SPINOZA

KETTNER

SPINOZA
THE BIOSOPHER
BY FREDERICK KETTNER

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SPINOZA
THE BIOSOPHER
BY FREDERICK KETTNER
INTRODUCTION BY NICHOLAS ROERICH

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"If the world is to exist an endless number of years, the universal religion will be pure Spinozism."

—Lichtenberg.
“Watchman, what of the night! Watchman, what of the night!”

“The watchman said, ‘The morning cometh, and also the night.’”

Throughout the night of human consciousness, up to the very dawn, the ever-vigilant, thought-creation of Spinoza stood its guard over the dikes of Holland.

It called out to the darkness: “Why is matter to be regarded as unworthy of divine nature?”

The very disintegration of the substance of matter, let us say, even that which protects Holland, would threaten with peril an entire country, because the “chaos” of ocean rises higher than the level of the lawfully manifest. How then can we underestimate the meaning of matter, which has been manifested by the great creativeness of spirit? Where is the law which bids us disparage and reject?

“The stone which the builders have rejected shall become the key stone.”

This is no pretense of a revelation of Spinoza. How is it possible to reveal that which has been discovered long since and which has already penetrated the best minds? But at a significant hour it is joyful to recall a wise one, a carrier of the treasure of thought, who opened one more channel to the beautiful synthesis.
Is it by accident that time itself reminds us of the glorious achievement of thought? Amidst the tremors, errors, disillusionments of the weak spirit the reality of this great, self-sacrificing personality astonishes one, like a sudden meteor from the far-off worlds, affording us by its example lessons in the understanding of life, which is nurtured and felt in one's heart.

The austere image of Spain, fatherland of Spinoza's family; the arduous destiny of the compatriots of the Moranos; the legend of Sabbatai Zevi; the flash of Uriel da Costa; the tragic death of his first teacher; his acquaintance with Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Giordano Bruno, DeWitt, these seekers of truth, who undertook upon themselves the burden of surrounding ignorance; all these make up the keynote of the life of the Thinker.

More than once, attempts were made against his life; in the Hague, where now stands a statue of Spinoza, the Thinker was arrested as a French spy. Indignant over the murder of his friend, DeWitt, Spinoza wished to mark the site of the murder by the inscription, “Ultimi Barbarorum.” In this cry of his soul, he poured out the deep pain of the heart.

Tragedy is the unfailing fellow-traveler of the searchers and finders, of the Treasure, of those who have touched Mystery. But it carries in itself that magnetic conviction which constructs the guiding and calling legend of truth. The name of Spinoza is surrounded by this heroic legend, which forcibly affirms the depths, the reality, of the conclusions of his trend of thought.

The uniqueness of the life of the Thinker himself, his triumph over human weaknesses and conventionalities, all these milestones, these beacon fires and torches of that sorrowfully stern march, illumine the image of Spinoza with a light which is kindled only by the power of thought and the reverberation of the heart. The wise one knows that the morning will not come swiftly, but he does not fear to set out upon the path by night, even if the night be starless, and if through its pall he can hear the ominous roar of the ocean.

“Think more broadly! Think better! Do not permit your thought to lack the precious essence. Dare not to disparage that which great thought has evoked from out the unmanifest chaos.”

While humanity stands appalled before the self-created economic and spiritual crises, the hours of destiny throb out the dates that recall the great figures, who by their vital example affixed the impression of their achievements. At the very moment when humanity is appalled so greatly at the wavering of its ephemeral, illusory standards, there come reminders of one who could not be held back by any dams; who ascended along the luminous arch from Amstel to the Valhalla of Highest Matter. When the fragments from our earthly crashes, seemingly bar the paths, there appear the messengers of the transmutation of thought into matter and matter into thought, who ascertain even the weight of thought.

The opponents of Spinoza speak of details, discuss his words, without desiring to see the basic trend of his thought. There is nothing baser than to tear from a multitude of successive signs, separate details and to brandish those in an attempt to confound or in a desire to violate, the current of thought. Out of the most precious tablets one may construct very strange designs.

Whoever has affirmed another great value, has thereby already enriched the possibility of evolution; he has thus
already become a glorious guest of honor at the feast of culture. Desiccation and decay or affirmation and unfoldment; there is no mid-way.

The thought of Spinoza is destined to flower. It is not in vain are so many young hearts attracted to it. Not to the abstract, but to the real, do the young hearts leap. They feel the direction of life.

Spinoza asserts that “Science has one destiny, to which all its branches are striving—namely, the highest perfecting of humanity . . .” “Those who deny that men can attain virtue and truth deprive themselves of these, by this very denial.”

“True cognizance generates only through the essence of things or through their knowledge: Proximate Cause.”

Let us not forget that Spinoza strives to “such a finding and possession as will give constant and highest joy in eternity,” to those “pure and clear thoughts, where passion ceases to be passion.” Thus Ethics ceases to be an abstraction and becomes the guiding star of joy in true vital application.

These reminders explain why the name of Spinoza attracts youth. Not only the gray-haired sympathize and help, but the young hearts also cooperate and quiver at hearing of the eternal joy.

In the orbit of the same happy guests revolve many glorious names almost contemporary to Spinoza: Keppler, Galileo, Leibnitz call to the far-off worlds. Along the same shores of Amstel at the same hour crosses another magi of light—Rembrandt, solving in his own way “the highest joy in eternity.”

Speaking of the flourishing of Spinoza’s thought, one cannot fail to remember our Spinoza Center in New York, that young group which gives joy, which gathers in the name of a great Thinker. Remembering this century of youths, striving to bliss, to the purification of life by thought, one always feels a hearty tremor, desiring to send them a greeting for the success of their communions. They also do not have it easy; thus it was not easy for the Thinker himself, nor is it easy for any enlightened ones. But for the transmution of thought a great fire and a mighty effort are needed. It is difficult to melt graphite, which records the thought, but nevertheless under a mighty heat it produces a diamond.

Spinoza could rejoice in his observation of the Rings of Saturn, as he turned to the far-off worlds. But he also studied the earthly laws, as the equilibrium of the foundations.

The Rabbi Gamaliel says: “The study of the law is a noble deed, if united with some art. Our occupation with them diverts us from sin. But each occupation unaccompanied by artistry leads to nothing.” And the Rabbi Yehudi adds: “He who does not teach his son an art prepares him to be a highwayman.” Spinoza, knowing his art of delicate telescopic lenses and having attained considerable perfection in drawing verily answered the covenant of harmonization and ennobling of the spirit.

More than once Spinoza received offers in money in exchange for only a few concessions in his views; but stoically he rejected them.

More than once he was threatened with murder or with the looting of his possessions. But could the ignorance of malice stop the torrent of thought? In order not to inflict danger upon his landlord, he offered voluntarily to face his assailants when they came to murder him. Does not the refusal of Socrates to escape from prison resound with the same nobility of spirit? Or the story of the dungeon of
Origen Adamantius? And does it not remind us of other great examples? Spinoza asked a friend not to translate all parts of his tracts into the Dutch language in order to avoid forbiddance. And does this not call for various great parallels, ancient and contemporary, when the words of bliss were proclaimed by ignorance as “dangerous poison”?

As signs for the human spirit rise the milestones of courage and of cognizance of an unrestrainable nobility; and at the destined hour, among the underbrush of weeds of ignorance, the spiritual human eyes, aroused, will see with unearthly fires and will exclaim: “One more pillar of the commands of King Asoka has been found.” . . . “A new stella of the laws of Hammurabi.” Kings—high priests, protosages, proto-evangels! Kings of spirit, your stella surrounded by a spectrum of tears of salt and joy, are being guarded invincibly for new cognition.

At his tri-centennial anniversary, people will turn with new benevolent attention to the renewed and penetrating image of Spinoza, and once again they will rejoice over his evolved consciousness, because the enchantments of thoughts never wither. Of course, true values find a place for themselves with difficulty. The standard depositories are not containers for them. It is painful to open an eye full of dust; and especially when not a speck of dust but a beam of wood, impedes.

One recollects the following truly “historical” episode:

When the mummy of Pharaoh Rameses the Great was found, it was packed in the pages of the newspaper Le Temps and brought to Cairo in a wagon. The custom official weighed it on the scale and “Not finding a corresponding custom levy in the list of tariffs, applied to it the ruling in regard to salt codfish.”

To us, the Holy relics of the ancients are in the category of salt codfish.

This is not a tale of Middle Ages but our very recent past which finds a parallel between the reverence of relics and salt codfish. And can we ascribe such ignorance only to our past? Up to now, a skeleton is imported under the tariff of second-hand things.

And even now, are not the foundations of culture being destroyed? Do we not attempt again to deprive matter, the great Materia Matrix, of her divine origin? Do not the ignorant try to place all scientific raptures into the coffin of dead symbols?

Verily not by accident have so many books of wisdom been revealed now for warning and preventing the possibility of new deplorable errors. Verily not by accident does time itself, by its dates, remind us of knights and heroes of thought, who, like the heroes of antiquity, have quaffed the poison of the world!

How will we then celebrate the tri-centenary of Spinoza? With what will the friends of his thought celebrate? Best of all, with that which would be closest to the Thinker himself, the creating of eternal joys. So let us try and find in this creativeness of luminous benevolence and renewed cooperation . . . “Joy is a special wisdom!”

Concerning the wise, one does not have to conclude with an exclamation. Perhaps the closest of all to us will be the words fixed by Plato—those epically clear words of Socrates, confirmed by his own life, when he drank poison, as the redeeming chalice of the world.
“He who during his entire life has renounced pleasure and the adornment of his body as things external and leading to evil; he who striving to the pleasures of knowledge has adorned his soul, with the befitting adornments—temperance, justice, power, liberty and truth. He can be assured in a happy destiny of his soul; he can calmly await the hour of his departure into another world for he is ready to part whenever fate summons him.”

Urusvati, Himalaya.

VITAL WISDOM

BY NICHOLAS ROERICH

The remembrance of the Spinoza Center of the Roerich Museum will forever remain one of the most precious impressions for me. In our times of unrest and commotion, in these days of the crumbling of mechanical civilization, each sign of spiritual upliftment is especially valuable.

I always remember with what eagerness and perseverance Dr. Frederick Kettner came to me and what ardor I felt in his approach in the name of the great philosopher, Spinoza. No less precious was it for me to see the group of striving young workers united in the great ideas of Spinoza and the ardent spirit of Dr. Kettner. I do not exaggerate but wish to express that which I witnessed.

It is impossible that one should not be aroused to great spiritual joy at the sight of youth, working without great means, striving and self-supporting, religiously gathering around a great name and using all its leisure time for the study of a high philosophy. And they do not study for abstract purposes. Nay, they transform their lives through it, and within their hearts high ideals begin to live. These self-sacrificing torches illumine the surrounding darkness and form one more stronghold against ignorance. And we know how militant is ignorance and how contagious is darkness.

The leader of the group, Dr. Kettner, is a true teacher,
for he not only guides the meetings and gives the lectures, but he is consulted in vital matters of life. He arms the young warriors with the most unfailing armors. He tells them how practical is the Good and how shameful and self-destructive is evil. And the Good is there, where are creation, constructiveness and spiritualization. The Good is there, where are containment, devotion and love. The highest is in the light of sacrifice and the basest is in the darkness of treason.

The conceptions of evolution and attainment, abstract for the average brain, become the vital cornerstones of everyday life. Such foundations are affirmed there, where life is so difficult; there where the struggle often withers away the best forces.

Is it not remarkable to see that a numerous group of youth has chosen as its weapon so high a philosophy? They have evoked and surrounded themselves with the name of a sage, who so fearlessly and self-sacrificingly brought into life the regenerated conception of Be-ness. Under his perspicacious understanding, matter occupied its befitting place and was uplifted. To uplift is a noble action. In uplifting we unavoidably uplift ourselves, because in creating the energy upward—everything from beginning to end, moves in this direction. With this noble upliftment comes also the quality of tolerance, so much needed. If we introduce tolerance only conventionally and superficially, nothing but hypocrisy can be created. Only through noble upliftment of the spirit, through incessantly realized labor comes this wonderful guest—tolerance. Precisely this quality when introduced naturally, creates the smile of Wisdom. I am speaking of that smile of Wisdom with which the Sage listens to the seeker. In his caressing eyes and the silent nod is expressed: “Try, my son!

Never mind if thou walkest now by the side road. Only walk without looking back, not fearing the stones, nor the thorns. Remember, if the steep slope would be too smooth, the ascent would be still more difficult for thee. The stones not only do not hinder thee, but support thee. Do not forget it and bless these stones, for they may be used as steps.”

I recollect how once in the East a learned Rabbi said: “You also are Israel, for each one in the quest of light is Israel.” Thus was expressed the Wisdom of the immemorial ages. In it resounds upliftment as well as tolerance.

When you, the participants of our Spinoza Center, gather for a meeting, you garb yourselves in the festive cloth, because as I know, this meeting is a festival for you. Such an attitude is already a pledge for this upliftment, and the consequence is tolerance and containment. You know how the great Spinoza suffered in his life only because he selflessly expressed true knowledge. But we know that martyrdom is but the tension of energies. In this tension you receive the right to knock at all gates where the useful construction can be strengthened. I repeat, you have transferred the philosophy from abstraction into life. In this you follow the beginnings of true evolution, for all Teachings and all philosophies are given for life. After all there is no high Teaching which is not also practical in the highest sense of the word. We can solve numberless problems of the contemporary disturbances only by the beautiful and highest consciousness. Only the Bridge of Beauty will be strong enough for crossing from the bank of darkness to the side of light. You know what great significance is allotted in the sacred Teachings to the symbol of the bridge. Upon this bridge will come the Highest in glory!
I know that the Spinoza Center will grow, because it began upon sane principles, vital in tangible reality. Not mist, but light lies at the foundation of evolution. If we are capable of understanding that light is color and sound, we shall also realize that everything beautiful is also needed for the construction of the Temple of evolution. The Djinns helped King Solomon build the Temple. Invoking the light and the beautiful, we shall force even the Djinns to help in the great construction. In the name of great Knowledge and beautiful achievement, I welcome you!

AUTHOR’S NOTE

No doubt, there are many individuals who can understand Spinoza’s teaching more as a guide in life than merely as a theory. In writing this book, I had in mind first of all those who have felt the greatness of Spinoza, and who therefore would like also to understand his Ethics better.

My aim is to give the reader a picture of Spinoza’s teaching, interpreting it more from the point of view of Biosophy than from that of Philosophy. I have thought it better to let Spinoza speak directly to the reader, and have therefore used many excerpts from his writings.

It is my wish that this short treatise may serve as an encouragement to those who already see intuitively the value of Spinoza’s teaching, that they may understand it further. There is no doubt in my mind that humanity to-day is dissatisfied with dogmatic religious theories, since such theories fail entirely when put to the test of real life. Intelligent men and women are searching for a new conception of life.

Is it not possible that Spinoza’s teaching shall render the solution to the problem of life that humanity so long has been seeking? During the three hundred years which have passed since Spinoza lived, scholars and admirers have found in his work not only the deepest intellectual food but also consolation for their hearts.

I think that the time now is surely arriving when Spinoza’s ideals will be applied to practice by those individuals who
are already tired of the superficialities of ordinary life. I also believe that the coming celebration of the 300th Anniversary of Spinoza’s birth on November 24th, 1932, will arouse, beside the usual curiosity, a true interest in Spinoza’s ideas and will strengthen the desire of many to study his books in the capacity of real students of life, that is, as Biosophers.

Their work in this direction will make it finally possible, after a lapse of three hundred years, to establish Spinoza Schools throughout the world. The blessing that this event will offer, especially for idealistic youth, can scarcely be estimated. The lives of such youth will find possibilities of much more beautiful molding through the true education that schools, based on Spinoza’s principles of ethics, can give them.

To practice Spinoza’s teaching of life means to bring into existence one of the most valuable systems of ethical-practical thought. The vital elements of his teaching, if accepted in the world, will enable us to make much greater progress in the science of character-building.

Spinoza was a pioneer of thought, who penetrated, far in advance of his times, into the region of ethical life. His teaching gives us the necessary food which those who do not live by bread alone cry for. His Ethics enables us to find the best within ourselves, and to prepare our inner natures for the service to humanity.

As soon as we forget our divine heritage, we lose our way in the mazes of life, and so have to inquire our way back, with much loss of time and energy, in order to become noble or God-minded. This implies that we must strive to improve our understanding of the idea of impersonality, so as to be able to use it as the foundation of ethical cooperation, or psycho-synthesis. The most important thing for human beings, therefore, is to improve their understanding of reality, and so to gain a better appreciation of ethical values.

Those who realize that besides earning a living, it is also necessary to cultivate the understanding of the fundamentals of ethical life, know that the blind activities arising from our instinctive urges do not and cannot bring us to the right understanding of the Kingdom of Character. Our foundation of life must be changed. As the root, so the fruit. If the root of our striving is one of selfishness and false motives, the stem will be of a like nature. Consequently, worldly interests will overpower our better natures. True friendship among human beings becomes then a myth; dogmatic states of mind become the rule; prejudices govern us; and the principles of mutual consideration—the blossoms of ethical virtue—lose their color and become artificial. It is no wonder, then, that the fruit is not that of the Tree of Life.

The instinct of self-preservation constantly grows stronger. Ultimately, it either leads the human being to practice the eternal “know thyself,” or else to degeneration.

