

The Episodic Nature of “Blessedness” in  
Spinoza’s *Ethics*

by

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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

The final chapter of Spinoza's *Ethics* has elicited numerous interpretations, and in this work, I discuss Jonathan Bennett's and Harry Wolfson's. Bennett claims that the doctrine of blessedness is unintelligible, while Wolfson claims that Spinoza's account of blessedness actually defends traditional, medieval views of the immortality of the soul. I find neither of these acceptable accounts for the reasons presented below, and I have a simple alternative explanation for this doctrine. Essentially, I argue that by 'blessedness' Spinoza means being happy with being virtuous. In my reading of the *Ethics*, Spinoza first offers the account that we should help others in order to help ourselves, and then he explains that we should enjoy doing so, and he writes that being happy with this is called 'blessedness.'

## **Acknowledgements**

This work would not have been possible without the support of my parents and family, nor would it have been possible without the feedback and criticisms of my supervisor and readers, Dr. Dea, Dr. Lawson and Dr. Abbott.

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this to my family, without whose unflinching love and support I would not have been able to study philosophy and complete this work.

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## Introduction

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza presents an argument for what he considers to be the highest satisfaction or good a person could attain. This subject does not receive very much attention in Spinoza scholarship; indeed, a search on the philosopher's index returned very few leads. This work will address the thoughts of two Spinoza scholars, Wolfson and Bennett, on the matter. Wolfson is entirely sympathetic to the doctrine of blessedness but he also interprets it as a doctrine of personal immortality in defense of traditional medieval views. This is problematic even on a superficial level because that interpretation does not accord with Spinoza's many rejections of doctrines of personal immortality, and it will be shown that Spinoza's metaphysical system simply does not support a doctrine of personal immortality. On the other hand, Bennett is entirely unsympathetic to the doctrine of blessedness, and he finds it completely unintelligible. However, I do offer an alternative interpretation, which claims that Spinoza's account of "blessedness" describes a state of satisfaction with one's own virtue, a love of virtue rather than vices; indeed, it is at best only an episodic state because no human being is capable of being forever virtuous, and will be acted on in Spinoza's language.

Of the two authors I have engaged with on the subject of Spinoza's account of blessedness, I am more sympathetic to Wolfson's interpretation. Indeed, I feel that he was steered off course in his interpretation of blessedness by his attempt to force Spinoza into the mould of a traditionalist who believes in an afterlife. Instead, I view Spinoza as a man who was continually confronted by the people of his time, who were largely ignorant of the discernable regularities that most of us now know actually do govern the world, and that these people committed horrible atrocities because of their ignorance. While the *Ethics* is full of speculative metaphysical ideas, it is about conduct first and foremost; otherwise, it would have another title. Indeed, Spinoza's biography shows that he had encounters with the deaths of close family members at a young age, and that the people in his

community had felt the religious persecution of the time, as he rightly says, “The mob is terrifying, if unafraid.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, we can only look back on this one and other periods of religious persecution and shudder at what human beings are capable of doing when they carry hateful beliefs, and I feel that Spinoza’s *Ethics* contains his best attempt at an antidote to the violence caused by ignorance. In it, he writes that cooperation is humanity’s best means to achieve individual self-preservation, and this could hardly be further from the accepted beliefs of his time.

I imagine that reading Spinoza’s *Ethics* for the first time is a strange thing for anyone, and will only be stranger for future generations, as we learn more through the sciences. Spinoza’s concept of thinking substance is so foreign to us today, yet he used this as a way to explain how one can have ideas, and it works insofar as he is able to show that God, or substance, lacks a will and that the ideas a person has come from previous experience. However, Spinoza’s system is not perfect; indeed, how could it be when the details are different from what we now know of reality? Nevertheless, the more often I have read the *Ethics*, the more respect I have for what Spinoza was trying to do with the knowledge available to him in his time, and the more I wonder what Spinoza might have said if he lived today.

This thesis asks whether or not the doctrine of “blessedness” and the last half of part five in general are consistent with what came before in the *Ethics*. I first engage with Bennett who reacts too harshly to Spinoza’s final doctrines, and calls them inconsistent when he should not. The chapter devoted to Bennett addresses his concerns about “blessedness” by considering his objection to the third kind of knowledge and the love of God. While his objection to the eternity of the mind is also unfounded, I have omitted it from this work because I feel that my responses to his objections to the

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<sup>1</sup> IVP54Schol.



third kind of knowledge and the love of God are enough to show that “blessedness” is intelligible in Spinoza’s work.

In the chapter concerning Wolfson, I focus on his interpretation of the doctrine of the eternity of the mind for the reason that Wolfson views the eternal part of the mind as an immortal part, and argues that Spinoza calls this immortality “blessedness”, which we can have intimations of during our lives. Hence, in order to reject Wolfson’s interpretation of “blessedness,” I must reject his account of the eternity of the mind. Indeed, by doing so I feel that I have adequately discussed the matter of the eternity of the mind as it pertains to my interpretation of “blessedness.”

I would like to offer a brief version of my account of “blessedness” here. Spinoza claims that cooperation rather than competition leads to an increased ability to strive, and that this is what each individual person should want to do. When we consider this alongside the final proposition in the *Ethics*, we can begin to see how Spinoza’s emphasis on blessedness as the enjoyment of virtue itself connects to his overall system. That is, by claiming that striving to persevere in being is a person’s real interest, Spinoza sets the stage for giving his readers reasons to want to be virtuous. Then, it is easy to see how he would call enjoying what he calls the best means to persevere in being “blessed.” The reason I call this an episodic account is because Spinoza’s account does not really permit a person to be virtuous all of the time, nor does it allow a person to always actually persevere in being. It does not allow a person to always ‘act’ but it expects that a person will be acted on, and it is for this reason that “blessedness” is only ever an episode in a person’s life, according to Spinoza.

## Chapter 1

### The Ten Uses of the Root “Beat” in the *Ethics*

Spinoza uses the word “blessedness” (*beatudino*) or “blessed” (*beat*) in only ten different places in the entire *Ethics*. In this chapter, I discuss the ten different locations the Latin root “beat” is applied in the *Ethics*, and I offer a brief interpretation of how these uses pertain to my argument.

The first time Spinoza uses the word “blessedness” is in the preface to the second book of the *Ethics*, Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind, Spinoza promises to explain “those things which must necessarily follow from the essence of God, [... and] that can lead us, by the hand, as it were, to the knowledge of the human mind and its highest blessedness.”

The second book details a great deal of Spinoza’s account of ideas, but also about the physical regularities evident in the world. He does not mention “blessedness” directly again until the scholium to the final proposition in this book. However, I would like to suggest that his treatment of ideas and of the world is pivotal to the doctrine of “blessedness” since the third kind of knowledge Spinoza makes so much of in the final book of the *Ethics* deals with the matter of adequate and inadequate ideas directly. To put things on a practical level, Spinoza’s treatment of the third kind of knowledge is his way of explaining how one can trust that the regularities evident in the world actually are eternal regularities.

The second place Spinoza uses the word “blessedness” it is in the fourth scholium to the corollary of the final proposition of the second book. I have reproduced it at length near the end of chapter three and I do not want to cite it here. However, the relevant section pertains to social life and the proposition pertains to man’s lack of free will. Indeed, the matter of free will in Spinoza’s *Ethics* is a

complicated one and I do not have the space to defend my thoughts here. However, I would like to offer an explanation of how this instance of the use of the word “blessedness” accords with my interpretation of “blessedness” as satisfaction with one’s own virtue. Arguably, Spinoza writes that the ideas other people hold come from their experiences, and they are not free to hold different ideas unless they have been accordingly influenced. Hence, if some people have lived poor, desperate lives because of oppressive conditions, then they will act in ways to persevere in their own being that might be dangerous to you. Thus, as a part of your own struggle to persevere, you would be remiss not to raise the standard of living of your fellow man so that he does not act against your interest from the trappings of poverty.

The third place Spinoza uses the word “blessedness” is in IVP21, and in the scholium. Here, Spinoza writes that a desire to be “blessed” entails a desire to live. I find this consistent with Spinoza’s claims in IIP7 and in other places as well, which states that self-preservation is the essence of singular things. Hence, it seems entirely consistent for Spinoza to then call a desire for self-preservation a person’s highest satisfaction.

The fourth place Spinoza uses the word “blessedness” is in the scholium to IVP54, wherein he explains that repentance is actually a bad thing for an individual because it entails a loss of power. However, it is also a good thing for that individual because it inhibits the unacceptable behaviour in people who do not live from the dictates of reason, and could not one day enjoy the life of the “blessed” if they gave in to all of their base desires. In an uncharacteristically manipulative tone, Spinoza thinks that these people might one day come to love virtue more than vice, and the first step they must take is to feel bad about their vices.

The fifth place Spinoza uses the word “blessedness” is in the fourth section of the appendix to the fourth part. It is a lengthy passage, but it is useful to note that Spinoza identifies the pursuit of

knowledge through reason as the highest satisfaction of the mind, and that “blessedness” lies therein. I have a great deal to say about this passage, but I use this information as a part of the argument against Bennett’s failure to appreciate the benefits of the third kind of knowledge. Perhaps it will do here to say that Spinoza’s endorsement of knowledge of the third kind is an endorsement of learning the best means by which to strive to persevere, because one gains adequate knowledge of the formal essences<sup>2</sup> of the attributes. This knowledge is proof that God lacks a will, and that the essences of the attributes are eternal. Thus, one can at least be certain that the regularities one observes in reality are here to stay.

The sixth place Spinoza uses the word “blessedness” is in the preface to the fifth part, wherein Spinoza treats “the power of reason, showing what it can do against the affects, and what freedom of the mind, *or* blessedness is.”<sup>3</sup> Clearly, this is a remark that further shows the extent to which Spinoza had “blessedness” in mind when he discusses reason and ideas, for he now promises to explain how this knowledge leads to blessedness. Indeed, in the preface to the third part, Spinoza writes that he will “consider human actions and appetites as if it were a question of lines, planes and bodies.”<sup>4</sup> Now, Spinoza wants us to apply the power of reason to our minds in order to alter our behaviour and achieve “blessedness,” or to learn how to like being virtuous out of our own interest in self-preservation.

