

Arguments Contrary to Spinoza's View of Time and Free-Will through the Philosophy of Henri Bergson

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Introduction

Issues of Time and free-will appear to be staples in philosophical literature throughout the ages. As understood by Spinoza, because Time's fixity is not due to people, or modifications of God, or Nature, and since God, or Nature is solely determinant, and also eternal, what people colloquially understand by Time, and free-will, are, in fact, farcical. Opposingly appears the philosophy of Henri Bergson, whose intuitive approach to the problem of Time, and critiques of determinists and those who ultimately treat Time statically, like Spinoza, helps to make room for the possibility of free-will.

This essay will begin by exploring some central aspects of Spinoza's God, or Nature, his understanding of temporality, and the problem of free-will arising from his comprehension of Time. Afterward, this essay will explicate Bergson's assertions regarding intuition and analysis, varieties of Time, the fallacies of determinism, and lastly arguments in support of Bergson's take on Time and free-will over Spinoza's account.

Some Main Points on Spinoza's God, or Nature

As understood by Spinoza, God or Nature is the only self-reliant, infinite, and eternal substance, who alone bears attributes, and exudes modes, or affections of itself.¹ First, by attributes, Spinoza understands that which we as modes, or indefinite, malleable, and finite beings, could perceive as constituting the essence of God, or Nature.²

Now, to Spinoza, since people always perceive life as extended, we may assert that Extension must be one of the eternal and infinite attributes of God when viewed as Nature.³ For, no other being could sufficiently entail the power to explain the infinite extensity of the physical universe but the Almighty itself.⁴

That is, as infinite, God, under the guise of Nature, bars anything from existing beyond the unending expanse of the corporeal cosmos, which, in the end, ties to what Spinoza calls the *conatus*, or our bodily instinct, to persevere, for we can never fail to be ultimately reliant on Nature, to subsist.⁵ Thus, since we may assert that it is Nature alone that is ultimately requisite for our corporeal preservation, we may better comprehend the Spinozistic view that Nature does not require any greater being, aside from itself, to explicate its total self-sufficiency.⁶

At the same time, we may address God, as that absolute notion, requiring no grander concept, to clarify the knowability or conceivability of the Deity.⁷ Accordingly, if we assume Spinoza's position, and declare that God's essence or power is that which alone could exude the eternalness of Thought, to explain reality, and humanity's never-ending flow of ideas, then God is eternal, and nothing is thinkable, or conceivable outside of God.⁸

One reason why Spinoza attributes Thought, as only being in the power of an eternal God to possess, is that, logically, nothing thinking could precede reality itself, which always sustains our ability to think.⁹ That is, if we follow Spinoza's understanding of God, as that solely eternal substance necessarily maintaining the endless continuity of all thinking found in the universe, we could only assert that God, alone, everlastingly ensures the sustenance of reality.¹⁰

Now, since nothing is outside of God, or Nature, for no greater idea or corporeal body could determine, fix, or be mandatory for the Deity's conceivability or existence, we may claim that nothing is essentially prior, or ontologically antecedent to God, or Nature.¹¹ Hence, God, or Nature, Spinoza would believe, as the only cause, eventually leading to the arrival of all life in the cosmos, is ultimately that which alone could fix the parameters of all that is thinkable and doable in the universe.¹²

Consequently, since nothing is exempt from ultimately relying on God, or Nature to continue to be, or be conceivable, either essentially or ontologically, we may assert that no unconditioned, uncompelled, or unswayable being or entity, bares existence or reality in Spinoza's sketch of life, aside from God, or Nature.¹³ At the same time, Spinoza also declares that God or Nature is not inexplicably free, for it would be an absurdity to believe that the Almighty's nature should bend to favor, remedy, or alternate for the whim of any.¹⁴

Thus, although the Almighty is under no compulsion, God or Nature still bears a nature, that exists in such a way that even as the only Deity, who alone ultimately fixes all that was, is, or could be, God or Nature still cannot be ungodly, or unlike itself.¹⁵ Finally, from this, we may assert that in Spinoza's philosophy, modifications, or affections of God or Nature, such as people, are ultimately void of free-will.¹⁶ For, our actions, as occurring in what we call Time, if real, could only be able to eternally depend on the Deity, like all other aspects of the universe, and thus, furthering us from the Almighty.¹⁷