Our essence is the foundation of our true thinking. The more conscious of it we are, the purer our thoughts and motives become, the more perfect we grow. The Culture of ethical thinking alone can solve the riddle of human existence.

Those who are striving towards higher truths may come to a pure region not begrimed by the smoke of toil and conflicts. Why is there so much smoke about us? The human ego is out of order, and we make no efforts to repair this defective fireplace at our own expense. We must begin to
understand our ego ethically. Otherwise our life becomes a
castle from which the owners have departed to visit their
relatives. The windows are closed; the curtains are drawn.
Darkness settles over all. And with darkness come evil
spirits. The castle becomes haunted. The owners learn of this,
are afraid to return, and live at the expense of their relatives.

How can we liberate ourselves? Man long has been in
doubt as to whether his gift of self-preservation is his ruin
or his salvation. Being constantly driven hither and thither
by his passions, he longs for a resting-place, a haven. But
he can reach it only after a grim struggle within himself.

Whence will man obtain the strength with which to
struggle against passions? In the external world he cannot
find the sources of this strength. Everything there is in a con­
tinual state of commotion. It is only when he learns to leave
the surface of life and plunge down into the depths of his
own true nature that he can realize freedom and victory.

In order to force our way to the other shore, that is to
freedom, we must use a higher kind of knowledge. For it is
only with this knowledge (intuition) that we can find courage
to strive towards thought-discipline. The degree of clearness
with which we perceive a thought decides the degree of our
success in solving it. Faulty practice of a true doctrine im­
plies an imperfect understanding of the theory, just as a
badly constructed bridge is the consequence of the deficient
knowledge of the science of engineering. To the extent to
which one penetrates into the principles of ethical life, to
that extent does one succeed in the practice of it.

If we are to solve the riddle of existence, we must study
and understand the corresponding idea of life, and just as a
man cannot practice the profession of medicine without first

having obtained a degree from a medical college, so is it
impossible to devote one’s self to ethical practice without
first having obtained a degree from the ethical faculty within
ourselves.

A New Era approaches! Who else but Spinoza can be its
true teacher?

F. K.
Before going into details on the subject of Spinoza and the idea of Self-improvement, let us think of a scene in the life of Spinoza which is of great significance in understanding what Self-education meant to him. We return to a day in February, 1673, to the room in which Spinoza carried on his trade—the grinding of lenses. We see him seated at his work bench. Before him is a polishing machine on which he is carefully finishing one of the lenses for which he is so well-known. So absorbed is he in his occupation that he does not hear his housekeeper knock on the door. Again she knocks, and this time Spinoza hears her. “Come in,” he calls, “come in.” And the good woman enters, all excited. For she carries in her hand an important-looking letter bearing a royal seal. Spinoza calmly opens the letter and reads the following:

To the very acute and renowned philosopher Baruch de Spinoza:

Most renowned Sir:

His Serene Highness, the Elector Palatine, my most gracious master, has commanded me to write to you, who are as yet unknown to me, but most highly commended to his Serene Highness the Prince, and to ask you whether you are willing to accept the ordinary Professorship of Philosophy in his illustrious University of Heidelberg? You will be paid the annual salary which the ordinary Professors enjoy to-day. You will not find elsewhere a Prince more favorable to distinguished geniuses, among whom he reckons you. You will have the utmost freedom of philosophizing, which he believes you will not misuse to disturb the publicly established religion. I could not but comply with the request of the most wise Prince. Therefore I most earnestly beg of you to answer me as soon as possible. I will only add this, that if you come here you will live pleasantly a life worthy of a Philosopher, unless everything turns out contrary to our hope and expectation. So farewell and hail to you, most honored sir!

From your most devoted

J. Louis Fabritius

Professor in the University of Heidelberg, and Councillor to the Elector Palatine.

In his reply Spinoza wrote: “I cannot be induced to embrace this glorious opportunity, although I have debated the matter with myself for a long time.” It was never his intention to give public instruction; he declined the professorship.

Why did not Spinoza want to become a professor in a university? In addition to other reasons, he was not interested in class instruction of the usual kind. There must therefore be a distinction between instruction and education. Spinoza had private pupils whom he wanted to educate
ethically. What does it mean to have a desire to educate someone ethically? It means to help him improve his own thinking. The direction of ethical self-education has not only to do with the making of a living, but also with the realization of the idea of a perfect life. "As we know not anything among individual things," writes Spinoza, "which is more excellent than a man led by intelligence, no man can better display the power of his skill and disposition than in so educating men that they come at last to live under the dominion of their own self-understanding."

The true purpose of self-education, therefore, is to strengthen ourselves and others inwardly—in other words, to practise mutual improvement. Education is mutual or it is not education at all. It becomes mere instruction. Instruction is an entirely different thing. We have plenty of people with all kinds of degrees. But where are the truly educated men and women? Only those are educated people or cultured individuals who understand and practise the idea of mutual education. What can we learn on the basis of true self-education? The most important thing that we can learn is how to discover within ourselves that which differentiates man from the animal. What is it? It is the unselfish will to be free and to control our lower nature. It is the consciousness of our true life. A higher kind of freedom is waiting for us. Why should we not open our minds in order to be able to see the truth?

The ethical aspect of truth is a treasure and a blessing for those who practise self-education. Self-education does not include only external things. It includes the inner side of our natures. Such inner processes are leading us towards perfection. Man experiences ceaseless struggle and sorrow because he strives away from self-perfection, and becomes enslaved by external influences.

However, Spinoza as educator did not deny the importance of the knowledge of external things. But he was interested in knowledge for the sake of human independence. Whether this desire for independence takes the form of political or economic revolution or, as in the teaching of Spinoza, the form of ethical revolution, there is always the desire in man to realize independence in body, mind and soul. Self-education as a revolutionary process in individuals is the key to the kingdom of freedom. Self-education helps us to get out of the false, fictitious and doubtful states of mind. To educate means to get out. By educating ourselves ethically we get rid of greed and social injustice, and help ourselves and others towards the attainment of a more beautiful character. True education is based on the understanding of the essence of man. Why shouldn't we know how strong, how rich we are inwardly? No doubt, there are many things in nature which we cannot understand perfectly. But it is time for man to begin to understand his own mind. There are many people in the world who do not yet know what mind is, and therefore they have no idea of the ethico-educational process which is necessary for self-perfection. A clear idea is the best medicine. In order to understand ourselves better we must find the causes of our emotions in connection with ourselves and with others. And that will also help us to understand our social environment. Self-education has two sides—the ethical and the social. We are accustomed to be more interested in the social side of life, but there is no way to overcome all these external difficulties without understanding the ethical side of human nature.
If education does not bring us nearer to ethical cooperation it is not really an education. And as yet we do not have groups of individuals who can cooperate, it means that we do not yet practise true self-education. We already have schools all over the world for instruction, but we do not yet have institutes for self-education. Education has to do chiefly with two questions—how to think adequately or clearly, and how to live ethically. Man is not only a political creature but also an ethical being. The goal of man on earth is, therefore, self-improvement through ethical self-education. Spinoza's Ethics has been studied only in connection with philosophy. But it is more important to connect his ideas with biosophy. Spinoza was deeply interested in the social problems because he was deeply interested in the idea of complete and full life. So long as man considers himself as nothing more than a social animal, he will live in an irrational way, and form an irrational society. True society begins with true understanding of man's nature. It is useless to try to understand the nature of society without understanding the lower and the higher nature of man. The more we understand ourselves, the more we shall understand and change the social conditions in the world. In order to have more peace, we must have more educators than instructors. If human beings want to be taken as machines, what will be the consequence? We shall have a machine society and not a human society. There cannot be a better society without better human beings. Is it possible to live in harmony with others, while most of us are confused in our minds and full of evil emotions? Spinoza teaches us how and why to eradicate our confusions, our hatreds, our misunderstandings, our superstitions. But let us not forget that individual courage is the foundation of ethical self-education. We all have learned to be courageous in the struggle for existence, and to win or to lose. Why should we not strive to win the ethical battle?

Although all things exist according to the eternal order and fixed laws of nature, and man is determined by many things, yet such determination does not exclude the possibility of true self-education. This means that man, having a mind, can have an idea of the eternal order of things as well as understand the laws of nature and of his own body.

The goal of real self-education is to understand this eternal order. Although man, in his weakness, seldom can grasp this order, he can nevertheless conceive a human character more stable than his own and can see no reason why he should not acquire such a character. Therefore, man is always seeking means which will bring him to this stage.

Ethical self-education expressed as the striving for human perfection has an adequate foundation in Spinoza's teaching. It is possible to begin with an imperfect understanding and, by improving it, to proceed gradually from the most simple things towards the heights of wisdom; or, as St. Paul says: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known."

But how shall we attain to this education, or to the heights of wisdom? According to Spinoza, we need not go back to infinity to do so. In order to discover the best method for finding the truth, it is unnecessary to look for another method in order to discover the second, and thus to go on to infinity.
Were we to do that, we should never arrive at the knowledge of the truth, or indeed at any knowledge at all.

The case is similar to the making of material tools. For here too, we can argue that in order to work iron a hammer is needed, and the hammer does not exist unless it has been made; but in order to make it, there would be need of another hammer and other tools, and so we can go on to infinity. We might in this way, try to prove in vain that men have no power of working iron.

But we know that men at first made use of the instruments supplied by nature to create simple forms of handicraft, and even these they fashioned laboriously and imperfectly. However, when these were made, they wrought other things, more difficult than the first, and with less labor and greater perfection; and so gradually they mounted from the simplest operations to the making of primitive tools; afterwards they were able to make more complex tools; finally they succeeded in making, with small expenditure of labor, the vast number of complex mechanisms they now possess.

In a similar manner, the mind, by its native strength, can make for itself intellectual instruments, by means of which it can acquire strength for performing other intellectual operations, and from these operations may gain fresh instruments which will give it the power of pushing its investigations further, and thus it gradually proceeds until it reaches the summit of wisdom.

2—The Three Outstanding Obstacles

We all know that the things most sought after in life, and esteemed as the greatest good, are riches, fame and pleasure.
ings of social life are vain and futile; seeing that none of the objects of my fears contained in themselves anything either good or bad, except in so far as the mind is affected by them, I finally resolved to inquire whether there might be some real good having power to communicate itself, which would affect the mind singly, to the exclusion of all else; whether, in fact, there might be anything of which the discovery and attainment would enable me to enjoy continuous, supreme and unending happiness.” We know, when we read his works, that his search was rewarded and that he found this real good which he had striven to attain.

But how can we, simple human beings, turn our minds away from the three things considered as the ultimate good in life, which prevent us from the search for the new principle? We can do so:

1. By a careful inquiry as to what would be the more useful to us.
2. By continuous consideration of this useful knowledge.
3. By the direction of our attention to the new quest.
4. And, lastly, by deliberation on the problem from within.

As we proceed along with our philosopher, we realize that even for Spinoza it was no easy task to overcome his desires. He tells us that he also made many efforts, but in vain, to arrive at the “love towards a Being eternal” without changing the order of his everyday life. But when he saw that all these ordinary objects of desire would be obstacles in the way of a search for something different and new, nay more, seeing that they were so opposed to it that either these objects or the search for the new would have to be abandoned, he was forced, Spinoza tells us, to inquire which would prove the more useful to him; for he saw that he seemed to be willingly losing hold of a sure good for the sake of something uncertain.

Further reflection convinced him that, if he could really delve into the root of the matter, he would be leaving certain evils for a certain good. He thus perceived that he was in a state of great peril, and therefore compelled himself to seek with all his strength a remedy, however uncertain it might appear to him. Indeed, he compared himself to a sick man struggling with a deadly disease, who, seeing that death will surely be upon him unless a remedy be found, is compelled to seek such a remedy with all his strength, inasmuch as his whole hope lies in that remedy.

Spinoza’s struggle was rewarded, and he finally realized that all the objects pursued by the multitude bring no remedy to preserve their being, and even act as hindrances often causing the death of those who possess them, and always cause the death of those who are possessed by them. History cites many examples of men who have suffered persecution even to death for the sake of their riches, and of men who in pursuit of wealth have exposed themselves to so many dangers that they have paid away their lives as a penalty for their folly. “And,” continues Spinoza, “examples are no less numerous of men, who have endured the utmost wretchedness for the sake of gaining or preserving their reputation. Lastly, there are innumerable cases of men, who have hastened their death through overindulgence in sensual pleasure.”

4—The New Search

Now that we have acquired a knowledge of the evils which cause men to suffer, the next question would then be: How
can we best avoid them? That can be done only when we understand that these evils arise from the fact that all of our happiness or unhappiness depends upon the quality of the object we love. We all know that when a thing is not loved, no quarrels will arise concerning it, there will be no sadness felt at its loss, no envy if it is possessed by another, no fear, no hatred, in short, no disturbances of the mind. All those disturbances of the mind arise only from the love of perishable things, such as the objects already mentioned. “But love toward a Being eternal and infinite feeds the mind wholly with joy and is itself unmingled with any sadness, wherefore it is greatly to be desired and sought for with all our strength.”

But to perceive this merely in a theoretical way is insufficient. Unless we can lay aside at once, at least in part, greed, pleasure and love of honor, we cannot grasp the essential meaning and value of these ideas. Spinoza noticed that these evils are not of such a nature that they cannot be overcome.

And we can now see that the remedies for these evils are:
1. To occupy the mind with new thoughts.
2. To meditate on the new plan of life.
3. To enjoy our moments of clarity.
4. And, finally, to perceive that riches, fame, and pleasure can also be used as means to a noble end.

Spinoza also knew well that to accomplish these feats was by no means an easy task. One thing was evident to him, namely, that, as long as his mind was employed with the new thought, it turned away from its former objects of desire and seriously considered the search for a new principle. Moreover, this state of things was a great comfort to him, because he then perceived that the evils were not such as to resist all remedies. He saw that, although the intervals of insight were at first rare and of very short duration, yet afterwards, as the true good became more and more discernible to him, they became more frequent and more lasting, especially after he had recognized that the acquisition of wealth, sensual pleasure or fame is only a hindrance, so long as they are sought as ends and not as means. These things, however, if they are sought as means, will be under restraint and, far from being hindrances, will further not a little the end for which they are sought.

5—Three Practical Rules of Life

In our desire to improve and to direct our mind toward the discovery of truth, we should at the start formulate certain rules of life, provisionally good—such as the following:
1. To speak in a manner intelligible to the multitude, and to comply with every general custom that does not hinder the attainment of our purpose. For we can gain from the multitude no small advantage, provided that we strive to accommodate ourselves as far as possible to its understanding; moreover, we shall in this way gain a friendly audience for the reception of the truth.
2. To indulge ourselves with pleasures only in so far as they are necessarily good for preserving our health.
3. To endeavor to obtain only sufficient money or other commodities to enable us to preserve our lives and health, and to follow such general customs as are consistent with our purpose.
6—Spinoza’s Goal: Ethical Group Life

Spinoza had a definite goal in mind. He was striving to attain to the realization of his essential nature or character and to endeavor that many more should attain it with him. In other words, it was to be a part of his happiness to lend a helping hand, so that many more might understand even as he did, and that their understanding and desire might entirely agree with his own.

But before we can attain to such a character or reach the goal Spinoza sought after, certain things are necessary, and they are:

1. A new understanding of human nature.
2. The creation of a new kind of group life.
3. The study of ethical philosophy.
5. The science of medicine.
6. The science of mechanics,
or, to quote Spinoza’s own words: “It is necessary to understand as much of nature as will enable us to attain an ethical character and also to form a social order such as is most conducive to the attainment of this character by the greatest number with the least difficulty and danger. We must seek the assistance of ethical philosophy and the theory of ethical education; further, as health is no insignificant means for attaining our end, we must also include the whole science of medicine, and as many difficult things are by contrivance rendered easy, and we can in this way gain much time and convenience, the science of mechanics must in no way be despised.”

7—Modes of Perception

The most important task for Spinoza was to direct his attention to the means which can best enable us to improve our understanding and thus render it capable of attaining the highest knowledge. In his search for this means, he realized that in order to affirm or negate anything, we must examine various types of perception, as well as experiences we have with each. That will help us to choose the best way of knowing nature and ourselves.

By reflecting upon different modes of perception, Spinoza realized that they may be reduced to four, namely:

1. Perception which arises from hearsay.
2. Perception which arises from mere experience.
3. Perception which arises from deducing the properties of one thing from another thing.
4. Perception which arises from the essence of a thing as its proximate cause.

Spinoza illustrates these kinds of perception with the following examples: By hearsay we know the day of our birth, our parentage, and any other matters about which we never feel any doubt. By mere experience we know that we shall die, for this we can affirm having seen that other people like ourselves have died before us, though all do not live for the same length of time, nor die from the same cause. From mere experience we also learn that oil has the property of
feeding fire, and water the property of extinguishing it. In
the same way we know that a dog is a barking animal, man is
a rational animal, and in fact by mere experience we know
nearly all the practical side of life.

And, once we have acquainted ourselves with the nature
of vision and know that it has the property of making one
and the same thing appear smaller when far off than when
near, we can deduce that the sun is larger than it appears;
in the same fashion, we can then draw other conclusions of
a similar kind. Lastly, we may perceive a thing solely
through its essence. For example, if we understand the
essence of the mind, we know that it is united to the body;
we are then perceiving things through their essences. What
is the essence of the mind? The essence of the mind is to
persist in adequate thinking in an attributive way, that is to
say, to affirm in thought the reality of pure being as a foun­
dation for ethical self-education and social values.

