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# Keeping Them with You: Spinoza, Love, and Eternal Minds

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In *Ethics* 5, Spinoza writes that 'something' of the human mind remains eternally beyond death (E5p23). I develop a novel implication of this doctrine, given Spinoza's views of knowledge and interpersonal love. I argue that one can Spinozistically keep the eternal element of a passed loved one 'with them' (so to speak) by developing adequate ideas of parts of their loved one's essence. §1 identifies what remains of someone post-death: namely, the idea of that person's essence as the idea of their striving, both bodily and mentally. §2 argues that Spinozistic love compels us and our loved ones to produce commonalities, that through commonalities we can thereby adequately know parts of the essence of a person we love, and that we can thus hold parts of the exact entity which remains eternally of a loved one in our own minds. Spinoza's correspondence with Pieter Balling makes this view especially plausible. Indeed, Spinoza there says that through their love Balling and his son became 'as it were, one and the same' and that Balling could 'participate' in his son's 'ideal essence'. In §3, I respond to potential objections and provide Spinozistic motivations for, as I call it, 'keeping them with you'.

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## Introduction

In *Ethics* 5 Spinoza (in)famously claims that '[t]he human Mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the Body, but something of it remains which is eternal' (E5p23).[1,2] This view is generally referred to as Spinoza's 'eternity of the mind' doctrine. Study of this doctrine has largely been focused on the interpretive questions it presents concerning the nature of the mind's eternality: What portion or aspect of the mind is eternal? What is meant by its eternality? Does this doctrine constitute a doctrine of personal immortality? How can one make as much of their mind as eternal as possible? What is the mode of extension that corresponds to the mode of thought that persists beyond the death of the body?[3]

In this paper, I approach the eternity of the mind doctrine from a novel direction. I investigate the relationship between one person and the eternal mind of another, a relationship of some interest given Spinoza's July 1664 correspondence with Pieter Balling. After the death of Balling's son, Spinoza writes that through their love Balling and his son became 'as it were, one and the same' and that Balling could 'participate' in his son's 'ideal essence' (Ep17).[4] Spinoza only uses this to claim that Balling could have experienced 'omens' anticipating his son's death, but I argue that the Balling letter points us towards a different Spinozist view. Specifically, I argue that it is a corollary of Spinoza's views on interpersonal love, knowledge, and eternal minds that one may hold in their mind, to a significant degree, the exact entity which remains (*remanet*, E5p23) eternally

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2. References to the *Ethics* give first the book number, then the number of the proposition, definition, axiom, postulate, etc., and then, when required, the number of a scholium, corollary, etc., such that 'E4p72s' refers to the scholium to the 72nd proposition of part 4 of the *Ethics*. English quotations from all of Spinoza's texts are from Curley's translations in Spinoza (1985–2016). Latin or Dutch references are from Spinoza (2008).

3. For some recent discussions of the aspect/part of the mind that is eternal, and of what its eternality is, see Garrett (most recently 2018, ch. 9); Grey (2014); Nadler (2002, ch. 5; 2018; 2020, ch. 10); Lærke (2016); Vermeiren (2023). Earlier commentators often thought that Spinoza accepted personal immortality (e.g., Wolfson 1934, vol. 2: 318; Tiebout 1956: 513, fn12; Donagan 1973; Bennett 1984: 375). However, there is now a near consensus that he did not (e.g., Curley 1988; Carlisle 2021, ch. 8; Lærke 2016: 269; Nadler 2002, ch. 5; 2018; 2020: 183; Taylor 2021: 76). Della Rocca (2008: 259) is notable as a more contemporary defender of Spinozist personal immortality. One could follow Monaco (2019) to build on Della Rocca's view.

4. References to Spinoza's correspondence start with 'Ep' (for *Epistolae*), then give the standard catalogue number of the letter.

of a loved one beyond their death. To refer to this phenomenon, I will use the English locution 'keeping them with you' or some such variant throughout. As we'll see, though Spinoza does not spell this out, Balling serves as an example of someone who could keep a loved one 'with him' in this sense. The Spinozist account of 'keeping them with you' also identifies a significant interpersonal aspect of the doctrine that's not often been treated as such.

This paper is structured as follows: in §1, I briefly explain Spinoza's eternity of the mind doctrine. This is the view that the idea of the essence of one's body and the idea of the essence of one's mind exist eternally in God's mind (E5p23s). In §2, I first explain that knowledge (*cognitio*) of a thing's essence must come from what Spinoza calls the 'second' or 'third' kinds of knowledge, on the basis of sharing commonalities with things we try to understand.[5] Second, I explain how love for someone pushes us and the beloved to forge commonalities and thereby makes knowledge of the beloved's essence possible. Third, I explain how being able to know a loved one makes us able to keep parts of the idea of their (bodily and mental) essence in our own mind, thus keeping the very entity that is eternal in them 'with us'. And fourth, I return to the Balling letter and explain how it makes all this plausible.[6]

Finally, in §3, I answer some lingering questions about the details of my view and respond to some potential objections. Though a Spinozist theory of 'keeping them with you' is not explicitly provided by Spinoza, it certainly follows from his explicit commitments, is of Spinozist value, and reveals interpersonal aspects of the eternity of the mind doctrine.

## 1. Eternal Minds

Spinoza writes that 'something' of the mind persists beyond death: 'The human Mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the Body, but something of it remains

5. While English readers traditionally translate *cognitio* as 'knowledge', it is increasingly common to translate it as 'cognition' (e.g., Spinoza 2018). I think that 'cognition' is preferable to 'knowledge' because it seems odd, as will become clear, to call the first kind of *cognitio* 'knowledge'. Nevertheless, I retain the traditional practice in order to align my terminology with the dominant English translation of the *Ethics*.

6. The closest claim to what I argue for here is Matheron's (1969) view that intellectual love of God *just is* God's love for humanity, and therefore that, when we attain knowledge of other humans' essences (or have them as objects of intellectual love of God), we know the eternal part of them via knowledge of God exactly as God knows them. Thus, in principle, we would know what I call their 'eternal something'. Matheron also references the Balling letter I will discuss (1969: 591–602). However, I do not make my argument on the basis of how intellectual love of God works, and Matheron does not address how this enables one to 'keep' a loved one with them after the loved one has passed. See also my comments on Douglas in note 41 as a closely related scholarly view.

which is eternal' (E5p23).[7] This 'something' I call the 'eternal something of the mind' (or some such variant) throughout. The eternal something of the mind is the idea that expresses the essence of the body (E5p23s). For Spinoza, this idea of the body explicitly 'pertains' to the mind's own essence (E5p23dem, E5p23s), and is thus something of the mind as well. When Spinoza says that the idea of the essence of the body must pertain to the essence of the mind, he cites E2p13 as what permits him this move, and E2p13 (alongside E2p7s) establishes mind-body identity. The idea of the essence of the body must thus also be the idea of the essence of the mind (by E2p13), just considered differently, as mind and body are the same thing but considered differently. Insofar as the mind and the body are one and the same thing, they must have the same essence, just considered in one instance through the attribute of thought and the other through the attribute of extension. What is clear then is that the 'something of the mind', which is eternal, is the idea of the mind's essence and the idea of the body's essence.[8]

Now each thing's essence, for Spinoza, is its striving to persevere in being (E3p7). This is his famed *conatus* doctrine. This striving, this essence, must thus be the object of the idea that constitutes the eternal something of the mind. This essential striving is the way that a given finite mode behaves to strengthen its powers.[9] What is good and bad is tied to our essential striving and its power: 'We call good, or evil, what is useful to, or harmful to, preserving our being (by E4d1 and E4d2), i.e. (by E3p7), what increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our power of acting' (E4p8dem). Further, joy is the experience of a strengthening of our essential striving for power expansion, or our passing 'to a greater perfection' (E3def aff2), and sadness is the experience of a weakening thereof (E3def aff3). We are always and essentially striving to maximise joy and gain greater power. This is a fundamental fact of everything's essence, since everything has the essen-

7. Authors often emphasise the eternal mind's being not merely *sempiternal*. But, following Lærke (2016), the mind can exist in duration *at least* while it is held in thought, especially since Spinoza says that it 'remains' (*remanet*) post-death. Cf. Lebuffe (2010, ch. 12), who thinks this portion of the *Ethics* is not concerned with the mind 'after the body, but without relation to the body' (210).

