

Spinoza on Time: Applying Modern Theories in the Philosophy
of Time to Spinoza's *Ethics*

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I dedicate this thesis to Dr. James Petrik, whose unwavering guidance allowed me to develop my philosophical ramblings into something coherent. I am indebted to him for his patience and encouragement throughout this process. Additionally, this thesis is dedicated to my friends and family whose support was invaluable — I could not have completed this project without them. Lastly, I dedicate this body of work to everyone who patiently listened to me discuss my topic over a few beers. They likely had no idea what they were getting into when they asked what my thesis was about.

Table of Contents

<u>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Chapter 2: Eternity and Sempiternity.....</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Chapter 3: Contemporary Debates</u>	<u>23</u>
<u>Concerning the Nature of Time</u>	
<u>Chapter 4: Spinoza on Time.....</u>	<u>36</u>
<u>Chapter 5: Conclusion.....</u>	<u>52</u>
<u>Bibliography.....</u>	<u>56</u>

Chapter 1: Introduction

Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* has inspired significant debate as to the meaning and tenability of various aspects of his system, including his pantheism, hard determinism, and denial of personal immortality.¹ One aspect of his work that has received comparatively less attention, however, is his theory of time. The literature that engages this topic, moreover, approaches it primarily from the standpoint of classical Platonic and Aristotelian discussions of time.² Though this work is both historically appropriate and sheds light on some of what Spinoza says about time, I believe that a more complete and coherent account of his view can be constructed by approaching it from the standpoint of contemporary philosophical discussions about the nature of time.³ Consequently, the main focus of this work will be to approach Spinoza's concept of time in the *Ethics* via contemporary conceptions of time. Specifically, I apply the contemporary distinction between A- and B-Theory accounts of time to argue that Spinoza is most charitably read as a B-Theorist. I show that such a reading is consistent with Spinoza's main statements about the nature of time in the *Ethics* and also sheds light on one of the most widely disputed issues in Spinoza interpretation; namely, his suggestion in E5p23 that there is a sense in which the mind survives the

¹ Spinoza, Baruch. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992.

² In some instances the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions about time are referred to as eternity and sempiternity, respectfully.

³ Note that when I refer to contemporary theories of time I am referencing contemporary theories of time related to metaphysics. I am aware that there are issues related to time in the philosophy of science, but those issues are beyond the scope of this thesis.

destruction of the body.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I will provide a short background on Spinoza and his works, including several prominent themes in his philosophy that are particularly germane to the topic of this thesis, and then give concise overview of this thesis.

1.1: Spinoza and His Works

Baruch Spinoza was born in 1632 in Amsterdam. He was the middle son in a prominent family of moderate means in Amsterdam's Portuguese-Jewish community. As a boy he was intellectually gifted, but at the age of seventeen, he was forced to cut short his formal studies to help run the family's importing business.

On July 27, 1656, Spinoza was issued the harshest writ of herem, or excommunication, ever pronounced by the Sephardic community of Amsterdam, due to the controversial views he was advancing. Within a few years, he left Amsterdam altogether. In 1661 his correspondence begins as he is living in Rijnsburg. While in Rijnsburg, he worked on the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and the *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being*. The only work he published under his own name in his lifetime was his critical exposition of Descartes' philosophy, entitled *Descartes's Principles of Philosophy*, which was completed in 1663. By this time, he was also working on what would eventually be called the *Ethics*; however, he put it aside to complete his *Theological-Political Treatise*, which was published anonymously in 1670. When Spinoza died in 1677, he was still at work on his *Political Treatise*, which was soon published by his friends along with the *Ethics*

and his other unpublished writings, including *A Compendium to Hebrew Grammar*.⁴

The *Ethics* is a five part exposition of Spinoza's mature philosophical views. Spinoza intends to demonstrate the truth about God, nature and ourselves. Although there is a great deal of metaphysics and psychology in parts 1-3, "Spinoza took the crucial message of the work to be ethical in nature."⁵ Spinoza was a monist about substance, claiming that there is only one. Within this one substance there are the infinite attributes of thought and extension as well as an infinite number of finite modes. He refers to this substance as "God," but it should be noted that Spinoza's God is very different from the dominant conceptions within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Spinoza's God is not a personal and free creator that is metaphysically distinct from its creation. Rather, Spinoza's God a) is not a person, b) is identified with the totality of the universe and c) is the source of its various finite modes through necessity and not free choice. His system is thus traditionally viewed as a version of pantheism, the theory that God is identical with the universe/creation.

Other noteworthy aspects of Spinoza's philosophy as expressed in the *Ethics* are the parallelism that is alleged to obtain between the modes of thought and extension and his commitment to a mind-body identity. In E2p7 Spinoza states, "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things,"⁶ and in the scholium to this proposition he states, "a mode of extension and the idea of that

⁴ Shortened from: Steven Nadler. "Baruch Spinoza," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/spinoza/>.

⁵ Ibid.,

⁶ Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 66

mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two ways.”⁷ Through these passages we can see that in his system there is an exceptionless correlation between the physical and the mental. It is possible Descartes’ work influenced Spinoza on this point, since one of the major challenges to Descartes’ dualist account of human beings was the problem of interaction; that is, the apparent impossibility of explaining how an immaterial mind and a material body can possibly interact. For Spinoza, since mental events and bodily events are really just different expressions of the same underlying reality, it is unavoidable that these different expressions should be correlated despite the fact that there is no causal interaction between them.

This parallelism also commits Spinoza to a mind-body identity. In E2p13 he states, “the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body – i.e. a definite mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else.”⁸ This proposition, in conjunction with E2p7s noted above — “a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two ways” — implies Spinoza’s mind-body identity. This point is made explicitly again at E2p21s: “the idea of the body and the body itself — that is, (2p13) mind and body — are one and the same individual thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought and now under the attribute of Extension.”⁹

The psycho-physical parallelism between modes and thought and modes of extension and the identity between a particular mode of thought and its related mode of extension are integral to Spinoza’s philosophy. They are also at the core of one of

⁷ Ibid., 66

⁸ Ibid., 67

⁹ Ibid., 80-81

the primary interpretive problems of the *Ethics*; namely, how to make sense of his suggestion in E5p23 that the “the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal.”¹⁰ This proposition is problematic for Spinoza, for if something of the mind remained, then, by parallelism, something of the body should remain too; however, here he appears to affirm an asymmetry between the longevity of the human mind and the human body. This would seem to violate both his parallelism and his commitment to an identity of the mind and the body.

Authors such as Martha Kneale and Alan Donagan have attempted to resolve this inconsistency through appeals to sempiternity, while other authors believe it is carelessness on Spinoza’s part.¹¹ While this thesis argues that Spinoza is best interpreted as a B-Theorist regarding time, it also engages the issue of E5p23, and tries to reconcile its apparent inconsistency with the rest of the *Ethics* through the application of contemporary theories of time.

1.2: Thesis Overview

To lay the groundwork for my interpretation, it will be important to consider the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of eternity that have been the dominant themes in the literature on Spinoza’s theory of time. Briefly, the Platonic theory states

¹⁰ Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 213-214

¹¹ A prominent example of a commentator who thinks Ethics 5p23 is incoherent is Jonathan Bennett. See his, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 358-363.

that eternity is best understood as timelessness, while the Aristotelian theory holds that eternity is best understood as everlastingness. For the sake of brevity and in an attempt to avoid confusion, I will refer to the Platonic sense as eternity and the Aristotelian sense as sempiternity from this moment on. After providing an overview of this distinction in the first part of chapter two, I engage the literature regarding Spinoza's conception of eternity, the majority of which comes from the work of Samuel Alexander, Alan Donagan and Martha Kneale, who have all worked extensively with Spinoza and present sophisticated arguments for their interpretations. Alexander attributes eternity to Spinoza, while both Donagan and Kneale argue that Spinoza is best understood as a sempiternalist. Additionally, in order to lay the foundation for my own interpretation of E5p23, this chapter will explicate Donagan's and Kneale's attempts to make sense of this puzzling passage.

In chapter three, I provide an overview of the contemporary literature concerning time, focusing particularly on the literature that has centered on the distinction between A-Theory accounts and B-Theory accounts. The distinction between A- and B-Theories of time first appeared in 1908 when J. M. E. McTaggart published his work, *Time*. In it, McTaggart critically assessed what he took to be essential to time and the consequences that follow from our interpretation of time. The crux of his work on time came to be known as McTaggart's Paradox and has been very influential in metaphysics in the years since. In his work McTaggart coined the terminology, "A-series" and "B-series." The A-series consists of the distinctions of time such as 'past,' 'present' and 'future,' while the B-series consists of the temporal relations of events such as "earlier than" and "later than." Viewing this distinction as

exhaustive of the possible ways of understanding a temporal series, McTaggart argues that neither series can make sense of time and that time, therefore, is not real. This argument — now known as McTaggart's Paradox — has been very influential in metaphysics in the years since McTaggart first proposed it.

