

CREATION

EMANATION AND SALVATION



From a Drawing on Embossed Scraper-Board  
by H. F. Hallett

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*A Spinozistic Study*

*by*

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## PREFACE

The present work is intended once again to draw the attention of readers to the resources opened up by Spinoza for the elucidation of the classical problems of philosophy. Today these problems are too often taken to be merely verbal, so that answers to them so far as these are metaphysical are confidently claimed to be "nonsense." My labours will, therefore, seem to minds thus committed to have been untimely and fundamentally futile. Untimely they may have been, but unless also futile their untimeliness may render them the more exigent; and to judge them as futile is to claim a certainty not available to the honest sceptic.

Vigorous attempts to discredit metaphysical investigation are no new thing, though the latest is, perhaps, the most thoroughgoing, and certainly the most self-confident. Yet it may well be argued that effective criticism of metaphysics is either itself a sort of metaphysics, or has for its foundation presuppositions that could only be metaphysically established. "*Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret.*" Metaphysics survives, and can only survive as a true *philosophia perennis*, as the catalyst of scepticism and schism – neither as inexorable dogma "once for all delivered," nor as "a plant that cometh of the lust of the earth, without a formal seed."

It is to this essentially catalytic character that we may attribute the persistence of the broad appeal of spinozism after nearly three hundred years of professional neglect and theological obloquy, and I am content if my work is as untimely as spinozism has always been.

Such content, however, is not enough to justify the publication of this new spinozistic study in an epoch given over to positivism and "humanism," but I am also encouraged by the fortunes of my earlier spinozistic study, *Aeternitas*, to believe that there remains, in spite of appearances, a philosophically-minded public by no means contemptible in weight, nor even in relative numbers, still willing, nay anxious, from such a speculation to seek, not merely relief in "metaphysic dream" from the grammarian's nightmare of current 'philosophy,' but the real profit that truth alone can provide.

Apart from the conception of durational 'emanation,' which is fundamental, the most noteworthy developments in the present work from the doctrine of *Aeternitas* consist, in brief, first in the making explicit the *activism* only implicitly and obscurely announced in the notion of "transformation without succession" held to constitute the essence of

spinozistic *aeternitas*;<sup>1</sup> and second, in the use made of the conception of 'diaesthesis,' which I advanced some years ago in various journal-articles.<sup>2</sup> The first led naturally to greater attention being paid to the ethical and political thought of Spinoza, which received little more than incidental treatment in *Aeternitas*, by way of *excursus*. The second would have been more appropriately deployed in an activist account of Spinoza's theory of knowledge, which for reasons of space has had to be postponed, save in so far as it could not be ignored without serious obscurity. As to the notion of 'emanation': the term, of course, suggests neo-platonic associations which I recommend the reader to eschew.

The distinction which I draw between a 'study of Spinoza' and a 'spinozistic study' is certainly obscure so long as the aim of the work is ignored. Since both involve speculative exposition the distinction of 'fact' and 'conjecture' has no relevance. For "the letter killeth," and dry chronicle is not history, so that he who would make a study of Spinoza must beware of too hasty judgement, forgetting his own alienation of mind as it has been determined by subsequent developments in Western thought, which it is easy to ignore and difficult to correct when recognized. Further, he must keep in mind the oblivion that has fallen upon the Nature-philosophies of the Renaissance, in the twilight of which Spinoza moved before the 'new philosophy' of René Descartes held his keen and delighted attention; the influences of the Jewish theology in which he was reared; the all-pervasive stimulus of Christian conceptions, orthodox or otherwise, acquired from his Gentile environment; the resolution of the hereditary 'Marrano-complex' of Jewish and Christian elements; for with all these influences operating in a mind of singular originality and outstanding intellectual fervour, the process of precise demarcation of 'fact' and 'conjecture' is likely to be one of egregious difficulty, from which a cautious scholar might well shrink, and which in the end would be philosophically fruitless. Thus even for a conservative 'study of Spinoza' speculative exposition, founded on the text, obedient but not servile to it, with constant recollection of the influences at work, so far as they are known, is not only the sole way of escape from the perils that beset the Spinoza-student, but the best service he can offer to Spinoza.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Aeternitas*, pp. 158, note 1, 234, *et al.*

<sup>2</sup> See "Knowledge, Reality, and Objectivity" (*Mind*, XLIX. N.S., pp. 170-88, 303-32), in which reference is made to other articles also concerned, more or less satisfactorily, with this conception.