8. One might push on this by objecting as follows: what persists eternally is the idea of the body's essence. *Contra* what I've said, this idea does not *immediately* have the same object as the idea of the mind does. The mind is the idea of the body's essence, and so the idea of the mind is the idea of the idea of the body's essence, and thus has a different object than the mind does (the body's essence is the object of the mind). But, because of the ideas-of-ideas doctrine (see note 14), the idea of an idea is identical to the idea it has as its object. Thus, if one can have an idea of another's body's essence, in the way I will later claim, one can do the 'keeping them with you' I outline in the rest of this paper, since the idea of the idea of the body's essence will be identical to the idea of the body's essence (i.e., it will be identical to the mind).

9. Traditionally, this has been read as a striving to exist as long as possible. However, as has been argued (MacLean-Evans 2023; Nadler 2016; 2020, ch. 9), this cannot be entirely correct insofar as Spinoza sometimes allows for rational suicide. In light of that, I hold instead that our striving aims at increasing our powers (following E3p12dem and E4p8dem).

tial striving described in E3p7, even if among different individual things what is power-enhancing will differ.[10] Power, for Spinoza, comes in a bodily form as the capacity to impart causal force on other extended things (power of activity) and in mental form as capacity to know things and judge what one ought to do in accordance with their essential striving (power of understanding).[11]

The eternal idea of a thing's essence must, then, capture its striving. This makes sense of Spinoza's claim in E5p39 that the more the body is capable of different things, the greater is the something of the mind that is eternal. The idea of our essence includes more content the more powerful we are. If the body is capable of more things, it has a greater power of activity, and thus its essential striving is greater. Since what is eternal of the mind is the idea of one's essence, the eternal something of the mind is thus greater to the extent that our bodily power or essential striving is greater, as the idea comprises more content.[12]

And similarly to the body, the eternal something of the mind is greater, the greater our mind's essential striving, i.e., the more we have adequate knowledge. For Spinoza, adequate knowledge is knowledge 'of the second and third kinds', which I will explain in more detail in §2.1. For now, note that, for Spinoza, 'the more the Mind understands things by the second and third kind of knowledge, the greater the part of it that remains unharmed' after death (E5p38dem). This is because our striving, considered mentally, is about increasing our power of understanding, even as for our body it is about increasing our power of activity.

10. See the distinction between equine and human reproductive strivings (E3p57s).

11. Spinoza suggests that the mind also has some 'power of activity' (E3p15dem, E3p53). But the mind's 'power of activity' is just its power of understanding (E3p59dem). In this paper I use 'power of understanding' to refer only to the mind's power, and 'power of activity' to refer only to the body's power, but recognise that, strictly speaking, the mind has a 'power of activity' as well.

12. Some will disagree about the object of the eternal idea of the body's essence. Smith, for example, writes in passing that what is eternal of a thing is 'its essence as the idea of a particular material ratio of motion/rest' that distinguishes a given body (2023: 349). Nadler similarly thinks that the object of the eternal idea of the body's essence is a 'ratio of motion and rest among a collection of material parts' (2002: 112). By contrast, I have claimed the idea of the body's essence is the idea of the body's striving or power. Now, it is true that a body's ratio of motion and rest of parts is how it is distinguished (*distinguuntur*) from others (E2p13lem.1). Nevertheless, Spinoza explicitly says that the essence (*essentiam*) of a thing is its striving (E3p7). What distinguishes a body from others, namely, the body's ratio of motion and rest of parts, may be involved causally or descriptively in a thing's striving (E2p13lem7), but it is not properly its essence. In his definition of 'essence', Spinoza makes no mention of 'distinguishing' features, which is a claim about a thing's relations with others, but only of what, being posited, posits a thing's existence (E2def2). Accordingly, given that Spinoza explicitly makes use of the language of 'essence' in his discussion of the eternal something as idea of the body in E5 (e.g., *essentiam* is used in E5p23dem), I hold that what is eternal is the idea of an essential striving, rather than the idea of a distinguishing ratio of moving/resting parts (though that may be a necessary condition of a thing's striving). Spinoza describes the proportion of motion/rest of our parts as the 'form' of the body (E4p39dem) and as 'pertaining' to the body's essence (E2p24dem), but it is clear that the body's *essence*, strictly speaking, is its striving or power.

Our mental power, our power of understanding, and so the mental aspect of our essence, thus increases when we gain understanding. 'The Mind's essence consists in knowledge' (E5p38dem), as Spinoza says. Thus, when we have more knowledge, the eternal idea of our essence (understood mentally) comprises more content.

It is important here to pause for a brief note. On many readings, Spinoza discusses two distinct ways in which the mind is eternal. Nadler, for example, distinguishes between the eternal mind 'as the idea of (the eternal essence of) the body' (2002: 114) and the eternal mind as 'the store of adequate ideas' or knowledge that a mind grasps during life and which remains eternal (2002: 127). This distinction maps onto the two ways we are eternal that I have mentioned: there is an eternal idea of our body's essence, and there is the collection of eternal knowledge or adequate ideas our mind grasps during life. I treat these ways together, but this is for a reason. As we'll shortly see, what will be important to my view is that we can know the essence of our loved one, and come to share the same knowledge as them. If we can do both of these things, then we can 'keep them with us' in the sense of keeping their eternal something with us. This will work regardless of which way, from the above distinction, we consider those eternal somethings: if we understand the essence of a loved one's body, we hold in our mind the eternal idea of their body's essence, and if we understand a loved one's knowledge, we hold in our mind the eternal idea of a loved one's store of adequate ideas or knowledge. As such, the distinction poses no issue for me.[13]

In any case, on my reading, the idea of our essence comprises our body's striving (or its power of activity), and also our mind's knowledge (or power of understanding). Since the eternal something of the mind is the idea of a thing's essence, both mentally and physically, both these aspects of a given person's essence remain eternally.[14]

With my reading of the eternal something of the mind settled, I now turn to the question of how we might keep a loved one's eternal something with us.

13. See Nadler (2002: 111–27) for full discussion of this distinction. That said, the two ways in which the mind is eternal may not be cleanly distinct. Recall that the mind's power just is its having adequate ideas, and that the body's power just is its having causal capacities. However, if these are the same, then the eternal idea of one's store of adequate ideas and the eternal idea of one's bodily essence (or power) may not come apart entirely. See Smith (2025: 155–68) for the view that one's mental power as adequate knowledge is the same thing as one's bodily power understood as physical causal activity.

14. One might wonder about the layering of ideas-of-ideas here. If one's mind is the *idea* of the body, and the eternal something of the mind is the idea of the mind's (and the body's) essence, then doesn't the eternal something comprise a separate and distinct *idea of an idea of the body*? Not really: Spinoza says that the 'idea of the Mind is united to the Mind in the same way as the Mind is united to the Body' (E2p21). So, the idea of the mind *just is* the mind, but considered differently, in the same way as the mind *just is* the body but considered differently. What persists, then, *is* our essence, just considered differently than during life. This is closely related to what I say in footnote 8.

## 2. Keeping Them with You

I argue that it is a corollary of Spinoza's views on the eternity of the mind, knowledge, and interpersonal love, that the eternal something of a lost loved one can really be kept *in* the lover's mind after the loved one's death.[15] To Spinozistically keep a loved one with us is to hold in our minds, to whatever degree we grasp a loved one's essence, the exact numerical entity which remains eternally of a passed loved one.[16] This requires adequately knowing our loved one; it demands that we understand at least some significant part of their essential striving, or their bodily and mental powers.

In this section, I'll explain how we can do this and 'keep them with us'. First, I'll briefly explain Spinozist epistemology and how we can acquire adequate ideas, showing that adequate knowledge of a thing generally demands commonalities with that thing. Second, I'll apply this to the case of loved ones, explaining how we can come to have adequate knowledge of a loved one's essence because love compels us to form commonalities with those we love. Third, I'll argue that this application lets us 'keep them with us' beyond a loved one's death when our minds hold adequate ideas of parts of a loved one's essence, since the ideas we have of those parts will be numerically identical with the ideas of those parts that remain eternally in God's mind. This means our minds can retain part-numerical-identity with a loved one's eternal something, and thus keep parts of their eternal something in our own mind. Finally, I'll show how Spinoza's correspondence with Pieter Balling reveals the Spinozist plausibility of 'keeping them with you'.

### *2.1. Knowledge and commonalities*

Spinoza differentiates three kinds of knowledge (*cognitio*): knowledge of the first kind is 'opinion', or more often 'imagination', knowledge of the second kind is 'reason', and knowledge of the third kind is 'intuitive knowledge' (E2p40s2). Adequate ideas are generally acquired through the second and third kinds of knowledge. By contrast, the first kind of knowledge refers to ideas we acquire through 'fortuitous encounters with things' (E2p29s). The first kind of knowledge arises when we, as finite things, encounter other finite things that differ from us and form ideas of them (E2p40s2). Knowledge of this kind is 'the only

15. A qualification: for Spinoza, one's destruction occurs when the 'proportion of motion and rest' of one's parts is sufficiently disturbed, and not always when one 'is changed into a corpse' (E4p39s). In this paper I focus only on when a body becomes a corpse (as in death).

