of God, which is the only emotion which belongs to the mind *qua* eternal, is an "intellectual" love which is no other than the infinite love with which God eternally loves Himself. A short account of the steps in the argument will make both these conceptions more intelligible. Props. 24, "The better we understand particular things, the better we comprehend God," and 25, "The highest aim and chief virtue of mind is to understand things with the third kind of knowledge"—*i.e.* to trace them as necessary consequences of the nature of one of the divine attributes—are merely introductory to what is to come, and as the proof of them must be obvious to anyone who has followed the argument of this essay up to the present point, they need not delay us. Prop. 26, "The more capable the mind is of understanding things with the third kind of knowledge, the more desirous is it of so understanding them," may also be allowed to pass without comment. Prop. 27 is more important. "From this third kind of knowledge arises the highest possible content of mind" (*mentis acquiescentia*). This follows naturally from what has been already laid down, that to attain this kind of insight into the ways of the world is the supreme endeavour (*summus conatus*, Prop. 26) of the mind; naturally, the gratification of the *summus conatus* produces the *summa quae potest dari mentis acquiescentia*, especially as each adequate Idea is, as we know (II. 43), accompanied by the knowledge of its own adequacy, that is, of the thinker's own perfection (*concomitante idea sui suaeque virtutis*). The *use* of this proposition will be, as we shall find, to establish the connection, which for Spinoza is essential, between full and perfect knowledge and the corresponding emotional state, the "*Amor intellectualis Dei*." In Prop. 29 we are at last face to face with the great paradox of the system. "Whatever the mind knows under the form of eternity it knows, not by conceiving the present and actual existence of its own body, but *by conceiving the essence of its body under the form of eternity*." The meaning of this amazing sentence will best appear if, discarding Spinoza's formal demonstration, we

go back to certain ideas which we have found underlying the Epistemology of the second part of the *Ethics*. We learned there, it will be remembered, that the immediate object of every idea is some affection or state of the corresponding body (II. 13, II. 19) and that, consequently, in our ordinary perceptions we might be said to be perceiving rather the changes in our own body produced by various objects than the real character of the objects as they are in themselves, or "in God" (II. 16, Coroll. 2). We may now see that the scientific apprehension of things "*ut in se sunt*" equally involves a reference to the body, but of a different kind. In all our statements about the physical world, for instance, there is a tacit but never absent reference to our own organism as a sort of permanent *Schauplatz* or background.

When we speak *e.g.* of the state of things on this earth at some remote period before the appearance of man, or in some obscure nook or cranny of the world where human foot has never trod, what we give as the fact is always what *we* should have seen, had we been there to see it. So with our descriptions of the behaviour of a microscopic animalcule; we narrate what we have seen under the microscope, or what we believe we should see, were our lenses of sufficient power. Apart from this ever-present reference to the standard of the normal human organism every quality in terms of which we can talk about the world as it exists for science becomes unmeaning. For, even if you succeeded in eliminating all so-called "secondary" qualities from your account of the "real" world, you would not have got rid of space and motion, and I suppose no one who understands what he is talking about means by space and motion anything other than the space and the motion which we *see*. Note, however, the difference between this reference of everything to our own body and the former. The uninstructed man's reference is to the *present* condition, or the past condition at some arbitrarily-chosen moment, of his own individual organism; the scientist's reference is to the standard of the normal human organism conceived of as being, without distinction of past, present and future, a permanent constituent of and abiding background for reality. Thus, while the basis of the ordinary man's knowledge, such as it is, of facts, is the knowledge of his own body "*cum relatione ad certum tempus et locum*," the knowledge of the body as involved in the scientist's *Welt-Anschauung* is knowledge "without reference to time," or "*sub specie aeternitatis*." So the distinction between the knowledge which the mind gets of things when that knowledge is based on the affirmation of the actual present existence of the body and the knowledge which is dependent on the affirmation of the "essence of the body under the form of eternity" is that the one takes its stand at a

particular point of time and space, and so sees all upon which it looks in a perspective which more or less obscures the true outlines of objects; the other is, so to say, raised sufficiently high above the plane in which its objects are contained to take in their relations to one another truly and without distortion, as the eye takes in the view from a balloon. In the one case you have a distorted congeries of personal recollections and experiences, in the other an orderly and digested system of science.

