



In Defense of Spinoza

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IN DEFENSE OF SPINOZA

SPINOZA'S *Ethics* must at least sometimes appear to be rather an unfortunate philosophical monstrosity than a great philosophical masterpiece. The geometrical order of demonstration seems not to have raised the *Ethics* along with mathematics to the ideal plane of science, above personal interpretation and controversy, but to have left it among the classical texts of the great philosophers. Instead of being as certainly clear as Euclid, the *Ethics* has, in the eyes of its readers and commentators, more nearly approached the obscurity, say, of Plato's dialogues. And Spinoza has been, and is, as much the quest of the Spinozist as Plato always will be of the Platonist. So much, anyway, is brought out with impressive clarity in the three volumes of essays which the *Societas Spinozana* has so far published.¹ But for the rest there is hardly a fundamental idea, presumably of Spinoza's philosophy, that can be successfully carried along as one passes from one important contributor to the next, for each has his own peculiar point of interpretation,—determined, as far as one may judge, by his philosophic creed or education. The extreme diversity of interpretation can be easily gauged from the fact that the contributors represent between them practically every important racial, linguistic, cultural, and philosophic tradition. Indeed, so diverse are the members of the *Societas Spinozana* that they seem to be rather, in Santayana's charming phrase, an uncovenanted society of spirits. Certainly there is no common bond between them.

Professor Morris R. Cohen must certainly be wrong when he states, even parenthetically, that "the doctrine of the intellectual love of God . . . is . . . the central doctrine of Spinoza's philosophy."² It can not even be considered the central doctrine of his ethics. It is quite difficult to say what is *the* central doctrine, but there can be no question about it that his doctrine of God or Substance is central in his metaphysics, and any systematic analytical exposition of his philosophy would do well to start with what Spinoza has to say concerning God, and to follow thereafter the order of Spinoza's own severely logical and well-integrated composition. Unless one understands Spinoza upon this all-important subject, the rest of his philosophy must be, necessarily, open to various, conflicting, unsatisfactory interpretations and expositions. However, in spite of the philosophic advisability, if not necessity, of understanding Spinoza's doctrine of

¹ *Chronicon Spinozanum*, Tomus Primus. Hagæ Comitum; Curis Societatis Spinozanæ, 1921, pp. xxiv + 326; Tomus Alter, 1922, pp. xxv + 276; Tomus Tertius, 1923, pp. vii + 376.

² Morris R. Cohen, "Amor Dei Intellectualis," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, III, p. 4.

Substance, no one seems to be able to—if it is legitimate to take as rough evidence the existence of many diverse unconvincing expositions of it. It would be hard to say just how many interpretations are today extant, and find complete or incidental expression in the essays under review, but their number, although not legion, is still considerable.

To consider only a few.

Professor Cohen, who is strongly, and perhaps unduly, influenced by the mathematical form of the *Ethics*, thinks that Spinoza's God is "the ideal essence or intelligible structure of nature,"³ although earlier in his paper he carefully identifies "the logical aspect or attribute of the universe" with "the intellect of God."⁴

Now, although if anything is clear, on any interpretation, it is that the infinite intellect of Spinoza's God (His intelligible structure, ideal essence or logical aspect) can not constitute His absolutely infinite nature, no less a philosophical historian than Hoffding seems also to hold some such erroneous view. Spinoza's God, according to him, is the Principle of Rationality, of Understanding, or Law in the universe. But how it is possible that a Principle, even of Rationality, Understanding, or Law can also be an entity or Being absolutely infinite, Hoffding does not indicate. The reasons that presumably constrained Hoffding to interpret God in this way seem to be born of a fundamental misconception or confusion on his part which in turn seems to be born of an epistemological bias or myopia best evidenced in his statement that Spinoza's "Metaphysik ist eine Projektion seiner Erkenntnistheorie."⁵ This misconception or confusion is that Substance is that which is known through itself *and makes everything else knowable* (alles andere verstandlich macht).⁶ Even if one grant that it may be true that a Principle of some sort or other could make something else knowable, it would not help in the least, for whether or not Spinoza's Substance is a Principle, it is as clear as anything in his philosophy can be, that it does *not* make anything else knowable—unless one restricts the sense in which it makes them knowable, to the sense in which it makes them knowable by virtue of the fact that it makes them *be* (I, 15). Modes are conditioned for existence by substance, and hence can not be adequately conceived except through substance (I, Def. V), but this is altogether different from being made knowable by substance, in the sense that it may be

³ *Loc. cit.*, p. 15.