Problematizing Time in Spinoza's Philosophy

First, Spinoza's problem of time begins with the fact that God, or Nature, as the only substance in existence, must be unique, and thus, apart or removed from humanity, in distinguishing ways.¹⁸ That is because, it would be impossible for the Deity, as the only substance to produce another substance, for the reality and nature of life reveals that "whatever is, is either in itself or in another," only.¹⁹ In other words, only God, or Nature could be "in itself," since the Deity necessarily precedes and antecedes all modes, like people, rendering the Almighty alone, to be the endpoint of thinkability and existence.²⁰

Now, if we assume the position that God is Nature, we may claim that for any life to arise, it is ultimately, Spinoza's materialized God, who must distinctly precede all that is.²¹ For the Almighty alone, when perceived as the infinite extendedness of the universe, necessarily possesses the extensity required to surround all corporeal, or extended beings, at once.²² Hence, because God, when viewed as Nature, is all-encompassing, it is only Nature itself, that all things reside in, which renders the Deity alone to be ontologically premier.²³

At the same time, we may also assert that this same Spinozistic notion of "whatever is, is either in itself, or in another," could apply to the one realm of ideas, or that unique house of all conceptual reality that Spinoza calls God.²⁴ That is because if Nature, as God, is that only entity, free of needing a greater concept for one to think of the Deity, then God alone "fits the mold," so to speak, of being that which must be at the highest degree of reality.²⁵ As such, all things are at a lower degree of reality than God, making it impossible for anything to be thinkable beyond the Almighty, rendering only the Deity to be conceptually prime, in the logical order of reality.²⁶

Now, because God as Nature, and Nature as God, precedes all that was, is, or could be, we may assert that God or Nature is necessarily timeless, or eternal, in Spinoza's metaphysical and ontological view of reality and existence.²⁷ That is because God or Nature is that which ultimately causes and surrounds all that is and is conceivable, including what we perceive as motion and change, or that which enables our perception of so-called Time.²⁸ Lastly, Spinoza believes this to be so, for no entities, or objects, are exempt from existing in God, or Nature, rendering all the events we partake in, to necessarily ensue in God or Nature.²⁹

Also, we may claim that because nothing could be, or be conceivable outside of the Deity; nothing could bound or limit the Almighty, rendering God, or Nature to be infinite.³⁰ Thus, because the Almighty is infinite, we may assert that God or Nature is immutably absent of change and motion, leaving us to further declare that God or Nature is eternal.³¹ For, nothing can curb the range of the Deity's lifespan, leaving us only to claim that what we take to be Time, as necessarily sheltered by God, or Nature is illusory to the Almighty.³²

Additionally, Spinoza also implies that the Almighty must also be in continuous activity, to facilitate the conditions needed for the continuity of all happenings,

occurrences, and events, to unravel.³³ However, to Spinoza, this must leave the Almighty to be immutable, or unchanging, for God, or Nature, as in necessarily endless activity, can only be that which we could assert possesses the capacity, or power, to forever maintain what we could refer to, as stowed in the “past,” happening in the “present,” or arising in the “future.”³⁴

Consequently, because God or Nature is necessarily immutable, we may continue to assert the Spinozistic notion that the reality of material change, or motion, is reducible to a non-existent status when contemplating the natural order from the perspective of the Deity.³⁵ However, the reality of Time as involving physical change is perceptible and registerable, by us, which draws a distinction between God as infinite and everlasting, and people as finite and durational modes.³⁶

Nevertheless, Spinoza still wishes to retain a startling claim, that although people bare a durational existence, we can nevertheless still perceive ourselves as eternal.³⁷ For, Spinoza even asserts that “we feel and know by experience that we are eternal,” indicating that we experience life, in such a way that we know our essence coheres with the essence of the Deity, rendering both humanity and God to be everlastingly conceivable.³⁸

Problematically for Spinoza, if we could perceive bodily movements, then how could it be that we, as possessing an immutable, eternal essence, and the Almighty, as eternally immutable too, could ever witness motion, while the Deity cannot.³⁹ In other words, if people, who ultimately derive from the conditions set by the Deity, partake in eternity, and God, or Nature, is eternity itself, how could it ever be that we could recognize change, via our perceptions connected to Time, while Time is unreal to the Almighty.⁴⁰

Although puzzling, Spinoza’s point of view is that Time, is ultimately reducible to God, or Nature’s eternalness, for the eternalness of the Almighty, led to the conditions for what we take to be Time, to arise, rendering Time to be, in the end, unreal.⁴¹ Hence, because God or Nature is uniquely eternal, infinite, and immutably fixed by solely itself, we may assume that Time, change, and motion must be absent, when viewing the universe, as Spinoza asserts, under the aspect of the eternity, of the Deity.⁴² Accordingly, we could claim that since Time is illusory, all events, occurrences, and happenings that we had, have, or will have, bear a determinant mark, and as such, we may continue to claim that without time, the reality of free-will is nil too.⁴³

