



## Spinoza's Mechanism, Attributes, and Panpsychism

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## DISCUSSION

### SPINOZA'S MECHANISM, ATTRIBUTES, AND PANPSYCHISM

PHILOSOPHERS have so long been in the habit of seeing in the detailed researches of science and scholarship a heedless neglect of wholes that it was quite natural for Professor Grace A. De Laguna, on finding herself in disagreement with some of the conclusions of my rather detailed study *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, to declare that while the book is "valuable" and "indispensable" as a detailed investigation, it did not do right by "Spinoza's system as a whole" (*Philosophical Review*, May, 1935). Of her disagreements three are specified, and Mrs. De Laguna has been thoughtful enough to state her case against me fully and clearly, by showing wherein my interpretation appears to her to present certain difficulties. I am grateful to her for raising these difficulties, for it affords me an opportunity to clarify my position.

1. *Extension and Thought, Descartes, and Mechanism.*—My discussion of the attributes of extension and thought falls into two parts. First, I try to unfold the reasoning which has led Spinoza, in opposition to all philosophers, including Descartes, to deny that matter and form are substances and to reduce them to attributes. Second, I try to explain why Spinoza has changed the terms matter and form to extension and thought. I show how throughout the history of philosophy matter was associated with extension, and among my instances I also mention the fact that Descartes defined matter as extension (I 235). In another place, speaking of the duality of matter and form, I add, "or, as it was better known in the fashionable philosophy of Spinoza's own time, of extension and thought" (I 79). Descartes, then, was not altogether overlooked by me; he was merely treated as part of a larger tradition.

In criticism of this, Professor De Laguna maintains that "it misses the essential aspect of Spinoza's thought that he derives from Descartes" and then proceeds to present her own version of the Cartesian background from which alone, according to her, Spinoza could have derived his doctrine of extension and thought.

Now it is the contention throughout my study of Spinoza that while we may ascribe to Spinoza a knowledge of any conceivable text in Descartes that may help us to explain his cryptic utterances, we must not ascribe to him a foreknowledge of modern textbooks on Descartes. Spinoza was too close to the original sources of philosophy to allow himself to fall into the error of considering every statement he found in Descartes as something peculiarly Cartesian. When Spinoza read in Descartes that "the nature of matter or body . . . consists in its being extended in length, breadth, and depth" (*Princ. Phil.* II 4), he

saw in it a philosophic commonplace which occurs in Aristotle (*Physics* IV 1, 209a4-5; *De Caelo* I 1, 268a23-24) and is variously interpreted by mediaeval philosophers, one of its interpretations being, as I have shown, that extension is the essence of matter. When he further read in Descartes that he does not "accept or desire any other principle in physics than in geometry" (*Princ. Phil.* II 64), he saw in it merely a reiteration of a philosophic commonplace as to the existence of necessary logical laws in nature. Spinoza himself, as I have pointed out (I 53), uses his geometrical analogies in this sense. When he discovered that Descartes himself did not adhere to his geometrical conception of nature and admitted the existence of free will in God and man, trying to explain human freedom, as Mrs. De Laguna so aptly puts it, by "man's will mysteriously acting through the pineal gland", he saw in it only one other attempt at a mysterious explanation of the action of a free will within a world governed by necessary laws. In Spinoza's own discussion of free will and final causes we find, on the basis of textual evidence, that his arguments are directed as much against mediaeval authors as against Descartes (*cf.* Chs. xii and xvii). In fact, his arguments against final causes are aimed primarily at the mediaevals and Heereboord. It is noteworthy that, throughout his allusions to Descartes which I have identified in the *Ethics* and throughout his discussions of Descartes' views on matters purely metaphysical in his correspondence, Spinoza treats Descartes as an exponent of traditional philosophy.

But Professor De Laguna thinks that I have failed to interpret Spinoza's doctrine as a whole because I have not said that in all his arguments against final causes, which are mainly directed against authors other than Descartes, Spinoza was merely trying to extend a Cartesian positive doctrine beyond the limits set for its operation by Descartes himself; for "Spinoza could not simply deny final causality. . . . He must replace it with some *positive* doctrine, and this doctrine is the mechanism he inherits from Descartes and makes universal" (my italics).

I take exception to this statement on two grounds:—

In the first place, Spinoza's argument, as he himself develops it in the *Ethics*, begins with the conception of God as acting without will and design; and from this premise he arrives at his denial of final causes in nature and free will in man (*cf.* I 424). This is evident from the very structure of the *Ethics*. He does not argue reversely, as Professor De Laguna suggests, from Descartes' mechanism of nature to a denial of freedom in man and design in God. Even in his correspondence, where he argues directly against Descartes' assertion of the freedom of the will, Spinoza does not confront him with the logical consequence of the latter's mechanism of nature, but argues from his own

conception of God as acting without will and design (*cf.* for instance, *Letters* 21, 43, 58).

