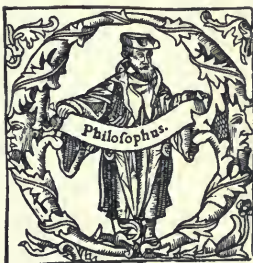


# SPINOZA AND TIME

B. ALEXANDER, M.A., LL.D., F.B.A.

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# SPINOZA AND TIME

Being the Fourth "Arthur Davis Memorial  
Lecture" delivered before the Jewish  
Historical Society at University  
College on Sunday, May 1, 1921  
Nisan 23, 5681



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# SPINOZA AND TIME

BY

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WITH AN AFTERWORD BY  
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## NOTE

**T**HE Arthur Davis Memorial Lecture was founded in 1917, under the auspices of the Jewish Historical Society of England, by his collaborators in the translation of "The Service of the Synagogue," with the object of fostering Hebraic thought and learning in honour of an unworldly scholar. The Lecture is to be given annually in the anniversary week of his death, and the lectureship is to be open to men or women of any race or creed, who are to have absolute liberty in the treatment of their subject.



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## AFTERWORD AS FOREWORD

BY VISCOUNT HALDANE, O.M., F.R.S.

I HAVE taken the Chair, by the invitation of this meeting, on the occasion of the remarkable address to which we have just listened. I have felt it an honour to preside over such a fine audience on such an occasion. Professor Alexander is not only one of yourselves, but he is a man of the highest intellectual distinction among the entire people of this nation. He is distinguished not less by a certain generous tone and temper which he brings to bear on his tasks, a tone and temper which recall something of the personality of the great thinker of whom he has spoken to us.

Professor Alexander has this afternoon placed his own distinctive interpretation on Spinoza's "Ethics." He has followed out this line of thought in the remarkable Gifford Lectures which he himself has recently published. Spinozism gets a fresh significance in the new atmosphere of Relativity, with

which Einstein, yet another member of your community, has recently invested mathematical physics and our conception of the universe which appears to confront us. The doctrine of the space-time continuum yields a new outlook for science and philosophy alike, and Professor Alexander has seen this. I should not be candid if I did not say that for myself there seems to lie behind this conception a yet wider one, that of mind—as I believe the principle of Relativity leaves us free to interpret it—as being foundational to all reality. But that does not make me the less appreciative of the very important contribution which our lecturer of this afternoon has made, on this occasion as well as in his recent book, to our understanding of the meaning of what we call real.

He has dealt more fully than Spinoza did with the meaning of Time as entering into the character of existence. The continuum in which it and Space have not yet been differentiated is for him the foundational fact of existence. Over this view many controversies will arise. Some of these are already well in sight. But the great point is to raise them distinctly, and this Professor Alexander has definitely done: already we



have heard something of this in the address to which we have just listened, for my part, with deep interest. To this end no subject could have served better as an historical jumping-off place than the teaching of Spinoza, and this our lecturer has put before us with the freshness which we anticipated from his touch.

Time received at the hands of Spinoza something less than justice. It is inseparable from Space. Apart from Space we cannot measure duration. Look at your watches and you will see why. The flight of time and its measurement are measured and made significant only by the spatial divisions through which the hands move, and which ascertain their progress. Space and Time here combine, and become phases of the yet more concrete actuality of motion or change in the relations of objects.

But I did not rise to detain you. We must all desire now to go away in order that we may think over the remarkable paper to which we have listened, itself a fresh instance of the indebtedness of the public to your community for growth in ideas.



# Spinoza and Time

## I

### THE WORLD OF EVENTS: TIME AS INTRINSIC

**I**F I were asked to name the most characteristic feature of the thought of the last twenty-five years, I should answer, the discovery of Time. I do not mean that we have waited until to-day to become familiar with Time; I mean that we have only just begun, in our speculation, to take Time seriously, and to realize that in some way or other Time is an essential ingredient in the constitution of things. Mr. Bergson, indeed, has declared Time to be the ultimate reality. The mathematicians and physicists refer things no longer to three axes of coordinates, but to four, the fourth being the time axis. It will take much thought between physicists and philosophers in co-operation

before opinion settles down upon the exact amount of reality we are to ascribe to Time and its companion Space, whether they are in the strict sense realities at all, or only constructions of the mind, and what their relation to each other is. But there is one proposition which is vital to the understanding of the theory of relativity, and is presupposed in its finished form as put forward by Mr. Einstein, and that is the proposition that the world is a world of events. I fancy we are accustomed to think of the world as a mass of things spread out in one comprehensive Space, and somehow or other Time is merely an interesting addition, whereby things happen and have a history. The discovery of Time means that we are to rid ourselves of this innocent habit of mind, and regard the world as through and through and intrinsically historical, and treat everything in it as events, not merely what are obviously events, but the most permanent things also, which seem to us fixed in their repose—stones and hills and tables—which become what Mr. Whitehead calls “chunks of events.” This is the simple meaning of the proposition of the mathematicians that we live in a four-dimensional world. It is

another and purely mathematical way of saying that Time is not something which happens to extended things, but that there is no extended thing which is not temporal, that there is no reality but that of events, and that Space has no reality apart from Time, and that in truth neither has any reality in itself, but only as involved in the ultimate reality of the system of events or Space-Time.

It is really quite a simple proposition, and though it is revolutionary enough, it is not so revolutionary as it sounds. In particular we are not to imagine that, as many people, I think, fear, Mr. Einstein and his predecessors have discovered a new kind of thing or substance. A reputable illustrated newspaper gave a picture of what a cube was like in four dimensions: it seemed to be surrounded by a kind of aura or haze. This comes from supposing that the four dimensions are all spatial, whereas the fourth is Time. Things, I may assure you, are in the four-dimensional world exactly what we are familiar with. The only difference is that we have learnt that they are four-dimensional, chunks of events. We have been living all our lives in four dimensions, but have only just come to know it, just as

M. Jourdain discovered that he had been talking prose all his life without knowing it. In his book on Dickens, Mr. Chesterton observes that M. Jourdain's delight at this discovery showed that he had the freshness of the romantic spirit. And I do not know anything more romantic than that the common things which surround us, including our own selves, have all this time been in the mathematical sense four-dimensional. It will not make them different, nor ourselves better, any more than when Berkeley maintained that bodies were but ideas in the mind, he maintained them to be less solid than before, though the unmetaphysical Dr. Johnson believed so. We have only gained a deeper and more satisfying insight.

Accordingly, since Time has thus stepped into the foreground of speculative interest, it seemed to me that I could best respond to the invitation of this Society to deliver the Arthur Davis Memorial Lecture by asking how far Spinoza could guide us to an understanding of Time and of the part which it plays in the reality of the world. The seventeenth century was in philosophy as well as in physical science the seminal period of European thought, and, at least in all the

questions that lie on the borderland of philosophy and physics, we are nearer to the great philosophers of that time than we are to those of the nineteenth century, and our minds go back to them to get their help or make clear to ourselves how we differ from them. Spinoza is more particularly suitable to consult, apart from the interest which any Jewish society must needs take in one of the greatest of Jews. For has not Heine said of him, with as much truth as wit, alluding to Spinoza's occupation of a maker of lenses, that all subsequent philosophers have seen through glasses which Spinoza ground?

