



Spinoza

A. Wolf

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SPINOZA

PROFESSOR A. WOLF

I. THE IMPENDING ANNIVERSARY.

FEBRUARY 21ST will mark the two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the death of Spinoza, which occurred on February 21st, 1677. The visitor to the Hague may still see, in the Paviljoensgragt, the small two-storied house in the top rooms of which Spinoza spent the last six years of his short life. A tablet placed under the top windows commemorates the fact. It was in these rooms that Spinoza completed his *Ethica*, which may perhaps be regarded as the greatest masterpiece in the history of Metaphysics. The house is in danger of being pulled down, and the *Spinoza Society* is endeavouring to secure it as a memorial to Spinoza, and a centre of philosophic studies. It is not so long since the house-breakers had their way with the home of Erasmus in Rotterdam. It would be sad indeed if the abode of another of the greatest Humanists were to meet with a like fate. It is to be hoped that the revived interest in Spinoza which we are witnessing now may take the practical form of saving this precious relic, which may well serve to promote the peace and goodwill among men which Spinoza had so much at heart.

During his life-time Spinoza had only published two works, namely, his geometric version of the first two parts of Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* (with an Appendix of Metaphysical Thoughts) and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. The latter appeared anonymously in 1670, and, owing to the aggressive intolerance of the Calvinistic clergy, was prohibited in 1674. This spirit of intolerance made it impracticable for Spinoza to publish anything else, so that his *Ethica* and other works were left in manuscript. Fortunately some of his friends in Amsterdam took



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the matter in hand without delay, and the *Opera Posthuma* were published before the end of the year in which Spinoza died. The clergy were at once on the trail, and already on February 4th, 1678, the *Opera Posthuma* were condemned as "a godless book the like of which did not exist from the beginning of the world till now." About two hundred years later Renan, one of the greatest historians of Christianity, unveiled the Spinoza monument in the Paviljoensgragt. Pointing to the windows of Spinoza's room he remarked: "Maybe it was from there that God was seen nearest."

The Renan incident shows in a nutshell the change that has taken place in intelligent people's estimate of Spinoza. Thanks to the researches of Meinsma, Meyer, Freudenthal, Gebhardt, and others the truth about Spinoza has gradually come through; and the denunciations of Bayle, Leibniz, Simon, and others against Spinoza's alleged atheism can be seen to have been merely a means of diverting suspicion from themselves. We know now that his character was held in high esteem by all those who knew him personally, even by those who did not agree with his views, or did not understand them. For a long time people were in the habit of assuming, on hearsay evidence, that Spinoza was the prince of atheists, and concluded from this that he must have been the prince of hell. All that has changed now; and enlightened Churchmen not only speak respectfully of Spinoza's life and character, but proclaim his merits as the pioneer of modern Bible study,¹ and teach with deep piety some of the very doctrines for which Spinoza was branded as an atheist by his and subsequent generations.² No doubt there still are plenty of ignoramuses and fanatics to whom the very name of Spinoza is odious. But they are negligible exceptions. Among intelligent people Spinoza may now be said to receive his due even when his views are not accepted.

But can it be said that *Spinozism* receives justice even now? Justice is now done to *Spinoza* inasmuch as people no longer allow their unfavourable views of Spinozism to prejudice their views on the life and character of Spinoza. But to do justice to Spinozism something more is required. What is required is to check one's interpretation of the philosophy of Spinoza by reference to his life and character. Biography, as was urged recently in these pages,³ may be of significance in the study of philosophy. It

¹ See, e.g., *History of Old Testament Criticism*, by Archibald Duff, D.D., who describes Spinoza as "the prince of all students of Judaism and Christianity, and indeed of all essential religion" (p. 84).

² E.g., Canon Wilson's *Evolution in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, or Dean Inge's *Personal Idealism and Mysticism*.

³ See *Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. i. pp. 481 ff.

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certainly is so in the case of Spinoza. Spinozism, I venture to suggest, has been misinterpreted more than once even by acute and friendly critics, simply because they left Spinoza out of their reckoning. For example, it is quite a common criticism against the philosophy of Spinoza that it explains everything except the possibility of the existence of a man like Spinoza himself. Such a criticism, it seems to me, stands self-condemned. An interpretation of Spinozism which leaves no room for Spinoza is most probably a *mis*interpretation. And in this respect there is yet much to do to secure justice for Spinozism.