It must also, of course, be remembered that, for Spinoza, to have an idea of a thing involves having an idea of that idea (II. 22), and consequently that adequate knowledge of the body "*sub specie aeternitatis*" includes not only a scientific apprehension of the outer world but also a profound knowledge of your own mind, the self-knowledge which brings sanity of moral purpose and inward quiet. The man who adequately knows his own body knows not merely the true relations of other things to each other, but the place of himself in the world, what his value in the scheme of things, what his power of action and grounds of hope. He knows "what things must, and what things may be;" he has the secret which enables a man, in the great phrase of Lucretius, "to contemplate the All with a mind at peace," and he is consequently strong, as only he can be strong, in the self-mastery and singleness of purpose which such knowledge gives. Prop. 30 takes us yet a step further towards our goal. "In knowing itself and the body under the form of eternity the mind necessarily has knowledge of God, and knows that it is in God and is conceived through God (*scit se in Deo esse, et per Deum concipi*). This follows, of course, from the equivalency, with which we are already familiar, of eternity with the necessity of the divine nature, and of knowledge 'under the form of eternity' with knowledge of things "*ut in Deo sunt.*" The object of restating the proposition in this form is to lead up to the demonstration of the connection between true thinking and the intellectual love of God. This demonstration is given in form in Prop. 32. As has already been shewn, the adequate knowledge of things under the form of eternity yields the highest possible peace and content of mind (Prop. 27), which moreover (Prop. 30) is accompanied by the recognition of God as its cause. Hence, adequate knowledge "*sub specie aeternitatis*" necessarily awakens *love* to God, not in so far as we imagine Him to be present at a given moment, but in so far as we recognize Him to be eternal. Thus this kind of love differs *toto caelo* from gratitude to God for private and personal favours vouchsafed; it arises, altogether apart from any personal reference, from the simple contemplation of the divine nature as it is "eternally," or for science, and it is therefore called by Spinoza, to distinguish it from all

emotions based on the "passions" which accompany "imagination" and its imperfect ideas—that is, based on *personal* grounds—intellectual. And this intellectual love of God is (Prop. 33) itself eternal. For, by Prop. 31, the mind in knowing anything under the form of eternity is knowing its *own* eternity. Hence it is only in so far as the mind is itself eternal that it can be the source of knowledge under the form of eternity and of the emotions consequent on it. True knowledge and the intellectual love aroused by it belong therefore to the mind *qua* eternal, and only *qua* eternal. They are thus themselves eternal. Further, knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis* and the intellectual love of God are the *only* activities of the mind which are truly eternal. For the former this results from what we have already learned of the perishability of all knowledge based merely on imagination and memory, that is, of all knowledge which is not *sub specie aeternitatis*; for the latter it is proved by Prop. 34, of which we have already made some use; "the mind is subject to the emotions which are grounded on the passions only so long as the body endures." As any and every emotion which arises from imagination,—that is, from any grade of knowledge short of true and adequate knowledge, is by Spinoza said to belong to the mind *quatenus patitur, non quatenus agit*, this at once excludes all and each of the emotions other than the intellectual love of God of which we have just heard. So that the "eternal" part of mind now stands reduced to two elements only, one cognitive and one emotional, the cognitive element being concrete but impersonal scientific truth, and the emotional the calm and acquiescence which such truth produces.

We have now practically completed our task. We have defined the eternal part of mind, and thus arrived at the answer to the question which confronted us a few moments ago, "What is the 'something' that remains when the body is dissolved by death?" The remaining propositions of the closing section of the *Ethics* contain much that is of high interest and would demand separate consideration in a complete account of Spinoza's philosophy. Particularly interesting is the suggestive identification of man's "intellectual" love to God with God's love to man, and of both with God's eternal intellectual love of Himself. All this, however, is nothing more than a fairly obvious deduction from the principles which have been established in the propositions that have already come under review, and contains nothing that could materially affect our decision as to Spinoza's meaning. Still less difficulty will be felt by a reader who has clearly grasped the principle of the parallelism of extension and thought in the statement that "*qui corpus ad plurima aptum habet, is mentem habet cuius maxima pars est*

aeterna." All that remains for me to do, then, is to attempt such a translation of our present results, so far as they bear on the state of the mind after death, into ordinary non-technical language as may give more definite and tangible sense to what must appear, to a reader who is not intimately acquainted with Spinoza's terminology, slightly vague and shadowy.