After the exposition of McTaggart's work in the metaphysics of time, I present the current state of the debate between A-Theorists and B-Theorists, touching on the main developments within each tradition. Within the A-Theory there are two main theories: presentism and the growing block theory, while the B-Theory only has one main contender: eternalism. My aim in doing so is not to take a side in this debate; rather, it is to provide detailed accounts of the two theories to serve as resources for the interpretation of Spinoza's theory that I develop in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four is the crux of this thesis. In this chapter I apply contemporary distinctions about the nature of time to the *Ethics*, ultimately advancing my contention that Spinoza is best read as a B-Theorist. In making my case, I build upon Jason Waller's argument that Spinoza's meaning holism entails durational eternalism, a B-Theory account of time. My contribution is to extend the textual case for this reading by considering passages not discussed by Waller. Specifically, I take the dozen or so passages of Spinoza's work that are related to time and discuss their coherence with both the A-Theory and B-Theory. I conclude that these texts preclude reading Spinoza as an A-Theorist and are consistent with reading him as a B-Theorist.

In the fifth and final chapter of this work, I return to that bane of Spinoza interpretation — E5p23 — in order to show that reading Spinoza as a B-Theorist can shed light on this notoriously problematic text. Here, I argue that the B-Theorist's

ability to view future objects and events as robustly real provides traction for Spinoza's suggestion that the human mind is, in a sense, eternal.

Chapter 2: Eternity and Sempiternity

One of the classical topics of debate in the philosophy of time is the question of whether eternity should be understood as timelessness or as everlastingness. The idea that eternity is best understood as timelessness is sometimes referred to as the Platonic sense of eternity, due to his thoughts on eternity in the *Timaeus*.¹² The other sense of eternity (everlastingness) is sometimes referred to as the Aristotelian sense of eternity — given the account of time presented in the *Physics* — and is more commonly referred to as sempiternity.¹³

2.1: Eternity and Sempiternity in Spinoza

That Spinoza attributes to God the characteristic of being eternal is uncontroversial.¹⁴ What is controversial, however, is whether this eternity should be understood in Platonic or Aristotelian terms. As mentioned above, Spinoza has classically been associated with Platonic eternalism, which views eternity as timelessness. This is the position, for instance, of Samuel Alexander.¹⁵ More recently, however, this traditional reading of Spinoza has been called into question by Martha Kneale and Alan Donagan, both of

¹² R. D. Archer-Hind (ed. and trans.), 1888, *The Timaeus of Plato*, London: McMillan & Co.; reprinted, Salem, NH: Ayers Co. Publishers, 1988. For more on the origin of eternity and sempiternity see Martha Kneale. "Eternity and Sempiternity," *Spinoza: A collection of Critical Essays*. (1973): 226-240.

¹³ Aristotle, *Physics*, Books I-II, translated with introduction and notes by William Charlton, Oxford: Clarendon Press (Clarendon Aristotle Series), 1970 (2nd. ed. 1992).

¹⁴ God's eternality is made clear in E1p19: "God, that is, all the attributes of God, are eternal," among other passages.

¹⁵ Other proponents of this reading include: H. F. Hallett. "Spinoza's Conception of Eternity" *Mind*, pp. 283-303 Oxford University Press, 1928: 283-303; and C. L. Hardin. "Spinoza on Eternality and Time," *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 8, (1977): 129-38.

whom argue that Spinoza's conception of eternity ought to be understood as sempiternity, that is, everlastingness or infinite temporal duration.

Note that in the Platonic sense of eternity, does not really exist and is reduced to nothing more than a perceptual or cognitive illusion.¹⁶¹⁷ This means that if this account of eternity is correct, then the A-Theory could not be applied to Spinoza's conception of substance, due to the A-Theory's commitment to the reality of temporal passage and the legitimate ascription of tensed-predicates. Conversely, if the sempiternal reading of Spinoza's use of "eternity" is correct, then this would count decisively against reading Spinoza as a B-Theorist about time.¹⁸ In chapter 4, I make a case for reading Spinoza as embracing a Platonic view of eternity that is best articulated as a B-Theory account. In this chapter, however, my goal is merely preparatory; that is, the focus is on articulating the two readings that have traditionally been applied to Spinoza's conception of eternity and not on adjudicating the dispute between their adherents.

¹⁶ Of course, one might advance an analysis of the concept of eternity in Platonic terms – maintaining that if there were eternality in reality, it would be Platonic in nature – but maintain that this eternality does not capture the way things really are. I am overlooking this possibility in this thesis as the use of eternity in Spinoza clearly indicates that he believes it captures the ultimate nature of the real. The only question, then, is whether he means this eternality to be understood in Platonic or Aristotelian terms.

¹⁷ By "time" here I'm referring to the typical understanding of time as something that involves change. With Platonic eternalism substance is timeless, while the A-theory is time-dependent, as there is a progression from moment to moment.

¹⁸ Initially, it might be wondered whether the converse holds. One might believe, that is, that the B-theory can serve as an analysis of sempiternity provided one does not accept McTaggart's contention that the B-theory cannot capture that which is essential to time. While this is true as far as it goes, it seems clear that a B-theory interpretation of sempiternity would wind up translating into atemporal terms all those features that distinguish sempiternity from eternity; thus, it seems safe to assume that the converse holds and that any victory for the sempiternalist's reading of Spinoza's theory of eternity would likewise count against reading him as a B-theorist about time.

2.3: Spinoza as a Platonic Eternalist

As mentioned above, the traditional reading of Spinoza has been to see him as a Platonic eternalist. One of the best known advocates of this reading is Samuel Alexander,¹⁹ who bases his interpretation entirely on the *Ethics*.²⁰

Summarizing his Platonic interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy of time, Alexander contends that Spinoza views our ordinary, temporally-laden language as deeply misleading. Alexander states,

. . . when we speak thus [in our human, temporal way of speaking] we are, according to Spinoza, not using the language of philosophy but of imagination. We are comparing one duration of time with another in our sensible world, and we may even conceive of these bits of time as limitations of an indefinite duration. But neither the bits of duration nor the indefinite duration are true realities.²¹

Thus it is that Alexander sees the *Ethics* as denying duration and time. He goes on to compare Spinoza's discussion of duration with that of space and extension. He states,

¹⁹ Samuel Alexander. "Spinoza and Time" *Studies in Spinoza: Critical and Interpretive Essays*. London: University of California Press, 1972.

²⁰ H. F. Hallet is another notable defender of this position in his article, "Spinoza's Conception of Eternity" *Mind*, pp. 283-303 Oxford University Press, 1928: 283-303. However, Hallet's account stems mostly from Spinoza's early work, the *Cogitata Metaphysica*. Since the focus of this thesis is the *Ethics* and since the *Ethics* is regarded as Spinoza's mature philosophical position, I will not discuss Hallet's argument in this work. Additionally, in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* it is often difficult to tell when Spinoza is explicating Descartes' views or presenting his own. For these reasons, I will focus instead on what Alexander states in his work "Spinoza and Time."

²¹ Samuel Alexander. "Spinoza and Time" *Studies in Spinoza: Critical and Interpretive Essays*. London: University of California Press, 1972.

“...when we speak of lengths and figures of things, we are not dealing with reality except in the confused manner of imagination... Spinoza does not contrast durations with duration as such, but with eternity, and eternity is not Time, but is timeless.”²²

Alexander notes several passages in the *Ethics* that support this Platonic interpretation. First, and most prominently, there is Spinoza’s definition of eternity (*aeternitatis*) at E1d8. Spinoza states:

By eternity, I mean existence itself, insofar as it is conceived as necessarily following solely from the definition of the eternal thing.

Explanation: For such existence is conceived as an eternal truth, just as is the essence of the thing. It therefore cannot be explicated by duration or time, even if duration be conceived without beginning or end (E1d8).²³

In this definition and explication it appears that Spinoza is explicitly denying that eternity can be explained in terms of duration or time. The last part of the explication, “[eternity] cannot therefore be explained by duration or time, even if the duration be conceived without beginning or end,”²⁴ is exactly how we would expect a Platonist to characterize eternity. There is even a clause indicating that he is considering and rejecting the sempiternity account of eternality. Spinoza notes that despite there being no beginning or end, duration still cannot explain eternity. Another of his remarks that appears to read eternity as denying temporality is “in eternity there is neither when nor

²²Ibid., 68

²³ Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 31-32

²⁴ Ibid., 31-32

before nor after (E1p33s).”²⁵ Again, it appears that Spinoza is denying duration and thus the sempiternal view of God. Given these passages, it is not a stretch to read Spinoza as a Platonic eternalist.

