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SPINOZA (1632-1677)

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“It is above all things useful to men to form COMMUNITIES and to bind themselves together with such bonds by which they can more easily make one individual of them all, and to do those things especially which serve to strengthen their friendship.”

—Spinoza.
light of the thinking mind. That, and nothing else will make more individuals light-hearted and free from depressions.

One of the greatest problems we are faced with today is how to enable men and women to think, especially if we realize that the memorizing, talking or writing man is not necessarily the thinker. If we take it for granted that there are teachers who are also independent thinkers, the problem still remains, where can they teach others to think independently? The teacher himself must be animated by the scientific spirit, the spirit of true thinking, in order to help those who are still influenced by their opinions based on false, fictitious and doubtful conceptions and not on their deeper convictions. There are such teachers and students. The most important question for us is: Where are the schools whose purpose it will be to cultivate the spirit of true thinking?

Neither our high schools nor our universities are working in a direction which can bring about this result.

We have institutes for the various arts, such as music, painting, sculpture, and so on, but not yet an institution to develop The Art of Thinking. When shall we have this new kind of school?

NEW ERA

By Nicholas Roerich.

Great changes have taken place during the last decade. Many walls of prejudice and of ignorance have been destroyed. Only the blind and deaf do not realize the knocks of the new forces that are coming into life. And the coming of these new messengers is as simple, as always is the coming of everything great.

Three gifts of perception are sent to humanity. The perception of One Spirit brings into being the unity of love of religions. The perception of the miracle of art creates the realm of beauty. The perception of cosmic force brings to us the idea of one universal power. And in the name of the enlightened New Era, we have to accept these blissful gifts with prayers and in constant readiness for action.

The Inquisitors did not trust Galileo in his statement on the revolving of the earthly globe. Solomon de Caus was placed into an insane asylum because of his belief in the power of the steam.

Fulton was ridiculed even by his own brother. Galileo wrote with grief that Professors in Padua refused to acknowledge anything concerning the planets, the moon and even the telescope, and that they were searching truth not in the world or in nature, but by comparing texts and trying to deprive the sky of planets by logical proofs.

Two hundred years later, Hegel basing himself on philosophical proofs tried to demonstrate the impossibility of the existence of planets between Jupiter and Mars. But in the very same year Piazzi discovered the first of the small planets.

Auguste Comte denied the possibility of analysing the chemical nature of stars. Five years later the inventors of spectral analysis established the classification of stars according to their chemical constituents.

Arago, Thiers, Proudhon were unable to foresee the future of railways. Thomas Joung and Fresnel were publicly ridiculed by Lord Broom because of their discovery of the waves of light.

In 1878 Bouillot, Member of the Institute, witnessing the demonstration of Edison's phonograph by Demoncel before the French Academy, declared that this was only a trick, and a half a year later urged the Academy not to trust "American charlatans."

And not long ago the existence of America itself was denied. So it was. So it is. But it shall not be so.

"Judge by the deeds, only. Judge only by results. Now in the time of action, not of discussion, let us remember this simple slogan. In our hard days of struggle and fight, humanity is growing weary of discussing all the conditional forms of contemporary life. But without a true conception of life proper, all the deliberations about its outward and casual signs are useless. You can talk about ways of communication, trade, production, monetary systems and innumerable related subjects. But where do we arrive at with all these "ways of communication"? ... There will be no peace until people learn how to discriminate between the "mechanical civilization" and the future culture of the spirit. ..."

"Even an approximate understanding of the fundamentals of true culture will create proper conditions for all the brilliant
discoveries that are awaiting mankind in the near future. Much will be achieved if explorers, daring and confident, will know how to approach the true nature of things without any prejudices which are characteristic of merely outwardly civilized people. Life is still full of prejudices seemingly fit only for the dark Middle Ages. However, there has never been so favorable a moment for the advent of genuine knowledge and beauty.

"You can claim that the expression of individuality of the various peoples always takes a different form. But one condition will hold forever: the forms of life must be not only civilized, but must have the elements of culture. And when you discuss the future, have in mind the essential conditions, that it must rest within the bounds of true culture.

"But how shall the conception of culture which is so easily understood, but not transmuted, be brought into life? Certainly not by words and proposals. What is needed now is harsh, practical and enlightened labor in its deep realistic meaning. The coming harvest of the forgotten forces of nature will blossom only on the soil of reality.

"Through creation and knowledge this reality of culture will take its place in life. Only the great Beauty and Wisdom will strengthen the actual path of life. And now the time has arrived for concentrated work. And every worker should realize that he is not merely an insignificant part of a complicated apparatus, but that the highway of attainment lies open before him.

"However humanity is not erecting a polyglot Tower of Babel. The common language of mankind is known to everybody to whom Beauty is not a dead word. And the thoughts of it, pure as a dove, fly the world around.

"It is with special attention and great joy that we are watching the youth of today. Their hearts are sounding in a unique and quite new way. They are going to build the new world and when they are praised, our heart is filled with hope. And the praises are many, for youth is working and hence strengthening its spirit.