However, Spinozism too will receive justice in due course. There are significant signs of that already. Professor Lloyd Morgan, in his remarkable Gifford Lectures,¹ has recently raised the cry: "Back to Spinoza." And Professor Whitehead's latest book² also proclaims the influence of Spinozistic conceptions. It is well worth noting that those who were chiefly responsible for the revival of interest in Spinoza and his philosophy, at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, were not Professors of Philosophy, but poets—Lessing, Goethe, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Heine. And now it is also not so much the ordinary Professors of Philosophy, but men of science who are also philosophers, who are reviving Spinozism. That is perhaps what might have been expected. The seventeenth century was essentially the golden age of the Spirit of Science. Its great philosophers were men of science as well. This is true of Spinoza as well as of Descartes and Leibniz. He was an optician by profession, and it was in that capacity that he was sought by Hudde, Huygens, Leibniz, and Tschirnhaus. He wrote on the Rainbow and on various chemical problems, and would have written a treatise on Physics, but for his death at the early age of forty-four. Though his actual contributions to science are negligible, yet so far as the *spirit of science* is concerned, or what is called the *scientific frame of mind*, Spinoza may perhaps be regarded as the highest embodiment of it even in that golden age of science. One need only read the theological writings of Boyle and Newton to realize how *thoroughly* scientific in spirit Spinoza was. This may help to account for Spinoza's appeal to philosophic men of science in an age when even the great Newton's supreme scientific achievement is betraying signs of weakness.

It is a grave mistake, I believe, to suppose that the philosophy of Spinoza is a thing of the past, and merely of historical interest. There is still plenty of vitality in it, even if it is not all vital; and the proper study of it has barely begun. The *Critical Philosophy*,

¹ *Life, Mind, and Spirit*, p. 26, etc.

² *Science and the Modern World*, p. 181, etc.

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with its attempt to destroy knowledge in order to make room for faith, and its consequent appeal at once to believers, on the one hand, and to agnostics and sceptics on the other, captured more or less the nineteenth century, and retarded "dogmatic" systems like Spinoza's. But the metaphysical (or rather ontological) craving was not entirely suppressed, and is reasserting itself now more and more. And those who are not excessively prone just to "believe" or to "disbelieve" can still find in the writings of Spinoza one of the most wonderful constructions of hard, honest thinking. But it is hard reading, and the ordinary student, to say nothing of the man of general education who may be interested in Spinoza, cannot be said to be sufficiently provided with the necessary helps to the study of Spinoza. This is particularly true of those who cannot read foreign languages easily. I am not unmindful of the excellent work done by Sir Frederick Pollock, Professor Joachim, and a few others; but much more is needed. Thanks to the enterprise of the University of Heidelberg, where Spinoza was offered the Professorship of Philosophy in 1673, a new and admirable edition of the complete works of Spinoza was published recently, edited by Dr. C. Gebhardt. On the basis of this text I hope to prepare a new English version of the complete works, with introductions and commentaries, so that the English student of Spinoza should be at no disadvantage.¹ When the three-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Spinoza is celebrated in 1932, it may be possible to report satisfactory progress in the study of Spinozism. In the meantime it may be helpful to some readers to have a brief sketch of the life of Spinoza, and an outline of the salient ideas of his philosophy.

II. THE LIFE OF SPINOZA.

Benedict Spinoza was born, in Amsterdam, on November 24th, 1632. His father and grandfather were Portuguese crypto-Jews, that is, the descendants of Jews who had been compelled, by the Inquisition, to embrace Christianity, but remained Jews at heart. When the Netherlands revolted against Spain and the Spanish Inquisition in 1567, and when, in the course of the long struggle that ensued, the seven northern provinces (united by the Union of Utrecht) decreed in 1579 that "every citizen shall remain free in his religion," many crypto-Jews in Spain and Portugal turned their eyes to Holland in the hope of finding refuge there from their common enemy. Accordingly, in 1593, five years after the destruction of the Armada, the first batch of Jewish refugees

¹ The volume containing Spinoza's *Correspondence* will be published some time this year by George Allen & Unwin. Also the *Oldest Biography of Spinoza*.