The seventh place Spinoza uses the word “blessedness” is in the scholium to VP31. The proposition endorses the third kind of knowledge, which I have already promised to discuss at length in a later chapter. The specific use of the word is found in the scholium, where Spinoza writes, “...the more each of us is able to achieve in this kind of knowledge, the more conscious of himself

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<sup>2</sup> CF Wolfson 292 for an analysis of formal vs. actual essences.

<sup>3</sup> VPref.

and of God, that is, the more perfect and blessed he is.”<sup>5</sup> Since Spinoza comes to endorse virtue as the best means of striving, then the more knowledge one acquires of the third kind, then the more one knows about the essence of the attributes of substance and of oneself, since each person is a mode. This knowledge should then lead to virtuous action, in Spinoza’s account.

The eighth place Spinoza uses the word “blessedness” is found in the scholium of VP33. This is the place where Spinoza writes, “If joy, then, consists in a passage to a greater perfection, blessedness must surely consist in the fact that the mind is endowed with perfection itself.”<sup>6</sup> The connection between joy and the passage to a greater perfection is something I discuss at length in the third chapter of this work. Here, it should suffice to say that “blessedness” is the feeling that accompanies virtue, and it only comes about because the mind actually holds adequate ideas; otherwise, the mind could hold inadequate ideas but one could still persevere. In that case, one would not be “blessed” because one does not achieve the satisfaction with one’s virtue.

The ninth place Spinoza uses the word “blessedness” is in the scholium to VP36. This is the proposition where Spinoza equates the intellectual love of God with the love with which God loves himself. In the scholium to the corollary to this proposition, Spinoza writes,

...our salvation *or* blessedness *or* freedom consists ... in a constant and eternal love of God...And this love, *or* blessedness is called glory in the sacred scriptures – not without reason. For whether this love is related to God or to the mind, it can rightly be called satisfaction of mind, which is really not distinguished from glory.

Spinoza’s explicit statement that “blessedness” is rightly called the satisfaction of mind accords with my interpretation of a satisfaction with one’s own virtue. The fact that Spinoza calls this the glory in

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<sup>4</sup> IIIPref.

<sup>5</sup> VP31Schol.

<sup>6</sup> VP33Schol.

the sacred scriptures sends Wolfson on quite a lengthy search in his book in order to find the passage to which he thinks Spinoza referred. We need not worry about that here since Wolfson's criteria for selecting one passage over another seem somewhat arbitrary.<sup>7</sup>

The final place Spinoza used the word "blessedness" is, of course, in the final proposition of the *Ethics*. This is where Spinoza pulls all of his ideas together and states that "blessedness" is virtue itself, and not the reward of virtue, which accords with my interpretation of "blessedness" as a satisfaction with virtue. In addition, "blessedness" is the love of God, which arises from the third kind of knowledge, and this accords with my interpretation of the ninth use of the word "blessedness." Moreover, Spinoza's point that one is able to restrain one's lusts because one enjoys blessedness is in accord with my interpretation of the sixth use of the word, when Spinoza discussed the power reason has over the affects.

This section was not an argument on its own, but I offer it as a catalogue of the instances where Spinoza used the word "blessedness" in the *Ethics*. Indeed, my own account does not come until later, but this piece does give a sense of my reasons for disputing the claims Wolfson and Bennett make.

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<sup>7</sup> CF. Wolfson, 313-316

## Chapter 2

### Bennett on Blessedness

Bennett writes, “the final one-twentieth of the work, from VP23 to the end, contains a failure, ... an unmitigated and seemingly unmotivated disaster. I would like to excuse myself from discussing it, but my adverse judgment on it should be defended.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, he writes, “after three centuries of failure to profit from it, the time has come to admit that this part of the *Ethics* has nothing to teach us and it is pretty certainly worthless.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Bennett goes so far as to say, “Those of us who love and admire Spinoza’s philosophical work should in sad silence avert our eyes from the second half of Part V.”<sup>10</sup>

While Bennett finds the doctrine of “blessedness” inconsistent with the remainder of Spinoza’s system, this thesis will argue that it actually is entirely consistent with the philosophical framework Spinoza created in the *Ethics*, and this allows us to understand the ethical project Spinoza had in mind. It is in the final section of the *Ethics* that Spinoza clearly states the way in which the love of God (which is virtue by another name) influences daily, practical conduct. That is, it is through satisfaction with virtue, which is the best means of striving to persevere in being, that one attains “blessedness.” This chapter will first explain the details of Bennett’s claims that “blessedness” is inconsistent with Spinoza’s *Ethics*, and will then dispute them.

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<sup>8</sup> Bennett 357

<sup>9</sup> Bennett 372

<sup>10</sup> Bennett 375

## 2.1 Bennett's Main Objections

It is somewhat difficult to address Bennett's concerns about "blessedness" for two reasons. The first is that he does not give Spinoza a very charitable interpretation; secondly, Bennett spends so little time discussing "blessedness," or, indeed, any of the three associated doctrines that it is difficult to see his reasons for claiming that the final four doctrines are unintelligible. Nevertheless, Bennett's claim that "blessedness" is inconsistent with Spinoza's framework must be addressed here in order for my claim, that "blessedness" actually is consistent, to be heard, because he is an absolutely canonical Spinoza scholar and he is the harshest critic of the doctrine of blessedness. This work focuses on the doctrine of blessedness, and since the three final doctrines do all pertain to blessedness, it is prudent to address Bennett's concerns about these doctrines. However, Bennett has such an overtly hostile tone toward the final section of the *Ethics* that it is difficult to be charitable to him. For example, Bennett remarks that Pollock is the only commentator of Spinoza who views the final stretch of the *Ethics* as intelligible whose work Bennett actually respects. Bennett cites Pollock's words that the eternity of the mind "throws a sort of poetical glow over the formality of [Spinoza's] exposition."<sup>11</sup> In response to this, Bennett writes that Pollock is "reduced to such babbling by his desire to praise the final stretch of the *Ethics*, [and] that is further evidence that this material is valueless. Worse, it is dangerous: it is rubbish that causes others to write rubbish."<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, Bennett finds himself at a loss to explain why Spinoza would include the final doctrines, and he even speculates that "...he was after all terrified of extinction and convinced himself – through a scatter of perverse arguments and hunger for the conclusion – that he had earned immortality ... it looks as though some passive affect – of fear or hope or excitement – clung stubbornly to the man and

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<sup>11</sup> Bennett 374

<sup>12</sup> Bennett 374



overcame his reason.”<sup>13</sup> It is of course acceptable to critique Spinoza’s conclusions about blessedness. However, it should not be acceptable to dismiss the doctrine outright as unintelligible on unfounded grounds.

## 2.2 Blessedness and Part IV

Bennett writes that Spinoza does not work hard enough to connect “blessedness” with Part IV in a coherent moral doctrine, and that the only time Spinoza actually connects the ideas of “blessedness” to the ideas from Part IV is in the final scholium of the book.<sup>14</sup>

Bennett is simply wrong to say that the only place Spinoza connects the doctrines of part five with part four is in the final scholium. Indeed, numerous references throughout the propositions of part five draw connections to propositions and axioms from part four. It is difficult to follow Bennett’s claims in this regard.

Bennett is puzzled by Spinoza’s characterization of the ignorant man, who “...as soon as he ceases to be acted on he ceases to be.”<sup>15</sup> Bennett’s puzzlement soon turns to undue criticism, for he writes, “he [Spinoza] is now writing in so lax and slippery a fashion as to defeat reasonable conjecture about his meaning.”<sup>16</sup> Truthfully, I am somewhat puzzled by this claim as well, and have been puzzled by Spinoza’s occasional statements that some things have more reality than others do.<sup>17</sup> However, I would like to offer an interpretation of Spinoza’s statement. I do believe that the *Ethics* has an undertone suggesting that the virtuous person is more real than someone who lacks virtue; however, since this work focuses on Spinoza’s concept of “blessedness” specifically, I do not have the space to

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<sup>13</sup> Bennett 375

<sup>14</sup> cf 371

<sup>15</sup> VP42Schol.

<sup>16</sup> Bennett 372

<sup>17</sup> cf E IIP13CS; IVPreface

address this curious aspect of Spinoza's *Ethics* entirely. However, a brief version is useful here, at least as an attempt to show that Bennett is being unduly harsh to Spinoza.

Consider IVD8, which suggests that virtue is “the very essence, or nature, of man insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone.”<sup>18</sup> We should also consider that the ignorant man lacks knowledge that virtue is his best means of striving, which is evident from IVP22. Hence, we should think that the ignorant man would lack the essence of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about things that can be understood through the laws of his nature alone. It is also useful to consider IVP21 on this matter, which states, “No one can desire to be blessed, to act well and to live well, unless at the same time he desires to be, to act and to live, that is, to actually exist.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, since the ignorant man lacks virtue, he can only bring things about that cannot be understood through his nature alone, in other words he can only bring things about inadequately. Indeed, his lack of virtue and his inability to act go together; hence, when he ceases to be acted on, he ceases to be a cause of things that can be understood through his nature. Perhaps this goes some way toward explaining how Spinoza can say that the ignorant man ceases to be when he ceases to be acted on, though what Spinoza has in mind is not entirely clear to me. Perhaps Spinoza is somewhat incautious by using the phrase ‘ceases to be,’ however, Bennett is inexplicably uncharitable in this section, and his inability to see the connections between parts five and four is startling. What is clear from this discussion is that Spinoza's final proposition, the one Bennett objects to, does have connections to the system Spinoza worked out in the preceding sections of the *Ethics*, and these connections go beyond the scholium to the final proposition.

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<sup>18</sup> IVD8

<sup>19</sup> IVP21

## **2.3 Bennett on the Third Kind of Knowledge and The Intellectual Love of God**

The following two subsections will consider Bennett's thoughts on the third kind of knowledge and the intellectual love of God, since these two are more closely related to virtue than to the eternity of the mind. Indeed, Spinoza writes that even if we have no knowledge of the eternity of our mind we would still pursue virtue, tenacity and nobility, which pertains directly to "blessedness."