16. What is kept, it should be noted, cannot be a ghostly entity, as Spinoza rejects their existence (Ep51–56).

cause of falsity' and is the source of all inadequate ideas (E2p41, E2p41dem). The first kind of knowledge could include cases such as bumping into an object and forming an inadequate sensory idea of it, listening to some hearsay and gaining some inadequate idea of the thing discussed, attempting to learn how to build a house through trial and error and considering its varying levels of success, and so on.

Unlike the inadequate first kind of knowledge, 'knowledge of the second and of the third kind is necessarily true' (E2p41). The second kind of knowledge is based on 'common notions' and derivations from them. A 'common notion' denotes something that two things share fully in common. What we grasp through a common notion, or through what we share in common with another thing, cannot be grasped inadequately. Spinoza explains how this works in E2p39dem, and then explicitly names 'common notions' in E2p40s2. The proof for the perfection of knowledge based on common notions turns on God's ideas of two bodies interacting, and on how God's ideas relate to the human mind, but pursuing this proof would take us too far afield. For present purposes, note simply that when a person shares something in common with a body with which one is interacting, one can adequately understand whatever is common to themselves and that body. Anything derived from these commonalities using proper geometrical reasoning, further, cannot fail to be true (E2p40s2). For example, all bodies share in extension (it is *common* to them), and so we, as bodies, can adequately know things about the extension of other bodies. That is, we have a common notion of extension. We can thus also derive claims about the extended, geometrical properties of other bodies through our shared extension, thereby enabling us to know various scientific matters concerning natural bodies.

Spinoza further allows knowledge of commonalities beyond the basic features all extended bodies share (i.e., beyond extension, motion, and rest, which are named in E2p13L2dem). For example, he notes that the mind can adequately grasp *more* things about others the more one's body shares things in common with other bodies (E2p39c), and that the mind is more able to 'perceive' things when the body is capable of being 'disposed' in many ways (E2p14). This makes natural sense: our bodies can take on new properties as they are affected, and so may come to share more in common with others.[17] So, because I share things in common with other humans (e.g., we all need food to satisfy our essential striving), I can adequately know certain basic things about other humans (e.g.,

17. It is somewhat controversial to claim there can be common notions of things beyond the universal commonalities. For a defense of the claim that the second kind of knowledge extends beyond extension/motion/rest, see Grey (2015). See also Sangiacomo's discussion of the literature on universal vs. proper commonalities, common notions, and knowledge (2019: 130–36). Sharp (2011: 98) also holds that one's having greater diversity in properties produces greater commonalities with things, and thus allows for knowledge of more things.

their striving-unto-food). Striving for food is something that is as much present in another human as it is in me: we strive to be as powerful as possible, and we both need sustenance to do so. It seems that Spinoza thinks we are both capable of, and have good reason to, form commonalities with others beyond the basic universal ones, and thereby also to make it possible to understand other things in ways that go beyond the basic universal commonalities they share with us.[18]

Further, if we can come to understand a thing's essence as it follows from the essence of an attribute (as it follows from the nature of extension or of thought), then we have intuitive knowledge, or the third kind of knowledge (E2p40s2). Knowledge gained through intuition is known on the basis of a thing's essence, and is also known as following necessarily from the order of nature, and so is understood without regard to duration. A square always has four sides, as that's simply the nature of a square, and a human always strives for its power-maximising ends, as that's just the nature of humans (and everything else) (E3p7). While we could grasp many of these truths through demonstrations, or the second kind of knowledge,[19] these things follow from the self-evident nature of squares and striving beings (Spinoza takes essence-as-striving to be self-evident, E3p6–7). And, once we grasp something on the basis of reason, we can know it by intuition without needing the careful steps of geometrical reasoning.[20]

So, the second and third kinds of knowledge are our two general sources of adequate ideas. However, while the first kind of knowledge is generally confused and produces all inadequate ideas, it can nevertheless serve as a stepping stone to at least the second kind of knowledge (and through it perhaps the third). Here is how that might work.

We can come into contact with a thing, develop an imagined idea of it, get dubious inadequate knowledge of it, and so recognise we should develop more properties to form more commonalities with it and thus know more. We can recognise when we are lacking an adequate idea of a thing by virtue of our being able to doubt our idea: adequate ideas have 'all the properties… of a true idea' (E2d4) and when we have a true idea we cannot doubt its truth (E2p43). So, if we find an idea of a thing dubitable, we know it cannot be true, and thus cannot be adequate. We can then know that we lack the commonalities necessary to develop indubitable adequate ideas, and thus aim to develop more in common with a thing. Through repeated exposure to a thing, we can move from a largely inadequate imaginative understanding of it on the basis of what we doubt about

18. Sangiacomo (2015) also thinks that our *conatus* is aimed at forming agreements or commonalities.

19. E.g., Spinoza claims we can identify the last number in a series via different kinds of knowledge (E2p40s2).

20. E.g., in E5p36s Spinoza says that, though reason can show us that all things depend on God, this is not as moving until we grasp the same thing by intuition.

it, to knowing it better through more commonalities as we try out different things to be more like it. That is, we can develop commonalities and understand things by the second kind of knowledge, based on our new-found common notions, and based on derivations following from them.[21] Once so grasped, we may even achieve intuitive knowledge of that thing. We can find by imaginative comparison what we doubt about a thing, and this identifies where we should try and develop commonalities that then enable adequate knowledge.

### *2.2. Knowing our loved ones*

To see how we can apply this process of knowledge acquisition to knowing our loved one's essences, we should first consider how Spinoza describes interpersonal love. Spinoza's standard sense of love for a worldly thing, or, in our case, interpersonal love, is 'joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause' (E3def aff6). We see some external thing as a cause of joy and thus love it. A further 'property' of love is 'a will of the lover to join himself to the thing loved', to maximise joy by achieving a 'satisfaction in the lover on account of the presence of the thing loved' (E3def aff6). That is, the lover wishes to form a union with the beloved to ensure the presence of the joy-causing object and thus maximise their joy.[22] In light of Spinoza's further comments on love in his early *Short Treatise*, it seems that the desired 'union' is of a very strong kind, where the union is the joining of the lover and beloved into 'one and the same thing'. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza writes that '[l]ove is a union with an object that our intellect judges to be good and magnificent; and by that we understand a union such that the lover and the loved come to be *one and the same thing*, or to form a whole together' (KV 2.5.6, emphasis my own).[23]

Given this, I suggest that love compels us to produce commonalities with our loved ones. Suppose person P loves person Q. P thus takes Q to be a cause of P's joy. Now, from here, love may make P either strive to make Q more like

21. Others agree that having more diverse properties allows movement from the first to the second kind of knowledge (Hübner 2022b, §3.2.3; Sharp 2011: 98). Others also see the first kind of knowledge as a basis for the second or third (Carlisle 2021, ch. 2; James 2020: 20–21; Lloyd 2020). More moderately, Rosenthal (2020: 247) thinks that knowledge of the first kind 'can be an effective ersatz form of reason via analogy'.

22. Spinoza says that striving to join in union with a loved thing is often erroneously taken to be the very definition of love rather than a mere property of it (E3def aff6). Curley thinks that Spinoza may be referring to Descartes here and notes that this view is as old as Plato (Spinoza 2016, vol 1: 533, fn 41). Strawser (2021, ch. 2) suggests this reflects the views of Tullia d'Aragona and Leone Ebreo.

23. References to the *Short Treatise* are given as KV (for *Korte Verhandeling*), followed by the part, chapter, and paragraph numbers.

themselves, or make P strive to make themselves more like Q. In the former case, P may take Q to be a generally joy-causing being, and thus strive to make Q more like P in whatever ways that P thinks are good. This would ensure that P may continue benefitting from Q's actions or presence, while making Q even more joy-conducive, and would seem plausible because P already thinks Q to be at least somewhat joy-conducive. For example, in doing our best to be loving rather than hateful, we will do our best to make others loving like us rather than hateful (E4p46dem), so that we may benefit further from them becoming loving individuals like us. One who is rational also, for example, strives to make others more rational, like themselves, through education, since the rational person knows that others will cause more joy (be 'more useful') the more rational they are (E4app9). So, if we love someone and already see them as joy-conducive, and see ourselves as rational or loving, we may want to make the person we love even more loving or rational like ourselves and thus even more joy-conducive, since we already know they are somewhat joy-conducive. Love can thus have us try to make others more like ourselves, insofar as (1) we see they are capable of causing joy in us, thus seeing them as joy-conducive generally, and (2) making them more like us further enables them to cause joy in us, which we think plausible because we already see them as somewhat joy-conducive.[24] In this case, if P loves Q, P will encourage Q to try out different properties until Q develops more commonalities with P, thus making P and Q more alike.