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arrived in Amsterdam. They were not received with open arms ; their presence was merely connived at. Not till sixty-four years afterwards (1657) were the Jews recognized as citizens. Among these early arrivals were the father and the grandfather of Benedict. They were merchants of some standing, and several times filled the office of Warden in the Synagogue. Benedict was barely six years old when his mother died of consumption, which he inherited from her. There was a Jewish Boys' School in Amsterdam, and Benedict must have attended this for many years. The curriculum was extensive, but entirely Hebrew—the Bible with commentaries, the Talmud with commentaries, and Hebrew versions of the philosophical classics of the Jews (Maimonides, Crescas, etc.). The vernacular in which the Hebrew texts were translated and expounded was Spanish. After school-hours (8 till 11 and 2 till 5) the boys would get private tuition in secular subjects. In this way Spinoza acquired a knowledge not only of Hebrew, but also of Dutch, Spanish, Italian, French, Physics, Mathematics, and Drawing. One of the earliest biographers of Spinoza (Colerus) possessed some ink and charcoal sketches which he had made of his friends, also one of Spinoza himself in the fisherman's outfit of Thomas Aniellos, who headed the Neapolitan revolt against Spain in 1647. About 1652 Spinoza joined the private school of Francis van den Enden, an ardent votary of the classics, and himself something of a poet and dramatist. It was probably through Van den Enden that Spinoza acquired his extensive knowledge of Latin literature, learned some Greek, and got into touch with the then "new philosophy" of Descartes. The natural, non-theological, undogmatic atmosphere of the classics and of Descartes must have come to Spinoza like a refreshing spring breeze after his long confinement in the close, dogmatic atmosphere of his theological studies. It certainly helped to develop more fully some of the sceptical, rationalistic, and heterodox germs which he picked up in the course of his Hebrew studies, from the works of Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Crescas, and others. There was consequently friction with the Synagogue authorities. These feared not only the spread of heresy in the Jewish community, but also the hostility of the Church. Opposition to Old Testament doctrine was offensive to the Church no less than to the Synagogue. And the Calvinist Church was watchful and powerful, while the Jewish community was only there on sufferance. So the Synagogue authorities tried to bribe Spinoza into silence, but in vain.irate and tactless, as well as alarmed, they excommunicated him in 1656. The one person who might have known how to handle Spinoza with sympathy and persuasiveness was Manasseh ben Israel, and he was away in England at the time, pleading with

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Cromwell for the re-admission of the Jews. So the Synagogue washed its hands of Spinoza, and reported the matter to the civil authorities, who banished Spinoza from Amsterdam for a short period. So at the age of twenty-four Spinoza stood alone in the world. His parents were dead, and he was cut off from his kinsmen and his community. But he was one of those strong characters who are strongest when they stand alone, and the experience only helped to raise him above the conflicts of creeds and of parties, a philosopher for all men and for all times.

Spinoza stayed in Ouwerkerk (near Amsterdam) a few months, and then returned to his native city, where he remained till 1660. During 1654-1656 he had been an assistant teacher in Van den Enden's school, and he had also learned the art of making lenses. He maintained himself now partly by giving private lessons, partly by making lenses for spectacles, microscopes, and telescopes. His leisure was devoted to study. That he was a close *student* of Descartes is certain. Whether he was ever a *follower* of Descartes is extremely doubtful. Spinoza's earliest writings, dating from 1660 or earlier, already show fundamental divergences from the Cartesian philosophy, and contain the main framework of his own system of philosophy as developed in his *Ethica*. The few friends he had in Amsterdam were mainly Collegiants and Cartesians. The Collegiants were non-Calvinist Christians, whom the intolerant, powerful Calvinists would not allow to have their own chapels and clergy, so that Collegiant prayer-meetings (*collegia*) were very like those of the Quakers. Moreover, Calvinist opposition to the "new philosophy" helped to bring together some of the Collegiants and the Cartesians as the victims of a common tyranny. And Spinoza helped some of the Collegiants in their study of Descartes' writings. Hence even his subsequent geometric version of Descartes' *Principia*, which was published by his Amsterdam friends in 1663, and of which a Dutch translation followed in 1664. Spinoza himself, however, made it quite clear that he was no Cartesian, as is evident from the Preface and the Appendix to the *Principia*. The most interesting thing, however, is that when Spinoza left Amsterdam in 1660 he left behind him a circle of friends who looked to him for philosophical guidance, and who met periodically afterwards to discuss philosophical essays which he sent them from his retreat in Rhynsburg. This is a remarkable tribute to Spinoza's personality, and the impression it conveys is more than confirmed by another incident which happened in 1661. Oldenburg, who at that time was in intimate touch with the founders of the Royal Society, and who became one of its Secretaries soon after its foundation in 1662, was on the Continent in 1661, and made it his business to get into touch with learned men. He visited Spinoza in

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Rhynsburg, and had a long conversation with him on many philosophical problems. In August he wrote to Spinoza as follows :

VERY ILLUSTRIOUS SIR, ESTEEMED FRIEND,

So reluctantly did I tear myself away from your side recently, when I visited you in your retreat at Rhynsburg, that no sooner am I back in England than I endeavour to rejoin you, as far as may be, by epistolary intercourse at least. The knowledge of weighty matters, allied with kindness and refinement of manners (with all which Nature and industry have most abundantly enriched you) have such charms of their own that they capture the love of all open-minded and liberally educated men. Come, then, most excellent Sir, and let us join hands in unfeigned friendship, and let us cultivate it assiduously with every kind of devotion and service. Whatever from my slender store can be of use to you, consider it yours. As to the riches of mind which you possess, allow me to claim a share of them, when it can be done without detriment to you. . . .