### **2.3.1 Bennett on the Third Kind of Knowledge**

In explaining how he understands the intellectual love of God, Bennett misses a part of Spinoza's argument. Spinoza writes that we come to know God by the third kind of knowledge, or intuition, and this is different from the second kind, reason; Bennett has difficulty understanding why the third kind of knowledge is different from the second kind. Bennett's error comes from his failure to appreciate the difference between having knowledge of a singular thing and knowledge of a singular thing's essence. Bennett writes that Spinoza does not "...explain how the proposition that all things depend on God is to be inferred from the very essence of any particular thing which we say depends on God."<sup>20</sup> Hence, Bennett does not understand what Spinoza means by the third kind of knowledge.

The connection Bennett does not seem to be able to make is that adequate knowledge of the formal essence of things is more than just adequate knowledge of singular things. In introducing the third kind of knowledge, Spinoza writes, "...this kind of knowing proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the formal essence of things."<sup>21</sup> Surely, this is something different from the second kind of knowledge, which consists of "...adequate ideas of the properties of things."<sup>22</sup> The difference that the third kind of knowledge

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<sup>20</sup> Bennett 369.

<sup>21</sup> IIP40Schol2

<sup>22</sup> IIP40Schol2

makes is that if one understands the formal essence of an attribute, one will also be able to understand the formal essence of any mode of that attribute. Hence, it gives a greater knowledge of substance, and the second kind of knowledge can lead to this. Indeed, if we consider IIP44C2 we can see that “it is of the nature of reason to perceive things under a certain species of eternity.” Hence, we could have adequate knowledge of a thing’s formal essence through the second kind of knowledge by understanding that the formal essence of the singular thing has a kind of existence that cannot be expressed in terms of duration. It is by encountering singular things and conceiving of them in this way that one might then arrive at knowledge of the third kind, which pertains to the eternal nature of the attributes, of which the singular things are modes.

The real difference is that a person with adequate knowledge only of the properties of things will not also know that all things are necessarily conceived through God (or the one and only substance). Hence, that person who only understands things by the second kind of knowledge would not be able to say with certainty that the same rules of cause and effect that are observed in this or that mode of an attribute are a part of God’s perfection, and it is crucial to note that difference. Consider that if one did not know that God was perfect, then one might be inclined to think that the benefits or hardships of one’s life were things that God ‘went out of his way to cause’ and were not events that simply follow from previous causes without any will on God’s part. Having adequate knowledge of a thing would mean having a complete account of the causes of that brought the thing into its current state, and this is impossible to have, and this is not a part of the third kind of knowledge. Instead, having adequate knowledge of the formal essence of a thing involves knowledge of the essence of the attributes of thought and extension, under which a thing can be conceived. Hence, the difference is

that one can actually have adequate knowledge of the formal essence of a thing, and this comes from considering it under a species of eternity, which I will discuss later.<sup>23</sup>

The counter argument I have presented here avoids certain problems Bennett sees with Spinoza's account of the third kind of knowledge. Essentially, Bennett writes that we cannot have adequate knowledge of the essence of things, "For intuitive knowledge deals only in adequate ideas, and an idea of the whole nature of a real thing could not be adequate in my mind i.e., caused wholly from within, unless my body contained the thing in question or a perfect duplicate of it."<sup>24</sup> Certainly, Spinoza did not envision anyone's bodies having perfect duplicates of things as a valid precondition for adequate knowledge of a singular thing's essence, and I think Bennett's claims about this come from his failure to appreciate the difference between a singular thing's actual essence and its formal essence.

As noted above, the third kind of knowledge pertains to adequate knowledge of the formal essence of attributes, and extends this to knowledge of the formal essence of singular things, which we get by encountering singular things. Bennett is correct to cite IIP37 in support of his claim that we cannot have adequate knowledge of a singular thing's actual essence simply by knowing what is equally in the part and in the whole. However, this is not what Spinoza is saying in his discussion of the third kind of knowledge; Spinoza simply says that we do know that the essence of all things is a striving to persevere in being. It is for this reason that I am unsure why Bennett even makes the claim that we cannot have adequate knowledge of the actual essence of singular things – Spinoza comes out and says what he thinks the actual essence of singular things is. However, the third kind of knowledge is not about knowing the singular thing's actual essence, but its formal essence. For an illustration of

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<sup>23</sup> CF Wolfson 292

<sup>24</sup> Bennett 367

the difference between the actual essence of a singular thing and the formal essence of a thing please first consider IIP15, which states, “The idea that constitutes the formal being of the human mind is not simple, but composed of a great many ideas...the idea of the body is composed of the many ideas of the parts composing the body.”<sup>25</sup> This means that a body is made up of other singular things, or smaller parts, and the formal idea of the body is also composed of the ideas of each of these smaller parts.<sup>26</sup> Then, please consider “The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing.”<sup>27</sup> Clearly, for Spinoza, the actual essence of each thing that constitutes the formal thing has this striving, but so too does the singular thing. Still, knowing the actual essence of a singular thing is not the same as having adequate knowledge of the singular thing, and we cannot have adequate knowledge of a singular thing but we also do not need it. If we use a human as our example of a singular thing, then it would not be possible to have adequate knowledge of that person because he or she might well have inadequate ideas, and be acted on in a way that is unpredictable to an observer. The third kind of knowledge is not about needing adequate knowledge about singular things; what we do need in order to be able to strive is knowledge of the attributes, and the formal essences of the attributes.

Perhaps a brief example would be useful: consider that a plant is composed of numerous physical structures, each of which seems to obey the regularity that it tries to keep itself together; however, understanding how cell walls function and why they fail over time does not give one the whole story of the plant, as this knowledge is. What this knowledge does give, though, is an example of chemical and physical regularities that do hold true in plants as well as other organisms. The knowledge we gain from our study of plants can be applied to other instances, and if we use this knowledge to help

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<sup>25</sup> IIP15, dem.

<sup>26</sup> IIP15 and below, deal directly with how these smaller parts can be considered one object together, like a body.

us to persevere, then Spinoza would say it would bring us joy. Conversely, having almost total knowledge of the forces that have ever acted on this or that plant does not bring us very useful information unless we understand it under a species of eternity, and in terms of its formal essence as being just another mode of substance, which adheres to the immutable regularities of the attributes;<sup>28</sup> otherwise, we would be unable to transfer the information observed in this instance to another plant, or to another instance. Hence, Spinoza's metaphysics endorses the scientific approach of using model organisms to observe biochemical processes that occur in a variety of organisms, in the hope that knowledge gained from a model organism will be transferable to other organisms, not because they have the very same actual essence, but because they are both modes of substance, and are intelligible under the very same attribute.

### **2.3.2 Bennett on the Intellectual Love of God**

Bennett writes that a positive account of why the intellectual love of God comes from our understanding of God as eternal rather than as what we imagine to be present to us would "...require a real understanding of what intuitive knowledge is."<sup>29</sup> Given the account presented above, we can now give the positive account Bennett was missing.

Spinoza writes, "Whatever we understand by the third kind of knowledge we take pleasure in, and our pleasure is accompanied by the idea of God as a cause."<sup>30</sup> Here, Spinoza writes that when we understand the eternal or immutable nature of the attributes we experience pleasure that is accompanied by the idea of God, or of substance, as a cause. It is easy to see why this would be the

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<sup>27</sup> IIP7

<sup>28</sup> The argument supporting the claim that attributes are eternal regularities is beyond the scope of this work, however, the reader who wishes to engage further with this material is advised to consider Edwin Curley's "Behind the Geometrical Method," particularly beginning on page 23.

<sup>29</sup> Bennett 370

<sup>30</sup> VP32

case. Given that Spinoza thinks that all things strive to persevere, and that pleasure accompanies an increase in one's ability to strive, knowing that substance has immutable or eternal attributes is a huge boon. Consider the opposite for a moment; indeed, if the attributes of substance did not express eternal or immutable regularities, and these regularities were not comprehensible, then we would not be able to strive well at all. Try to imagine the chaos that would happen if the normal regularities did not exist, and we were, for example, able to drink water to quench our thirst one day, but be unable to do so the next because water suddenly disappeared from the planet. On its surface, this is an outlandish example, but it is not so different from what Spinoza is actually trying to rule out with the second and third kinds of knowledge. However, this still does not suggest that human beings could completely understand all of the antecedent causes that brought about this or that event because they regress infinitely; moreover, there are also cases where the regularities themselves are too complex to grasp. Simply put, however, the normal, everyday regularities necessary for survival are absolutely comprehensible parts of the eternal attributes, and understanding that they hold true from one point in time to another is a source of "power" because holding this knowledge increases one's ability to strive to persevere.

It is knowledge of the third kind, of the formal essences of the attributes and therefore of the formal essences of all modes as well that allows us to strive well. In other words, knowledge of the third kind shows us that the eternal essence of the attributes applies, and this lets us know how to strive to persevere in all places, because certain regularities always hold. This is the backbone Spinoza needs for his ethical system to endorse virtue, and it is for this reason that Spinoza writes, in the corollary to the above quoted proposition, "...love of God, not insofar as we imagine him to be present, but



insofar as we understand God to be eternal. And this is what I call the intellectual love of God.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, when Spinoza discusses the intellectual love of God, he does not mean us to imagine this or that part of substance that is before us, and how it might be behaving; instead, he means for us to understand the eternal nature of the attributes, and recognize their usefulness to us. It is worth noting that Bennett explicitly calls Spinoza’s statements in VP32 “lame.”<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche would call them lame because Nietzsche disagrees with Spinoza’s moral and ethical conclusions; however, Bennett calls them lame because he does not appreciate what the third kind of knowledge delivers.

Spinoza introduces something he calls God’s intellectual love for himself. Admittedly, this sounds strange, and, as is to be expected, Bennett certainly does not endorse it. When we consider God’s intellectual love for himself, we should look to the scholium to the corollary to VP36 for clarification. Here is one of the few places in the *Ethics* that Spinoza uses the word “blessedness” and Spinoza writes, “From this we clearly understand wherein our salvation, *or* blessedness, *or* freedom, consists, namely, in a constant and eternal love of God, *or* in God’s love for men.”<sup>33</sup> Here is the connection to the moral doctrine toward which Spinoza has been working. Virtue, striving to persevere and the third kind of knowledge all come together here in Spinoza’s account of a person’s highest satisfaction. The third kind of knowledge is how we can understand that the formal essences of singular things are a part of the formal essence of the attribute under which they are conceived. Thus, we know that the regularities that we see as the essence of the attributes that hold here and now are eternal ones, and that these are separate from the actual essences of singular things. Moreover, this information aids us in striving to persevere in our being because it is proof that the regularities will

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<sup>31</sup> VP32

<sup>32</sup> Bennett 370

<sup>33</sup> VP36CS

hold throughout our lifetime, and the virtue Spinoza's system endorses really is effective 'throughout' substance.