<sup>3</sup> A summary of the results of such an enquiry will be found in my article on Spinoza in *Chamber's Encyclopaedia* (New Edition), and a fuller account in my *Benedict de Spinoza, The Elements of His Philosophy*. See also art. 'Spinoza' in *Encyclopedia Americana*.

But in service to ourselves as philosophers we are permitted to go further and speculatively to apply the fundamental principles of his philosophy to the problems as they face us today after three hundred years of further reflection, discovery, and dispute; and a 'spinozistic study' must in the nature of things be in this additional sense speculative – though not therefore more fanciful. What alone is fanciful is the assimilation involved of Mijnheer Benedict Despinoza with 'o Spinoza, and this too (*pace* Taylor) has respectable philosophical precedent. Thus my aim has been, in the present work as in *Aeternitas*, to discover and articulate the fundamental principles that often lie *perdus* in the laconic inferences of his massive speculation, with a view, not to the mere recovery of a historical system, but to the clarification of its fecund implications for our own enlightenment.

Something should be said, perhaps, about the order in which I have set forth the topics of *Part I*. Here I have followed the lead of Spinoza in the *Ethics*, adopting the 'order of nature' in preference to the 'order of discovery' – in cartesian terms, the 'synthetic' rather than the 'analytic' order. This may not commend itself to the generality of contemporary readers who by habit and precept prefer to proceed from what is more familiar, however complex, rather than from what is more recon-dite, however simple. The nature of metaphysical method will be considered below,<sup>1</sup> and I need only say here that the two methods differ, not merely as mutually reversed orders which therefore may be considered as interchangeable (as Descartes suggests), but in nature and aim, so that both are essential in the metaphysical quest. The method of discovery follows the ascending order of increasing intelligibility; that of nature follows the descending order of creation, *i.e.* the intelligible order, most suitable, therefore, for formal exposition. Nevertheless, it is right that account should be taken of currently prevalent prejudices (such as the tacit bias in favour of the temporality and objectivity of the real, or the clamorous objection to metaphysical deduction) likely to prevent the most innocent reader from reaching the standpoint from which alone the order of nature can be surveyed; but as defence against mere bigotry, not its appeasement. And I have sought in some measure to fulfil this duty by dealing first of all, in the *Prolegomena*, with some of the more crucial general topics which are inherent in the discussions which follow, and preconceptions concerning which form the chief sources of misunderstandings most likely to impede progress, or even to bring it to a standstill. This, of course, is a methodological compro-

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 1–21.

mise, and as such cannot be wholly successful, or successful at all without the co-operation and good will of the reader. Full understanding of these topics requires reflection upon the processes in which they are inherent, and by consideration of which they are authenticated.

Of the dangers that beset the philosopher who seeks to compass the problems of ontology and epistemology by an exclusive reliance on the analytic or empirical method, I need say no more than that even where an effort is made (as by Whitehead, and even more urgently and amply by Polanyi) to avoid the objectivistic truncation of the range of empirical *data*, exemplified by Hume and his successors, dangers enough remain in so far as principles adequate enough in the temporal realm are taken to be incorrigible, universal, and primordial; or again, in so far as the nature of truth is subordinated to an ultimate 'personal commitment' which is *justifiable* only by reference to an ideal of truth. And I venture to suggest that had these writers the flair for, and the training in, philosophy comparable with their brilliance and industry in the sciences, some inkling of the nature and essential point of the philosophy of Spinoza might have rendered less labyrinthine and bizarre the conclusions of the one, and his exposition of them less replete with abstractions and *ad hoc* 'principles'; and recognition of the central importance of spinozistic 'emendation of the understanding' for the *justification* of the 'will to believe' might have redeemed the epistemology of the other from its ultimate naivety as the apotheosis of 'wishful thinking.'

In sum, what is above all else essential is that the investigator should grasp the nature, and for man the crucial importance, of the 'human predicament': that *man is not an extrinsic spectator of Nature*, as he is only too prone to assume, but in some sense a 'part' of Nature viewing the whole from within; so that his *partialitas* cannot but, in one way or another, condition his 'speculation': and *the paramount business of metaphysics is to ensure that this conditioning does not involve falsification.*

Finally, to Professor A. E. Teale who devoted much time and thought to the first draft of this book, and made many suggestions for its improvement, both in detail and in general arrangement, most of which I have been glad to accept, I accord my sincere thanks.

H. F. H.

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