But the commonality producing nature of love can also work the other direction and make us want to be more like others. Again, suppose P loves Q and thus takes Q to be a cause of their joy. Because P understands Q to be joy-causing, P will want to be like Q for at least two reasons. First, P will want to be able to cause joy in others like they imagine Q does, since imparting joy on others is itself joyful (E3p30).[25] Second, P will want to become like Q so that P can cause joy in themselves even when Q is absent, given that 'we strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to Joy' (E3p28). P will want to ensure they enjoy whatever it is that lets Q cause joy even when Q isn't present. P will thus strive to be like Q for both reasons. This direction of emulation should also feel somewhat natural to the Spinozist. For example, Della Rocca (2010: 179) holds that rational people want to become like those they see as rational,[26] and this fits naturally with my reading of love: when we encounter a rational person, they

24. Soyarslan (2023) and Nadler (2021) have an amiable view, where the enlightened person strives through friendship to enlighten others.

25. Per Tucker (2015: 31), something like this is part of a Spinozist account of children emulating their parents, though she writes in terms of Spinoza's doctrine of the imitation of the affects, rather than the present paper's focus on Spinoza's views on interpersonal love.

26. See also Della Rocca's discussion of the imitation of the affects in Della Rocca (2004).

will be powerful,[27] and thus more likely to cause joy in us,[28] and so, naturally, we will love them and want to be like them in what makes them joy-conducive.[29]

Love can thus push us to develop commonalities with the beloved, either by encouraging them to become like us, or by making us try to be like them (or both).[30,31] Perhaps the former represents how a parent teaches a child to navigate the world as a parent does, and the latter how a child strives to learn from a parent, but this should generalise to all interpersonal love. For brevity, I will mostly treat love restricted to the case where the lover tries to be like the beloved, but in principle it can flow in both directions.

Now, let us return to P and Q, where P loves Q and wants to become like Q. Let us consider how this leads to P being able to know Q's essence. P can have some minimal adequate knowledge of Q when they come in contact through their common extension, motion, and rest. But P will also be repeatedly exposed to Q, and so various images of Q will become present in P's mind. These images will, of course, constitute the inadequate first kind of knowledge insofar as P has differences from Q. But as we saw in §2.1, we can move from the first kind of knowledge to the second. P realises that much of their idea of Q is dubitable and therefore false and inadequate. P can then try developing more diverse properties. Once P lands on a new property which is actually common to Q, P can come to adequately learn more things about Q and also becomes more like Q.

As P tries to become more like Q in light of P's love for Q, P will strive to copy whatever P adequately understands of Q more regularly. This forms the kind of 'union' Spinoza identifies, in which lovers become 'one and the same' (KV 2.5.6). P and Q will share more in common, and thus will be able to know each

27. The 'striving of the mind' is how it 'reasons' (E3p26dem), and striving is, of course, identical to power.

28. People we see as powerful are people we will take to have more joy-conducive effects on us, as the rational or powerful will strive to increase the power of others ('everyone who is led by reason desires for others also the good he wants for himself' (E4p73s)).

29. Douglas (2024, chs. 2–3) concludes that we love those we take as exemplars or try to emulate (e.g., 'our kings') (42–43). This is another example of one direction of the commonality-building tendencies of love (though sometimes to vicious results, per Douglas).

30. This aligns with Balibar's view that relations of mutual use between persons grows commonalities (2020: 67).

31. A reviewer points out that for Spinoza love is generally an appropriate response to another's hatred (E4p46). Thus one might object that love is not always aimed at the production of commonalities, insofar as lover and hater are different in terms of their affects. However, love is an appropriate response to hatred, in part, because love can destroy hatred and turn the hatred into love (E3p43–E3p44). Thus, one's love for another that hates them can actually produce loving commonalities.

other even more by the second and eventually the third kinds of knowledge.[32] And the more they become alike, the more the same things will be good for each of their strivings. They will therefore be better able to help each other and thus also see themselves as more power-enhancing and joy-conducive (E4p18s, E4p31c, E4p35c1, E4p34s). This, in turn, will further increase their mutual love, since they can more readily see each other as external causes of joy, and further reinforce their growth of commonalities as they are more encouraged to become like each other. The cycle of love and becoming alike is thereby self-reinforcing.

Now, as our strivings become more alike (like P and Q), we are more able to understand each other's strivings. Many of the commonalities we develop will naturally be either commonalities in our bodily powers or will be commonalities in things that our minds understand,[33] and so will be commonalities we have with parts of a loved one's essential striving.[34] For instance, P may find the way that Q plays music especially joy-conducive, and thus try to gain the same musical skills and knowledge as those that characterise Q's essential power. If P can learn how to use their body to cause a particular effect on an instrument in the same way Q does, P can thus understand something that characterises Q's power, both in terms of the physical skill itself and the knowledge or idea of it. Since knowledge of a thing is possible insofar as we enjoy commonalities with it, in developing commonalities in our bodily skills and mental knowledge, we become capable of adequately knowing parts of our loved one's bodily skills or mental knowledge. To the extent that we can form an adequate idea of our loved

32. A reviewer asks about intuitive knowledge of things that lovers, say P and Q, share in common. They ask because intuition is about 'singular things' (E5p36s) and so might not seem applicable to commonalities. However, Spinoza allows for intuitive knowledge of attributes (e.g., E4app4), and an attribute like extension, for example, is common to all extended modes. Thus it seems that intuitive knowledge of a singular thing (e.g., the attribute of extension) can be knowledge of a singular thing that is nevertheless common to many things (e.g,, modes of extension). So, it seems conceptually possible for P to have intuitive knowledge of a single thing (e.g., part of P's or Q's essence) that is common to both P and Q.

33. Lenz (2022, ch. 1) thinks that we can literally come to have other people's ideas (in the sense, at least, of something like causal ownership).

34. One reviewer aptly asks whether essences can have 'parts' in the way I explore in this paper. But it is worth noting that, in E3p3dem, Spinoza says that the idea of the body, which is the mind's essence, 'is composed of many others', suggesting that the essence of the mind itself has parts (those other ideas that compose it). Spinoza thus seems to admit of 'parts' of essences insofar as particular ideas pick out some constituents of an essence. This explains why *some* of the mind remains eternally: the mind is composed of both adequate and inadequate ideas during life (E3p9) but only adequate ideas remain eternally (as we've seen) and so only some 'part' of the essence remains (that is, some but not all of the essence remains).

one's essence in our minds, we can thus keep the very same entity in our mind that remains of a loved one eternally.[35]

### *2.3. Keeping a loved one with you*

I will now explain some vital features of Spinozist 'keeping them with you'. First, I've just said that *to the extent* that one can form an adequate idea of our loved one's essence in our minds, one can 'keep them with you'. Earlier, I also said that one could keep a loved one's eternal something with them *to a degree*. These 'to the extent that' or 'to a significant degree' qualifiers therefore require clarification. Second, I will provide a more concrete example of a relationship in which 'keeping them with you' is possible, for further clarification. Finally, I will briefly explain why I take this 'keeping them with you' to amount to keeping one and the same numerical entity in one's mind as remains of a loved one eternally, to whatever degree they grasp our loved one's essence.

Now, given the self-interested biases and differing experiences of any two people's respective essential strivings, two people may not share all relevant properties in their essences, even when they are pushed by love to become more alike.[36] As a result, they may never know each other's essences entirely, given that they won't have everything in common. Consider our friends P and Q. P's idea of Q's essential striving, or P's idea of Q's essence, may not adequately capture *absolutely everything* about Q's essential striving. But as Hübner (2022a) has argued, adequacy of ideas (and other 'epistemic phenomena') can come in degrees, and adequate ideas can be parts of larger, not entirely adequate ideas. Insofar as we know parts of a given thing through the second or third kinds of knowledge, we know it adequately, and insofar as we fail to grasp other parts or imagine false parts of a given thing, we know it inadequately (or fail to know it). These 'insofar' qualifiers therefore yield, I suppose, *degrees* of adequacy. As such, one can have a *varying degree* of adequate understanding of their loved one's

35. The objector can point to E2p17s as a challenge to our being able to know each other sufficiently to keep our loved ones with us. There, Spinoza has us consider two acquaintances, Peter and Paul. Spinoza says there is a difference between the idea of Peter which actually constitutes the essence of Peter's mind and the idea of Peter that Paul has. But this difference arises because Paul and Peter share uncommon natures (reading E2p17 through E2p16, and in turn reading them through E2a1'' in the physical digression). But if, via the routes I've drawn, we can develop commonalities in bodily capacities, then we can have knowledge of each other, unlike Peter and Paul. One could also object that we can be mistaken about what should be the object of love (see Morejón 2022: 111–14), and so all this can fail if we mistakenly love things incompatible with our natures. However, I am only concerned with success cases here.