## Chapter 3

### Wolfson on Blessedness

#### 3.1 Wolfson on the Eternity of the Mind

Wolfson interprets Spinoza's statement that "The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal"<sup>34</sup> as an indication that Spinoza's philosophical system posits not only the eternity of the mind, but the immortality of the mind as well. "Immortality ... means the eternal preservation of something that was peculiar to a particular human being during his lifetime."<sup>35</sup> This chapter will demonstrate that the argument Wolfson presents to support this claim simply does not follow from Spinoza's system. This is important ground to cover because Wolfson's claims about the eternity/immortality of the mind underpin his claims about "blessedness," and refuting his claims about the immortality of the mind goes a long way to refuting his conclusions about "blessedness" as well. Wolfson also connects the doctrines of the third kind of knowledge and the intellectual love of God to "blessedness." He argues that "blessedness" is a glimpse of immortality that humans can experience in this life; however, it is important to give a great deal of attention to Wolfson's claims about the eternity of the mind because if he is correct about the eternity of the mind, then he is correct about "blessedness" as well.

Wolfson's argument about the eternity of the mind undergoes at least two significant turns or shifts. Wolfson begins by arguing that Spinoza's system does not permit the body to have an eternal existence, but does permit such an existence for a part of the mind. Spinoza does say that part of the mind is eternal, and this is integral to his discussion of "blessedness," both in my account and in

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<sup>34</sup> VP23

<sup>35</sup> Wolfson 295

Wolfson's. However, analyzing the way Wolfson treats the doctrine of the eternity of the mind and refutes the idea that the body has an eternal existence is fruitful for criticizing Wolfson's account of "blessedness." The response to this section of Wolfson's work will make use of passages from Part 2 of the *Ethics*, and will demonstrate that Spinoza's system actually precludes the possibility of a doctrine of personal immortality, and Section 1 will deal with this matter.

In contrast to the first section, which discusses whether Spinoza's system, as outlined in the second part, allows for a doctrine of personal immortality at all, Section 2 of this chapter will respond to Wolfson's account that Spinoza openly argued for a doctrine of personal immortality in the fifth part of the *Ethics*. Essentially, Wolfson tries to connect VP23, which states, "The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body but, something of it remains which is eternal" with the demonstration to VP38, which states, "the more the mind knows things by the second and third kind of knowledge, the greater the part of it that remains." Wolfson suggests that Spinoza's sentiment in VP38 echoes what Gersonides says in the following passage: "The individual differences of the immortal souls were explained as resulting from the differences in the nature and degree of the intellectual attainments of the individual persons during their lifetime."<sup>36</sup> Hence, it is from the connection between these two propositions that Wolfson draws the inference that the eternal existence a mind has as a part of God's intellect constitutes a kind of personal immortality. The Second section will explore this matter. The two-step approach I employ here will show that Wolfson's claims about the immortality of the soul are not only inconsistent with a superficial reading of Spinoza's text, given that the scholium to VP41 rather explicitly states, "...the mind is not eternal, *or* immortal" but also with an in-depth analysis of Spinoza's system.

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<sup>36</sup> Wolfson 318

### 3.2 Wolfson's First Argument

Wolfson begins this section, beginning on page 289, by discussing various ways theologians have thought about the immortality of the soul, and he divides these into two broad categories: "To those who consider the soul to be a self-subsisting spiritual substance which happens to exist for a certain tract of time in the body but is never a part of it, the soul in its entirety is said to be immortal."<sup>37</sup>

Wolfson agrees that Spinoza does not fall into the first category, but Wolfson would like to make the case that Spinoza does, in some way, fall into the second category of "those who consider the soul to be an inseparable form of the body, the soul as a whole is destroyed with body and only that part of it which becomes a self-subsisting substance, namely, the acquired intellect, remains immortal."<sup>38</sup> The idea of the existence of an acquired intellect in Spinoza's system is really central to Wolfson's analysis. Wolfson then adds to this claim Spinoza's proposition that all minds have an eternal part.<sup>39</sup>

Wolfson tries to show that Spinoza's division between the imagination and the intellect parallels Maimonides' division between the part of the soul that dies with the body and the part that gains eternal existence as the acquired intellect. Wolfson's first point is to say that in Spinoza's system, "The mind is inseparable from the body; and consequently some of its functions, like imagination and memory, which are dependent upon sensation, must disappear with the disappearance of the body."<sup>40</sup> Clearly, this follows from VP21, "The mind can neither imagine anything, nor recollect past things, except while the body endures."

The second point that supports Wolfson's claim about the existence of an acquired intellect in Spinoza's system is found in VP23, which states "The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed

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<sup>37</sup> Wolfson 290

<sup>38</sup> Wolfson 290

<sup>39</sup> CF VP23

<sup>40</sup> Wolfson 291

with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal.” Clearly, Wolfson does have some initial cause to suspect that Spinoza echoes Maimonides in this regard. However, the question remains what the content of that eternal part of the mind is, whether it can gain eternal existence (as the acquired intellect does for Maimonides) and whether it is also immortal, in other words personal.

It is important to note that Spinoza has a rather odd way of discussing the difference between the duration of the mind and the eternity of the mind. Essentially, he writes that “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 ... we do not attribute duration to it except while the body endures.”<sup>41</sup> Hence, Spinoza seems to think that the mind is always eternal except while the body endures, when it includes the imagination and is not completely eternal; however, more will be said about this in later Sections.

### **3.2.1 The Acquired Intellect**

As noted above, Wolfson would like to connect the notion of the eternal part of the mind, as Spinoza puts it “... in its [i.e. the mind’s] thinking essence it comes from above, like the acquired intellect from Maimonides; it is a mode of the eternal and infinite attribute of thought.”<sup>42</sup> It is important to pause and note that Wolfson uses the term “from above” here not only to explain that the rational part of the mind comes from the attribute of thought but also that it returns to it later, which the following passage from Wolfson reinforces, “The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal (VP23). That something is the thinking essence of the mind, which after the death of the body returns to unite itself with the attribute of thought, whence it

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<sup>41</sup> VP23Dem.

<sup>42</sup> Wolfson 292

came.”<sup>43</sup> In essence, Wolfson writes, “Both mind and body, Spinoza will admit, come from God, and unto God shall they return.”<sup>44</sup> This is a problematic way to interpret Spinoza since he defines God as substance, and Wolfson’s interpretation would mean that there must first be some kind of separation between God and the substance wherein existence takes place for a return to happen later. It will be shown below that Wolfson’s idea of a coming from God and a return to God are not appropriate descriptions for how the mind relates to the attribute of thought.

In discussing VP22, Wolfson makes a noteworthy error in discussing the body’s ‘ideal’ existence. VP22 states, “Nevertheless, in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human body, under a species of eternity.” The interesting point Wolfson makes is that “...even after the body has actually ceased to exist, it still has ideal existence.”<sup>45</sup> Wolfson comes to this conclusion because “this idea or conception in God which expresses the essence of the human body is something which pertains to the essence of the human mind, for the human body is the object of the idea constituting the human mind.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, one wonders how the idea or concept in God of the essence of a human body can have any existence as something resembling a human body at all, and more must be stated about what the essence of a human body is.

First, consider IIA1, which states, “The essence of man does not involve necessary existence, that is, from the order of Nature it can happen equally that this or that man does exist or that he does not exist.” Then let us then consider IIP10, which states,

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<sup>43</sup> Wolfson 293

<sup>44</sup> Wolfson 294

<sup>45</sup> Wolfson 293

<sup>46</sup> Wolfson 293

The being of substance does not pertain to the essence of man, or substance does not constitute the form of man.  
Dem. For the being of substance involves necessary existence. Therefore, if the being of substance pertained to the essence of man, then substance being given, man would necessarily be given, and consequently man would exist necessarily, which (by A1) is absurd.

From the above quoted passages, we can read a very significant point of Spinoza's philosophy. The first part of this point seems trivially true, which is that people actually do come to exist and cease to exist because of the order of Nature (i.e. a series of causes). However, this also suggests a more subtle point that we must reconcile with VP22: IIP10 suggests that individual bodies do not have a guaranteed existence, and yet Spinoza writes in part V that bodies do exist as an idea of God under a species of eternity and that the mind cannot be entirely destroyed with the body.

Arguably, any existence – even ideal existence – must take place in substance, and we must realize that Spinoza's system guarantees the existence of the object of an idea. If God has an idea of something then it must exist, because all ideas are adequate in God. IIP10 states that substance does not constitute the form of man, yet obviously, some human beings do exist for a time, and the corollary to the proposition explains, "From this it follows that the essence of man is constituted by certain *modifications* of God's attributes."<sup>47</sup> Thus, a human body exists as a particular modification of the attribute of substance called extension; hence, we must explain human existence as a rearrangement of modes of substance. I believe the following anecdote is an example of the idea Spinoza was trying to present here.

During one of the lectures of an introductory physics course I attended, a student asked the professor how we could treat the mass of the earth as a constant "given all of the 'living and dying' that has taken place over all the years, which has surely added to the mass of the planet." The

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<sup>47</sup> IIP10Cor.



professor responded by saying that eating food is the means by which humans –and all other living things as well – rearrange the world around them and incorporate it into their bodies. When a living thing dies, its remains decompose into smaller parts and the mass of the earth remains constant.