Spinoza was twenty-nine, Oldenburg was forty-one at the time of their meeting. This letter is surely a remarkable tribute to the personality of Spinoza, whatever allowance be made for the courtesy and kindness of Oldenburg.

Rhynsburg, near Leyden, was the headquarters of the Collegiant giants, and Spinoza's stay there was probably arranged by his Collegiant friends. The cottage in which he stayed (still preserved as a Spinoza-Museum) had inscribed on one of its stones the following characteristic lines from Kamphuyzen's *May Morning* :

"Alas ! if all men were but wise,
And would be good as well,
The Earth would be a Paradise,
Where now 'tis mostly Hell."

It was there that Spinoza wrote the later parts of the *Short Treatise*, the *Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding*, part of his version of Descartes' *Principia* with the appended *Metaphysical Thoughts*, and possibly the first Book of his *Ethics*. In 1663 he moved to Voorburg, near the Hague, in order to be near that centre of culture. He stayed there till 1670, and during that period he came into touch with various influential people, such as Christian Huygens, who lived near Spinoza during 1664-1666, Hudde, Van Beuningen, and Jan de Witt. At first Spinoza was busy with his *Ethica*, but in 1665 he laid this aside and started his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, which he felt to be needed more urgently at that time. Holland was in the throes of a struggle between Republicans (headed by Jan de Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland) and Monarchists (under the Prince of Orange). The Monarchists coquetted with the Calvinist clergy, who were thirsting for much greater power than the broad-minded Republican statesmen were prepared to cede to them. When in 1665, during the

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wars with England and with Sweden, the Dutch were hard pressed, the Orange party and the Calvinist clergy exploited the occasion, and tried to get the young Prince elected as civil and religious head of the State. The Republican party was on its trial, and it was necessary to defend the separation of Church and State. Spinoza was "a good republican," and resolved to attack the very citadel of Calvinist pretensions. The Calvinist clergy based their claims on scriptural arguments, and endeavoured to silence opposition by quoting the Bible. Spinoza undertook to show that they simply did not understand the Bible, that the Bible properly understood was opposed to the usurpation of power and its application to the suppression of honest opinion, and only demanded the exercise of goodness and charity. Four busy years were devoted to this work, which appeared anonymously in 1670, and proclaimed on its very title-page that its object was "to show that not only is perfect liberty to philosophize (i.e. to reason freely) compatible with devout piety and with the peace of the State, but that to take away such liberty is to destroy the public peace and also piety itself." The work was written with such thoroughness and historical insight that, quite apart from serving its main purpose, it became also the "Prolegomena to every future study of the Scriptures." The Calvinist clergy were furious, and condemned it, but they were kept in check by the Liberal Statesmen in power. After the murder of the De Witts, however, and the triumph of the Orange party, the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* was prohibited, in 1674, and its author was watched so closely that he could not publish anything more for the rest of his life.

Spinoza moved to the Hague in 1670, and remained there till his death. The murder of the De Witts in 1672 stirred him so deeply that he wanted to put up, on the scene of the murder, a placard denouncing the "lowest barbarians" who had perpetrated the crime. But his landlord locked the door, and so probably saved him from sharing the fate of the De Witts. The murder of the De Witts was the outcome of the French invasion of Holland. The Dutch were not prepared to offer effective resistance, and the people were easily persuaded by the Orange party to vent their wrath on the De Witts, and to put the Prince of Orange (afterwards our William III) into power. The French invasion had yet further consequences for Spinoza. In 1673 the French army under Prince Condé was in camp at Utrecht. Among his officers was a Colonel Stoupe, an adventurer who, though a Protestant and an ex-parson, had brought a Swiss regiment to help the Catholic French against the Protestant Dutch. He had been severely rebuked for this by a fellow-countryman, and in order to save his reputation he hit on the ingenious idea of



THE HOUSE (x) IN WHICH SPINOZA DIED
"C'est d'ici peut-être que Dieu a été vu de plus près."—RENAN.

