



Introduction to the Philosophy of Spinoza

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I

Spinoza's philosophy has suffered not a little from the highly abstruse and technical form in which the *Ethics* is written. Some, who are not inured to the hardships of philosophy, quite naturally jump to the conclusion that its formidable geometry contains only the most inscrutable of philosophic mysteries; and a wise humility persuades them to forego the unexampled enlightenment a mastery of the difficulties would yield. Others, who are devoutly wedded to what they consider the unreservedly empirical character of modern (that is, true) philosophy, avoid the *Ethics* because they are convinced, on general principles, that only a mind hopelessly lost in the dark night of medieval speculation could conceive of philosophy in such ultra-deductive fashion. Reason was for so long servile to idle theology, it is not at all surprising that a work exemplifying reason to such high degree as does the *Ethics*, should receive scant respect from intrepid empiricists. It is so easy to confuse the rationalizations of reason with the nature of reason itself.

Spinoza did not, however, choose the geometrical order because he thought his philosophy too profound for ordinary exposition; nor did he choose it because he was enmeshed in medieval philosophic speculation. He chose it because his fundamental philosophic aim was to establish ethics on a thoroughly tested, scientific foundation; and geometry, an exemplar of all mathematical science, most completely embodied, at that time, the highest scientific ideal. Man, Spinoza held, is a part of Nature, and Nature is governed by eternal and immutable laws. It must be just as possible, therefore, to apply the mathematical method to man, as it is to apply it to matter. It must be possible to determine, with the certitude obtainable in the exact sciences, what things are good for man and what means he has for attaining them.

Spinoza's belief in the self-sufficing, lawful order of Nature, and the adequacy of the natural powers of our mind to understand the mysteries (popularly so appraised) of heaven and earth, the singular expository style of the *Ethics* emphasizes in unmistakable fashion. Even for our understanding of God's own nature, Divine Revelation, as commonly interpreted in Spinoza's day and our own, is wholly unnecessary. We need only the revelation afforded by the natural powers of reason operative in us. In geometry, we do not blindly accept conclusions on faith, nor do we reject them by authority. We are guided in our discovery of the true and the false, solely by the light of our natural understanding. And the truths we discover are not temporary fabrications of the human mind, but eternal truths about the nature of things. Perhaps no other single aspect of Spinoza's philosophy distinguishes Spinoza from the medievalists as thoroughly as does his use of the geometrical order of exposition; and no other single aspect, perhaps, justifies as thoroughly Spinoza's claim to rank with the moderns if not even the contemporaries.

The geometer's method of starting with definitions and axioms and proceeding from proposition to proposition especially appealed to Spinoza, apart from the fact that geometry

was an ideal science, because, for Spinoza, the essence of logical method consists in starting out with ideas that are of utter simplicity. Then, if the ideas are understood at all, they can only be clearly and distinctly understood. The absolutely simple we can either know or not know. We cannot be confused about it. And ideas which are clearly and distinctly understood are, according to Spinoza, necessarily true. Such unambiguously simple and therefore necessarily true ideas Spinoza believed his definitions and axioms expressed. Furthermore, if we gradually build up the body of our science by means of our initial simple ideas, justifying ourselves at every step by adequate proof, our final result will necessarily be as firmly established and as certainly true as the elementary ideas we started with. The reliability of this whole procedure more than compensates for its tediousness—a defect Spinoza expressly recognizes.

Unfortunately, however, there are other defects in the geometrical method when it is applied to philosophy, far more serious than its tediousness,—defects, moreover, Spinoza apparently did not recognize. Even though the geometrical method is preëminently scientific, it is hardly a form suitable for philosophy. The Euclidean geometer can take it for granted that the reader understands what a line or plane, a solid or an angle is. For formality, a curt definition is sufficient. But the philosopher's fundamental terms and ideas are precisely those in need of most careful and elaborate elucidation—something which cannot be given in a formal definition or axiom. Also, in the geometrical form, the burden of the author's attention is shifted from the clarification of the propositions to the accurate demonstration of them. Which, in a philosophical treatise, is most unfortunate. For though it is undoubtedly highly desirable that the philosopher should observe the same care and precision as the scientist, admitting nothing he cannot prove, it is nevertheless just as well for the philosopher to take reasonable care that what he is conscientiously proving is understood. That Spinoza did not always take such care but considerably over-estimated the self-evidence of his definitions and axioms and the simplicity of many of his important propositions, is an unhappy fact conclusively established by the increasing volume of Spinozistic literature.

II

However, in spite of the difficult, and to the literary repellent form of the *Ethics*, the catholicity of Spinoza's influence has been extremely remarkable. In time, his influence bids fair to equal in range, if not in gross extent, the as yet unparalleled influence of the artist-philosopher Plato. It took about a hundred years for Spinoza to come into something of his own. For the *Ethics* was condemned with the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* as an atheistic and immoral work. Only when the romantic philosophers of Germany, following the lead of Lessing and Jacobi, found in Spinoza a man who was, as they thought, after their own heart, did Spinoza's mundane fortune change. As a result of their efforts, Spinoza ceased to be a philosopher to be execrated in public (though furtively read in private), and became a philosopher to be eulogized on all occasions in most rhapsodic, if bewildering, terms. Many others too, besides professional philosophers, began to read Spinoza with much sympathy and unbounded admiration. Goethe, Matthew Arnold, Heine, George Eliot, Flaubert, Coleridge, and Shelley—to mention only a few distinguished lay names—found in Spinoza a powerful, stimulating and, in varying degrees, congenial thinker. To-day, after having been one of the liberating thinkers of mankind who was read but not honored, Spinoza is fast becoming one of the canonized of mankind who are honored but not read.

The reason for Spinoza's magnificent influence is not difficult to discover: his philosophy deals in a grand, illuminating way with all that is of profoundest importance in human life. There is no material the universe offers for man's life but Spinoza seeks to understand and

explain its rational function and utility. For Spinoza set before himself the hard task of laying down the principles whereby men may guide themselves aright in all the affairs of life—the lowest as well as the highest. His philosophy, as a result, is at once the most exalted and the most matter of fact. There is no high sentiment or glorious ideal to which Spinoza does not give proper attention and a proper place. And yet he propounds nothing in his ethical theory that cannot be clearly seen by reason and that cannot be fully substantiated by the history of man. Spinoza's ethics is perfectly balanced, eminently sane. And there is, pervading it all, a stately sustained resolution of mind, a royal, often religious spirit and calm.