36. Indeed, insofar as they have different causal histories, their essences can never be *entirely* identical.

mental and bodily power, and insofar as there is a *degree* of adequate knowledge, they can keep the loved one with them *to that degree*. Whatever degree is required to 'keep them with us' meaningfully may be difficult (or impossible) to pin down, but we can indeed 'keep them with us' to whatever degree we have adequate ideas of parts of their essential striving. As love continues to produce more commonalities between us and our loved ones, we will develop more commonalities in our strivings, thereby being able to understand more parts of our loved one's essence, and thereby increasing the degree of adequacy of our idea of a loved one's essence. Through our tendency to become like people we love, or make them more like us, we increase how much of a loved one's essence we can adequately know.[37]

Let me give a more practical example than those provided by P and Q. Suppose you are the child of a devoted and loving parent. You see your parent as the cause of your joy: when they are around, you typically feel joyful (they help you with your homework, feed you, play with you, etc…). You thus come to love them. You do your best, then, to become like your parent, to develop what you take to be joy-conducive properties and thus get to experience joy more often and cause it in others. You can know something limited about your parent in light of what you share in common with them as extended things, for example that they move, they rest, etc. Of course, these things are only minimally joy-conducive. You want to develop further commonalities, to be more like a joy-causing thing, and so you wish to know more about them beyond these basic commonalities. As a result, you try to take on more properties. You observe your parent enjoying cooking, and you don't understand the art or have an adequate idea of the intricacies you observe while they cook. You do your best to come to know their cooking: you repeatedly spend time with them, discuss cooking with them, and through trial and error, learn their cooking skills. That is, you learn how to exercise your body to cause effects in the food or cooking tools in the same way as your parent. The two of you develop a new commonality in your bodily capacities (the cooking skill) and your mental understanding (the knowledge of the cooking skill). You could thus adequately know a part of their essence, namely, the part constituted by their cooking skills and knowledge of it.

37. A reviewer asks about the centrality of passive love here insofar as love's being a passion might demand inadequate ideas of the thing loved (see E3p1) rather than lead to adequate ideas of the thing loved. However, even if the relevant love is passive, note that in E3p11s Spinoza includes joy as the 'passion by which the Mind passes to a greater perfection'. Thus passions can sometimes be power-enhancing. And as my paper argues, passionate love of another can encourage commonalities that enable adequate knowledge, and thus eventually be power-enhancing, even if the love itself is initially based on inadequate ideas. So, while the initial love for someone may be passive and based on an inadequate idea, it can produce the kinds of activity that lead to adequate knowledge of a loved one and thereafter joy.

And recall, the commonality-producing tendency of love can work both ways. Your parent may love you, for example, and want you to become more like them. They encourage and engage in your efforts to learn their cooking skills, and point out when you develop commonalities in skills as you come to more closely match their cooking. This speeds up the process, and explains the commonality-producing tendency of love in the other direction.

As a result of both directions of love's commonality-producing property, you can eventually adequately know the idea of cooking that your parent has in their mind. You thus, in bringing that idea of cooking into your mind, have the very same idea in your mind that characterises a part of their mind's power or essence. And since your parent's cooking, as an activity, is part of their bodily power of acting, you thereby also know something about their body's power of activity: you bear in your mind now, to whatever degree you understand your parent's cooking, the idea of the very same bodily power that comprises part of their essence, and thus the idea that comprises part of their eternal something. This process can be mirrored by a variety of other forms of knowledge and capacities. Some developed commonalities, like learning and then speaking a common language, could further accelerate the development of other commonalities insofar as they facilitate the future learning process. And insofar as you do this with more and more capacities or knowledge that are part of your parent's essence, you can retain an even greater portion of their eternal something in your own mind: more and more of the very thing that is eternal of your parent is present in your own mind. Once you have the idea of parts of your parent's essence, you can keep those parts with you beyond their death. To whatever extent you adequately know your parent's essence, the same idea that constitutes the eternal something of your parent remains in your own mind.

Lastly, I should say why I believe that this amounts to keeping numerically the same entity in your mind as is the eternal something of a loved one, at least to a degree. That is, I must clarify why this amounts to having in your mind parts of the very same idea that comprises their eternal something, rather than simply having a different token of the type of idea.

Now, I have already established that to 'keep them with you', you must have adequate ideas of parts of your loved one's essence, and to the degree you adequately understand parts of that essence, you can 'keep them with you'. Note that adequate ideas are always true ideas (E2p34, Ep60) and that 'a true idea must agree with its object' (E1a6).[38] However, two numerically distinct true

38. We call an idea 'adequate' when considering 'the nature of the idea in itself' (Ep60), and call the same idea 'true' when we consider how it agrees with its object.

ideas, $I_1$ and $I_2$, would have to differ in some way.[39] As such, they could not both agree with their object—they could not both be true. If $I_1$ agrees with its object, whatever $I_2$ has or lacks that differentiates it from $I_1$ will also mean it does not agree entirely with its object. But this is absurd, since they are both supposed to be true ideas. As such, $I_1$ and $I_2$ must be numerically identical ideas. Since this holds for true ideas, it must hold for our adequate ideas, given that true ideas are also adequate ones. Thus, it holds that the adequate idea of part of a loved one's essence which remains eternally in God's mind is numerically identical to our own adequate idea of that part of a loved one's essence. Whatever parts of our idea of a loved one's essence are adequate, then, are going to be numerically identical with those parts of God's eternal idea of a loved one's essence. Indeed, Spinoza makes use of the tenet that, when we have an adequate idea of something, it is the very same numerical idea of that thing that God has: in various parts of E2p39dem–E2p43s, it is implied that if we have an adequate or true idea of a thing, it is numerically the same as God's idea of the thing. For example, Spinoza writes that 'our Mind, insofar as it perceives things truly, is part of the infinite intellect of God (by E2p11c); hence, it is as necessary that the mind's clear and distinct ideas are true as that God's ideas are' (E2p49s), with the inference obviously depending on our true ideas being the very same ones as God's true ideas (this is what ensures our clear and distinct ideas are as true as those of God). So, if we have an adequate idea of part of a loved one's essence, that idea is going to be numerically identical with God's idea of that part of their essence. Thus, our idea of that part of their essence is numerically identical with the idea that remains eternally of that part of their essence in God's mind.

Going back to the earlier example, if I understand my parent's cooking skill adequately, have the same cooking ability as them and have the same cooking knowledge as them, then I can adequately have the very same numerical idea of the part of their essence that is composed of their cooking powers/knowledge as is part of God's idea of their essence. Part of their eternal something is literally kept with me in my mind. Again, we can keep progressively more of their eternal something 'with us' the more we develop commonalities. Moreover, I am not alone in holding that two minds can have the very same numerical idea (as in when we share the same idea of cooking as our parent). Nadler, for example, thinks that two minds could acquire the very same adequate ideas during life, not even differentiated with respect to the perspectives of each mind: 'What is to keep two minds from having acquired in this life exactly the same collection of adequate ideas? Since adequate ideas reflect reality *sub specie aeternitatis*,

39. In E1p4, Spinoza accepts some version of the identity of indiscernibles (Crane and Sandler 2005; Della Rocca 2008: 47). Cf. Morrison (2021).

there would not even be any difference of perspective on the objects so cognized' (2002: 125).[40] All adequate ideas consider their object from God's eternal perspective, and thus are the same, undifferentiated even by perspective.[41,42]

The numerical identity of parts of the idea of an essence in our mind and in God's is hard to conceptualise, but we can think of this roughly like so: suppose the adequate idea of a loved one's essence is comprised of content {*x*, *y*, *z*}. So, *x*, *y*, and *z* are ideas of a loved one's bodily capacities or mental understanding. God's adequate idea of the loved one's essence will just be {*x*, *y*, *z*}. To the extent that we have an adequate idea of our loved one's essence, our mind might grasp a portion of God's idea. To illustrate this, suppose our mind's ideas of things not related to our loved one are [*a*, *b*, *c*] (in square brackets). Suppose we grasp *x* and *y* of our loved one's essence, but fail to capture *z*. The mental situation would then look like [*a*, *b*, *c*, {*x*, *y*,] *z*}, with the square brackets denoting our own mind and the curly brackets denoting God's idea of our loved one's essence. We can see how our mind encompasses portions *x* and *y* of God's adequate idea of a loved one's essence. Our mind thus comprises, in this instance, some numerically identical parts of God's idea of a loved one's essence. It is just that our mind is able to incorporate a significant portion of the very same numerical idea that remains eternally of our loved one, and to that extent keep the very same entity that is eternal of them in us. Our mind enjoys a partial identity with the exact numerical entity that remains of a loved one, insofar as parts of our mind are composed of the very same numerical parts as those composing the eternal something of a loved one. Insofar as we do not succeed in developing *all* the same capacities or knowledge (and do not have identical causal histories), the identity will not be absolute; we will not keep our loved one's eternal something with us *entirely*. But insofar as we do develop the same bodily capacities and the

40. Nadler has this as a step in concluding that eternal minds do not retain individuality post-death. If this is correct, it has no impact on my view, since I am arguing that we can keep something with us of a loved one post-death that only characterised that loved one *during their life* (i.e., we can keep adequate ideas of things they had adequate ideas of with us, whether or not, after death, they remain individuated).