⁴ *Loc. cit.*, p. 5. In still another place God is "the unity of all finite things," p. 12.

⁵ Hoffding, "Die Drei Gedankenmotive Spinozas," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, I, p. 8.

⁶ *Loc. cit.*, p. 7.

true a Principle of Understanding (of some sort or other) may make something else knowable, although it does *not* make them be.

Hoffding supports his interpretation, indirectly rather than directly, by an equally unfortunate interpretation of Spinoza's doctrine of causality. According to Hoffding, Spinoza used in fact two principles of causality—man konnte es das ideale und das elementare Kausalverhältnis nennen⁷—a duplicity Spinoza himself was, of course, innocent of at the expense of almost open and flagrant contradiction. This we see when we consider together Propositions I, 15 and I, 28.⁸ In I, 28 Hoffding says that Spinoza tells us that every mode must be explained or understood (erklärt) through another mode, and that again through another *ad infinitum*, while in I, 15 he tells us that whatever is (hence necessarily including finite modes), is in God and must be explained or understood through God. Clearly, argues Hoffding, these statements can be freed from palpable mutual contradiction only by means of a special interpretation of God, an interpretation, namely, which holds that God is a Principle of Rationality. Such a Principle would no doubt eschew, as a matter of integrity, any such irrationality as a contradiction, and, besides, it would enable us to escape from the dangerously imminent infinite regress of I, 28 and its equally threatening clash with I, 15: for explanation or understanding would consist in apprehending the Principle binding all things together. However appealing and plausible Hoffding's arguments may be, they seem to have little relevance to Spinoza's own view, for he does not, in the first place, maintain that one finite mode must be explained or understood (erklärt) through another finite mode (a quite impossible doctrine); he maintains, quite simply, that finite modes are dependent actually for their existence and action upon other finite modes and they again on others *ad infinitum*, although formally considered they are as much dependent upon God for their existence and action as are infinite and eternal modes (I, 28, schol. I, 15). Modes are understood when their essence is understood (and they are also thereby explained) and their essence is certainly *not* another mode. In the second place, there is no need for two causal principles. The essential difference between the finite and the infinite is sufficient to account for the fact that finite modes do not follow from the absolute nature of God as do infinite modes, although they are not, strictly speaking, differently determined by God, in that God can be considered the proximate cause of the latter, but not of the former (I, 28, schol.).

⁷ Hoffding, "Das Erste Buch der Ethica," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, II, p. 23.

⁸ *Chronicon*, II, p. 39 ff.

II

In striking contrast to the logico-mathematical or epistemological interpretation of Spinoza's God is the theologico-metaphysical interpretation Professor H. A. Wolfson presents in three extremely well-written chapters.⁹ Professor Wolfson comes to his study with a mind quite harmfully at ease in medieval philosophy as can be seen from the title of his forthcoming book. Nothing could be quite so far from the truth as the conception of Spinoza as a medievalist. It is incredibly erroneous. There is not one doctrine in Spinoza's philosophy—be it his psychology, logic, ethics, physics, politics, historiography, cosmology, or metaphysics—that can intelligently be called distinctively medieval. They can not be called anything but modern if not even contemporary. This can be even more easily seen if you take, for example, Professor Dewey's summary contrast of medieval and modern philosophy.¹⁰ Spinoza in every particular is a full-blooded modern. But, it is true, there may be one medievalism Spinoza is guilty of—the very familiar use of the term "God." And it is perhaps unfortunate that he did not consistently use the term "Nature," which to us has none of the fulsome religiosity of the more sanctified term. Had he used the term "Nature" commentators would not have gone so readily to their parallel texts and original spinozistic sources in medieval Jewish, Arabic, and Gentile philosophers. What Maimonides says about God would not be so quotable had Spinoza always spoken of Nature. Still, more recently modern philosophers than Spinoza have been known to use the word "God," and Spinoza should not, because of the use of the one term, be put in such bad philosophical company.