8—The Development of Our Ethical Nature

With these modes of perception in mind, we can begin
with the most important problem of all, namely, the im­
provement of our ethical consciousness, so that we may
understand not only the surface of things, but also their
essence, and so be able to perfect our nature. Spinoza points
out to us that it is necessary:—

1. To have an exact knowledge of our nature which we
desire to perfect, and also as much of the nature of things as
is necessary.

2. To collect in this way the differences, agreements, and
oppositions of things.

9—The Knowledge of Truth

The best mode of perception which can help us compre­
hend the essence of a thing will also be a means whereby we
may investigate the truth. “It is clear,” says Spinoza, “that
no one can know the nature of the highest certainty unless he
possess a true idea or the objective essence of a thing. For
certainty is identical with such objective essence.”

What the objective essence of a thing is, we learn from the
following example. We know that a circle is one thing and
that the idea of a circle is another thing. The true idea of a
circle is not a pictorial image of the circle which subsists in
our memory, but rather a mental realization in thought of
what the essence of the circle really is. What is the essence
of a circle? It is the fundamental affirmation of it in all geo­
matical forms. The idea of a circle does not appear to us as
something having a particular circumference and center, as a
circle has; nor is the idea of a body the same as that body
itself. In this way we can comprehend the objective essence
of man or the reality of his true nature. For instance, the
man Peter is something known to us. The true idea of Peter,
however, is something in thought; it is the essence of Peter;
it is in itself something real and quite distinct from the man
Peter of whom we think in terms of name and address.
Now, with the understanding of the essence of man, we have the true idea of his nature. This true idea enables us to be active according to our understanding of human nature in general, or according to the understanding of ourselves in particular. It enables us further to continue, in an adequate manner, the process of our self-education.

10—The Skeptical Mind

What, we may now ask, will enable us to remove all doubts from our minds? The most vital thing is to have true ideas and to think of everything according to the standard of a true idea. This method of thinking would prevent us from overburdening our minds with useless and faulty conceptions. Furthermore, the affirmation of a true idea as an innate instrument of the mind is the beginning of true self-education. It will then not be difficult at all to understand the difference existing between things, because the true idea helps us understand our own powers. And the more the mind comprehends its own power, the more it understands other things; and the better the mind comprehends its innate capacity, the better it understands the order of nature. Finally, the more the mind grasps the order of nature, the more easily can it liberate itself from useless things.

How does it happen then that in our inquiries into nature, we seldom investigate things according to the standard of the first and foremost truth? This is so:—

1. Because we are not accustomed to inward meditation.
2. Because our minds are engrossed by prejudices.
3. Because there is need of forming accurate distinctions which is a most laborious and difficult procedure.

4. Because human beings are exceedingly changeable.

Spinoza aids us with his own words: “If there yet remains some skeptic who doubts of our primary truth and of all deductions we make, taking such truth as our standard, he must either be arguing in bad faith, or we must confess that there are men in complete mental blindness, either innate or due to misconceptions—that is, to some external influence. Such persons are not conscious of themselves. If they affirm or doubt anything, they know not that they affirm or doubt; they say that they know nothing, and they say that they are ignorant of the very fact of their knowing nothing. Even this they do not affirm absolutely, they are afraid of confessing that they exist, so long as they know nothing; in fact, they ought to remain dumb, for fear of supposing haply something which should smack of truth. If they deny, grant or gainsay, they know not that they deny, grant, or gainsay, so that they ought to be regarded as machines, utterly devoid of intelligence.”

But why are there so many persons who have doubts concerning what is true? It is because such persons do not pay attention to the distinction that exists between true perception and all other types of it. In fact, such men are like people who, while they are awake, do not doubt that they are awake, but afterward when dreaming, they think that they are awake, and upon awaking, having found themselves to have been in error, become doubtful even of being awake.

11—Discrimination

Our search for true self-education enables us to understand the real nature of things. This essential understanding
makes itself evident in our minds, and affords us an idea of truth, which likewise helps us in dealing with fictitious, false and doubtful perceptions, and in seeing in what manner we may be delivered from them.

In order to understand the nature of things, it is most important to discriminate between the essence of an object and its existence. This Spinoza helps us to do when he says: "Before proceeding further, I must remark by the way in passing, that the difference between the essence of one thing and the essence of another thing is the same as that which exists between the reality or existence of one thing and the reality or existence of another."

We must also bear in mind that it is necessary to discriminate between a general conception and a particular one. Spinoza teaches that the more particularly a thing is conceived, the more clearly it is understood. And since it is so difficult to pay attention to the idea of the order of nature, we shall not confuse the characteristics of one thing with those of any other, so long as we have a particular and detailed conception of the thing considered.

The best way to understand things clearly, therefore, is to have regard for the simple parts of which they are composed, because a very simple thing cannot be feigned but only understood. Therefore, we can infer with Spinoza, "that if the idea be of a thing very simple, it cannot but be clear and distinct, for such a thing cannot be known in part but either as a whole or not at all."

The conviction which arises from perceiving things clearly and distinctly protects us against the fear of confusion. For instance, we shall never believe that a man can suddenly turn into a beast or, vice versa, that a beast can suddenly turn into a man, simply because we understand the nature both of man and beast to such a degree that we know such a thing to be impossible. We are convinced that man has a certain nature and lives according to it, and we also know that a beast has an entirely different nature and lives according to that. It is impossible for us to conceive the one suddenly turning into the other. As we conceive these facts clearly and distinctly, we cannot mistake one thing for the other, and, similarly, were we to do so with all of our conceptions, that is, to conceive them in their simple parts, we should be much more capable of discriminating between what is a false perception on our part and what is a true one.

12—The Causes of Confusion

According to Spinoza, all confusion proceeds from:

1. The fact that the mind knows a composed thing only in part.
2. The fact that the mind does not distinguish the known part from the unknown.
3. The fact that the mind regards simultaneously many parts that are contained in one thing.

Confusion, however, can be banished, if a thing that is composed of many parts is divided in thought into its simplest parts and each part is regarded in itself. Let us take, for example, the nature of a circle or that of a square. As soon as we discover their natures it becomes impossible for us to mistake one for the other.

We need not fear, then, that fictitious ideas will be confused with true ideas so long as the existence of an object be conceived as an eternal truth, and so long as we conceive
the nature of the object clearly; for, when we conceive a thing clearly, we can feign nothing concerning it. We must only take care that we compare its existence with its essence and that at the same time we pay attention to the order of nature. If we have in mind a finite thing, we shall be obliged to consider its causes and in what manner such a thing is determined. But the most important thought to be considered is that very simple things cannot be feigned but are necessarily understood.

"Observe," says Spinoza, "that fiction regarded in itself, differs only from dreams in that in the latter we do not perceive the external causes which we perceive through the senses while awake. It has hence been inferred that representations occurring in sleep have no connection with objects external to us." From all that has been said above, we can now see that by considering things in their simplest parts we shall be able to rid ourselves of confusions.

13—Fictitious and False Ideas

This last mentioned point will help us understand the difference between a fictitious and a false idea. In dreams we do not perceive the external causes and, therefore, the occurrences have no connection with objects outside us. In fictitious ideas, too, we perceive the external causes, but only through the senses. In such cases several confused ideas of diverse objects are blended together, and we direct our attention to all these imaginary things at once, leaving them unaccompanied by any mental assent. A false idea, however, differs from a fictitious idea, only in so far as a mental assent is implied in the one and not in the other. This means, that, while we have false conceptions, there are no causes which permit us to conclude that the false ideas arise from external objects. In fact, the case is similar to dreaming with eyes open or while awake. And this can be seen more clearly by reading the note to the forty-ninth proposition of the second book of the "Ethics." "Falsity consists solely in the privation of knowledge involved in ideas which are fragmentary and confused. Wherefore a false idea, inasmuch as it is false, does not involve certainty. When we say then, that a man acquiesces in what is false, and that he has no doubts on the subject, we do not say that he is certain but merely that he does not doubt, or that he acquiesces in what is false because there are no reasons which should cause his imagination to waver. Thus, although the man be assumed to acquiesce in what is false, we shall never say that he is certain. For by certainty we mean something positive, not merely the absence of doubt."

False ideas are compounded of different confused perceptions of things existing in nature. For example, some men are persuaded that deities are present in woods, in statues, in beasts, and in other things similar to these; that there are bodies which by their composition alone give rise to intellect, that corpses can reason, walk about and speak, and, what is still more ridiculous, they further imagine that God can be deceived.

We may then conclude this part with saying that we either have ideas compounded of various confused perceptions (false ideas) or we have ideas which are compounded of very simple ideas (true ideas). And to give Spinoza's own words on this point: "The impossibility of a very simple idea
being false is evident to every one who understands the nature of truth and falsehood."

14—The Doubtful Idea

Besides the fictitious and false ideas, there is another type of inadequate ideas, the doubtful idea. According to Spinoza, however, real doubt is never produced in the mind by the thing in question. In order to find something certain about the thing in which we doubt, we must make use of some other idea that is clear and distinct. But the trouble is that we usually take refuge in an idea which itself is inadequate, and in concluding something from this new inadequate idea, we arrive again at a confusion. If, however, the idea to which we turn, in order to find something certain concerning the object doubted, is a true idea, we shall be able to remove all doubt in respect to the thing doubted.

To illustrate this, let us take the following example: Let us suppose that man has never reflected, or has never learned from any other experience that our senses at times deceive us. He would never doubt whether the sun be larger or smaller than it appears. Therefore, ignorant people are generally astonished when they hear that the sun is larger than the earth. But if these people reflected on the senses and saw that they at times deceive us, doubt would arise in their minds, and if, after doubting, they acquired a true knowledge of the senses and how things at a distance are represented through their instrumentality, doubts again would be removed from their minds.

However, before doubts can be removed, two things are needed:

1. To understand that doubt is never induced in the mind by the thing doubted.
2. To understand that a perception which causes us to doubt is not clear and distinct.

We must know, therefore, in what manner to investigate. The right process of determining the order of thinking will help us to be free from doubt, which is nothing but a suspension of thought concerning some affirmation or negation upon which we would pronounce unhesitatingly, were we not in ignorance of something without which the knowledge of the matter at hand must needs be imperfect. We may, therefore, conclude that doubt always proceeds from want of due order of investigation.

15—Deception

We may now inquire and see from what falsities we are delivered when we endeavor to examine all our perceptions according to the standard of a true idea. And our inquiry reveals to us that such an examination frees us from:

1. Deceptions arising because we are unable to discriminate between imagination and understanding.
2. Deceptions which we have acquired from hearsay or vague experience.
3. Deceptions arising from abstractions.
4. Deceptions which arise in us because we misunderstand the primary elements of nature.

However, if we proceed with as little abstraction as possible, and begin with primary elements, that is, with the source and origin of nature, as far back as we can reach, we need not fear any deception of such a kind. As far as the knowledge of the origin of nature is concerned, there is no
danger of our confounding it with abstractions. For, when a thing is conceived in the abstract, as are all universal notions, the said universal notions are always broader in the mind than the number of individuals forming their contents really existing in nature.

“Again,” says Spinoza, “when there are many things in nature whose difference is so small that it almost escapes the understanding, then it can easily happen (if they are abstractly conceived) that they are confused. But as the origin of nature, as we shall see afterwards, cannot be conceived either abstractly or generally, nor can be extended further in the understanding than it really is, and has no similarity with changeable things, there is no fear of confusion to be entertained as regards its idea, provided we have the standard of truth.”

16—IMAGINATION AND UNDERSTANDING

We learn from Spinoza, that fictitious, false and all other inadequate ideas originate in the imagination, that is, in certain sensations, fortuitous (so to speak) and disconnected, which arise not from the power of the mind, but from external causes. But one may take any view one likes of the imagination so long as one acknowledges that it is different from the understanding.

When we contrast true understanding with imagination, we realize that true understanding is the knowledge which serves as a standard of reality. With the consciousness of such an understanding we no longer fear that we shall confuse the true idea with false, fictitious, or doubtful ideas. Neither shall we wonder why we understand things that in no way

fall within the scope of the imagination, whereas other things are in the imagination but are wholly opposed to the understanding, or still others which agree with it. And we also know that the operations, whereby the effects of the imagination are produced, take place under laws quite different from the laws of the understanding.

We also learn from Spinoza, that the false ideas teach us nothing of the essence of true understanding. According to him, false and fictitious ideas have nothing positive about them which causes them to be called false or fictitious; they are only considered as such through the defectiveness of knowledge we possess. Therefore, false and fictitious ideas can teach us nothing concerning the essence of thought.

The consciousness of true understanding, we learn from Spinoza, is the highest knowledge we can attain, and neither memory nor forgetfulness concern this kind of knowledge. It is a knowledge that comes only with true thinking. The essence of true thinking, according to Spinoza, must be sought from the positive properties of the understanding. The question now arises: What are the properties of this understanding? According to Spinoza:—

1. It involves certainty.
2. It forms some ideas absolutely; some ideas from others.
3. The absolute ideas of this understanding express infinity.
4. It forms positive ideas before forming ideas that are negative.
5. It perceives things under a certain form of eternity.
6. It forms ideas in harmony with our will.
7. It determines in many ways the ideas which are formed from other things.
8. It can express ideas of more perfect objects.

17—Certainty

What are the instruments of the mind which can be used by a man who is striving to attain perfection for himself, and who desires to help others understand the quest for wisdom? The best instruments are true ideas. But let us ask further, how can we be certain that our ideas are true? The truth of knowledge includes certainty; that means, that a true idea recognizes itself. It is, therefore, unnecessary to look for external confirmations to be convinced that we possess a true idea. But how do we know that we are certain of our true ideas? Our awareness is a silent witness to it, just as a man really awake can never think that he is dreaming.

Certainty expresses itself from the depths of our higher consciousness, and it is entirely different from theological faith or from our everyday confidence in things and facts. Very often indeed we have false conceptions and yet are confident that we possess a true idea. This false kind of self-confidence is based on ignorance, whereas certainty is knowledge which is true. Certainty, as the understanding of essence, does not depend on this or that object; it depends on the awareness of our thinking mind.

“As regards that which constitutes the reality of truth,” says Spinoza, “it is certain that a true idea is distinguished from a false one, not so much by its extrinsic object as by its intrinsic nature. If an architect conceives a building properly constructed, though such a building may never exist, never-theless the idea is true and the idea remains the same, whether it be put into execution or not. On the other hand, if any one asserts, for instance, that Peter exists, without knowing whether Peter really exists or not, the assertion as far as its asserter is concerned, is false, or not true, even though Peter actually does exist. The assertion that Peter exists is true only with regard to him who knows for certain that Peter does exist.”

It is unnecessary to test a true idea because the standard of such an idea is produced by the native power of our intellect, a power which is not caused in us by external causes. The test of truth, therefore, cannot be an external one.

Such an instrument as a true idea which is created within our native understanding is the first tool ready for our use. Having discovered this first instrument, we have found the prerequisite for the making of subsequent tools.

We can now maintain that the value of certainty lies in that:

1. It protects us against fictitious, false, and doubtful ideas, or bad instruments which we form because we do not consider the essence underlying our erroneous suppositions.
2. It helps us to arrange and to connect our ideas.
3. It reminds us not to form any conclusions from abstract notions.
4. It teaches us to discriminate between that which is only a general knowledge of things, and that which is in things.

To do this, it is necessary to remember, when the mind devotes itself to any thought in order to examine it and to deduce from it all the legitimate conclusions possible, any falsehood which may lurk in the thought will become quite evident and we shall then readily proceed without interrup-
tion to deduce truths from the thought. This is necessary for our purpose, for our thoughts may be brought to a close by the absence of such a foundation.

18—Continuity of Thinking

True ideas are the best foundation for our continuity of thinking. In order to understand that thoroughly, it is necessary to know that, for Spinoza, a true idea is not a logical abstraction. He asks us again and again to make a distinction between generalities and essentialities. By that he means that the Essentialities of things which we can grasp only intuitively are different from the properties of things. The understanding of the essence of things makes us more active because we then begin to use our own minds.

By creating a new idea, truth manifests itself as truth. The realities of the mind are an affirmation of the true ideas and a negation of the fictitious, false, and doubtful ideas. Truth is the self-affirmation of the essence of things.

The fundamental conception of truth consists, for Spinoza, in the reality of truth as self-revelation, which means that it is independent of the world of objects, being a kind of activity of the soul.

Although we cannot always preserve our true ideas or true being, because we often have erroneous conceptions due to our imagination, nevertheless we can improve our understanding of the nature of true ideas by practising thought-discipline or self-education.

A special soul-education is therefore necessary in order to understand different kinds of ideas from a practical point of view. Truth is life, according to Spinoza, as truth is also nature or God.

19—The Knowledge of the Perfect Being

To find the true idea of the most perfect being is the surest way towards self-perfection or freedom. Spinoza calls this most perfect being, “nature” or God. To be at one with nature means to know oneself as part of the infinite and eternal order of nature. This knowledge of the union which the soul has with the whole universe is the highest kind of knowledge attainable by man.