We have already abundantly seen what the mind's eternity is like as felt and enjoyed during life; we have now only to ask how we are to conceive of its continuance after death. That it does in some sense continue; *i.e.* that "eternity" does not mean *merely* the highest form of mental activity during the present life, I think I have already proved beyond all reasonable doubt, but I may now further strengthen my case by the citation of three passages which could not well have been adduced at an earlier stage in our enquiry. The first of the three is found in the Scholium on Prop. 34, where we are told that mankind in general, though conscious of their own eternity, confound it with duration and attribute it to memory or imagination, which they believe capable of surviving death. Here it will be observed that the error attributed to the mass of mankind is not that they wrongly think that what is "eternal" remains or persists after death; so far they are in accordance with Spinoza's own language on the subject; but that they (1) think this "survival" *the essence* of eternity, and (2) attribute it to the wrong element in mind. So in the Corollary to Prop. 40 it is laid down that the "part which remains," be it ever so small in respect of the whole mind, is still the "most perfect part," where, as anyone may see, the qualitative superiority of the "eternal" life and its persistence are as clearly distinguished as it is possible for two things to be. Lastly, in the Scholium to this same proposition we have the formal definition of the mind's eternity in these words: "the mind, in so far as it understands (*intelligit*), is an eternal mode of thought which is determined by another eternal mode of thought and this again by another, and so on *in infinitum*; so that all *together* (*simul*) form the eternal and infinite intellect of God," where the last clause seems absolutely to exclude the perishability, in any sense, of the "eternal" mode of thought referred to.

Some difficulty may perhaps arise from a comparison of this Scholium with certain other passages in the *Ethics.* It might be asked how the statement that the sum total of finite minds makes up the infinite intellect of God is consistent with the famous sayings in the Scholium to I. 17, where we are told that God's intellect differs from ours *toto caelo* and that the only point of identity between the two is, like the point of identity between a common dog and the dog-star, their being usually

called by the same name. And a further difficulty suggests itself about the whole conception when we go on to read the proof given in this same Scholium of the incommensurability of the divine with the human intellect. For the point on which the whole argument turns is the very natural one that an intellect which, like that of God, is the cause both of the essence and of the existence of its objects cannot but be very different from one which is not. Yet how are we to reconcile this explicit recognition of the divine intellect as the sole cause (*unica causa*) of the objects it comprehends with the equally explicit declaration of I. 31 that the "*intellectus actu*," *whether finite or infinite*, belongs not to *Natura naturans* but to *Natura naturata*? I cannot go into these questions here at any length, but I may perhaps be allowed just to indicate what I take to be the way out of the difficulty. To take the second point first. It is clear, I think, that the "intellect" of God of I. 17 is something more than the *intellectus actu* of I. 31, even when the latter is taken to be "infinite." For it is clear from the language of Spinoza's proof of the latter proposition that the *intellectus actu*, even when thought of as infinite, must be taken to mean an understanding which is still distinguished from other forms of psychical life (as *e.g.* will and feeling) to say nothing of the forms of extension or of some third attribute of God. Whereas in God not only the various "modes" of each attribute, but also the infinite attributes themselves, form a perfect unity without distinction of any sort (see II. 7, Corollary). Hence the *infinitus intellectus Dei* cannot be identified with any form of *intellectus actu*, that is intellect as distinguished from and opposed to extension or any other attribute, and the argument of Prop. I. 31 is therefore not applicable to it. And with respect to the other question, the difficulty vanishes, I think, on a second reading. For we must remember that we have no right to assume that *human* minds are the only finite minds in the world. God, we must remember, has an *infinite* number of attributes which are inaccessible to our human perception; and it must follow therefore, on the Spinozistic principle of parallelism, that each modification of each of these —to us—unknown attributes will be attended by its corresponding Idea in God conceived under the attribute of thought, that is, by its corresponding finite "mind." Hence there will be a great deal in the "infinite intellect of God" besides *human* thought. And it is these other hypothetical minds, I suppose, which he means by the "other eternal modes of thought" by which, according to the Scholium on V. 40, the eternal mode of thought which constitutes "our mind" is limited. This interpretation is rendered practically certain by two passages in

Spinoza's letters[1]. Writing to Oldenburg (Land and Van Vl. XXXII) he expressly says that the difference between the human mind and the *potentia infinita cogitandi* in nature is that the latter "*in se continet totam naturam obiective*," while the former is this same infinite intellect (*hanc eandem potentiam statuo*), but not *qua* infinite and comprehending the universe but *quatenus tantum humanum corpus percipit.* And in the important letter (L. and Van Vl. LXVI) to Tschirnhaus we learn that, though every single thing is expressed in the infinite intellect of God in an infinite number of ways corresponding to the infinite number of attributes, still these infinite "ideas" have no connection with one another, and therefore constitute the mind, not of one, but of an infinite number of beings (*unam eandemque rei singularis mentem constituere nequeunt, sed infinitas*).