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showing that the Dutch were not really true Christians, but atheists and free-thinkers. For this purpose it seemed to him promising to get into touch with Spinoza. So he persuaded Prince Condé to invite Spinoza to Utrecht. Spinoza only saw in the invitation a possible opportunity of helping his country. So, after consulting some leading Dutch statesmen, he set out for Utrecht armed with permits from the Dutch and the French. He was well received by the Prince of Luxemburg, in the absence of Prince Condé, who had been called away. After waiting several weeks in vain for Prince Condé, Spinoza returned to the Hague, where a suspicious mob greeted him with scowls and stones, but nothing worse. About three months before the invitation from Prince Condé, another and more important invitation had reached Spinoza. It was from the Elector Palatine, Karl Ludwig, who offered him the Professorship of Philosophy in the University of Heidelberg. But Spinoza had no taste for publicity and the friction with theologians in which it would have involved him. So he declined the invitation, and stayed in the Hague, where he had a number of friends, and was visited by various distinguished foreigners, including Leibniz and Tschirnhaus.

The last years of Spinoza were devoted chiefly to the completion of the *Ethica* and the writing of the unfinished *Political Treatise*. Early in 1677 it was evident to his friends and to himself that he would not last much longer. He entrusted his manuscripts to his landlord, with instructions what to do with them when the time came. On February 21st he passed away peacefully in the presence of Dr. Schuller, his medical friend from Amsterdam.

III. THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPINOZA.

Even the barest outline of Spinoza's *Weltanschauung* must deal with at least three of its characteristic features, namely, its Rationalism, its Pantheism, and its Mysticism. These, again, involve certain other features which also need explanation. Moreover, these principal characteristics must not be divorced from one another, as they modify each other in such a way as to blend and merge in one harmonious system. Bearing in mind this reservation, it may be said that of the characteristic features of Spinozism its Rationalism is the most fundamental. With it, accordingly, I propose to begin, allowing its other features to evolve in as logical an order as possible.

Rationalism.—New movements in human thought usually begin by way of protest against existing conditions. Hence the importance of biography and history for the understanding of the history of philosophy. In some important ways Spinozism is best under-

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stood as a revolt against medievalism. By the seventeenth century the protest against medievalism had already come to a head in the movements of the Renaissance and the Reformation. Yet important as these movements undoubtedly were, they were in some ways abortive. And the spirit of the twin movement found its fullest expression in Spinozism. It may well be the case that the Reformation was far better suited to those times than Spinozism was. But I am not passing moral judgment on either ; I am only concerned with the philosophical considerations.

Turning to Rationalism, it is obvious that the Renaissance and the Reformation were protests against authority. The Reformers, however, as events proved, were not opposed to *authority* as such, only to *existing* authority. They revolted against the authority of the Pope and of Aristotle ; but they maintained the authority of Scripture, and claimed authority for themselves. Hence the tragedy of Servetus in Geneva, and of Koerbagh (a friend of Spinoza) even in Amsterdam, which, in spite of the persecuting zeal of the Calvinist clergy, was the most tolerant city in the world. The Renaissance was more effective in this respect, and there were certainly some Humanists who defended the autonomy of Reason as against the authority of books and institutions. This rationalist tendency found its climax in Spinozism, which subordinated even the Scriptures to the authority of Reason, and protested against chaining Reason to the authority of Scripture.

Cosmic Unity.—This, however, only expresses the negative result of Rationalism, and nothing can be built on mere negations. On its positive side, the Rationalism of the Renaissance found expression in the great classics of science which appeared during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—the works of Copernicus, Vesalius, Galileo, Gilbert, Kepler, Harvey, Boyle, Descartes, Huygens, Pascal, Leibniz, and Newton, to mention but a round dozen of the most famous names of the period. These express the positive work of Reason, the attempt to discover the connections between phenomena, and to make manifest the laws which they embody, and which make them intelligible. And on its positive side likewise it may be said, without disrespect to any of his famous predecessors and successors, that Rationalism found its culmination in Spinoza, who endeavoured to interconnect the *whole* of reality in *one* organic cosmos, in a manner that might have shocked the whole of the above-mentioned galaxy of geniuses, who could not get over the cleavage between Nature and the Supernatural and all that it involves. Spinoza's thoroughgoing Rationalism led him to the conception of the whole of Reality as one organically interconnected Universe, in which everything

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is and happens according to law and order, and not as the result of mere chance or mere caprice. For Spinoza the world is really a Universe. It is organically one; it is complete, everything real (divine or human, etc.) is it, or within it; and it is rational or orderly.