And Spinoza's thought, if not all of his terminology, is refreshingly modern and contemporary. We find in him, as in contemporaries, an utter reliance upon the powers of the human mind. All dogmatism, in the pristine connotation of unexamined adherence to the doctrines of tradition, is absent from his thought. Spinoza is thoroughly critical, for only modern philosophic arrogance, in first full bloom in Kant, can justly monopolize the term "critical" for itself. Naturally, though, Spinoza is unfamiliar with the whole apparatus and style of philosophic thinking which the last two centuries of excessively disputatious and remarkably inconclusive philosophy have created. Spinoza has his own technical philosophic style, inherited to some extent, but to a much larger extent transformed by him for original use. But technical as his style may be, it is simplicity itself when compared with the horrific styles which were, until the last few decades, alone thought adequate to express the profound and esoteric mysteries of modern philosophy. The philosophic jargon of the 18th. and 19th. centuries is now almost universally discarded, and with it preternaturally recondite and ineffectual modes of thought. Those who have achieved at least some of the new simplicity in thought and expression are better able than any others to enter into the heart of Spinoza's philosophy, into the open secret of his thought. For apart from the mere stylistic difficulties of the *Ethics* and some detail of his metaphysical doctrine, the few great and simple ideas which dominate his philosophy are quite easy to understand—especially if one uses the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* as an introduction to them. It was an unexpressed maxim with Spinoza that even at the risk of keeping our heads empty it is necessary we keep our minds simple and pure.

III

The central controlling idea of Spinoza's philosophy is that all things are necessarily determined in Nature, which he conceives to be an absolutely infinite unified and uniform order. Instead of maintaining that God is like man magnified to infinity, who has absolute, irresponsible control of a universe which is external to him—the rather rude anthropomorphic account of the ultimate nature of the universe contained in the Bible—Spinoza maintains that God is identical with the universe and must be and act according to eternal and necessary laws. God is Nature, if we understand by Nature not merely infinite matter and infinite thought,—the two attributes of Nature specifically known to us—but infinite other attributes the precise character of which we can never, because of our finitude, comprehend. Within this Being—God, Nature or Substance (the more technical, philosophic term)—there is no dichotomy; and there is outside of it no regulative or coercive intelligence such as the Biblical God is conceived to be. Whatever is, is one. And it is, in the special Spinozistic sense, supremely perfect because absolutely real. There is, considered in its totality, no lack or defect in Nature. There can be, therefore, no cosmic purposes, for such purposes would imply that Nature is yet unfinished, or unperfected, that is, not completely real. Something that cannot possibly be true of an absolutely infinite Being.

Spinoza's conception of an absolutely infinite universe is a vast improvement upon the pent-in, finite medieval universe inherited from Aristotle. It exceeds by infinity, in breadth of vision, even our contemporary notion of an infinite physical cosmos. And his conception of

universal necessity is as great an advance upon the view that transformed natural occurrences into miraculous events. Miracles, according to the Bible, most clearly exemplify God's omnipotence; for omnipotence in the popular mind consists in nothing so much as in the ability to satisfy any purpose or whim no matter how transitory it is, or how incompatible with what has been antecedently desired or done. Miracles may be extraordinary occurrences with reference to the order of Nature, but they are, with reference to God, commonplace exhibitions of His Almighty power. For Spinoza, however, miracles, did they actually occur, would exhibit not God's power, but His impotence. The omnipotence of the one absolutely infinite Being is not shown by temperamental interruptions of the course of events; it is manifested in the immutable and necessary laws by which all things come to pass.

Spinoza's conception of the universe, flawlessly operating under necessary laws, effectively disposes of miracles. And to dispose of miracles is one of Spinoza's primary concerns. For as long as miracles happen, organized knowledge and rational control—the bases of a rational life—are both impossible for man.

If events were not absolutely conditioned by the determinate nature of things, instead of science, we should have superstition, and magic instead of scientific control. When a god governs the universe according to his transitory and altogether personal whims, or when chance, without a god, reigns, man is hopelessly at the mercy of the flux of events. In the conduct of his affairs memory is of no use to him, and forethought is impossible. In such cases man, as we read in his history, and could easily conclude from his nature, piteously grasps for salvation at whatever happens his way. All things are then loaded with ominous powers the strength of which is directly proportionate to the hope or fear that enthralles him. If the universe were lawless, the irony of man's fate would forever be what it was when he lived in abysmal ignorance: when in bitterest need of sane guidance, he would be most prone to trust to the feeblest and most irrational of aids. On the other hand, if things are determined by necessity, nothing happening either miraculously or by chance, science and a commensurate power of scientific control is possible for man. No more important argument could Spinoza conceive in favor of his doctrine.

IV

But the very doctrine which Spinoza placed at the heart of his philosophy because of the inestimable advantages man could derive from it, people loudly objected to on the ground that it robbed man's life of all moral and religious value. Determinism, they exclaimed, reduces man to the rank of inanimate Nature; without "free-will" man is no better than a slave, his life doomed by an inexorable fate. True enough, nothing is more abhorrent or more deadly to the striving soul of man than to be bound in a fatalistic doctrine. But the anti-determinists wildly confuse a perverted determinism of ends with a scientific determinism of means. And only the former determinism is truly fatalistic. This confusion is to be found equally central in Henry Oldenburg's inconsequential letters to Spinoza and in Bernard Shaw's shamelessly silly Preface to *Back to Methuselah*. Fundamental confusions remain astonishingly stable throughout the centuries.

Spinoza, when he maintained that all things are necessarily determined by the laws of their own being, certainly did not mean to say that, for example, the toothbrush I shall buy tomorrow will be determined by the stellar dust of æons ago. He did not wish to maintain that the infinite occurrences of the past were slowly but persistently moving to that far from divine or distant event. No aboriginal astronomer royal could have predicted the pending purchase merely by exhaustively analyzing the then stellar dust. For toothbrushes and their purchase are

determined by the nature of human beings, not by the nature of embryonic stars. And Spinoza's doctrine of necessity maintains that all events are determined by their proper causes, not that everything is immediately caused by some antediluvian event. And this is true even though we can start from any event in the present, no matter how trivial, and go back to an event causally antecedent, and from that to another, even until we recede into the stellar dust itself. But this only amounts to saying, what is undoubtedly true, that neither I nor the toothbrush could now exist if the stellar dust, and the whole series of intervening events, had not existed. But this is totally different from saying that the stellar dust existed that I might exist to-day and buy a toothbrush to-morrow, or, what equals the same, that I and the toothbrush exist so that the stellar dust and the exceedingly long consequence of natural events should have a final purpose, an ultimate end—even if not an ideal fulfillment. Now only when causality, as in the latter case, is perversely teleological is determinism fatalistic. Fatalism is the result only when the ends of activity are necessarily but arbitrarily determined. But when causality is not arbitrarily teleological, or when only the natures of things, the instruments or means of activity are necessarily determined, then determinism involves no fatalism at all.

