



## Spinoza and Cartesianism (II)

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## II.—SPINOZA AND CARTESIANISM (II).

BY L. ROTH.

### II.

In an earlier article I endeavoured to show that the logical premises and theological bias of the Cartesian philosophy were such as to result, even on Descartes' own admission, in a scepticism for which the discovery, the demonstration, and the communication of rational knowledge were alike impossible. Before considering the systematic logic of Spinoza,<sup>1</sup> it will be convenient to deal with the problems presented by the actual form of his principal work, the *Ethics*.

#### § 1. THE FORM OF THE "ETHICS".

As is well known, the suggestion of its peculiar method of presentation was derived immediately from Descartes. At the end of the second set of objections, collected by Mersenne from various theologians and philosophers, there occurs the following passage: "In order that it may be profitable for each and all to read your meditations, containing as they do so much subtlety, and, in our opinion, so much truth, . . . it would be well worth the doing if, hard upon your solution of the difficulties, you advanced as premises certain definitions, postulates, and axioms, and thence drew conclusions, conducting the whole proof by the geometrical method in the use of which you are so highly expert. Thus would you cause each reader to have everything in his mind, as it were, at a single glance, and to be penetrated throughout with a sense of the Divine being."<sup>2</sup> This proposal to present non-

<sup>1</sup> All references to Spinoza are from Bruder's edition; except for the letters, which are quoted by the numbering and pages of Van Vloten and Land's 2nd edition (1895) and the Short Treatise, which is quoted by the pages of Wolf's English Version (A. & C. Black, 1910).

<sup>2</sup> *Obj.*, p. 128, 14-18 (ut unico velut intuitu lectoris cuiuscunque animum expleas ac ipso numine divino perfundas).

geometrical matter in geometrical form was not novel,<sup>1</sup> as, indeed, is suggested by the fact that Descartes received it without surprise. He pointed out, however, that the analytic method of proof which he had employed in the *Meditations* is also essentially geometrical, and, as opposed to the synthetic method, which is the geometrical method as generally understood, has the great advantage of revealing to the reader the process by which the author himself came to his conclusions. It suffers, however, he says, from the defect that it only persuades a reader who is of like mind with the author, and who is open to be led gradually along the road of the discovery of truth. When, therefore, the reader is likely to be hostile, and only then, it is necessary to adopt the synthetic method of proof, because, in a close chain of propositions, each one depending on the preceding, misunderstandings and disagreements are easily tracked down and quickly removed.<sup>2</sup> To Descartes, therefore, the whole value of the synthetic method of exposition is just this rigid certainty of demonstration.

A consideration of the method as it appears in the work of Spinoza reveals precisely the opposite conception. It is first of all not a method of proof, but an order of presentation, as may be proved not only by the very title of the *Ethics*, but also by the fact that Spinoza proposed to deal in precisely the same way with the intricacies of Hebrew Grammar.<sup>3</sup> In the *Ethics* itself the geometric form, even as an order, is dropped

<sup>1</sup> To the references of Dilthey (*Gesam. Schr.*, ii., pp. 272-273, 278) and Freudenthal (*Leben.*, p. 113) may be added the curious passage of Albert, to which attention was first directed by Jourdain (*Recherches*: Paris, 1843, pp. 445 ff.): "Accipiemus igitur ab antiquis, quæcumque bene dicta sunt ab ipsis, quæ ante nos David Judæus quidam ex dictis Aristot. Avicennæ. Algæze. et Alpharab. congregavit, per modum theorematum ordinans ea, quorum commentum ipsemet adhibuit, sicut et Euclides in geometris fecisse videtur: sicut enim Euclidis commento probatur theoremata quodcumque ponitur ita et David commentum adhibuit, quod nihil aliud est nisi probatio theorematis positi" (*De Causis et Processu Unius*, ii., tract. i., cap. i.) [The Pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *De Causis* to which reference is supposed to be made hardly answers to this description.]

Meyer, in the third paragraph of his introduction to the *Princ. Phil. Cart.* (p. 4) speaks of a few authors before Descartes who had tried "ut reliquas, ultra Mathesin, Philosophiæ partes, methodo atque certitudine mathematica demonstratas posteritati relinquerent". He himself confesses to have made the attempt, before he knew of Spinoza's work, on the Cartesian philosophy (*ibid.*, § 5, p. 6).

<sup>2</sup> *Obj.*, p. 155 f. Cf. Joachim, *Study*, p. 10. "Omnia ea quæ in tractatu meo explicabam," he writes to Mersenne (*Ep.*, II., lxxvi.), "a se mutuo ita pendebant, ut si scias illorum unum esse falsum, satis habeas ad concludendum rationes quibus utebar omnes corruiere."

<sup>3</sup> In animo semper habuit Hebræam grammaticam, more geometrico demonstratam, luci exponere. (*Pref. Op. Post.* ap. Bruder, vol. iii., p. 275.)

at convenience. The most characteristic portions of the work are to be found in the excursions on particular problems in the appendices and longer scholia. In many passages he has stepped aside altogether and vindicated his method or results<sup>1</sup>; in many others he has gathered up the threads of a past argument, or sketched out the path for the future.<sup>2</sup> Now he gives a detailed criticism of current views;<sup>3</sup> now develops a particular point of special interest of his own.<sup>4</sup> And all in order to lead men, as he phrases it, "by the hand," to the "knowledge of the human mind and its highest beatitude".<sup>5</sup> The geometric order could hardly have been regarded as the highway to truth by a man who by its help had calmly "demonstrated" propositions which he expressly repudiated.<sup>6</sup>

It would, however, be unfair to Spinoza to affirm that the geometric order was one of convenience only, and nothing more. He adopted it for a definite reason, and that was its impersonality. Mathematics recognises and has no place for personal prejudice. It sees nature 'as in truth it really is,' a whole of law by which all things are. It neither laughs nor weeps at the objects of its study, because its aim is to understand them.<sup>7</sup> The great enemy to knowledge, Spinoza tells us, is man's habit of interpreting all things by the standard of his own likes and dislikes, and the consequent setting up of merely human norms by which the whole of nature is judged. On the basis of this irrational prejudice men build up a superstitious theology, and, being too lazy and conceited to abandon it when they find it inadequate to meet the facts,

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, *Eth.*, II., App. (the practical value of the system); III., pref. (the mathematical method in ethics); iv., 18 sch. (the essential piety of utilitarianism).