I do not, however, propose to enter minutely into Spinoza's philosophy. There are two ways of approaching a great philosopher. The one is to study his precise teaching, setting it into relation with his age and with his contemporaries and immediate predecessors. I have the greatest admiration for those who perform this work of scholarship, which is the only satisfactory and respectful method of understanding a philosopher, requiring as it does both historical research and the most sympathetic philosophical insight. But it is beyond my competence, and the only addition I shall attempt to make to the interpretation

of Spinoza I shall have to omit in addressing you for want of time. I shall follow the other and easier method of inquiring what a philosopher can teach us in our present problems. Relying on those who have expounded him for us with such care, I shall repeat what he has to say upon Time, and then I shall ask, in view of the new prospects opened by our present speculation, what difference it would make to Spinoza's philosophy if we assign to Time a position not allowed to it by Spinoza himself, but suggested by the difficulties and even obscurities in which he has left it.



## II

### SPINOZA'S CONCEPTION OF TIME

THE trouble is that there is very little to say about Spinoza's conception of Time. It stands for the general character which things have of existence: they exist for a longer or a shorter time, according as they are determined by other things. Thus the momentary closing of a current produces a flash of light; if the current remains switched on, the light endures. But when we speak thus we are, according to Spinoza, not using the language of philosophy but of imagination. We are comparing one duration of time with another in our sensible world, and we may even conceive of these bits of time as limitations of an indefinite duration. But neither the bits of duration nor the indefinite duration are true realities. We are but using relative measures of duration; because we are considering things as if they were separate from one another and had an independent existence, whereas they are but manifestations of the

one reality which is God. Now just as Newton contrasts what he calls the relative measures of time with absolute Time, we might expect Spinoza to contrast these pieces of duration with Time or Duration as such. This is what he does when he considers Space or Extension. There too, when we speak of lengths and figures of things, we are not dealing with reality except in the confused manner of imagination. There are no separate lengths and figures, but only Space as such, which is God under a certain attribute, and is indivisible into lengths. But Spinoza does not contrast durations with duration as such, but with eternity, and eternity is not Time, but is timeless. When he declares that there is something eternal in the human mind, which lies at the basis of our experience that we are immortal, he does not mean that we are immortal in the sense of indefinite continuance after death. To be eternal is to be comprehended in the nature of God, and things are real in so far as they are thus comprehended and are seen in the light of eternity, *sub specie quâdam aeternitatis*. Thus times are not contrasted with Time as bits of space with Space, but with timelessness. Had he treated Time as he treats Space, Time

would have been an attribute of God. As it is, Time is no more than a character of finite things. I am proposing to explain what difference it would make to Spinoza's philosophy if, to make an impossible hypothesis, he had treated Time as an attribute of God.

It is not so much to be wondered at that Spinoza has failed to conceive the relation of finite times to infinite Time with the same clearness as he has conceived that of finite spaces to infinite Space. Time is indeed thoroughly perplexing, in a way in which at first sight Space is not. For bits of space can be kept together before our minds at once, and though we cannot imagine Space as a whole, but only an indefinitely large space, we can readily think of it. But we cannot do this with the parts of time. For Time is successive; there is no sense in a duration which is not a duration that is passing away, and when you experience a moment of time, the immediately preceding moment is gone. Otherwise Time would be a kind of Space. No doubt we do experience Time as not merely a succession but as a duration, as something that lasts: the moments of time are not discontinuous, but are as much continuous as the points of space. But how can we in our

thoughts reconcile the persistence of Time which we experience, with its habit of dying from one moment to another? You will say the past is preserved for us in memory, in which the past and the present are before our minds together, just as the parts of space, distant and near, are before our eyes together. But now comes Mr. Bergson and says that when we thus conceive Time we are spatializing it, turning it into Space, and urges that the Time we thus spatialize is not real Time.

There are more ways than one of meeting these difficulties. One was the naïve answer of Descartes, to which we shall recur, that things are conserved and endure, because they are being re-created by God at each moment. This is the very *ne plus ultra* of the conception that I alluded to, that things are extended, and that Time happens to them. Another way is to show that Space and Time are not independent of each other, but as the mathematicians say, are but aspects or elements of Space-Time. Spinoza takes neither one view nor the other, yet he gives us indications which stimulate the reflecting mind to pass from the one to the other.

### III

#### THE INFINITE MODE OF MOTION AND REST

**L**ET me first remind you of the main outlines of Spinoza's metaphysical doctrine. Spinoza is a pantheist, not in the superficial sense that God is a spirit which pervades all things, but in the truer sense that all things are in God and are modifications of him. There is and can be but one being which is entirely self-dependent, needing no other being for its explanation ; this being is Substance or God or Nature : it is the universe as a whole, not as an aggregate of things, not even as a whole of parts in the sense in which you and I who are organic are wholes of parts without being mere aggregates, but as a unitary being from which all its so-called parts draw their nature and in the end their existence. In themselves these parts, or as Spinoza calls them, modes, have no being except in God. Only our fancy, as I have noted, assigns them in what he calls the common order of

nature a fictitious independence. God is the unity of all his modes conceived in their interrelation with one another and in their eternal, that is, ultimate and timeless, effluence from himself; and Spinoza tries steadily to think of God as the positive comprehension of all things, though, as his commentators have pointed out, he sometimes falls into the mystical conception which defines God by the negation of all positive predicates.

For him the finite is the negation of the infinite, and not the infinite the negation of the finite, however much he may drop into the other way of thought. In truth, for Spinoza and Descartes and the men of their day the infinite was conceived positively as prior to the finite, as it is in modern mathematics, and in fact it is only by negating the infinitude of God that we can arrive at the notion of quantity at all. To apply the idea of quantity to God were to make him not infinite but indefinitely large. Most of our modern difficulties have arisen from trying to reconcile the notion of infinity with that of quantity, and the reconciliation has been accomplished in present mathematics.

Now, Substance or God presents itself to intellect, not to our intellect alone, but to

intellect of every sort, under the form of attributes. They are not constructions of the intellect nor forms of it in the Kantian sense, but what intellect discovers in the Substance, so that so far there is in Spinoza no suggestion of idealism. God as infinite possesses infinite such attributes or aspects, but only two of these are discoverable to the human intellect, namely Extension and Thought. How we are to understand the infinite other attributes is a longstanding puzzle in the interpretation of Spinoza to which I shall advert later. These attributes reveal the whole of God's nature or essence; and the great forward step which Spinoza took in philosophy consisted in this doctrine. For it follows that since God is perceived completely either as Extension or as Thought or Thinking, Extension and Thought are not two different realities, but two forms of one and the same reality.

It follows further that since modes are modifications of God, each of them is alike extended and a thought. Hence in the first place our thoughts and our bodies are not two different things, but the same mode of God under two different attributes. This is the way Spinoza would answer the question whether brain-processes and their correspond-

ing thought-processes accompany each other or act upon each other. For him they are the same thing twice over; there is neither correspondence nor interaction between them, but identity of essence. This he expresses by saying that an idea or thought is the idea of a certain condition of the body, which varies with the object which provokes this bodily condition. I only wish there were room for me within the limits of my subject to develop his famous proposition which really follows from this conception, that the idea which I have of the table informs me rather of the state of my body than of the table, or in other words the table reveals itself to me in so far as it induces in me a certain process of body (we should say of the brain) which is identical with what we call the thought of the table.

Next it is a consequence of the truth that every mode exists under both attributes that not only our self but every extended mode is also a thinking one, and that all things are 'in a manner animated.' The importance of this we shall see later on.

So much is simple and clear. But now I have to turn to one of the most difficult and at the same time most fascinating parts of



the doctrine. Between God as perceived under the attribute of extension and the finite extended modes which are singular bodies there intervene infinite modes which as it were break the fall from Heaven to earth. Spinoza touches them only lightly, enough for his immediate purpose of explaining the constitution of our bodies, yet it is about these that what I have to say centres. The 'immediate' infinite mode of extension Spinoza calls motion and rest. The first step in breaking up the unity of God's infinite extension into multiplicity (a multiplicity still retained within the unity) is its manifestation as motion and rest. The next step is the 'mediate' infinite mode, in which God's extension is the whole system of bodies as reduced to terms of motion and rest; and the finite modes or singular things are but the parts of this 'face of the whole universe,' when those parts are considered, as they must be for science, in their relation to the whole—as varying modifications of motion and rest. These are the gradations in the specification of God as extended. The corresponding gradations between God as a thinking being and finite thinking things or thoughts are harder to identify, and I need not refer to them further.