Spinoza says: “As regards the order of our perceptions, and the manner in which they should be arranged and united, it is necessary that, as soon as is possible and rational, we should inquire whether there be any Being (and if so, what Being) that is the cause of all things, so that its essence, represented in thought, may be the cause of all our ideas, and then our mind will to the utmost possible extent reflect nature. For it will possess, subjectively, nature’s essence, order, and union.”

20—Fixed and Eternal Things

There are mutable things, and there are eternal things. In regard to the mutable things, Spinoza explains, “It would be impossible for human infirmity to follow up the series of particular mutable things, both on account of their multitude, surpassing all calculation, and on account of the infinitely diverse circumstances surrounding one and the same thing,
any one of which may be the cause of its existence or non-existence."

The mutable things differ from the eternal things in so far as the existence of the mutable or finite things has no connection with their inmost essence. On what then do these mutable things depend, and how are we going to find their inmost essence? The inmost essence of these mutable things must be looked for in fixed and eternal things, and in the laws inscribed (so to speak) in those things as in their true codes, according to which all particular things take place and are arranged. Moreover mutable particular things depend so intimately and essentially upon fixed things, that they neither can be, nor be conceived without them.

Let us now ask what these fixed and eternal things are, in contra-distinction to individual mutable things? Fixed and eternal things are also called individual things, but in the sense of belonging to an eternal order, which means, that they are present everywhere and that their widespread power makes them the proximate cause of things." "Whence these fixed and eternal things," says Spinoza, "though they are themselves particular, will nevertheless, owing to their presence and power everywhere, be to us as universals, or genera of definitions of particular mutable things and as proximate causes of all things."

This passage can only be understood adequately when taken in connection with the "Ethics," for by fixed and eternal things Spinoza means the attributes of God or nature. Spinoza was aiming to discover the highest good as the knowledge of the union existing between the mind and the whole of nature. How can our mind possess nature's essence, order and union? That can only be realized intuitively by proceeding from a true idea of the absolute essence of certain of these fixed and eternal things, or attributes of God to the true understanding of the inmost essence of things. The "attributes" are the most real things for us, as thinking beings. The "attributes" are realities in God or Nature even without relationship to our intellect. Our intellect does not affix or add anything to the reality of the fixed and eternal things or attributes. Spinoza says in the 19th proposition of the first book of the "Ethics," "God and all the attributes of God are eternal."

There is a kind of knowledge which proceeds from an adequate idea of the absolute essence of certain "attributes" of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things. Thus we can see that above all things, it is necessary for us to deduce all our ideas from real entities (attributes) and to proceed as far as possible, according to the series of causes (attributes), from one real entity to another real entity, never passing to abstractions, but always passing to essentialities. In the corollary to the 25th proposition of the first book, we read: "Individual things are nothing but modifications of the attributes of God, or modes by which the attributes of God are expressed in a fixed and definite manner," which helps us to understand more clearly the following passage from the Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding. "The essences of particular mutable things are not to be gathered from their series or order of existence, which would furnish us with nothing beyond their extrinsic denominations, their relations, or at most, their circumstances, all of which are very different from their inmost essence. This inmost essence must be sought solely from fixed and eternal things, and from the laws inscribed (so to speak) in those things as in
their codes, according to which all particular things take place and are arranged.”

Each of the fixed and eternal things or attributes is a real entity and identical with the all-being or God (nature). The finite things depend on the attributes essentially, and are produced in accordance with the laws which are inscribed in the fixed and eternal things. Spinoza endeavors to show us the way towards a true understanding of the reality of nature, both as a totality and as parts. Nature as a whole is God consisting of infinite attributes. From the “Ethics” we know that only two of the infinite attributes, Thought and Extension, can be understood by us, although these fixed and eternal things or attributes are all inseparable in nature. “It is in the nature of substance (God),” says Spinoza, “that each of these attributes is conceived through itself, inasmuch as all the attributes it has, have always existed simultaneously in it and none could be produced by any other; but each expresses the reality or being of substance. An absolutely infinite being must necessarily be defined as consisting in infinite attributes each of which expresses a certain eternal and infinite essence.”

There is a being (substance) whose nature we can understand through the awareness of the attributes. As we know only two of the infinite attributes of God, namely, Thought and Extension, we depend on these for our true knowledge of the divine reality. “We have so far been able to discover two attributes only which belong to this all-perfect being,” says Spinoza in his treatise on “God, Man and His Well-Being.” “And these give us nothing adequate to satisfy us that this is all of which this perfect being consists; quite the contrary, we find in us a something which openly tells us not only of more, but of infinite perfect attributes, which must belong to this perfect being before he can be said to be perfect. And whence comes this idea of perfection? This something cannot be the outcome of these two (attributes): for two can only yield two, and not an infinity. Whence then? From myself? Never; else I must be able to give what I did not possess. Whence then, but from the infinite attributes themselves which tell us ‘that’ they are, without however telling us, at the same time, ‘what’ they are; for only of two do we know what they are.”

Our knowledge of the attributes or fixed and eternal things tells us that they are:

1. Simultaneous in Nature or God.
2. Present everywhere.
3. Operative everywhere.
4. The immediate causes of all other things.
5. And lastly, that they have laws of their own which determine the essence of all the particular mutable things.

21—The Doctrine of Definition

But Spinoza is very anxious to make it clear that the inquiry into the essence of things has nothing whatever to do with conclusions from abstractions. “We must be extremely careful,” he admonishes us, “not to confound that which is only in the understanding with that which is in the thing itself.” It is only the very nature of a thing that can be in the thing itself.

From what, therefore, should we conclude anything? The best basis for drawing a conclusion, according to Spinoza,
will be a true and legitimate definition. To investigate the nature of things we should first of all know that particular things have two sides; the external which is characterized by its properties and the internal which explains the essentialities. We then realize that to study a thing from within is the best method of investigation.

Spinoza’s doctrine of definition must be clearly understood because it includes a fundamental truth. Spinoza aims to give us the knowledge of the essence of things and ideas. The true understanding of the doctrine of definition is a means to knowing not only fixed and eternal things but also the nature of particular mutable things.

That which explains the quintessence of a thing, Spinoza calls a perfect definition. And as he makes a distinction between essentialities and properties, we must take care not to substitute the one for the other. “In order to illustrate my meaning,” says Spinoza, “without taking an example which would seem to show a desire to expose other people’s errors, I will choose the case of something abstract, the definition of a circle which is of little moment. If a circle be defined as a figure, such that all straight lines drawn from the center to the circumference are equal, every one can see that such a definition does not in the least explain the essence of a circle, but solely one of its properties.” It is also important to know that as long as the essentialities of things are unknown to us, their properties cannot be understood adequately. If we do not go deeper into the essence of things, the order and connection of things in our understanding will be confused and we shall be unable to find the true idea of nature. We shall then never reach the goal for which we are striving.

In order that we may be delivered from this fault, Spinoza offers us his doctrine of definition, which helps us improve our understanding and discover the essence of particular things. The resulting gain is that:

1. We have no longer any regard for verbal affirmation.
2. Our ideas arise from the mind alone.
3. Our ideas become clear and distinct.
4. We seek conclusions only on the basis of essential knowledge.

Why should this essential knowledge be particularly sought after? We find the best answer in the 24th proposition in the fifth book of the “Ethics.” “The more we understand individual things (essentially) the more do we understand God,” or the more do we enjoy consciously the union which the mind has with the whole of nature.

22—Four Kinds of Things

In order to improve our understanding essentially, we must find the intrinsic values of particular things, and we must realize that this innermost essence of particular things must be looked for in fixed and eternal things. We have already tried to make it clear that these fixed and eternal things are called attributes in the “Ethics.” At the same time we should not be surprised to read that attributes are also things. We read in the first and second propositions of the second book of the “Ethics”: “Thought is an attribute of God, or God is a thinking thing,” and “Extension is an attribute of God, or God is an extended thing.”

According to Spinoza, there are four kinds of things:

1. The thing in itself, or Substance, God (nature).
2. The fixed and eternal things: the attributes.
3. The infinite things, as motion and rest, and the universe.

4. The finite things, or modes.

In regard to the first, we read in the “Improvement of the Understanding”: “It is necessary for our purpose that everything should be conceived either solely through its essence, or through its proximate cause. If the thing is self-existent, it must be understood through its essence only.” This self-existent thing is called God in the “Ethics.” This is in fact a being single and infinite; in other words, it is the sum total of being, beyond which there is no being found.

The attributes treated in the “Ethics” are eternal and fixed things which constitute the essence of substance or God.

In reference to the third kind of things mentioned, the infinite modifications, we shall quote the 21st proposition of the first book: “All things which follow from the absolute nature of any attribute of God must always exist and be infinite, or, in other words, are eternal and infinite through the said attribute.”

And finally, we understand that the individual mutable things are made and arranged essentially according to the fixed and eternal things and existentially according to the laws of motion and rest.

23—Of True Ideas

Spinoza explains in his “Ethics” that from the essence of God things follow in infinite numbers and in infinite modes, but he also clearly states that he wants to explain only those things which can lead us to the knowledge of the human mind and its highest freedom. Spinoza’s philosophy, therefore, is the philosophy of self-education,—a teaching intended to prepare individuals for ethical friendship units. And in showing us that the foundation of our being is substance, Spinoza means to point out that we can improve our understanding of the connection between the essence of man, on the one hand, and God with his attributes, on the other.

It is above all things necessary for us to improve our understanding because, without an improved understanding, we can never reach the highest good, nor can we be active in the direction of self-improvement. But what does it mean to be active ethically? Nothing else than to act according to the ideas derived by the pure mind from our true nature. In our purified mind, we can think of an idea which is real in the mind even though it has yet received no visible expression. We can be conscious of something essential as a kind of reality different from the external figures and shapes. The truth makes itself clear only in pure minds. It is possible to have a true idea and to know that it is a true idea because “As regards that which constitutes the reality of truth,” Spinoza tells us, “it is certain that a true idea is distinguished from a false one, not so much by its extrinsic object as by its intrinsic nature. If an architect conceives a building properly constructed, though such a building may never have existed and may never exist, nevertheless the idea is true; and the idea remains the same, whether it be put into execution or not.... Whence it follows that there is in ideas something real, whereby the true are distinguished from the false.”

Does it not follow that there can be thoughts in our mind which are not determined by any external object? And on what would these true thoughts depend? Spinoza teaches that
the reality of a true idea has as its foundation the idea itself without acknowledging an object as its cause and that the nature of this true idea depends on the actual power of the mind. Let us now think of some true idea, whose object we know for certain to be dependent on our power of thinking and to have nothing corresponding to it in nature, and we shall see the validity of the above statement. With an idea of this kind before us, we shall be more easily able to carry on the research we have in view. For instance, in order to form the conception of a sphere, let us invent a cause at our pleasure—namely, a semicircle revolving round its center, which thus produces a sphere. This is indisputably a true idea; and, although it is likely that no sphere in nature has ever actually been so formed, the perception remains true and is the easiest manner of conceiving a sphere.

In order to form true conceptions of things, we must only affirm that which the things really contain. If we do not associate the conception of the motion of a semicircle with the idea of a sphere, then our affirmation of the motion of a semicircle is false. Whence it follows that simple ideas cannot help being true, as in the instance of the simple idea of a semicircle.

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Only in regard to true understanding, therefore, can our mind be said to be active; whereas in regard to imagination, the mind is passive. Why should we strive to improve our understanding? Because the more our mind understands, the more clearly it thinks; and that signifies from the ethical point of view, that the mind thus acquires more power over emotions and is less subject to those emotions which are evil. Our aim is to have true ideas; namely, the ones which arise from the pure mind alone. As soon as we distinguish between a true idea and an inadequate idea, we know that the latter has its origin in imagination but not in the true understanding. “Thus, then,” says Spinoza, “we have distinguished between a true idea and other perceptions, and shown that ideas—fictitious, false, and the rest—originate in the imagination; that is, in certain sensations fortuitous (so to speak) and disconnected, arising not from the power of the mind, but from external causes, according as the body, sleeping or waking, receives various motions.”

24—Conclusion

In Spinoza’s work on the “Improvement of the Understanding” we can find the seeds and the foundation of Spinoza’s teaching. We have in this treatise an introduction to the “Ethics.”

The foremost aim of this work is to show the way to true ideas, leading us like a compass on the ocean, to avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of life. The explanation of the quintessence of a thing Spinoza calls a definition. If we form thoughts according to some given definition, we shall proceed that much more happily and more easily in the improvement of our understanding. We arrive at more perfect conceptions of the properties of things by knowing their essence or definitions. Spinoza, therefore, began his “Ethics” with the following eight definitions:

1. By that which is self-caused, I mean that of which the essence involves existence, or that of which the nature is only conceivable as existent.

2. A thing is called finite after its kind, when it can be limited by another thing of the same nature; for instance, a
body is called finite because we always conceive another greater body. So also, a thought is limited by another thought, but a body is not limited by a thought, nor a thought by a body.

3. By *substance*, I mean that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself; in other words, that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception.

4. By *attribute*, I mean that which the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of substance.

5. By *mode*, I mean the modifications of substance, or that which exists in, and is conceived through, something other than itself.

6. By *God*, I mean a being absolutely infinite—that is, a substance consisting of infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality.

7. That thing is called *free* which exists solely by the necessity of its own nature, and of which the action is determined by itself alone. On the other hand, that thing is necessary or rather constrained, which is determined by something external to itself to a fixed and definite method of existence or action.

8. By *eternity*, I mean existence itself, in so far as it is conceived necessarily to follow solely from the definition of that which is eternal.

SPINOZA devotes the first book of his Ethics to the explanation of the nature of God. He begins his “Ethics” with the definition of *cause in itself* (causa sui). By that which is self-caused, Spinoza means *that* of which the essence involves existence, or *that* of which the nature is only conceivable as always being in existence. He begins, in short, with the eternal reality which is so constituted that it necessarily must exist.

In order to follow Spinoza’s explanation of the nature of God, one should understand the two related concepts: essence and existence. In the 34th proposition, he proves that the essence of God is the same as his power, or God’s essence is necessarily the cause of his activity. In the 8th definition Spinoza explains that eternity is existence itself: “I understand eternity to be existence itself, in so far as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition of an eternal thing.” It follows that essence involves existence, or that the nature of the “cause in itself” can be conceived only as an eternally functioning reality.

We must make it clear to ourselves that eternal self-reality or cause in itself cannot be interpreted in terms of a mechanical conception of cause and effect. The distinction between these two kinds of causes is evident from the follow-
ing propositions: “The existence of God and his essence are one and the same thing.” (I.20) This refers to eternal self-causality. And when in the 24th proposition he states that “the essence of things produced by God does not involve existence,” Spinoza refers to the finite conceptions of mechanical cause and effect.

If we understand something, the existence of which is absolutely self-evident, we have a true idea of that, the essence of which involves existence; which can exist only in accordance with the laws of its own essence, because it is of such a character that its essence is in harmony with its existence. This eternally active self-vitality is the first principle in regard to the nature of God. Indeed, we might even say that self-vitality, according to Spinoza’s definition, is the ethical formula for the eternal self-preservation of God.

From where else, indeed, do we derive our own instinct of self-preservation but from the primal source or the cause in itself? The consciousness of being connected with the God-causality helps us proceed from the instinct of self-preservation, through the striving for the improvement of the understanding of human nature, to the ethical love of God. If this instinct is not ruled by inadequate emotions but is clarified by the intuitive knowledge of our own character and the true nature of other human beings, it is possible to connect it with the highest goal. “For,” says Spinoza, “individual things are modes whereby the attributes of God are expressed in a given determinate manner, that is, they are things which express in a given determinate manner the power of God.” As nothing can destroy this idea of divine power in human nature, the real essence of man is expressed in the striving to discover the highest kind of reality. And the endeavor wherewith a man endeavors to persist in his true being is nothing but the essence of the man. It follows, that the more active man is, essentially, the more capable is he of understanding his true nature and of acquiring the highest knowledge (intuition) which will lead him to the noblest activities, and finally to the ethical love of God (Amor dei intellectualis).

The definition of cause in itself is above all, a hint to the primal character of the nature of substance or God, and is at the same time a key to the understanding of the principle of self-preservation in man, who is conceived as a mode of substance. By “substance” Spinoza understands that “which is in itself, and is conceived through itself”; in other words, “that, of which the conception does not need the conception of another thing from which it must be formed.” (I Def. 3) By modes he understands “the modifications of substance, or that which is in another thing through which also it is conceived.” (I Def. 5) However, substance (or divine nature) is to Spinoza prior to its modifications (objects). (I.1) Taking this definition not only from the point of view of its metaphysical implications but also for its practical value, we can readily see why contradictions continually arise in men. For “although the divine nature ought to be studied first,” explains Spinoza, “because it is first in the order of knowledge, and in the order of things, man thinks of it last; while, on the other hand, those things which are called objects of the senses are believed to stand before everything else. Hence it has come to pass that there has been nothing of which men have thought less than the divine nature, while they have been studying natural objects, and when afterwards they have applied themselves to think about God, there
has been nothing of which they could think less than those prior fictions upon which they had built their knowledge of natural things; for these fictions could in no way help to the knowledge of the divine nature. It is no wonder, therefore, if we find them continually contradicting themselves.” (II. 10 Note) And since “everything which is, exists either in itself or in another” (I. ax. I), it follows that there is nothing but the one substance and its modifications.