While there is thus what appears to be clear textual evidence supporting a Platonic interpretation of Spinoza’s use of eternity, the scholarly opinion on this issue is not unanimous. As noted above, Martha Kneale and Alan Donagan both offer sempiternalist interpretations of Spinoza’s account of eternity. It is to their views that we turn in the next section.

2.4: Spinoza as a Sempiternalist

Though both Kneale and Donagan argue for a sempiternal reading of Spinoza’s use of eternity, their views differ in important respects. Nonetheless, the motivation for both of their theories is explaining proposition 23 of book V, which states, “The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal.”²⁶ To better understand their resolutions of the textual problem this passage poses, let’s first take a closer look at Kneale and Donagan’s respective positions concerning Spinoza’s use of “eternity.”

Kneale begins by stating that she believes that if you look at the first four Parts of the *Ethics* and all of the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Spinoza should be read as an eternalist. She states, "I think that Spinoza began with a Platonic view of eternity as

²⁵ Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 54-55

²⁶ Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 213-214

timelessness sharply separated from duration."²⁷ However, Kneale believes that Spinoza changed his views about eternity while working on the *Ethics*. With respect to Part V of the *Ethics*, Kneale states:

[...] Spinoza was thinking in a more Aristotelian way. He thought that eternity was essentially necessity, that he can prove the necessity of the human mind and from this the sempiternity of the human mind. I say deliberately 'sempiternity' rather than survival because there are two passages which suggest the preexistence as well as post existence of the mind.²⁸

The two passages mentioned above are the scholium to proposition 23 (already noted in chapter 1), which states, "although we do not remember that we existed before the body, nevertheless we feel our mind to be eternal,"²⁹ and the scholium to proposition 31 in Part 5. The part of this scholium that Kneale is referring to states, "we shall consider the mind as if it were now beginning to be and were now beginning to understand things under a form of eternity."³⁰ In this scholium, Kneale argues, Spinoza is holding that the human mind's duration is endless in both directions. This is due to the presence of the qualifying clause "as if." Kneale notes that this qualifying clause suggests that it is an artifice to view the mind as now beginning —as opposed

²⁷ Martha Kneale. "Eternity and Sempiternity," *Spinoza: A collection of Critical Essays*. (1973): 226-240. 238

²⁸ Martha Kneale. "Eternity and Sempiternity," *Spinoza: A collection of Critical Essays*. (1973): 226-240. 238-239

²⁹ Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 213-214

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 216-217

to the everlastingness expressed at the beginning of the scholium. After arguing for sempiternity in Part V of the *Ethics*, Kneale provides an interpretation of the problematic proposition 23 of Part V. She notes, there “is in God the knowledge of each human body, which is different than the essence of every other human body and this knowledge is necessary, i.e., eternal and therefore sempiternal.”³¹ Therefore, the “something of [the mind] that remains” remains through God’s necessary and sempiternal knowledge and is nothing other than the divine idea of the essence of the body.

Much like Kneale, Donagan begins with a discussion of how Spinoza has been classically ascribed a Platonic view of eternity. Donagan differs from Kneale, however, in that he reads Spinoza as holding a sempiternal view throughout the *Ethics*. Part of his argument relies on the sense of the word “time” (“tempus”). Donagan believes that Spinoza used this term in a very restricted sense. In support of this he cites E2p44cor1s:

Besides, nobody doubts that the way in which we imagine time is this: we imagine some bodies to be moved, with respect to others, more slowly, or more quickly, or equally quickly.³²

Donagan notes that this passage echoes an analysis in Spinoza’s *Cogitata*

³¹ Martha Kneale. “Eternity and Sempiternity,” *Spinoza: A collection of Critical Essays*. (1973): 226-240. 239

³² Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 92-93

Metaphysica,³³ The passage from the *Cogitata Metaphysica* states:

[I]n order that [a quantity of duration] be determined (determinetur), we compare it with the duration of other things which have a certain and determinate motion (motus), and this comparison is called time. (C. M., I, 4).

The significance of these two passages, according to Donagan, is the following:

This analysis tells us what a time is: namely, an interval of duration measurable by a clock. It analyzes the sense of ‘time’ in which it is said that the time Michelangelo took to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel was four and a half years.³⁴

What these passages tell us, according to Donagan, is that there is time in the *Ethics* and, moreover, that this restricted sense of time is fully compatible with sempiternity.

This, in conjunction with the passages regarding the human mind that Kneale mentions, is enough to convince Donagan that Spinoza should be read as a sempiternalist.

Donagan then transitions into attempting to provide an interpretation of proposition 23 of Part 5. His account is nuanced and detailed; so, I reproduce it here at some length.

Spinoza had laid it down that, if an essence were such that its existence would not in itself involve a contradiction, then what would call for explanation would be not so much its existence (if it existed),

³³ Donagan cites a letter Spinoza wrote to Lewis Meyer as support for the claim that this is Spinoza’s view.

³⁴ Alan Donagan. “Spinoza’s Proof of Immortality,” *Spinoza: A collection of Critical Essays*. (1973): 243-244.

as its nonexistence (if it did not). Let us call such essences 'intrinsically possible.' His idea evidently was that an infinite substance would bring about the existence, as a finite mode, of every intrinsically possible finite essence, unless its other finite modes made it impossible to do so. Here Spinoza anticipated Leibniz: his infinite substance necessarily brings into existence the most perfect intrinsically possible system of modes (E., I, xxxiii S2). *Natura naturata* is therefore what Leibniz would have called the best of all possible worlds. And, although strictly speaking only the essences of modes in the most perfect possible modal system have power of existing, every intrinsically possible essence has it loosely speaking: that is, every intrinsically possible essence has conditional power of existing—it would exist if some finite existent did not prevent it. Essences possessed of power of existing only in this loose or conditional sense are not actual.

Since the very same essence (for example, that of Socrates' body) may be actual at one time (say, 424 B.C.) but not another (now) it is useful to have an epithet to indicate when an essence is being spoken of with no implication that it is actual. Spinoza used 'formalis' ('formal') for this purpose. Hence, in speaking of essences of individuals merely as they are contained in the divine attributes, without any implication as to whether the divine finite modes are or are not

permitting them to be actual, he called them 'formal essences' ('essentiae formales') (E., II, viii). The idea of an actual essence is therefore composite, and may be analyzed into the idea of a formal essence, and the idea of other existents being such as not to prevent its existence. Spinoza presupposed an analysis of this kind when he declared that 'something of the human mind' is eternal, namely, the idea of the essence of the human body The answer to the question what Spinoza took the eternal part of a mind to be ... is: the idea of the (formal) essence of its body.³⁵

According to Donagan, then, both before and after the actual existence of the human body, the mind exists as the formal essence of the body; that is, it exists as an intrinsic possibility that is prevented from actually existing by other finite modes except while the body actually exists. Thus, when he states that the mind partially survives the destruction of the body, Donagan believes that Spinoza is merely acknowledging that the intrinsic essence of the body exists regardless of whether the body is actual.

A question that remains on Donagan's and Kneale's interpretations of 5p23 is why Spinoza seems to assert an asymmetry between the survival of the mind and the survival of the body. If the mind continues to exist as the idea of the formal essence of the human body, why would it not be just as meaningful to say that the body enjoys a sort of survival no less than the mind in that there must be a mode of extension corresponding to the idea of this essence? Additionally, why would the body's

³⁵ Alan Donagan. "Spinoza's Proof of Immortality," *Spinoza: A collection of Critical Essays*. (1973): 241-258. 249-251

survival not be as meaningful as the mind's survival; that is, why call attention to one and not the other. Though neither Donagan nor Kneale shed much light on this issue, it is an issue worth discussing and an issue to which I will return to in Chapter 5.

As will become evident in chapter 4, my own interpretation of Spinoza on time is a variant of Platonic eternalism; nonetheless, it was not the purpose of this chapter to establish this point. This chapter was devoted to sketching the dominant lines of interpretation of Spinoza's theory of time to be found in the secondary literature, lines of interpretation that approach Spinoza's theory in terms of the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions that undoubtedly influenced it. However, to fully appreciate Spinoza's theory of time and his reasons for it, I believe it is important to approach his work not merely from the standpoint of the historical context in which he was working. One ought, I contend, consider it from the standpoint of contemporary work on the philosophy of time. To lay the groundwork for doing so, I must first provide an overview of the extensive contemporary work on the philosophy of time that was inspired by McTaggart's paradox. It is to this task that I turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Contemporary Debates Concerning the Nature of Time

In my previous chapter I discussed one of the classic debates about the nature of time and the application of that work to Spinoza's *Ethics*. In this chapter, I move to more recent debates on the nature of time; namely, the influential work of J. M. E. McTaggart and various contemporary A- and B-Theories of time that were inspired by his attempt to show that time is unreal. With the goal of showing that Spinoza is best read as a B-Theorist regarding the nature of time, a detailed background of the subject of recent work about the nature of time is essential. With this in mind, I begin this chapter with a discussion of McTaggart's work, *Time*,³⁶ and then present both the A-Theory and B-Theory accounts of time, respectively. Here it is important that the reader note two things: 1) there has been an enormous amount of work regarding the nature of time over the last 100 years — much more than could be treated adequately in a thesis — thus, this chapter focuses only on giving a brief summation of recent work on the A- and B-Theories; and 2) I am not arguing for one theory over the other. My goal is to give detailed accounts of both theories only in order to support my contention that Spinoza is best read as a B-Theorist.