These immediate and mediate infinite modes of motion and rest take us back to the doctrine of Descartes in the second part of his *Principles*. Spinoza takes it as axiomatic, speaking first of uncompounded bodies, that they are all either in motion or at rest, and move either more quickly or more slowly. Rest seems to be regarded as something positive, not the mere absence of motion, and a slower motion is as it were the blending of motion with rest, much as Goethe later regarded colour as a blending of light and darkness. Descartes apparently, perhaps only apparently, has the same notion. Compound bodies, what we ordinarily call bodies, are constituted of these simple bodies impinging on one another and communicating their motions in a certain proportion. Such an individual body remains the same when the proportion of its component motions is undisturbed, and the whole "moves altogether if it moves at all," and hence, though affected by other bodies in many ways, it may retain its own nature. The individual changes if this proportion is disturbed. The dissolution of our body at death is a case in point, occurring in a very composite body composed of many individual bodies which are its parts.

## IV

### THE TRANSITION FROM EXTENSION TO THIS MODE

**T**HE details do not concern us so much. After all, vague as it is, the picture is but the familiar one that in the end bodies are complexes of motions. I would fain linger on its consequences for the theory of science. Motion and rest being the common characters of bodies, their laws are the ultimate and simplest conceptions for science, which Spinoza contrasts with such vague and confused conceptions as being, thing, something, which he calls transcendental terms. Motion and rest would be the true universals, in contrast with what are vaguely called universals, such as man, tree, etc. But I must not be tempted away from my immediate topic.

For us the question is by what right Spinoza can pass from God's attribute of extension to the infinite mode of motion and rest. That he deliberately faced the problem is clear from his attitude towards Descartes. Bodies for

Spinoza are intrinsically complexes of motion and rest. For Descartes body was nothing but extension, figure, size, in three dimensions. Extension without body, that is empty space, was nothing. An empty space between two bodies or in the pores of a body meant only the presence of some other body; hence, in the famous illustration, if a vessel could be completely emptied of body, the sides of the vessel would be in contact. Motion, according to Descartes, was a mode or state of body, and it was imparted to body by God. Spinoza protests in explicit terms in two letters to his friend Tschirnhaus against the Cartesian view and denies that the variety of the universe can be deduced *a priori* from extension alone. Descartes' view that motion is imparted by God is in fact a confession that body in motion is not mere extension, if extension is conceived as by Descartes as created, not as by Spinoza as being an attribute of God. Matter, says Spinoza, must necessarily be explained through an attribute which expresses eternal and infinite essence. This attribute he found in Extension, which he conceived to manifest itself immediately as we have seen in the infinite mode of motion and rest.

Spinoza is thus aware of the problem; and it is a great advance upon Descartes to see that body or matter is intrinsically motion and rest, and not bare extension into which motion is introduced by the creative act of God. But has Spinoza solved the problem? The answer must be, I think, that he has failed because he has omitted Time. It seems to him indeed that matter is motion because extension expresses God's essence, or as Mr. Joachim puts it, expresses God's omnipotence. Substance, this admirable interpreter urges, is not lifeless, but alive, and doubtless this was at the bottom of Spinoza's mind. But life and omnipotence are undefined ideas, transferred from our experience to describe metaphorically the being of God which is held to be behind and beyond the things of experience. Life implies change and so does omnipotence; and change implies time. Yet Time is excluded from the eternal nature of God, who comprehends Time indeed, but only, to use a paradoxical phrase, in its timelessness.

If, therefore, motion is to be the infinite mode of God's extension, it must be because Time has been slipped into Extension out of the undefined activity of God. We might be

tempted to say that extension includes not only extension in space but duration in time. This would make extension a double-faced attribute. It would solve Spinoza's problem, but there is no word of it in Spinoza and could not be. On the contrary, such a supposition would make existence of which Time is the general character an attribute of God, which for Spinoza it is not. God's essence and his existence are, he says, one and the same thing.

The truth appears to be that Spinoza could pass so easily from extension to motion because motion was conceived as it were statically. Nothing seems so obvious to us as the proposition that motion takes time and is unintelligible without it. But Descartes certainly, and it would seem Spinoza as well, conceives motion as change of place. Motion Descartes describes as 'the transference of a part of matter or body from the neighbourhood of those which are touching it immediately and which we consider as at rest to the neighbourhood of some other bodies.' This conception of motion makes it something geometrical instead of physical. Consistently with this conception Descartes could think of motion only as an impulse given to matter from God. Spinoza's insight

was a deeper one. Extension being an attribute of God reflected the activity of God's nature, and therefore the modes of extension were intrinsically motion, to correspond with the activity of God. He did not see that this implied Time also as an attribute. The activity of God could not translate itself into motion, when motion was conceived as more than a change of place, except God's activity was expressed by Time. In other words, if motion and rest is the infinite mode of extension, that extension must be not Space but Space-Time. By insisting that bodies are intrinsically complexes of motion, Spinoza, though he has rather stated the problem than solved it, has put us upon the way of solution.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I have omitted to notice minor difficulties in Spinoza's doctrine of motion and rest, such as the question how simple bodies come to have variety of motion. (See Camerer, *Die Lehre Spinozas*, 1877, p. 61 ff.) For an admirable account of the difficulties of Descartes' treatment of motion, see N. Kemp Smith, *Studies in the Cartesian Philosophy*, London, 1902, pp. 75 ff.

## V

### TIME AS AN ATTRIBUTE OF GOD: CONSEQUENCES OF THIS HYPOTHESIS

**L**ET us ask then what changes are produced in Spinoza's doctrine if we regard Time itself as an attribute of the ultimate reality. In what remains I propose to offer these consequences as a gloss upon Spinoza's teaching, remarking explicitly that they are a gloss and not a commentary. A commentary must be historically true, but for Spinoza it was impossible to think of Time as an attribute. Slight as the change may seem verbally, it leads to a remodelling of the whole. Yet unhistorical as the procedure is, I venture upon it before an Historical Society because the real greatness and spirit of a man may often be best appreciated by asking not what he said himself but what he may lead us to say.

(1) In the first place the ultimate reality would be something which in one aspect, under one attribute, is Space, under another, Time. It would be Space-Time or Motion itself.



I dare not yet assume that Time in this conception replaces Thought as the second attribute which our intellect perceives. It might still be true that Thought is a third attribute. It will appear, however, presently that Thought is not an attribute at all, but is an empirical or finite mode.

The ultimate reality or Space-Time ceases also to be Substance in Spinoza's sense, still less is it identifiable with God, which is for Spinoza the only substance. It is rather identical with the infinite immediate mode of motion and rest, or if we rid ourselves of the perplexing idea of rest as something positive, with the infinite mode of motion. It is still infinite and self-contained and the ground of all finite modes. But it is not so much the Substance of which things are modes as the stuff of which they are pieces, the material out of which they are made. It is comparable rather to the Space which in the Platonic *Timæus* is that which receives definite character through the ingression (I borrow the word from Mr. Whitehead) of the Forms or Ideas. The difference from Plato is that the material which thus receives form is in the *Timæus* purely spatial, and contains intrinsically no time. For Plato Time comes into being with

the creation of things and is but the shadow of eternity. In our gloss upon Spinoza the ultimate reality is full of Time, not timeless but essentially alive with Time, and the theatre of incessant change. It is only timeless in the sense that taken as a whole it is not particularized to any one moment or duration, but comprehends them all.