<sup>2</sup> *E.g.*, III., App. (the passions); IV., App. (summary of ethical teaching); IV., 73 sch. (the free man's outlook); V., 20 sch. (power of mind in the control of emotion); V., 42 sch. (the freedom of the wise).

<sup>3</sup> *E.g.*, I., App. (final causes and value judgments); V., pref. (Cartesian psychology); I., 15 sch. (infinity); I., 33 sch. (eternity and necessity); II., 48-49 (will and intellect); V., 41 sch. (conceptions of immortality).

<sup>4</sup> *E.g.*, IV., pref. (good and evil); II., 17 sch. (error); II., 40 sch. (common notions, and grades of knowledge); III., 2 sch. (power of body); IV., 17 sch. (*ἀκρασία*); IV., 35 sch. (asceticism); IV., 39 sch. (alternations of personality); V., 10 sch. (value of ethical maxims); V., 36 sch. (beatitude).

II., pref.

<sup>6</sup> " . . . me non omnia quæ in eo tractatu continentur, pro meis agnoscere, cum non pauca in eo scripserim quorum contraria prorsus amplector . . ." (*Ep.*, XIII., p. 235). Spinoza is annoyed with Blyenbergh for not having paid attention to Meyer's preface (*Ep.*, XXI., p. 278). He remarks on the irksome prolixity of the mathematical method in *Eth.*, IV., 18 sch.

<sup>7</sup> *Eth.*, III., pref. For similar phrases cf. *Ep.*, XXX., p. 305, and *Tr. Pol.*, I., § 4.

erect finally their own ignorance into a god. "It is easier for them," he writes, "to affirm the insoluble character of this and similar problems" (of teleology) "and retain their present innate state of ignorance, than to pull down the whole construction and think out a new one. And so they hold it as a fixed principle that the '*judgments of the gods surpass by far the grasp of the human mind*'; a principle, forsooth, which in itself would have been sufficient to keep truth away from the human race for ever; had not mathematics, which deals not with ends, but only with the essences and properties of figures, pointed out to them another standard of truth."<sup>1</sup> The mathematical method, therefore, meant to Spinoza the free unprejudiced enquiry of the human mind, uncramped by the veto of theology and theological philosophy. If we ask whose philosophy is here under criticism, the answer is clearly, *the philosophy of Descartes*. It was Descartes who had laid it down as a *metaphysical canon* that 'the judgments of God surpass the grasp of the human understanding,' and so gave the sanction of the first philosopher of the age to the principle which 'would have been sufficient in itself to keep truth away from the human race for ever'.<sup>2</sup> The mathematical method was held in esteem, then, by Spinoza, not because it was the method of Descartes, but because it was one<sup>3</sup> of the influences which helped to free him from Descartes. The form of the *Ethics*, in fact, far from being a tribute to Descartes, is the most vivid protest against his authority.

## § 2. SPINOZA AND THE CARTESIAN LOGIC.

### *The Groundwork : Meyer's Preface.*

That Spinoza was specifically dissatisfied with the logic of Descartes, and that he did not keep his dissatisfaction to himself, we have interesting and important contemporary evidence in the preface written to his account of Descartes' philosophy by his intimate friend Dr. L. Meyer. The oft-recurring statement that such and such a question 'surpasses the power of human comprehension,' he says, must be remembered to be the opinion, not of Spinoza himself, but of Descartes. "For our author considers that all those matters,

<sup>1</sup> *Eth.*, I., App., pp. 217-218.

<sup>2</sup> See Meyer's pref., § 10 (p. 9), quoted below pp. 163-4; cf. *Eth.*, I., 33, sch. 2: "Verum neque etiam dubito si rem meditari vellent . . . quin tandem talem libertatem qualem iam Deo tribuunt, non tantum ut nugatorium sed ut magnum scientiæ obstaculum plane reiiciant."

<sup>3</sup> "Præter mathesin aliæ etiam adsignari possunt causæ, a quibus fieri potuit . . . ut homines communia hæc præiudicia animadvertent et in veram rerum cognitionem duerentur." *Eth.*, I., App., p. 218.

and not those matters only, but also many others of greater sublimity and subtlety, can not only be clearly and distinctly perceived by us, but also are subject to the easiest of explanations, provided only that the human intellect is led to the investigation of truth and the knowledge of things by a *road other than that thrown open and laid down by Descartes*; and that therefore the principles of the sciences as laid down by Descartes, and everything built up by him upon them, do not suffice to unravel and resolve either all or the most difficult of the problems which meet us in metaphysics, but that *other principles must be sought for* if we wish to raise our intellect up to 'that pinnacle of knowledge'."<sup>1</sup>