3.1: The Unreality of Time

As already mentioned, the distinction between A- and B-Theories of time first appeared in 1908 when J. M. E. McTaggart published his work, *Time*. He begins by

³⁶ J.M.E McTaggart. "Time." *Metaphysics, Contemporary Readings*. Ed. By Michael J. Loux. 2008: 350-361.

mentioning some famous philosophers who have (to differing extents) denied the existence of time in their work, and then notes that he, too, falls into that category, although for different reasons. His reasons stem from two distinctions about the relations of time that he labels the A- and B-series. The A-series consists of the distinctions of time such as ‘past,’ ‘present’ and ‘future,’ while the B series consists of the temporal relations of events such as “earlier than” and “later than.” Additionally, later literature has included the determination “simultaneous as” in the A-series. It is important to note that while an event’s possession of the characteristics past, present and future changes over time, an event’s possession of the relational predicates “earlier than” and “later than” does not change over time. For this reason, it is sometimes said that the relational predicates of earlier than and later than apply atemporally, in the sense that one event being earlier/later than another will be true for all times and statements expressing these relations never change their truth-values.

Another issue covered in this debate is the idea of tensed vs. tenseless language. Tensed language refers to events or objects as they are in the past, present or future, while tenseless language refers to events or objects without reference to the past, present or future. Stating this distinction between the A-series and B-series, McTaggart critically assesses what he takes to be essential to time; viz., that it involves change, and thus time cannot exist if it does not account for change. This argument for the unreality of time came to be known as “McTaggart’s Paradox” and has been very influential in the field of metaphysics. To understand his conclusion, an in-depth look at his argument concerning the two series of time is required.

The problem that arises is that neither the A-series nor B-series, as McTaggart

defines them, are sufficient in accounting for change. First, let's look at the A-series. Due to the A-series' temporal relations being "earlier than" and "later than," it primarily deals with events in time. For example, the election of Barack Obama's first term of office is earlier than his reelection for a second term. Conversely, his reelection is later than his first election into office. So does this series account for change? McTaggart thinks not. He states, "If N is ever earlier than O and later than M, it will always be, and has always been, earlier than O and later than M, since the relations of earlier and later are permanent."³⁷ These events will always have a place in the time series and thus cannot begin or cease to be events. McTaggart then considers the idea of events merging. If M from the above example can merge itself into another event such as N, events would then be able to account for change. However, McTaggart thinks this is impossible as well, since somewhere in the process of the events merging there would be a point at which M ceased and N began.³⁸ Moreover, M merging into N would consist in an event that has characteristics of both events without being either. In a way it would create a new, distinct event; however, barring further event-merging, this new event would be equally as atemporal as the others, and any attempt to resolve this by further merging of events leads only to an infinite regress. Given these circumstances, McTaggart concludes that the A-series is not sufficient in itself to account for time. The A-series is thus needed to express the change central to McTaggart's argument.

Due to the A-series' inability to account for change, McTaggart posits that the A-series is required to account for change and preserve the existence of time. With the

³⁷ J.M.E McTaggart. "Time." *Metaphysics, Contemporary Readings*. Ed. By Michael J. Loux. 2008: 350-361. 352

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 352

A-series we can express the change that the A-series was unable to capture. We can say that event N was an event in the future, changed to being an event in the present and changed one last time to become past.³⁹ This seems to be in line with the A-series's commonsense appeal, as I do not think it is a stretch to assert that it is natural to perceive objects and events as changing from future to present and finally to past. Even though the A-series may appear to be a natural way of viewing time, McTaggart, thinks we must note that "past," "present" and "future" are incompatible determinations. Every event must possess only one of these because if it possessed two or more of these determinations simultaneously, there would be a contradiction since being present means something happening now while being future/past means something not-now. This is the problem that McTaggart recognizes: one event can't have all three determinations applied to it; yet, every event appears to have all three. For example, I can say that the action of myself eating lunch is currently in the present. However, this morning this action was an event in the future, and as I look back upon my day and (perhaps fondly) remember my lunch, the same event is in the past. This example highlights that given these determinations, one event possesses contradictory predicates. Having formulated this problem for the A-series, McTaggart does consider a natural response to it. This response appeals to our use of the predicates past, present and future to characterize moments of time; that is, we are comfortable saying a moment of time *is* present, *was* past and *will be* future. The moments of time are then qualified by each having appropriate uses of these verb forms successively, and so none of them contradict each other, which allows us to maintain that the inconsistent predicates of past, present and future are ascribed to the

³⁹ Ibid., 353

same event only at different times. Unfortunately, according to McTaggart, this approach fails since it leads to an infinite regress. He reasons as follows:

Thus our first statement about M—that it is present, will be past, and has been future—means that M is present at a moment of present time, past at some moment of future time, and future at some moment of past time. But every moment, like every event, is both past, present, and future. And so a similar difficulty arises. If M is present, there is no moment of past time at which it is past. But the moments of future time, in which it is past, are equally moments of past time, in which it cannot be past. Again, that M is future and will be present and past means that M is future at a moment of present time, and present and past at different moments of future time. In that case it cannot be present or past at any moments of past time. But all the moments of future time, in which M will be present or past, are equally moments of past time[...]. And thus again we get a contradiction, since the moments at which M has any one of the three determinations of the A series are also moments at which it cannot have that determination.⁴⁰

We are thus left with two determinations that are incompatible. Now, one could repeat this process again to try and resolve that, but doing so would lead to an infinite regress, as McTaggart shows,

⁴⁰J.M.E McTaggart. "Time." *Metaphysics, Contemporary Readings*. Ed. By Michael J. Loux. 2008: 350-361. 359.

If we try to avoid this by saying of these moments what had been previously said of M itself—that some moment, for example, is future, and will be present and past—then “is” and “will be” have the same meaning as before. Our statement, then, means that the moment in question is future at a present moment, and will be present and past at different moments of future time. This, of course, is the same difficulty over again. And so on infinitely.⁴¹

McTaggart concludes that, although the A-series seems to account for change, it is contradictory and thus cannot be what composes time. On the other hand, though the B-Theory is coherent, it is not able to account for the change that is essential to time. This is McTaggart’s paradox, and it is the cause for a deep divide in contemporary philosophy of time between the aptly named “A-Theorists” and “B-Theorists.”

The divide between A-Theorists and B-Theorists left each side choosing a different aspect of McTaggart’s argument to counter. The A-Theorists attack the second part of his argument and deny that use of tensed language such as “past,” “present” and “future” leads to a contradiction, while the B-Theorists maintain that there is a contradiction in tensed language, but that McTaggart was wrong in claiming that the A-series cannot account for time. They advocate the use of tenseless language, saying that tenseless language can account for expressions of tensed language. Within each camp of metaphysicians, there are some differences in how McTaggart’s arguments are refuted. Within the A-Theory, the main differences lie within two

⁴¹ J.M.E McTaggart. “Time.” *Metaphysics, Contemporary Readings*. Ed. By Michael J. Loux. 2008: 350-361. For a more detailed explanation of this defense, see the bottom of P. 358 through to the middle of P. 359.

distinct theories: Presentism and The Growing Block Theory (GBT).⁴² Within the B-Theory, there is only one dominant variety – eternalism – but different versions of this theory arise concerning which tenseless locutions provide the best translation for tensed language.

3.2: The A-Theory

As mentioned above, the two most widely accepted positions that argue for an A-Theory of time are Presentism and GBT. Both views agree with McTaggart that being past, being present and being future are three distinct and incompatible properties, but they attempt to avoid the contradiction by denying that anything has all three properties.

The growing block theory was first proposed by C. D. Broad in his 1923 work, *Scientific Thought*.⁴³ This theory holds that the universe is always increasing/growing in its temporal size. As each moment of time passes, a temporal slice is added to the temporal whole of the universe. In this view, the future does not exist in the sense that anything meaningful can be said about it. However, the past does exist in the sense that it is a collection of temporal slices. Broad maintains that it is absurd to claim that the past does not exist, which is why he keeps it in his theory. He states, “Nothing has happened to the present by becoming past except that fresh slices of existence have been added to the total history of the world.”⁴⁴ I take this statement to mean that ceasing to be present and thus becoming past involves no intrinsic change to the

⁴² This is also sometimes referred to as The Growing Universe Theory.