Arguably, the student began with the assumption that the being of substance does pertain to the essence of man (of living things in his words), and that these substances were somehow generated and accumulated over time to the point where they influenced the mass of the earth. Spinoza’s position in IIP10 is clearly in accordance with the professor’s statement that living bodies are capable of rearranging the world around them into parts that are constitutive of their form, but that each form is not its own substance. Thus, a body would be a mode of the attribute of extension, or a particular arrangement of substance, and this arrangement would only exist for a certain duration, but would not be a permanent feature of substance, which IIA1 suggests, or a substance on its own as IIP10 also demonstrates. This is relevant to Wolfson’s account, for while he does not make the mistake of the introductory physics student, “For the death of the individual does not diminish the total amount of extension in the universe any more than it diminishes the total amount of thought.”<sup>48</sup> However, this does begin to chart a course for how we can respond to Wolfson’s claims that the mind comes from God and returns to Him.

### **3.3 On the Mind**

This section will discuss the second part of the *Ethics*, especially focusing on connections between eternity, ideas and bodies, which Spinoza then makes use of in the fifth part. The analysis contained in this section will demonstrate that Spinoza’s philosophical system does not support Wolfson’s comparison between Spinoza and Maimonides, i.e. between an eternal mind and an acquired intellect

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<sup>48</sup> Wolfson 295

that attains eternal existence; in addition, with Wolfson's account disproved, this will pave the way for an alternative explanation not only of the eternity of the mind, but also of blessedness as well.

Let us begin by considering IIP15, which states, "The idea that constitutes the formal being of the human mind is not simple but composed of a great many ideas." In the demonstration of that same proposition, Spinoza draws the connection between the "great many highly composite individuals" composing the human body and the ideas that correspond to those individual substances, which follows from his pan-psychism. Then we should connect this to IID7, part of which states, "...if a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them, to that extent, as one singular thing." Thus, we can see that the body is made up of a number of smaller parts, each of which can exist on its own, but when they are together in the body, they constitute one singular thing. In short, each body is made up of small parts, and the idea of the formal essence of the mind is nothing but a collection of the ideas of these small parts. When the small parts come together to form a body and constitute a singular thing, then the mind can be said to have the body as an object, which follows from IIP13, which states, "The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, *or* a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else." Moreover, this also follows from the scholium to IIP7, which states, "...a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two different ways." Since the mind is the idea of a body that exists, and its formal essence is a conglomeration of ideas corresponding to the small parts that make up the body, the mind (the idea of those smaller things in a particular arrangement) can only be the idea of the body when there is a body; otherwise, when the body does not exist, then the mind cannot exist either, and the idea of those smaller parts of the body must be ideas under the attribute of thought, in the infinite intellect of God. Later on, in part five, Spinoza will show that the imagination is destroyed with the body, but that there remains a part of the

mind that is eternal. However, the following paragraph will demonstrate that the eternal part of the mind cannot contain or be the idea of anything personal.

Since Wolfson would like to assert that eternity entails immortality, it is fruitful to consider what can happen to an idea when the singular thing (i.e. a human body) it is the idea of no longer exists as a singular thing. For this reason, we should turn to IIP8, which states, “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.” At this point we might be tempted to side with Wolfson, and think that God does maintain an idea of this or that person in his infinite idea, even after they are dead. However, consider the demonstration to IIP3, wherein Spinoza writes that “...God can think infinitely many things in infinitely many modes ... but whatever is in God’s power necessarily exists.” Now we can draw some connections together. Since everything that God can think exists, we should no longer be tempted to side with Wolfson, given what has been stated above about the essence of man, namely, that man’s essence does not entail existence, according to IIP10. Moreover, since the mind only exists while the body does, if the body does not exist then the mind does not exist either. Since man’s essence does not guarantee existence, then the idea in God’s intellect of the essence of “this or that human body” cannot be an idea of the person while they were alive, or the person must exist whenever God held the idea of this or that person. Thus, by the fact that God does have an idea of the essence of this or that person, and that essence does not entail existence, then we should think that a person’s essence cannot really be anything personal at all, and that no thoughts pertaining to the ‘person’ persist after his/her death.

While I do want to focus on the second part of the *Ethics* in this section it is almost concluded, and there is an important connection that has not yet been made between the fifth and second parts that will reinforce the point that Spinoza’s system simply does not permit the idea of the body to have an

eternal existence. The demonstration to VP23 states, “In God there is necessarily a concept, *or* idea, which expresses the essence of the human body, an idea, therefore, which is necessarily something that pertains to the essence of the human mind...” It is important to then see that the corollary to IIP8 supports my argument, in 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.” Hence, when a person dies, the idea in God of that person changes from an idea of the being as a whole to an idea that is a part of God’s infinite idea (or the attribute of thought). In a way, then, the mind stops being the idea of a singular thing and is replaced by the ideas of each of the constituent parts, which always was the formal essence of the mind. Hence, Spinoza’s system does permit an eternal existence to the attributes and to the formal essence of modes, but not to the modes themselves, in other words, human beings.

### **3.4 Wolfson’s Second Argument**

As outlined above, Spinoza’s system does not allow for a mind, or an idea of a mind, to exist once the bodies that make up that mind no longer exist together as a singular thing; hence, since substance changed in such a way that the body no longer exists, then the idea of the finite modes (or singular things) should no longer exist. However, the infinite idea of the formal essence of substance should still exist. In other words, the ideas of the constituent parts of the body should still exist, but the idea of the body should disappear.

Wolfson goes on to make the claim that the fifth part of the *Ethics* can be interpreted in such a way that all minds have an eternal part, but that this eternal part is personal; essentially, Wolfson wants to connect the activities of a living person with what the properties that the eternal mind will have. This is a legitimate project, given Spinoza’s statements in propositions 38 and 39 of part five, wherein he

asserts that a mind can have a greater or lesser part that is eternal, and a greater or lesser part that perishes with the body. On its face, Wolfson's proposal that "... there exist certain differences between the individual souls which remain after death"<sup>49</sup> is not easily dismissed unless one considers the consequences of Spinoza's system, as discussed above. Wolfson's view would have it that the mind acquired eternal truths, and that these truths distinguish this mind from that within God's intellect. However, then it would mean that God had an idea of a disembodied mind that contained ideas of eternal truths. Because of Spinoza's parallelism, an idea in the intellect of God would have to have a corresponding part of substance that could be understood under the attribute of extension, which would mean that the idea in question would have to be an idea of something. Thus, if it were true that the eternal part of the mind did acquire knowledge, then God would actually have an idea of a dead person doing this or that, which would seem to be necessary for Wolfson's account to hold, and there must be a person actually doing this or that. However, human essence does not involve existence, and there would actually be an afterlife in Spinoza's system after all, so this would be absurd.

I question Wolfson's approach because if something (i.e. the mind) is eternal, then it should not be able to change once it is embodied in a singular thing. In short, the eternal thing that 'comes out of' the body after death should be the same as the eternal thing that 'went into' the body before it existed. While Wolfson considers the following point "...it is against Plato that [Spinoza] argues that "it is impossible that we should recollect that we existed before the body,"<sup>50</sup> this simply does not address the fact that there is evidence in Spinoza's text to show that what he conceives of the mind as eternal really is everlasting and immutable. Consider IP21, where Spinoza states, "All things which follow

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<sup>49</sup> Wolfson 318

<sup>50</sup> Wolfson 296

from the absolute nature of any of God's attributes have always had to exist and be infinite, *or* are, through the same attribute eternal and infinite." Since thought is an attribute, we should think that IP21 applies to the attribute of thought; moreover, since the intellect is part of God's infinite intellect, we should think that the intellect is immutable.

However problematic Wolfson's 'acquisitive' view of the eternal part of the mind may be, he holds to it, and writes that the cause of the differences between the souls after death "...is to be found in the difference between men in the acquisitions of conceptions both qualitatively and quantitatively."<sup>51</sup> Wolfson then adds to this the claim that "...the unity which these conceptions form in his acquired intellect after death will differ from the unity formed in the acquired intellect of another person who has acquired fewer conceptions of the same science."<sup>52</sup> In this way, we can see that Wolfson's account is inconsistent with the framework Spinoza has outlined in the second part for several reasons. Wolfson is simply unable to prove that Spinoza's system allows for the eternal part of the mind to retain any knowledge, or concepts as he calls them; instead, Wolfson should recognize that Spinoza's account of the eternity of the mind leads one to think that the eternal part of the mind is the part that allows the mind (which is stuck with a body of some duration) to understand the eternal essences of the attributes, and that Spinoza's references in Part V to minds with greater or lesser eternal parts does not imply that the eternal part grows. Indeed, it seems much more likely that the imagination shrinks, because the mind, i.e. the idea of the singular thing, holds fewer inadequate ideas when it holds more adequate ideas. Put another way, if a mind had fewer passions, it would have fewer confused ideas and the part of the mind that held inadequate ideas would then be smaller than the part that held adequate ideas of the essence of God. The following Section elaborates on this idea.

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<sup>51</sup> Wolfson 318

<sup>52</sup> Wolfson 318

### 3.4.1 The Infinite Intellect

In this section, I will argue that the fifth part of the *Ethics* simply does not support Wolfson's account of an infinite intellect as the eternal part of the mind. The above sections have shown that if the body does not exist, then the ideas associated with the parts of the body must disperse and become different finite modes of the attribute of thought as the parts become different finite modes of the attribute of extension. This section will discuss how the intellect and the imagination pertain to the mind in an effort to argue against Wolfson's conclusions that the mind's activity of forming adequate ideas and understanding things by the third kind of knowledge leads to a unique eternal part, which attains immortality. In this section, I will argue that Spinoza has to say that some part of the mind is eternal; otherwise, he would be hard-pressed to explain how it is that beings whose existence necessarily involves duration can understand the eternal regularities we observe using reason and science.

Wolfson's view of the acquired intellect must be opposed by the view that the eternal part of the mind simply recognizes, or is influenced by what is already there. Consider, Spinoza's claim that

It is clear that our mind, insofar as it understands, is an eternal mode of thinking, which is determined by another eternal mode of thinking, which is determined by another eternal mode of thinking...and so on to infinity; so that together, they all constitute God's eternal and infinite intellect.<sup>53</sup>

Spinoza treats the eternal part of the mind and the mind that can only conceive of duration in a similar way, in that both are aspects of the modes of the attribute of thought, and these two aspects both correspond to some part of substance, and that each follows from previous states of substance. Otherwise, the eternal truths would not hold because one eternal mode of thinking would not then have consequences for the following mode in the very same way that one object bumping into another will have consequences for it. Consider the demonstration to VP23, which in part states, "...since

what is conceived, with a certain eternal necessity, through God's essence itself is nevertheless something, this something that pertains to the essence of the mind will necessarily be eternal."<sup>54</sup> Hence, Spinoza thinks that the things that are conceived of under a species of eternity really are things. Thus, the ideas of these eternal things determine the eternal part of our mode of God's infinite intellect, but Spinoza's system does not support the view that they adhere to the eternal part in the acquisitive way Wolfson sets out from Spinoza's system. These eternal modes should be just like the modes of singular things, which we encounter and which determine us to action, but which we do not then make a part of us, or acquire. One eternal mode simply causes a change in state in another mode that parallels the regularities that are visible in extended substance.