The only truly fatalistic systems which have had an important influence in the history of mankind, have been certain religious systems—the Christian religion among them. The energies of western men were, for over fourteen centuries, robbed of all vitality and meaning because Christian theology irrevocably fixed the end of life, and man could do nothing to alter it significantly in any respect. Arbitrary teleological determinism is, in the Christian religion, the philosophic root of otherworldliness. And it was no alleviation of the state of affairs that miracles could happen in the realm of Nature, that is, that Nature was not determined, but was undetermined, accidental, or “free.” On the contrary, it was a decided aggravation that there existed side by side with a perverse teleological determinism for the other world, an instrumental indeterminism for this world. For the latter served as effectively to put the means of man's life, as the former did to put his end, out of his present reach and control.

Contrast the modern and contemporary Christian period with the medieval and pre-medieval Christian period. What a vast difference there is! With the introduction of the modern period man's energies were almost instantaneously liberated. And why? Because of Chancellor Bacon's discovery of the value of empirical investigation? Hardly. For this discovery had been made long before Bacon. But it was only after Bacon that the discovery had a great effect because an enormous intellectual transformation had already partly taken place in the time between the first medieval discovery of the empirical method and Bacon's proclamation of it. The enormous change was that determinism had been transferred from ends to means; and indeterminism from means to ends. Mathematical physics had, as a system for explaining Nature, supplanted theology.

With scientific determinism firmly established in the realm of Nature and arbitrary determinism thoroughly disestablished in the realm of ends, the two-fold fatality that crushed man with its oppressive power, automatically disappeared. On the one hand, the world ceased to be haunted by demonic powers; it was no longer a miraculous world subject constantly to capricious perturbations. It was no longer a world alien to man's nature and it therefore ceased to be sheerly brutal to him. For the world is brutal only as long as we do not understand it. As soon as we do, it ceases to be brutal, and becomes quite human, if not humane. Knowledge transmutes a brute existent into a rational instrumentality. And, on the other hand, man could now espouse any end consonant with his nature. He was no longer bound and dwarfed by an alien, superimposed end which is just as sheerly brutal to man's soul as an alien world is sheerly brutal to man's body.

Of course, the ends that are consonant with man's nature are determined by his nature, so

that it may seem we have not really escaped the fatality of “determinism.” This is, however, only seemingly so. Because, according to the teleological determinism of Christian theology the ends were fixed independently of the natures that were to fulfill them; just as, according to instrumental indeterminism events were caused independently of the natures of the things that caused them. Otherwise there would be nothing miraculous about miracles and nothing virtuous about Calvinism. But if the ends are the ends of our natures,—that is, if teleological determinism is not perverse and arbitrary but rational and scientific—we are, as Spinoza constantly points out, free. Only when we are subject to alien ends or the ends of alien natures are we enslaved. For freedom is not opposed to necessity or determinism; it is only opposed to an alien necessity or alien determinism. Freedom consists not in absolute indetermination, but in absolute self-determination. And self-determination is the very last thing that can be called fatalistic.

Because Spinoza knew that freedom consists in self-determination he was saved from falling into the absurdities of Rousseau’s “Back to Nature” doctrine even though Nature is, for Spinoza, the origin of everything and its laws, the only laws that are divine. Still, the purpose and conduct of man’s life, if they are to be rational, must be defined by man’s nature not by any other nature; if man is to be free, he must be guided by the particular laws of his own being, not by the laws of any other being least of all by the general laws of so totally dissimilar a being as absolutely infinite Nature. There is as much sense and rationality in exhorting us to go back to the Realm of Nature, as there is in exhorting us to go on to the City of God.

There is, in Spinoza’s system, no teleological determinism (in the perverted theological usage explained above); but neither is there, in Spinoza’s system, any “free-will” for man. And the hue and cry that is always raised when “free-will” is denied, was raised against Spinoza. The clamorous moralists protest that “free-will” is the necessary (*sic!*) foundation of all morality, and hence of religion. This is the starting point of Bernard Shaw’s no less than of Henry Oldenburg’s infuriated argument. And, unfortunately, no less a thinker than William James starts from the same misguided assumption. And yet nothing can be more certainly clear than that if man as a matter of fact has no “free-will” it is the very height of absurdity to maintain that man’s morality necessarily depends upon his having “free-will.” Something man does not possess cannot be made any condition, let alone *the* indispensable condition of his being able to live a moral life. Man’s morality must be based upon his nature; and what his nature is cannot be antecedently determined in accordance with the demands of any special moral theory. Moral theory must be based upon man’s nature; not man’s nature upon moral theory.

Far from “free-will” being a necessary foundation of morality “free-will” would make all morality, of the kind we know and the “free-will”-ists want, absolutely impossible. The central condition of moral life is responsibility. So central is it, that it is now acknowledged as such in all the penal codes of civilized countries. But if man has, instead of a determinate nature, “free-will”, responsibility can in no way be fixed. Education, too, is necessarily impossible. Hence all punishment would have to be retributive. Moral strife, as well as legal penalties, would bear all the stigmata of unmitigated, imbecilic cruelty. This is not the case however if man has an absolutely determinate nature. Education is possible. And therefore although crime loses none of its evil character, punishment can lose all of its inhuman sting. The necessary condition of human morality is responsibility not irresponsibility; reliability not unreliability; certainty not uncertainty; a firm will, not a “free” will.

“Free-will” is necessary only in theological apologetics. According to Christian theology, if man did not have “free-will” it would follow that God is the Author of all the evil of the world. Something which is not quite in keeping with His perfect goodness. By a queer twist of mind, theologians therefore gave man, and not God (as they should have done) “free-will.” But they

gave man “free-will” not to enable him to live virtuously, but to enable him to sin. If man were able to live virtuously as well as sinfully of his own “free-will” he would then be altogether independent of God, which can in no way be admitted or allowed. Hence the bitter and heart-rending cries of orthodox, especially evangelical ministers that if left to themselves they can only sin! They can live virtuously only when they are absolutely coerced so to live by God! Their radical inability to understand or believe the self-reliant moral person grows from the very heart of their theology. For “free-will”—the only freedom they know—is the necessary condition, not of man’s morality, but of God’s!

There is no fatalism in Spinoza’s system. Fatalism is the moral value of a theory of the universe. That theory is fatalistic, which makes the activities man cherishes either futile or impossible. Any system that puts man at the mercy of the flux of events does precisely this. This is necessarily done by a system according to which the universe does not faithfully observe an immutable order, does not obey certain fixed and eternal laws. Nothing is as fatal as an accident; no universe as fatalistic as an accidental universe.

There is no fatalism in Spinoza’s system because there are no accidents in Spinoza’s universe. All things are necessarily determined by immutable laws, and man, who is an integral part of the universe, is necessarily without “free-will.” In Spinoza’s system, ends, being undetermined (as contrasted with their[xliii] being determined in the theological sense explained above) they can exercise no fatalistic power; and means, although determined (in the strict scientific sense) are similarly impotent because they are, in the life of man, subordinate to ends. Consequently, Spinoza was able to write upon Human Freedom with a truth and clarity and force excelling by far all theological, teleological, “free-will,” idealistic philosophers from Plato to Josiah Royce. Spinoza was able to write thus because, not in spite of the fact that he placed at the heart of his philosophy the doctrine of necessity; because, not in spite of the fact that he developed the only complete system of philosophy strictly consistent with the principles of natural science or mathematical physics. Spinoza is, perhaps, the only thoroughly emancipated, the only thoroughly modern and scientific philosopher that ever lived. And he is, much more certainly, the only thoroughly emancipated, the only thoroughly modern and scientific ethicist that ever lived.