It lies, therefore, in the power of the intellect to perceive not only the modifications of substance, but also that which constitutes the essence of substance. These essential aspects are defined by Spinoza as attributes. “By attribute,” he explains, “I understand that which the intellect perceives of substance, as if constituting its essence.” (I. Def. 4) Each of these attributes expresses eternal and infinite essence. And substance consisting of infinite attributes is identical with what Spinoza calls God. “By God, I understand the Being absolutely infinite, that is to say, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence.” (I Def. 6)

The existence of God, however, can be understood only intuitively, because essence can only be perceived through intuition. “No doubt,” says Spinoza, “it will be difficult for those who think about things loosely, and have not been accustomed to know them by their primary causes, to comprehend that existence belongs to the nature of substance. For such persons make no distinction between the modifications of substances and the substances themselves, and are ignorant of the manner in which things are produced; hence, they attribute to substances the beginning which they observe in natural objects. Those who are ignorant of true causes make complete confusions;—think that trees might talk as well as men;—that men might be formed from stones as well as from seeds; and imagine that any form might be changed into any other. So, also, those who confuse the two natures, divine and human, readily attribute human passions to the Deity, especially so long as they do not know how passions originate in the mind. But if people would consider the nature of substance, they would have no doubt about the truth, that its essence necessarily involves existence.” (I. 8 Note 2)

Each thing that exists expresses, therefore, in a certain determined manner, the essence of God, or in other words, is a modification of one of the two attributes, Thought or Extension.

It is apparent that, although the two attributes (Thought and Extension) are really distinct, the one cannot be conceived without the other. “We cannot, nevertheless, conclude that they constitute two beings or two different substances; for this is the nature of substance, that each of its attributes is conceived through itself, since all the attributes which substance possesses were always in it together, nor could one be produced by another; but each expresses the reality or being of substance.” (I. 10 Note) Since the nature of substance can only be conceived as absolutely infinite, substance is indivisible (I.13); it also follows that nothing can either be, or be conceived, without God. (I.15) It is of the utmost importance to have a clear understanding of the preceding proposition, for many imagine God to be like a man, composed of body and soul, and subject to passions. But those who believe this are far from the true knowledge of God. “All things,” says Spinoza, “are in God, and everything
which takes place, takes place by the laws alone of the infinite nature of God, and follows from the necessity of his essence. Therefore, in no way whatever can it be asserted that God suffers from anything, or that substance extended, even if it be supposed divisible, is unworthy of the divine nature, provided only it be allowed that it is eternal and infinite.” (I. 16 Cor. 1) Moreover, since nothing can exist outside of God, it follows that “God is the immanent and not the transitory cause of things.” (I.18)

Finite things cannot be produced by the absolute nature of any attribute of God, for whatever follows from the absolute nature of any attribute of God is infinite and eternal. (I.21) Therefore, there are not only finite modes but there are also two kinds of infinite modes. The example of the first kind of infinite mode in the attribute of Thought is infinite understanding; and in Extension, motion and rest; of the second kind, the whole universe which, although it varies in infinite forms, yet remains always the same. The finite modifications do not follow from God or from any one of his attributes so far as that attribute is expressed by one of the two kinds of infinite modifications. “An individual thing, therefore, or a thing which is finite and which has a determinate existence, cannot exist nor be determined to action unless it be determined to existence and action by another cause, which is also finite, and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause cannot exist nor be determined to action unless by another cause, which is also finite and determined to existence and action, and so on, ad infinitum.” (I.28) Although each finite modification is determined by another finite modification to exist in a certain way, nevertheless God, or the divine nature, is the immanent cause of those individual things (modes); and, as God exists necessarily, everything which is determined from the necessity of the divine nature exists and acts in a certain manner, not by contingency but by this eternal necessity. “In nature, there is nothing contingent, but all things are determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and act in a certain manner.” (I.29)

Since all modifications follow necessarily from the nature of God, and are determined to existence and action in a certain manner, the will also is only a certain mode of thought. Spinoza teaches that “The will cannot be called a free cause, but can only be called a necessary cause.” (I.32) Will and intellect are natural things, and as such must be determined in a certain manner and are related to the nature of God.

Nevertheless, there are individuals who believe that they act through free will. Hence it happens that men are filled with prejudices of all kinds. Spinoza undertakes to point out the causes of all these prejudices. He explains, first of all, why it is commonly supposed that God has made all things for the sake of man, and that all things in nature work to some definite end. After having investigated the causes of these prejudices and shown their falsity, Spinoza explains: “The attempt to show that nature does nothing in vain (that is to say, nothing which is not profitable to man), seems to end in showing that nature, the gods and man are alike mad. Do but see, I pray, to what all this has led. Amidst so much in nature which is beneficial, not a few things must have been observed which are injurious, such as storms, earthquakes, diseases, and it was affirmed that these things happened either because the gods were angry on account of wrongs which had been inflicted on them by man, or because of sins committed in the method of worshiping them; and although
experience daily contradicted this, and showed by an infinity of examples that both the beneficial and the injurious were indiscriminately bestowed on the pious and impious, the inveterate prejudices on this point therefore have not been abandoned. For it was much easier for a man to place these things aside, with others of the use of which he was ignorant, and thus retain his present and inborn state of ignorance, than to destroy the whole superstructure and think out a new one.” (Lapp.)

After Spinoza has shown that in things there is absolutely nothing by which they can be called contingent, he goes on to explain what is understood by “necessary.” To him, a thing is necessary either in reference to its essence or its cause. From this, it follows that things have been produced by God in the highest degree of perfection, since they have followed from the existence of a most perfect nature. All things, then, depend upon the power of God. For if things were differently constituted, then God’s will would be differently constituted. But since God is a perfect Being, his will cannot be other than it is.

As God is the cause of himself and the cause of all things, everything follows from his essence or power. Each thing, therefore, that exists expresses in a certain determined manner the power of God, because it is a modification of one of the two attributes, Thought and Extension.

Man usually has no clear conception of the causes of things, but he desires to seek what is profitable to him and believes himself to be free in his quest, “because he is conscious of his wishes and appetites whilst at the same time he is ignorant of the causes by which he is led to wish and desire; in fact, not even dreaming what they are.” To be ignorant of the true causes of things means to have a false conception of the nature of God. It is only when we begin to understand things essentially or intuitively that we see their nature in a clearer manner, and finally can affirm the nature of things to be in harmony with the very essence of the infinite and eternal reality which Spinoza calls God. We are capable of having a true idea of God because we ourselves partake of two divine attributes.

Since whatever exists expresses the power or essence of God, Spinoza concludes the first book of the Ethics by saying that, “nothing can exist from whose nature an effect does not follow.” (I.36)

In the first book of the Ethics, Spinoza has given us his doctrine concerning God, or Substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal essentiality, and his idea of the attributes and of the nature of individual things, or modifications of the attributes of God. Thus we have God (substance), attribute, and mode, the philosophical trinity of Spinoza’s teaching.
BOOK II

It is very important to understand clearly Spinoza’s definition of attribute as that which constitutes the essence of substance or God. It is also necessary to understand that, although we as human beings know only the two attributes, Thought and Extension, nevertheless God, as the one substance, consists of infinite attributes. “I now pass on,” says Spinoza in the preface to the second book, “to explain such things as must follow from the essence of God, or of a being eternal and infinite: not all of them indeed, but only such as can lead us by the hand (so to speak) to the knowledge of the human mind and its consummate blessedness.”

In order to understand the nature and origin of the mind, it is necessary to know that individual thoughts are modifications of the attribute of Thought, which express the reality of God in a certain manner. This means that God possesses an attribute, the idea of which is the foundation of all individual conceptions. “Thought is an attribute of God, or God is a thinking thing,” teaches Spinoza in the first proposition of the second book.

Mind as a modification must be conceived as being dependent upon the attribute of Thought which expresses God’s eternal and infinite essence, or, in other words, God is a thinking being. “It is also clear,” says Spinoza, “from the fact that we can conceive an infinite thinking being. For the more a thinking being can think, the more reality or perfection we conceive it to have. Therefore a being which can think infinite things in infinite modes is necessarily, as regards thinking, infinite. Since, therefore, from the mere consideration of thought we can conceive an infinite being, therefore necessarily thought is one of the infinite attributes of God.”

In a similar way, Spinoza explains that Extension is an attribute of God. “All who have in anywise reflected on the divine nature,” says Spinoza, “deny that God has a body. Of this they find excellent proof in the fact that we understand by body a definite quantity so long, so broad, so deep, bounded by a certain shape. It is the height of absurdity to predicate such a thing of God, a being absolutely infinite. Meanwhile, by the other reasons with which they try to prove their point, they show that corporeal or extended substance is composed of parts, but such hypotheses I have shown to be absurd. Moreover, any one who reflects, will see that all these absurdities, from which one seeks to extract the conclusion that extended substance is finite, do not at all follow from the notion of an infinite quantity, but merely from the notion that an infinite quantity is measurable, and composed of finite parts; therefore, the only fair conclusion to be drawn is that infinite quantity is not measurable and cannot be composed of finite parts. This is exactly what we have already proved. Wherefore the weapon which they aimed at us has in reality recoiled upon themselves. If from this absurdity of theirs, they persist in drawing the conclusion that extended substance must be finite, they will in good sooth be acting like a man who asserts that circles have the properties of squares, and, finding himself thereby landed in absurdities, proceeds to deny that circles have any center, from
which all lines drawn to the circumference are equal. For, taking extended substance, which can only be conceived as infinite, and indivisible, they assert, in order to prove that it is finite, that it is composed of finite parts, and that it can be multiplied and divided.

“If any one asks me the further question, why we are naturally so prone to divide quantity, I answer that quantity is conceived by us in two ways: in the abstract and superficially, as we imagine it; or as substance, as we conceive it solely by the intellect. If then, we regard quantity as it is represented in our imagination, which we often and more easily do, we shall find that it is finite, divisible, and compounded of parts; but if we regard it as it is represented in our intellect, and conceive it as substance, which it is very difficult to do, we shall then, as I have sufficiently proved, find that it is infinite, one, and indivisible.

“This will be plain enough to all who make a distinction between the intellect and imagination, especially if it be remembered that matter is everywhere the same, that its parts are not distinguishable, except in so far as we conceive matter as diversely modified, whence its parts are distinguished, not really but modally. For instance, water, in so far as it is water, we conceive to be divided, and its parts to be separated one from the other; but not in so far as it is extended substance; from this point of view it is neither separate nor divisible. Further, water, in so far as it is water, the mode, is produced and corrupted; but, in so far as it is substance, it is neither produced nor corrupted.

“All things, I repeat, are in God, and all things which come to pass, come to pass solely through the laws of the infinite nature of God, and follow from the necessity of his essence.
the infinite intellect as constituting the essence of substance, belongs altogether only to one substance; consequently, substance thinking and substance extended are one and the same substance, comprehended now through one attribute, now through the other. So, also, a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, though expressed in two ways. . . . For instance, a circle existing in nature, and the idea of a circle existing, which is also in God, are one and the same thing displayed through different attributes. Thus, whether we conceive nature under the attribute of extension, or under the attribute of thought, or under any other attribute, we shall find the same order, or one and the same chain of causes—that is, the same things following in either case."

So long as we consider things as modes of thinking, we must explain the order of the whole of nature, or the entire chain of causes only through the attribute of Thought; and similarly in the case of other attributes. "Nevertheless," says Spinoza, "though such is the case, and though there be no further room for doubt, I can scarcely believe, until the fact is proved by experience, that men can be induced to consider the question calmly and fairly, so firmly are they convinced that it is merely at the bidding of the mind that the body is set in motion or at rest, or performs a variety of actions depending solely on the mind's will or the exercise of thought. However, no one hitherto has laid down the limits to the powers of the body, that is, no one as yet has been taught by experience what the body can accomplish solely by the laws of nature, in so far as it is regarded as extension. No one has gained hitherto such an accurate knowledge of the bodily mechanism, that he can explain all its functions; nor need I call attention to the fact that many actions are observed in the lower animals, which far transcend human sagacity, and that somnambulists do many things in their sleep, which they would not venture to do when awake; these instances are enough to show that the body can by the sole laws of its nature do many things which the mind wonders at."

In order to understand the nature and origin of our mind, it is necessary to know the essence of God. "Hence it follows," says Spinoza, "that God has this or that idea, not in so far as he is infinite, but in so far as he is displayed through the nature of the human mind, and in so far as he constitutes the essence of the human mind; and when we say that God has this or that idea, not only in so far as he constitutes the essence of the human mind, but also in so far as he, simultaneously with the human mind has the further idea of another thing, we assert that the human mind perceives a thing in part or inadequately. Here, I doubt not, readers will come to a stand, and will call to mind many things which will cause them to hesitate; I, therefore, beg them to accompany me slowly, step by step, and not to pronounce on my statements until they have read to the end."

The explanation of the nature and origin of the mind is based upon Spinoza's idea of God. According to Spinoza, the essence of our minds consists solely in knowledge, whereof the beginning and the foundation is God. To know that means to understand in what manner and way one's mind, in reference to its essence and existence, follows from and depends upon the divine nature.

But what is the first thing that the mind usually recog-
nizes? “The first element which constitutes the actual being of the human mind is the idea of some particular thing actually existing.” (II.11) And what is this particular thing actually existing? “The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, in other words, a certain mode of Extension which actually exists and nothing else.” (II.13)

It is therefore important to understand the nature of the human body. The idea of the relationship between mind and body helps us understand not only the union existing between mind and body, but also the nature of this union.

For a thorough comprehension of the identity of mind and body it is necessary to know that all things are animated in different degrees as modes of the attributes. The understanding of the relationship between the two attributes, absolute Thought and absolute Extension, leads us to the understanding of the infinite intellect and infinite motion and rest in their essential unity.

The identity of the two attributes in God is expressed modally as the identity of the mind and body in man. “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.” (II.7). From this principle of identity, it follows that when a body is better adapted to perform activities, the mind is also better fitted to perceive many things. The human mind, being the idea of the human body, at first experiences the changes in the body as physical reactions. This knowledge is, however, imperfect: it means that the human mind does not yet possess an adequate or clear knowledge of the parts composing the body and, consequently, does not possess an adequate knowledge of the external world. Therefore, the kind of self-consciousness which has the idea of these actions as its foundation does not involve an adequate understanding of the human mind and the human body. “I say expressly,” explains Spinoza, “that the mind has not an adequate, but only a confused knowledge of itself, its own body, and of external bodies, whenever it perceives things after the common order of nature; that is, whenever it is determined from without, namely, by the fortuitous play of circumstances, to regard this or that, and not when it is determined internally, that is, by the fact that it regards many things at once, or understands their agreements, differences, and oppositions, one to another. For whenever it is disposed in this or any other way from within, then it regards things clearly and distinctly.” (II.29 Note).

Anything, therefore, that we perceive as existing only in the realm of time and space, is an expression of our mind distorted by the medium of the senses. This type of perception can be considered only as an external way of thinking; it fills our minds with imagination or confused knowledge.

Thus, we have, in general, two ways of acquiring knowledge: an external way and an internal way. But even the latter method is in itself of a twofold nature. It involves knowledge based on the understanding of the laws of nature (reason), and knowledge based on the understanding of the essence of things (intuition). Hence, we can say that in addition to imagination, the first kind of knowledge, there are two more kinds of knowledge, reason and intuition.

In the first stage of knowledge, we have confused ideas of individual objects, for we do not understand the essence of things. In the second state, however, we progress to the state of having adequate ideas of the common properties of things, for instance, the idea of motion and rest. Still we fail to
possess the knowledge of the essence of individual things. For as long as we do not comprehend our own essential nature and the essence of other individual beings, we cannot attain to the state of true and perfect knowledge.

As substance cannot be truly perceived from the viewpoint of common-sense logic, it is therefore necessary to reach a different kind of awareness in order to realize the truth and meaning involved in ethical conceptions. To think in terms of ethical values implies the affirmation of our mind as a function of the rational nature in man. And each idea which follows from our active mind, in so far as it is more related to the essence of our mental nature than to the result of the external influences, is of adequate importance and may be termed an adequate idea. Adequate ideas and pictorial images which subsist in the mind are fundamentally different; a pictorial image has reference to an object, whereas an adequate idea has reference to the mind as a thinking thing. Pictorial images follow from passive states of mind and are determined by sense impressions of an external nature; adequate ideas on the other hand, follow from the necessity of thought. Sense data are not enough. But as soon as the mind contributes order and connection, we begin to understand things adequately.

The affirmation of these rational principles not only leads us to the adequate understanding of the properties of things but also creates in us the desire to understand ourselves. And having realized this knowledge of self, we continue to strive for the understanding of the relationship not only between things as modifications of the attribute of Extension, but also between thoughts as modifications of the attribute of Thought; and this kind of knowledge which Spinoza calls intuition, is the basis of scientific Ethics. It points to a deeper order and connection, and makes us more and more aware of the one Substance, consisting of infinite attributes and their modifications. In perceiving our own essence we realize the idea of oneness in the many. “The more we understand individual objects, the more we understand God.” (V.24). As soon as we perceive nature intuitively and not only imaginatively we transcend the world of finite differences in the realization of the oneness of the One in the many.