### **3.5 Wolfson on the Third Kind of Knowledge**

Wolfson's argument regarding blessedness is, essentially, that each bit of information that the soul acquires by the third kind of knowledge becomes a part of the intellect that attains eternal (in other words, immortal) existence. While the previous section argued that Spinoza's system simply does not support this interpretation, this section will show that Wolfson's interpretation of what can be known by the third kind of knowledge is also not consistent with Spinoza's system. Since the third kind of knowledge is critical to Spinoza's account of blessedness, highlighting Wolfson's inconsistencies with Spinoza's account further bolsters the case that his interpretation of blessedness is flawed.

It is clear that Spinoza holds that God is substance, but the eternal properties of substance are the essence of God, for Spinoza. So, it is somewhat strange to find Wolfson making the claim that "...Spinoza believes that we have a direct, intuitive knowledge of the existence of God."<sup>55</sup> Surely, it

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<sup>53</sup> VP40Schol.

<sup>54</sup> VP23Dem.

<sup>55</sup> Wolfson 298



would have been more appropriate for Wolfson to introduce the matter by saying that we understand the essence of God. Wolfson wants to distinguish between the knowledge that we gain from individual things and the knowledge of the third kind, “This peace of mind, which the third kind of knowledge brings to us during our lifetime, Spinoza seems to say, is a foretaste of the eternal blessedness which awaits us after death.”<sup>56</sup>

### **3.5.1 Wolfson’s Account**

I agree almost entirely with Wolfson’s interpretation of the third kind of knowledge. Wolfson concludes, “This knowledge of God and of one’s being in God and of one’s being conceived through God is the subject matter of the third kind of knowledge.”<sup>57</sup> Wolfson writes, “Previously, (VP24) he has stated that the understanding of individual things will be helpful toward the attainment of the third kind of knowledge.”<sup>58</sup> This is the important beginning point for understanding the third kind of knowledge, and Wolfson is correct to point it out. He makes no mistake by then saying that “it is only when we have adequate ideas of individual things, as when we know their common properties or when we know them in their mutual relations, that we understand them, and it is only such an understanding that will lead to the highest kind of knowledge.”<sup>59</sup> He is correct to say that we must know singular things adequately by their mutual relations and common properties, particularly by being aware of what is equally in the part (or mode) and in the whole of substance.

Consider IIP26, which states, “The human mind does not perceive any external body as actually existing, except through the ideas of the affections of its own body.” Spinoza goes on, in IIP25, to state “The idea of any affection of the human body does not involve adequate knowledge of an

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<sup>56</sup> Wolfson 299

<sup>57</sup> Wolfson 302

<sup>58</sup> Wolfson 300

<sup>59</sup> Wolfson 301

external body.” Thus, if the mind only knows external bodies by the affection of the body, and any affection of the human body does not involve adequate knowledge of an external body, then the mind can only have inadequate ideas of external bodies; in addition, IIP27 through 31 further state circumstances of inadequate knowledge, which all have to do with the body’s affections. However, this is not the only way the mind can know external bodies, and the mind can form adequate ideas. The following paragraph shows how Wolfson correctly identifies Spinoza’s system that explains adequate knowledge.

Indeed, Wolfson correctly identifies passages from Spinoza’s text that show “...it is the nature of the mind in its second kind of knowledge, or, as it is called by Spinoza, reason, to see things under the form of eternity.”<sup>60</sup> Wolfson then makes the connection that the mind can only know external things by virtue of the body. “Consequently, if the mind knows external things under the form of eternity, it must know them only through knowledge of its own body under the form of eternity...and so also, of course, must the mind know itself under the form of eternity.”<sup>61</sup>

It is important to note the connections Spinoza makes between adequate knowledge and essences, which is shown in his discussion on reason and intuition. Reason depends on those things “...which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole, [which] can only be conceived adequately.”<sup>62</sup> In the corollary to this proposition, Spinoza introduces the term ‘common notions,’ “for (by L2) all bodies agree in certain things, which (by IIP38) must be conceived adequately, *or* clearly and distinctly.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, these are things that are common to all bodies. However, the essence of a thing does not consist merely in what is equally in the part and in the whole, and this is evident from IIP37.

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<sup>60</sup> Wolfson 301

<sup>61</sup> Wolfson 301

The final part of Wolfson's account of the third kind of knowledge is his correct statement that "from the third kind of knowledge there arises the highest possible satisfaction of the mind ... [i.e.] the intellectual love of God."<sup>64</sup> Wolfson's evaluation of the intellectual love of God will be treated in the next short section following this one.

I must say that I agree with all of what Wolfson has said, and the problematic parts of his account happen in his analysis of the eternity of the mind, where he misjudges whether Spinoza's system is capable of supporting an acquisitive eternal part of the mind. However much I agree with what Wolfson has said about the third kind of knowledge, I must say that Wolfson has missed something important as well by locating human kind's highest good, or "blessedness," in the afterlife.

### **3.5.2 Against Final Causes, and What Wolfson Missed**

Spinoza works so hard in his text to show that nature does not act toward an end of any sort. In the appendix to Part one, Spinoza tries to address the prejudices of men, identifying the origins of the ideas that attribute a will to God; indeed, he appeals to mathematics, "which is concerned not with ends, but only with the essences and properties of figures [, which] shows men another standard of truth."<sup>65</sup> Along with not attributing a will to God, arguably, Spinoza also does not attribute a will to human kind, for the reason that the ideas this or that person has, at any given time, exist because of previous causes, in the very same way as the particular arrangement of substance at any given time follows from previous causes. Indeed, IP17 rather explicitly states, "God acts from the laws of his nature alone, and is compelled by no one." However interesting this might be, I mention it only to give a sense of the importance Spinoza places on explaining things by their properties and essences,

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<sup>62</sup> IIP38

<sup>63</sup> IIP38C

<sup>64</sup> Wolfson 302

and because the discussion of properties and the essence of man and of God are central to understanding the third kind of knowledge, and in the following section I would like to argue that Wolfson's account of the third kind of knowledge is incomplete, and misses Spinoza's goal of endorsing reason as the best way for man to persevere in this life.

Aside from his mistake to call it acquisitive, Wolfson's account of the third kind of knowledge comes very close to the one I would like to use to support my argument about "blessedness." It is evident that Wolfson locates human kind's highest quality of life in the afterlife, and that is why he does not make the step I will here. Wolfson comes so close when he writes, "the third kind of knowledge is the object of the conscious effort and desire of the mind during its existence in the human body."<sup>66</sup> For Wolfson, that desire leads to making intuitive connections that will enlarge the eternal part of the mind, and guarantee immortality; whereas, I interpret this topic as Spinoza's endorsement of a sound conception of cause and effect, with which one can increase one's ability to persevere in this life rather than in the afterlife.

Quite correctly, Wolfson explains that the mind can only adequately understand things under a species of eternity, and that in so doing, the mind is aware of its own eternal nature. However, Wolfson and I differ on what that knowledge then leads one to believe about one's afterlife. For Wolfson, the mind's knowledge of its own eternity is the foretaste of the "blessedness" of the afterlife. For me, the mind's awareness of its own eternity means it can understand cause and effect; indeed, God acts from his own perfection, and this action is not teleological. Hence, the mind is able to apprehend the eternal properties of substance, like those found through science. If we consider that the mind might only consist of a part that can only think of things and essences existing for some

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<sup>65</sup> I Appendix 1

<sup>66</sup> Wolfson 302

duration of time, then it would be difficult to be able to understand that the regularities that appear actually reflect the eternal properties of substance. Hence, Spinoza's account of the eternity of the mind and the third kind of knowledge is an attempt to account for the mind's ability to perceive certain things as eternal regularities, rather than as a 'whim' of God, who, if his attributes were not eternal and perfect, might not act the same way again in the future.

According to IVD8, the essence of man is virtue, insofar as we consider the things that a person can bring about by his/her nature alone. This is an important point, because it allows us to take Wolfson's argument in a different direction. Consider the scholium to IIP45, which states, "...still the force by which each one [i.e. singular things] perseveres in existing follows from the eternal necessity of God's nature." To this, we can connect the following proposition, which states, "The human mind has adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence." Thus, we should connect the claim in IVD8 that the essence of a person is virtue (insofar as we consider what that person can bring about by his/her nature alone) to the claim that the mind has adequate knowledge of the essence of God. Discussing the importance of bringing things about through actions rather than passions is a part of the analysis of the intellectual love of God; however, it is important to note here that it is by understanding the immutable rather mutable nature of these essences that allows one to increase one's ability to persevere.

### **3.6 The Intellectual Love of God**

We can see a conceit in Wolfson's interpretation of the intellectual love of God when he writes, "It is the accurate and true knowledge attained only by philosophers of the absolute essence of God."<sup>67</sup>

Surely, this is not compatible with Spinoza's sentiment in VP41, which states, "Even if we did not

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<sup>67</sup> Wolfson 306

know that our mind is eternal, we would still regard as of the first importance morality ... and absolutely all the things we have shown to be related to tenacity and nobility.”<sup>68</sup> Hence, it would seem that one does not have to be a philosopher in order to realize that morality, and virtue in particular, are of the utmost importance, and Spinoza calls these the intellectual love of God.