The significance of this statement is only fully understood when we remember that it was made with the full knowledge and acquiescence, if not at the actual request, of Spinoza himself.<sup>2</sup> This preface is to be regarded as a manifesto of dissociation from Descartes. It is not only on the different questions of metaphysical speculation that Spinoza is declared to be at variance with the man whose philosophy he is expounding, however weighty these questions may be; but on the fundamental logical conceptions on which the whole structure of that philosophy was reared. And indeed, the two characteristic features of the Cartesian metaphysic which are specifically singled out as rejected by Spinoza<sup>3</sup> are just those which, in fact, confess the failure of the Cartesian logic. The God of Descartes was nothing more than an asylum ignorantiae; while his doctrine of the impotence of human thought merely covered the impotence of his own method. Descartes had, in fact, sublimated his inability to meet the problems of metaphysics into the metaphysical principle of the incomprehensibility of phenomena.<sup>4</sup>

*Central Problem: Nature of God. (a) God as Asylum Ignorantiae.*

Now Spinoza, like Descartes, affirmed the dependence of all things and thoughts on God,<sup>5</sup> but with an entirely different

<sup>1</sup> *Princ. Phil. Cart.*, pref., § 10, pp. 9-10. There seems to be a sarcastic reference to Descartes' letter prefixed to the *Principia*.

<sup>2</sup> See *Ep.*, XIII. The parts of the preface he objected to (*Ep.*, XV.) were evidently removed.

<sup>3</sup> Meyer's pref., §§ 9-10, pp. 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> "Huius doctrinae sectatores . . . novum attulerunt modum argumentandi, reducendo scilicet non ad impossibile sed ad ignorantiam, quod ostendit nullum aliud fuisse huic doctrinae argumentandi medium" (*Eth.*, I., App. p. 219).

<sup>5</sup> "We know Him better even than we know ourselves, because without Him we could not know ourselves at all." *Short Treatise*, II., 19 (p. 123); and often.

meaning. By Descartes, as we have seen, both thoughts and things are viewed as discrete entities, linked with their own pasts and futures, and with those of other entities, not by any inherent power of their own, or by any universal laws of connexion, but by the constant reinforcement of their being from the creative activity of God. Now the creative acts of God do not form a rational whole, that is, a whole such that, starting from any one constituent, we could infer the rest. And the reason is that the basis of inference is lacking. The course of the creative acts of God is determined by His ends, but His ends, though very real, are not intelligible to man. It is not to be doubted that such ends exist, or that the conception of ends in nature is valid; but, being the ends of a transcendent being, they are twice removed from the intellect of man.<sup>1</sup> We cannot, on the one hand, trace out connexions in things, because they do not exist; nor, on the other, can we understand the divine plan which causes such connexions to appear. The presence of a rational connexion in the universe, therefore, would be due to the accident that in this one case the divine will had coincided with the human understanding, but we have no guarantee that an accident which has occurred once will occur again. The discrete events remain discrete events. If we have a clear idea of any one, then we have a right to affirm its existence; but from this unique event no other can be deduced—at every step we must refer back to the immediate efficient cause of all, the working of which is beyond our comprehension. “He had conceived the mind so distinct from the body,” runs Spinoza’s criticism of the crucial difficulty of the Cartesian psychology and its characteristic resolution, “. . . that he was forced to take refuge with the cause of the whole universe, that is, with God.”<sup>2</sup>

(β) *The Modifications of the “Princ. Phil. Cart.” in the “Cog. Met.” God as Summa Intelligentia.*

Traces of Spinoza’s own opinion may be found already even in the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, a work which, with the Principles of Descartes’ philosophy to which it is appended, he by no means recognised as his own<sup>3</sup> In it he takes over

<sup>1</sup> *Princ.*, I., 28; III., 2; *Med.*, IV., p. 55, 23-26; *Resp.*, V., p. 375, 7-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Eth.*, V., pref., p. 390.

<sup>3</sup> In *Ep.*, XIII., he includes, “*præcipua quæ in metaphysicis tractantur*” with “*secundam partem Principiorum Cartesii*” as comprising the treatise which he had dictated to the pupil “whom he did not wish to acquaint with his own opinions”. It is not surprising, therefore, to find in it doctrines, e.g., as to the nature of time, which we know him to have definitely repudiated. But, although the *Cog. Met.* cannot be adduced as in any wise authoritative, it is legitimate to use it as illustrative of

the Cartesian God, and, up to a point, and up to a point only, reveals his own position in its regard. Thus God is conceived of still as the conserving cause of the universe, but it is God as immutable and as infinite intellect.<sup>1</sup> God's existence and intellect and essence are one, and His power, too, is only one with His essence; but this involves the position, not that God wills, and then understands what He has willed, but that He understands and, in the very act of understanding, creates.<sup>2</sup> It is, indeed, from this identification of the will with the understanding (not of the understanding with the will) that the immutability of God may be demonstrated,<sup>3</sup> and so, too, His unity—because if there were many Gods the knowledge of each would be dependent on the others.<sup>4</sup> It is only as the object of His own knowledge that God may be said to create or to know created things; but since the knowledge of God is simple, it follows that His idea or decree concerning created nature is one.<sup>5</sup> Spinoza carries this stress on the conception of God as supreme intellect to its logical conclusion. Descartes had said that one must not be puzzled with the reflexion that the will of man depends often on external things, and therefore might be conceived to be determined by them and not by God; because God is to be conceived of as having arranged these external things also according to His will. Spinoza transfers the suggestion from the sphere of will to that of intellect. It is true, he says, that God might have created things otherwise; but, seeing that man, too, is a part of created nature, he too would have been different in the universal change of all things, "*in order that he might be able to understand them*". The remark is peculiarly significant in that it places the mind of man in the centre of things, and refuses to consider the very possibility of the universe being other than such as the mind

discussions found elsewhere. Spinoza himself refers to some of its points later, e.g., *Ep.*, LVIII., p. 384.