The thesis Wolfson presents in his first chapter is that Spinoza's definition of substance agrees in all substantial respects with the medieval conception, and that only in his conception and definition of mode does he strike out an original path of his own. Now this Spinozistic medieval Substance is "a whole transcending the universe which is the sum of the modes (not necessarily excluding its being immanent in the universe)."¹¹ The insuperable dialectical difficulties in the way of any such immanently transcending substance Wolfson has carefully considered in his second and third

⁹ Wolfson, "Spinoza's Definition of Substance and Mode"; "Spinoza on the Unity of Substance"; "Spinoza on the Simplicity of Substance," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, I, II, and III respectively; being three chapters in a work to be entitled: *Spinoza the Last of the Medievals; A Study of the Ethica ordine Geometrico Demonstrata in the light of a hypothetically constructed Ethica More Scholastico Rabbinoquo Demonstrata*.

¹⁰ Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Chapter VI.

¹¹ "Spinoza's Definition of Substance and Mode," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, I, p. 111.

chapters, in which he presents Spinoza's refutation of philosophic dualism, (alleged to be contained in Propositions II-VI), which paves the way for his own philosophic monism.¹² But it is quite unnecessary to have a whole array of arguments to show that the initial interpretation of God as a whole which transcends (though it is immanent) is wrong—unless one would want to make unjust capital of Spinoza's lack of logical provision against a divinely vacuous and inefficacious part of God. Otherwise the proposition that "God is the immanent and *not* the transitive cause of all things" (I, 18) is alone sufficient to dispose of such an absurd conception. It would not be necessary to mention that God is among an infinite number of other things, an infinite corporeal Being (I, 15, schol.)—something Wolfson seems to overlook and even argue against¹³—and it would be extremely trying for such a Being both to transcend the universe and to be immanent in it; indeed, only less trying than it would be for It to reduce Itself to a logico-mathematico-epistemological Principle.

However, Professor Wolfson's general conclusion concerning the nature of Substance is what is most striking and interesting. He concludes that "Spinoza's substance is inconceivable, its essence undefinable, and hence unknowable."¹⁴ Truly a remarkable pronouncement, when we consider that Spinoza defined substance, and that this chapter is supposed to be about that definition. Even if Wolfson would want to maintain that Spinoza defined one of the properties, or an accident of substance, not its essence (something he could hardly maintain), his statement would be no less distressing, since he maintains also that substance is unknowable. And if substance is unknowable so are modes (I, Def. V) and since nothing besides these two is granted beyond the intellect (I, 4) it follows we can never know anything—not even that Substance is a whole transcending the sum of modes which is the universe—(not necessarily excluding its being immanent, too). And yet, contrariwise, Spinoza maintained, differing from both Descartes and Maimonides, that "the human mind possesses an *adequate* knowledge of the eternal and infinite *essence* of God" (II, 47). Besides, it would be somewhat difficult, were Wolfson correct, to explain why "the highest good of the mind is the knowledge of God and the highest virtue of the mind is to know God" (IV, 28). The inspiration of the *amor Dei intellectualis* would, on the same principle, be pure charlatanism.

How does Wolfson come to his strange conclusion? Substance, by definition, is that which is conceived through itself. "But," says

¹² "Spinoza on the Unity of Substance," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, II, p. 92.

¹³ "Spinoza's Definition of Substance and Mode," *Chronicon*, I, pp. 108-110.

