Some Incoherencies in Spinozism (II.)

A. E. Taylor

Mind, New Series, Vol. 46, No. 183. (Jul., 1937), pp. 281-301.

Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0026-4423%28193707%292%3A46%3A183%3C281%3ASIIS%28%3E2.0.CO%3B2-8

Mind is currently published by Oxford University Press.

VOL. XLVI. NO. 183.] [JULY, 1937.

MIND

A QUARTERLY REVIEW

OF

PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

I.—SOME INCOHERENCIES IN SPINOZISM (II.).

BY A. E. TAYLOR.

HITHERTO I have in effect been arguing that Spinozism can produce no intelligible theory of natural knowledge, because by ignoring the *concipient*, it has made its "mind" into one which may be called a theatre of "psychical occurrences," but really *knows* nothing. I want now to contend that the system, if consistent, is precluded from having any genuinely ethical doctrine at all by its proposed exclusion of the notion of moral value. The exclusion is explicitly accomplished in the famous *Preface* to Pt. III., where Spinoza compliments himself on his superiority to the common run of moralists, who are accustomed to praise or condemn human "affects" and human actions, and announces his intention to consider the subject-matter as indifferently as though it were that of geometry, "lines, planes, solids". The words might be harmless if their purpose were merely to censure the pulpit-eloquence into which the treatment of ethics may degenerate in the hands of third-rate writers. But Spinoza means a great deal more than this. The "prejudice" from which he proposes to show himself free is, as he candidly admits, that of believing in any objectively valid standard of values at all (III. 39 schol.), and the "geometrical" treatment of human passions and the acts to which they prompt is intended

to mean a merely naturalistic psychological account of the way in which the various " passions " are generated and the kind of acts to which they lead. The declaration of the *Preface* prepares us for the subsequent enunciation of the proposition that " we do not desire a thing because it is good; it is good because we desire it," *i.e.*, *good* is only a name for whatever is in fact desired by the person using the word.

It ought to be obvious that on such an assumption neither a moral code nor a philosophy of morals is possible. Both are possible only on the presupposition that it is possible to pronounce on the *worth* of different human passions and desires by reference to a standard independent of the passions and desires to which it is applied, just as Mill's insistence on a difference of *worth* among pleasures was only possible to Mill because in his heart he did not believe, as his exaggerated reverence for Bentham and his own father led him to imagine he believed, that pleasurableness and goodness are the same thing. I am not here denying that the great Greek tradition, according to which all of us, at the bottom of our hearts, have an inextinguishable desire for the 'true good', is sound; in fact I am prepared to maintain the view myself, with the necessary explanations. But if we are to hold such a view, we must also be prepared to say that most men do not know what it is that they are really desiring, that the things they spend their lives in pursuing prove to be really *not* what they desired. For what they pursue is, to speak with Aristotle, the 'apparent good', and the 'apparent good' and the good are commonly different things. Hence it would be in principle impossible to Plato or Aristotle, as much as it would be to a 'deontologist' like Kant, to grant that the good is not pursued because it is good, but is good because it is desired, or that 'this is good' *means* that this is being actually pursued. And the much admired proposal to treat moral actions exactly as though they were geometrical figures is really ridiculous. It is to ignore their specific character as *moral*. To construct a morality from which the distinctions of the objectively good and evil, right and wrong, are absent, is like proposing to construct a geometry superior to the 'vulgar prejudice' that there is a distinction between straight and curved.

This is really the central point at issue in Spinoza's correspondence with William Blyenbergh, and it is not to the credit of the exponents of Spinozism that it should have been left to Prof. Guzzo to point out that, though the worthy merchant was, as he said, a tyro in metaphysics, his main ethical contention is absolutely sound. When we divest the debate between the

correspondents of terminology borrowed from a now obsolete Calvinistic theology, the question is simply this. Spinoza himself, let us say, is what we commonly call a morally good man, Nero or Cesare Borgia a very bad one. But is there any real distinction between these men which corresponds to the verbal distinction we have just drawn ? Clearly not, if we are to stand by the principles laid down in the *Preface* to *Pt.* III. Spinoza, Nero, Borgia, each has his characteristic individual *natura*, and can have no other, and the life of each of them is a *conatus* to preserve this *natura* and assert it against opposition. Their *naturae* are different, no doubt, but only as the curvature of one circle is different from that of another circle of different radius ; or perhaps, in view of the inconsistencies of human action, it would be better to say, as the curvatures of one ellipse are from those of another of different eccentricity. In this there is no more ground for asserting the *moral* superiority of one of the three men to another than there would be for discriminating between the moral worth of one circle or ellipse and that of another. It is true, no doubt, that *I* might find the existence of Spinoza in the circle of my associates of high advantage to me, and that of Nero or Borgia a menace or a nuisance. But this is a purely extrinsic denomination, and, in point of fact, if Nero is a nuisance to me, to another man he might be a convenience, and Spinoza the nuisance.[1] The accidental circumstance that I find Nero or Borgia the nuisance is assuredly not what I mean, truly or falsely, to assert when I call them bad men.

Yet it is all the difference Spinoza can allow to be real, and for that reason he has to explain in so many words that he regards the distinctively ethical notions of *merit* and *demerit* as baseless, and elsewhere to justify the punishment of criminals as being exactly on a par with the shooting of a rabid dog or the killing of a venomous snake. In the matter of the administration of criminal justice *his* morality will literally ' treat a man like a dog ', a procedure which has always been held to be morally particularly objectionable. May we not retort on this that no one who does not understand that even a murderer is a man to whom we have obligations, and not a dangerous animal, should pretend to have a *moral* theory ? [2]

[1] Nero was an advantage to Poppaea ; she would probably have found the company of Spinoza a nuisance.