⁴³ C. D. Broad. *Scientific Thought: A Philosophical Analysis of Some of Its Fundamental Concepts, Volume 1*. Psychology Press, 1923.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 66

objects/events that undergo this transition.⁴⁵ He states:

There is no such thing as *ceasing* to exist; what has become exists henceforth forever. When we say that something has ceased to exist we only mean that it has ceased to be present; and this only means that the sum total of existence has increased since any part of the history of the thing became, and that the later additions contain no events sufficiently alike to and sufficiently continuous with the history of the thing in question to count as a continuation of it.⁴⁶

But how does this position avoid the contradiction? Broad's answer is:

the laws of logic apply to a fixed universe of discourse, and we can at any moment get a fixed universe of discourse by taking the sum total of reality up to that moment. But the universe of actual fact is continually increasing through the becoming of fresh events; and changes in truth, which are mere increases in the *number of truths* throughout this cause, are logically unobjectionable.⁴⁷

Broad's prescription for avoiding the problem of the ascription of incompatible tensed predicates to particular objects seems to be that the sort of change that the universe

⁴⁵ I am following Zimmerman in reading Broad in this way.

⁴⁶ C. D. Broad. *Scientific Thought: A Philosophical Analysis of Some of Its Fundamental Concepts, Volume I*. Psychology Press, 1923. 69

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 83

manifests does not constitute a fixed universe of discourse and thus is not an appropriate object for logic or a charge of logical inconsistency.⁴⁸

There have been several criticisms of the Growing Block Theory since its formulation, but I only wish to draw attention to one of them here, as it can also be a criticism for presentism as well. A consequence of this theory is that the use of temporal slices to explain change prompts the question of just how fast time moves/progresses. This is a problem for any theory involving temporal passage. What would be needed to measure this temporal passage is another temporal frame of reference, a hyper-time, that would measure the rate of change. But if this hyper-time is truly temporal, then it will also be subject to questions about the rate of change, and require another hyper-time, and so on ad infinitum.

In contrast with the Growing Block Theory, Presentism seems a bit more radical in trying to avoid McTaggart's paradox. It holds that only present objects exist, and thus all three determinations — being past, being present and being future — are not possessed by the same event. Only the present moment of time is real; thus, one can only ascribe the predicate of presentness. Therefore, all worries about the joint ascription of two or more members of the inconsistent temporal triad — pastness, presentness and futurity — vanish. While this solves the charge of incoherence, this has a profound effect on a presentist's ontology. With presentism, it follows that if we were to make an accurate list of all the things that exist in the universe, there would

⁴⁸ C. D. Broad. *Scientific Thought: A Philosophical Analysis of Some of Its Fundamental Concepts, Volume 1*. Psychology Press, 1923.

not be a single non-present object on the list.⁴⁹ Regarding this, A. N. Prior states, “[t]he pastness of an event, that is to say its having taken place, is not the same as the event itself; nor is its futurity; but the presentness of the event is just the event.”⁵⁰ Prior’s thought seems to be that when events move into the past they no longer exist, and thus are no longer real. A famous example put forth by A. N. Prior involves the phrase “thank goodness that’s over,” which also happens to be the title of his paper. The point of this phrase is to highlight that we rejoice when negative things, such as pain, have passed. We do not talk about the pain of a headache as if it still exists; rather, we treat it as if it were nonexistent, and rejoice that it is no longer affecting us. All in all, presentism maintains that our commonsense intuitions of past, present and future represent the true metaphysical nature of time. In fact, this is exactly why Dean Zimmerman believes the A-Theory is correct. He states,

My reason for believing the A-Theory is utterly banal [is that] it is simply part of commonsense that the past and future are less real than the present; that the differences between events and things that exist at present, and the ones that do not, goes much deeper than the difference between events and things near where I am and the ones that are spatially far away.⁵¹

According to Zimmerman, our commonsense views of time and space reveal that the

⁴⁹ Markosian, Ned, "Time", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL =<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/time/>>.

⁵⁰ A. N. Prior. “The Notion of the Present.” *Metaphysics, Contemporary Readings*. Ed. By Michael J. Loux. 2008: 379-383. 381

⁵¹ Dean Zimmerman. “The Priveleged Present: Defending an A-Theory of Time,” *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Malden, Blackwell Publishing, 2008. 221

existential implications of temporal differences go “much deeper” than spatial differences in that two or more objects located at different places can be equally real whereas two more objects located at different times cannot all be fully real at a given moment.

Though it may have commonsense on its side, presentism is nonetheless beset by serious challenges. First, there is the problem I mentioned earlier about the rate of change/passage of time. How fast, it seems reasonable to ask, do these moments of time pass? Additionally, with this conception of time there is a vague idea of what a *moment* of time really is. If presentism maintains that the present moment is all that is real or meaningful, then it would be useful to know precisely what constitutes a moment of time. Is it a second? Two seconds? An hour? Has the present moment of time passed by the end of reading this sentence? Or has it passed when this paragraph is over? Or is it completely lacking in temporal extension? A durationless horizon marking the boundary between the past and future?⁵² The lack of definite measurement of what a moment of time is definitely needs to be addressed by a presentist. Finally, since only the present moment exists on this account, the only meaningful talk is that of the present. Therefore, I cannot meaningfully talk about past events or objects.⁵³ I could not have a meaningful discussion concerning the different philosophies, qualities and lives of past philosophers, such as Spinoza, Socrates and Descartes, because they are neither spatially nor temporally present in the present

⁵² Markosian, Ned, "Time", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/time/>>.

⁵³ Or truthfully, for that matter. This will be explained in more detail in the discussion of the B-Theory.

⁵⁴ Markosian, Ned, "Time", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/time/>>.

moment of time. With implications like these, many have stated that this view satisfies commonsense in certain respects only at the price of violating it more deeply in others.

3.3: Eternalism

Unlike the A-Theory, the B-Theory possesses one variant: eternalism. In this theory, objects from both the past and future exist just as much as present objects (in an ontological sense). The event of my writing of this paper is as real as the event of Socrates's death. Unlike presentism, my talk of past objects and events are meaningful and verifiable. And, as discussed above, the B-Theory reduces temporal relations to the predicates "earlier than/later than." Advocates of this theory claim that the temporal passage of time is unreal and that any use of "past," "present" and "future" determinations results in a contradiction. They go further and say that the A-Theorist's conception of "past," "present" and "future" are also anthropocentric. To this end they state that their theory advances a non-anthropocentric view, and is therefore preferable. In support of this claim, J. J. C. Smart states "[c]oncepts of past, present and future have significance relative only to human thought and utterances and do not apply to the universe as such." On the other hand, using earlier/later than is seen as non-anthropocentric because these terms do apply to the universe, as there is a clear atemporal ordering of events that can be reflected in a timeline.

J. J. C. Smart provides non-anthropocentric translations of the anthropocentric terms, "was," "now" and "will be," into the tenseless, nonanthropocentric expressions, "earlier than," "later than," and "simultaneous with." One method he

uses to thus translate tensed language into these tenseless expressions is called token reflexivity. Token reflexivity involves placing “is earlier/later than this utterance” after the description of an event and using a tenseless ‘is’ to capture the tensed predicates “was” and “will be”. “Now” is similarly captured by placing “is simultaneous with this utterance” after the description of an event. For instance, when discussing a past event such as the ratification of the 50th state in the United States of America, one would use “is earlier than this utterance” if you were at any place in time after August 21, 1959. Now if one were in Hawaii during the time of ratification (August 21, 1959), instead of saying “The state is ratified now,” s/he could say, “The state’s ratification is simultaneous to this utterance.” And if you were living in 1935 you would say, “The ratification of the 50th state is later than this utterance.” On using token reflexivity, Smart recommends thinking of token reflexivity as like the difference between sugar “melts” and sugar “dissolves.” The former may be the ‘ordinary’ way of talking about sugar, but the latter is in line with scientific locution. Because of its capacity to translate tensed, anthropomorphic language into tenseless terms, Smart’s views token reflexive translations of tenses as the way best-suited for scientific descriptions of the actual nature of reality.