For Spinoza the ultimate reality was necessarily conceived as Substance, as the one self-dependent, self-contained or infinite, self-caused, being; this distinguished it from the finite things which were its modes. The very difference and advance which he made upon Descartes was that created things, which for Descartes were in a secondary sense substances, became for Spinoza mere modes of the one Substance. And at least it is clear that if the ultimate reality is described as Substance, finite things, which in the words of Locke "are but retainers to other parts of nature for that which they are most taken notice of by us," cannot be substances in the same sense. But in fact substance, causality and the like are categories applicable in the first instance to finite things, and only transferred to infinite reality by a metaphor in which their meaning is changed; and it has

now become a commonplace since Kant to declare that the categories of finite things are not applicable to the ground of finite things. And when once Time is regarded as an attribute of ultimate reality, the contrast of the Spinozistic Substance and its modes falls away. Reality is Space-Time or motion itself, infinite or self-contained and having nothing outside itself; and the vital contrast is that of this infinite or *a priori* stuff of the Universe and the empirical things or substances which are parts or modes of it. For this reason I speak of the ultimate reality of motion not as substance but as stuff.

Before passing to these empirical modes let me observe that the conception of Space-Time or Motion as the stuff of the Universe is not in all respects the same as that taken of it in the theory of relativity. That theory is a physical and not a metaphysical theory, and, properly, as a physical theory it begins with bodies. Space-Time for it is perhaps best described as an order or system of relations that subsists between bodies. Whether this is to be accepted as an ultimate statement for philosophy is just one of those matters to which I alluded at the beginning, on which discussion has yet to do its work. I may

merely note in passing that one pronounced supporter of the relativity theory in this country maintains that when it is said that Space-Time is wrinkled or warped in the presence of matter this means that matter is the very wrinkle in Space-Time. From this to the proposition which I have taken as included in our gloss upon Spinoza, viz. that Space-Time is the stuff of which matter is made, is but a step.

(2) I pass to the singular things which in their totality constitute the *facies totius universi*. As with Spinoza, they are modifications of the ultimate reality which has now become Space-Time. But there is now no ditch to jump between the ultimate ground of things and things themselves; for things are, as Spinoza himself would say, but complexes of motion and made of the stuff which the ultimate or *a priori* reality is. In this way the danger is avoided which besets Spinoza's doctrine, the danger that the modes or things should be engulfed in an ultimate being which purports to be the positive ground of its modes, but always is on the point of slipping into bare indefiniteness.

This danger I have noted already, but it may be well to revert to it here by way of

pointing out the source of the difficulty. The modes for Spinoza determine each other into existence within the modal system in a chain of causation. But they follow, considered in the light of eternity, from the nature of Substance or God, who is their cause or ground. This causal issuing from God is, however, not the physical relation of cause and effect, but the geometrical one of ground and consequent. The modes follow from God as the properties of a triangle follow from the nature of the triangle. This being so, the ultimate Substance being the ground of the modes must be a positive reality which accounts for them, of which they are, in modern phrase, the appearance. But then, we have to urge, the modes are not properties of Substance, but are things.

On the other hand, if we ask for the ground of these things which are modes, and are told that they follow from the ground, but that the characters which things possess in the common order of nature are the confused deliverances of our imagination, how can we conceive the ground otherwise than as something or other, we know not what except that it is their ground? The case is different if things are regarded as modes of the stuff

which is Space-Time. Their relation to their ground is no longer that of the properties of a triangle to the triangle, but rather that of the two triangles which compose an oblong to the oblong. They are involved in the oblong; and in like manner the valley and the mountain are both contained in that configuration of nature which we call a valley or a mountain, but the valley does not follow from the mountain geometrically in the sense in which the properties of the triangle follow from the triangle.

But if the reality in its barest character is Space-Time, the face of the whole universe is the totality of all those configurations into which Space-Time falls through its inherent character of timefulness or restlessness. The stuff of reality is not stagnant, its soul's wings are never furled, and in virtue of this unceasing movement it strikes out fresh complexes of movements, created things.

(3) This leads us directly to a third consequence. All things as in God are alike perfect; they are what they are and cannot be other. Yet there are grades of perfection amongst things, the one has more reality than another. On this subject, as I cannot express Spinoza's sense so well

myself, I will transcribe a page from Mr. Joachim's book:<sup>1</sup>

"God, as the necessary consequent of his own free causality, is *Natura Naturata*—an ordered system of modes following with coherent necessity from *Natura Naturans*.<sup>2</sup> But though all things follow with the same inevitable necessity from God's nature, they differ from one another in degree of perfection or reality; and indeed the difference is one not only of degree but also of kind. 'For although a mouse and an angel, sadness and joy, depend equally on God, yet a mouse cannot be a species of angel, nor sadness a species of joy' (Ep. 23). 'The criminal expresses God's will in his own way, just as the good man does in his; but the criminal is

<sup>1</sup> H. H. Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*, Oxford, 1901, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> For the distinction of *natura naturans* and *naturata*, see Eth. i. 29, Sch. God as free cause is *natura naturans*; *natura naturata* is all the modes of God's attributes, so far as they are considered as things which are in God and which cannot either be or be conceived without God. See Mr. Joachim's note 1, p. 65. Mr. Joachim adds that "*Natura naturata* is not the world of sense-perception, but the universe in all its articulation as a perfect understanding would grasp it, if that understanding apprehended it as the *effect* of God's causality."

not on that account comparable with the good man. The more perfection a thing has, the more it participates in the divine nature and the more it expresses God's perfection. The good have incalculably more perfection than the vicious; and therefore their "virtue" is not to be compared with the "virtue" of the vicious. . . .' (Ep. 19.)

"It is in 'natura naturata,' the eternal system of modes, that those degrees of perfection or reality are exhibited. For there is an order in the sequence of the modes from God's nature, and on that order their degree of perfection depends. The order is not a temporal, but a logical one. There is no before and after, no temporal succession, in the relation of the modes to God; all modes are the eternal consequence of God's causality. But there is a logical priority and posteriority; and on this their degrees of reality depend. 'That effect is the most perfect which is produced by God immediately; and the more mediating causes which any effect requires, the less perfect it is.' (Eth. i. App.)"

Now directly Time has become an attribute of the ultimate reality, this order ceases to be merely a logical one, and becomes temporal. The grades of modal perfection are no longer



a 'static' series of forms, but a hierarchy produced in the order of time. The idea of evolution is introduced, and from matter or from before matter there have grown up in time the modes of physical existence, and thence the forms of life and finally of mind. Existence is stratified, level upon level with each its distinctive quality, and the strata are not barely superposed, but each higher level is the descendant in time of the lower. Hence, for instance, living things are not merely alive, but their life is a differentiation of physico-chemical body, and that body is but a particular complexity of mere matter. Upon what particular basis bare matter depends is a question not for the philosopher but the physicist to decide. If the old doctrine of the *Timæus* should be true, according to which solid matter is composed of elementary figures in space, we should have the notion here suggested as flowing from our gloss upon Spinoza, that the primary modes are the mere differentiations of bare Space-Time. But all the particular history of this long descent (or call it rather ascent) to higher levels of perfection amongst the modes is to be traced empirically under the guidance of science.