Freudenthal has shown the strong influence of the Scholastic Revival in the *Cog. Met.*, but the edge of the argument, as M. Delbos has remarked (*Le Spinozisme*, Paris, 1916, p. 24), has been turned by the researches of M. Gilson, who, in his *Index Scholastico-Cartésien* (Paris, 1913) has demonstrated the close connexion between the Scholastics and Descartes himself.

<sup>1</sup> *Cog. Met.*, II., 2 and 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I., 2, § 3; II., 7, § 2 note, § 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II., 4, note in Van Vloten's edition: "Deum immutabilem esse clarius etiam apparebit, ubi eius voluntatem ab intellectu non differre ostensum erit".

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II., 2, § 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, II., 7, §§ 2-3, 6, 7 (una tantum erit Dei idea sive decretum de Natura naturata).



of man could understand. But its significance is rendered even greater in view of the following sentence, in which Spinoza notes that by this one conception he has definitely broken with the philosophers who retained the traditional idea of God as transcendent will.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis is no longer on the power of God, but on the mind of man. And so he can say later: "The Philosopher does not inquire into what God can effect with His supreme power; but judges concerning the nature of things from the laws which God has implanted in them".<sup>2</sup>

(γ) *The New Orientation; Thought and Necessity as Opposed to Will and Freedom.*

It is not difficult to disentangle the problems and solutions of the Cartesian and Spinozistic logics, however much they are involved in words and phrases which have long been emptied of their meaning. As we saw in the treatment of Descartes, the arguments touching the veracity and the concursus of God have a real logical significance. If we are to think at all, we must have confidence in the value and validity of thinking; and this confidence can spring only from the conviction of the existence of an intelligible order in that about which we are thinking. It is an irony that Descartes, who did so much to further the actual progress of the sciences, should, by reason of the premises which he adopted, have been unable to find a logical justification for the very possibility of science. For the rational investigation of phenomena we need to be assured of two things, first, that we have the ability to reason, and, second, that the universe is such that we can reason about it. The first was denied by Descartes' subordination of intellect to will in man, the second by his affirmation of the incomprehensibility of the universe, which is only another aspect of the subordination of intellect to will in God. Both these positions must be rebutted if science is to be possible. As opposed, therefore, to Descartes, Spinoza held the identity of will and intellect in both man and God,<sup>3</sup> thus securing universal validity for the intellect of man; and by declaring God to be not the efficient

<sup>1</sup> *Cog. Met.*, II., 9, § 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II., 12, § 5.

<sup>3</sup> *E.g.*, *Eth.*, I., 32-33; II., 48-49. *Tract. Pol.*, II., § 6; *Ep.*, XXI., pp. 278-280; LVI., p. 377 ("Si affirmamus Deum potuisse rem non velle," etc.); *Ep.*, XIX., p. 254 ("Quia enim illa [Dei voluntas] ab eius intellectu non discrepat, impossibile æque est, aliquid fieri contra eius voluntatem ac contra eius intellectum; hoc est, id quod contra eius voluntatem feret, talis deberet esse naturæ ut eius etiam intellectui repugnaret, ut quadratum rotundum").

and transeunt, but the immanent, cause of the universe,<sup>1</sup> secured its rationality by declaring its groundwork to be reason.

So far, then, it seems to us, Meyer's claim is justified. The foundation of Spinoza's logic is fundamentally different from that of Descartes, and it must therefore be regarded as a new and distinct system. It is now clear why the controversy anent the freedom of the will assumed such importance at this crisis in the history of philosophy. It is not a psychological problem so much as a logical one. To Spinoza necessity is a *logical* theory. The universe must be such that it can yield its secrets to thought; thought must be capable of discovering those secrets. If either is unreliable, then there can be no science, and the pursuit of knowledge is a sham. The doctrine of necessity, therefore, stands at the very heart of Spinozism, as we have seen the doctrine of freedom to stand at the heart of Cartesianism. Just as the objections offered to Descartes centre around the problems attaching to the being and attributes of a creational Deity, and bring into question, not the doctrines themselves, but the method by which they were reached; so the objections offered to Spinoza scattered through the correspondence are directed for the most part against the idea of the scientific universe open to the investigation of the human mind. It makes no matter who it be—the secretary of the Royal Society in London, or the philosophising merchant of Amsterdam, or the professor of metaphysics at Leyden, or the doctor of Utrecht, or the great Leibniz himself<sup>2</sup>—it is always the same charge again and again; here is a man who has dared assert that God, in the words of a modern writer,<sup>3</sup> “must be conceived of as one who is absolutely faithful to his own methods, and who permits those methods to be scrutinised by man”. “What!” cries the outraged Dr. Velthuysen, “God cannot make a light weight lift up a heavier one, or a slow-moving body catch up one moving twice as fast!” and adds significantly, before passing the final judgment of “atheism,” this author “refuses to go with Descartes, whose teaching, however, he would like to be thought to have adopted, and affirm that just as the natures of all things are different from the nature

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, *Short Treatise*, I., 2, p. 30, 1-3; *Eth.*, I., 18; *Ep.*, LXXIII., p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> *Eps.*, 3, 5, 71, 73-75 (Oldenburg); 18-24 (Blyenbergh); 42 (Dr. Velthuysen); *Lebensgeschichte*, p. 228 (Prof. Volder); and pp. 218 and 235 (Leibniz).