41. A beatific person with perfect knowledge, who sees *everything* with the third kind of knowledge, could in fact keep *everyone* with them. As Douglas (2024) suggests, the beatific person can use their perfect knowledge to assume the perspective of other people and God, to literally *have their ideas*. They would no longer be 'pained by the perceived fact that some joy or beloved person is departed' and 'could be truly convinced that they [the deceased] are very much present to us' (Douglas 2024: 120).

42. This paper is concerned mainly with interpersonal love, though it is worth noting that a human's intellectual love of God is literally God's love of himself (E5p36), another instance in which we have literally the same mental content as God.

same adequate ideas, we may, in our own mind, keep with us some meaningful part of the exact same numerical entity that remains of a loved one.[43]

### *2.4. The Balling letter*

With these preliminaries in place, we can at last turn to Spinoza's July 1664 letter to Pieter Balling.

After the death of Balling's son, Balling wrote to Spinoza describing how he had anticipated his son's death through 'omens', to which Spinoza responded with what we might regard as a naturalistic explanation of Balling's experience.[44] I set aside this aspect of the letter, what matters for present purposes is that Spinoza makes a claim that is directly relevant to my account of 'keeping them with you'. For Spinoza, Balling so loved his son that they became 'as it were, one and the same', just as love has us do in the *Short Treatise*. I will argue in this section that this claim about Balling and his son constitutes an example of two people developing commonalities in their essential striving through interpersonal love. As I have argued, Spinoza's epistemology entails that we can know a loved one's essence to the extent that our striving or power has things in common with theirs, and that this enables our 'keeping them with us'. As such, if my reading is correct, and Balling and his son come to enjoy common features in their essences, then Balling could have kept his son with him in the way I have outlined (whether or not he in fact did so). If we see here an example of someone coming to enjoy essential commonalities with a loved one as a result of their love, then we can identify an actual instance in Spinoza's *corpus* in which my account of Spinozist 'keeping them with you' is possible. Let us consider the relevant extract of Spinoza's letter at length:

> To take an example like yours, a father so loves his son that he and his beloved son are, as it were, one and the same (*quasi unus, idemque sint*). According to what I have demonstrated on another occasion, there must be in thought an idea of the son's essence, its affections, and its consequences. Because of this, and because the father, by the union he has with his son, is a part of the said son, the father's soul must necessarily participate in the son's ideal essence, its affections, and consequences. (Ep17)

43. Note that I point to bodily *capacities*, not body *parts*. The eternal something of a loved one is the idea of their body's essence (and their mind's). But as I have argued, the essence of a body is its *power*, not its ratio of parts. Accordingly, the ideas we need to have of our loved one's bodily features are of their body's powers or abilities.

44. Balling's son, and later Balling himself, likely died in a wave of plague (Nadler 2018: 250; Israel 2023: 495).

In this passage, Spinoza suggests that Balling and his son, joined by love, can become 'one and the same', that Balling can be 'part' of his son, and can 'participate' in his son's ideal essence. I suggest that Spinoza thinks this is possible because, by striving in light of their love to become more alike, they can come to share significant commonalities in their essences.[45] Love, of course, must be what produces the relevant features of Balling's relationship with his son, since it is what Spinoza cites explicitly as making the father and son 'one and the same'. And Balling, it seems, can 'participate' in the idea of his son's essence that persists in the attribute of thought (the 'ideal essence' that 'must be in thought'), suggesting that he can literally 'participate' in his son's eternal something. This aligns quite nicely with the account I've given of how love can produce essential commonalities and make it possible to know a loved one's essence, and thus to keep in one's mind the very thing that is eternal of them.

As evidence for this reading of the letter, we should look to where Spinoza deploys the concept of two individuals enjoying commonalities in nature or essence. If these passages reveal that people sometimes enjoy commonalities in their nature or essence, we can read how Balling and his son came to be 'one and the same' and could 'participate' in each other's essences.

At E4p18s, Spinoza deploys the idea of multiple people enjoying the same nature and becoming 'joined' to one another, and that this is what happens when they 'agree in all things':

> For if, for example, *two individuals of entirely the same nature* are joined to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one… Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that *all should so agree (convenient) in all things* that the Minds and Bodies of all would compose, as it were (*quasi*), one Mind and one Body. (E4p18s, emphasis my own)

In this passage, the way that people can come to 'agree in all things' and thus enjoy the same nature is what will help us.

Spinozist 'agreement', generally, is about having commonalities, and this can be supported by what is further found in E1p17s.[46] There, Spinoza claims that people can 'agree' and thus come to enjoy the same essence: Spinoza says explicitly that while two humans cannot enjoy the same numerical existence in their lives and must remain in different bodies ('in existence they must differ (*dif-*

45. Cf. Strawser, for whom the Ballings unite 'not in a mythical way in which two beings are said to merge, but rather in the phenomenological sense that their ideal essences and worlds are interconnected' (2021: 167).

46. That Spinozist agreement is about commonalities is a common view. See Della Rocca (2010: 177–78) for a way of motivating this claim.

*fere*)'), they can have essences which 'agree entirely' (*prorsùs convenire*) (E1p17s). When people's essences 'agree entirely', they have commonalities in essence, or, given that our essence is our power, the same powers. That is, two people can enjoy commonalities in essential power in different existences.[47] In such cases, 'if the essence of one could be destroyed, and become false, the other's essence would also be destroyed' (E1p17s).[48] The agreement they enjoy must thus be in having the same things characterise their essential striving or power. This makes it so that, if one's essential powers are destroyed, so also are those that characterise another person's essence. While yet 'if the existence of one perishes, the other's existence will not thereby perish' (E1p17s), their essences are characterised by the same kind of powers. This informs how agreement leads people to enjoy commonalities or agreements in 'nature', as they do in E4p18s.

We can thus see how Balling and his son come to be 'as it were, one and the same': people can have 'agreements' in their natures, and to that extent their essences are characterised by the same kinds of powers (both bodily and mental). When they have (largely) the same powers, the properties that characterise their essences (how they strive) must 'agree' or be the same, and so they to that extent become 'one and the same'. Indeed, this should make intuitive sense given my discussion of love as producing commonalities, and also Spinoza's claim that it is through love that Balling and his son became 'one and the same'.

Finally, and emphatically, the Latin deployed in the Balling letter is also especially revealing. The Latin that describes Balling and his son as one and the same is as follows: '*pater (ut tui simile adducam exemplum) adeò filium suum amat, ut is, & dilectus filius quasi unus, idemque sint*' (Ep17). This mirrors the Latin that Spinoza uses when establishing the numerical identity of a mode of extension and its corresponding mode of thought: '*Sic etiam modus extensionis, & idea illius modi una, eademq́ue est res, sed duobus modis expressa*' (E2p7s). It also mirrors the Latin used when Spinoza identifies will and intellect as numerically the same thing: '*Voluntas, & intellectus unum, & idem sunt*' (E2p49c). In each extract, we see, respectively, the use of *unus*, *una*, and *unum* (all modifications of *unus*), and of *idemque*, *eademque*, and *idem* (all modifications of the same root word *idem*, with an additive *que* in two cases). In each case, the 'being one and the same' is explained with the very same language (save for the *quasi* in the letter, to be discussed shortly). And, lastly, other commentators have treated the way that

47. Cf. Sangiacomo (2015), who thinks that 'absolute agreement… in nature [is] impossible in Spinoza's ontology'.

48. One might worry here that Spinoza is speaking of people sharing a 'human essence' rather than parts of their essences as individuals. But this conflicts with Spinoza's refutation of the existence of universals, which explicitly includes a refutation of a universal essential idea of 'man' (E2p40s1). He must thus be discussing essences of individuals. For a contrasting view that posits a Spinozist theory of universals, see Hübner (2015) and Newlands (2017).

lover and beloved become 'one and the same' in the passage on love in the *Short Treatise* as being about numerical identity.[49] It is widely accepted that, for Spinoza, a body and its mind are the same mode of substance, and also that will and intellect are numerically the same thing. So, if the same language is used in the Balling letter to describe Balling and his son becoming one and the same, and the loving union of the *Short Treatise* is about numerical identity, then we should take seriously the view that the ideas of Balling's essence and of his son's essence are at least partly numerically identical, insofar as they are characterised by ideas of the same powers. That is, the two of them enjoy commonalities in their essence, and thus can know parts of each other's essences adequately, and so keep each other 'with them' after the other's death.