¹⁴ *Loc. cit.*, I, p. 111, *cf. also* III, p. 165.

Wolfson, "to be conceived through itself is really a negation. It does not mean anything positively. All it means is that it cannot be conceived through something else."¹⁵ By the same reasoning, surely, "to be in itself" is also really a negation. All it means is that it can not be in something else. Hence since substance is a negation and since modes are in substance and the universe is the sum of modes, the universe disappears! Truly a most giddy kind of hard-headed realism!¹⁶ One need hardly take time to point out how obviously and interestingly Wolfson's indefinable, *unknowable* substance contradicts Hoffding's substantial Principle of Understanding which makes all else *knowable*.

In such fashion is Spinoza's conception of God expounded.

III

It is perhaps natural to expect that Wolfson would not be very clear about Spinoza's definition of mode since he is not very clear about his definition of substance. And, in fact, he isn't. "Mode," he tells us, "is related to substance as the individual essence to its genus." An example is man who "is conceived through his *genus* animal, and its species *rational*." Hence when "Spinoza rightly says that *A substance is prior in its nature to its modifications*,"¹⁷ we can with equal justice say that animals are prior in nature to man. Which is quite plainly absurd.

Wolfson's detailed discussion of the first thirteen Propositions is open to as much obvious objection as is his interpretation of substance and mode. It would take considerable space to dispute his orthodox contention that Propositions II-VI are a polemic against, or refutation of, medieval dualism, although indirectly it can be easily indicated that they are not; for, to make use of an *experimentum crucis*, Proposition I, 18 (if Wolfson is right) should logically depend upon Propositions I, 2, 3, and 6. An examination of the demonstration, however, shows that it is not; nor are the propositions by which it is demonstrated. And the proof of the proposition (to perfect the proverb) is in the demonstrating of it!

As for Wolfson's analysis of Propositions VII-XIII, there is very little more that can be said for it. If we take God to be a Being absolutely infinite (as we should) in which all modes, finite and infinite, exist, it is manifestly impossible to maintain that Spinoza asserted the simplicity of substance in a sense which denied that there was "*any* kind of internal plurality, physical as well as meta-

¹⁵ *Chronicon Spinozanum*, I, p. 111.

¹⁶ *Chronicon Spinozanum*, I, p. 110.

¹⁷ *Chronicon Spinozanum*, I, pp. 111-112.

physical.”¹⁸ Also it is difficult to understand what on earth Wolfson can mean by his very curious “parallelism between substance and God”¹⁹ by which he seeks to maintain that what Spinoza “has laid down of God in his definitions, he . . . tries to prove of substance in his propositions.”²⁰ Of equal order of curiosity is his exposition of Proposition IX. “The proposition as it stands is incomplete. Only the major premise is given. Its full significance, however, can be brought out by supplying the minor premise and conclusion.”²¹ This is something like Pollock’s well-known mutilated and confused interpretation of Proposition VII, of the *Second Part*, and it is perhaps no breach of philosophic amenities leniently to call it absurd.

Professor Wolfson, as so many other commentators, seems to have a veritable gift for crediting Spinoza with ideas against which Spinoza sought to protect himself. So, for example, he says that by eternity Spinoza means “infinite time,”²² although Spinoza carefully tells us he means something that “cannot be explained by means of continuance or time” (Def. VIII, Explanation). Again, discussing the distinction between the infinite in its own kind and the absolutely infinite, Wolfson states that Spinoza’s description of God as absolutely infinite is “a description which denies the existence of *any* relation between the essence of God and that of other beings,”²³ although Spinoza, replying to Oldenburg on the same point, writes: “As for your contention that God has nothing actually in common with created things, I have maintained the exact opposite in my definition.”²⁴ On the whole problem of the nature of the infinite, however, Wolfson seems to be more or less adrift. The upshot of his discussion is that “the term infinite stands in Spinoza for such terms as unique, incomparable, homonymous, indeterminate, incomprehensible, ineffable, indefinable, unknowable, and many other similar terms. *Unknowable* and *indefinable*, however, will be found its most convenient equivalents. It is in accordance with Aristotle’s dictum that *the infinite so far as infinite is unknown*.”²⁵ In Proposition II, 47, already quoted, Spinoza maintains that the human mind has an *adequate* knowledge of the *infinite* essence of God—so that the term “infinite” can hardly be equivalent to “incomprehensible, ineffable, unknowable, indefinable, no matter what Aristotle’s dictum may