To-day, in view of the extensive dominion and authority of science, the objections against Spinoza’s doctrine of necessity can hardly be as self-righteous and as loud as they were two centuries ago. The principle of the uniformity of Nature has become the established foundation of natural science. And it is also acknowledged, except in the recent ranks of superstition, that man is a part of Nature, not independent of it.

Man’s connection with Nature is, in Spinoza’s system, at least as intimate as it is in the latest system of natural science. The original doctrine of the origin of species, Spinoza would have found entirely in harmony with his general philosophy, although what he would have thought of subsequent evolutionary extravaganzas, it is impossible to say. Darwinian biology made man consubstantial with the animal kingdom; Spinoza’s metaphysics makes man’s body consubstantial with the infinite attribute of extension or matter, and his mind consubstantial with the infinite attribute of thought which is the mind of Nature or God. Man, as a “mode” of extension and thought, is necessarily subject to the laws of these two attributes of which he is compounded. The fundamental relation of man to the universe, set forth in the Bible, is radically transformed. Man is no longer an only child of God, enjoying his privileges and protection (occasionally tempered by inexperienced punishments); he is a mode of two attributes of substance inexorably determined by their universal, immutable laws.

V

Of all the laws of the universe, it was Spinoza's chief object to discover the mental laws. That there were such laws his metaphysics assured him; and the existence to-day of a science of psychology substantiates his belief. The most popular of recent psychologies—Freudianism—is based upon the principle that nothing whatever happens in the mental life of man, waking or asleep, that is not specifically determined by ascertainable causes. Psychoanalytic therapy would be impossible otherwise. Psychiatry, too, has conclusively demonstrated that only metaphorically is the subject matter it deals with in the region of the "abnormal." Actually, the insane are subject to laws of behavior which can be scientifically studied no less than the sane. They are no more possessed of an evil, designing spirit, as our witch-burning ancestors consistently believed, than the ordinary human being is possessed of "free-will."

Spinoza's psychology is dialectical. But it is no indictment of his psychology to point out that it is. It is true, his formal definition of sorrow, for instance, fails supremely to touch the strings of a sympathetic heart. But the philosophical psychologist is not a novelist. The recent claim that "literary psychology" is the only valid psychology, is as well founded as the claim would be that only a "literary physics" is valid. Mathematical physics gives us no more a picture of the actual physical universe than Spinoza's psychology gives us a picture of the mental and emotional life of an actual human being. But the failure of these sciences to give us a picture of the living world in no way invalidates their truth, or deprives them of their utility.

Consider, as an example, Spinoza's psychological law freely expressed in the dictum that Paul's idea of Peter tells us more about Paul than about Peter. This conclusion follows strictly from fundamental principles of Spinoza's abstract, dialectical psychology; but its truth or its practical applicability is because of that not in the least impaired. Indeed, because of its dialectical form its range of meaning is greatly increased. Spinoza's dictum applies to what William James called the "psychologist's fallacy." It also applies to what John Ruskin called the "pathetic fallacy." Again, it applies to the fallacy Franz Boas exposed and which he may justly have called the "anthropologist's fallacy." And it applies also to what one may, with a great deal of benefit, dub the "ethicist's fallacy." For the very same constitutional weakness of man to identify confusedly his own nature with that of the object he is contemplating or studying, is most flagrantly and painfully evident in the fields of theoretical and practical ethics. The "ethicist's fallacy" is the source of all absolutism in theory, and all intolerance in practice.

All four fallacies just enumerated come under Spinoza's dictum as special cases come under a general law. And these four are by no means the only instances of the common habit of mind. From no field of human endeavor is the mischief-working fallacy ever absent. We find it lodged in the judge's decision, the propagandist's program, the historian's record, the philosopher's system. In the field of metaphysical poetry it has recently been identified by Santayana as "normal madness." In its milder forms, the fallacy is now known by every one as the "personal equation"; in its pronounced, abnormal manifestations it is known by the psychoanalysts as "transference." It is a Protean fallacy woven into the emotional texture of the human mind. Nothing, for it, is sacred enough to be inviolate. For Spinoza discovered it sanctimoniously enshrined even in the Sacred Scriptures. As he brilliantly shows us in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, the prophets' ideas about God tell us more about the prophets than about God.

The far-reaching significance of Spinoza's propositions is one of their most remarkable characteristics. This is due to the fact, contemporary philological philosophers notwithstanding, that Spinoza defined the essence, the generating principle, not the accidental qualities, of the human mind.

Another example may not be out of place. Spinoza's proposition that anything may be accidentally (in the philosophic sense of "accident") a cause of pleasure, pain, or desire seems to explain the essence of all the particular variations of the psychological phenomena known

now by all who have been aroused to the significance of their vagrant cryptic slumbers, as the phenomena of symbolism, sublimation, and fetich worship. Spinoza's proposition explains all the phenomena adequately because among the fundamental human emotions, Spinoza like Freud—if we discount the recent attempt to go beyond the pleasure-principle—reckons only three: desire, pleasure and pain. And with Spinoza, as with the Freudians, it sometimes seems that desire is more fundamental than the other two, for desire expresses, in Spinoza's terminology, the essence of man. Desire however may be stimulated by almost anything. It requires the least sanity of mind, therefore, to prevent one from scandalously over-emphasizing one particular class of objects—of desire.

The striking similarity, if not identity, between Spinoza's psychological doctrines and those of contemporaries, serves to give conclusive lie to the crass contemporary contention that Truth instinctively shuns the philosophical study, and that she only favors the laboratory or clinic where she freely comes and frankly discloses herself to the cold, impersonal embrace of mechanical instruments.

It is not altogether fortuitously that Spinoza's psychology embraces so readily contemporary psychological conceptions. Spinoza made a psychological, if not psychoanalytical, analysis of some portions of Scripture. And Scripture is a very rich human material. Besides having to explain the diverse and conflicting accounts the different Scriptural authors gave of the nature of God, Spinoza had to account for the superstitious beliefs commonly held by men that are incorporated in the Bible—the beliefs in omens, devils, angels, miracles, magical rites. Spinoza had to account for all these by means of his analysis of human nature since he would not grant the existence of supernatural beings and powers. Spinoza's psychology adequately performs the task. His psychology demonstrates with unsurpassed thoroughness and clarity how human emotions, when uncontrolled in any way by intelligence, naturally attach themselves to all sorts of bizarrely irrelevant and absurd things, and stimulate the imagination to endow these things with all the qualities and powers the disturbed hearts of ignorant men desire. Ignorant and frustrated man, Spinoza showed, frantically dreams with his eyes open.