“He who knows things by the third kind of knowledge passes to the summit of perfection.” (V.27 Note). Only by the third kind of knowledge can we comprehend the adequate essence of a thing, and that without danger of error. It follows, as a result, that the intuitive understanding is of a higher order than the intellectual understanding and that only this intuitive knowledge enables us to accomplish more and more on the way towards ethical perfection. “It is clear,” says Spinoza, “that we, in many cases, perceive and form our general notions: 1, from particular things represented to our intellect fragmentarily, confusedly, and without order through our senses. I have settled to call such perceptions by the name of knowledge from the mere suggestions of experience; 2, from symbols, e.g., from the fact of having read or heard certain words, we remember things and form certain ideas concerning them, similar to those through which we imagine things. I shall call both these ways of regarding things knowledge of the first kind: opinion and imagination; 3, from the fact that we have notions common to all men, and adequate ideas of the properties of things; for this I call reason, and knowledge of the second kind. Besides these two kinds of knowledge, there is, as I will hereafter show, a
third kind, which we will call intuition. This is the kind of knowledge which proceeds from an adequate idea of the absolute essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things.” (II.40 Note 2). Thus we have: Imagination, Reason, and Intuition, the psychological trinity of Spinoza’s teaching.

Corresponding to the three kinds of knowledge, there are three kinds of ideas: inadequate, adequate, and true ideas. Our manner of perceiving things can be of a threefold nature, depending upon whether our mind has inadequate, adequate or true ideas.

How are we to know that our ideas are true? “He who has a true idea,” answers Spinoza, “simultaneously knows that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt of the truth of the thing perceived.” (II.43). Spinoza further explains in the note to this proposition: “No one who has a true idea, is ignorant that a true idea involves the highest certainty. For to have a true idea is only another expression for knowing a thing perfectly, or as well as is possible. No one, indeed, can doubt of this, unless he thinks that an idea is something lifeless, like a picture or a panel, and not a mode of thinking—namely, the very act of understanding. And who, I ask, can know that he understands anything unless he first understands that thing itself? I mean, who can know that he is certain of anything unless he first be certain of that thing? What then can be more clear or more certain than a true idea to be the standard of truth? Clearly, just as light shows itself and darkness also, so truth is a standard of itself and falsity.”

When we perceive things in their true light, we know that our mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God. “Therefore,” says Spinoza in the same note, “the clear and distinct ideas of the mind are as necessarily true as the idea of God.”

Our mind, consequently, can be active in three ways: first, in so far as it perceives things without relation to their eternal nature and without their essence; in which case we say that the mind thinks in an inadequate manner; secondly, in so far as the mind perceives what is common to all things, in which case we say that it thinks adequately, and thirdly, in so far as our mind proceeds from the understanding of the attributes of God to the true knowledge of the essence of things, in which case we say that the mind thinks intuitively or truly. In the first and second stages of knowledge, man’s thoughts are in contact with the world of externalities. In the third state, he lives in the realm of essentialities or absolute truth.

As individual things actually existing necessarily involve the attribute of which they are modes, so the ideas of these things must necessarily involve the conception of that attribute under which they are considered. And since the attributes express the essence of God, it follows that “Every idea of everybody, or of every particular thing actually existing, necessarily involves the eternal and infinite essence of God.” (II.45).

While we thus consider the idea of a thing which involves the eternal and infinite essence of God, we think adequately. And since the human mind perceives ideas by which it understands itself and its own body together with external things as actually existing, it is, therefore, in possession of the true knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God. “Hence, we see that the infinite essence and the eternity of God are known to all. Now, since all things are in God, and are con-
ceived through God, we can from this knowledge infer many 
things, which we may adequately know, and in that way we 
may form the third kind of knowledge (intuition), of which 
we shall have further occasion to speak in Book V.” (II.47 
Note).

Since the mind is nothing else than a modification of the 
attribute of Thought, it cannot be the free cause of its own 
actions. There is not, therefore, such a thing as an absolute 
faculty of willing. Spinoza says: “In the mind there is no 
absolute or free will, but the mind is determined to wish this 
or that by a cause, which has also been determined by an­
other cause, and this last by another cause, and so on to 
infinity.” (II.48). Only individual volitions, that is to say, 
this and that affirmation, or this and that negation, can exist 
in the mind. But an affirmation or negation of the mind can­
not be conceived without the idea of the thing affirmed or 
negated. By will, then, Spinoza understands the capacity of 
the mind, either to affirm or to deny, but not to desire, or 
in Spinoza’s own words: “Before, however, I advance any 
farther, I must observe that by the will I understand a fac­
culty of affirming or denying, but not a desire; a faculty, I 
say, by which the mind affirms or denies that which is true or 
false, and not a desire by which the mind seeks a thing or 
turns away from it.” (II.48 Note).

Spinoza warns us to distinguish carefully between an idea 
of the mind, an image of a thing, and words. Such distinc­
tion is necessary if his doctrine of the will is to be of any 
practical value for the purposes of adequate thinking and 
of ethical living. “It will be easy for us, however,” he says, 
“to divest ourselves of prejudices if we attend to the nature 
of thought, which in no way involves the conception of ex-
tension. By doing this, we clearly see that an idea, since it is 
a mode of thought, is not an image of anything, nor does it 
consist of words. For the essence of words and images is 
formed of bodily motions alone, which involve in no way 
whatever the conception of absolute thought.” (II.49 Note).

As soon, therefore, as we begin to understand that ideas do 
not consist of images, formed in us by the contact with ex­
ternal bodies, we cannot consider ideas as lifeless pictures 
on a tablet, and we begin to see more clearly the importance 
of the third definition of the second book: “By an idea, I 
mean the mental conception which is formed by the mind as 
a thinking thing.”

Those who do not see that an idea in so far as it is an idea 
includes affirmation or negation, confuse words with ideas 
and fill their minds with misconceptions or falsities. But that 
which constitutes the form of error or falsity is not a positive 
mode of thinking because such a mode cannot be in God, as 
all ideas in so far as they have reference to God are true. 
(II.32).

In what then does falsity consist? “Falsity consists in pri­
vation of knowledge which is involved by inadequate or muti­
lated and confused ideas.” (II.35). Those, therefore, who 
imagine that they have true ideas, although their conceptions 
of things are false, lack the most positive element of the 
mind, the conception of certainty. “Consequently, when we 
say that a man acquiesces in what is false, and that he has 
no doubts concerning it, we do not say that he is certain, but 
merely that he does not doubt, or that he acquiesces in what 
is false.” (II.49 Note). In short, to affirm or deny that which 
is true or false means to be mentally active or to will, and not 
merely to desire.
In the third book, to which we now turn, Spinoza explains the origin and nature of our emotions. We shall soon learn that it is only by crossing the bridge of emotions that we can find the road leading to God.

BOOK III

In the third book, Spinoza explains emotions as natural phenomena which follow from certain definite laws. Spinoza does not think of man as a separate entity existing apart from nature; he rather conceives man as following nature’s order. Therefore, he prefers to understand human infirmities rather than to deride them. “The passions of hatred, anger, envy and so on, considered in themselves,” he says, “follow from the same necessity and efficacy of nature; they answer to certain definite causes, through which they are understood, and possess certain properties as worthy of being known as the properties of anything else, whereof the contemplation in itself affords us delight. I shall, therefore, treat of the nature and strength of the emotions according to the same method as I employed heretofore in my investigations concerning God and the mind. I shall consider human emotions and desires in exactly the same manner, as though I were concerned with lines, planes and solids.” (III. Introduction).

As emotions, according to Spinoza, are modifications of the body, whereby the active power of the said body is increased or diminished, aided or constrained, and as they are also the ideas of such modifications, man can achieve progress towards self-perfection by understanding the nature of his emotions. Spinoza says: “Our mind is in certain cases active, and in certain cases passive. In so far as it has ade-
quate ideas, it is necessarily active, and in so far as it has inadequate ideas, it is necessarily passive.” (III.1). It may readily be seen that, although there is no freedom of will in the ordinary sense, it is nevertheless possible to have adequate ideas, or to be more active than passive. But clarification in the process of self-perfection depends upon the clear understanding of the principle of ethical self-preservation as man’s ultimate motive. According to Spinoza, individual things are modes whereby the attributes of God are expressed in a given determinate manner, that is, they are things which express the power of God, whereby God is and acts; so no thing contains in itself anything whereby it can be destroyed, or which can take away its existence; but contrariwise, it is opposed to all that could take away its existence. Therefore, in so far as it can, and in so far as it is in itself, it endeavors to persist in its own being. (III. 6 Dem.).

Man as an individual being has such powers as necessarily follow from his given essence. On the basis of this inner power or essence, man endeavors to persist in his true being and can become conscious of his desire to practice the principle of self-preservation not only confusedly but ethically. This desire to practice ethical self-preservation is the key to true self-perfection or self-understanding. As soon as man becomes conscious of himself and recognizes the harmony between himself and the idea of God and of the attributes, he understands the principle of self-preservation in an ethical way. Spinoza says: “If we can be the adequate cause of any modifications, I then call the emotion an action; otherwise, I call it a passion, or state wherein the mind is passive.” (III. Def. 3). Elsewhere Spinoza explains that the desires which follow from our nature in such a manner that they can be understood through it alone, are those which are referred to the mind in so far as it conceives things adequately, and their force and increase are generally defined by the power of man, and not by the power of things external to us; wherefore, the former are rightly called actions, the latter passions, for the former always indicate our power, whereas the latter show our infirmity and fragmentary knowledge. Our actions, that is, those desires which are defined by man’s power or reason, are always good. The rest may be either good or bad. (IV. App.).

Herein, we may discern the fundamental difference between instinctive and ethical self-preservation. Both our active and our passive natures endeavor to persist in their own being. If we passively follow the urge of the instincts we practice selfishness, but if we endeavor to assert our strength in spite of the resistance of our instinctive nature, we act in accordance with the idea of ethical self-preservation. “The mind,” Spinoza adds, “both in so far as it has clear and distinct ideas, and also in so far as it has confused ideas, endeavors to persist in its being for an indefinite period, and of this endeavor it is conscious.” (III.9). In other words, from the nature of man necessarily follow activities which tend towards his preservation, and these activities may arise either from adequate ideas or from inadequate ideas.

There is, furthermore, a definite relation between Spinoza’s theory of knowledge and his doctrine of the emotions. The connection between these two is realized in the principle of self-preservation. Whence comes this instinct? It is the first expression of the divine nature in man, but it functions at first only in the physical realm, proceeding from the affirmation of the existence of our body alone and not of the idea
of God. "Since the first element that constitutes the essence of the mind is the idea of the human body as actually existing, it follows that the first and chief endeavor of our mind is the endeavor to affirm the existence of our body; thus, an idea which negates the existence of our body is contrary to our mind." (III. 10 Dem.).

Although we may be chiefly concerned with the body, we must understand, according to Spinoza's doctrine of the attributes, that whatsoever helps the power of activity in one's body, helps the power of thought in one's mind. And with regard to our mental nature, Spinoza says that the mind can undergo many changes and can pass sometimes to a state of greater perfection, sometimes to a state of lesser perfection. These passive states of transition explain to us the emotions of pleasure and pain. "By pleasure," says Spinoza, "I shall signify a passive state wherein the mind passes to a greater perfection. By pain I shall signify a passive state wherein the mind passes to a lesser perfection. And desire," he continues, "is appetite with consciousness thereof." (III. 11 Note). Thus, desire, pleasure and pain are the three primary emotions, and beyond these three Spinoza recognizes no other primary emotion. He shows as he proceeds that all other emotions arise from these three.

Spinoza also explains that there are as many kinds of pleasure, of pain, of desire, and of emotions compounded of these, as there are kinds of objects whereby we are affected. This means, that every emotion by which the body is affected must also involve the existence of some external thing and, therefore, we may also be affected by the image of an object in the same way as if the object were actually present.

Thus we understand what is meant by the terms hope, fear, confidence, despair, joy and disappointment. Hope, according to Spinoza, is nothing but an inconstant pleasure, arising from the image of something future or past, whereof we do not yet know the issue. Fear, on the other hand, is an inconstant pain also arising from the image of something concerning which we are in doubt. If doubt be removed from these emotions, hope becomes confidence and fear becomes despair, in other words, pleasure or pain arising from the image of something concerning which we have hoped or feared. Again, joy is pleasure arising from the image of something past, whereof we doubted the issue. Disappointment is the pain opposed to joy. (III.18 Note).

The mind endeavors as far as possible to understand those things which increase the body's power of activity, that is, those things which it loves. Therefore, the mind's images of those objects or persons that stand for their existence help the mind's endeavor to regard the said persons and objects with an emotion of love. However, if we conceive that one takes delight in something which only one person can possess, he shall endeavor to bring it about that no other man shall gain possession thereof. "We thus see," Spinoza now says, "that man's nature is generally so constituted, that he takes pity on those who fare ill, and envies those who fare well with a hatred proportionate to the love we bear to the thing which we imagine some one else to possess. We see, again, that from the same property of human nature from which it follows that men are pitiful they are also envious and ambitious. Now, if we would wish to consult experience, we find that she teaches us all this, more especially if we pay attention to the early years of our life. For we find that children,
inasmuch as their bodies are, so to speak, in equilibrium, will laugh and cry merely because they see others laugh or cry; and whatever they see any one do they immediately desire to imitate, and they desire all things for themselves which they see give pleasure to others:—clearly because the images of things, as we said, are the very modifications of the human body or modes in which the human body is affected by external causes, and disposed for doing this or that.” (III.32 Note).

Spinoza also endeavors to explain that every man judges a thing to be good or bad according to his disposition. He says that by good he means every kind of pleasure, and all that conduces thereto, especially that which satisfies our longings, whatsoever they may be. By evil, he means every kind of pain, especially that which frustrates our longings. “I have shown,” says Spinoza, “that we in no case desire a thing because we deem it good, but contrariwise, we deem a thing good because we desire it; consequently, we deem evil that which we shrink from. Every one, therefore, according to his particular actions, judges or estimates what is good, what is bad, what is better, what is worse, lastly, what is best and what is worst. Thus, a miser thinks that abundance of money is the best, and want of money the worst; an ambitious man desires nothing so much as glory, and fears nothing so much as shame. To an envious man, nothing is more delightful than another’s misfortune, and nothing more displeasing than his good fortune.” (III.39 Note).

Although man is naturally envious, rejoicing in the shortcomings of others and feeling pain at their virtue, his mind still persists in its attempts to assert its power of activity, to know itself and to pass to a greater perfection. Thus when man understands that hatred is increased by being reciprocated, and can, on the other hand, be destroyed by love, he endeavors to remove this hatred. Spinoza adds that if love replaces hate, it is greater than if hatred had not preceded it. Though this be so, he remarks however, that no one will endeavor to hate anything or to be affected with pain for the sake of enjoying this greater pleasure; that is, no one will desire that he should be injured, in the hope of recovering from the injury. No one longs to be ill for the sake of getting well. For every one will always endeavor to persist in his being well, and to ward off pain as far as he can. If the contrary is conceivable, namely, that a man should desire to hate some one, in order that he might love him the more thereafter, he will always desire to hate him. For the strength of the love is in proportion to the strength of the hatred, wherefore the man would desire to become more and more ill, in order that he might take greater pleasure in being restored to health; in such a case, we would always endeavor to be ill, which is absurd. (III.44 Note).

Why is it then that men feel more love or hatred towards one another than towards any other object? Because they think themselves and each other to be free inasmuch as they are conscious of their volitions and desires. They never even dream, however, in their ignorance, of the causes which have disposed them to wish and desire. Love towards a thing, which we conceive to be free, teaches Spinoza, must, other conditions being similar, be greater than when it is felt toward a thing acting by necessity. A thing which we conceive as free must be perceived through itself without anything else. If, therefore, we conceive it as the cause of pleasure or pain, we shall love it or hate it, and shall do so with
the utmost love or hatred that can arise from the given emotion. But if the thing which causes the action be conceived as acting by necessity, we shall then conceive it not as the sole cause, but as one of the causes of the emotion, and therefore our love or hatred toward it will be less.

In order that our activities be of a positive character and in harmony with our essential nature, we must endeavor to divert our emotions in a positive direction. On what does this direction depend? The right direction for the emotions depends upon the right kind of knowledge, for just as our kind of knowledge influences our impulse of self-preservation, so do our emotions determine the nature of our thoughts. Any emotion of a given individual, explains Spinoza, differs from the emotion of another individual only in so far as the essence of the one individual differs from the essence of the other. The pleasure and pain felt by one man differ from the pleasure and pain felt by another man in so far as the nature of the one man differs from the nature of the other. It follows, therefore, that the emotions of the animals which are called irrational (for, after learning the origin of the mind, we cannot doubt that brutes feel) differ from man’s emotions only to the extent that brute nature differs from human nature. So also the lusts and appetites of insects, fishes, and birds must needs vary according to their several natures. Thus, although each individual lives content and rejoices in the nature belonging to him, wherein he has his being, yet the life, wherein each is content and rejoices, is nothing else but the idea, or soul, of the said individual, and hence the joy of one differs from the joy of another, to the extent that the essence of one differs from the essence of another. Lastly, it follows that there is no small difference between the joy which actuates, say, a drunkard, and the joy possessed by a philosopher. (III.57 Note).

There are emotions attributed to man not only in so far as he is passive but also in so far as he is active. When the mind conceives itself and its power of activity, it feels pleasure; therefore, it feels pleasure in so far as it conceives adequate ideas, that is, in so far as it is active.