¹⁸ “Spinoza on the Simplicity of Substance,” *Chronicon Spinozanum*, III, p. 145; italics mine.

¹⁹ *Loc. cit.*, p. 164.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 147.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 162; italics mine.

²⁴ Epistle IV.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163, italics Wolfson’s.

say.²⁶ Also, the infinite can no more be equivalent to the indeterminate (which is, I assume, equivalent to the indefinite), since Spinoza expressly distinguishes between them.²⁷ And as for being unique and incomparable, *sui generis*, these are characteristics which belong to many things, including the finite.

IV

Intimately connected with the doctrine of substance are the doctrines of attribute and mode. On the former, Egon v. Petersdorff, and on the latter, Elisabeth Schmitt, contribute exceedingly well-informed discussions in which the historical material and the various views that have been held on these subjects are presented succinctly, with admirable clarity and considerable grasp. However, neither the one nor the other have anything singularly striking to offer as conclusion, both ending on a negative note. Both authors seem to be well entangled in Kantian and post-Kantian habits of thought if not of doctrine, which (so I think) stultifies them in no inconsiderable degree—their criticism as well as their understanding. For example, both emphasize (although Petersdorff more than Elisabeth Schmitt) that Spinoza is a pre-Kantian Dogmatist, not a Critical Philosopher like the best of us are since Kant steeled us to the seductiveness of philosophic sleep. Spinoza's dogmatism is seen first and foremost in his bald assertion that a true idea is its own standard and the standard of what is false. True enough, but wherein lies the dogmatism? Is not a true idea its own standard and the standard of the false? This point is of greatest importance to get clear because all the other dogmatic metaphysical assumptions of Spinoza are sprung one way or another from this *Grunddogma*.²⁸ In what sense is the doctrine dogmatic? Is it possible to determine what is the nature of truth if we do not before our discovery know how to distinguish the false from the true, that is, if we do not already know what is the nature of truth? Will "Die Wahrheit Uberhaupt" slap us on the back and say "Here I am! Your search, weary philosopher, is over!"? If a true idea can not reveal its own identity to us, what can? Surely a false, fictitious or dubious idea can not. If when we have a true idea we do not know that it is a true idea (and only a true idea could tell us that) no philosophy, critical or otherwise, will be able to save us from the philosophic abyss. Then why not be

²⁶ Cf. some very brief, but pertinent, remarks by Prof. Cohen on the knowability of the infinite. He says in part "The question . . . how can man as a mode know the infinite substance? is based on a crude analogy which supposes the relation of knowledge to be like that of a box to its contents," *loc. cit.*, p. 15.

²⁷ Epistle XII.

²⁸ Egon v. Petersdorff: "Spinoza's Unendliche Attribute Gottes," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, II, p. 68.

“dogmatic” since in order to discuss the nature of truth it is necessary for us to know beforehand what truth is?