[2] In the correspondence with Blyenbergh Spinoza ends by fairly involving himself in a formal contradiction. In *Ep.* 19 he had laid it down that, though the *improbi* are fulfilling the ' will of God ' by their misdeeds no less than the *probi* by right action, the difference remains that the *improbi* are the less " perfect ". *I.e.*, the world is really and objectively

The point comes out with particular distinctness in the final exchanges between the disputants. Blyenbergh had asked, 'why, on your principles, should you not commit the actions of a Nero'? and had received the answer (*Ep.*, 21) 'because they do not agree with my particular nature, exactly as I abstain from certain dishes becauses they do not agree with my digestion'. To which he replies (*Ep.*, 23) 'a man who *only* abstains from crimes because they disagree with his particular nature cannot plume himself on his virtue'. And the reply is really fully justified. A man who refused an unwholesome dish merely because its flavour had no attraction for him could not, of course, claim to be showing himself properly attentive to dietetics, for, if his *only* reason for abstinence were the one he gives, it follows that if he had happened to like the flavour, he would have eaten the unwholesome thing for all its unwholesomeness. It is equally true that no man shows himself to be particularly virtuous by not committing sins which have no attraction for him; where I *prove* my virtue is in resisting the temptations which *do* appeal to me. A decent man does not want to commit acts of license, for example, but even if he did feel a keen desire to commit them, he would refuse to do so; his reason for avoiding vice is not merely that he in particular has no taste for it, but that it is doing what is *evil* or wrong. There can be no moral philosophy at all if the distinction between right and wrong can be reduced to one between what does in fact attract a certain man, or type of man, and what repels him. From premisses which state mere non-moral 'matters of fact and relations between them', you cannot deduce ethical conclusions. On this point Blyenbergh, crudely as he puts the matter, and influenced as he probably was by the anxiety to provide a hell after death for sinners, was simply right.

a *hierarchized* world. In 21 he goes on to explain the statement by saying that the proper method of estimation in every case is to judge by the *quality of the deed alone* (*ex operis qualitate, non vero expotentia operatoris*). That is, an *act* of justice, as such, has a higher "perfection" than a theft, and *therefore* we pronounce the honest man "more perfect", and so better than the thief. But in the very next letter (*Ep.* 22) this position is reversed, and we are told that if we regard only their *opera*, a just man and a thief are *equally* "perfect". I do not know a better example of the 'circle' which Kant says is unavoidable in a "perfectionist" doctrine of morals. The thief is first declared to be the worse man because his act is the less perfect; then we are told that the thief's act is only to be called "less perfect" because the agent is a worse man.

The argument about the rabid creature (I think it means really rather a *man* suffering from the bite of a rabid dog than the dog itself) will be found in *Ep.* 78 (to Oldenburg).

In fact, Blyenbergh is really putting in a crude way the very objection which Kant was afterwards to urge against 'Perfectionism'. Presumably it is Leibniz rather than Spinoza, whom he seems never to have read, whom Kant actually has in mind here, but his criticism is really more directly effectual against Spinoza. He urges that if Perfectionism is to work, it will have to presuppose the very principle (that of the distinction between right and wrong) which it pretends to explain, and is thus committed to reasoning in a circle.

This is exactly true of Spinoza. He professes to explain our moral distinction between the good act or man and the bad one by reducing it to a difference in degree of *realitas* or *entitas*. (It is not clear to me how such degrees are supposed to be measured, but I presume he, like Descartes, would have said that *A* has more *realitas* than *B* if the number of positive predicates which can be ascribed to *A* is greater than that assignable to *B*.) But how does he know that a morally good man *has* more *realitas* than a morally bad one? In what respect is the 'finite mode' of God which we call the Apostle Paul more *real* than that other 'finite mode' which we call the Emperor Nero? *Plato* might have replied that the one is 'more *like* God' than the other, but to say this would be to fall into the anthropomorphism Spinoza is most anxious to avoid. There can be no likeness, near or remote, between the mode and the infinite substance. If you equivocate on the word *perfect*, and argue that the good man is 'morally more perfect' than the bad, and *therefore* has more *realitas*, you are, as Kant said, presupposing as an independent given the very moral distinction you are pretending to explain.[1]

The best defence of Spinozism in this matter that occurs to me is to say that Spinoza's ideally virtuous man is supposed, as we see from *Pt.* V., to have a wider range of insight than other men into the universal order and concatenation of things, and that thus we might say his *intellectus* is at any rate more like the

[1] Or it would be pertinent to say that Spinoza's reasoning entirely overlooks that ambiguity of the words *nature*, *natural* rightly insisted on by Butler. No doubt, since Spinoza does not, like Nero or Orestes, commit matricide, there is *something* in the 'particular nature' of Spinoza to which matricide is distasteful. But for the moralist the all-important question is what this something is. Is it a mere 'idiosyncrasy', like a disrelish for tobacco or port wine, or is it 'conscience' with its universality and its 'manifest authority'? Is matricide to be avoided because *A B* has no taste for it, or because it is 'contrary to the nature of *man* as a *system*'? Unhappily Spinoza's nominalism—a relic of the decadence of scholasticism—requires him to deny that there *is* any 'nature of man'.