(4) The last level of things accessible to our

senses would be that of minds, or as Spinoza would call them thinking things. Thought, therefore, upon our gloss becomes not an attribute of the ultimate reality but the distinguishing quality of the highest level of empirical things. We are left with Space and Time as the two attributes which our intellect perceives, and Time displaces Thought in the Spinozistic scheme. And yet we arrive also at a conclusion which seems to repeat Spinoza's view that thought is a universal feature of things, only with a difference. All things for him are in a sense animated, they are all in their degree thinking things. For us things which are not minds, which are merely alive or are inanimate, are no longer minds, but they do bear an aspect, or contain in themselves an element, which corresponds to the aspect or element of mind in a thinking thing. That aspect or element is Time.

We may express the relation between the orders of modes in two different ways. We may say that life is the mind of the living body, colour the mind of the coloured material body, matter or materiality the mind of the spatio-temporal substructure of a material body. In doing so, we are humouring our propensity to construe things on the pattern of what is

most familiar to us, our own selves, in which mind is united with a living body ; and are just comparing one set of empirical things with another. The other way penetrates more deeply into the nature of things. It starts with a piece of space-time, in which there are the bare aspects of its space and its time, and it construes thinking things after the pattern of this. One portion of the living thing, let us say its brain, is at once a peculiarly differentiated portion of space and correspondingly and inevitably a peculiarly differentiated complex of time. Were it not for the peculiar complexity of the brain, we should have the brain a merely living structure ; as it is, when living matter is so differentiated as to be a brain, its time element becomes mind, or rather the character of mentality. It is as if we had a clock which not only showed the time but was the time it showed.

According, then, to the one method all things are, as Spinoza says, thinking things, and in the end, paradoxical as it sounds to say so, Time is the mind of Space. According to the other, mind is the time of its brain, life the time of the living parts of the living body and the like. On either method we realize the same truth that all the world and

everything in it are constructed on the same plan, which betrays itself most plainly in our thinking bodies. But the Spinozistic method is a comparison of the modes with one another ; the other method views the modes in the light of the ultimate or *a priori* reality from which they derive.

The same result is reached from a different consideration. Thinking things know, they have ideas. The idea of a tree which I have when I see one is for Spinoza the thought-aspect of the bodily condition into which I am thrown by the action of the tree upon my bodily senses. Or as we should say nowadays, it is the inner side of the brain-process. What is a brain-process under the attribute of extension is an idea or thinking process under the attribute of thought. To think of the tree means to have an idea or a bodily process which would be different if the tree were replaced by a table ; and accordingly if for some reason or other this bodily condition recurs in the absence of the tree I still have the tree before my view as an image. Whether this is or is not a true account of the knowing process is under some discussion at the present moment among philosophers. But that does not concern us here. What does concern us

is that it applies in its degree to all things alike whether minds in the empirical sense or not. The stone knows its surroundings in the same way as we know ours, though of course not to the same extent. Now, if this is so, it would seem again, that thought or knowing is a universal character of things and might claim therefore to be an attribute. Yet once more, thought as knowing is in truth merely a relation among the modes. In so far as my mind or the stone is affected by other things, it knows them. Accordingly knowing, being an affair of modes *inter se*, is not an attribute. For an attribute is not a character which arises out of the interrelation of modes, but every mode intrinsically possesses a character in so far as it is considered under an attribute. We again arrive at the conclusion that thought is empirical, not *a priori* or ultimate ; and so far Space and Time are seen to exhaust the attributes of reality.

## VI<sup>1</sup>

### SPINOZA'S INFINITY OF ATTRIBUTES

**W**HAT then becomes of the infinite other attributes which the ultimate reality according to Spinoza possesses in virtue of its infinite perfection? The answer to this question will illustrate the tenor of the foregoing remarks. For we shall see that these supposed attributes are otiose and unnecessary; but what is more important, we shall see that Spinoza's justification of them, to my mind successful, depends for its force not upon the view that Thought is an attribute, but on the empirical character of particular minds.

This matter is the standing unresolved puzzle of interpretation of Spinoza to which I have alluded above. For we are faced with a dilemma. All the attributes are in a metaphorical phrase co-extensive, and accordingly my mind is identical not only with my body

<sup>1</sup> A reader not interested in Spinoza scholarship may be recommended to pass over this section.

but with modes under all the other attributes—let us take one of them for short and call it the  $x$ -attribute. Why then do I not perceive my  $x$ -ian mode as well as my body? I do not, and Spinoza insists that I cannot (Ep. 64). But if so, there must be thought-modes which correspond not only to body-modes, as they do, but to  $x$ -modes, that is (to quote Mr. Joachim<sup>1</sup>), “there are modes of Thought which are *not* the thought-side of modes of Extension, and the ‘completeness’ of the Attribute of Thought is more full than the ‘completeness’ of any other Attribute,” or as Tschirnhaus put it, the attribute of Thought is much wider than the other Attributes—is in fact coextensive with them all.

Even Mr. Joachim regards the difficulty as insoluble. One commentator, Sir F. Pollock, in his excellent book,<sup>2</sup> reminding us that an Attribute is what intellect perceives in Substance as constituting its essence, has accepted this last result and given Spinoza’s doctrine a kink in the direction of idealism. Yet exactly the same kind of reflection might with proper changes be applied to Extension, which

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> *Spinoza, His Life and Philosophy*, 2nd edition, London, 1899, p. 162.

would then be wider than all the other attributes, and Spinoza might thus receive a kink in the direction of materialism. Spinoza himself answers Tschirnhaus briefly, and perhaps a little impatiently, in a letter which I will quote (Ep. 66): "In answer to your objection I say, that although each particular thing be expressed in infinite ways in the infinite intellect of God, yet those infinite ideas, whereby it is expressed, cannot constitute one and the same mind of a particular thing, but infinite minds; seeing that each of these infinite ideas has no connection with the rest (and he refers to Eth. ii. 7, and Sch. i. 10). If you will reflect on these passages a little, you will see that all the difficulty vanishes."

It may be doubted whether a little reflection is enough or all difficulty vanishes; but I believe that Spinoza upon his own principles is right and that his thought is clear, with a little indulgence for his language. I cannot perceive  $x$ -modes because I am a body, and I can only perceive those objects which my body enables me to apprehend. Remember that when Spinoza says that a mode of thought, my idea, has for its *ideatum* a condition of my body, he does not say that I *perceive* that



condition of body. The body is expressed (objectively he says, subjectively we should say) as the idea, but what I perceive is the tree, whose existence is implied in my bodily condition, because that condition varies with the perceived object. We perceive extended things, and we may also perceive our body, though the perceiving of my body is of course not the same idea as corresponds to the condition of my body when I perceive the table. Thus I can be said to perceive Reality under the attribute of extension, and in like manner I may be said to perceive the attribute of Thought because I apprehend thought in my own person, although it must be admitted this statement raises certain difficulties.

Now there is an  $\alpha$ -mode corresponding to the idea and bodily condition I am in when I perceive the table. But I cannot perceive an  $\alpha$ -mode because my particular sort of mind which is united to a particular sort of body has no means of perceiving  $\alpha$ -modes. My bodily organs are affected in the world of motion and rest by the extended table, but I do not perceive the  $\alpha$ -mode of the table but only its extension-mode, and consequently though my idea has a corresponding  $\alpha$ -mode

I cannot perceive it, because I do not perceive  $x$ -objects exterior to my body.

It may be answered: granted that I do not as a matter of fact perceive the  $x$ -mode of the table, the question is still, why not? Does not the  $x$ -mode of the table affect the  $x$ -mode of my body or mind and throw it into a condition parallel to the condition of my extended body which has for its mental correlate the idea of the table? The answer is that interaction between a thing like the table and my body is intelligible only within the infinite mode of motion and rest; but we cannot speak of  $x$ -modes in such terms. We cannot therefore be sure that the  $x$ -correspondent of my idea of the table gives me the perception of the  $x$ -table. It might, for instance, be possible that in order to have perception of the  $x$ -table there was needed another body composed say of half my body and half yours, or of my body and a stone. The  $x$ -correspondent of my body in perceiving the table may be only a part of the  $x$ -mode which is necessary for the perception of the  $x$ -table, which perception consequently would belong to a quite different mind from mine. In other words, a different distribution of matter or rather of motion may be required for the

purpose than is afforded by that particular distribution which constitutes my human body.