Along with the foregoing, Spinoza is guilty of the naïve dogmatism that logical and metaphysical predicates are identical, that *cogitare-esse* which is the “erkenntnistheoretische Begründung”²⁹ of his conception of God. The origin of this gross confusion on the part of Spinoza is his assumptions concerning the nature of the Subject—for he does not analyze the nature of the Subject although in the very first definition of the *Ethics* the Subject already conceives, and elsewhere it considers, expresses, explains, *etc.* If one asks Spinoza Who is this Subject? or What is the Subject-Object relation? there is no answer. This accusation is even more groundless than the one considered. Not only did Spinoza not neglect to consider the Subject (for what else is the *Second Part* about?), but, what is just as important, if not more so, he also knew *when* to consider it—something which can hardly be said for any other modern philosopher. From the days of *cogito ergo sum* to the days of sense-data and critical essences, the proper order of philosophic enquiry—from metaphysics to anthropology (in the original sense of the word)—has been neglected in favor of the inverted order at the cost of the principal contradictions, rebellions, confusions which so typically characterize modern philosophy. Not only did Spinoza recognize the true order, implicit in the order of *Parts I* and *II*, but he has specifically commented upon it in words that have telling application to some of the more consuming of contemporary philosophic problems.³⁰

The conclusion arrived at by Petersdorff is not at all surprising in spite of the portentous discussion. It is, that although Spinoza started out by dogmatically asserting the existence of a Being absolutely infinite he ended an agnostic as far as all the attributes except thought and extension are concerned.³¹ Far more interesting than this commonplace is Petersdorff’s incidental attempt at philosophical psycho-physico-analysis. He sagaciously remarks apropos some spinozistic difficulties “Dennoch wird man einen Menschen, der selbst nicht weiss, dass er an der Schwindsucht leidet, als Wissender nicht gesund nennen können.” (!)³²

A careful reading of the opening passage of Elisabeth Schmitt’s essay will most likely discourage any further voluntary reading.³³ Every philosophic pantheism, she tells us, has to face the difficult

²⁹ Petersdorff, *loc. cit.*, p. 69.

³⁰ *Ethics*, II, X schol.

³¹ Petersdorff, *loc. cit.*, p. 91.

³² Petersdorff, *loc. cit.*, p. 70.

³³ Elisabeth Schmitt, “Zur Problematik der Unendlichen Modi,” *Chronicon Spinozanum*, II, pp. 155 ff.

task which is presented in the problem of Individuation. No such philosophy, unless it wants to enter bankruptcy claims immediately, can escape answering the questions (1) How can God be the world, our world? (2) How can one absolute Being at the same time be Full, Manifold, and Finite? (3) How does God (wie wird Gott) become the world, nature? (4) How does our world come to be in God? These are, beyond peradventure, extraordinarily difficult questions to answer, but it is doubtful whether Spinoza (or for that matter any one) need answer them. Indeed, it was similar if not identical questions that Spinoza brushed aside with considerable irritation when writing to Oldenburg in 1665 and to Boxel in 1674.³⁴ But the considerations to be found in these letters smack altogether too much of pre-Kantian dogmatism to appeal to our critical commentators.

There is one other point that well deserves comment, *viz.*, the references that are sometimes given for points made (or scored). We are told, for example, that (chez Spinoza) "Erkenntnis heisst vollständige Causalerklärung."³⁵ Yet when one in astonishment checks the references, the word "cause" is not even incidentally discovered—as one would quite sanely expect. For is it not a commonplace that Spinoza knew that knowledge is of the essence or nature of things? And when we consider the essence or nature of things their causal necessity is, quite unparadoxically, an accident. Failure to recognize this may, perhaps, account for the fact that while every one cries out against the horribly immoral and irreligious doctrine of absolute necessity (passionately miscalled fatalism) which renders human nature degradingly impotent and valueless, Spinoza speaks calmly and clearly, as no other philosopher has done, about Human Freedom, or the Power of the Intellect.

V

It is greatly to be deplored that the *De Intellectus Emendatione* is not complete, for some of the characteristic difficulties of commentators would have been provided for. An understanding of Spinoza's logic is as pressingly preliminary to an understanding of his metaphysics, as is his metaphysics to his ethics. The *Ethics* begins where most treatises (nowadays) end. It assumes the reader is a trained philosopher³⁶ and does not stop to elucidate minor or even major difficulties. The unfinished treatise would have been a much needed introduction. Spinoza would have had much to say concern-

³⁴ Ep. 32, and Ep. 56. Cf. also *Ethics*, I. App.