In the second place, the term mechanism cannot be spoken of as a "positive doctrine", for it is only a description of the denial of final causes but not an explanation. Teleology, to be sure, can be loosely spoken of as a positive doctrine, because it implies some positive principle, such as God or some of its more polite equivalents in current philosophy. But mechanism, if it is thoroughgoing, does not imply any positive principle, whether it is the thoroughgoing mechanism of the ancient Atomists, according to the mediaeval as well as Spinoza's conception of it, or the equally thoroughgoing mechanism of Spinoza. In the former it means the denial of God; in the latter it means the denial of will and design in God. If the term mechanism is applied to Descartes and to others like him despite their belief in a God endowed with will and acting by design, it is only by the courtesy of modern historians of philosophy. But, for that matter, the same courtesy might with equal propriety be extended to all the mediaeval philosophers who believed in necessary laws of nature preordained by an unknown will of God. Though these mediaeval philosophers continued to speak of final causes, the term really was nothing with them but a verbal designation for what they believed to be the revelation in the world of some divine purpose unknown to men—exactly the position taken by Descartes with all his verbal denial of final causes. To say, therefore, as Professor De Laguna does, that Spinoza replaced the mere denial of final causality by the "positive doctrine" of mechanism is to reduce Spinoza to the intellectual level of the village freethinker who tantalized his bucolic listeners by declaring that he did not have to explain the origin and order of the universe by the existence of a God, as he could explain everything by the existence of atheism.

2. *The "Nonsense" of Subjective Attributes.*—In his *Way of All Flesh*, Samuel Butler describes the shock which young Mr. Pontifex received when he read in Dean Alford's notes that despite the contradictions in the various accounts of the Resurrection in the Gospels the whole story should be taken on trust. Such an implicit faith in the integrity of any kind of scripture against the striking evidence of facts has, alas, disappeared from almost every field of learning. It is refreshing to see that it is still alive among students of the scripture of Spinoza, as when, for instance, Professor De Laguna maintains that even if the "historical evidence" is in favor of the subjective interpretation of Spinoza's attributes, such an interpretation must be discredited because "it makes nonsense of a great thinker". But the "nonsense" of the subjective interpretation is really nothing more than the fact that it presents certain difficulties according to the contention of Mrs. De Laguna. These difficulties, however, I shall try to show, are due to a

misreading of the meaning of the term "invented", which I have used in connection with the subjective interpretation. Professor De Laguna takes the term to mean the invention by the mind of something of which substance is devoid, whereas what it really means is the invention by the mind of certain universal terms, referred to as attributes, to describe the actions or power of substance.

Since my subjective interpretation of attributes has proved to be the most disturbing part of my study on Spinoza, I shall try to restate it in its salient features.

That attributes are only perceived by the mind is a common expression throughout mediaeval philosophy and down to the time of Spinoza. When we examine, however, the meaning of this expression in its various contexts, we find that it sometimes means that attributes have a certain kind of real existence in the essence of God but an existence which can be *discovered* only by the mind, and sometimes it means that they have no objective existence at all but are only *invented* by the mind. Now according to both these views the attributes of God are admitted to be perceived by the human mind only through the various manifestations of God's actions, which actions receive the name attributes when they are transformed into adjectives and thus become universalized by the mind. But here the problem of universals comes into play. Those who held a nominalistic conception of universals, *i.e.*, universals are only *invented* by the mind, had no difficulty at all in asserting that all the various actions of God are attributes, inasmuch as the plurality of such nominalistic attributes does not imply a plurality in the essence of God. All propositions about God, therefore, assume with them a subject-predicate relation. Those, however, who considered universals as having some kind of real existence, *i.e.*, the mind only *discovers* them, could not consider the various actions of God as attributes without implying the existence of a plurality in the divine essence. They therefore had to resort to the following alternative: (a) either to maintain that such a plurality in the divine essence was not inconsistent with its simplicity, (b) or to maintain that propositions about God do not express a subject-predicate relation. In the latter case, it was usually said that in all propositions about God the predicate always expresses a dynamic relation, that is to say, it always expresses a pure action, the assumption being that a variety of actions can proceed from a simple essence without implying a plurality of elements in it.