How then to restate our results in more modern language? I think, thus. What is meant by the survival of the Mind as "intelligence" is simply the fact that an adequate idea, when once thought, forms a permanent addition to the stock of scientific knowledge in the world. In a way, of course, all emotions and thoughts are eternal, as being the product of one and the same eternal "World-process," but it is only the perfectly adequate scientific formulation of truth which can persist unchanged. Thus, those personal memories and affections which derive all their piquancy and poignancy from the personal reference, perish for ever, as such, at death. Parental or sexual love, *e.g.*, may be a permanent factor in human life, but not the love of this particular parent for this particular child. That derives all its depth from the fact that it is not merely parental love as such, but the love of a particular individual *A* for his own child *B*. Hence, with the death of the persons involved, it too dies. And so with all thought and feeling whose inmost being is bound up with the personality of the subject who experiences them. They depend for their very existence on just those differences which make the existence of one man separate from that of another, and it is for Spinoza not in so far as men are thus exclusive of one another, but only as they can enter into and share a life without personal reference where all meet and are indistinguishably one that they are immortal. So again with honest but defective scientific thinking. The astronomical ideas of Ptolemy or Tycho-Brahe, so far as they contained truth, survive indeed in later science, but only after suffering strange transformations. As formulated and held by those scientists, they have perished

[1] Here, again, I have to express my indebtedness to Mr Dale.

beyond the power of time to recall. And this utter mortality is to some degree the doom of every man, no matter how great his stock of adequate ideas. For by IV. 4, *no* man can make himself a *mere* home of adequate thought. *Fieri non potest ut homo non sit naturae pars.* And the Corollary is *hominem necessario passionibus semper esse obnoxium;* and to be subject to "passions" is, as we have seen by V. 34, to be perishable at death. But an adequate idea, once thought, takes its place, in the form in which it is thought, as a permanent addition to knowledge. Whoever would think again the adequate geometrical ideas of Euclid or Newton must think them not only in the spirit but in the very shape in which Newton or Euclid thought them. For an adequate idea has a double prerogative over every other factor in the soul's life. In formulating it, he who first does so is rethinking part of the eternal content of the divine intellect in its true form; thus the adequate idea, properly speaking, has had no beginning and will have no end. He is also thinking something which all subsequent human science must rethink after him; hence the adequate idea, because adequate and eternal, is also, so far as it appears in time at all, as a consequence of its eternity, permanent and ever-during. For even human thought is not for Spinoza, as it might be for some philosophers, a merely transient phase of the supreme reality which may sooner or later give place to some newer development, but an abiding and perpetually necessary consequence of the divine nature, an *aeternus modus* of one of the attributes, which consequently *semper existere debet.*

Such a theory of intellectual, or impersonal, immortality is not without its repellent aspects and difficult points. It may be attacked, as by Martineau, on the ground of its failure to satisfy ordinary human yearnings and aspirations. Or it may be assailed more philosophically from the opposite side by one who likes to raise the question whether we have a right to assume, as Spinoza does, that any truth is so true that it can be regarded as a permanent and immutable contribution to knowledge. It may be said that even the most indisputable axiom must be prepared to undergo modification as science grows, or that, if there be "adequate ideas" at all, they will at best be found among the most abstract and empty generalisations of logic, and so fall far short of the concrete fulness which is with him the characteristic peculiarity of knowledge of the third or highest kind.

With Spinoza, however, as with most writers who are really worth a serious study, the task of intelligent interpretation, though harder, is infinitely more valuable than that of facile criticism, even when the critic hits the real blot. Almost more

than any other modern philosopher, the retiring and unobtrusive man has succeeded in awakening the most opposite feelings and the most ludicrously exaggerated judgments. But it is really a question of only secondary importance whether the great Jew of Amsterdam is for us as for Novalis, a "Gott-betrunkener Mensch," and for Renan the man who "has perhaps had the nearest vision of God," or whether we regard him, to use the more than half ironical expressions of the most illustrious of English philosophers, as a "famous atheist," and his system as the "gloomy and obscure region of hideous hypothesis." The main thing, here as everywhere, is not to judge—that is easy enough—but to make sure that we understand.