"At this moment America is endeavoring to help many countries. This help makes us rejoice, for it comes from friends of future. Those help who possess faith and a clear foresight.

"With hearts open to Beauty, in evoking young forces to a bright outlook, the people are deciding their future. During the present hard strife, the nations begin to understand why it is practical to retain the treasures of culture. They know that the new line should be erected according to these hieroglyphics of wisdom. Because the past is but a window to the future. Through this window will come the joy of presenting to friends the new peaceful discoveries of Beauty.

"Many persons have asked me during this year what reason there has been for organizing now in New York the Master Institute of United Arts and Corona Mundi. Certainly to those who know the organization there is nothing casual in their beginnings; they are answering the needs of our time. I was asked to give the mottos for the two institutions and I chose two quotations from my articles, because in our day of keen struggle and international misunderstanding, I insist that they are purely practical.

"For the Master Institute, I offered: "Art will unify all humanity. Art is one. . . . Indivisible. Art has its many branches, yet all are one. Art is the manifestation of the coming synthesis. Art is for all. Everyone will enjoy true art. The gates of the "Sacred Source" must be wide open for everybody, and the light of art will influence numerous hearts with a new love. At first this feeling will be unconscious, but after all it will purify human consciousness. And how many young hearts are searching for something real and beautiful. So, give it to them. Bring art to the people. Where it belongs. We should have not only museums, theatres, universities, public libraries, railway stations and hospitals, but even, prisons decorated and beautified. Then we shall have no more prisons."

"For Corona Mundi, the following: Humanity is facing the coming events of cosmic greatness. Humanity already realizes, that all occurrences are not accidental. The time for the construction of future culture is at hand. Before our eyes the revaluation of values is being witnessed. Amidst ruins of valueless banknotes, mankind has found the real value of the world's significance. The values of great art are victoriously traversing all storms of earthly commotions. Even the "earthly" people already understand the vital importance of active beauty, and when we proclaim: Love, Beauty and Action, we know verily, that we pronounce the formula of the international language. And this formula, which now belongs to the museum and stage, must enter every day life. The sign of beauty will open all sacred gates. Beneath the sign of beauty we walk joyfully. With beauty we conquer. Through beauty we pray. In beauty we are united. And now we affirm these words—not on the snowy, heights, but amidst the turmoil of the city. And realizing the path of true reality, we greet with a happy smile the future."
“Those who sit in pigeon holes may believe that these mottos are too idealistic and can doubt their practical application in our day, amidst our complex life. But this doubt comes only from the personalities of limited knowledge, narrowed by the stress of urban life. But our way is not with these, for we have seen how the buildings of their limited knowledge are easily destroyed. But take the simpler souls, not from the dark city, but those closer to nature, from town and village, from that universe where the wings of possibility are growing. From these you will have an entirely different response. Even simple Russian peasants understood that in the art object was the real valuta, more stable, more firm, than in any pecuniary possessions. In the same way, these peasants felt the significance of music and song—and really, if serpents can be charmed with music, how much greater importance has it for the human soul.

“Without any exaggeration, I emphasize that not one government can endure henceforth unless it shall take into consideration the veneration of beauty expressed in all branches of art and higher knowledge.

“And if the transports shall carry for exchange, not guns but beauty, one may believe that not one hand would be found to destroy these objects. There is one point at which beauty always conquers, when even the sceptical ones are confounded and begin to realize that they have to do with something beyond themselves.

“All possibilities of the lower ways have already been tried. We have such superb poisons, and such all-destroying explosives, and our knives are so keenly sharpened that every heart can be destroyed. What a splendid apotheosis of destruction. We must have reached to the second thousandth year of our era to achieve such perfect eminence. And at the same time hypocrisy is at its flood tide. For we pretend great concern with international law. Pity the professor of international law for his position is now very insecure; to discuss peace at a table beneath which is lying the most powerful explosive is hardly pleasant. And there is no rescue for them. No possibility of being saved until they have returned again to the right way.

“Should someone wish to dispute with me this matter, denying the vital side of Beauty, I will gladly discuss with him. I have on my side the soundest historical facts and what I am saying is based only upon results. When people accuse me of being only an idealist, I can well say: “No, I am the realist because I believe in knowledge and facts, in the synthesis of beauty, while you lay your faith on scraps of paper.

“Nor, in speaking of art, do I refer necessarily to the great manifestations of art, to the Challapins, the Wagners, for them a small glimpse of sincerity possesses such mysterious conviction that in approaching it, you feel a breath of purer air. Recently at the Master Institute a very young boy gave his first recital, and one could perceive how quite different hearts in hearing him were united, even antagonists were for that moment in unity. If this principle is sound, certainly such a moment can be extended to infinity. And all such difficult social and national problems can be solved in that moment because they do not exist in reality. Beneath this ascendency of Beauty, you can distinguish the great visage of our religion, manifesting itself in the simplest way under the wings of beauty.