With this survey of the landscape of contemporary theories of time in place, we are now in position to return to Spinoza to see what light can be shed on his thought by approaching it from the standpoint of the distinction between A- and B-Theory treatments of time, a task that is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Spinoza on Time

With the relevant background information on eternity, sempiternity, and the A- and B-Theories in place, I can now defend the thesis that Spinoza is best read as a B-Theorist concerning time. This chapter is set up in two parts: 1) a summation of the argument that Spinoza is a B-Theorist that Jason Waller puts forth in his work, *Spinoza on the Persistence of Bodies*⁵⁵ and 2) my own textually-based argument to show that Spinoza should be read as a B-Theorist.

4.1: Waller's Argument

Waller's work contains the only explicit argument in the secondary literature for regarding Spinoza as a B-Theorist. He calls his argument the "Representation Argument for Durational Eternalism," and draws upon aspects of Michael Della Rocca's work, *Representation and the Mind–Body Problem in Spinoza*, to advance his thesis.⁵⁶ Briefly, his argument draws upon Spinoza's meaning holism (as elaborated by Della Rocca) and his parallelism to show that past, present and future bodies are all fully real at all times and that, therefore, Spinoza cannot be an A-Theorist.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Waller, Jason. *Spinoza on the Persistence of Bodies*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012.

⁵⁶ Michael Della Rocca. *Representation and the Mind–Body Problem in Spinoza*, Oxford 1996.

⁵⁷ Recall here that the A-theory claims that only present objects exist; thus, Spinoza's belief past and future bodies exist contradicts the presentists' claims, thus making the B-theory the only viable option for Spinoza.

Waller begins his argument with a discussion of Spinoza's account of temporal concepts. According to Waller, "Spinoza distinguishes three different temporal concepts: duration (*duratio*), time (*tempus*), and eternity (*aeternitatis*). Duration and time relate to the existence of modes and eternity relates to the existence of substance."⁵⁸ For Waller's purposes, he focuses on duration and thus modes rather than eternity.⁵⁹ Here he reminds us of the following about a mode's duration: "how long a mode exists (that is, the quantity of its duration) is ultimately determined not by the mode's own essence, but by its external causes (E2p30, E3p8.). If there were no external causes, the mode would continue to exist forever."⁶⁰ This aspect of Spinoza is, as the reader will see, integral to the next part of Waller's argument.

Waller proceeds to discuss the relationship between human minds and God's mind, drawing attention to the following passage from E2p11c:

When we say that the human Mind perceives this or that, we are saying nothing but that God, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is explained through the nature of the human Mind, or insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human Mind, has this or that idea; and when we say that God has this or that idea, not only insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human Mind, but insofar as he also has the idea of another thing together with the human Mind, then we say that the human Mind perceives the thing only partially, or

⁵⁸ Waller, Jason. *Spinoza on the Persistence of Bodies*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012. p 18.

⁵⁹ It should be noted that Waller considers time to be the comparison/measurement of durations. He states, "In the world there are no minutes and hours, only modes which exist and so have a certain duration. It is only when we consider these durations that we get the concepts of time."

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 18

inadequately (E2p11c.).⁶¹

This passage indicates, according to Waller, that ideas in the human mind are generally inadequate due to the limitations in understanding endemic to a finite mind. On the other hand, all ideas are adequate and true in God's mind when the latter is not restricted to being considered as constituting the human mind. Waller cites this passage not only to explain the difference between adequate and inadequate ideas, but to introduce an issue concerning these ideas and then ultimately discuss meaning holism. The issue that arises is "how can one and the same idea be adequate insofar as it is explained together with certain ideas not in the human mind and inadequate when explained without reference to these other ideas?"⁶² This is where Della Rocca's meaning holism enters Waller's account. Della Rocca argues that Spinoza holds that "in order to have an idea or mental state with a certain content, one must have very many other ideas or mental states that have content related in some way to the content of the original mental state."⁶³ This solves the issue "because idea A insofar as it is in God's mind is considered in relation to many more ideas than when [idea] A is considered in the human mind" and thus, by meaning holism, "idea A has different content in God's mind than it does in the human mind."⁶⁴ He continues, "that God's mind includes all and only adequate ideas is important because Spinoza argues that the

⁶¹ Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 70-71

⁶² Waller, Jason. *Spinoza on the Persistence of Bodies*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012. 21

⁶³ Michael Della Rocca. *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*, Oxford 1996.73

⁶⁴ Waller, Jason. *Spinoza on the Persistence of Bodies*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012. 21-22

inadequate idea of body x in God's mind and body x itself are one and the same thing considered in two ways."⁶⁵ Combining Waller's discussion in this paragraph with proposition 7 of book II,⁶⁶ we can conclude that "Spinoza's parallelism of ideas and bodies bears directly on his theory of representation."⁶⁷

From this discussion of the relation between the human mind and God's mind Waller arrives at two theses:

1. The Causal Adequacy Thesis: an adequate idea of body x requires and involves an adequate idea of all of x's causes.
2. The Representational Parallelism Thesis: an adequate idea of body x and x itself are one and the same thing explained through different attributes.⁶⁸

Utilizing these two theses, Waller formulates an argument for the existence of past bodies:

1. God has an adequate idea of all presently existing bodies. (Premise 1)
2. Thus, God has an adequate idea of all of the past bodies which are causally related to presently existing bodies. (Causal Adequacy Thesis)
3. Thus, the adequate ideas of past bodies exist in God's mind. (From 2)

⁶⁵ Ibid., 22

⁶⁶ "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things."

⁶⁷ Waller, Jason. *Spinoza on the Persistence of Bodies*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012. p 21

⁶⁸ Ibid., 23

4. An adequate idea of x and body x are one and the same thing considered in two ways. (Representational Parallelism Thesis)
5. Thus, past bodies exist (tenseless) (From 3,4)⁶⁹

If one has accepted Waller's interpretation of the relation between the human mind and God, then this proof is nearly complete. The last thing that Waller needs to show is that all past bodies are causally related to presently existing bodies. If Waller cannot clearly show this, then we would have to conclude that only some past bodies are causally related to presently existing bodies, a much a weaker claim. The question then arises of whether or not there can exist past bodies which are not causally related to any present bodies? To show that there cannot, Waller suggests,

that one might try to argue against the possibility of a causally isolated past body by citing Elp36 which tells us that 'nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow.' One might argue that for body x to exist in the past and not have any present effects it would have to be the case either that x itself does not have any effects at all (which violates Elp36) or x would have to cause something that doesn't have any effects at all (which likewise violates Elp36).⁷⁰

However, he notes that this line of reasoning is not decisive since it's possible for two past bodies to be reciprocally causally efficacious — i.e., each causes something

⁶⁹ Ibid., 23

⁷⁰ Waller, Jason. *Spinoza on the Persistence of Bodies*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012. p 24.

about the other — while they exist, but be annihilated simultaneously at some point in the past. In order to eliminate this possibility, Waller explores Spinoza's theory of bodily destruction, which can be found by looking at E2p17 and letter 4. E2p17 states, “[i]f the human body is affected in the way (modo) that involves the nature of some external body, the human mind will regard that same external body as actually existing, or as present to itself, until the human body undergoes a further modification which excludes the existence or presence of the said body.”⁷¹ From this proposition we can begin to piece together his theory of bodily destruction. For Spinoza, the existence of a particular body excludes the existence of other bodies. On this point, think of the cotton in a T-shirt. The present existence of this T-shirt prevents the existence of another T-shirt or tie or shorts using that same cotton.

The next part of his theory of bodily destruction is found in letter 4. Within it, we find the following passage:

I beg you, my friend, to consider that men are not created, but only begotten, and that their bodies already existed, but in a different form. However, the conclusion is this, as I am quite willing to admit, that if one part of matter were to be annihilated, the whole of extension would also vanish at the same time (Letter 4).

From this passage we can discern that there is a principle of the conservation of matter at work here, since Spinoza states that one part of matter cannot be annihilated (since

⁷¹ Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 77

its annihilation would cause all of extension to disappear) and that men's bodies have already existed in some form. If men's bodies consist of other parts that have existed in some form, then I think we can safely infer that there is some causal relationship between past bodies and present bodies, albeit even if it is only a partial one.

Having supported his Spinozistic proof for the reality of past bodies, he then argues that future bodies must be equally real for Spinoza, a set of ontological commitments that eliminate the possibility that Spinoza was an A-Theorist about time. To make this case, Waller notes that "Spinoza infers from E2p7 that the ideas of present bodies entail the ideas of future bodies (E2p9, E2p7c)."⁷² Coupling this point with Spinoza's psycho-physical parallelism, Waller notes that we can infer that there will also be a future extended body as well as the idea of a body. Next, he discusses e2p3, which states that "in God there is necessarily an idea both of his essence and of everything that necessarily follows from his essence."⁷³ Waller believes "that we can take E2p3 as entailing that God's mind must include the ideas of everything that are entailed by his adequate ideas," and "[t]hus, God must have adequate ideas of all future bodies." With passages supporting the existence of future bodies explained, Waller summarizes his Spinozistic proof for the existence of future bodies as follows:

1. God has an adequate idea of all present bodies. (Premise 1)
2. An adequate idea of the effect follows from an adequate idea of the cause. (Premise 2)

⁷² Waller, Jason. *Spinoza on the Persistence of Bodies*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012. p 26

⁷³ Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 64-65.