³⁵ Schmitt, *loc. cit.*, p. 155. The references are V, 25; 27; dem.; IV, 24 dem.; 28; 36 schol.

³⁶ Notice Spinoza's young impatience with Oldenburg ". . . the distinction was pointed out . . . sufficiently clearly at any rate for a philosopher" Ep. 4 (ca. 1661).

ing the distinction between "ratio" and "scientia intuitiva" and their relation to one another and to the truth, a problem which M. Terrasse deals with in a very comprehensive way.³⁷ Had Spinoza written more fully upon this subject, as he intended,³⁸ commentators

³⁸ *Ethics*, II, 40 schol.

would not be so prone to give his philosophy idealistic twists.³⁹ M. Terrasse, for a young man of twenty-one, displays an unusual philosophic grasp, and had he not been, lamentably, one of the earliest victims of international stupidity and brutality, he would certainly have, in time, taken a place in the front ranks.

M. Rivaud examines more closely than others the logical structure of the *Ethics*. It is difficult to follow him to the startling conclusion that "les *per se nota* appartiennent non à la Philosophie proprement dite, mais à la théorie de la méthode."⁴⁰ His whole discussion affords many contentious points. The contagious theory that (chez Spinoza) a true idea is one that has a place in a system and implies it, and that a false or mutilated or confused idea is one that has no such systematic place or implications,⁴¹ is certainly false. An idea may be *detected* to be false by means of developing its implications (a matter of fact doctrine), but its falsity or truth is constituted by its disagreement or agreement with its ideatum. M. Decoster is misled on the same point, by the distinction Spinoza makes between the intrinsic and extrinsic marks of an idea.⁴² It must be remembered that the Spinozistic "idea" is, in latest terminology, both constitutive and epistemic, metaphysical and psychological, and hence has distinctive properties besides that of being either true or false. M. Rivaud makes an enormous blunder when he considers that "ut omnes uno ore statuunt"⁴³ is an appeal "au consentement universel."⁴⁴ As can be seen at a glance from the usage in a letter to Boxel,⁴⁵ Spinoza is, in such instances, merely pointing to the agreement or similarity between his doctrine and doctrines commonly held. Such, for example, is his more specific reference to the Jews⁴⁶ which certainly has no intended demonstrative value. Spinoza, in no instance, forsakes apodictic demonstration for popular prejudice.

³⁷ Louis Terrasse. "La Doctrine Spinoziste de la Vérité," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, III.

³⁹ Terrasse. *Loc. cit.*, p. 215 ff.

⁴⁰ Albert Rivaud, "Les *Per Se Nota* dans l'*Ethique*," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, II, p. 150.

⁴¹ Rivaud, *loc. cit.*, p. 143.

⁴² Paul Decoster, "Quelques Aspects de la Dialectique Spinoziste," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, III, p. 181.

⁴³ Appearing in *Ethics*, II, 3, schol.

⁴⁴ Rivaud, *loc. cit.*, p. 143.

⁴⁵ Ep. LVI. (Van Vloten & Land, 3d ed.)

⁴⁶ *Ethics*, II, 7, schol.

VI

It has been remarked more often than pleasantly that Spinoza has never had a school of followers although he has had shoals of admirers, as the international Spinozistic society magniloquently testify—after his first century of neglect inductively proving the street adage that the first hundred years are the hardest. The absence of the customary coterie of fervid disciples is nothing to be deplored, for one of the saddest things great men have to suffer from is the zeal of their followers. Also, there is no recognizable reason for being apologetic about Spinoza, taking up his defense, as the *Societas Spinozana* have seen fit to do by prefixing to their volumes a bizarre collection of documentary guarantees of Spinoza's philosophic greatness and personal moral goodness, written by distinguished men of all sorts and several generations. A more familiar acquaintance with Melville's series in *Mobie Dick* on the virtues of the whale would have certainly deterred them, had no other, wiser counsel prevailed. Spinoza is easily great enough to take his position with the indisputable and undefended masters of philosophic men.