infinitus intellectus Dei than that of any one else.[1] But it seems to me a highly dubitable assumption that a man with an intellect thus capacious might not be morally one of the worst of mankind. I do not see why a great man of science, profoundly alive to the concatenation of cause and effect throughout nature, might not be morally a very bad man indeed, and it is quite certain that a man who has never accustomed himself to think of the 'unity of all nature' and the universal *commercium* between all the constituents of nature, may be morally exceptionally virtuous. It seems to me, therefore, that Spinoza never succeeds in showing any connection between *perfectio* (in the only sense in which he professes to use the word) and *moral* perfection, and that if he had attempted to show the connection (as it is vital to his way of treating moral questions that he should) he would have had to fall into the very fallacy which Kant was exposing. All that really follows from his professed principles is that bad men are psychologically *different* from good men, and that the exceptionally bad man must be, judging from the standpoint of the average human being, what one of Charles Lamb's friends used to call atrocious murderers, 'highly eccentric'. But the *moral* difference between the two types is just the one difference Spinoza (correctly on the principles of his *Preface*) refuses to allow, a difference in *desert*. It is in keeping with this that the very word *duty* or *obligation* hardly occurs anywhere in the *Ethics*, and that, though Spinoza had fine things to say about the virtue of benevolence, he is curiously silent about the great virtue in which the concept of a *debitum* is most markedly prominent, the virtue of *justice*. But I should say that there must clearly be something wrong with the very foundations of a moral theory which can be worked out without reference to justice and obligation.

Even if these criticisms can be completely met, there remains what seems to be an insuperable practical difficulty. How, on Spinoza's theory, does the transition from servitude to passion into the 'freedom' of action at the dictate of reason come about? This is really, at bottom, the same problem we met before when we were considering the transition from *imaginatio* to *ratio*. Antecedently we could suppose the process to take place in either of two ways. A man might undergo an intellectual enlightenment, he might experience a 'day of Damascus', when he beheld for the first time with unclouded eyes the vision of the true good, and this clarification of the intellect might effect a

[1] Though this is a poor 'best', since the *infinitus intellectus* is really only a collective name for all the finite intellects there may happen to be (V. 40 Schol.).

liberation from the passions connected with illusion and inadequate thinking. The man might cease to care for his old false gods, because, in the light of the vision, he had seen them to be false. Or conceivably the change might be wrought from the other side. A man might pass through an emotional crisis, he might awaken to noble emotions to which he had been a stranger, and the purification of emotion might be supposed to have a clarification of the intellect as its effect. It was, as we know, in the first of these ways that Plato and his followers supposed 'conversion' to be effected; the 'eye of the soul' was to be turned in the direction of the good. The memorable 'conversions' in the history of Christianity have been largely of the second kind. My trouble with Spinoza is that he seems to block both routes. For he lays it down expressly that we are of necessity under the dominion of the passions so long as our ideas remain inadequate. We should expect him, then, to teach a doctrine of intellectual conversion, making escape from the passions consequent on the attainment of adequate ideas. But if he is to take that line consistently, he must be prepared to hold that truth, at least truth about the good, as truth, has an inherent attractive power which can master the emotions. Reason must be able to encounter and defeat the passions in its own strength. But (and here again the difficulty seems to have escaped most, if not all, the expositors except Guzzo) it is Spinoza himself who also says that a true and adequate idea has in itself no more hold over our 'passional nature' than a false and inadequate one; it can only prevail if it happens to be associated with a more powerful 'affect' (IV. 7, IV. 14). Thus it seems in the end to be an accident, dependent on those circumstances of our environment which Spinoza tells us are, taken together, so much more powerful than ourselves, whether we ever escape out of our bondage or not, though the object of the whole *Ethics* has been to show us how we may compass our own deliverance.

Its promises, like the unerring prophecies of Tiresias, end in *quidquid dicam aut erit aut non*. If they really inspire hope in the reader, it is because he silently presupposes all the time that truth seen to be true has a compelling power due to its truth; he fancies that illusions, once known for what they are, will lose their grasp on him just because "killing *Truth*" has "glared on them". But this is just what his author maintains will not happen.

Thus the old question "what must I do to be saved?" receives no answer. Or at least it only gets the unsatisfactory answer offered by Leibniz to readers frightened by *his* Pre-

destinationism into asking whether they may not be among the predestined to damnation, 'As you don't know, you may as well make the more agreeable guess that you are among the elect.'

When we turn, however, to the detailed teaching of *Pt.* V. about the road which leads to 'freedom' and life, Spinoza might almost seem to have forgotten the emphatic declarations in *Pt.* IV. upon which we have been remarking. For what are the practical recommendations he sets before us? They are, in effect, that we should use our cool hours in meditating on the inevitable necessity of the law of cause and effect, and the enormous complication of the cause of every event, in virtue of which the contribution of any one particular man or thing to our happiness or misery may be considered infinitesimal. We are, in fact, to remember two maxims, that nothing can possibly occur except precisely as it does occur, and that it takes the whole of the universe to cause any particular effect. Such meditation will, in the end, liberate us from unreasonable passions. For such passions are due to two concurrent delusions. We fancy that the favours or the blows of fortune are dealt out with conscious purpose, that there is 'some one' who is at work to convenience or to spite us in all that befalls us. And also, we wrongly single out some one thing or person which, or who, has been merely contributory, along with all other things or persons, to our ill or good fortune, and make it or him the exclusive object of our gratitude or resentment. The dissipation of these errors may be expected to moderate our transports whether of love or of hate, and to leave us with an equal mind, *in utramque sortem paratos.*