Spinoza’s Problem of Free-Will

Next, the problem of free-will, to Spinoza, involves the query of how it could be that we could think of ourselves as free, while at the same time, residing in God, or Nature whose overarching power, or potency, alone predetermines, or fixes the conditions necessary for all rational powers, like willing, to emerge.⁴⁴

At the same time, Spinoza declares that when we believe ourselves to be acting freely, it is just because we adequately understand our actions as arising internally, without anything externally forcing our conduct.⁴⁵ That is, it is not that God or Nature

fails to bracket or encompass the domain in which all our supposed free volitions happen; instead, it is we who fail to contemplate that the Deity is mandatory for those events to manifest when we comprehend ourselves as acting under no compulsion.⁴⁶

Now, let us investigate the problem of free-will, as connected to Time in Spinoza's thinking. First, to Spinoza, the eternal essence of God, or Nature translates to be that which possesses the utmost Being, or that the Almighty is without limits, and thus negation does not apply to the Deity; instead, negation is a byproduct of the Deity.⁴⁷ As such, we may claim that in Spinoza's view, because God, or Nature alone is all-powerful, and we people, as mere modifications of the Deity, dependent on God, or Nature, can never surpass the ability of the Almighty, leaving us to be forever unfree.⁴⁸

One reason for why it is that people could never reach or go beyond the power of God, or Nature, is that there could be simply no substance aside from God, or Nature.⁴⁹ That is, we, as only determinate expressions of God, or Nature, could never possess the formidableness of the Almighty, because we are not absolutely eternal or infinite.⁵⁰ Hence, because only the Deity could genuinely assume the title of "substance," and we as merely durational and finite modes, could never possess the ability of God, or Nature.⁵¹ Finally, from this, we may assert that all our so-called free choices, can only occur in God, or Nature since we can never be free to outlive the Almighty.⁵² For, the Deity alone is absent of indefiniteness and duration, and as eternal, we may only attribute God, or Nature as that which could set the conditions for all occurrences, of all ephemeral beings, like us, to arise.⁵³

Consequently, because our understanding of our supposed freedom and volitions manifests, as necessarily and ultimately a derivative of the Deity's power, we may claim that God, or Nature at the utmost level of freedom, always was, is, and will be inaccessible to us.⁵⁴ Lastly, this unattainable ability to be maximally free, or to exist as the one substance, was, is, and will be for all time, for the Almighty as necessarily eternal shall never fail to be that which limits or negates our freedom.⁵⁵

Next, let us look at Spinoza's assertion that "the order and connection of things follow the same as the order and connection of ideas," and how it relates to free-will and Time.⁵⁶ Now, if moving things in God, or Nature, such as our bodies are motive continuously, and if our ideas necessarily trek the same path, albeit in a cognizable way, then, to Spinoza our minds and bodies form a unity or seamlessly coherent parallelism.⁵⁷

Thus, we may claim that to Spinoza, the mind and body are a determinate unity, which we could neither change alone nor defy our minds' and bodies' as being in impeccable synchronicity.⁵⁸ Lastly, this Spinozistic notion of the mind's and body's determinant and completely synchronic coherence causes a rift in Spinoza's system. For, how could we explain our ability to understand ourselves as perfectly equipped for life, or our power to freely attribute ourselves as those who enacted our volitions, without appeal to God, or Nature, directly, if the Deity forever determines us all?⁵⁹

Bergson on Intuition and Analysis

As understood by the philosopher Henri Bergson, intuitive approaches to philosophical inquiries, are requisite to embrace, for only our intuition, as the “intellectual sympathy” of our minds, helps us to peer into what is inexpressibly unique to objects.⁶⁰ That is, intuition allows us to penetrate things intellectually, or imaginatively inspect them from within, as if we inhabited them, ourselves.⁶¹

Now, although only the immediacy of our intuitions enables us to grasp what is at the root of objects, let us first begin by addressing problems associated with what is opposite of Bergson’s embrace of intuition.⁶² That is, let us investigate the errors of definitional, formulaic, or rational methods of analyses, as well as empirical, or sensory-based forms of the same.⁶³