To appreciate Spinoza's conception of cosmic unity one need only endeavour to understand thoroughly any single object or event. For instance, in front of me is a radiator. Suppose an unusually inquisitive schoolboy plies me with questions. I should have to describe its connection by means of pipes with the water-boiler in the distant cellar, the laws relating to the evaporation of water, the circulation of steam, the radiation of heat, the condensation of vapour, etc., etc. If he is shown the furnace, he may inquire about its structure, the fuel used, etc. If he wants to know how the fuel is obtained, I may have to describe the financial system of the school, the ways of coal-merchants, the effect of the coal-strike on coal and coke prices, the organization of transport from the mines to London, etc., etc. If he is curious about the nature of coal, I may have to describe how trees and plants absorb and store energy from the sun's radiation, sink in the earth and become fossilized, etc., etc. He may want to know how the sun comes to radiate energy and to be near enough to warm the earth. Then I must tell him about the formation of stars out of nebulae, the release of energy by the explosion of the heavy atoms, the radiation of energy according to certain laws, the mutual control of the stars, etc., according to the Principle of Gravitation, etc., etc. I may even have to explain that solar radiation alone would be insufficient to support life on this planet, and that a considerable part of the energy available is radiated by other stars, etc., including some spiral nebulae which are so far away that it takes nearly a million years for their light to reach us.

This account, with all its obvious gaps, has barely touched the fringe of the matter. Nothing at all has been said, for instance, about the mental factors involved in the invention and construction of boilers and furnaces and buildings and mining machinery, etc., etc. Yet a trifle like a small radiator, the moment you seriously try to understand it fully, seems to radiate out in all directions, and it is only sheer fatigue or want of time or interest that makes us stop our inquiry where we do. It seems probable enough that the inquiry cannot halt anywhere, but must go on indefinitely.

' All things by immortal power
To each other linkéd are,
That thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling of a star.'

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It is not, be it carefully observed, merely a matter of tracing a thing to its cause, and that to its cause, until we reach a First Cause. The trails spread out far and wide, and the farther anything is traced, the more numerous do the causes (or conditions) become—the linking up is *systematic*, not merely *linear*.

Naturalism.—The problem confronting us is this. Whatever object or event or experience be considered, it is found to be dependent on innumerable other things, events, or experiences, without which it could not be. And each of the things, or events, or experiences on which it is dependent for its reality appears to be in the same plight of dependence on innumerable others. Is it conceivable that an infinity of things, etc., should have a conditioned or dependent existence unless there is something that has an unconditioned, an independent, or absolute reality of its own? And if it be agreed (as it usually is) that there must be some such self-dependent Being (or "Substance" or Absolute), then the next question is, what is this Being, and what is its relation to the world of dependent objects, and events, and experiences? One common answer is that the Absolute is God, an omnipotent and perfect transcendent Being who created the world out of nothing, maintains it in existence, and occasionally interposes in miraculous ways. This idea was almost universal in the time of Spinoza. Even Descartes noted in his Diary his assent to the three wonders, namely, the creation out of nothing, free-will, and the God-man. But the idea of an external Creator did not satisfy Spinoza. It is not difficult to see some of his objections to it. It conflicted with his thoroughgoing Rationalism. There is something capricious in the alleged choice of one time rather than another for the Creation. Moreover, the idea of creation out of nothing is at least as difficult as the problems it is intended to solve. Granted that it is necessary to posit an Absolute Ground of Reality, why not regard Reality itself as self-dependent in its systematic totality? Such a view would have the merit of avoiding the problems of creation out of nothing. Its greater simplicity, or economy of explanation, would naturally appeal to the scientific side of Spinoza. It would also prove more satisfying to his religious or mystical side by bringing God and man into more intimate relationship. Such were the more obvious grounds which induced Spinoza to adopt this conception.

Now Reality, conceived as an interconnected system, is called Nature. And Spinozism may be described as *Naturalism*, in the sense that it does not treat Nature as a mere illusion or as the arbitrary creation of a supernatural or transcendental power. No, Nature is completely real, and all that is real. It is neither the product of the arbitrary *fiat* of another being, nor is it arbitrary

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in any way. It is self-existing and self-maintaining, and it is the very incarnation of law and order.

Pantheism.—But if Spinoza repudiated any reality outside the cosmic system, he was careful to include within the cosmic system whatever could claim reality. He rejected the bait of the specious simplicity obtainable by denying the reality of Matter, or of Mind, or of God. They have their place in the cosmic system; indeed, they are, or at least God is, the cosmic system, according to Spinoza. For God is usually conceived as the Perfect Self-Existent, and according to Spinoza that is just what the cosmic system, or Nature, is. Hence Nature, or the cosmic system, is God—*Deus sive Natura*. The One-and-All is God, and God is the One-and-All. This is the *Pantheism* of Spinoza.