I can now return more immediately to Spinoza's own words in his letter. A different kind of mind is required to apprehend things as  $x$ -modes, and so it is only such minds which can perceive  $x$ -modes, *e.g.* the  $x$ -table, and can consequently perceive themselves also as  $x$ -modes. The infinite thought-mode includes every possible empirical variety of mind, some of which may overlap ours. Such minds would of course have extended bodies, but it is easy enough to conceive that they might apprehend  $x$ -modes but fail to apprehend modes of extension, for want of the proper means. I take it that when Spinoza says that each particular thing may be expressed in infinite ways in the infinite understanding of God he means that in that infinite understanding there are minds enough to perceive the  $x$ -mode and every other mode of my body or mind ; and that he uses the word 'express' with some looseness or inaccuracy, and does not mean that the  $x$ -mode of my mind or body has a different mind for its *correspondent*, but only a different mind for its *percipient*. This being granted, there is no further difficulty in

Spinoza's reply to the question of Tschirnhaus and his modern critics than is implied in the habitual ambiguity with which he speaks of an idea sometimes as the idea of the bodily condition which is its correspondent mode of extension, sometimes as the idea of the object.

Spinoza's critics have therefore, I plead, forgotten that what we humans can perceive in the ultimate substance depends on the empirical character of our bodies, on our particular distribution of motion and rest, and correspondingly of thought.

At the same time, good as Spinoza's defence may be made, consistently with his pre-suppositions, the defence is only necessary because he has taken thought to be an attribute of reality instead of merely an empirical character of certain complexes of space-time or motion. Substitute Time for Thought, and the whole edifice of infinite other attributes is otiose and unverifiable. It is founded indeed on the notion that Substance being the ground of all things must not only have attributes which characterize infinite modes but an infinite number of such attributes. With our gloss, we can be content to note that mind belongs to certain things in the world and not to others. There may indeed

be other minds than ours, with bodies different from or more perfect than ours. And it is legitimate enough to suppose that such minds may apprehend other characters of things than we do. Why should colour, taste, etc., be the only secondary qualities of things? But there is no reason why we should assume that the objects perceived by such minds should be other than material or quasi-material objects like ours, and like them modes of extension or rather complexes of motion. The usefulness of other minds is in probing to the full the riches and variety of the *facies totius universi*. Perfection we shall find not in the arbitrary imagination of attributes which cannot fall within our human ken, but in the hierarchy of the verifiable qualities of the real world, culminating in the quality characteristic of God.

What remains of Spinoza's doctrine upon our gloss is not that there are infinite attributes but that there are infinite levels of the modes, that there is no end to the hierarchy of qualities amongst finite things.

## VII

### (5) RELIGION IN SPINOZA AND THE INTELLECTUAL LOVE OF GOD

**A** MOST important, and perhaps the most interesting, question is the consequence for the conceptions of religion and God of recognizing Time to be an attribute. Spinoza's official description of religion is this: "Whatsoever we desire and do, of which we are the cause, in so far as we have the idea of God, or know God, I set down to religion" (iv. 38, note 1). This describes the religious life, and is in the spirit of the words, "who sweeps a room as for Thy laws makes that, and the action, fine." But when we ask what is the nature of the religious emotion and what is God who is its object, we must carry our thoughts further. God for Spinoza is identical with Substance and is the whole universe. This belief is not demonstrated, or is only formally demonstrated, it is a restatement of the definition of God. Spinoza's conception of God is none the worse for being presented

in the form of a definition. The great fundamental notions of philosophers are not proved, their truth is seen. Proofs are nothing but machinery which helps others to secure the philosopher's vision. It may be doubted, I observe in passing, whether this is not also true of every scientific principle too. It is reported of the old Greek philosopher Xenophanes that he said with reference to the whole universe that the One was God. The Greek phrase which is translated 'with reference to the whole universe' is commonly, but Mr. Burnet, the great historian of Greek philosophy, says incorrectly, translated with greater picturesqueness, 'looking up to the vault of Heaven.' At any rate Spinoza looked out upon the universe and declared it to be God: he saw it as a unity and found God there. In like manner the physicist looks out on the universe and sees it to be a system of events. The greatest truths claim but to be statements of fact which the discoverer sees by looking out upon the world and finding them there. The only question is whether his vision is pure or distorted or partial.

Our question in regard to Spinoza is whether the God which he sees is not merely a name for the universe but truly the object of worship,

of the religious sentiment or emotion. If we seek in Spinoza for our experience of the religious passion, we find it in the noble and ecstatic conception of what he calls the intellectual love of God. It arises out of or along with the third or highest form of knowledge, intuitive knowledge. Science or reason, the second kind of knowledge, is the knowledge of true universals, those common properties of things which I have before alluded to as the characters of the world of motion and rest, which we would give a great deal that Spinoza had dwelt upon more fully. But intuitive knowledge is scientific knowledge seen in its connection with God. And since all knowledge of things is for Spinoza experience of ourselves, such knowledge means the experience of our own unification with God; it enables us to realize all things in their necessary connection with God's nature as expressed by his attributes, it gives us control of our passions, for it takes us out of our isolation and gives us communion with other persons and with God, it secures us true contentment of spirit, something like the tranquillity of which Epicurus spoke, but a contentment which is not empty, but on the contrary rich in all knowledge, for it pervades



the whole of our action and contemplation with the sense of the abiding reference of it to God.

It is not very easy to make clear to ourselves the nature of this intuitive knowledge and its accompanying emotion. Spinoza himself illustrates it by a simple and not very satisfying example. He takes the case of finding a fourth proportional to three given numbers. Mere science or reason would find it by multiplying the second and third numbers together and dividing the product by the first. But with simple numbers like 1, 2, 3, we recognize intuitively that the fourth proportional is 6. The notion is that of an act whereby truth is recognized without the labour of demonstration. A later philosopher of our day, Mr. Bradley, has spoken of a feeling which is above and supersedes reflection. Our simplest life is that of bare feeling; then follows reflection in which we think of the relations of things; then comes the feeling in which we cease to break up the unity of realities into their separate aspects or features, which our analytical reflection discloses and in which it works as in its appropriate medium, and we return to the immediacy of our original feeling, but an immediacy which is no longer naïve

and irreflective, but chastened by reflection and superior to it. Something like this is implied in the intuitive knowledge of Spinoza. And the emotional condition corresponds. It is port after stormy seas; the labour of reflection, its doubts, its strenuous pain are replaced by the passionate calm of utter conviction and satisfaction of the mind.