<sup>3</sup> Beard, *The Reformation*<sup>2</sup>, (Hibbert Lectures, 1883), p. 392.

and essence of God, so their ideas exist freely in the divine mind".<sup>1</sup>

### § 3. THE DEVELOPED DOCTRINE.

#### (a) *The God of the Theology.*

How Spinoza carried this conception of a rational Nature over into the realms of theology has been brilliantly expressed by an English expositor of the first part of the *Ethics*: "He did not simply break off from theological speculation, and seek to establish philosophy on an independent footing; he seems intent on showing that theological speculation itself, when reason is once allowed free play, must at last purge itself of anthropomorphism and come round to the scientific view. Spinoza does not ignore theology, but provides an euthanasia for it; and there is every reason to believe that in so doing he faithfully reproduces the development of his system in his own mind. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Whether Spinoza, in order to achieve scientific orientation, had any occasion or no to leave the theology from which he started, may be left for later consideration. It is, however, of the supremest interest and importance to note that the characteristics which we have seen to be implicit in the Spinozistic God in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* are put forward without apology, and as self-understood, in the work which he devoted specifically to theology.

The third, fourth, and sixth chapters of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, which are nothing but a polemic against the Cartesians, illustrate this fact most clearly. They comprise the bold and clear affirmation of the reign of law, from the recognition of which, and of which alone, we can attain knowledge of God. If we break with the postulate of the rationality of Nature, then we break with the idea of God; from miracles we learn nothing but atheism.<sup>3</sup> To Spinoza, too, as to Descartes, the arguments for the existence of God depend on the existence of the mind; but it is not the mind as individual will, confined to the consciousness of its imperfection, but the mind as universal intellect, affirming and discovering itself in the very process of thought. From the one conception we are brought to the inference of the existence

<sup>1</sup> *Ep.*, 42, pp. 339 and 340.

<sup>2</sup> Pollock, *Spinoza*, 1912, p. 155.

<sup>3</sup> "Si quid igitur in Natura fieret quod ex ipsius legibus non sequeretur, id necessario ordini quem Deus in æternum per leges Naturæ universales in Natura statuit, repugnaret, adeoque id contra Naturam eiusque leges esset, et consequenter eius fides nos de omnibus dubitare faceret, et ad Atheismum duceret." *Theol.-Pol.*, cap. vi., § 28.

of an independent supreme will; from the other to that of a self-dependent supreme reason. Or we may phrase the difference in another way. Descartes could only argue to the validity of thought from the existence of God; Spinoza argued to the existence of God from the validity of thought. "Since the existence of God," he says, "is not known through itself, it must necessarily be inferred from notions the truth of which is so firm and unshaken that no power can be given or conceived by which they can be changed. To us at least from the time when we infer from them the existence of God, they must so appear, if we wish from them to infer it beyond all possibility of doubt. For if we were able to conceive that those very notions could be changed by any power whatsoever it might be, then we would be in doubt concerning their truth, and consequently even concerning our conclusion, *i.e.*, the existence of God."<sup>1</sup> The reference of the passage is clear. The Cartesian doubt can never bring to certainty; and the Cartesian God, with his power to shake our belief in the validity of thought, is a self-contradiction.

It is to be noted that Spinoza is not satisfied with the mere conception of law as existing. Law must be conceived of, not only as existing in the abstract, but as knowable, that is to say, as open to the investigation of unprejudiced mind. The word "miracle" may be understood in two senses, either as an actual break in the order of Nature, or as an event which cannot be explained by natural causes. That belief in the former is the merest atheism we have already seen; but belief in the latter is only a subtler and more dangerous form of the same, for, implying as it does the doctrine that there are things which by their very nature are closed to the human mind, it puts a direct bar in the way of our only possible approach to truth and God. To speak of the transcendence of Nature and the incomprehensibility of the workings of God's will, far from saving the idea of God, destroys its meaning. Men only take sanctuary with the idea of God, he complains, when they cannot find a rational explanation; whereas, as a matter of fact, it is only when they have a rational explanation that they may be said to be appreciating somewhat of the idea of God.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Theol.-Pol.*, vi., § 17.

<sup>2</sup> "Quia naturæ potentia nulla est nisi ipsa Dei potentia, certum est, nos eâtenus Dei potentiam non intelligere quatenus causas naturales ignoramus; adeoque stulte ad eandem Dei potentiam recurritur quando rei alicuius causam naturalem hoc est ipsam Dei potentiam ignoramus." *Theol.-Pol.*, i., § 44. "Ex eo quod nostrum captum superat nihil intelligere possumus. . . . Nos eo melius Deum Deique voluntatem cognoscere

(β) *The God of the Logic.*

This parallel conception of the unity of God and the unity of created Nature as a rational whole, which is the core of the *Cogitata Metaphysica* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, is made the pivot of the specifically logical treatise, the *De Intellectus Emendatione*. That this early and unfinished treatise (which contains in brief space the essential doctrine of the *Ethics*) bears in its detail the mark of many extraneous influences, has been often pointed out.<sup>1</sup> For our purpose it is more important to note that as a whole it is specifically directed against any logical theory which sets out, as we have seen Descartes' logic to do, from the individual idea as discrete.

Taking without discussion the fundamental premiss that thought reflects reality, or, in Spinoza's terminology, that an idea contains "objective" all that its "ideatum," or correlate in things, contains "realiter"; in order to understand the nature and significance of thought in general, we are told we must study what a thought or an idea is and involves. Since the thought or idea reflects a real thing, whatever is predicated of the thing is to be predicated of the thought. But in Nature there are no things in the sense of discrete objects. Reality is a whole in which all things are interconnected, and therefore to speak of a "thing" is to use a false abstraction, there being in reality no separate things at all. Since, then, a thing has no existence apart from the system of things, it cannot be seized hold of by itself. As soon as we attempt to grasp it, it grows, as it were, under our hands, involving an ever-widening circle of connexions, until finally the process is only brought to an end by the bounds of the completed system itself. But what is predicated of things is to be predicated of ideas. Just in the same way, therefore, as a thing eludes our grasp, so an idea eludes our grasp, if we attempt to isolate it. An idea can be treated as discrete only if the thing it reflects is discrete, but a discrete thing, "within the bounds of created Nature," does not exist.<sup>2</sup> It follows that

quo melius res naturalis cognoscimus. . . . Ei igitur plane nugantur qui ubi rem ignorant, ad Dei voluntatem recurrunt; ridiculus sane modus ignorantium profitendi." *Ibid.*, cap. vi., §§ 21, 22, 23.