First, let us entertain that we are attending to an object, by our senses alone. Now, when we start to examine our object, we must initially admit that we could only possess a relative knowledge of our thing because we can only view it from its position, as related to us.⁶⁴ Next, even if we choose to encircle our object so that we can try to witness all of its many facets better, simultaneously, we could only come to find that it is impossible to possess absolute knowledge of it.⁶⁵ For, we could only fail at capturing our object’s oneness by using just our senses.⁶⁶ As such, we may claim when we inspect our object, via mere sense perception, we miss something that reflects what our intuition immediately tells us; namely, that there appears an object before us, that we can comprehend as a unity or singularity, that is distinct from its identity as an array.⁶⁷

Unsurprisingly, we may believe that we ought to turn to rational forms of analyses, or those attempts to fix, or render a multiplicity into something that captures our underlying assumption, that a quality of uniqueness is inherent to our object, since we cannot deny that we recognize our object as a singularity, removed from us.⁶⁸ However, by embracing rational analyses, which only could produce static definitions, or immutable concepts, as found in language, and stationary formulae, as found in mathematics, we mistakenly nullify the fact that our object is viewable from multiple vantages which our experience of life sufficiently verifies.⁶⁹

Thus, Bergson would assert that because, neither fixed concepts nor lifeless definitions, nor the failure of experience alone, to capture an object as a one and many, at once, renders us required to embrace intuition, to attempt to grasp the distinct unity and plurality of our thing, simultaneously.⁷⁰ For, Bergson would assert that intuition alone could imaginarily place us in our object as if we were within it, and therefore, we would be able to know it absolutely, as necessarily monadic and multifaceted, at the same time.⁷¹

Now, if we embrace intuition, as our paradigmatic attitude, we find that we could genuinely intuit what the essentiality of our thing is.⁷² That is because, only our intuition could explain the way we immediately grasp our object, as it appears before us, in its raw form, as a multiplicity and a unity, but neither at the same time, when we rationalize or account for it by our senses, alone.⁷³

In other words, Bergson believes that it is solely an intuitive approach that is most promising, to achieve total knowledge of our thing, because intuition alone, immediately presents and maintains how our object appears before us, which is truly impossible to depict by mere sense-perception or conceptualization accurately.⁷⁴ For, only our intuition does not “other” our thing from how we could focus, or attend to it, as it presents itself to us in life; namely, as a necessary synthesis that could never be genuinely describable, representable, or experienceable as a full multiplicity and unity, at once.⁷⁵

Bergson on Time

From these shortcomings of rational and empirical analyses, and our need to ascribe to intuition, arises another aporia in Bergson’s philosophy, which concerns two ways of treating two varieties of Time.⁷⁶ These two types of Time, Bergson refers to as pure duration, which ties to intuition, and scientific, or mechanical Time, which links to analyses.⁷⁷

First, Bergson believes that those who attempt to depict Time, scientifically and accurately, via adherence to the static byproducts of sensory-based analyses and formulaically-focused treatments of temporality, always fail at capturing a complete account of Time.⁷⁸ Now, to depict this problem of the scientific treatment of Time, or why it is that neither an empirical nor rational approach to temporality can ever depict Time as we understand it in our lives, let us imagine the moving hands of a watch.

To begin, let us assert that the second hand of our watch completes what we refer to as a half-hour by traveling around a full circle of sixty second-markers, thirty-times. Next, we can enumerate our half-hour in two ways; namely, by either counting each fixed second-marker, thirty-times, for a total of one-hundred-eighty counts on our watch, or by watching the second hand of our watch, traverse our timepiece as it appears movingly.

Now, if we count every individual second-marker, on our watch, we are merely treating time inertly, failing to capture the lifelikeness of its motion or the facticity of its progressiveness.⁷⁹ At the same time, if we only attend to our watch as it appears to move around our timepiece, we are guilty of imposing space onto Time, and thus, tainting the purity of Time, by rendering it reliant on extensity, for it to be registerable by us.⁸⁰

Antithetically, if we view time more intuitively, by comparing it to a continuous ray of light, passing through a glass gradient, illuminating intensifying variations of the same color, as it progresses, revealing the multiplicity of aspects of that single spectrum of the one hue it brightens, simultaneously, do we approach a closer depiction of Bergson’s pure duration.⁸¹ That is because, what Bergson coins as pure duration, is akin to an illuminated, intensifying gradient of colored glass, with each tone of that one shade appearing to fade into the next, allowing us to more adequately visualize a less discrete multiplicity of different aspects of a singularity.⁸² Finally, although this example comes closer to an accurate depiction of pure duration, we must recall that it is merely akin to it and that this example more correctly helps us to envision what Bergson calls a succession.⁸³