Copernicanism.—Consistently with his Naturalism and his Pantheism Spinoza could claim no such privileged position for man as was associated with the old dispensation, according to which even the sun, moon, and stars were made for his sole benefit. In this respect, indeed, *Copernicanism* found its fullest expression in Spinoza, who repudiated the homocentric conception of the creation, which was really the mainstay of the geocentric theory. The earth, according to Copernicus, is not the centre of the universe, but a small planet occupying no privileged position in the solar system, less still in the cosmic system; and man, adds Spinoza, is, like his planet, a part, but only a part, of the cosmic system, not *imperium in imperio*. It is consequently irrational to explain everything by reference to human needs.

Cosmic Structure.—The next problem is to indicate the inner structure of the Universe, the interrelations between the whole and its parts, and of the parts to one another. The broad outlines of Spinoza's views may be stated as follows. The cosmic system in its organic totality is Nature, or God, or Substance—that is, the self-existing and self-maintaining ground on which everything depends, or from which everything derives its reality. All material phenomena may be regarded as changing modifications of an infinite material energy, which Spinoza calls Extension, by which, however, he does not mean empty space (the reality of which he denies), but Materiality, Matter, or Physical Energy. Similarly all kinds of mental experiences may be regarded as the modifications of an infinite Mind-Energy, or Mentality, which Spinoza calls *Cogitatio* (Thought), after its most characteristic manifestation. Each of these Spinoza calls an infinite Attribute of God (or of Substance), in the sense that each is an ultimate phase or character or activity of the ultimate Ground of the Universe, and each is completely exhaustive of its kind of energy. There may be other such Attributes unknown to man. But the complete

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totality of the Attributes are God, or Substance, and each Attribute gives rise to a complete series of objects and events of a certain kind, in accordance with its own nature and the laws of its nature. Thus Substance expresses itself at once in different ways, along its different Attributes, in different series of events. These events, these Many, change and pass, but not into nothingness, for the One remains.

“ Birth and the grave,
A limitless ocean,
A constant weaving,
With change still rife,
A restless heaving,
A glowing life. . . .”

Body and Soul.—Spinoza's conception of the concurrent (or parallel) activities of the Attributes of Substance threw a new light on the old problem of the relation between mind and body. Indeed, it was this old problem which led him to the conception of concurrent Attributes. Already in Plato we find a certain tendency to treat body and soul as not only different, but as antagonistic to each other. This conception, which was the outcome of a strong ascetic strain in Plato's character, was taken over and emphasized by Christianity. Hence its war against the world and the flesh. And this idea survived even in Descartes and many others. The consequence of this was that the Cartesian and other attempts to account for the apparently intimate relation between body and soul were unsatisfactory. They either tended to explain away mind, or to explain away matter, or to make God synchronize material and mental events like the wire-puller in a Punch and Judy show. Spinoza realized the *difference* between the mental and the material, but rejected the idea of their mutual *antagonism*. Accordingly he did not hesitate to regard Materiality, as well as Mentality, as an Attribute of God. And just as God, or Nature, is both Extension and Thought, so man, a finite mode of Nature, is at once physical and mental, and functions in both ways concurrently, though neither interferes with the other. This solution of the problem, however, involved as a consequence the conception that all material things have a mental side, or some degree of mentality. And Spinoza did not shirk the implication, but maintained that all things really are animated, though in very different degrees. In this respect, too, Spinoza carried forward the tendency of the Renaissance, which revived the Hellenic attitude towards the material world, an attitude of friendliness and of admiration, in contrast with the medieval Christian attitude of hostility and contempt, for the physical world. It was largely in consequence of their different attitudes towards

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physical nature that the orthodox theologians of the seventeenth and subsequent centuries could see in Spinoza nothing but an atheist who used the language of religion to conceal his want of it. But that was a gross error.

Mysticism.—It is easy enough to see that Spinoza's conception of God may well seem strange to many people. They have no real philosophic interests, and so the conception of God as a key to the solution of *intellectual* difficulties makes no appeal to them. They think of God only in relation to their *emotional* needs, not in relation to the needs of their intellect. And a full heart may go together with an empty head. In that case comfort is sought and found readily by imagining a kind of Man-God into whose patient ears one can pour tales of woe, or a kind of Woman-God on whose apron one may wipe away tears. It is so much easier to image an idol than to think of God. Nor can one altogether condemn this habit. There are sorrows enough in this world; and he who understands this will forgive much. No need to disturb the simple faith of simple people. Spinoza himself carefully avoided doing anything of the kind. He showed a friendly and encouraging interest in the simple faith of the Van der Spycks; and he begged his friends not to communicate his philosophy to any but genuine seekers after the truth. The trouble is mostly the other way. Calvinist zealots did their worst to silence Spinoza and Spinozism by sheer force. And to this day there is a tendency to regard intellectual imbecility as a qualification for religious authority.