<sup>1</sup> See Gebhardt's *Spinoza's Abhandlung über die Verbesserung des Verstandes* (Heidelberg, 1905), and the same author's introduction to his translation in Meiner's series (Leipzig, 1907).

<sup>2</sup> Adde quod idea eodem modo se habet objective ac ipsius ideatum se habet realiter. Si ergo daretur aliquid in natura nihil commercii habens cum aliis rebus, eius etiam si datur essentia objectiva quæ convenire omnino deberet cum formali, nihil etiam commercii haberet cum aliis ideis, id est, nihil de ipsa poterimus concludere; et contra quæ habent commercium cum aliis rebus, uti sunt omnia quæ in natura existunt, intelliguntur et ipsorum etiam essentiæ objectivæ idem habebunt commercium,

the very essence of an idea lies in its connexion with other ideas. There is, in fact, only one idea, *i.e.*, the systematic unity of all ideas, as there is only one thing, the systematic unity of all things.<sup>1</sup>

This one idea is the norm of the mind's thinking with which the Spinozistic methodology begins, and the process of the mental development of the individual is just the process of approximation to it. But this conception is not to be taken in any mystic sense. No mere dreaming on "absolute unity" is to bring the mind to perfection, and this for the reason that the "objective" unity has a "real" content in the totality of Nature. The parallelism is so strict that as far as we are concerned the two are interchangeable. "It is a self-evident truth that the mind understands itself more, the more it understands Nature." From one point of view, the mind grasps the whole of Nature, only when it grasps or becomes the most perfect idea; from another, it only knows of, and approximates to, the most perfect idea, as it learns more and more of created Nature.<sup>2</sup>

It follows that there is a real order and a real progress in ideas. Theoretically speaking, the mind has only to be started on any one idea in order finally to arrive at the whole, since the idea contains in itself precisely the same system of connexions (leading finally to the whole as a totality) which is contained in the thing of which it is the idea. The "concatenation" in either case is one and the same,<sup>3</sup> and it therefore makes no difference from which side the movement is begun. The criterion, then, of truth and of error, is precisely the length to which any suggested "concatenation" may be traced. Error, like truth, quickly reveals itself as such, simply by the fact that, when followed out in its connexions, it does not, as does truth, result in and embrace the whole system.<sup>4</sup>

The process of human thought, therefore, and the process

*id est aliæ ideæ ex eis deducuntur, quæ iterum habebunt commercium cum aliis et sic instrumenta ad procedendum ulterius crescent. D.I.E., § 41 (cf. Eth., I., 36).*

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, § 42, cf. § 76 with note 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, §§ 39-40.

<sup>3</sup> "Concatenatio intellectus . . . naturæ concatenationem referre debet" (§ 95); "anima . . . perget objective eosdem effectus formare" (§ 60 n.), and often.

<sup>4</sup> "Mens cum ad rem fictam et sua natura falsam attendit ut eam pensitet et intelligat bonoque ordine ex ea deducat quæ sunt deducenda facile falsitatem patefaciet; et si res ficta sua natura sit vera, cum mens ad eam attendit ut eam intelligat, et ex ea bono ordine incipit deducere, quæ inde sequuntur, feliciter pergat sine ulla interruptione sicut vidimus, quod ex falsa fictione modo allata statim ad ostendendam eius absurditatem et alias inde deductas præbuit se intellectus." § 61, cf. § 104.

of created Nature, are one and the same; the "spiritual automaton"<sup>1</sup> and the universe it sets out to investigate, are constructed according to the same pattern. The human mind is simply a fragment of the totality of thought,<sup>2</sup> just in the same way as a thing is only a fragment of the totality of things, because the human mind is one with its ideas and its ideas reflect ideata from the world of things. The "one true idea" of the logic and the "God" of the theology are then one and the same; and together they stand in a twofold relationship, on the one hand to their correlate, the totality of Nature, on the other hand to their part, the mind of man.

(γ) *The God of the Metaphysic.*

Leaving the various problems of the logic for later discussion, we may turn to the metaphysic in order to inquire into the nature of its fundamental premiss and its relation to the intellect of man. Spinoza's arguments for the existence of God are given in the eleventh proposition of the first book of the *Ethics*. After ten propositions have been allowed to pass without a mention of God, the demonstration is attempted that "God or a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists". This apparent paradox is due to the fact that Spinoza has taken over current philosophical terms, and by a close insistence on exact definition shown that they can only lead to his own views. The "causa sui," the "substance," the "attributes," the whole metaphysical terminology, in fact, which Descartes and the contemporary revivers of scholasticism had taken over from mediæval thought; all, when allowed to develop their own inner logic, result in the God of Spinoza. By the time he comes to the eleventh proposition, all he has to do is to substitute the word "God" for the word "substance".<sup>3</sup> The first demonstration, therefore, by the "reductio ad absurdum" method, is the only logical one; God is that the non-existence of which cannot be conceived.

This argument is only differently presented in the alternative demonstrations, which, in Spinoza's own words, all depend on the proposition that "either nothing exists, or a

<sup>1</sup> § 85.