Our mind’s power of thinking is increased to the extent that we are active. No painful emotions can be attributed to the mind in virtue of its being active. Furthermore, the more active we become in both body and mind, the less do we act in the way of instinctive self-preservation and the more do we seek the welfare of other men. To quote, “All actions following from the emotions, which are attributable to the mind in virtue of its understanding, I set down to strength of character (fortitude), which I divide into courage (animositas) and highmindedness (generositas). By courage I mean the desire whereby every man strives to preserve his being solely under the dictates of reason, to aid other men and to unite them to himself in friendship. Those actions, therefore, which have regard solely to the good of the agent, I set down to courage; those which aim at the good of others, I set down to highmindedness. Thus, temperance, sobriety, and presence of mind in danger, etc. are varieties of courage; courtesy, mercy, etc. are varieties of highmindedness.” (III.59 Note).

Emotions are the factors which enable the mind to perceive its activities. Emotions merely express the condition of our own body, and do not reveal the nature of external circumstances, whereas ideas express the condition of our body and of our relation to the external world. Since our knowledge is that which relates simultaneously to the condition of
our body and the objects external to it, an emotion is that which results from the change caused in our body through contact with external things and expresses therefore an increase or decrease in our power of action or understanding.

We have pointed out previously that there are three kinds of knowledge. Now we learn that there are likewise three fundamental emotions. There is a relation between Spinoza’s theory of knowledge and his doctrine of the emotions. From a general point of view, we have two main groups of emotions: active and passive, and correspondingly, we have also two main groups of ideas: absolute and relative.

The question arises, which of these two modes of thought and emotion will be the prime factor in shaping one’s life? We know that the actual essence of a thing is its endeavor to persist in its own being. This inner desire to preserve our true nature helps us escape the disintegration of our body in finding the integration of our essence. This desire to be conscious of the affirmation of our essential reality as the expression of the functioning of the principle of self-vitality forces us to preserve ourselves in the world of change, and can guide us from the realm of the relative into that of the absolute. It is from this life principle as the central impulse of our being that comes the endeavor to practice discipline of thought in order to get rid of bondage or human infirmity in moderating and checking the emotions.

Spinoza explains in the third book the principal emotions and vacillations of the mind which arise from the combination of the three primary emotions, to wit: desire, pleasure and pain. “It is evident from what I have said, that we are in many ways driven by contrary winds, we toss to and fro, unwitting of the issue and of our fate.” (III.59 Note).
In the fourth book of the Ethics, Spinoza treats of human bondage. Lack of power in moderating and checking our emotions is called by him servitude. “For when a man is a prey to his emotions, he is not his own master, but lies at the mercy of fortune; so much so, that he is often compelled, while seeing that which is better for him, to follow that which is worse. Why this is so, and what is good or evil in the emotions, I propose to show in this part of my treatise.” (IV. Preface).

Man as a part of nature must undergo changes. But these changes may either be forced upon him by external causes or they can be the result of his own desires. Spinoza points out that we live in a state of perpetual change and, accordingly, as we are changed for the better or worse, we are called happy or unhappy. In this life, therefore, we primarily endeavor to modify the body of a child, in so far as its nature allows and conduces thereto into something capable of very many activities, and referable to a mind which is highly conscious of itself, of God, and of things; and we desire so to change it that what is referred to its imagination and memory may become insignificant, in comparison with its intellect. (V.39 Note).

There are two main expressions of human knowledge; the one tends toward the relative or external form of knowledge and the other towards absolute or inward form of knowledge. The power of understanding things according to the first (imagination) and the second kind of knowledge (reason) is relative. If we desire to understand our own essential nature, we must endeavor to reach the intuitive stage of knowledge. There is no other way to free ourselves from external influences and passions. For, as Spinoza says, “The power and increase of every passion, and its persistence in existing, are not defined by the power whereby we ourselves endeavor to persist in existing, but by the power of an external cause compared with our own.” (IV.5).

We are thus subject to passion whenever the force whereby we try to preserve our own existence is surpassed by the power of external circumstances. Therefore, “the force of any passion or emotion can overcome the rest of a man’s activities or power, so that the emotion becomes obstinately fixed to him.” (IV.6).

Just as man’s capacity to know things is classified under three headings, namely, inadequate, adequate and intuitive, so are the possibilities of human activities also threefold; passive, active and perfect. “Our mind is in certain cases active, and in certain cases passive,” says Spinoza. “In so far as it has adequate ideas, it is necessarily active, and in so far as it has inadequate ideas, it is necessarily passive.” (III.1).

“Hence,” he continues in the corollary to this proposition, “it follows that the mind is more or less liable to be acted upon, in proportion as it possesses more or less inadequate ideas, and contrariwise, is more active, in proportion as it possesses more adequate ideas.”

Man can understand himself and things confusedly, clearly, or truly. These modes of thinking form the foundation for corresponding ways of life. This means that
men may lead lives in accordance with either emotions arising from imagination (passions), emotions from reason (actions), or emotions arising from intuition (perfection, or the love of God). This love toward God, according to Spinoza, is the highest good which we can seek under the guidance of higher reason. It is open to all men, and we desire that all should rejoice therein; therefore it should not be stained by the emotion of envy, nor by the emotion of jealousy; but contrariwise, it must be the more fostered, the greater number of men we conceive to rejoice therein. (V.20 Dem.).

Although man has a desire for harmony with others, this harmony cannot be realized on the basis of imagination and passions. “In so far as men are a prey to passion, they cannot in that respect be said to be naturally in harmony.” (IV.32). Men not only differ in nature but are contrary one to another when they are assailed by the emotions that are passions. Every man, according to the laws of his nature, desires to persist in that which he deems good and endeavors to remove that which he deems bad. But since only that is necessarily good or bad which we deem good or bad in accordance with reason, it follows that men, in so far as they live in obedience to higher reason, necessarily do only such things as are good for human nature, and consequently are in harmony with each man’s nature. Therefore, men, in so far as they live in obedience to ethical reason, are necessarily and always in harmony with one another. (IV.35 Dem.).

Under the guidance of reason, man will endeavor as far as possible, to avoid being assailed by emotions which are bad. “He who lives under the guidance of reason” says Spinoza, “endeavors as far as possible, to render back love, or kindness for other men’s hatred, anger, contempt, etc. toward him.” (IV.46). In the note to the same proposition we read, “He who chooses to conquer hatred with love, fights his battle in joy and confidence; he withstands many as easily as one, and has very little need of fortune’s aid. Those whom he vanquishes, yield joyfully, not through failure but through increase in their powers; all these consequences follow so plainly from the mere definitions of love and understanding, that I have no need to prove them in detail.”

When man’s mind is not in a passive state, he is determined by the necessity of his own nature to perform ethical actions. “To all the actions whereto we are determined by emotion in so far as the mind is passive, we can be determined without emotion by reason.” (IV.59). All attempts to act ethically are the expressions of our essential desire. “Desire which springs from reason cannot be excessive,” says Spinoza. (IV.61). Furthermore, since all emotions which are attributable to the mind as active (through reason) are emotions of joy and desire, therefore, “he who is led by fear and does good in order to escape evil, is not led by reason.” (IV.63).

Spinoza recognized inadequacy of fear and superstition. His efforts were directed towards leading human beings to true virtue and to a joyful life. “Superstitious persons,” says Spinoza, “who know better how to reprobate vice than to teach virtue, and who strive not to guide men by reason, but so to restrain them that they would rather escape evil than love virtue, have no other aim but to make others as wretched as themselves; wherefore, it is nothing to be won-
dered at if they be generally troublesome and odious to their fellow-men.” (IV.63 Note).

Since it is in the nature of human beings to strive to know themselves better, they are constantly seeking for characters which may serve as examples of the highest possible human perfection. “Inasmuch as I desire to form an idea of a type of human being which I may hold in view,” says Spinoza, “I shall mean by good that which we certainly know to be a means of approaching the said type.” (IV.Pre.). Spinoza’s goal is the free man.

Just as we have distinguished between the two main tendencies in thinking, the relative and the absolute, we must also distinguish between the two kinds of human beings, the enslaved man and the free man. The power whereby a man preserves his being is the power of God or nature in so far as it can be explained through the reality of man’s essence. “The more every man endeavors, and is able to seek what is useful to him, in other words, to preserve his true being, the more is he endowed with virtue; on the contrary, in proportion as a man neglects to seek what is useful to him, that is, to preserve his own being, he is wanting in power. No one can desire to be blessed, to act rightly and to live rightly, without at the same time wishing to be, to act, and to live—in other words, to actually exist. No virtue can be conceived as prior to this endeavor to preserve one’s own being. To act absolutely in obedience to virtue is the same thing as to act, to live, or to preserve one’s being (these three terms are identical in meaning) in accordance with the dictates of reason on the basis of seeking what is useful to one’s self.” (IV.20, 21, 22, 24).

The basis of our life is the affirmation of this power of existence, yet there is in the mind no volition or affirmation save that which an idea (inasmuch as it is an idea), involves. In this connection, Spinoza also explains that the human mind perceives not only the modifications of the body, but also the ideas of such modifications; in other words, the mind knows itself only in so far as it perceives the ideas of the modifications of the human body. One’s mind thus affirms, concerning its body, a greater or lesser power of existence according to the ideas which it has in relation to physical reactions, that is, according to its own experience of pleasure or pain. And this idea of pleasure and pain, which arises from the pleasurable or painful emotion, gives us the knowledge of good and evil. “The knowledge of good and evil is nothing else than the emotions of pleasure or pain, in so far as we are conscious thereof.” (IV.8).

To the three concepts of knowledge: inadequate, adequate, and intuitive, and to the three concepts of emotion: passion, action, and perfection, we must now add the three concepts of ethics: evil, good, and free. What is the knowledge of good and evil? To repeat: “The knowledge of good and evil is the emotion of pleasure or pain in so far as we are conscious thereof; therefore, every man necessarily desires what he thinks good, and shrinks from what he thinks bad. Now this appetite is nothing else than man’s nature or essence. Therefore, every man, solely by the laws of his nature, desires or shrinks from that which he deems to be good or bad.” (IV.19 Proof).

But it is hard for a man to follow precepts of reason, because he is often assailed by emotions contrary to his nature. Further, we must remember that our desires are caused both by the force of our own power and also by the
force of external conditions. We read in the Ethics: "Desire arising from the knowledge of good and evil can be quenched or checked by many of the other desires arising from the emotions whereby we are assailed. Desire arising from the knowledge of good and evil, in so far as such knowledge regards what is future, may be more easily controlled or quenched, than the desire for what is agreeable at the present moment. Desire arising from the true knowledge of good and evil, in so far as such knowledge is concerned with what is contingent, can be controlled far more easily still, than desire for things that are present." (IV.15, 16, 17).

Spinoza's main contribution towards the true understanding of human emotions consists in the fact that he explains the causes of human infirmity and inconstancy and shows why it is that men do not abide by precepts of reason. To quote: "I think I have now shown the reason, why men are moved by opinion more readily than by reason, why it is that the true knowledge of good and evil stirs up conflicts in the soul, and often yields to every kind of passion. This state of things gave rise to the exclamation of the poet: 'The better path I gaze at and approve, the worse I follow.' Ecclesiastes seems to have had the same thought in his mind when he said:—'He who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.' I have not written the above with the object of drawing the conclusion that ignorance is more excellent than knowledge, or that a wise man is on a par with a fool in controlling his emotions; but because it is necessary to know the power and the infirmity of our nature, before we can determine what reason can do in restraining the emotions, and what is beyond her power. I have said that in the present part I shall merely treat of human infirmity. The power of reason over the emotions I have determined to treat separately." (IV.17 Note).

The human mind, in so far as it reasons, desires nothing beyond understanding. Yet the mind cannot possess certainty concerning anything, except in so far as it has adequate or true ideas thereof. Wherefore, to those who would ask what good or evil are in the absolute sense, Spinoza gives this answer: "We know nothing to be certainly good or evil, save such things as really conduce to understanding, or such as are able to hinder us from understanding." (IV.27).

The foundation underlying every activity of ours is, we can now see, our thinking capacity, which may be either inadequate, adequate, or intuitive. When man is active in accordance with the second kind of knowledge, that is, in accordance with the laws of his own nature, he strives to affirm his existence; he acts adequately or virtuously. As virtue, according to Spinoza, is the power of our essence, we understand that, in the second stage of knowledge, the instinct of self-preservation changes into the desire for self-improvement. The essence of man becomes active and he is determined to do things simply because he understands how to live. Spinoza now says that, in so far as man is determined to perform a particular action because he has inadequate ideas, he cannot be said to act in obedience to virtue; he can be so described only in so far as he is determined for action by his understanding.

The effort for self-preservation is nothing else than the essence of man, and this effort of the mind wherewith it endeavors, in so far as it has adequate ideas to preserve its own existence, is nothing but understanding. The mind's striving to understand is the basis of the second stage of
knowledge, and, therefore, the mind, in so far as it reasons, will consider good that thing only which helps it to understand. Spinoza accordingly writes: “Whatsoever we endeavor to do in obedience to reason is nothing further than to understand; neither does the mind in so far as it makes use of reason, judge anything to be useful to it save such things as are conducive to understanding.” (IV.26).

The instinct of self-preservation may or may not develop into ethical self-preservation, depending entirely on whether the imagination or the ethical tendency of thinking becomes uppermost. In other words, it is possible for man to progress from the instinct of self-preservation to a conscious striving after true self-knowledge and to attain to the understanding of the essence of God and his attributes. “The mind’s highest good is the knowledge of God, and the mind’s highest virtue is to know God.” (IV.28).

However, Spinoza concedes that often human power is limited as compared to external influences, and he writes in the appendix to the fourth book: “We shall bear with an equal mind all that happens to us in contravention to the claims of our own advantage, so long as we are conscious that we have done our duty and that the power which we possess is not sufficient to enable us to protect ourselves completely; remembering that we are a part of universal nature, and we follow her order. If we have a clear and distinct understanding of this, that part of our nature, which is defined by intelligence, in other words the better part of ourselves will assuredly acquiesce in what befalls us, and in such acquiescence will endeavor to persist.”

When compared to our own power, the power of external causes surpasses the force of our desire for self-preservation. The desires arising from emotions due to external causes are stronger in proportion to the vehemence of the emotions. Our desires, which arise from true knowledge of good and evil, can be stifled therefore by many other desires arising from the emotions due to the pressure of external conditions upon us.

We read in the Ethics: “An emotion whereof we conceive the cause to be with us at the present time, is stronger than if we did not conceive the cause to be with us. Toward something future, which we conceive as close at hand, we are affected more intensely than if we conceive that its time for existence is separated from the present by a longer interval; so too, by the remembrance of what we conceive to have passed away not a long time ago, we are affected more intensely than if we conceive the reverse. An emotion toward that which we conceive as necessary is, when other conditions are equal, more intense than an emotion toward that which is possible, or contingent or non-necessary. An emotion toward a thing which we know not to exist at the present time, and which we conceive as possible, is more intense, other conditions being equal, than an emotion toward a thing contingent. Emotion toward a thing contingent which we know not to exist in the present, is, other conditions being equal, fainter than an emotion toward a thing past.” (IV.9, 10, 11, 12, 13).

Thus we get some idea of the nature of human emotions and their effects upon our actions and our disposition.

How is it possible then to cross the ocean of passion and arrive at the haven of bliss or the knowledge of God? Just as it is easier for a captain, who is an enthusiastic seaman, to face the storm, so is it easier for a man inspired by love
for the highest good to overcome the storm of existence. The key to the mastery of the emotions is revealed in the following proposition: “An emotion can only be controlled or destroyed by another emotion contrary thereto.” (IV.7).

In the first and second stage of knowledge, man does not have the power to conquer his emotions. From the ethical viewpoint there is a distinction existent also between the man in the first stage of knowledge and the man in the second stage. The former is entirely oblivious to freedom. The latter, on the other hand, knows what reason prescribes, but the power of his emotions is stronger than the power of his intellect, and he finds himself unable to utilize his knowledge and free himself. He is like the prisoner who moving about freely, is nevertheless not in possession of perfect freedom. The free man, however, differs from the others in that he both knows and acts in accordance with virtue. Yet, the way to freedom lies open to all. We read in the Ethics: “The highest good of those who follow virtue is common to all, and therefore all can equally rejoice therein. The good which every man who follows after virtue desires for himself, he will also desire for other men, and so much the more in proportion as he has a greater knowledge of God.” (IV.36, 37).

Confusion in man arises because the human mind possesses both adequate and inadequate ideas and, therefore, forms conceptions both of good and evil. “If men were born free,” says Spinoza, “they would so long as they remained free men, form no conception of good and evil . . .” “This and other matters,” he continues, “which we have already proved, seem to have been signified by Moses in the history of the first man. For in that narrative no other power of God is conceived, save that whereby he created man, that is, the power wherewith he provided only for man’s well-being; it is stated that God forbade man, being free, to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and that as soon as man should have eaten of it, he would straightway fear death, rather than desire to live. Further, it is written that when man had found a wife, who was in entire harmony with his nature, he knew that there could be nothing in nature which could be more useful to him; but that after he believed the beasts to be like himself, he straightway began to imitate their emotions and to lose his freedom; this freedom was afterward recovered by the patriarchs, led by the spirit of Christ; that is, by the idea of God, whereon alone it depends that men may be free.” (IV.68 Note).