One of the commonest objections to Spinoza's conception of God is that He is not a "personal" God. This criticism is based partly on the anthropomorphic tendency to find a "human" or quasi-human comforter, the afore-mentioned proneness to imagine an idol rather than think of God, and partly it is due to a misunderstanding of Spinoza. God, according to Spinoza, is not "personal," not because He is less than a "person," but because He is incomparably *more* than any person, of the kind we know anything about, can possibly be, so that His relation to man cannot rightly be compared with the relation between human beings. And the super-personal God conceived by Spinoza may well be the object of genuine religious feeling among those who have outgrown anthropomorphic idols. This is easily shown by the life and character of Spinoza himself, by the experiences of the great nature-poets, and of other, lesser folk.

Spinoza's *amor intellectualis Dei* (intellectual love of God) is grossly misinterpreted if it is emptied of its religious significance. The misinterpretation is due mainly to the failure to pay sufficient attention to the place of *Intuition* in the philosophy of Spinoza.

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This failure is not entirely unnatural, because Spinoza does not devote much space to the consideration of Intuition, and one is tempted to suppose that he did not attach great importance to it. But that is not correct. The fact is that Intuition, as Spinoza conceived it, is not a suitable subject for discursive treatment. It is a kind of mystic vision, and what is mystical is inarticulate. That is why Spinoza writes so little about it. Yet it is the climax of his philosophy as a mode of life, and its foundation as a system of thought.

Intuition (*Scientia intuitiva*) is described by Spinoza as the third and highest grade of knowledge. Spinoza distinguishes, namely, three kinds or ascending grades of knowledge—perceptual, rational, and intuitive. At the lowest stage we know things in so far as we observe them or imagine them, but bare observation presents objects as discrete or detached; it does not reveal their connections and their laws. The second grade of knowledge is that which, by the aid of our reason, gives us an insight into the laws and connections of things; it is the stage of scientific knowledge; it is also the kind of knowledge which Spinoza's writings for the most part were meant to teach. The second kind of knowledge, however, though very superior to the first kind, in so far as it follows up and reveals numerous lines of connections, is still rather abstract, in the sense that it does not give a synoptic view of the cosmic system as a whole. This last task is the function of Intuition, which is only possible after the mind has been through the discipline of the two preceding preparatory stages of Knowledge. It is "thoughtfulness matured to inspiration." When learning a new language one learns first the letters of the alphabet, then combinations of letters in words and of words in sentences according to grammatical rules, until finally one takes in the significance of whole sentences and paragraphs at a glance. In somewhat the same way we learn the great book of Nature. First comes observation of apparently isolated facts and events. Then the understanding of their connections and laws. Finally, the intuition of the significance of it all; the great vision which sees God in all things, and all things in God. It is a vision that brings peace and inspires effort. But it drops into silence, so that even the greatest poets have failed to express it in words. This vision Spinoza did not even attempt to describe. But he was no stranger to it. The lingering light thereof shines through his closely reasoned arguments, at least for those who bring with them a heart that watches and receives. To judge the religion of Spinoza without realizing and appreciating his mysticism is a stupid impertinence. Not only poets like Goethe, but even pessimists like Schopenhauer have felt the spirit

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of religious peace that moves over the pages of Spinoza. And only what comes from the heart goes to the heart.

It is well to remember, however, that Spinoza's mysticism is not merely sentimentalism. He would have no sympathy with Wordsworth's protest :—

“ Enough of Science and of Art ;
Close up those barren leaves. . . .”

For Spinoza one can never have “ enough of Science and of Art ” ; for him the contemplation of Nature, with “ a heart that watches and receives,” would be a *supplement* to, not a *substitute* for science and art. Similarly for Spinoza Nature, as we perceive it, is no illusion or mere symbolism. Like Wordsworth, he would have rejected Shelley's suggestion that human knowledge

“ Like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity.”

What we observe is the real, the eternal, though we do not always know it adequately. The finite is a real mode of the Infinite, and the temporal is a real mode of the Eternal. Hence the importance which Spinoza attaches to knowledge. For him the pursuit of knowledge is not merely a means of obtaining a livelihood (important as that is), nor only a way of life (which is more important still) ; for Spinoza knowledge is the very pathway to Eternity.

That pathway Spinoza trod. And although he was not honoured by his generation, yet we remember him as one of the spiritual fathers who begat us ; and many generations yet unborn will remember him, and feel grateful for the heritage of inspiration which humanity owes to him.