Now, Bergson would claim that pure duration, is akin to the rhythm of a tune; however, we may also liken it to something such as a human pulse.⁸⁴ Now, the intuition of our pulse is not that of a strict multiplicity, for that would imply it occurs outside of us, in space, which our intuition refutes since we can never intuit, or imaginatively place ourselves in another person and claim to feel that individual's pulse, unfold in extension.⁸⁵ This predicament leaves us to claim that pure duration is not entirely understandable as a succession. For, we never can speak of pure duration as unraveling, accurately, unless we dilute it with spatial terms leading us to the conundrum that pure duration relies on extensity. That is because, we can only describe pure duration as an unfolding sequence, when we mistakenly link it to a mere occurrence in space.⁸⁶

At the same time, our pulse is not that of a unity, for that would imply it is static, which the experiential fact that our pulse throbs, evidently repudiates.⁸⁷ Accordingly, we may claim that a pulse by neither being a full unity nor complete multiplicity, can only be anecessary synthesis of the two, just as pure duration is the synthesis of our intuitive grasp, but inability, to express time as a complete unity, while also a total multiplicity, at once.⁸⁸ Thus, like our pulse, it would be more accurate to call pure duration a necessary synthesis, that we also happen to all rely on, since if our pulse or pure duration were absent, or were to fluctuate, our understanding of ourselves would change, instantly.⁸⁹ Lastly, we may assert that rhythms of existence, like time's pure duration, or even the human pulse, attach a distinct dimension to temporality, on which we all rely.⁹⁰

In sum, unlike the scientific treatment of time, we do not need to forgo our immediate grasp of the mobility of Time, when we more intuitively understand temporality.⁹¹ Next, by likening pure succession to a ray of light that brightens an entire range of one color, in a way that allows us to better eviscerate the infinitesimal variations we analytically discern as constituting a lesser or greater intensification of that same shade, do we help to do away with complications arising from static ways of treating Time.⁹² Lastly, by explicating Bergson's example of pure duration, by tying it to something such as the human pulse, we may better understand how pure duration is independent of the problems of scientific accounts of Time.⁹³ For, pure duration, like our pulse, is knowable via intuition, and thus knowledge of either does not depend or require us to understand them as just fixed unities or to account for them as only detailed multiplicities.⁹⁴

Bergsonian Arguments against Determinism

From these considerations, we may now enter Bergson's philosophy of free-will, which Bergson explores by critiquing psychological and physical determinism.⁹⁵ However, let us consider Bergson's explication of the rivalry between mechanistic and dynamic takes on freedom, first.⁹⁶

As understood by Bergson, mechanistic theorists of free-will tend to believe that the laws of nature arrange the experiential data, we encounter in our lives, such that we can organize those facts, and thus, render free-will, rule-bound.⁹⁷ That is, mechanistic

theories of freedom place a higher priority in natural laws, than in the simplicity of something such as our ability to be spontaneously free.⁹⁸

For, if what we take to be scientific explanations of freedom, as involving us as necessarily having to conform to the influence of the natural order, like all other lifeforms and things, then we, as part of natural life, would only be able to deny free-will.⁹⁹ However, since mechanical theorists of free-will must give an account as to why something like the spontaneity of freedom, must be nil, they fail to admit that they are tacitly acknowledging the apparentness of freedom, a fact familiar and confirmable by us all, including those who treat free-will mechanically.¹⁰⁰

Opposite this mechanical take on free-will, are those who invest in a dynamic approach to freedom and claim that the spontaneity, and the immediacy of voluntary action that we experience in the world, helps to justify the common knowledge we all possess of ourselves as free.¹⁰¹ That is, to dynamic theorists of freedom, the apparentness of knowing ourselves as free, renders free-will to be a self-sufficient intuition, for freedom's apparentness matches the immediate intuition we possess of our free-will.¹⁰² Thus, we need not engage in immensely complex, or less intuitive arguments, if we embrace our intuitive knowledge of ourselves as free. However, there nevertheless continues to be the theories of psychological and physical determinism, that we can use, albeit to Bergson, failingly, to deny free-will.