No conception however exalted suffers from homely illustrations, and a few such will help us to approximate to the condition described. I will take so simple a case as the conviction, after Euclid's demonstration with all the apparatus of geometrical construction, that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, or the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal; when the result is proved the properties in question are seen and with delighted satisfaction; that "tempest of the soul is resolved," to use a phrase of Epicurus, with which the process of reflection was attended, and the delighted spirit enjoys its vision. A still homelier example occurs to me. There is a passage of well-known difficulty in *Hamlet*: "For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a God kissing carrion," and so on. The original text said, 'a good kissing carrion,' but as the com-

mentators could make no sense of it, one of them emended the text and substituted the phrase I quoted, which held its ground, although everybody felt it was too artificial even for Shakespeare in his earlier years, and certainly in his maturity when he wrote *Hamlet*. But one fine day Sir Walter Raleigh points out that the phrase 'a good kissing carrion' is analogous to 'a good drinking water.' Our doubts disappear, and not only have we the conviction that the old text is right, but we bathe in the conviction, and go about our work for the rest of the day whistling, with the sunshine in our hearts. Every one knows of the excitement into which Newton was thrown when with the newly arrived corrected measurements of the distance of the moon, he discovered his theory to be verified. Mr. Einstein has not yet betrayed to us what he felt when the news reached him that the deflection of light from a star by the neighbourhood of the sun had been found in a solar eclipse to be twice what it would be if Newton's law of gravitation were accurate, and that it verified the formula which followed from the theory of relativity.

These examples may seem to be no more than mere scientific or intellectual pleasure in

a limited subject. Yet they all exhibit the recognition that the limited subject fits into a whole department of our intellectual world and the pleasure pervades our whole being. They are at least approximations to the goal. Imagine that any object is conceived in its relation to God, and we have on the one side intuitive knowledge, on the other the union of ourselves with God, which is the intellectual love of God.

Spinoza does not call this intellectual love religion, but it is the emotion which in his system is nearest to the religious passion, and it is implied in the official account of religion which I began this section by quoting. At the same time these illustrations help us to recognize a certain defect in Spinoza's conception of intellectual love in so far as we take it to represent religious passion. It seems to describe the passion in terms of the character of its object as recognized by intelligence, to describe it by a symptom rather than intrinsically. Unless the religious passion were already lit, it is hard to see how the intellectual love would rise above a supreme intellectual satisfaction, and this is not the religious but the scientific sentiment. Suppose the passion for God, and this scientific sentiment blazes

up into religion. But the religious passion must be there to begin with.

The defect must not be exaggerated. For knowing is for Spinoza an action, judgment is an exercise of will; and to that extent the intellectual recognition of the object of a passion is itself something practical. But it remains true of his whole treatment of the emotions, masterly as it admittedly is, that it defines the emotions too exclusively in intellectual terms of the knowledge involved; and is able to do so, because from the beginning emotions are considered as forms of desire. Take as typical his description of love as pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause, which he contrasts with the account given by some that it is the lover's will to unite himself to the beloved object, an account which he thinks expresses a property but not the essence of the emotion. The truth is rather reversed. It is rather Spinoza who is describing by a property. It is not the lover's recognition of his pleasure (which be it remembered is with Spinoza a passion and a conation) as caused by the object which makes his pleasure into love. On the contrary, it is because his pleasure has the character of love that he recognizes the object

as its cause. Or in other words the object induces a certain reaction on the part of the lover, and it is this emotional reaction, the particular form of his pleasure, which makes him recognize the object as lovely and the cause of his pleasure. Just in the same way, I do not eat an apple because I see it to be good to eat, but in so far as it excites in me the blind appetite to eat it I recognize it to be eatable. The intellectual love of God so far fails of being religious as it wants the special flavour of worship. But given the passion of worship, that passion leads us to discover and recognize God (supposing we identify God with the Spinozistic Substance) as the fountain of all our perfect knowledge. It will be seen that the question at issue, betrayed by these difficulties, is whether the ground and sum of our knowing is truly the object of our worship. For the pantheist it is.

It is outside my subject to ask whether Pantheism is right in this belief. But before I pass on to my proper question I will allow myself to add two more remarks before I tear myself away from the fascination of intellectual love. It has been stigmatized as mysticism; but to my mind that is not in itself a reproach.

There is a sound and a dangerous mysticism. The sound variety is an essential ingredient in all religion ; it is not too much to say that it is the vital ingredient of religion, without which religion is a thing of forms. To say that Spinoza was a mystic is only to say that he was full of the religious passion. And in the main his mysticism in its origin from intuitive knowledge is of the sound variety, reflected in the temper of contentment, or *acquiescentia animi*, which makes all life a service of God.

The dangerous form of mysticism is that in which the worshipper is lost in the adoration of God, and God becomes an infinite abyss of negatives, an abstraction which in purporting to be the secret of reality is in fact attenuated into the indescribable. Spinoza's conception of God does not altogether escape this reproach, and accordingly in one of its aspects the intellectual love of God does not always leave room for the claim of the healthy individual soul, but tends towards the utter absorption of the individual in God. It asks for no answering love from God. It is but a portion of the infinite love with which God loves himself. It is not only unselfish, being intensified with the imagination that others are

joined with us in this love, but it is selfless. This was the very feature which recommended Spinoza to the mind of Goethe. But it is the drawback to which the religion of Pantheism is always liable, and which Spinoza has not completely avoided. The healthy religious mind shares Spinoza's mysticism to the point of its feeling of our oneness with God; but it asks for the fathering response, and holds that God's need of us is no less than our need of him. It saves the individual from absorption by securing his independent entry into the relation of dependence upon God, and seeks in God fulfilment of the human being and not absorption. But for Spinoza it was difficult to secure such independence because God for him, though singular, is not so much an individual as a totality, and is not a person, for personality is but a finite mode, and his eternity is not duration any more than the immortality of man is prolonged life after death.



## VIII

### CHANGES IN THE CONCEPTION OF GOD AND RELIGION. THE *CONATUS* OF SPINOZA AND THE *NISUS*

“**B**UT now my *gloss* proceeds.” When Time is introduced into the ultimate reality as an essential ingredient, the conception of God and of the religious passion is altered at once. If we consider Spinoza, we are at a loss to identify God as the sum of reality with the object of worship; worship, as we have seen, is with him an intellectual passion and wants the specific flavour of devotion. The difficulty is common to Spinoza with every form of Pantheism. For the pantheistic Supreme Being lacks the human note. It contains humanity and all other things indiscriminately, and it contains evil and good alike, for what from our human view is evil is not evil as in the Supreme Being. Whereas worship demands in its object something indeed greater than man, and different from him in kind, not personality, but still something

in touch with personality, which therefore in our weakness of imagination we shadow forth to ourselves as a person, and something which if the predicates of good and bad are inappropriate to what is above good and evil, is yet in the lineal succession of goodness.

Now, if the ultimate reality is Space-Time, the stuff out of which by various distributions all things arise, there can be no pretence that it can be the object of worship, it can no longer be as such identified with God. We must seek accordingly for God, or let us say rather his divinity, elsewhere, as some character not coextensive with the reality but contained within it.

To find this deity or divinity let us go back to another of Spinoza's conceptions, that of the *conatus* which according to him everything possesses of persisting or persevering in its being. It belongs to everything, but is best realized from considering organic creatures. In all their goings-on, various as these are with the differences of occasions which provoke them, the plant or animal maintains its single individuality of being, abandoning it only to external violence or internal decay, or perchance in rarer cases (those of divided personality) splitting for the

time into two things each of which persists in its being, though they may overlap in some respects and have common use of some portion of the one body in which they are lodged. But the description applies equally to a stone or a molecule or an atom. The atom persists in its being in so far as the motions of its planetary system of electrons moving round their central nucleus are conserved. When five alpha particles are emitted in a series, the atom of radium changes to one of lead.