VI

Spinoza's method in psychology is dialectical, but his interest is practical. His psychology one might almost say is a moral psychology. Spinoza wants to explain mental phenomena through their primary causes because a knowledge of man's nature is the radical cure for his ills. The greatest obstacle man has to contend against is his emotional nature. Not that it is inherently degraded or sinful—the grotesque superstition some religious moralists have maintained; but man's emotional nature masters, more often than not, man's rational nature, and leads man astray. When the emotions are unrestrained and undirected by knowledge and intelligence, they violently attach themselves to anything that chances to excite them. Their stark immediacy vitiates man's judgment. He is unable, while under their sway, to select and follow the course that is best, because his mind is engulfed in the evanescent present. In his hectic desire to gain the passing pleasure, man loses his ultimate good.

But man's salvation, just as much as his damnation, is within his own control. Salvation or blessedness is something man can achieve by his own efforts; it is not something he can achieve only by Divine Grace. For it is no innate perversion of soul, no inherent wickedness of man, no malicious "free-will" that causes him to follow the lure of the Devil rather than the light of God. The very elements in man's nature which cause him to fall are the means by which he can make himself rise. He can pit one emotion against another and the stronger will not merely win, but will win over, the weaker. And it is in the nature of the emotions not to have only one

satisfying object, but to be able to derive satisfaction from almost any object whatsoever. The most spiritual forms of human love have the same emotional foundations as the most bestial forms of human lust.

To learn how to become master of one's emotions, to learn how to free oneself from their bondage, is, therefore, the primary condition of sustained and rational happiness. The key to virtue, Spinoza independently agreed with Socrates, is knowledge of oneself. Only when we understand ourselves can we control our emotions. And only when we have our emotions under control are we able consistently to direct our activity towards a definite, rational goal. Our activity then follows from our own nature, and not from the nature of external things which arouse our emotions and determine their strength. And, as already noticed, to be the necessary cause of our own activity is, according to Spinoza, to be free.

It is impossible, of course, for man ever to be the sole cause of his activity. To be such, he would have to be an entirely independent being—an absolute power—something he can never be. No matter how eloquently misguided enthusiasts extol the powerful merits of man's "free-will" it will always be true that man's emotions, sensations and ideas change very significantly with the organic changes that occur in his body. The emotions, sensations and ideas of a child differ from those of a man, and those of a man in maturity differ from those of a man decrepit with old age. And these and similar changes are quite beyond the control of man.

However, without denying man's intimate dependence upon Nature, it is still possible to distinguish between those activities which follow, in an important degree, from a man's individual nature—whatever it may happen to be at the time—and those activities which follow only from his own nature in conjunction with the nature of other things. The movement of my pen on paper would be impossible without the general order of Nature which allows such phenomena as motion, pen and paper, to exist. Nevertheless, I can profitably distinguish between the movement of my pen on paper and the movement of my body through stellar space. The former movement follows, in an important sense, from my own peculiar constitution; the latter, from the constitution of the stellar system. Likewise, but more significantly for human welfare, one can distinguish broadly between the activities and the passivities of the mind; between man as an agent, a doer—man's intellect; and man as a patient, a sufferer—man's passions. In this creative age such distinction should be singularly easy to draw. In moral terminology one can distinguish between man as free and man as enslaved.

Since man can never be the sole cause of his activity, he can never be wholly free. The range of human power is extremely limited, and Spinoza is ever careful to point that out. Spinoza is no incurable optimist, no Leibnizian Pangloss who believes this is, for man, the best of all possible worlds. To be humanly idealistic it is by no means necessary to be super-humanly utopian. But neither is Spinoza a shallow Schopenhauerian pessimist. Spinoza's realistic appraisal of man's worldly estate is entirely free from all romantic despair. This world is no more the worst than it is the best of all possible worlds for man. Although man cannot completely alter his evil estate, he can better it. And the wisdom of philosophy consists in recognizing this fact and discovering what ways and means there are for bringing such betterment about.

This Spinoza has in mind throughout the devious courses of his philosophy. It is present to him when he delineates the character of Nature or God, when he outlines the nature of the mind and its emotions, no less than when he specifically addresses himself to the task of describing the way to the highest blessedness of man. Indeed, so intent is Spinoza upon reaching his ethical goal, and making all his doctrines contributory to it, he purposely omits to treat of many philosophical problems because they are, though interesting in themselves, of too little value for the conduct of man's life. His philosophical system, as a result, is in many respects merely sketched in massive outline.

VII

The dominant ethics of Christian civilization has made a special point of disregarding the intimate connection that exists between human nature and rational conduct. Morality has been identified, not with living a life according to a rational plan and an adequate conception of an ideal form of human existence, but with a strained attempt to live in accordance with an inherited system of coercive social habits. Of this morality, the Puritan is the popular type. Only in quite recent years has some advance been made back to the sane naturalistic conception of morals which is found in the Greeks and also in Spinoza.

It is a fundamental point with Spinoza that the ceremonial law, as he puts it in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, can at best secure man wealth and social position. Man's highest blessedness can be secured by the divine law of Nature alone. Here^[liii] Spinoza and Rousseau are at one. It was relevant to Spinoza's purpose to treat only of religious ceremonial law; but his conclusions apply with equal force and relevancy to social and political ceremonial law as well. Spinoza's distinction between ceremonial and divine law is peculiarly significant and illuminating when applied to marriage. For to-day in marriage, if anywhere, is it glaringly evident that the legal or religious or social ceremonial law can at best secure man or woman wealth and social position. Happiness or blessedness lie altogether beyond its powerful reach. Marriage is sanctified and made blessed not by the ceremonial law of priest or city clerk but by the divine law of love. Natural love, or love free from all ceremonial coercions, is not merely not a questionable source of marital happiness: it is the only source. The ceremonial law, the legal or religious marriage custom, has nothing whatsoever to do with human happiness. If by "free" love is meant love free from all legal, social and religious ceremonial restraints, then free love is, according to Spinoza, the only basis of rational marriage.

No man ever treasured the joys of the spirit more than did Spinoza; but he did not because of that nourish a savage antagonism against the body. The very bases of his philosophy of the mind saved him from any such disastrous folly. What Havelock Ellis says "We know at last" Spinoza knew all the time—"that it must be among our chief ethical rules to see that we build the lofty structure of human society on the sure and simple foundations of man's organism." It is because Spinoza knew this so thoroughly and remembered it so well that he devotes so much of his attention to the nature of the human mind and the human emotions in a treatise on ethics.

Mind and body are not intrinsically alien or inimical to one another. They are coöperative expressions of the one reality. The mind is the idea of the body and "in proportion as one body is better adapted than another to do or suffer many things, in the same proportion will the mind, at the same time, be better adapted to perceive many things." Purely psychologically, all that we can ever discover about the regulating influence glands have upon personality can only go to corroborate, not to improve this general position. And morally, the implications are equally far-reaching and profound.