Now, to Bergson, physical determinism, or the theory that the cosmos is a bunch of material that is analyzable, by symbolizing the measurements of the various velocities of perpetually moving particles, fails to damage the possibility of freedom, despite the so-called determinant power of these governing bodies.¹⁰³ That is because, on the one hand, we never immediately cognize the motion of these atoms composing us, as we do our understanding of ourselves as free.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, if intuition allows us to live like others, imaginarily, as if we were within them, then we would still find ourselves immediately knowledgeable of our free-will as given, without the need to know about the molecular activity that allegedly determines our free choices.¹⁰⁵

Also, physical determinists draw from the principle of the conservation of energy, or the law of physics proclaiming that only a certain amount of energy exists in the universe's closed system, making it exempt from depletion or excess, as a means to debase freedom.¹⁰⁶ Now, determinists who rely on this law of energy upkeep, Bergson would claim are wrong, for a fixed share of energy erroneously implies an ultimately static universe.¹⁰⁷

That is, Bergson would claim that if the conservation of energy in the universe were indeed an unswayable law, then all moving entities, like people's bodies, would necessarily return to precisely the same physical state, they were in, after moving.¹⁰⁸ However, our physical bodies, as housing a plethora of ever-changing chemical combinations, are so variously affectable, that the physical determinist idea of bodies returning to the same previous state they were once in, lacks complete verification.¹⁰⁹

Next, we may enter Bergson's critique of psychological determinism. First, Bergson asserts that psychological determinism is the philosophical position that our prior conscious states pave the way for our present conscious states, and thus every idea necessarily leads to the emergence of our next idea.¹¹⁰ However, Bergson points out that there nevertheless remains some uniqueness or distinguishableness harbored by each idea that arises from within us.¹¹¹

That is because, there exist qualitative differences between ideas such as ones associated with pain, arousing a discomforting feeling when recalled, and others of hope, inspiring us to be our best, justifying that our ideas are not easily reducible to one another. Accordingly, if our ideas never precisely match, as implied by our conscious experience of never thinking of the same idea, in the same way, forever, then the belief that we could reduce our present ideas to our previous ones, utterly and undeniably, is not as easily justifiable as psychological determinists proclaim.¹¹²

Bergsonian replies to Spinoza's Problems of Time and Free-Will

From these Bergsonian understandings of time, coupled with Bergson's critiques of physical and psychological determinism, we can now embark upon a path to debunk Spinoza's understanding of time and free-will.

First, let us begin with a critique of Spinoza's view of time, stating that temporality is ultimately an illusion, at best. For, God, or Nature as in everlasting and ceaseless actuality, who alone explains the constant activity of life is necessarily exempt from any duration and is rather absolutely eternal.¹¹³

Now, by duration, Spinoza understands that time during which some modification of Nature, or affection of God, perseveres, or persists in its being.¹¹⁴ However, this Spinozistic idea of duration Bergson would oppose, wholeheartedly. One reason why Bergson would disagree with Spinoza is that Spinoza erroneously ties duration to the *conatus* or our bodily strivings.¹¹⁵ At the same time, Spinoza also admits that the body cannot be aware; let alone of something like its duration, allowing us to assume that Spinoza misunderstood crucial aspects of Time.¹¹⁶

For, Spinoza removes duration from what Bergson would call its "psychical nature" barring us from being able to intuit duration, purely, if we assume our intuition of time inseparably links to our bodily persistence, alone.¹¹⁷ That is because, if pure duration were solely reliant on our natural strivings, then pure duration would have to flux when the duration of anyone's body ceases to persist.

However, even when we ascribe to intuition, and abandon our senses, and imaginarily place ourselves in another, we cannot intuit that person as genuinely believing that if only one person did not exist, then Time and its pure duration, would alter, or change, necessarily.¹¹⁸ Instead, it is pure duration, which our bodies and even our minds, ultimately rely on, for pure duration alone dictates how we intuit, reason, and understand Time, not the persistent nature of our bodies, alone.¹¹⁹

Additionally, Bergson would assert, that Spinoza erred when he mismatched the Deity as being eternal, while also proclaiming that all other things as residing in God,

or Nature, are indefinitely durational.¹²⁰ That is because, if the Deity existed forever, without beginning, middle, or end, then Bergson would assert that the Almighty is lifelessly immobile.¹²¹ In other words, if God or Nature were an immutable, eternal substance, as Spinoza indeed maintains, then the continuity of life, the flow of all modes, and the impermanence of our existence would necessarily be completely “other,” to the Deity.¹²² Thus, we could only fail, to assign the various varieties of the innumerable occurrences that arise in our lives, to God, or Nature, if the Almighty were immutable, which is a claim, Spinoza wishes to keep.