Such is the illuminating conception of the conatus. In Spinoza's language we may say that within the infinite mode of motion and rest, a certain complex of motion and rest has arisen from the original Substance in which an equilibrium exists, in virtue whereof the proportions of motion and rest among the parts of the complex retain their proportion. But for him, as we have seen, these bodies which thus maintain a moving equilibrium arise by the edict of God, but do not grow from one another in the order of time or as we say by evolution, but rather subsist side by side as in a museum of forms. With Time as the other aspect of Space-Time, the animating mind of the body which is Space, it is easy for us to see, vaguely perhaps

and yet without doubt, that it is the restlessness of Space-Time which it owes to its temporal character, which is itself the author of this variety of forms, now no longer an array but a procession. Space-Time falls of itself under the impulse of Time into these distributions of motion, into the complexes which are bodies, and certain of them attain equilibrium and persist as such. Yet nature infected with Time, not as a disease but as its vitality, does not stop, but pushing on, evolves out of these stable forms fresh distributions and a new order of beings with their specific character and their own conatus to persevere in their type. Experience shows us this evolution and science endeavours to exhibit the methods in detail by which the evolution is effected.

This striving of Space-Time and of the world of things heretofore precipitated from that matrix, we may call, not by the Spinozistic name of conatus, but by the simpler and vague name of a *nisus*. It is not an effort of the world to go beyond itself. We cannot think of the infinite stuff widening its limits, it would in that case cease to be infinite. It goes beyond itself only by the effecting of fresh distributions of its motions into new complexes of motion. This *nisus* or effort

of the world as a whole (which as a whole is never in moving equilibrium and therefore does not possess a conatus) is felt or shared in by the individual forms in which it has resulted, and hence out of those forms, out of one level in the hierarchy of levels of existence, a new level of existence is evolved. This is what we actually observe. The descendants of a type of beings become modified and suiting themselves to their environment, that is, not only to other beings on their own level or on lower ones, but to all those portions of nature as well which have not yet taken the shape of individual forms of being—climate, weather, magnetic variations, everything which may be summed up as moods of the unorganized world—change their character and become new beings on a different level. They were stones, and out of that physical level arises life; out of life, mind. Thus the nisus of the world as a whole is reflected in the transformation of types which takes place, as attested by observation and theory, out of lower to higher levels. Like a man caught in the cogs of a machine, material things are caught in the nisus and give rise to living ones.

Moreover the nisus of the whole is shared

at any moment by everything within it, though it is only in those things from which a new level not yet attained is to proceed that it is palpable. Life has been evolved and has been embodied in finite living things ; and mind in sentient things. The nisus would seem to have done its work so far as the attainment of life or mind is concerned. Yet still material and living things are caught in the nisus, in virtue of which they sustain the level above them, and without which that level would disappear, and things would shrink back to a lower stage. And within the 'minds' of these material or living things themselves the nisus is felt as a nisus towards something unattained, and they have the analogue of what religion is for us. The 'mind' of the stone is a dim striving towards life, which for the stone is an unattained level of existence, although we who come later know that life has taken the realized form of finite living things.

Thus the nisus of the world is not like the turning of a squirrel in a cage, a mere repetition of itself. If that were so, Space-Time would be not what it is, a stuff in which individual forms are moulded, but itself an individual ; instead of an infinite mode of motion, it would

be Substance, and that motion is incompatible with the essentially temporal nature of reality. It is the impulse of the world towards new levels of existence (as well as towards new kinds of being within any one level), and the guarantee that the particular distribution of motion attained shall not be permanent as a whole, but only admit those relative permanences within it which do exhibit the Spinozistic conatus.

Each of these levels in the hierarchy of beings is characterized by its distinctive quality—materiality, let us say taking the most prominent examples, life, mind. We can now adumbrate the meaning of deity. It is the characteristic quality of the next higher level of existence prophesied by the nisus of the universe which has created mind and the finite beings endowed with it, which observe are not necessarily only human minds. The beings which would possess such deity would be finite gods. But when we ask what for us is God, we must answer that it is the world as a whole with this nisus towards deity. If deity were attained, there would be not infinite God but finite gods, and the world-nisus would carry the distribution of motion in turn past them. But for us, into

whose experience deity attained does not enter, for whom there are not gods but infinite God, God is the being described. His body is the whole universe, his mind (or his distinctive form of temporal complex) is infinite deity. Such deity would not be coextensive with the whole world. For when we examine empirically the relation of beings of one level to existence at a lower level we find that the higher quality is not coextensive with a body of the lower level but with a portion of it. The mind, for instance, is coextensive with, Spinoza would say, is the idea of, a portion of the living body, the brain or at most the central nervous system. In like manner we must conceive deity as belonging not to the world as a whole, but to a portion of it. Only so long as we are thinking not of gods but of God, that portion is an infinite portion, which represents the whole world in the same sense as the brain is commonly believed to represent the whole body, because every affection of the body is directly or indirectly reflected in the brain. Hence, instead of a God who is identical with the whole of nature, as with Spinoza, we have to say that only God's body is so identical, but that God's deity, that which is characteristic



of him, is lodged only in a part of the world. God is immanent in nature, is pantheistic, in respect of his body, but in respect of his divinity transcends us, though still remaining within nature, and is theistic.

The sentiment of religion, the emotion of worship compels an explanation upon the same lines. Sharing in the nisus of the universe; caught as we are in the wheels of that being, which arising out of the chaos of Space-Time evolves levels of beings with their conatus, but always retains the unused chaos which allows of the emergence of new levels; we respond to that nisus in the feeling of oneness with the next higher type of quality which is to arise out of the level we or other minds have attained. As love, to go back to the old example, is in its essence a specified reaction to an individual of opposite sex, so religion is the reaction which we make to God as the whole universe with its nisus towards the new quality of deity. But whereas love is a manifestation of the conatus of the human or animal individual, religious passion is a manifestation of the nisus which the human being possesses because he is caught in the general machinery. It has therefore no specific organ though it issues in bodily movements of

supplication and diffused bodily excitements. And like other emotions it leads us to the intellectual apprehension of its object. Because the whole world in its nisus to deity evokes in us the response of religion, we become aware of the world as in this tendency divine, and apprehend God, as we apprehend the object of love to be lovely. The religious passion which we find in ourselves cries out for an object which intellect then sets itself the task of describing in intellectual terms, discovering its relation to observed realities.

Thus the gap which we find in Spinoza between the speculative conception of God and the religious demand that God should be an object of worship, is filled when Time is acknowledged to be of the very life of ultimate reality. In this process, however, the idea of God suffers, in being thus brought near to the common experience of religion, a radical change, and the idea of religion becomes in some sense, as indeed we feel it to be, a bodily passion, not merely an intellectual love.

## IX

### CONCLUSION

**S**UCH are some, and perhaps the most important consequences which would follow from the substitution of Time for Thought in the Spinozistic attributes. It goes without saying that no one would propose to construct a philosophy for himself in this fashion by trying upon the system of a great philosopher the effects of a hypothesis. He could in fact only make the hypothesis if he had himself reached such conclusions already, without deliberately or consciously building himself upon the philosopher in question.<sup>1</sup> But he may take pride in showing his affiliation to such a philosopher as Spinoza, and the more if he is himself a Jew speaking to Jews: and he may do so I think legitimately by the avowedly unhistorical method of using Spinoza to an end which the historic Spinoza would not have entertained. My hearers may think

<sup>1</sup> See the writer's 'Space, Time and Deity.' London, 1920.

that however much I have tried to render faithfully the historic meaning of certain parts of Spinoza's doctrine, I have been more concerned with the gloss than with the text. But a great man does not exist to be followed slavishly, and may be more honoured by divergence than by obedience. As for Spinoza himself, it is too late a day to express unbounded admiration. Moreover, no courage is required to praise him, for the admirer runs no risk. The Jews will not excommunicate me for my veneration of Spinoza, neither will the Gentiles denounce this lecture as infamous. He who for a hundred years was *Maledictus de Spinoza* has long since recovered his proper name of Baruch or Benedictus. I have at most illustrated the commonplace that veneration is not the same thing as idolatry.

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