The virtue of the mind is not to despise or reject but to understand and transform. And it clearly must be more excellent for the mind to know both itself and the body than it is for the mind to know itself alone. For natural science is the result when the mind organizes into a system what are, in their own nature, simply apprehensions of bodily existences; and art is the result when the mind transfuses with an ideal quality of its own what are, in their own nature, simply apprehensions of bodily excellences of form or motion, color or sound. Matter is, in its nature, no more hostile to spirit than body is alien to mind. Paradise is not a non- or super-physical realm; it is a physical realm made harmonious with the ideality of the soul. Spirit is an appreciation, a transmutation of matter. For the lover, the physical embrace is a spiritual revelation.

The fundamental metaphysical law from which Spinoza's ethical system flows is that everything endeavors to persist in its own being. This law is the metaphysical equivalent of the first law of motion in physics which is itself the equivalent of the law of identity in logic. By his law Spinoza does not mean anything which anticipates the nineteenth-century doctrine of the competitive struggle for existence. On the contrary, nothing is so clear to Spinoza as the fact that the most efficient way of preserving one's own being is not by competitive but by cooperative activity. Especially is this true of human beings. By his own efforts a solitary man cannot, even after he has been nursed to maturity, maintain himself in a decent manner. Certainly he is unable successfully to resist his foes. But with the aid of his fellows man can develop a highly complex and tolerably stable civilization, all the excellences of which he can enjoy at the comparatively small risk of becoming a victim of its dangers. Social organization is the natural expression of man's fundamental endeavor to preserve himself. A perfect social organization naturally expresses the highest form of human existence—individualism without anarchy and communism without oppression.

Consistent with his primary law of being, Spinoza defines virtue not in terms of negations, inhibitions, deficiencies or restraints; virtue he defines in terms of positive human qualities compendiously called human power. Virtue is power, however, not in the sense of the Renaissance ideal of "manliness" as we glimpse it, for instance, in Benvenuto Cellini; nor is it power in the vulgar sense of dominion which seems to be the confused ideal of some ultra-contemporaries; virtue is power in the sense of the Greek ideal that virtue is human excellence. It was therefore very natural for Nietzsche who consciously went back to the Greeks to hail Spinoza as his only philosophical forerunner, the only philosopher who dwelt with him on the highest mountain-tops, perilous only for those who are born for the base valleys of life. And it was equally natural for Nietzsche to fail to see the important differences between his own violent and turbid thinking and the sure and disciplined thinking of Spinoza—on those very points upon which Nietzsche thought they agreed.

Perfection and imperfection are, in Spinoza's thought, identical with the real and the unreal. The perfect is the completed, the perfected; the imperfect, the uncompleted, the unperfected. These terms have, in their first intention, no specifically ethical significance. Nature is perfect, that is, absolutely real or completed; but in no intelligible sense is Nature ethically good. However, it is possible to convert non-ethical into ethical terms. We can do this by designating, for example, a certain type of character as the "perfect" type. If we reach that type we are perfect or supremely "good"; insofar as we fall short of it, we are imperfect, or "bad."

Just what constitutes human excellence is determined in each case by the specific nature and relations of the individual involved. The excellence of a child is not that of a man; and the excellence of a free man differs from that of a slave. For the parent, the perfect child is docile, beautiful and full of promise; for the ruler, the perfect man is industrious, respectful of law and order, eager to pay taxes and go to war; for the free man, the perfect man is a rational being, living a harmonious life in knowledge and love of himself, his neighbor and God. Moreover, within any one class the excellences vary in harmony with the variations in the individuals. There is no excellence in general.

But because ethical standards are quite human and vary, they do not lack, therefore, all validity. They are within their range of applicability, absolute, even though they are, in a more comprehensive universe, relative. A just appreciation of the relative nature, but absolute value of specific ethical judgments, is above all things vitally necessary in ethics. Such appreciation saves the ethicist from the pernicious fallacy of erecting personal preferences into universal laws; and it also saves him from falling into the ethical abyss where all things are of equal value because all things are equally vain.

Ethical tolerance is different from ethical sentimentality. Every one has the sovereign natural right to cherish the excellence in harmony with his character. But the equality extends no further. A comprehensive estimate of the powers of the mind can be made and they can be arranged in a series of increasing value. No arrangement can ever be absolutely final and authoritative, for what one free man considers the highest perfection of human life, another will consider to be only of secondary importance. Still, all free men will agree that certain powers of the mind are superior to others. But superiority is not rationally endowed with legislative power over others. The free man is superior to the slave, but he has, because of that, no rational right to dominate him; neither is it his office to revile or despise him; the slave was given his nature, he did not ask for it.

But if it is not the office of the free man to dominate or revile the slave still less is it the divinely appointed office of the slave to rule and revile the free man—universal democratic prejudices notwithstanding. And in support of the independent, and in case of contest, superior right of the free man we have the very highest authority for those who do not trust themselves to be guided by reason. God Himself has pronounced upon this tremendous issue. And not in mere words, but by unmistakable deeds. When Lucifer, the first absolute democrat or equalitarian, the first one to maintain that no one was better than he was, raised his impious standard, God assembled all His faithful hosts together and hurled Lucifer out of Heaven into Hell. And justly so. For Lucifer had, by his foul, sacrilegious doctrine and action, revealed himself to be the Prince of Darkness not the Prince of Light. To our untold and everlasting misery the Prince of Darkness who failed to ensnare the majority of angels did succeed in ensnaring the majority of mankind. So irredeemably so, even the sweetly and tenderly lyrical Prince of Peace had to be sent to us bearing a ghastly sword.

Reason is not, according to Spinoza, a constitutive power in man's life; it is a regulative principle. Spinoza is, in the traditional usage of the term, anything but a rationalist in his ethics. Only if rationalism consists in being unflinchingly reasonable is Spinoza an avowed and thorough-going rationalist. Reason has, for Spinoza, no transcendental status or power, and it plays no dictatorial rôle. Reason, for him, is essentially an organizing not a legislative power in man's life. To take a phrase from Professor Dewey, reason, for Spinoza, is reconstructive not constitutive. The power of the intellect is not some underived, original, independent power which can impose or, better, superimpose its categorical imperatives upon human conduct. The power of the intellect is wholly derivative, dependent upon the nature of the things that it understands.

Reason gives man the power and insight to organize his life on the basis of his knowledge, to chose an end harmonious with his nature, what is for his best advantage—the basis of all virtue—and to select and control the means by which it can be attained. For the happy governance of our lives the object we must chiefly understand is ourselves. Because—in Matthew Arnold's line—"the aids to noble life are all within." When we become creatures conscious of our natural endowment we cease to be blind instruments of our natures and become rational, intelligent agents. For intelligence, in the fundamental sense of the word, consists in knowing what we are and understanding what we can do.