Now all this seems to take it for granted that the thoughts of universal necessity and the thorough-going complication of causes have, after all, only to be steadily entertained as truths, and their very truth will make them victorious over the most violent 'affects', though we had been told in *Pt.* IV. that truth can only win the day when it has a '*stronger* affect' for its ally. I do not see how we can escape recognising a contradiction here, for, on Spinoza's own showing, 'an affect towards an effect which we regard as necessary is *ceteris paribus* not so strong as though the effect were supposed free' (III. 49). At least, then, though the emotional moods evoked by the meditations recommended may, by habitual practice, be made more *usual* with us than the violent passions they are to subdue, they will not be made 'stronger', and it was 'stronger affects' which had been declared in *Pt.* IV. to be necessary if the "passions" are to be mastered. We may fairly say, I think, that if we accept Spinoza's own reasoning, the effect of habitual meditation on the lines

recommended should not be to generate " stronger " rivals to the ' passions ' which he desires to control, but rather to bring about a general deadening and flattening of the emotional life. Perpetual preoccupation with the thought, ' what has happened to me could not have been other than as it is, and no one and nothing in particular has had very much to do with it ' is less likely to give rise to a *summa mentis acquiescentia* which can colourably be called a ' love of God ' than to that dull and hopeless indifferent listlessness which the Middle Ages knew as *acedia* and recognised as a peculiarly ' deadly ' sin. And the literary records of humanity seem to show that where the original ' passive affects ' were really strong, or where they are reinforced by grievous external circumstances, meditation on the inevitable necessity of all that happens cannot be counted on to beget even indifference; it may arouse angry revolt against the whole scheme of things. The author of the *Shropshire Lad* gives every sign of being as convinced as Spinoza of the interconnection and iron necessity of all events, but the thought does not temper his resentful animosity against ' whatever brute or blackguard made the world '. Hardy, in *Tess of the Durbervilles*, constructs a train of events which is inevitably to lead his heroine to the gallows, but the inevitability does not prevent him from shaking his fist in the face of the ' President of the Immortals '; he is so transported by his ' affect ' that he comically enough forgets that it was not God but Thomas Hardy who " made " Tess, and made her expressly for the purpose of getting her hanged.

It is true that Christians *have* been enabled to take the worst as well as the best the world has to bestow with *summa mentis acquiescentia*, but they have been able to do so precisely because of their belief, which Spinoza does not share, that if the course of all things has been predetermined, it has been predetermined for a good, though hidden, purpose by a Creator who is both wise and loving, and therefore there is ground for *gratitude* in all that befalls them. If they overcome the world, it is not in virtue of the mere belief in complete preordination which some of them have in common with Spinoza, but in virtue of what they add to this conviction, their belief that the preordination is purposeful, and that the purpose, when disclosed, will be seen to be good.

No one, I take it, doubts that Spinoza's own contemplation of the order of the universe brought him the serene and solemn joy which he describes; if he had not felt it in himself, he could not write of it as he does. But that the contemplation brought him that joy is only explicable if it included features which are not represented in his professed account of its object, *natura sive*

Deus, and never justified in his metaphysic. Like most of the rest of us, he had a religion which could not be decanted, without spilling, into any set of metaphysical formulæ. If you doubt this, imagine a perfectly possible situation, which has often enough been the actual situation of a British subject. 'Here am I, in prison, aching from the rack, and to-morrow I am to be taken out to be hanged, drawn, and quartered. What I have done to bring this on me, I do not know, but there is the fact; it cannot be altered, and nothing that I, or any one else could ever have done, could have made any difference to it. *Che sarà, sarà*'. What is there here to breed *acquiescentia mentis* in any child of man?

Also, it ought not to be forgotten that, be they good or bad, the directions given us in the *Ethics* for the conduct of our meditations presuppose that very kind of freedom which Spinoza has repeatedly declared to be an illusion of ignorance. It is taken for granted that we can *at will* determine for ourselves what we will meditate upon, in what light we will consider the course of things,—or at least, that we can do so 'in a cool hour'. (In fact the same assumption had been made less obviously in *Pt.* II. in using the very word *dictamen*, with its suggestions of command and self-direction, to describe the deliverances of 'reason'.) But according to the teaching of the earlier parts of the *Ethics* a man has no power over the direction of his thoughts, in any hour, however 'cool'. My present thinking is a 'mode' of God necessarily determined to be there, and to be what it is, by another earlier mode, itself similarly determined by a yet earlier mode, and so on in *indefinitum*. Nowhere in this chain of successive 'ideas' do *I* appear as a being with any power whatever to deflect the succession from its predetermined course. Recommendations to practise meditation, such as Spinoza gives, would have been consistent enough in Descartes, because Descartes believed in a man's power of self-determination; they are out of place in Spinozism, which allows of no such power. The only liberty Spinoza can consistently recognise is a mere matter of fact, the fact that some men are, though most men are not, superior to the 'passions'. But liberty as something which we as yet do not *possess* but may set ourselves to *acquire* by following certain precepts, is a matter not of fact, but of *right* (*ius*); whether it will be translated into actual fact or not depends on our observation or neglect of the precepts, and hence, unless the right is merely illusory, the very giving of the precepts presupposes that a potentiality not yet realised is not a mere nothing, and that the actualisation of *this* possibility of life free from the

tyranny of the passions depends on the *liberum arbitrum* of each of us. We can " make a right use of our presentations ", as the Stoic formula puts it, if we will.

It is, indeed, so manifest that ' free will ' is the *causa essendi* of the moral life and the moral law that no one, in all probability, would ever have disputed the fact but for the unlucky confusion of free will with a supposed ' motiveless choice between motives '. When I choose to do an act simply because I judge it right that it should be done and wrong that it should be left undone, I am not making a *motiveless* choice ; it is the rightness of the act (or, if you prefer to say so, the wrongness of leaving it undone) that is the motive influencing my decision. Unfortunately Spinozism, like all ' naturalistic ' doctrines of morals, cannot consistently admit determination by such a motive. The only determination it can admit is determination of a particular natural fact, or event, by others, which are in turn determined by yet others, and so on *in indefinitum*. And the rightness or wrongness of an act is not such a natural event, either in the series of modes of extension or in that of those of " thought ". In a world which is simply a complicated chain of events, or a number of such chains, and nothing more, there is no room for right and wrong themselves, and therefore, of course, no room for a choice of right simply as right.