The letter's language concerning Balling and his son being 'one and the same' though, comes with a qualification. Spinoza, of course, thinks that Balling and his son cannot become *entirely* identical. They become only 'as it were' (*quasi*) one and the same. But, given my earlier discussion of knowing a loved one as a matter of degree, and there being degrees of 'keeping them with you', this qualification is actually quite natural. Insofar as people have parts of their striving or power in common, they become 'one and the same'. That said, this is always a matter of degree. So, Spinoza must qualify his claim with a *quasi*. What differences Balling and his son retain make them not entirely identical, but having common powers makes the idea of their essential striving or power the same *to a degree*.

If this reading is correct, then we have textual evidence that 'as a result of their love', people can come to have commonalities in parts of their essences. As I've already argued, this makes knowing a loved one's essence possible, and makes 'keeping them with you' possible to the degree that one knows parts of a loved one's essence. Though Spinoza does not make these connections anywhere, the relationship he attributes to Balling and his son, his epistemology of commonality, his views on love, and his views of the eternal mind, demand that a Spinozist accept 'keeping them with you' as a real possibility for real people.

## 3. Objections and Replies

The careful Spinoza scholar might raise a few questions here. First, does this reading implicitly treat interpersonal love as a power-enhancing experience,

49. E.g., Della Rocca (2026: 248) uses this to show that we can become *literally the same* as God via love for God. This is part of a larger (controversial) argument that modes and substance are literally identical. See also Pautrat (2011, ch. 9), who identifies a variety of implications that are caused by the literal union of love as described in the *Short Treatise*, especially with regards to intuitive knowledge or knowledge of God as involved in the union of God and lover of God (2011: 253).

despite Spinoza's worries about love being a sad and potentially weakening passion? Second, does this reading not depend on a particular reading of the eternality of a Spinozist essence, and is it thereby thwarted by opposing candidate views? And finally, does it preclude the fact that we can love many people, and thus the view that we strive to be like what we love will be problematised, since different beloved people will differ? I will answer each in turn.

### *3.1. Love is not always sad, and can be power-enhancing*

Recall that sadness is a passage to a lesser perfection (E3def aff3), so we should aim to avoid anything that produces it in us. This may reduce the significance of a Spinozist theory of 'keeping them with you': one might ask 'so what if we can keep them with us? Such keeping is conducive to sadness, and thus Spinozistically useless or inert'. To object as such, an objector can point to Spinoza's comment in E5p20s on the dangers of love: 'sickness of the mind and misfortunes take their origin especially from too much Love toward a thing which is liable to many variations and which we can never fully possess. For no one is disturbed or anxious concerning anything unless he loves it' (E5p20s). Since we can be disturbed by harms to, or the absence of, the things we love, interpersonal love can be the source of great sadness. And some of Spinoza's discussions of undesirable passions even give specific examples of how love can lead to sadness. Longing, for example, is 'a Desire, or Appetite, to possess something which is encouraged by the memory of that thing, and at the same time restrained by the memory of other things which exclude the existence of the thing wanted' (E3def aff32). We long for something when 'we remember a thing that affects us with some kind of Joy' (E3def aff32) but which we know can no longer be present, given conditions that exclude that thing's existence. We might long for a loved one, then, by remembering them, and at the same time know that they've passed, and so their existence, in some sense, is excluded by the current state of things. Interpersonal love, when it leads to a longing to keep passed loved ones with you, may thus seem to provoke sadness.

But this objection is solvable. If love permits us to grasp something *eternal* of a loved one, in the way I've suggested, then we do not need to suffer a longing for the loved one. Someone who *longs* for a loved one is holding in their mind something which is really gone. They are picturing the loved one as a person with a memory and imagination as much as a person characterised by an essence or power, and so are picturing something that truly passes when the loved one perishes (see E5p21). But if we call to mind only the parts of the eternal something of a loved one to which we have access, then we cannot be subject to longing. There is nothing which can 'exclude the existence' of a loved one's

eternal something because the eternal something is eternal, it 'remains' (*remanet*, E5p23) no matter what, and so can always be brought to the mind to whatever degree someone comes to know it. When considering only a loved one's eternal something, we only consider something that is truly existent, and so run no risk of a sad longing, or indeed any other sad passion that comes from loving a thing 'which is liable to many variations and which we can never fully possess' (E5p20s). To whatever extent one understands it, a passed loved one's eternal something is, of course, neither liable to variation nor unpossessable.

This is also why Spinozist 'keeping them with you' is different from mere memory of a passed loved one. For Spinoza, remembering is just what happens when we encounter something and then bring to mind, through what we are accustomed to seeing alongside that something, another thing that is not necessarily present (E2p17s): for example, we hear 'apple' and immediately recall an image of an apple. Yet, if we call to mind a loved one's eternal something, we hold in our mind the exact thing which 'remains' of someone's mind after their death to whatever degree we adequately know it, and so it is necessarily present to us. It will not be a mere conjuring of something which may be absent, but a coming to enjoy something that necessarily *is*.[50]

Further, we can identify Spinozist motivations to keep our loved ones with us, showing the desirability of the love required to achieve it and the therapeutic value of 'keeping them with you'. Whether Spinoza himself would identify the benefits I outline here is unclear, but these benefits are certainly implied by his views. There are at least two ways that keeping our loved ones with us enhances our power or joy. These ways will provide further evidence against the objector's view that 'keeping them with you' can lead to sadness.

The first benefit of keeping our loved ones with us is that it demands knowledge of something as eternal, and so is necessarily power-enhancing. For Spinoza, '[t]o conceive things under a species of eternity… is to conceive things insofar as they are conceived through God's essence' (E5p30dem). The mind, when considering its own essence, knows itself as part of and following from God (E5p30). The same should apply to a loved one's essence, as it would to anything else's. So, when entertaining the eternal idea of the loved one's essence, we are coming to know God (conceiving it 'through God's essence'), and for Spinoza, '[t]he greatest virtue of the Mind is to know God' (E5p27dem). Indeed,

50. Ahmet Aktas has noted in personal communication that anything we loved of someone that was part of their body is lost when they pass. Perhaps we will, as a matter of fact, long for what is truly lost in a loved one, and experience sadness, but that does not mean we ought not or cannot do our best to focus our attention on what *can* be kept with us. See also Aktas (forthcoming) for alternative views on how sad longing for a lost loved one could be Spinozistically valuable.

knowing essences constitutes the intellectual love of God (E5p32c) which is an active enhancement of our nature and in fact its very blessedness (E5p36–E5p36s). Therefore, it is to our benefit to know and consider the eternal something of our loved ones.[51]

Second, in calling to mind the loved one's eternal something, we will be bringing to mind an object of love. Recall that love, for Spinoza, is 'joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause' (E3def aff6). Joy, you will also recall, is a passage to a greater perfection (E3def aff2). Insofar as we keep something of a loved one with us and call that something to mind, something of our loved one, who is associated with joy, will be present to the mind. And if a lover experiences the 'presence of the thing loved', then 'the lover's Joy is strengthened or at least encouraged' (E3def aff6). As long as the thing loved will not later cause us more evil or sadness, we are strengthened by its presence. Clearly, an unchanging post-death essence will not later cause more evil or harm to us: it is unchanging! As such, it is good to bring it to mind and be strengthened by it.