A man who governs his life according to the dictates of reason tries, insofar as possible, to harmonize his conflicting interests. He balances, impartially, future with present goods, and he bases his decision upon the broad foundation of all his needs. He does not madly satisfy or repress one passion at the expense of the rest of his nature. He satisfies a maximum rather than a minimum of his desires, evaluating them not merely by numerical strength but by quality and duration. It is only stupid and pernicious confusion that makes man's moral problem consist in his discovering instead of a good "relative" to his nature, an "absolute" good, good for no

nature at all. Man's real moral problem is to secure a permanent good instead of a transitory good; a more inclusive good instead of a more restricted good; a higher good instead of a lower good. Morally, it matters nothing whether an intellectual good is "absolute" or whether it is only "relative" to man's mind and his power of comprehension. But it matters everything, morally, whether an intellectual good is more or less permanent, more or less inclusive, more or less valuable than a sensory good. This is the real moral problem man is faced with. And this is the moral problem Spinoza considers and solves.

Everybody knows what is Spinoza's solution. One permanent intellectual good is, according to him, of more importance and value in the life of man than countless transitory sensory pleasures. The object most permanent in character and greatest in value is Nature or God. The highest virtue of the mind, therefore, the highest blessedness of man, consists in the intellectual love of Nature or God. Thus Spinoza passes from ethics to religion, which in his thought almost imperceptibly blend together.

VIII

The beginning and the end, as familiar wisdom has long since propounded, are the same. The ultimate origin of man is God, and the final end, the blessed[lxi] crown of life, is to return to God in fullest knowledge and love. The philosopher who was during his lifetime and for over a century after his death constantly execrated for being an atheist (he occasionally still is by some hardy fools) made God a more integral part of his system than did any one else in the whole history of philosophy. Spinoza did not do occasional reverence to God; he did not, in lightly passing, perfunctorily bow to Him; God is the veritable beginning and end of all his thought.

The intellectual love of God does not demand as basis a knowledge of the cosmic concatenation of things. Omniscience alone could satisfy such a demand. The intellectual love of Nature or God depends solely upon a knowledge of the order of Nature, upon a knowledge of the infinite and eternal essence of God. And such knowledge is within the limits of our reach.

We can apprehend the eternal essence of God because the temporality of our thought is accidental to its meaning. It is the nature of reason to see things under the form of eternity. And we can apprehend the infinite essence of God or Nature because every particular finite thing is a determinate expression of the infinite. The law of causality requires that there be an essential identity of nature between cause and effect; otherwise it would follow that something can be produced from nothing. Since cause and effect belong to the same realm of existence, to the same attribute of Nature, whenever we apprehend the essence of a particular thing, we necessarily apprehend the infinite essence of that attribute of Nature. For the infinite, with Spinoza, is not so much an extent as a quality of being. Thus from the comprehension of any particular thing, we can pass to a comprehension of the infinite and eternal.

This is most commonly understood, curiously enough, not in religion, but in art. The ecstatic power of beauty makes the soul lose all sense of time and location. And in the specific object the soul sees an infinite meaning. Indeed, one can almost say that the more specific or limited the artistic object, the more clearly is the absolute or infinite meaning portrayed and discerned. A sonnet is oftener than not more expressive than a long poem; the *Red Badge of Courage* reveals more impressively than does the *Dynasts* the absolute essential horror of war. There are present, apparently, in the more pronounced mystical visions, characteristics similar to those of significant esthetic apprehensions. These visions are extremely rare and fleeting. But then we can be at the highest peaks only seldom and for a short while. But in a moment we see eternity, and in the finite, the infinite. It is for this reason Spinoza says the more we understand particular things the more do we understand God.

The great religious significance of Spinoza's doctrine of the intellectual love of God is that it establishes religion upon knowledge and not upon ignorance. The virtue of the mind is clearly and distinctly to understand, not ignorantly to believe. There is no conflict between science and religion; religion is based upon science. There is a conflict only between science and superstition. Mysteries, unknown and unknowable powers, miracles, magical rites and prayerful incantations are instruments not of religion but of superstition which has its origin in ignorant and ignominious fear.

The free man does not fear and he is not consumed by fear's boundless conceit. He has no apprehensive conscience which unceasingly interprets all unusual or untoward events as being deliberate signs of a god's impending wrath. The free man knows that man is, cosmically considered, impressively insignificant. Human loves and hatreds, human joys and sorrows are, in the face of the eternal and infinite, the littlest of little things. Human nature is only an infinitely small part of absolutely infinite Nature; human life only a very tiny expression of infinite life. Inordinate conceit alone could conceive Nature to have been made designedly either for our pleasure or our discomfort. The stars were not hung in the heavens so that we may steer our petty courses across the seas; nor were the sun and moon put in their places so that we may have the day in which to waste ourselves in futile labors and the night to spend in ignorant sleep. Even if there were a cosmic drama—which there is not—man is too trivial to play in it a leading rôle. The free man knows all this; but his heart is tempered and strong. He can contemplate his place in the universe without bitterness and without fear. For the free man's love, as his worship, flows from his knowledge of God.

IX

Spinoza is unsparing in his criticisms of the superstitions which are in, and which have grown up around, the Bible. All Spinoza's major conclusions have been [lxiv] embodied directly or indirectly in what is now known as "the higher criticism" of the Bible, which is the basis of the Modernist movement. It was Spinoza who established the fact that the Pentateuch is not, as it is reputed to be, the work of Moses. It was Spinoza, also, who first convincingly showed that other of the Scriptural documents were compiled by various unacknowledged scribes; not by the authors canonized by orthodoxy, Jewish or Gentile. The wealth of philological and historical material at the disposal of the contemporary Biblical investigator is incomparably richer than it was at Spinoza's time. But modern scholarship has only added more material—only extended in breadth Spinoza's modest researches. In depth, nothing new has been achieved. The principles of investigation and interpretation, and the general results Spinoza arrived at have not been improved upon in the least, nor is it at all likely that they ever will. Spinoza founded himself upon bed-rock.

Spinoza's aim in revealing the defectiveness of the Bible was not theological but philosophical. Orthodox Biblical conceptions had in his day, as they still have to a certain extent in ours, a peculiarly sanctified power, because they were institutionalized and made the basis of an authoritative system of conduct. The misbegotten doctrines therefore could not be questioned with impunity, for a criticism of the doctrines on intellectual grounds was invariably construed as an attack upon the vested customs. The misfortunes of history made dissent from palpable absurdities capital heresy. Social and religious bigotry burned scientific men with political ardor.