That Spinoza himself was alive to this seems to be proved by his assertion that the true antithesis is not between *free* and *necessitated*, but between *free* and *fortuitous* (*Ep.* 56, cf. *Ep.* 58). His purpose is, of course, to make free action one special case of necessitated action, the case in which the necessitation arises not from without, but from the internal constitution of the agent. But the result of drawing the distinction in these terms is that one would have to class together as equally ' free ' acts which are done to gratify an overmastering passion (the very kind of acts from which the precepts of the *Ethics* are meant to deliver us) and acts which are done for the sake of their goodness or rightness. When a man has to say to himself, as the sole justification of his acts, *sit pro ratione voluntas*, he is exhibiting an example of the very thing which Spinoza himself calls *servitus humana ;* when he acts ' from the dictate of reason ' he is exemplifying *libertas*, but equally in both cases he acts *nullo cogente*. Yet morally the two actions are as far asunder as the poles, and this is why I believe that the mere description of man as an *automaton spirituale* will never satisfy any thinker who, like Kant, takes the moral law seriously. Any account of moral freedom which is to be

acceptable to any one who is at once clear-headed and in earnest about morality must somehow involve the recognition of *indetermination ; so far*, it seems to me, Descartes was manifestly in the right.

Where the indeterminist moralist is in danger of going wrong, I should say, is not in frankly treating indetermination as a fact, but in an elementary mistake about the nature of the fact. What is indispensable to ethics is that there should be for each of us a sphere—however hard it may be to specify its precise boundary —of *fully imputable* acts, and that, within that sphere, there should be no complete determination of any act by the series of past acts and past events ; whenever I do an act which is fully imputable to me, it remains undetermined which of the alternatives open to me will be adopted until *I* determine what I will do. My fully imputable actions are not even determined (*ad unum*) by past imputable acts ; they are, in the last resort, determined by me, and I am other than the series of my past acts. But this does not mean that I determine them without a *motive ;* motiveless willing is the merest fiction, the *motive* is the recognition of the act determined upon as ' best ', or as ' obligatory '. The libertarian who knows his business will not attempt to prove that the ' free choice ' has no motive, but he will insist on the radical distinction in character between determination by ' motives ' and the kind of determination by antecedent events, which is what is meant when we talk about ' causation ' in natural science. To say that I now do *A* rather than leave it undone *because* I now judge *A* to be what it is obligatory on me to do presupposes that, however narrowly my choice may be circumscribed as a consequence of the past, there really *is* now an open alternative before me ' to do *A* or to leave *A* undone ' ; which of the two lines of action shall be followed has *not* been settled by my past or by the past of the whole universe ; it is precisely what I have now to settle, and to settle for myself. It is only in the actions of persons that we meet with clear evidence of the reality of such a situation, and, as Kant saw, the only convincing evidence that we meet with it there is just our moral conviction of the *obligatoriness* of morally right action. No philosophy which begins by confusing a personal agent with the series of his acts, or, like Spinoza's, defines his mind as a ' complex idea ', can consistently recognise this evidence, and no such philosophy, therefore, can construct a genuine ethics without deserting its own professed principles, any more than Hobbes could succeed, on his professed principles, in establishing the proposition, which is vital to his whole moral doctrine, that

men absolutely ought 'to perform their covenants'. For that reason it has long seemed to me that the real imperishable service of Kant to philosophy is to be looked for not in the confused and self-contradictory epistemology of the first *Critique*, but in his triumphant reassertion, against all the superficialities of the eighteenth century, of the significance and implications of the idea of moral obligation and his elucidation of the meaning of a good will.

It is said, of course, that so long as we remain at the level of obligation we are still concerned only with *mere* morality, and that the truly religious man has transcended all such *mere* morality. He has substituted the higher motive of love for that of cold duty. Now I have no quarrel with the view that in a worthy religion morality is transfigured, and, if you like to say so, transcended. But to transfigure morality is one thing, to ignore it quite another, and too much of the modern 'idealism' which draws deeply upon at any rate *Pt.* V. of Spinoza's *Ethics* seems to me to be merely ignoring morality when it supposes itself to have transcended it. It supposes itself to have risen above the ethical sphere by disparaging *Moralität* in favour of something which is called *Sittlichkeit*, but proves on examination to be no more than the apotheosis of the supreme Antichrist, the 'totalitarian State'. 'Free conscience', because not infallible, is vilified in the interests of the conscienceless will of a dictator or group of dictators, and thus we are left with an immoral 'morality' and an 'idolatrous' religion.

Spinoza was himself protected from excess of this kind by his personal sincere adherence to the principles of a free constitution; *he* was no worshipper of Napoleons. But one can see the moral mischief beginning even in him when he tells us, for example, in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* [1] that though forgiveness of injuries would be right in a state of nature, in civil society it becomes a 'pious' act to prosecute any one who has 'taken my cloak' even to death, if the State in which I live has provided 'hanging laws' for the purpose. The State is here beginning to usurp the place of common humanity, and I could wish that the philosopher could have profited by the indignant language in which Cromwell, in his own life-time, remonstrated with his Parliament on the barbarity of the contemporary laws of England. It is worse still that, as we all know,

[1] C. 19, pium est ei qui mecum contendit, et meam tunicam vult capere, pallium etiam dare; at ubi judicatur hoc reipublicae conservationi perniciosum esse, pium contra est eum in judicium vocare, *tametsi mortis damnandus sit.*

Spinoza should have openly proclaimed that any State may at any moment and without warning of any kind, violate all its most solemn engagements to another purely from consideration of its own convenience (*Tractatus Politicus* c. 3). I would commend the whole chapter of the *Tractatus Politicus* in which this State immoralism is inculcated to the serious meditations of any one who is tempted to hope much for mankind from a religion founded on an 'intellectual love of God' which transcends moral obligation by simply ignoring it.