However, by maintaining that God or Nature is unchangingly eternal, Spinoza implies that the Almighty must be at a standstill, and thus, what we take to be the continuity or flow of life must be stationary too, which our senses could never affirm.¹²³ For, when we witness the dynamism of life, we attend to a multiplicity of sense-datum, inciting our perceptions, which would be impossible, if we were in an utterly stationary reality, as implied by Spinoza’s understanding of eternity.¹²⁴

Moreover, Bergson would disagree with Spinoza’s belief that motion and change in Nature are ultimately non-occurrent, for it would fail to match the Nature of eternity with how we intuit and understand Time as people.¹²⁵ Now, if we adhere to Spinoza’s view that motion and change are illusory under the aspect of eternity, then how can we explain what Spinoza also asserts; namely, that under the aspect of duration, we can perceive motion and notice alterations in Nature.¹²⁶ Accordingly, Bergson would assert that this is an aporia in Spinoza’s philosophy, for how could Spinoza, on the one hand, deny change and alteration, while maintaining a static God, or Nature, to whom mobility is ultimately void.¹²⁷

Moreover, even when we try to intuit or apply our ability to view reality from the aspect of God, or Nature, we can never do so in a way that is genuinely absent of Time and pure duration.¹²⁸ That is because, God, or Nature which is a unique, and necessarily immutable substance, is unanthropomorphic, as Spinoza asserts, which renders us only to claim that we can never intuit Time or pure duration as God or Nature would, adequately.¹²⁹ Unfortunately for Spinoza, if we could never intuit Time or pure duration as the Deity, then how could we surely assert that God or Nature ultimately paved the way for the conditions for Time and pure duration to arise? That is, if two things possess nothing in common, then one cannot be the cause of the other, as Spinoza would claim.¹³⁰ Finally, we may also accuse Spinoza of downgrading the power of the Almighty. For, how can we intuit, or apply our imaginative power to place ourselves in another, to capture Time and pure duration, absolutely, if God, or Nature, as static and impersonal, can never do the same?

Also, if we follow Spinoza’s lead that experience provides us with knowledge of our eternalness, then how can the immediate intuition of our bodies, as possessing the power to move, bear any reality, if, at the same time, our inner essence is forever, and thus, stationary.¹³¹ That is, if our eternalness helps to constitute an eternal truth, determined by God, or Nature, as outlined in Spinoza’s *Ethics*, we would then have to

treat essences as immutable points, mismatching our psychical vitality, which involves our powers to discern, reflect, and assign different qualitative features to the various ideas associated with the many moments in our lives.¹³²

Furthermore, if we adhere to Spinoza's view that the order and connection of ideas must follow the same as the order and linkage of things, then we may assert, like Bergson, that our power to differentiate ideas, shatters Spinoza's claim.¹³³ That is because of the psychical fact that we discern between our ideas, which implies that we acknowledge our ideas as bearing qualitative differences, providing us with evidence that we can never entirely reduce our ideas to our previous ideas.¹³⁴ As such, this bars Spinoza's notion that when we go from bodily movement to rest, our minds must return to their previous psychical state, too, indubitably.¹³⁵ Lastly, this helps to defy Spinoza's understanding of Time, because it shows that mental progression does not indubitably cohere with physical existence, which would necessarily be if our mental and physical lives were in absolute synchronization.

Moreover, Spinoza, who equates infinity to eternity, is ultimately guilty of confusing space with Time, which Bergson would find to be problematic. First, Time and its pure duration are only that which intuition can best explain, and a purely rational treatment of Time and its pure duration, would only leave us with an inadequate understanding of temporality.¹³⁶ For, our rational powers, to express the lifelikeness of Time and its pure duration by signs, such as “,” is wrong because this symbol merely statically depicts the livingness of Time and pure duration, which misrepresents the dynamic quality of temporality.¹³⁷

Next, if Time and pure duration were genuinely infinite, each would be visible in space as a never-ending unfolding sequence.¹³⁸ However, our intuition, or our imaginative ability to place ourselves in Time and pure duration, to better comprehend either, would always fail because we never genuinely witness Time and its pure duration unfolding in the world.¹³⁹ In other words, if infinity is indeed eternity, then eternity would necessarily continue without end, rendering it findable in space, perhaps as an endlessly unraveling continuum that would necessarily be incomplete, forever.¹⁴⁰ As such, if we can never reach the end of an utterly infinite series, like God, or Nature, then we can never declare that God or Nature is eternal. For, Spinoza, who mistakenly equates infinity with eternity mismatches the unending extensity of the former, with what would have to be the unchangeableness of the latter.