The original essays, fortunately, are as a rule totally free from the tragic anxiety to qualify the hero for his just due—(again testifying that the group is neither so intelligent nor so finegrained as the individual)—except, perhaps, Professor A. Wolf's essay⁴⁷ which would rank high in the literature of a philosophic Sunday school. Professor Wolf hopes by means of his selected and dominating feature to explain Spinoza's failure (better termed success) to generate a school while attracting a varied and ecstatic appreciation. This is due to his "breadth of outlook and of sympathy, which saved him from *extremes*, prompted him to allow everything its due, and so made him a great Conciliator. . . . Take most of the antitheses. . . . It will be found that in each case Spinoza's *attitude* was one of conciliation. Consider, for instance, the antithesis between Materialism and Idealism. . . . Spinoza's view is that ultimate reality is both matter and mind."⁴⁸ And so on incredibly. Spinoza a conciliator! What an instance of conciliation! As if one would conciliate France by pointing out that as a matter of fact she along with the Allies had her inevitable part in causing the War and hence must bear with Germany half of the burden of indemnity. A more tragically miserable misvaluation of Spinoza could hardly be conceived.⁴⁹

The chief impression these essays (many excellent ones have not been even mentioned for lack of space) may leave on the reader is one

⁴⁷ A. Wolf, "Spinoza the Conciliator," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, II.

⁴⁸ Wolf, *loc. cit.*, p. 5, italics mine.

⁴⁹ In pleasant contrast is Wolf's vigorous and critical comment on Alexander's *Spinoza and Time* (*Chronicon Spinozanum*, I, pp. 321-324).

of wonderment at the many ways there are of misinterpreting the same text. Which is, of course, as it should be, since Paul's idea of Peter tells us more about Paul than about Peter. Thus we learn something about Pollock, for example, when he says, objecting to Duff, that Spinoza "expected his philosophy to throw *some* light on the conduct of life" as can be said "with as much and *no more* truth than of almost all philosophers."⁵⁰ We learn that Pollock has recently changed his mind,⁵¹ although Spinoza has not. Herein, in large measure, lies the great value of these essays which no student of Spinozistic literature can afford to miss possessing. Herein too, by the way, lies the solution of over-rated Tschirnhausen's vexed question to Spinoza who answered with brief clarity, "that although each particular thing be expressed in infinite ways in the infinite understanding of God, yet those infinite ideas, whereby it is expressed, can not constitute one and the same mind of a particular thing, but infinite minds."⁵²

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BOOK REVIEWS

Dialogues in Limbo. GEORGE SANTAYANA. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1925. 192 pp.

George Santayana is best known by his five-volume monumental contribution to general philosophy, *The Life of Reason*, a painting of the ideals of society, religion, art, and science. The human purport of this elaborate imaginative creation of a great poet-philosopher was a life of harmony, a rich fruition of our natural impulses and tendencies which compose the rough foundations or raw materials of the *Life of Reason*. These basic cravings are at bottom lacking in logicity with their imperative way of seeking satisfaction, each impulse proclaiming insistently its absolute prerogative with total disregard for the rest of the restless members of the soul. Hence the apparent paradox of the *Life of Reason* was that it aimed at rational harmonies of irrational elements.

Now the venerable poet, as he attains unto the prophetic wisdom of age (the former professor is over sixty years old), turns his eye back over the flux of existence in order to review the sources

⁵⁰ F. Pollock, "Spinoza's Political Doctrine," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, I, p. 45, italics mine.

⁵¹ "The aim of Spinoza's treatise (*Ethics*) is not to give a complete system of philosophy or psychology, but to show the way to human happiness. The philosophical introduction, elaborate as it appears, is subordinate to the ethical purpose. Pollock, *Spinoza, His Life and Philosophy*, p. 212.

⁵² Ep. 66.