It is the more important not to lose sight of these deliverances because the stress laid in the *Ethics* on the thought that *homo* (so far as he is led by the 'dictate of reason') is *homini deus* tends to make us forget that the *homines* who behave so handsomely to one another are, after all, only those who happen to be connected by common subjection to the same sovereign, they are *concives*, and according to Spinoza's own explanations, any man who is not my *concivis* is a *hostis* outside the sphere of rights. (*Tractatus Politicus*, c. 3, *homines enim in statu naturali hostes sunt; qui igitur Jus Naturae extra civitatem retinent hostes manent.*)[1] As far as the words go, this is, to be sure, no more than the well-known doctrine of Hobbes. But there is the very real difference that Hobbes obstinately holds to his declaration that it is a 'law of nature' that men perform their covenants, and that even in the 'state of nature', this obligation is binding in *foro interno*, that is, it is a matter of conscience to *endeavour* to fulfil it, though not always binding *in foro externo* (not always to be acted on without qualification), whereas Spinoza simply ignores the obligation in *foro interno*. In practice this would work out to a real difference. Hobbes is only saying that where there is nothing but my own wit and my own arm to protect me, I must judge for myself whether the conduct of another justifies me in going back, for my own self-preservation, on a promise I have made, and this is no more than any moralist might concede in the case *e.g.* of a solitary Briton or Frenchman surrounded by a tribe of savages. A man in such a case must do for himself what he would not be entitled to do in a settled society, judge for himself whether the presumption of *mala fides* in the other party cancels the moral obligation originated by his promise. Spinoza is tacitly legitimating unlimited deceit and bad faith towards any one who is "outside the pale". Hence I cannot but agree with Prof. Laird that Spinoza's *theory*—his practice

[1] *Cf. Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, c. 16. Hostis est quicumque extra civitatem ita vivit ut neque ut confoederatus, neque ut subditus, imperium civitatis agnoscat.

would, no doubt, have been much better—is tainted by a *wickedness* from which Hobbes, as his fellow-countrymen may be glad to recognise, is entirely free. The maxim *nulla fides haeretico praestanda* may conceivably—I do not know—have originally had an innocent meaning; the thought may have been that I should never trust the heretic's word without substantial guarantees, because I can have no assurance that *he* respects the same ultimate "sanctions" as I do. But whatever the original meaning of the maxim, it became one of the most abominable principles of the worst kind of ecclesiastic, and Spinoza has adopted it, in its full extent, and enlarged its scope by making it apply to any man whose political allegiance is other than my own. By an entertaining irony of history the ardent defender of the 'liberty of prophesying', whose *Tractatus Theologico-politicus* was undertaken as an *apologia* for the broadest toleration, has also supplied the 'totalitarian State' with the standing defence of its fanatical particularism.

I do not make these remarks in the interests of a narrowly 'deontological' conception of ethics. I should myself be the first to admit that our sense of obligation itself is due in the end to the drawing power of good recognised for what it is, that it is the ἀγαθόν which is also the δέον. What I am contending for is not any *independence* of the notion of *right* as against that of *good*, but the impossibility of separating the two. It is, I should say, characteristic of the morally good to be obligatory, and any professed account of it which leaves this feature of it out of account is at once discredited.[1] You cannot even reduce the good to the *desirable*, unless you are careful to explain that by the *desirable* you mean not that which *can* be desired, but that which *cannot but be desired* by sane and properly informed minds; the further reduction of *good* to the *actually desired* attempted by Spinoza, as by so many others, is positively preposterous, unless its meaning is completely transformed by the explanation that no man knows, except in the vaguest way, what it is that he actually desires, while most men suppose themselves to be desiring what in reality they do not desire. If it is a fact that all of us desire the good, as Socrates and Plato held, it is no less a fact that many of the things most of us believe ourselves to desire are actually bad. A moral philosophy of the naturalistic type, professing to found itself upon empirical fact, cannot, of course, treat of *unconscious* desires as ascertained facts; at most

[1] *Cf.* M. C. D'Arcy, *Thomas Aquinas*, p. 230. "The good for man must appeal to him as his duty, for the reason that he is possessed of a mind and will which of their natures move in the world of the absolute."

it can only allow itself to speculate about them as an unverifiable imaginative hypothesis. The ascertained and certain "facts" from which it starts must be statements about what men suppose themselves to desire and say that they desire, and if many of these supposed objects of desire are, as they certainly are, evil, such a moral philosophy is bound to go wrong from the outset.

And now what is to be said about the concluding section of the *Ethics*, the famous doctrine of the "intellectual love of God" and the deathlessness which that love confers on a certain 'part' of the mind? In the first place, I fully admit the contention of Martineau that the strict logic of Spinozism requires us to hold that this 'love' (though it is said to be 'part of the infinite intellectual love with which God loves himself', and even spoken of as a 'love of God for man') does not exist in God 'as infinite', but only as 'constituting this or that finite mind', and would thus seem to mean no more than that content or delight which the human thinker derives from his passionless insight into truth, and that its 'eternity' similarly should only mean that while we are engaged in the contemplation of scientific truth, we are lifted into a region in which we forget our concern with our own personal destinies. But it seems to me no less clear that, whether his own logic can justify him or not, Spinoza really meant more than this; he did suppose himself to have found in the doctrine a message of personal hope for himself. This comes out plainly enough in the fact that, though for obvious reasons he makes a point of avoiding the word *immortality*, with its suggestions of survival, in favour of the term *eternity*, he does incidentally allow himself to talk of 'deathlessness', and a 'part of the mind which cannot be *destroyed*', and what is this but to give back with one hand what he has taken away with the other?