However, although Spinoza suffered in his own person from religious persecution, he never for one moment held as did, for example, Voltaire, that the Church is the wily and unregenerate instrument of vicious priests. On the contrary, Spinoza was quite sure that many of the clergy

were among the noblest of men, and that the Church was in large measure a very salutary institution for the masses who cannot learn to govern themselves by force of mind. But Spinoza was unalterably opposed to any encroachment of Church authority upon the just liberties of men. Especially did he object to the Church extending its prohibitive power over men's thinking. It is the business of the Church to inculcate "obedience" in the masses; not to dictate to philosophers what is the truth. The fundamental purpose of Spinoza's attack upon the Bible is to free philosophy from theology; not to destroy the Church but to disestablish it.

Many readers of Spinoza conclude that because Spinoza tolerated Church authority in matters of public morality he therefore either did not in his own thought thoroughly adhere to his principles or else he was excessively cautious, even timid, and did not fully or consistently express his mind. No one would deny that there is some accommodation in Spinoza's language. He certainly followed the practical wisdom of the thinkers of his day. Even so, however, Spinoza was by no means as cautious as was Descartes. Anyway, accommodation does not fully account for Spinoza's attitude on this question; in fact, it does not account for any significant feature of it.

Spinoza never believed a sound metaphysics was, for the masses, the indispensable basis of a good moral life. The multitude, he was firmly convinced, are controlled by their passions and desires, not by knowledge and reason. The coercive law of the State and Nature, not philosophy, keep them living within the bounds necessary for social order and human well-being. Far from it being necessary to tell the masses only the truth Spinoza believed, as did Plato before him, that it may even be necessary in order to rule the masses successfully in the ways of wisdom and virtue to deceive them to a greater or lesser extent. Such deception is, as a political expediency, morally justified, for the rulers would be lying in the interests of virtue and truth.

Spinoza did not suffer from the fond contemporary delusion that the salvation of mankind will come about when philosophers become like all other people. He knew, as Plato did, that the day of ultimate, universal happiness will dawn rather when all other people become like philosophers. In the meantime, it is the height of moral and political folly to act as if that day had arrived or else could be ushered in by morning. Spinoza had nothing but contempt for facile-tongued, feather-brained Utopians. He loved humanity too sincerely to mislead humanity or himself that way. And so we find in Spinoza's *Ethics* as in his *Tractatus* two systems of morals—one for the many who are called, and one for the few who are chosen. In the *Tractatus*, the religion of the many is summarily called "obedience"; in the *Ethics* it is more fully shown to consist of utilitarianism in the conduct of our affairs, high-mindedness towards our fellows, and piety towards Nature or God. To this is added, as the rare[*lxvii*] religion of the few, what is designated in both treatises alike as the intellectual love of Nature or God.

X

Spinoza's religion is as naturalistic as his ethics. By making God and Nature equivalent terms Spinoza was not merely resorting to equivocation to escape the penalty of his views. The identification of God and Nature fully embodies Spinoza's doctrine that there is no supernatural realm; and therefore if man is to have a God at all, Nature must be that God. To contend, as so many do, that "true religion" must be based upon the existence of a supernatural realm, no matter whether or not such a realm exists, is as absurd as to contend that "true morality" must be based upon man's "free-will" no matter whether or not man has "free-will." Spinoza's system has been called pantheistic. But it is pantheistic only in the sense that whatever man considers Godlike must be found in Nature, for no other realm exists, and there are no gods.

But the question is always raised, how is it possible to love a Being indifferent to our human

miseries and blind to our hopes? How is even an intellectual love of such a Being possible? Man, as his religions show, wants God to be a father, a protector, One who cherishes man's desires and cares for his wants. The least anthropomorphic of religions wants God to be the depository of abstract human ideals. But Spinoza's God is not even as human as this. Nature does not constitute the ideal type for man.

Religion is, it is true, man's search for comfort and security in an alien and hostile world. The simple demand of the human heart is to be recognized and to be loved. Love is the magic touch that transforms all that is barren and cold into all that is rich and warm and fruitful. But man is neither loved nor recognized by the immensities of the universe. And in face of the illimitable stretches of time and space even the stoutest heart involuntarily quakes. We cannot consider the vast power of the universe without feeling crushed and becoming despondent. And ignorant man cannot see in the finite things about him the full expression of the infinite beyond. He cannot derive any moral strength or comfort from the world about him because he conceives that world to be an implacable instrument of a god's uncertain, inexplicable will. He therefore cosmically projects, in a frenzy of despair, his crying human demand. And out of the wastes of space there arises for him a personal God.

Anthropomorphic religions reveal man at his weakest, not at his best. Man's true grandeur is shown when he transcends by his own power of mind his insistent human desires. He can then stand free before the Almighty. He may tremble, but he is not afraid. For his strength of soul is grounded not in the external world but in his own ideal. If we are born under a lucky star, and are fortunate and happy lovers of the ideal, the ecstasy of the mystic's beatific vision is ours. But even if we are born under an unlucky star, and are misfortunate and unhappy lovers of the ideal, we still have the ideal to which we can hold fast and save ourselves from being shattered in our despairs, from dying in spirit, which is far more terrible than any death in the body could possibly be. We have the ideal to give us the strength, if we are lovers of God, to go to the cross with Jesus; or, if we are lovers of Virtue, to drink the hemlock with Socrates.

The intellectual love of God is a devotion purged of all fear, of all vain regrets and even vainer hopes. The wild and angry emotions of sorrow and pain leave the strong and noble heart of man like the tidal waves leave the scattered rocks of the shore. As the rocks, when the waves return to their depths, smile securely in the glistening sun in the sky, so does the brave, free heart of man, when the passionate deluge is spent, smile serenely in the face of God. The free man is born neither to weep nor to laugh but to view with calm and steadfast mind the eternal nature of things.

To know the eternal is the immortality we enjoy. But to know the eternal we must forget about ourselves. We must cease to be consumed by a cancerous anxiety to endure in time and be permanent in space. In the order of Nature our own particular lives are of no especial importance. And unless we recognize this, we are necessarily doomed to a miserable fate. We must recognize that our mere selves can never give us ultimate fulfillment or blessedness of soul. Only by losing ourselves in Nature or God can we escape the wretchedness of finitude and find the final completion and salvation of our lives. This, the free man understands. He knows how insignificant he is in the order of Nature. But he also knows that if only he can lose himself in Nature or God then, in his own insignificant particularity, the eternal and infinite order of Nature can be displayed. For in the finite is the infinite expressed, and in the temporal, the eternal.

It is this knowledge that makes man free, that breaks the finite fetters from his soul enabling him to embrace the infinite and to possess eternity. Once man is reconciled to the petty worth of his own person, he assumes some of the majestic worth of the universe. And the austere sublimity of soul that inscribes on the grave of the beloved *God is Love*, inscribes, when it is

chastened and purified by understanding, on the grave of all that is merely human *Nature is Great*. Religion is the joy and peace and strength that is all understanding.

Joseph Ratner, ed. *The Philosophy of Spinoza*. Tudor Publishing Company, 1926.

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