REMARKS ON THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL IN SPINOZA

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Is the partial eternity of the soul for Spinoza a true immortality? Not, of course, in the usual sense, for it has nothing in common with an indefinite duration. But in the proper sense of the word ‘immortality’? Can one say that the soul, insofar as it has something eternal about it, does not die? Spinoza says: remanet (5p23). And yet the body dies completely, although it also has something eternal about it. How is this possible?

Eternity is “existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing” (1d8). Two remarks on this: first, this definition does not restrict itself to distinguishing things that possess the property from those that do not possess it. If eternity is existence itself envisaged under a certain aspect (i.e. a certain aspect of all existence), then all things must display this characteristic in one way or another; the only question is whether their entire existence is included in it. If so, they are eternal without restriction; if not, then they at least have something eternal about them. Second, because of an apparently clumsy formulation, this definition has a double meaning. In the one sense, the existence of a thing is eternal inasmuch as it is conceived as following necessarily from the mere definition of this thing; in a second, derived sense, the existence of a thing is eternal inasmuch as it is conceived of as following necessarily from the mere definition of another thing that is itself eternal in the former sense. Hence, two evident conclusions can be drawn: God is unrestrictedly eternal in the former sense (1p19), and the infinite modes are unrestrictedly eternal in the latter (1p21, 1p21dem, 1p22).

As regards the finite modes, they still have something eternal about them in the derivative sense. In order to prove this, a threefold analysis

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1 The text has first appeared in 1972 in Les Études Philosophiques and has been reprinted in 1986 in a collection of articles by Matheron under the title "Anthropologie et politique au XVIIe siècle, pp. 7–16, Paris (VRIN) 1986."
is necessary. In the first place, the finite modes exist alternatively in two different ways: if they are only contained in God’s attributes, their existence is incomplete, or *inactual*; if, on the other hand, they are contained in God’s attributes and have duration as well, their existence is complete, or *actual* (2p8, 2p8c). The demonstration of 2p11 identifies this second sort of existence immediately with actual existence). Incomplete existence cannot be reduced to a pure possibility: from the fact that the essence of a thing can be constructed without contradiction from the corresponding divine attribute (or from the mere conceivability of this thing, which amounts to the same) follows not only that this thing *can* exist, but from thence alone, regardless of any relation to exterior causes, it follows as well that it *must* exist someday (1p16). A thing’s essence is its being-destined-to-exist, or God’s property of being necessarily destined to produce it. This essence, considered on its own, very well has an actual existence, as the attribute whose property it is actually exists itself; and an actually eternal existence, as this follows from the definition of God. But the thing whose essence it is, insofar as it only exists in this way, still only *strives* to exist: God must produce it, but will only produce it then, when certain conditions converge (1p28); where they do not, it keeps striving eternally. And the thing’s complete existence consists in the actualisation of this tendency, which occurs only if and as long as the context produced by the other, already actualised, finite modes allows. Only then is the thing said to have duration. Hence follows, as M. Gueroult demonstrates,\(^2\) the relation of the finite modes to the infinite modes: The immediate infinite mode is the eternal totality of essences, or of the eternal tendencies to exist; the mediate infinite mode is the eternal totality of the non-eternal, actual existences.

In the second place, actual existence presents itself under two aspects. These aspects accord to the two types of causality which determine actual existence, and preference can be given to either of the two. These are: its nature and its duration (2p45s). The duration, or the continuation, of the thing regarded purely on its own, is actually unbounded (2d5), but exterior causes assign a beginning and an end to it. So if we disregard its ontological fundament, and envision it only with reference to the phenomenal connection, whose determinism escapes us, we are condemned to imagine it as a sort of haphazardly

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\(^2\) Gueroult (1968, Ch. XI: 309–325).