Now Spinoza starts like all mediaevals with the conception of God as pure activity, or, as he himself says, "the power of God is His essence itself", meaning by power that which "He and all things are and act" (*Ethics* I 34). But unlike those mediaevals against whom he especially argues, namely, the emanationists, he considers the activity of

God to be not only understanding but also motion. These two activities are what Spinoza calls the two immediate infinite modes. From these two immediate infinite modes follow the two finite modes, mind from the former and body from the latter. Then mind, according to Spinoza, universalizes the various manifestations of these two activities of God and transforms them respectively into the attributes of thought and extension. Following tradition, Spinoza defines attribute as that "which the intellect perceives of substance, as if constituting its essence". But he does not tell us whether he meant by it that the intellect *discovers* the attributes or whether he meant by it only that the intellect *invents* them—the problem upon which, as we have seen, the mediaevals were divided. The question can be answered only indirectly by the following considerations: (1) The terms Spinoza uses in connection with attributes are like those used by mediaevals who denied the real existence of attributes in substance. (2) His statements about universals point to a nominalistic conception. (3) The emphasis with which he insists upon the simplicity of substance as something which logically follows from his definition of attribute points to a subjective theory of attributes. This last type of evidence, however, I consider only as corroborative of the first two, for Spinoza, like some of the mediaevals whom I have referred to, could have found a way of showing that the simplicity of substance is not inconsistent with its containing a plurality of real attributes, even though he does not explicitly argue that point. When, however, a question on this point was raised by de Vries, Spinoza's answer was that the attributes are merely "names", *i.e.*, invented by the mind (*cf. Letter 9*).

When Professor De Laguna therefore asks how, if the attributes of thought and extension are invented by the mind, there could be a mind to invent them, or where did material things come from, the answer is, in the words of Spinoza himself, that the mind follows from the immediate infinite mode of the absolute intellect and that material things follow from the immediate infinite mode of motion, both of these immediate infinite modes being actions of the infinite power of substance, the power which is the essence itself of substance; and it is through these actions that substance appears to the mind as having the attributes of thought and extension.

3. *Unity of Nature and Omnia Animata.*—If the unity of nature were a principle which Spinoza advanced as a religious dogma, and we were fundamentalists who accepted his dogma literally, then of course we would also have to accept Spinoza's *omnia animata* in its literal sense as implying the existence of consciousness of some degree in all things; for otherwise, as Professor De Laguna rightly argues, "the unity of nature breaks down". But the unity of nature with Spinoza is merely the carrying out of the principle of necessary causality to

its logical conclusion, and it can mean no more than what is warranted by that principle. The principle itself is that there can be nothing in the effect which is not in the cause, which reflects the old philosophic axiom *ex nihilo nihil fit*. It is as a result of this principle that Spinoza argues, as I have shown, that inasmuch as there is extension in the universe there must be extension in God (I Ch. iv). It is by the same reasoning, too, that Spinoza had to assume consciousness in God: since there is consciousness in some finite modes (I 329; II 337) and since also he pleased to think of God as the cause of modes (II 342). But the converse of this principle, namely, that everything in the cause must be in the effect, is not true, especially when the effect is removed from the cause by the interposition of intermediate causes. Moreover, in the case of Spinoza, by the very same eternal necessity by which modes are according to him unlike substance in their being finite and temporal and imperfect (I 397-398), they are also different from one another; and some of them are still further unlike substance in their being devoid of consciousness. We must not lose sight of the fact that while Spinoza has rejected the traditional belief in creation he has not anticipated the modern theory of evolution. To him the universe in its complexity was not the result of an evolutionary process; it was a static universe fixed in its present form from eternity. Living things and non-living things, beings endowed with consciousness and beings devoid of it, thinking beings and non-thinking beings—all these existed side by side in their present form from all eternity. There is no break therefore in the unity of nature, as understood by Spinoza, when we say that he did not assume that all finite modes are like God and man in the possession of consciousness. If man is still "a kingdom within a kingdom", his kingdom is no longer of Heaven. The "kingdom" which Spinoza denies man is not that of his occupying a special realm in nature, delimited by certain special properties he possesses in the universal order of things, but rather, as Spinoza explicitly states, that of his having "an absolute power over his own actions" and of his being "altogether self-determined" (*Ethics* III, Preface). His *omnia animata* need not therefore on that account be taken literally; it means, as I have tried to show, that all things may be said to have an *anima* in the same sense as in the older philosophy all things were said to have a *forma*.