And there is an obvious difficulty which Martineau and those who agree with him in accepting a minimising exegesis of the famous propositions never really face. It should be clear that the *eternity* ascribed to a 'part' of the thinker's mind cannot be simply the same thing as the eternity which Spinoza, like Descartes and Leibniz, attributes to scientific truths as such. In the sense in which the Pythagorean theorem can be said to be an *aeterna veritas*, the same thing can be said about any proposition which is really true. True statements about the mind subject to the domination of the passions are no less *aeternae veritates* than true propositions about the mind which has emancipated itself. If all that were meant by the eternity of that 'part of the mind' which has adequate knowledge, were that 'timelessly true'

propositions can be made about it, there would be no reason why this eternity should be treated as a prerogative of one particular part of the mind, or why it should be represented as something only to be won by a life of arduous mental and moral discipline. In any case, then, something more than this must be intended. But what? Martineau has, I think, tried to answer the question, but his solution comes only to this, that the true thought, once conceived, persists indefinitely as a thought in some one's mind, though not necessarily in the mind of any particular person. Thus the mind of Newton may long have ceased to function, but the Binomial Theorem remains, and will remain, a truth entertained by the minds of all mathematicians, and this is all that Spinoza means by his language about deathlessness. He means only that my thoughts, so far as they are true, persist in God as 'constituting the *essentia* of *some* human mind'.[1]

Now I admit at once that, owing to Spinoza's neglect to distinguish the concipient from the *conceptum* and the *conceptio*, there is a standing equivocation in his use of the expression 'the mind of *X*'; he never seems to be clear whether he means the propositions entertained as true by *X*, or the *X* who so entertains them, and this would make it very easy for him to talk of the survival of Newton's thought as though it were the same thing as the survival of the thinker. And yet I feel, and I think reasonably feel, a difficulty in supposing that this is all that he intends. For it simply is not true, and I should have thought that even a thinker of the optimistic 'century of genius' must have known it not to be true, that a true proposition once discovered must persist continuously and indefinitely in being entertained by all posterity. Can Spinoza not have known that a truth may be discovered only to be lost again?

I may take as an illustration the case of some of the propositions about numbers enunciated by Fermat.[2] Some of these, as I am given to understand by mathematical friends, remain to this day undemonstrated, though believed to be true. In other words it is believed that they can be proved, though no one knows what the proof is. Let us suppose, then, what I take it is at least possible, that one of these propositions is true and that Fermat had a proof of it which he never made known. (In the early

[1] *Types of Ethical Theory*,[2] I, 381.

[2] For example, take the proposition that if a, b, c be integers the equation $a^n + b^n = c^n$ is always false if $n > 2$. This is, I understand, believed to be true, but no general proof is known, though Fermat said that he had discovered a *demonstratio mirabilis* (Peano, *Formulario*, II. § 9.4).

years of the nineteenth century, Legendre writes about one such theorem as one which may well be true though no successor of Fermat has ever succeeded in demonstrating it in its complete generality.)[1] If, then, Fermat's theorem is true, his knowledge of that truth did not persist endlessly, though in some other mind than that of Fermat; that 'part of his mind' did not escape the doom of destruction by death.

On the other side, it is not only truths but 'vulgar errors' which enjoy a persistence of this kind. No one has been more emphatic than Spinoza in insisting that *fieri non potest* that men should get rid of 'inadequate ideas'. He certainly regarded the belief in our own freedom, for example, as a mere illusion due to our ignorance, until enlightened by a philosophy like his own, of the causes of our acts. Equally certainly he held that this ignorance with the consequent false belief in our freedom, is an inevitable and incurable consequence of our situation in the universe. The truest thinking of Galileo or Newton is, at best, no more 'eternal' than the vulgar error of believing in freedom. Once more, then, with what right, on Martineau's interpretation, does Spinoza make *eternity* a prerogative in particular of *true* thinking?

He can only do so, as it seems to me, if he intends to ascribe 'indestructibility by death' not simply to the true thought, but to the mind which thinks it. If that is his meaning, we can understand him. For if it is true that he who has a true idea *knows* that he has it, error and prejudice may be as perennial in the human species as truth, and truth may only be discovered by a solitary thinker to be lost again by his successors, but for the thinker who has found a truth, what he has found is henceforth a genuine possession; if he, in some way, persists, and not otherwise, the possession is really a κτῆμα εἰς ἀεί. Such considerations lead me to think that Spinoza really meant to ascribe an eternity which may not be exhausted by, but yet includes, persistence in despite of death to the individual mind,

[1] Legendre, *Théorie des nombres*, 204-206. The theorem specially discussed here is Fermat's proposition that any integer can be represented as the sum of not more than three 'triangular' numbers. Legendre says that while he knows of no proof of this, it may be considered as probably true, because one can from it immediately deduce the known and demonstrable consequence that any integer can be represented as the sum of not more than four squares. But Fermat's language, as quoted by Legendre, shows that *he* believed himself to be able to demonstrate the primary proposition itself. It would be no way out to suggest that the knowledge of such a truth survives in the *infinitus intellectus* Dei; that is, for Spinoza, a 'creature' with no existence apart from that of individual minds.

or rather to that 'part of it' which thinks. (His phraseology, we must remember, comes to him from Maimonides, and Maimonides, in turn, clearly took it from Aristotle's mysterious words in *de Anima III.* about the imperishability of the *intellectus agens*. And whatever Aristotle may have meant by his few broken phrases, there is really nothing in them to suggest that he regarded the *intellectus agens* as detachable from the individual person. He says, indeed, in the *de Generatione Animalium* that it 'comes from outside', but that only means that it is not derived by generation from a man's parents, and is, in fact, just as much a part of the philosophy of Plato as of that of Aristotle.)