As was the case in the section concerning the third kind of knowledge, Wolfson presents an interpretation that the intellectual love of God follows from Spinoza’s endorsement of blessedness as a kind of personal immortality. Wolfson does not amend his earlier claim that the eternal part of the mind gains things by the third kind of knowledge by considering the scholium to VP33, which states, “...the mind has had eternally the same perfections which, in our fiction, now come to it...” Indeed, Wolfson had not anticipated the criticism raised earlier that the eternal mind should be immutable, and therefore not able to acquire new knowledge, even by intuition. He does not deal with this problem at all, nor does he deal with what is now a new problem for his account, which states that the mind almost ‘recalls’ the eternal things. Arguably, if Wolfson were right, and the mind did gather ideas together by the third kind of knowledge, then surely the differences between the souls in the afterlife should vanish at some point, since Spinoza thinks that the mind is endowed with perfection.

Spinoza writes in IIP6 and IIP7 that all things strive to persevere in their being, and that this striving is nothing but the actual essence of the thing. This is helpful for understanding the third kind of knowledge, because we can now connect Spinoza’s statement in IVD8, “that is (by IIP7), virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone.” The striving that is evidently the essence of man is best achieved, Spinoza reckons, through virtue. However, we should now also note that virtue goes by the name of the intellectual love of God as

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<sup>68</sup> VP41

well. Since blessedness is the enjoyment of virtue (or the love of God), we should note that blessedness is the enjoyment of our striving to persevere in our being, all of which is clearly connected in the scholium to the final proposition.

Since it has been shown that Spinoza's system simply does not support Wolfson's attempt to argue that the object of an individual's pursuits should be his/her immortal nature, we should note that virtue, or the love of God is about actual beings in existence striving to persevere in their being. The intellectual love of God is in complete accord with an interpretation of blessedness that treats actual increases in one's power to persevere as an individual person's highest good. The reason that this is not a selfish thing is because Spinoza thinks that our perseverance is aided by our fellow man, and that by helping others, we help ourselves by making a better world wherein it is easier to persevere.

The following chapter will present an account of blessedness that treats a person's satisfaction not as a kind of immortality, but as his/her enjoyment of his/her own virtue. The account of blessedness that remains is one in which a person can only ever achieve moments of blessedness, but those details remain for the following section.

## Chapter 4

### The Episodic Nature of Blessedness in Spinoza's *Ethics*

In this section, I will discuss Spinoza's conception of blessedness, as Spinoza outlines in the final proposition of the *Ethics*. Wolfson's interpretation of blessedness as Spinoza's doctrine of personal immortality does not follow from Spinoza's philosophical system, nor does Bennett's interpretation of Spinoza's doctrine of blessedness as unintelligible rubbish follow either. I would like to present the following as an interpretation of blessedness that is both consistent with Spinoza's philosophical system and is also quite intelligible. Moreover, it is entirely consistent with Spinoza's hints earlier in the text that the true happiness for human beings is found in a good life here and now, and that our understanding of the eternal nature and properties of substance gives us the means to achieve that life. My account is motivated by Spinoza's discussion of blessedness in IIP48Schol.IV, which I shall quote in full:

Our greatest happiness *or*, blessedness consists in the knowledge of God alone, by which we are led to do only those things which love and morality advise. From this, we clearly understand how far they stray from the true valuation of virtue, who expect to be honoured by God with the greatest rewards for their virtue and best actions, as for the greatest bondage – as if virtue itself and the service of God were not happiness itself, and the greatest freedom.<sup>69</sup>

Blessedness is different from joy, which is comparatively easy to arrive at. According to the general definition of the affects, "Joy is a man's passage from a lesser perfection to a greater perfection" and sadness is the opposite; in addition, "Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself; nor do we enjoy it because we restrain our lusts; on the contrary, because we enjoy it, we

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<sup>69</sup> IIP48CScholIV



are able to restrain them.”<sup>70</sup> Hence, the interpretation I offer here is that the enjoyment of virtue is a blessing since it is how we are best able to fulfill our nature, which is to strive to persevere; alternatively, we could think of blessedness as freedom from the affects that reduce our ability to strive. In a later section, I will use the details of Spinoza’s account to show why one’s strong desire for virtue is the only means for overcoming one’s passions. It is important to note that Spinoza uses the word virtue because “by virtue and power I understand the same thing” (IVD8). Thus, blessedness is the enjoyment of power, which is an expression of our ability to persevere in being. I will show that Spinoza conceives of blessedness as the satisfaction with our own power. Since I do not believe that one can be satisfied with one’s power unless one actually has it, I do not think that Spinoza’s account of blessedness works if one has no power, or even if one experiences a loss in power.

I will demonstrate that having an inadequate idea entails a loss of power, and that having inadequate ideas is an inevitable part of our life, in that it is inevitable that we will be acted on in the future, and therefore suffer passions; consider that Spinoza writes, “It is impossible that a man should undergo no other changes except those of which he himself is the adequate cause.”<sup>71</sup> Thus, I will demonstrate that even if one is blessed, the experience will not last indefinitely. I will also show that Spinoza anticipates this, and this does not undermine the idea of blessedness at all. In the last few sections, I will show how one’s ideas are related to God, in other words, I will show how Spinoza demonstrates that an adequate idea ‘works’ in relation to an inadequate one, by discussing the third kind of knowledge and the eternity of the mind.

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<sup>70</sup> VP42

<sup>71</sup> IVP4Schol.

The first part of this Chapter will be concerned with showing why blessedness must be episodic, while the second part will specifically show, by carefully looking at the third kind of knowledge, what happens when one has an adequate idea vs. an inadequate one. This will be an effort to explain the matter of the intellectual love of God that Spinoza outlines in the fifth book, and especially in the demonstration to VP42.

#### **4.1 On Virtue and Power**

I have already discussed the connection between virtue and power Spinoza makes. It is particularly evident in IVD8, which we can connect to IIIP7. Indeed, Spinoza stipulates that virtue is the essence of man insofar as he brings things about that can be understood through the laws of his nature alone. Thus, virtues are nothing but our striving when it is motivated by our natural *striving alone* rather than by external causes, or passions. Hence, virtues come from adequate ideas<sup>72</sup> because they can be understood internally – and are not ever motivated by inadequate ideas, or passions, thus, in a way, virtue is like tenacity, “For by tenacity I understand the desire by which one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to preserve his being” (IIIP59).

Perhaps we could think of virtue as striving from adequate ideas, and that is more powerful than striving from confused ideas because it means that one acts in ways that depend on contingencies, but I will explain adequate ideas thoroughly in the last sections. Nevertheless, blessedness, which is the enjoyment of virtue, is the enjoyment of power, and I will now show why Spinoza’s system includes a fluid loss and gain of power over time that would make blessedness the type of state that can only ever be achieved for a brief period.

In this section I would like to focus on two propositions that are, I think, key to understanding why blessedness must be episodic. These two propositions will show that the mind strives to have adequate ideas, and gain power, but it will also show that if the mind is met with a more powerful inadequate idea, then it will lose power. IID3 makes a significant claim, “By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections.” Thus, whenever there is an affect of the body there is also an idea of that affect in the mind. Hence, this section shows that if the body is exposed to events that reduce its power of acting, then the mind’s power will also be reduced because an idea of the affect is always present in the mind. “The idea of any thing that increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our body’s power of acting, increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our mind’s power of thinking.”<sup>73</sup> Hence, the interrelatedness of the mind and body seems to lead to the consequence that the mind’s power of thinking is restrained whenever the body is affected by something that restrains its power of action.

Here it would perhaps be useful to discuss briefly what the mind’s power is. From the scholium to VP4, “the mind has no other power than that of thinking and forming adequate ideas.” Just to clarify, we can see that the mind’s only power is that of forming adequate ideas, that it can be aided or restrained in this by the affections of the body, and that whenever the body has an affection, the mind is affected as well. Thus, the mind loses its only power, i.e. its ability to form adequate ideas, whenever it is acted on; more importantly, each and every human being is also affected in the mind whenever the body is affected by something external. Spinoza writes, “We are acted on, insofar as we are a part of Nature, which cannot be conceived through itself, without the others.”<sup>74</sup> Hence, it is

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<sup>73</sup> IIP11

<sup>74</sup> IVP2

inevitable that a human being will be affected by external things in order to show that the mind does not ever exist in such a state where it is beyond passions indefinitely.

A part of Spinoza's philosophical system posits that everything is a part of nature, and that nothing exists outside of nature. Thus, there are no people who are not a part of nature. Thus, we are all acted on, and this is reinforced by IVP3, and IVP4, quoted above, "The force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes."<sup>75</sup> This proposition states that regardless of how much one tries, one will not be able to persevere forever against the external causes, which is an inevitable consequence of our being a part of nature. Since it is inevitable that one will experience inadequate ideas, then one's virtue (or power) is reduced; thus, one's ability to enjoy that power is reduced as well. Hence, if one ever experienced blessedness, one could not count oneself blessed when one meets any of the external causes that 'push' one out of blessedness again. In other words, if one did love one's own virtue and enjoyed virtue for its own sake, then, as a part of nature, it is inevitable that one will encounter (at least for a short time) some external cause that reduces one's love for virtue with a stronger desire brought about by the imagination. One can always lose a loved one to violence, disease or through accidents, which are all brought about through nature. However, these types of moments would always jar someone out of blessedness, and it is for this reason that Spinoza includes the first fifteen propositions of the fifth part.

## **4.2 Tips on Intellectual Housekeeping from Part Five**

It is this idea of being surpassed by the external causes that I wish to call attention to. External causes always cause passions, and the fifth book of the *Ethics* teaches a sort of proactive plan one can take to

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<sup>75</sup> IVP3

remove the passions more quickly, and not be acted on by them for quite as long. We should especially consider Spinoza's sentiment in VP11, where he makes the simple point that the more often an image or affect occurs, the more often it engages the mind. Perhaps this book could be read in such a way that shows that Spinoza considers blessedness to be a state that is permanent, or fixed; in that, that the more often one experiences joy, the more the affect will flourish. However, as I have shown above, there is enough evidence to suggest that our nature as beings who inevitably suffer external causes of some sort makes only some kind of transfigured state the one where blessedness lasted forever. However, this would be inconsistent with Spinoza's work as he regards reality as perfect and refutes the idea of a dominion within a dominion. Rather, while Spinoza does not say this explicitly, I will now continue to argue that it is, to some extent, implied that the state of blessedness can only ever be episodic.