<sup>2</sup> § 73. The conception is detailed in *Ep.*, 32 (p. 310), cf. *Joachim*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>3</sup> It follows that the idea of God in Spinoza's system is prior to that of substance, as is shown by M. Delbos in his paper read before the 3rd International Congress at Heidelberg on "La notion de substance et la notion de Dieu dans la philosophie de Spinoza"; cf. the same writer's *Le Spinozisme* (Paris, 1916), pp. 18-19.

being, absolutely infinite, necessarily exists as well".<sup>1</sup> This fundamental conception of God as that which exists of itself, is not only the pivot of his whole philosophy, but also what appears to have been considered in his own time as its characteristic and peculiar feature.<sup>2</sup> If we ask what it means to say that something "exists of itself," and what significance it can possibly have for logic, we may refer to the first alternative demonstration. This turns again upon the point that the whole of things cannot be contingent, because a universal contingency is self-contradictory. We speak of the existence of any comprehensible object as possible, because we do not know whether the universe as a fact contains it, as we think it might. By the fact that it is comprehensible in thought we know that it has claims to be considered a candidate, as it were, for existence; but owing to our ignorance of the complete detail of the structure of things,<sup>3</sup> we cannot say positively whether it has or has not been admitted. Such a doubt applies to every thing except one, and that is clearly the whole structure of things itself. There can be no question of its failing to harmonise with its own self, and therefore of necessity it is. The existence of God is involved in His own nature, but that is because there is nothing other than God. "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God."<sup>4</sup> The two orders of the logic, therefore, the order of ideas and the order of things, are two expressions of one and the same unity, which is *Deus sive Natura*.<sup>5</sup>

That this conception is historically not the end, but the beginning, of Spinoza's metaphysic, may be seen from an examination of the first chapters of his earliest essay, the *Short Treatise Concerning God, Man, and his Well-Being*. Here we find already fully expressed not only the opposition between contingent and necessary existents which leads us to the idea of the one, and only one, necessary existent, and the deduction of its immutability and perfection from the

<sup>1</sup> "Ergo vel nihil existit vel ens absolute infinitum necessario etiam existit." *Eth.*, I., xi. al., p. 194; cf. Joachim, *Study*, p. 45, and p. 51, n. 1 (on *Ep.*, XII.).

<sup>2</sup> *Eps.*, XXXIV.-XXXVI. In *Ep.*, XII., Spinoza reminds Meyer that he had demonstrated it to him "viva voce" (p. 230).

<sup>3</sup> "Res tantum ex parte novimus," *Tract. Pol.* II., § 8; "naturæ ordinem . . . ignoramus," *ibid.*, § 22; cf. *Theol. Pol.*, XVI., § 11, and IV., § 4, *Eps.*, VIII.-X. (on definition) and often. The "naturæ ordo," therefore, is a problem to be worked out and the way is left open to the purest empiricism.

<sup>4</sup> *Eth.*, I., 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Eth.*, II., 7, sch.



fact that outside it there is nothing;<sup>1</sup> but also its being the idea of the whole of Nature from the very consideration of the unity of which its essential character may be deduced.<sup>2</sup> Our thesis that in itself it is sufficient to sever Spinoza's system once for all from that of Descartes may be finally illustrated from, and summed up in, a consideration of the first phrase and the key-word of the *Ethics*, the 'causa sui'.

(δ) *God as 'Causa Sui'*.

The question as to whether God may rightly be called 'causa sui' was raised by the priest Caterus in the first set of objections to Descartes' *Meditations*. The discussion centred round the conception of God as efficient cause, that is, in His characteristic function of creation, and Descartes finally affirmed that, since God preserves Himself in existence, He may be called the efficient cause of Himself or 'causa sui'.<sup>3</sup>

The interesting point to note is that Descartes views God consistently under the categories of will. Being and perfection are only other aspects of the power which enables any entity to preserve itself. For this reason, as Descartes goes on to say, no human being may be said to exist 'per se,' because he depends on an external power for his continued preservation.<sup>4</sup> Cause, therefore, to Descartes, means producing—and conserving—power, and, as Spinoza remarks, it is this conception of cause which underlies the very statement, "Cogito, ergo sum".<sup>5</sup>

The efficient cause borrows its terminology from the vocabulary of effort. Its objects are graded as being, not more or less intelligible, but more or less easy of attainment. And so we see that the Cartesian axioms employed in the "Arguments drawn up in geometrical fashion" in the appendix to the second set of objections, all of which turn upon the idea of cause, involve the terms "easy" and "difficult". "That which can effect what is greater or more

<sup>1</sup> *Short Treatise* I., 1, p. 18, 25 f.; p. 20, 19 f.; 2, p. 30, 2; II., cap. 4, p. 45, 15 f.; 6, p. 49, 22 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I., 2, p. 22, 3 f.; 24, 31 f.; 26, 34 f.

<sup>3</sup> "Plane admitto aliquid esse posse in quo sit tanta et tam inexhausta potentia ut nullius unquam ope egerit ut existeret neque etiam nunc egeat ut conservetur atque adeo sit quodammodo sui causa; Deumque talem esse intelligo" (*Resp.*, I., p. 109, 3-7); cf. the reply to Arnauld (p. 231, 24 f.), "... ubi tantum intellexi rationem propter quam Deus non indiget ulla causa efficiente ut existat, fundatam esse in re positiva, nempe in ipsamet Dei immensitate qua nihil magis positivum esse potest".

<sup>4</sup> *Resp.*, I., p. 111, 8-12.