But if Spinoza really meant what it seems to me he must have meant, he is breaking away here from the very foundations of his own doctrine. Manifestly he does so when he converts the intellectual love of God into a 'part' of an infinite love of God for Himself. On an interpretation like Martineau's this 'infinite' love can, of course, only 'exist in God' as 'constituting the *essentiae* of particular minds', and will mean simply the summed devotion of countless such minds to truth. But the truth-lover's devotion to truth can hardly be described intelligibly as a devotion to *himself*. The meaning would have to be that I, who am a finite 'mode' of God, love God, not in so far as God is the finite mode which I call myself, but precisely in so far as God is envisaged as the absolute 'substance', as being what I am *not*. And it is of God precisely as *absolute infinitus* that we are told in V. 35 that he *gaudet infinita perfectione*, and that *concomitante idea sui*. *I.e.*, this intellectual love belongs to God not as *natura naturata* but as *natura naturans*, for it is only as *natura naturans* that God is "absolutely" infinite. (Even the *infinitus intellectus Dei*, being a mode of one particular attribute, could only be said to be infinite *in suo genere*.) Thus if Spinoza is to be taken at his word the 'infinite intellectual love of Himself' belongs to God, or should belong to God, as the *author* of nature, though this would not really be strictly consistent with the earlier declarations that the *infinitus intellectus* itself belongs to *natura naturata*, and is a mode 'produced' by God, who Himself *has* not *intellectus*, but merely produces *intellectus* in the 'creatures'. But a God who *has intellectus*, and feels a *gaudium* 'with a concomitant idea of Himself as its cause' is a *personal* God. You really cannot have it both ways. If you are going to admire Spinoza for his account of this intellectual love of God for Himself, you must be prepared to believe in a Deity who has both *intellectus* and *voluntas*. If you are to admire him for his superiority to the 'vulgar prejudice' which attributes understanding and will

to God, you must deny the very existence of the 'intellectual love' *as* Spinoza describes it. For, as I have said, if the phrase means nothing more than that *I* feel a peculiar "thrill" when I know the truth and know that I know it, that "joy" is not accompanied with an 'idea of *myself* as its cause'. I am, according to the theory, 'God as constituting the idea of a particular body', but it is *not* to God as constituting the idea of that body that 'absolute perfection' belongs. (And Spinoza indicates this plainly enough by appealing to his definition of *ens absolute infinitum* for the proof of his proposition.)

Where there is already so utter a failure in consistency, it becomes by comparison a secondary contradiction that the God who loves Himself with an infinite intellectual love has already been declared (V. 17 and Corr.) incapable of feeling pleasure or pain and therefore incapable of loving or hating anything. If it was to escape from making *this* contradiction too glaring that Spinoza avoided using the word *laetitia* in connection with the love of God for Himself, and preferred to speak of *gaudium*, he cannot well be said to have mended matters, for the *definition* propounded of *gaudium* in the appendix to *Pt.* III. (§ 16) had made *gaudium* a subspecies of *laetitia*, and a subspecies particularly hard to attribute to God (whether God be understood in the Theist's sense or in that of *Ethics* I.). *Gaudium* had been said to be '*laetitia* accompanied by the idea of a matter in the past which has fallen out beyond one's hopes'. But be the mind which entertains the idea of God as the absolutely infinite substance whose mind it may, the thought of that substance is not the thought of an unexpected stroke of past good fortune. (It is, to be sure, a very minor fault that by the time Spinoza had reached the end of his book he had forgotten his own definition of *gaudium* given in the middle of it. I only remark on the point because the psychological accuracy of the philosopher has been almost as much over-rated as his supposed logical rigour. Spinoza's empirical psychology is full of good things, but it has its full share of internal discrepancies and distortions of fact, if any one cares to take the trouble to look for them.)

The one point of capital importance in connection with the famous concluding section of the *Ethics* on which I want to insist is simply that somehow the conception of God with which the treatise opened, and to which it adhered faithfully enough down to the middle of *Pt.* V. is wholly transformed when we come to V. 35. If it is mainly on the strength of that proposition and those which follow it that a man admires Spinoza—and I believe that it is just these pages of the *Ethics* which have done most to

foster the attitude of Spinoza-worship—it is not for his eminence as a rigidly logical thinker that he is admiring him, but rather for his refusal to be logical. He is being revered for a personal religious faith which he entertains to the ruin of his whole metaphysical construction. It is just those critics who, like Martineau, will allow Spinoza no 'extra-belief' going beyond what his metaphysical postulates can justify, who revere him least, and I think they are in the right from their own standpoint. In many respects (not in all, for he has his share of the bitternesses of the fanatic) one cannot admire Spinoza's personality more than it deserves. But I am not sure that Spinozism, as a pretended coherent metaphysical doctrine, does not deserve the hardest things which have ever been said about it. After all, when these unfavourable verdicts are translated into strictly philosophical and passionless language, they amount to no more than this, that Spinozism is a metaphysic built up in blind reliance on a misconceived "mathematical method" which starts from 'high abstractions' as its foundations and consequently can never reach anything else in its conclusions. And this, as Tschirnhaus seems to have perceived at the time, is no more than the truth.