3. God must have in his mind the ideas of everything that follows from his ideas, (by E2p3)
4. Ideas that follow from adequate ideas are themselves adequate. (E2p40)
5. Thus, the adequate ideas of all future bodies are in God's mind. (From 2, 3)
6. But an adequate idea of x and body x are one and the same thing considered in two ways. (Representational Parallelism Thesis)
7. Thus, all future bodies exist (tenseless). (From 5,6)

Thus, through argumentation that past and future bodies are fully real at all times, Waller eliminates the possibility that Spinoza is an A-Theorist and concludes that Spinoza is a B-Theory eternalist.

Jason Waller thus provides powerful theoretical reasons that Spinoza could not have been an A-Theorist and that he is, therefore, best read as a B-Theorist. In the next section, I extend Waller's conclusion by making a more detailed textual case for believing that it is appropriate to read Spinoza as a B-Theorist. The case I make will come in two stages. First, I will consider texts that might be thought to pose a problem for reading Spinoza as a B-Theorist in order to show that the texts are in fact consistent with a B-Theory interpretation. Second, I will consider texts – not discussed by Waller – that lend further support to reading Spinoza as a B-Theorist.

4.2: Spinoza as an A-Theorist

Although I believe a B-Theory reading of Spinoza to be the natural reading and also believe that Waller presents a convincing argument against reading Spinoza as an A-Theorist, we must be open to the possibility that Spinoza is not consistent on this issue. In fact, there are texts that might be taken to lend support for reading Spinoza as an A-Theorist; thus, a full defense of the B-Theorist interpretation of Spinoza requires a plausible reading of these texts that renders them consistent with a B-Theory understanding of time. In this section, I will address this worry by considering those texts that might be read as implying an A-Theory account of time. Specifically, I will consider E1d8, E1p33s2, E2p30 and E2p31, the primary passages of which I am aware that might be construed as supporting an A-Theory reading.

We already looked at E1d8 with regards to eternity and sempiternity in chapter 2, but for reference, recall that Spinoza states:

By eternity, I understand existence itself, so far as it is conceived necessarily to follow from the definition alone of the eternal thing.

Explanation —For such existence, like the essence of the thing, is conceived as an eternal truth. It cannot therefore be explained by duration or time, even if the duration be conceived without beginning or end. (Id8).⁷⁴

At first glance, this passage may appear to hurt my thesis, as it appears that Spinoza is denying duration and time. By denying duration, Spinoza might be taken to be denying the reality of past and future bodies and thus a B-Theory account of the finite

⁷⁴ Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 31-32

modes of substance. This inference, however, would be unfounded for a couple of reasons. First, recall from my discussion of Waller that eternity applies to substance, while duration applies to modes. This is also supported by Spinoza in letter 12, “[i]t is to the existence of modes only that we can apply the term duration; the corresponding term for the existence of substance is Eternity, that is, the infinite enjoyment of existence...” Insofar as this passage is focused on the eternality of the existence of substance, it does not lead to a denial of the applicability of either the A-Theory or B-Theory to the finite modes of that substance. Secondly, and more importantly, while Spinoza is clear that duration and time cannot be used to explain the eternity of the existence of substance, the converse is not trivially implied; that is, this passage does not eliminate the possibility that the atemporal language of eternity might be used to provide atemporal translations of our ordinary, anthropocentric tensed language that is used to characterize the finite modes of substance.

The next passage that might be seen as supporting an A-Theory reading is E1p33s2, which states, “[b]ut since the eternal does not admit of ‘when’ or ‘before’ or ‘after,’ it follows merely from God's perfection that God can never decree otherwise nor ever could have decreed otherwise.”⁷⁵ Here I think one arguing in favor of Presentism could misinterpret this passage and try to use it as support for their position in that the text might be taken as the basis for the following sort of argument against reading Spinoza as a B-Theorist:;in maintaining that ‘before’ and ‘after’ aren’t applicable to Spinoza’s metaphysics, the text is eliminated essential A-series terms; thus, Spinoza cannot be a B-Theorist about time. However, again the reader needs to

⁷⁵ Ibid., 55

keep in mind that Spinoza is discussing the eternity of substance in the text in question; thus, the points made with respect to the text discussed in the preceding paragraph apply equally well in this case.

Propositions 30 and 31 both concern inadequate knowledge with respect to duration. They state: “We can have only a very inadequate knowledge of the duration of our body” and “We can have only a very inadequate knowledge of the duration of particular things external to us” (PII, Pr. 30 and 31, respectively). This “inadequate knowledge” of the duration of both our bodies and particular things might be taken as support for the presentist’s claim that only the present exists. In other words, an inadequate, or confused, idea that we have about something external, such as our bodies, can lead to a false assumption about past or future objects not existing. Also, it might be the case that since we only have limited knowledge about duration, the natural way to think of time is through the concepts of the ‘past,’ ‘present’ and ‘future.’ Although this may be a natural way to understand time, it does not make it the correct way to understand time, especially if it is the result of inadequate (confused) ideas. More importantly, though, the passage is about the human epistemic standing with respect to duration and time; thus, it has no direct implications with respect to Spinoza’s account of the metaphysics of time. Here again, the passage is consistent with either an A- or B-Theory interpretation of Spinoza.

As mentioned above, I believe these passages are the ones most open to a presentist reading in Spinoza’s corpus; however, at most they provide a very weak presumption in favor of a presentist version of the A-Theory. As was shown, however, they are all consistent with a B-Theory reading of Spinoza; thus, they do not rise to the

level of defeating Waller's argument for reading Spinoza as a B-Theorist. Moreover, they do not rise to the level of defeating the evidence for reading Spinoza as a B-Theorist provided by passages in the *Ethics* not considered by Waller. It is to these passages that I now turn.

4.3: Spinoza as a B-Theorist

In this section I will discuss the remaining passages concerning time in Spinoza that count in favor of reading Spinoza as a B-Theorist.

E2p18 states: "If the human body has once been affected by two or more bodies at the same time, when the mind afterwards imagines one of them, it will straight away remember the others too."⁷⁶ This proposition forms part of Spinoza's view on memory. What's important here is this idea of the mind imagining bodies in the past. This appears to give evidence for the reality of the past. Moreover, although it is not stated here explicitly, I do not think it is a stretch to assume that the bodies are as equally real in the past as they are in the present. This assumption, moreover, is actually supported by the corollary to proposition 17 in book II of the *Ethics*. It states, "The mind is able to regard as present external bodies by which the human body has been once affected, even if they do not exist and are not present."⁷⁷ Here it is clear that, for Spinoza, past bodies are "able to be regard[ed] as present external bodies." If one is to regard it as a present body, then that would mean the existence of the two bodies (past and present) are on a par ontologically. Of course, the clause "even if they

⁷⁶ Ibid., 79

⁷⁷ Ibid., 77-78

do not exist” might be seen as posing a problem for my reading. That this is not the case is clear provided one keeps in mind that the present non-existence of an object does not entail that its past duration is less real at the present moment than the reality of the present existence of a different body in the present moment. Recall that a B-Theorist can still talk of objects existing for different, non-overlapping finite periods, without metaphysically privileging the reality of either of these objects because of their relation to the flow of time.

Further evidence for this claim can be found in E2p17.⁷⁸ Spinoza states, “[i]f the human body is affected in the way (modo) that involves the nature of some external body, the human mind will regard that same external body as actually existing, or as present to itself, until the human body undergoes a further modification which excludes the existence or presence of the said body.”⁷⁹ I believe that E2p17 and its corollary are clear support of the assumption I believed to be present in E2p18.

Another important passage is the scholium to proposition 44 of book II. Spinoza states, “[f]urthermore, nobody doubts that time, too, is a product of the imagination, and arises from the fact that we see some bodies move more slowly than others, or more quickly, or with equal speed”⁸⁰ Rather than taking this at face value and believing Spinoza to be denying time completely, let’s think about how time could be a product of the imagination. Since Spinoza has several passages regarding duration and showing that there is some aspect of time in his work, I do not think duration is

⁷⁸ Though Waller does discuss this text, he uses it only to build his interpretation of Spinoza’s account of bodily dissolution and does not use it to support directly the point I am presently making.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 77

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 92-93

what is imagined here. I believe Spinoza to be referring to temporal passage, due to this idea of objects moving (changing, as it were). McTaggart held a somewhat similar view about temporal passage being an illusion, despite arguing for change as necessary to time. The suggestion that temporal passage is a construct of the human imagination and thus does not capture the real metaphysics of duration is, of course, fully in line with a B-Theorist's account of time.