### *3.2. Different readings of essences and eternality*

One might also ask whether I need to commit myself to a certain reading of what it means for an essence to be eternal, even given my treatment of Nadler's distinction between the ways the mind is eternal in §1. Objectors might suggest, for example, that I need to adopt something like Garrett's view, according to which what is eternal of an essence, and so what persists as the eternal idea of a loved one, is only the formal essence of that loved one (most recently given in Garrett 2018, ch. 9). On Garrett's view, a thing's eternal formal essence is different from a thing's essence when that thing is actually considered as existent. I.e., a formal essence differs from an actual essence. On the Garrettian view, what persists as formal essence in the attribute of thought is merely the idea of the formal content which would need to be actualised for a passed person to actually exist. What persists as formal essence in the attribute of extension is a pervasive feature of extension (an infinite mode of extension) that makes possible the actualisation of the body when it actually exists. Now if what persists is a Garrettian formal essence only, then there is no problem for me: someone can, through the ways I describe, come to know the conceptual content required for someone else to be actualised as a striving being, or what is required in extension for their body to be actualised— insofar as they develop commonalities with a loved one and

51. A similar point is made in Sharp (2009). See especially her discussion of love between a parent and child (2009: 14).

make those features knowable.[52] This might reduce the 'wow-factor' of the Spinozist theory of 'keeping them with you', but strictly speaking, it will not reduce the Spinozist possibility or value of 'keeping them with you'.[53]

The Spinoza interpreter may ask if I am committed to this because the main alternative, it seems, would involve following those readers who maintain that what persists is just the actual mind, though considered as necessary or essential rather than as contingent and durational. On this approach, the actual mind is either, for some examples, the mind considered (a) as *having* an eternal aspect (Grey 2014), (b) as *under* a certain aspect (Lærke 2016), or (c) from a certain *perspective* (Vermeiren 2023). In fact, though, I take it that my view is also compatible with this approach.

Suppose that what persists is the mind itself but considered differently than when alive, we will then run into *prima facie* issues. For example, some authors posit that the mind can cease to exist in duration while being 'eternal', since eternality is not strictly concerned with indefinite duration (that would be a thing's mere *sempiternity*). When these authors consider what it means for the mind itself to be eternal, they regard its durational existence as irrelevant. All it means for the mind to be 'eternal' for (at least some of) them is that its existence follows necessarily from God's nature (as does everything else's; see E1p16–18). Recognising the mind's eternality, or eternal something, for some of these interpreters, just means understanding a thing's essence as it follows from God's nature, rather than supposing there is something that extends through all durational time. As such, for some of these interpreters, the eternal something of the mind can in principle cease to exist in duration if it is not thought, whether or not it in fact does. Lærke, for example, writes that 'eternity can last as long as you want, for a moment or for a long time' and 'it is simply irrelevant to its constitution

52. Garrett speaks of *the* formal essence of *the* human body throughout. This might suggest that what persists is the formal essence of *human bodies in general*, rather than that of any particular human (at least this is how one reviewer of this paper interprets Garrett's view). However, in E5p22, Spinoza describes how an idea of 'the essence of this or that human Body' exists in God's mind eternally, and his proof in E5p23 of the eternity of the mind cites this claim about ideas of particular, non-universal human essences. An idea of a singular human body's essence must thus persist. That the relevant idea is about particular humans is also suggested by the fact that different people can be eternal to different extent (E5p38–39). And Garrett himself actually treats the formal essence of each body as particular: for example, in his account of their eternal formal essences, Garrett describes how humans should aim to achieve 'as much adequate cognition as possible of the formal essence of *his or her body* and of other things as they relate to' (2018: 255, emphasis my own). Garrett has also confirmed in personal communication that he thinks there is a formal essence of each particular human body, as well as a formal essence of human bodies generally.

53. In her own work on Spinozist love, Ayalon (2021) argues that the distinction between actual and formal essences does not really obtain. This would pose a challenge to Garrettian readings of essences.

which is rigorously a-temporal' (2016: 278).[54] All that pertains to a thing's being eternal, for these readings, is its being necessary. As such, would it not be possible for a loved one's eternal something to cease being during the durational time in which I exist after them? On the contrary, this view, in addition to Garrett's, is compatible with what I say. If we become through love sufficiently like our loved one, then when they pass, an eternal idea of their body's and mind's powers, and how they followed from nature, can still be present in our own mind. We can force the eternal something of a loved one to our own mind, and make its 'eternity last as long as' we are able to think it. This, again, will preserve the benefits I attribute to 'keeping them with you' in §3.2. The idea in our mind will be an eternal one, will exist in its durational reality (as long as this idea is thought), and will still be a source of joy.

### *3.3. Loving many with many differences*

Lastly, one might ask if my reading implies that we can only love one person in the fashion requisite for 'keeping them with you', since we must develop commonalities with people, and different people will differ quite a lot. My reply is 'no'. Again, we experience interpersonal love when we think that someone is the external cause of joy in us. We want to form commonalities with our loved ones so we can enjoy their joy-causing properties—or make them like us so they can enhance our own joy in the future. So, if I love my sibling and I love my significant other, I will find that each of them produces some kind of joy in me. What I want subsequently is to enjoy whatever it is in either of them that produces joy in me—or make them more like me insofar as I am rational or powerful. So, insofar as I take my sibling to cause me joy, I will want to be like my sibling in their joy-conducive capacity, and insofar as being like me could improve their capacity to impart joy, I might want to make them like me. The same is true of my significant other. If different parts of each of these people cause joy in me, respectively, I will want to be like them to the extent that they have different things that cause joy in me, and if different parts of me could make them more able to cause further joy in me, then I will strive to make them like me in different ways. That is, if I love my sibling because they have properties $\{x, y, z\}$ that cause joy in me, and my significant other because they have properties $\{a, b, c\}$ that cause joy in me, I will strive to be like my sibling in developing $\{x, y, z\}$ in common with them, and also strive to be like my significant other by developing $\{a, b, c\}$ in common

54. Although Lærke also thinks that a mind's eternality is compatible with its sempiternality—and indeed, the mind is also sempiternal insofar as God always holds an idea of its essence, even though this sempiternality is not the same as its being eternal. Thus, Lærke might not actually offer the objection here that the hypothetical objector I've created is using him for.

with them. A similar pattern holds if trying to make them more like me: different properties of myself might be relevant in making them more powerful. Accordingly, I can form commonalities with two different people in light of different joy-conducive aspects of them or of myself.

But what about cases in which we love one person with properties {*~a*, *b*, *c*} because we associate those properties with joy, and another person with properties {*a*, *y*, *z*}? In this case, the two beloveds each have some property that contradicts a property of the other (*~a* and *a*, respectively), and I cannot become entirely like both. But all that this implies is that the degree to which we can all have essential commonalities is reduced, and I must determine whether *~a* or *a* is more joy-conducive in establishing which commonality to build. This is fine for my view, I think, and indeed seems inevitable if we are going to consider how 'keeping them with you' could work in practice: some joyful parts of a loving relationship with people whose relationships with us differ cannot be made common to each person we love. Insofar as it is possible, though, we may enjoy different loving relationships with different people, form commonalities to different extents, make them further enjoy commonalities with us and with each other, and thus finally understand different parts of their essences to different extents. As such, depending on relevant circumstances, we may come to know just one, or very many, different people we love to whatever degree is required to meaningfully keep them with us.[55]

## Conclusion

I have here argued that Spinoza's system has, as a corollary of Spinoza's views on love and the eternity of the mind, a theory of 'keeping them with you'. This theory does not depend on anything mysterious or non-natural, but only on having adequate ideas of parts of a loved one's essence. To call forth to mind the eternal something of a loved one is to call forth to mind the idea of a loved one's bodily and mental striving, to whatever extent we understand parts of that striving. This eternal something of a loved one is learned about during life, as a direct result of our love, through a union of commonalities of the kind exemplified by Pieter Balling and his son. To keep our loved one with us, for the Spinozist, is

55. Aktas (in correspondence) raises another limitation for my view: it implies that we may not be able to keep non-human loved ones with us as much as human loved ones, if at all. When a beloved pet passes, it seems harder to have had sufficient commonalities with them to 'keep them with us'. I admit this may be an unfortunate limitation of what I describe. However, Sharp (2011: 101–13) discusses the Matheronian reading of Spinoza's 'ethics of similitude', and does her best to work out how this can apply to our interactions and similarities with non-human animals (most succinctly in Sharp 2012: 263–65). Perhaps this is a route for us to consider commonalities with non-human animals, and perhaps also to 'keep them with us'.

of great use in expanding our power and living a joyful life. Identifying the Spinozist theory of 'keeping them with you', further, emphasises the interpersonal consequences of what seems at first like a very individualistic doctrine about maximising one's own eternality. And while it may not be easy to know our loved ones as adequately as is necessary to 'keep them with us', its difficulty or rarity, as any Spinozist will know, does not diminish its excellence (E5p42s).

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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