But Professor De Laguna seems to think that, because Spinoza qualifies his statement that all things are besouled by the phrase "in different degrees" (*diversis gradibus*), the differences must be only quantitative or qualitative and not specific, and that consequently the souls of all things must differ only in the *degree* of the consciousness which they all possess and not in the fact of their having consciousness or of their not having it. This reasoning from the use of the term "degree" is not

conclusive. In philosophic Latin, the expression *diversi gradus* or *diversitas gradus* means also a difference in natural perfection which implies a specific difference. The following quotation from Thomas Aquinas will show that the expression *diversis gradibus* here in Spinoza is to be understood in the sense in which I have taken it: "In material substances different degrees (*diversi gradus*) in the perfection of nature constitute a difference in species. . . . For it is manifest that mixed bodies surpass the elements in the order of perfection, plants surpass mineral bodies, and animals surpass plants, and in every genus one finds a diversity of species (*diversitas specierum*) according to the degree of natural perfection" (*Quaestiones Disputatae: De Anima*, Art. 7, Resp.). Now the term "species" (εἶδη) by which Thomas describes the elements, mixed bodies, plants, and animals, is what is also known as "forms"—the Aristotelian term to which, as I have shown (II 46-48, 59), Spinoza's "souls" corresponds. These Aristotelian "forms" are described by Thomas as *diversi gradus* just as Spinoza describes his "souls" by *diversis gradibus*. The differences of degree which Thomas finds between the forms of elements, mixed bodies, plants, and animals, consist in the fact, as we know, that elements and mixed bodies have no power of nutrition, growth, and reproduction, which plants have, and that plants have no power of sensation, which animals have. The differences of degree which Spinoza finds between the various souls are of a similar nature, and they include among them, as may be inferred from his own statements, also the following difference, namely, that man has consciousness which other things have not (II, 59-61).

Ultimately there is an arbitrary element in the philosophy of Spinoza as there is an ultimate element of arbitrariness in every system of philosophy. When Spinoza has rejected by logical reasoning the hypothesis of an immaterial God and of creation and of emanation, he could have assumed the universe to be only an aggregate of modes, or what he calls *facies totius universi*, existing by its own necessity in its present form from eternity. Epicurean atomism of antiquity thus saw no need for the assumption of a cause to explain the origin of the world; and while Spinoza disapproves of this view, applying to it the mediaeval opprobrium of "chance" (I, 318, 422), he does not undertake to disprove it. The substance or God which he supplies serves no other purpose except, to quote my own words, that of "an infinite logical crust which holds together the crumbs of the infinite number of finite modes" (I 398; II 343). For the existence of that substance or God he offers no proof except the three forms of his ontological argument, which is nothing but the assertion that we have a clear and distinct idea of its existence (I, Ch. vi). But, having assumed its existence and having conceived its relation to the universe of modes as that of cause to effect, he had to play the game of causality according



to its accepted rules. He was thus quite logical in reasoning from the nature of the effects of substance to its own nature and in assuming that it cannot be devoid of anything which is found in its effects; and so he arrived at the conclusion that it must have extension and thought, and also consciousness as a condition of thought. But there was no logical compulsion, and no rule of the game requiring him, to reverse the reasoning and to endow all effects, contrary to observation, with thought and consciousness. And it is in accordance with these considered views of Spinoza that his casual and qualified *omnia animata* is to be understood.

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### BRADLEY ON RELATIONS\*

IN addition to two hitherto unpublished papers, and reprints of Bradley's two early pamphlets, "The Presuppositions of Critical History", and "Mr. Sedgwick's Hedonism", these two volumes contain twenty-seven papers which have already been published, several short papers or notes, and a bibliography of Bradley's writings.

"The Presuppositions of Critical History", Bradley's earliest published essay, shows that his conception of experience, as being throughout relational in character, was in his mind at the beginning of his life as a philosopher in print. For example, he argues in this pamphlet that there are no facts exempt from criticism, because all facts result from our interpretation of experience—a contention which was to become, in the *Logic*, the conclusion that even those judgments of sense, which seem to be analytic, are in truth synthetic. Again, he urges that since the critical historian has at his disposal neither the methods of the scientist, who can repeat his observations and experiments, nor those of the barrister, who can cross examine witnesses, the historian must apply other rules of evidence. And the main criterion can only be that of the analogy of the alleged fact with the funded experience of the historian. This point is developed in a way that makes of it more than a foreshadowing of the theory of truth that Bradley was to develop.

The tone of "Mr. Sedgwick's Hedonism" may remind the reader of it that, on occasion, Bradley was capable of adding little to the urbanity of the Merton Senior Common Room of his earlier years as Harmsworth Fellow. Yet, if an all too human sharpness is among the failings of this essay, still it helps us to understand Bradley's attitude in his *Ethical Studies* toward Sedgwick, and, on that account alone, we may be grateful that it is now easily available.

\* *Collected Essays*. By F. H. Bradley. 2 vols. New York, The Oxford Press, 1935. Pp. 708.