Recall my discussion of J. J. C. Smart's B-Theory from last chapter. Part of his argument against presentism rests on the idea of A-series determinations being anthropocentric. In terms of time, 'past,' 'present' and 'future,' are seen as anthropocentric, since they rely, in part, on the temporal location of an individual. A-series determinations, however, are not anthropocentric. They deal solely with events (which are unchanging) and regardless of human existence there would still be a sort of temporal ordering. As Smart states, using the A-series determinations to express tensed statements is to use a more precise scientific language for time. Why is this non-anthropocentric talk important? Simply, because Spinoza is trying to explain reality as it is, *sub specie aeternitatis*. Therefore, a non-anthropocentric view of time would be metaphysically privileged within his system.

The last passage I want to focus on is found in letter 12. To put the passage in context, it must be noted that the "abstracted way" that he references is the use of the imagination, rather than intellect, to quantify duration. Spinoza states:

If someone conceives Duration in this abstracted way, and confusing it with Time begins dividing it into parts, he can never understand how, for instance, an hour can pass by. For in order that an hour should pass by, a half-hour must

first have passed by, and then half of the remainder, and then half of what is left of the remainder; and if you go on subtracting half of the remainder to infinity, you can never reach the end of the hour. Therefore, many, who are not used to distinguishing mental constructs from reality have ventured to assert that Duration is composed of moments [...] To say that duration is made up of moments is the same as to say that Number is made up by adding noughts together.⁸¹

Two important things are happening in this paragraph. First, he is using a modified version of Zeno's paradox to argue against the existence of duration in this abstracted way, and second he is criticizing the idea of moments. Through imagination we can imagine things as being infinitely divisible, but in reality that just is not the case. Concerning moments, it's important to note that he is not saying a moment is incoherent; rather, he's criticizing the suggestion that one might compile moments to create/explain duration. However, it is possible that he found a moment of time to be a troublesome notion. Regardless, within this passage I believe there is an aversion to this use of moments, which is thus inconsistent with a presentist reading. Additionally, I suspect that Spinoza would not have any qualms about composing duration through the use of events, like the A-series does. Of course, this is textual speculation; nonetheless, it is, in my estimation, fairly plausible speculation.

When read carefully, Spinoza's various remarks on the nature of time are either a) consistent with either an A-Theory interpretation or a B-Theory interpretation or b) line up in favor of a B-Theory interpretation. This, taken in conjunction with

⁸¹ Ibid., 269-270

Jason Waller's argument for the eternal reality of past and future existents, provides compelling evidence that Spinoza is best read as endorsing a Platonic B-Theorist account of time.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks

Having assembled considerable evidence that a B-Theory reading is the correct interpretation of Spinoza's theory of time, in this chapter I will show that this interpretation sheds light on a much-disputed textual problem in the *Ethics*; namely, what sense can be made of Spinoza's contention in E5p23 that "[t]he human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed along with the body, but something of it remains, which is eternal."⁸²

As mentioned in the first chapter, two important aspects of Spinoza's philosophy are his parallelism and his mind-body identity. As a recap, in E2p7 Spinoza states, "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things,"⁸³ and in the scholium to this proposition he states, "a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two ways."⁸⁴ For Spinoza, since mental events and bodily events are really just different expressions of the same underlying reality, it is unavoidable that these different expressions should be correlated despite the fact that there is no causal interaction between them. This parallelism also commits Spinoza to a mind-body identity. In E2p13 he states, "the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body – i.e. a definite mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else."⁸⁵ This proposition, in conjunction with E2p7s, implies Spinoza's mind-body identity. This point is made

⁸² Ibid., 213

⁸³ Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 66

⁸⁴ Ibid., 66

⁸⁵ Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 67

explicitly at E2p21s: “the idea of the body and the body itself – that is, (2p13) mind and body – are one and the same individual thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought and now under the attribute of Extension.”⁸⁶

The problem that then arises (as mentioned in chapter 1) is proposition 23 of part V, in which he states, “[t]he human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed along with the body, but something of it remains, which is eternal.” This appears to be an obvious contradiction and violation of his parallelism and his mind-body identity. The perplexity caused by this proposition has led scholars to offer many different strategies for reconciling these texts, two of which were outlined in Chapter 2. I believe that my B-Theory interpretation of Spinoza can help to dispel at least some of the tension introduced into the *Ethics* by this surprising proposition.

Approaching our conclusion concerning Spinoza’s theory of time a bit more abstractly, I think we can equate an event with a metaphysical time slice. Note that this is not the same sense of time slice as C.D. Broad uses;⁸⁷ rather, picture these as large time slices, with each event constituting its own time slice. With this in mind, I think we can take “something of it remains, which is eternal” to refer to both the time slice of the mind and body (in their respective attributes, of course). Through application of aspects of the B-Theory, we can conclude that 1) past, present and future bodies are real and 2) the time slices of the mind and body are as fully real, even in periods of duration during which they are not actualized.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 80-81

⁸⁷ C. D. Broad. *Scientific Thought: A Philosophical Analysis of Some of Its Fundamental Concepts, Volume I*. Psychology Press, 1923. Recall that a time slice for Broad is similar to a moment of time. It is unclear what amount of time it is (seconds, minutes, hours...etc), but after it “comes to be,” it remains as a past time slice. Here I am suggesting that time slices are just constituted by events.

To see this, we must return to the notion that the reality of something that exists for a finite period other than the present is as real as things existing in the temporal period we consider “the present.” The B-Theory holds that even though many years have passed since the death of Spinoza, his existence in the 16th century is no less real than the day I write this sentence. Moreover, God’s idea of the reality of Spinoza’s past existence today is conceived in a present finite mode of thought, and, in keeping with Spinoza’s parallelism, this same finite mode of thought is also expressed as a mode of extension. For Donagan and Kneale, this second point – that God presently has an idea that captures the essence of a finite mind whose body has been destroyed exhausts the sense in which Spinoza may assert the mind’s eternity (or, sempiternity, as they would have it.) What reading Spinoza as a B-Theorist contributes to understanding the eternity of the mind affirmed in e5p23 is a fairly robust sense of the mind’s eternity in that the reality of Spinoza’s mind existing in the 17th century is no less real today than it was then. Put in terms of the time slice metaphysics used above, the reality of Spinoza’s mind as a time slice does not change due to the times at which it is considered. Its reality is thus independent of time.

There remains, however, one issue from E5p23 that I have yet to cover: the apparent asymmetry between how the mind survives and how the body survives. Recall that Spinoza asserts that “[t]he human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed along with the body.”⁸⁸ On this issue, I do not think that a B-Theory interpretation is necessarily positioned any better than an A-Theory interpretation of Spinoza. There is, however, a possible strategy that might be pursued to explain this asymmetry. One of the things it is meaningful to say about Spinoza’s body during a period in which Spinoza doesn’t exist is that the body has undergone dissolution or destruction. This process of dissolution is one that requires constitution by parts that are externally distinct from one another and that can therefore be rearranged. This

⁸⁸Baruch Spinoza. *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1992. 213

concept of dissolution, however, can only be expressed through the attribute of extension. When considering the human being under the attribute of thought, however, the concept of constitution by an organization of distinct parts does not apply. Given this, and given that the human mind just is the human being *expressed under the mode of thought*, it follows that there is no time at which this concept of dissolution can be applied to the human mind.⁸⁹

As already noted, using this general asymmetry to explain the asymmetry between the possible destruction of the body and the mind is one that both an A-Theorist interpretation and B-Theorist interpretation could put forth. Nonetheless, combining this point with the previous argument that allows one to attribute robust reality to the human mind even in periods at which the human being no longer exists enables one to make sense of Spinoza's affirmation of the eternity of the mind along with his suggestion that the mind is never destroyed. Additionally, it allows one to understand how Spinoza can meaningfully assert both of the following: i) the existence of Spinoza's mind is no less real today than it was during his lifetime and ii) Spinoza's mind, unlike Spinoza's body, was never destroyed. Moreover, if we keep in mind the time slice in which Spinoza's mind and body exist as different expressions of one and the same finite mode, there is nothing in this account that offends against either Spinoza's commitment to psycho-physical parallelism or mind-body identity. Thus, reading Spinoza as a B-Theorist plays an essential role in an interpretation of E5p23 that makes sense of the strong affirmation of the mind's eternity despite the body's destruction without violating Spinoza's commitment to either the parallelism or the mind-body identity.

⁸⁹ Special thanks to my advisor and mentor Dr. James Petrik for suggesting this line of argumentation. Without his guidance, my argument would not be half as clear as it is now.

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