Now, if we recall Bergson's critiques of physical and psychological determinism, we may now explore how Bergson would debate Spinoza's denial of free-will. That is, to Bergson, something such as Spinoza's idea that the actions of our bodies and the ideas of our minds necessarily and ultimately follow the same path, and thus, reciprocally determine one another, denies freedom, erroneously.¹⁴¹

First, Bergson would assert that our ability to distinguish between the various qualitative differences of our ideas displays that our bodies' fail to rein in our minds, when our bodies return to their previous states, before physical movement.¹⁴² One

reason why Spinoza's view fails is that the order and connection of ideas and things are not strictly the same. That is, Bergson would assert that Spinoza fails to explain how our minds never backtrack to a previous idea in the same way as our bodies do, upon going from motion to rest.¹⁴³

Hence, a Bergsonian reply to Spinoza's belief in the mind's and body's necessary unitedness is that it implies that Spinoza failed to acknowledge that we can account for intervals in our thinking.¹⁴⁴ For, our ability to attach qualities to our ideas, like those we understand as sorrowful or joyous, displays our power to recognize separations between conceptualizations, as well as understand our minds' as housing a temporal aspect, which our bodies do not.¹⁴⁵ That is because, by recognizing separations between our ideas, we can never claim that our minds unfailingly fallback to one core idea, as do our bodies, when they go from motion to rest.¹⁴⁶

Also, the inability of our minds to return to one static idea, always, would allow Bergson to continue to claim that our capacities to assign and contrast ideas from how they were, to how they are, and to how they will be in the future, refutes.¹⁴⁷ As such, we may claim that, to Bergson, our power to assign temporal dimensions to our conscious lives, helps to depict a type of independence each of us possesses, emerging from our ability to discern between ideas, defying how we understand our physical existence.¹⁴⁸

Accordingly, we may assert that one way, to maintain the conditions for free-will, is to recognize our ability to distinguish between ideas, which leads to our power to temporalize our ideas.¹⁴⁹ Lastly, this keeps freedom intact from solely relying on the order and connection of things. For, we can never access past moments or future states of our physical lives, in the same way, that our minds can freely recall the past, focus on the now, or contemplate the future.

Another way Bergson would debunk Spinoza's claim, that the order of our bodily movements must be in perfect synchronization with the order of our ideas, to make room for free-will, is that we cannot attend to each aspect of our bodies, all at once, implying that our bodies possess a certain amount of freedom from our minds.¹⁵⁰ That is because, not even intuition, or our ability to imaginatively place ourselves within another, could yield absolute knowledge of our, or that person's bodily states.¹⁵¹

As such, we may claim that it is not that the body fails to be affectable in numerous ways, it is instead our minds which can never adequately explain the nature of the body, which is a claim Spinoza would find agreeable.¹⁵² However, our lack of conscious ability, to know all facets of our body, entirely and continuously, helps to damage Spinoza's understanding of free-will, for it shows that even the body may be in some ways, independent, which is a claim Spinoza would never accept.¹⁵³ Finally, from these complications of Time and free-will in Spinoza's philosophy, we may claim that Bergson justifiably leaves open the possibility of free-will, as well as the reality of Time. For, neither Time and pure duration, nor the immediate intuition of our freedom are fully depictable if we adhere to Spinoza's system, alone.

Conclusion

This piece began with a brief overview of Spinoza's God, or Nature, his denial of the reality of time, and his focus on the absence of free-will. Next, this article guided readers through Henri Bergson's methodological framework of intuition, how it differs from mere analytic paradigms, and the implication of both on Bergson's theories of Time and freedom.

Afterward, this essay, by applying Bergson's criticisms of those who deny the existence of Time, as well as those who deny the reality of free-will, like Spinoza, set the stage for readers to reconsider these topics. Lastly, by demonstrating how Spinoza fallaciously understood Time and freedom, this article intended that a different understanding of these issues could emerge, with the help of Bergson's philosophy of Time, allowing us to declare that the conditions for the possibility of free-will could still be.

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Notes

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³ Ibid., 1p8, 1p10, 1p11, 1p19, & 2p2.

⁴ Ibid., 1p8, 1p10, 1p11, 1p19, 1p20, & 2p2.

⁵ Ibid., 1p29, 3p6, & 3p7.

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¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 1p15, 1p17.

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³⁷ Ibid., 2d5, 5p23, & 5p30.

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⁵⁰ Ibid., 1d5, 1d6, 1p14, 2d1, 2d2, & 2d5.

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¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

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