While I do wish to focus on the fifth book in this section of the work, I will begin with IVP6, which states, "The force of any passion, *or* affect, can surpass the other actions, or power, of a man, so that the affect stubbornly clings to the man."<sup>76</sup> I find this to be a key section, and one that the first propositions of the fifth book specifically address through their emphasis on the use of the mind's power to form adequate ideas of the things that are currently passions.

It is important to note that, from IVP3, we are always vulnerable to external causes that are more powerful than we are, and that can prevent us from striving successfully. However, the disentanglement of passions from their causes is introduced in VP3, which states, "An affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it," and, from VP4, "There is no affection of the body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct concept." Thus, each

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<sup>76</sup> IVP6

passion we are affected by affects us and diminishes our power. It affects the body and the mind together and it does diminish the power of action in the mind and in the body.

In order to overcome the mind's loss in power the mind could 'recall the things that aid its power' and exercise its ability to form clear and distinct ideas on any passion. Moreover, by VP6, "Insofar as the mind understands all things as necessary, it has a greater power over the affects, *or* is less acted on by them." Thus, Spinoza starts giving an account of 'tricks' the mind can use to increase its power over the power of the affect. Hence, Spinoza teaches the reader a way of purging the mind of the ideas of the passions.

In order to strive well, Spinoza provides reasons for joining with other human beings and aiding one another in the common task of perseverance. "By nobility I understand the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship."<sup>77</sup> Surely, this is the kind of 'ready knowledge' that Spinoza encourages his readers to have at hand in VP10Schol., "To put aside fear, we must think in the same way of tenacity: that is, we must recount and frequently imagine the common dangers of life, and how they can be best avoided and overcome by presence of mind and strength of character,"<sup>78</sup> and most of these tasks are made easier by joining with our fellow man. If we now look back at VP42, we can apply what I have covered in these two sections. First, if "blessedness is virtue itself" and by virtue we can also understand power, insofar as it is our tenacious striving from the dictates of reason, then I think that I have shown how power, and therefore blessedness, can be lost due to the inevitability of external causes. Thus, whenever we lose power, we lose the state of blessedness if we ever had it. However, if a person has lost power (which is inevitable when one feels a passion), then he/she can form a clear and distinct idea of it, and

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<sup>77</sup> IIP59Schol.

<sup>78</sup> VP10Schol.

mentally regain his/her power by acting from reason rather than a passion. Nevertheless, being that we are always contingent creatures, and that we will always be acted on, we can only ever try to persevere and we will ultimately fail.

### **4.3 Love of Virtue and the Intellectual Love of God**

I have shown in the sections above that Spinoza's conception of power is fluid, i.e., that power can come and go, and that blessedness can (possibly) come and (surely) will go. Since it is our nature to suffer inadequate ideas from external causes, then if our someone ever has a moment of being truly blessed, one where she rejoices in her virtue and truly suffers no externally caused ideas, she will do so only until her nature as a thing subject to external causes catches up with her. That is not to say that she could not then overcome the new idea, but she will not be blessed again until she does so. As I have outlined above, existential 'quality of life' matters in Spinoza's account at least as much as the intellectual or mental side does. For the remainder of this paper I would like to focus only on the intellectual side of blessedness, and presume that our Spinozist is not in any danger, at the moment, of 'losing' blessedness due to an external cause, like an illness or some other threat. I know that it is difficult, if not impossible, to analyze the mind separately from the body and I do not mean to. However, in this section, I only want to look at the purely intellectual love of virtue, and how that pertains to Spinoza's definition of blessedness.

Let us focus briefly on one short section of Spinoza's demonstration of VP42.

...because the mind enjoys this divine love *or* blessedness, it has the power of restraining lusts. And because human power to restrain the affects consists only in the intellect, no one enjoys blessedness because he has restrained the affects. Instead, the power to restrain lusts arises from blessedness itself.

As I have stated previously, Spinoza's account of blessedness is an account of enjoying virtue. It is clear that the power to restrain affects is found solely in the intellect, for our ability to "...bring about the preservation of the proportion of motion and rest of the human body's parts have to one another..." is a bodily kind of power, and is different from the one that can restrain the passions (IVP39). That is just to say that thinking adequate ideas will not cure hunger, and having all the food you might ever need to survive will not prevent passions. Our physical preservation can come from inadequate causes, by definition, it would not be virtuous, but it could work. Given these distinctions, blessedness is something that requires the preservation of the normal proportion of motion and rest of the body's parts as a pre-condition; afterwards, the power of the mind can begin to dismantle the affects that "stubbornly cling" to man, and those that arise in the future, as was discussed in the 'housekeeping' section. I will return to the matter of how the mind achieves blessedness by loving virtue, but first wish to engage in a brief, but perhaps fruitful, digression.

In the fourth book, Spinoza presents an account of one affect being overcome by another, stronger one. In the fifth book, Spinoza presents an account of reason divorcing affects from their external causes, and thereby forming a clear and distinct idea of them, which eliminates the passion. While this does seem like two different accounts, if we look at VP6 again, we can see that he actually presents an argument that the activity of creating adequate ideas gives one a 'reason' (in the sense of a justification) for wanting virtue more than a passion, and thus be able to overcome passions in the same manner as the fourth book. "Insofar as the mind understands all things as necessary, it has a greater power over the affects, *or* is less acted on by them."<sup>79</sup>

As was outlined in book five, and was quoted above, the intellectual activity of understanding the efficient causes leads to the mind's increased knowledge of the reasons it should have for wanting



virtues. Perhaps this is mostly because acting virtuously is the most likely way to get the efficient causes to align in such a way that makes striving easier. Thus, the more adequate ideas the mind has, the more it should want virtues, rather than (and I do not know if anyone actually holds this view or not) the view that reason is something divorced from affects. Thus, we can look at some relevant passages from the fourth part,

No affect can be restrained by the true knowledge of good and evil insofar as it is true, but only insofar as it is considered as an affect<sup>80</sup>

...no affect [, and passions are affects,] can be restrained except by an affect stronger than and contrary to the affect to be restrained...<sup>81</sup>

In this way, all the appetites, *or* desires, are passions only insofar as they arise from inadequate ideas, and are counted as virtues when they are aroused or generated by adequate ideas.<sup>82</sup>

We can see that for Spinoza each inadequately caused affect must be restrained by a stronger, adequately caused affect, and that once an affect comes from an adequate idea, *it is called a virtue*. Hence, this gives us further cause to reject Bennett's assertion that the fifth book makes no sense given the other four. We should confidently take Spinoza literally when he writes that one has the power to restrain lusts because one enjoys blessedness (which is virtue by another name), that is, we have the power to restrain lusts because we enjoy virtue more than we enjoy them.

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<sup>79</sup> VP6

<sup>80</sup> IVP14

<sup>81</sup> IVP37Schol.2

<sup>82</sup> IVP4Schol.

## Conclusion

I have treated the love of God, the eternity of the mind and the third kind of knowledge in the preceding chapters concerning Wolfson and Bennett, and I have delivered positive interpretations of each in those sections. While it is tempting to repeat the relevant sections here, perhaps it is enough only to discuss a few connections to virtue.

According to Spinoza's system outlined in Part Two, the third kind of knowledge is useful because it gives one adequate knowledge of the essence of the attributes, which one can then use to improve one's striving. One can then use this information to predict those dangers that one can anticipate along with ways to avoid them, as Spinoza suggests. The adequate knowledge of the attributes is useful because then one can "consider human actions and appetites as if it were a question of lines, planes and bodies."<sup>83</sup> In other words, one can anticipate the consequences one's actions will have on others and one can thereby overcome dangers with thoughtful preparation and actions that will aid in one's nobility and by avoiding things that might be an obstacle to striving. Spinoza actually takes a rather hard line on this, and if we recall his definition of nobility, we can understand how high the standard Spinoza's lays out for cooperation with the rest of humanity is, and he foreshadows it at the end of the Second Part,

This doctrine contributes to social life, insofar as it teaches us to hate no one, to disesteem no one, to mock no one, to be angry at no one, to envy no one; and also insofar as it teaches that each of us should be content with his own things, and should be helpful to his neighbor, not from unmanly compassion, partiality or superstition, but from the guidance of reason, as the time and occasion demand.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> IIPref.

<sup>84</sup> IIP48C.Schol.IV

We might disagree with Spinoza on whether or not it matters that we disesteem or mock anyone. However, he might argue that this would restrict or diminish our nobility and reduce the extent to which we can make use of the benefits of others in our striving, or our virtue, especially when we consider that our goal is long-term cooperation with others.

All things that have been said about virtue can also be said about the love of God, for it is virtue itself according to the demonstration of VP42. Throughout this work, I have endeavoured to argue that blessedness is episodic and why it must be so, for it is inevitable that one will be acted on by external causes, and that this necessarily leads to a loss in power, which must be a loss in virtue, the enjoyment of which Spinoza calls blessedness. One cannot enjoy a thing one does not have, so it seems likely to me that one cannot be blessed if one loses power since a loss of power is inevitable because inadequate ideas are inevitable, and because all men and women are a part of nature. Moreover, I hope that this work showed how Spinoza's use of 'eternity of the mind' and 'God's intellectual love for himself' are compatible with his earlier accounts of virtue.

In this thesis, I have argued that Bennett's claims that blessedness is inconsistent with the rest of Spinoza's *Ethics* are unfounded and that Wolfson's claims that Spinoza had a doctrine of personal immortality in mind are not supported by Spinoza's system; in addition, I have presented my own positive account of blessedness that is both consistent with Spinoza's system and with his rejection of doctrines of personal immortality as well. I would like to say that I find it sad that blessedness does not receive more attention in Spinoza scholarship, particularly because this is one aspect of his work that gives us a guide for how to read the *Ethics*, which the geometric method makes so fragmentary an experience. Indeed, Spinoza's clear statements that he feels that blessedness is a person's highest good should be an indicator that most of his arguments in the *Ethics* pertain to it.

## Appendix A

### List of Spinoza's Uses of The Word "Blessedness" and Cognates

Number	Location
1	Preface to the second book
2	IIP49S
3	IVP21
4	IVP54
5	Appendix to the fourth book, number 4
6	Preface to the fifth book
7	VP31
8	VP33
9	VP36S
10	VP42

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