I believe always that the most idealistic ideas are the most practical, and so it has proved in every organization in which I had the opportunity of participating during my artistic career. If anyone shall argue that something is too idealistic and hence outside of life itself, one can say: “Excuse me. You are wrong. It is out of life because it is not high enough. It is as in mathematics where we have to do with strange figures that seem to be not vital, but in their application these figures become magnetic forces attracting life in all its atoms. And only in this way does one find the true ascent which leads us to the truism; from the highest mountain one attains the brightest outlook. And from the clearest outlook one can discern how the seeming destruction is in reality the part of great constructive work.”

“I have many friends among the children and I have always been especially proud of the little visitors to my exhibition. For who can grasp in the easiest way, the vital power of art? — the simple people and the children, the people of nature. And in organizing the new international army of the new era, we must not forget the simple people and the children. The new era must have its new knights. And the best countersign of the army — the true passport for honor and eternity — is the sign of true culture. Before this countersign all communications shall be opened. And how simple and how beautiful shall be this vital sign.”

“We have noticed that the greatest enemies of beauty are vulgarity, hypocrisy, selfishness, and above all, ignorance. The last one, although harmful, is not so dangerous. For this ailment may be cured, and my advice for remedy is to go to the first sources; then the cure is sure, based on real facts, will open the eyes of those afflicted. One woman whom I know who lectures and sincerely attempts to interpret the meaning of art, once asked me what I
would call her profession. I replied that the best title was probably a “window cleaner”. And this is not entirely jest. For I assert that every human being has an open view into this realm of Beauty if only the dust of life and the dirty windows do not obscure his vision.

“I recall also another conversation with a man in an official position, who wanted to speak to me about this subject. During a conversation of three hours, he refused everything I told Him and I covered everything he told me. Finally I told him, ‘Now during three hours you have denied everything of mine, while I have found a place for everything you have said. Please comprehend whose position is better.’ And I saw how really amazed he was to realize that he was only a negative spirit. And how many of these opposing spirits in official life are crossing our ways, only denying. But when their eyes shall be opened they will be astonished at their own bigotry. And they shall see how easily in our every-day lift, a new order and a new realm can be established in the most vital way.

“Remember not dreams, but facts. And results. And from where comes the most bracing energy to grasp the vital ideas? Only from the infinite power of the air, of the sun, only from the light, comes this life-giving smile.”

“Modern thought—should we not say modern Europe?—was born in the mind of Benedict Spinoza. Not in Hobbes’ “Leviathan” (1651), nor in Descartes’ “Discourse On Method” (1687), nor in Kant’s “Critique of Pure Reason” (1781), though all these helped, but it was in Spinoza’s “Ethics” (1677) that the light burst upon the benighted West and rescued it from the spectral darkness of mediaevalism. At rare intervals in history there appear cosmic minds whose creative thoughts grow bigger and attain greater vitality with the flight of the ages. Such was Spinoza. . . . . If Plato gave tongue to what was deepest, richest, and ripest in ancient thought, it remained for Spinoza to provide the various molds in which all subsequent philosophical systems, religious ideas, and artistic and literary schools in England, France and Germany have been shaped.”

—T. M. Phillips.

**A SPINOZA UNIVERSITY**

With the advent of 1932 we enter upon a year of great import—a year marking the tercentenary celebration of the birth of Spinoza. What raises in importance the three hundredth birthday of this thinker is that it is only at this late year that his true greatness has been realized.

Spinoza is indeed more alive today than he has ever been before—Spinoza lives in the hearts of men. His Ethics is now acknowledged and sought after as a means for the solution of the most vital individual and social problems of life. For has not his ethical philosophy withstood the most searching tests of men's minds for three hundred years, and has it not now finally emerged victorious—acclaimed as a true and livable “code of life”?

But the question which now arises is: How can we best honor the memory of this noble character? How can we show the truest appreciation of his great contribution to humanity? And would not the answer be: by establishing a Spinoza University, a school which would teach human beings the principles of Spinoza’s Ethics? Would it not be by creating a school in which academic knowledge would be subordinated to character development, in which the intellectual, rather than the intellectual, young man and woman would be the ideal—in which biosophy would supeceedenot the intellectual.

Spinoza was not merely interested in theories and abstractions. He advocated character training and the inculcation of “virtue” as the highest goal for men. That is why we, having grown more conscious of the depth and meaning of Spinoza’s principles by practising them in our daily lives, maintain that nothing more fitting could grace the anniversary of this great thinker than a university dedicated to his name and teachings.

The youth of today is already taking a markedly rebellious stand against the modern educational systems where the struggle for passing grades, encouraging fear and its accompanying evils, reigns uppermost. It becomes increasingly evident to the more enlightened leaders of the day that what is really needed is a school for the improvement of the understanding as a helpful guidance in life. And what nobler part can a university play? Spinoza has touched the very root of human understanding, and it is only the school based on his principles that can offer the student a deeper comprehension of life. Where are those, we now ask, who dare to make real such an ideal? Where are those, we ask, with vision enough to see beyond the surface of things—