<sup>5</sup> "Si quis dubitare velit an ex nihilo aliquid fiat simul poterit dubitare an nos quam diu cogitamus simul." *Princ. Phil. Cart.*, I., 4, sch.

difficult, can also accomplish what is less" is the eighth axiom; "it is a greater thing to create or conserve substance than the attributes or properties of substance," is the ninth. On these two axioms the whole of the Cartesian *a posteriori* arguments for the existence of God are based, and their importance, therefore, cannot be overestimated. But neither can their unintelligibility. "For what does he mean by 'easy'?" cries Spinoza in the first, and one of the only, explicit criticisms of Descartes in his account of the Cartesian philosophy, "and what does he mean by 'difficult'? For nothing can be called difficult or easy absolutely, but only in respect of its cause; and so one and the same thing may be called both easy and difficult at the same time in respect of divers causes!"<sup>1</sup> More power or effort cannot be taken as a definition of essence. A thing "is" not in so far as it has power, but has power in so far as it is.<sup>2</sup> We can only employ the idea of cause in the definition of God if we recognise that an efficient cause may be internal as well as external. But this is, of course, to destroy the notion of cause altogether, because such an immanent cause "by no means produces anything outside itself".<sup>3</sup>

The perfection, then, attributed throughout by Spinoza to God is not immensity of power, but self-completion of being. God, and the correlate of God, or Nature, "is and is known through himself". He is "the object of his own knowledge, or rather He is his own knowledge," and to Him and His knowledge nothing is possible, but everything is.<sup>4</sup> In this logical sense He is a 'causa sui,' a completely self-contained entity which cannot be thought away. So the very first words of the *Ethics* link up the whole movement of the various other expressions of Spinoza's philosophy, and throw into clear relief the nature of its primary and ultimate distinction from that of Descartes.

The clarity and distinctness of an idea, we may say, is indeed the test of its truth; the fact of the human mind as

<sup>1</sup> *Princ. Phil. Cart.*, I., 7, sch. The note is characteristic. "Ne alia exempla quæras cape exemplum aranæ quæ telam facile textit quam homines non nisi difficillime texerent; homines contra quam plurima facillime faciunt quæ forte angelis impossibilia sunt."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 2 ("vis quâ substantia se conservat nihil est præter eius essentiam") with reference to the *Cog. Met.*

<sup>3</sup> *Short Treatise*, First Dialogue, p. 34, 29; cf. *ibid.*, I., 3, p. 41, 20; *Ep.*, LX., p. 386 ("intelligo enim causam efficientem tam internam quam externam").

<sup>4</sup> *Short Treatise*, Appendix I., prop. 4, proof and cor. (pp. 155-156); *Cog. Met.*, II., 7; cf. the criticism of the idea of perfection in *Eth.*, IV., pref.

thinking is indeed the foundation of knowledge; God is the conserving cause of all, both of things and of thoughts, and of the connexions between things, and of the connexions between thoughts. But all this is because there is only one idea which, being self explanatory, is clear, and only one idea which, there being nothing outside it, is distinct; because the human mind thinks not in terms of now and here, and personal circumstances, but universally for all time, all places, and all men; because the universal order of thought and the universal order of things is one in the self-subsistent system of the whole, which is God. The eternal verities are eternal and true; God willed them so to be; but 'willed' them not in the sense of producing them as a casual and insequent creation; His will and intelligence are one with His essence, and therefore they flow from His free necessity, as do properties from a mathematical figure. Without God, the 'causa sui,' nothing can be or be conceived, not because God is absolute power, but because God is absolute reason.

#### § 4. RECAPITULATION.

The results so far achieved may be summed up as follows:—

The logic of Spinoza far from being dependent on, and a development of, the logic of Descartes, is a conscious and definite presentation of precisely the opposite point of view. The discrete idea; the creational deity; the voluntaristic metaphysic; have been shown to lead to a scepticism in which proof has no meaning and knowledge no place. The ideal of freedom, if severed from that of law, leads inevitably to chaos; and the logic of Descartes allows the uncontrolled ideal to penetrate all spheres in turn from the individual thoughts of man to the volitional activities of God, as if the inherent defects of the first premiss might be rectified by allowing it an ever wider licence. The experiment, however, boldly and uncompromisingly carried out though it was, was foredoomed to failure. It reached its highest point in its transference, from the sphere of theological physics to that of logic, of the conception of God as conservational cause, but, being unable to deny of God the freedom it affirmed of man, was forced to see the universal order within its reach collapse into a universal chance. Knowledge as a whole of connected ideas was shown finally to be impossible, because the existence of connexions between one idea and another was, ex hypothesi, wanting.

Spinoza, consciously recognising the necessity of this conclusion, and yet convinced of the universal character of knowledge and the universal validity of logic; was bound by the nature of the case to put forward a different premiss. If the discrete idea cannot lead to knowledge and yet knowledge is possible, then we must find some other starting-point from which to set out on our search. On the one side are the individual ideas corresponding with the individual things; on the other side the totality of knowledge, corresponding with the totality of things which can be known. If we start from individual ideas, we cannot, as the Cartesian attempt had shown, arrive at the totality of knowledge. There is left then the alternative of assuming the totality of knowledge and working down from it to the individual ideas. This alternative Spinoza adopted unconditionally in whatever sphere of thought he entered upon, and in logic, theology, and metaphysics, insisted on the primary conception of God not as a-rational will but as universal reason embodied in the oneness of "natura naturata".

The conclusion we have reached is, as a general result, by no means novel. The method adopted, however, has revealed at least one important fact. If the traditional account of Cartesianism be the true one, then Spinoza's criticism is unintelligible. It may be that, following this criticism, we should be prepared to revise our interpretation and estimate of Cartesianism. But, however that may be, it is clear that Cartesianism *as thus understood* can by no manner of means be considered to be the source of the philosophy of Spinoza.