As soon as we awake to the realization that we have our true being in the supreme reality of God and live therein, we begin to free ourselves. That is, the nearer we are to the reality of eternal life, the less selfishly do we act. We desire directly that which is good and are not led by fear. Therefore, we think of nothing less than of death. “A free man,” declares Spinoza, “thinks of death least of all things; and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life.” (IV.67). Man endeavors to understand what life and freedom are. Concerning the attitude of the free man towards the facing of danger, Spinoza says: “The virtue of a free man is seen to be as great when he declines dangers, as when he over­comes them.” (IV.69). Spinoza’s teaching concerning the free man applies not only towards his attitude to life, death and danger, but also to his relationship and dealings with his fellow-men. “The free man who lives among the ignorant” he says, “strives as far as he can, to avoid receiving favors from them, I say, ‘as far as he can,’ for though men be
ignorant, yet are they men, and in cases of necessity could afford us human aid, the most excellent of all things; therefore, it is often necessary to accept favors from them, and consequently to repay such favors, lest we should have the appearance of despising those who bestow them, or of being, from avaricious motives, unwilling to requite them, and so give ground for offense by the very fact of striving to avoid it. Thus, in declining favors, we must look to the requirements of utility and courtesy.” (IV.70 Note).

“Only free men are thoroughly grateful to one another. . . . The good will which men who are led by blind desire have for one another, is generally a bargaining or enticement, rather than pure good will.” (IV.71 and Note).

“The free man never acts fraudulently, but always in good faith.” (IV.72). In the fourth book of the Ethics, Spinoza shows how man is enslaved and limited by his emotions. However, Spinoza is not the philosopher who points out man’s weaknesses and man’s enslavement only—for that would lead only to despair. In the fifth book Spinoza shows us how to transcend these weaknesses or to use his own words “this human bondage”; and points the way towards man’s freedom, the key to which lies in his highest nature or soul.

GOOD EVIL

BOOK V

Spinoza begins the fifth part of the Ethics with the following words: “At length I pass to the remaining portion of my Ethics, which is concerned with the way leading to freedom. I shall therefore treat therein of the power of reason, showing how far the reason can control the emotions and what is the nature of mental freedom or blessedness.”

According to Spinoza, only he who has adequate ideas is essentially active. In other words, each man preserves his own being or essence according to the kind of understanding he has both of himself and of his emotions. Now, since there is no modification of the body whereof we cannot form some clear and distinct conception, it follows that there is no emotion whereof we cannot have some clear and distinct idea. But in so far as man is dominated by passions, he is hindered from preserving his thinking being; in other words, he does not connect the principle of self-preservation with the attribute of Thought. It must be remembered, however, that mind and body comprise one and the same individual conceived under the two attributes, Thought and Extension. But the idea of the mind and the mind itself are one and the same reality which can only be conceived under the attribute of Thought.

“We showed,” says Spinoza, “that the idea of body and body, that is, mind and body, are one and the same individual conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now un-
der the attribute of Extension; therefore, the idea of the mind and the mind itself are one and the same thing, which is conceived under one and the same attribute, namely, Thought. The idea of the mind, I repeat, and the mind itself are in God by the same necessity, and follow from the same power of thinking. Strictly speaking, the idea of the mind, that is, the idea of an idea, is nothing but the distinctive quality of the idea in so far as it is conceived as a mode of thought, without reference to the object: if a man knows anything, he by that very fact, knows that he knows it, and at the same time knows that he knows that he knows it, and so on to infinity.” (II.21 Note).

If we consider the two concepts of self-preservation, the biological and the ethical, we come to understand man not only as a social animal but also as a thinking being. If man persists in his thinking being, he is in harmony with his essential nature. His existence then becomes the sum total of his relationship to other human beings, and to the different things with which he comes in contact. Furthermore, his existence becomes the realization of the principle of ethical self-preservation. Our essential being is, for Spinoza, the central point of ethical life or the life of freedom. Since the power of the mind, according to Spinoza, is defined by the understanding only, each individual derives remedies against his emotions, solely from his knowledge of the mind.

Passive pleasures are consequences of the external causation which we understand inadequately, whereas active joy, or the mind’s blessedness, is the result of adequate causes. What is an adequate cause? “By an adequate cause,” says Spinoza, “I mean a cause through which its effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived. . . . I say that we act when anything takes place either within us or externally to us, which can through our nature alone be clearly and distinctly understood.” (III.Def. 1, 2).

In order to make this idea of adequate activity more clear, we shall quote from the appendix to the fourth book: “All our endeavors or desires so follow from the necessity of our nature, that they can be understood either through it alone, as their proximate cause, or by virtue of our being a part of nature, which cannot be adequately conceived through itself without other individuals.”

“Our actions, that is those desires which are defined by man’s power or reason, are always good. The rest may be either good or bad.”

To persist in our thinking being, means to be truly active. It is not the contemplative life of a dreamer that Spinoza considers as the highest kind of living, but the active life of a doer. The life of perfect activity is the life of perfect self-control.

What diminishes or hinders man’s power of ethical action? Nothing but his own inadequate ideas. As soon as man comes to understand the nature of the principle of self-preservation, not only as a biological process but also as an ethical activity, he learns how to face the struggle for essence; he also discovers that this new kind of struggle is the struggle for more perfection. Spinoza says: “In proportion as each thing possesses more of perfection, so is it more active, and less passive, and vice versa, in proportion as it is more active, so is it more perfect.” (V.40).

What kind of activities will help us in the striving for perfection? Ethical activities. “The mind’s essence,” explains Spinoza, “consists in knowledge: therefore, in proportion as
the mind understands more things by the second and third kinds of knowledge, the greater will be the part of it that endures, and consequently, the greater will be the part of it that is not touched by the emotions, which are contrary to our nature, or in other words, evil. Thus, in proportion as the mind understands more things by the second and third kinds of knowledge, the greater will be the part of it that remains unimpaired and, consequently, less subject to emotions which are evil.” (V.38 Proof).

Whenever passions rule us, we cannot persist in the preservation of our thinking being. In order to practice or use the thinking power of our minds, we must learn to overcome external influences and thus destroy emotions which arise from these causes. In order to remove negative thoughts, a new order and connection of ideas has to be formed in our minds, and this arrangement will bring about a new order of the modifications in our body. For: “Even as thoughts and ideas of things are arranged and associated in the mind, so are the modifications of the body or the images of things precisely in the same way arranged and associated in the body.” (V.1). It is only the true discipline of thought that helps us form clear and distinct ideas of our passions.

“There is no emotion,” says Spinoza, “whereof we cannot form some clear and distinct conception, for an emotion is the idea of a modification of the body, and must therefore involve some clear and distinct conception.” (V.4). It follows, therefore, that every one has the power of clearly and distinctly understanding himself and his emotions; if not absolutely, at least in part, thus making himself less and less subject to passions. Nothing more excellent within our power can be devised than this remedy for the emotions, which consists in a true knowledge thereof. For our minds have no other power save that of thinking and forming adequate ideas.

Although there are many things which frequently hinder our minds from understanding, yet there are moments when we are not assailed by evil emotions. Were we to make the right use of such moments more often, we would change ourselves radically and begin to act according to the ethico-intellectual order.

“So long as we are not assailed by emotions contrary to our nature,” teaches Spinoza, “we have the power of arranging and associating the modifications of our body according to the intellectual order.” (V.10). In one of the most important notes of the Ethics, the understanding of which can cause a most thorough change in our everyday life, we read: “By the power of rightly arranging and associating the bodily modifications, we can guard ourselves from being easily affected by evil emotions. For a greater force is needed for controlling the emotions when they are arranged and associated according to the intellectual order, than when they are uncertain and unsettled.” (V.10 Note). The best we can do, according to Spinoza, so long as we do not possess a perfect knowledge of our emotions, is to frame a system of right conduct, or fixed practical precepts, commit it to memory, and apply it to the particular circumstances which now and again meet us in life, so that our imagination may become fully imbued therewith, and that it may always be on hand.

For instance, it has been laid down among the rules of life, that hatred be overcome with love or high-mindedness, and not requited with hatred in return. In order that this precept of reason be always ready for use in time of need, we should
often reflect upon the wrong generally committed by men, and in what manner they may best be warded off by high-mindedness. Thus, we shall associate the idea of wrong with the idea of this precept, which accordingly will be ready for use when a wrong is done to us. If we also keep in mind the notion of our true well-being, and the good which follows from mutual friendship and common fellowships, and, if we remember that complete acquiescence is the result of the right way of life, and that men, no less than everything else, act by the necessity of their nature, in such case, the wrong, or the hatred, which commonly arises from it will engross a very small part of our imagination and will be easily overcome. Even if the anger which springs from a grievous wrong be not easily overcome, nevertheless it will be conquered far sooner, though not without a spiritual conflict, than if we had not thus reflected on the subject.

In the same manner, we must think of courage in order to lay aside fear; that is, we must enumerate and imagine common perils of life and in what manner they may best be avoided and overcome by courage. However, let us note that we must always pay attention to the ordering of our thoughts and images, and to those things which are good in each thing, so that we may always be moved to action by an emotion of pleasure. For instance, if any one sees that he seeks honor too eagerly, let him meditate on the right use of honor, to what end it should be sought, and by what means it may be acquired, rather than on vanity and the inconstancy of men, or on other things of this kind, of which no one ever thinks save people with unhealthy minds. For ambitious men assail themselves with such thoughts when they despair of attaining the honor which they long for; and while they utter their rage, they may appear wise. Wherefore, it is certain that those are most desirous of honor or glory, who cry out the loudest against its abuse and against the vanity of the world. And this is applicable not only to the ambitious, but to all to whom fortune is unfavorable and who are powerless in mind.

For a poor man who is greedy, will not cease to talk of the abuse of money and the evils of riches, by which he shows not only that he is poor, but also that he cannot bear to see others rich.

Therefore, one who moderates his emotions and desires through love of freedom, endeavors as much as possible to obtain knowledge of virtues and their causes, and to fill his mind with that joy which arises from true knowledge of them; by no means does he regard the vices of men, disparage his fellows and rejoice in a false species of liberty. “And he that has diligently observed what is explained here,” says Spinoza, “and makes use of it, will be able in a short space of time to direct his actions for the most part according to the direction of reason.” (V.10 Note).

He, therefore, who begins to live in harmony with the dictates of ethical reason can improve his character and life. But how can we bring this about? By understanding the fundamental principle that “the mind can bring it about, that all bodily modifications or images of things be referred to the idea of God.” (V.14). This is the pivot about which all our endeavors should center if we are sincerely and ethically interested in the improvement of our understanding of life and society. Only when we begin arranging and referring modifications of our physical nature to the idea of God, or to
the intellectual order, do we become less agitated by those emotions which are evil and contrary to our nature.

This idea of God is the key to Spinoza's kingdom of freedom. To become more and more conscious of this idea, means to become increasingly active. The following is cited as a representative passage: "The human mind has an adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God. Now, as all things are in God, and are conceived through God, we can from this knowledge infer many things which we may adequately know, and we may know thereby the third kind of knowledge. Men have not so clear a knowledge of God as they have of general notions because they are unable to imagine God as they do bodies, and also because they have associated the name of God with images of things that they are in the habit of seeing, as indeed they can hardly avoid doing; being, as they are, men and continually affected by external bodies. . . ." (I.47 and Note).

The idea of God is within us, within our essential nature, and this idea is adequate and perfect. But we do not always realize this truth, simply because there are obstacles on our way toward the kingdom of perfection. These obstacles hinder the mind from being able to think in harmony with the idea of God. But as soon as we endeavor and succeed in connecting our confused mind with the depth of our true being, we come to understand ourselves and our emotions. Thus, with constant ethical practice, we can begin to experience the joy which, according to Spinoza, is the expression of the love of God.

"He who clearly and distinctly understands himself and his emotions loves God and so much the more in proportion as he understands himself and his emotions more." (V.15).

The concentration of our mind on the love towards God will make us realize that this love is the highest good which we can seek under the guidance of intuition, realizing at the same time that this highest good is common to all men. "This love towards God," says Spinoza, "cannot be stained by the emotion of envy or jealousy; contrariwise, it is the more fostered in proportion as we conceive a greater number of men to be joined to God by the same bond of love." (V.20).

Here we have the foundation for an ethical life. Here, too, we can begin to understand that the central thought of Spinoza's philosophy is the idea of ethical friendship, a point which most of the commentators and interpreters of Spinoza have heretofore overlooked. This central idea of unselfishness can be found in many passages throughout the writings of Spinoza.

Does not an ethico-social order presuppose human beings with the desire to understand more clearly and deeply what unselfishness really is? Spinoza maintains that it does, for only then do the interests of others begin to become more and more our own interests, and only then, do we discover that our own selfish desires are not, after all, expressions of our true being. Then we decide to overcome selfishness and to develop strong characters. It is this striving which enables us to understand the following proposition in its true light: "He who loves God cannot endeavor that God should love him in return." (V.19). We experience what the dispassionate and unselfish attitude of mind really means, and we learn how to proceed from an adequate idea of the absolute essence of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of man.

But why are men so often confused? Spinoza gives us this answer: "I think the cause for such confusion is mainly
that they do not keep to the proper order of philosophic thinking. The nature of God, which should be reflected on first, (inasmuch as it is prior both in the order of knowledge and the order of nature,) they have taken to be last in the order of knowledge, and have put into the first place what they call the objects of sensation; hence, while they are considering natural phenomena, they give no attention at all to the divine nature, and when afterward they apply their mind to the study of the divine nature, they are quite unable to bear in mind the first hypotheses, with which they have overlaid the knowledge of natural phenomena, inasmuch as such hypotheses are no help toward understanding the divine nature. So that it is hardly to be wondered at, that those persons contradict themselves, here and there.” (II. 10 Note).

How then can we overcome confusions, contradictions and difficulties? It is possible to do that only by the right use of the power of our minds. “The power of the mind,” says Spinoza, “is defined by knowledge only; it therefore follows that that mind is most passive whose greatest part is made up of inadequate ideas, so that it may be characterized more readily by its passive states than by its activities; on the other hand, that mind is most active, whose greatest part is made up of adequate ideas, so that, although it contains as many inadequate ideas as the former mind, it may yet be more easily characterized by ideas attributable to human virtue, than by ideas which tell of human infirmity. . . . We may thus readily conceive the power which clear and distinct knowledge, and especially that third kind of knowledge founded on the actual knowledge of God, possesses over the emotions. . . . Further, it begets a love toward a thing immutable and eternal, whereof we may really enter into possession; neither can it be defiled with those faults which are inherent in ordinary love, but it may grow from strength to strength and may engross the greater part of the mind, and deeply penetrate it.” (V. 20 Note).

Our instinct of self-preservation is not only the expression of our desire to follow our passions but also of our striving for perfection. The difference depends upon the direction towards which our activities lead us. If our desires are the expression of our essence, then we desire more ethically values, we proceed towards a more perfect understanding of ourselves and others, and become active in a more intuitive way. Furthermore, as soon as our desire for self-preservation transforms into striving for perfection, we develop a yearning to understand things essentially and, in so far as we conceive the mind to be capable of comprehending things by the third kind of knowledge, we find it to be eternal. “The highest endeavor of the mind,” says Spinoza, “and the highest virtue is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge. In proportion as the mind is more capable of understanding things by the third kind of knowledge, it desires more to understand things by that kind.” (V.25, 26).

Since the highest capacity of the mind is to know things by intuition, and since the desire to understand things by this knowledge is greater in proportion as the mind comprehends more and more things intuitively, he who understands things by this kind of knowledge passes to the summit of human freedom. “From this third kind of knowledge arises the highest possible mental acquiescence.” (V.27). The man, therefore, who can conceive things under the form of intuition, will be more fully conscious of his essential nature and
of the idea of God. “Whatsoever we understand by the third kind of knowledge, we take delight in, and our delight is accompanied by the idea of God as cause.” (V.32).

In the sense that God is called the cause of himself, he must also be called the cause of all things. The essence of things must be inferred from the divine nature, no less than their existence. God is therefore the cause not only of the existence of our body, but also of its essence. The essence of the human body therefore must necessarily be understood through the very essence of God. That means, that there necessarily is in God an idea which expresses the essence of the human body under the form of eternity.

“The human mind,” says Spinoza, “cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but there remains of it something which is eternal.” (V.23). Why can we not remember that we existed before our bodies? “It is not possible,” answers Spinoza, “that we should remember that we existed before our body, for our body can bear no trace of such existence, neither can eternity be defined in terms of time, or have any relation to time. But notwithstanding, we feel and know that we are eternal. For the mind feels those things that it conceives by understanding no less than those things that it remembers. For the eyes of the mind, whereby it sees and observes things, are none other than proofs. Thus, although we do not remember that we existed before our body, yet we feel that our mind, in so far as it involves the essence of the body, under the form of eternity, is eternal and that thus its existence cannot be defined in terms of time or explained through duration.” (V.23 Note).

While the body endures, the mind can remember things past and imagine modifications of the body. In so far as the mind conceives the present existence of our physical nature, to that extent it conceives things in relation to time. “But,” says Spinoza, “eternity cannot be explained in terms of duration. Therefore, to this extent the mind has not the power of conceiving things under the form of eternity, but it possesses such power, because it is in the nature of reason to conceive things under the form of eternity, and also because it is the nature of the mind to conceive the essence of the body under the form of eternity. Besides these two, there is nothing which belongs to the essence of mind. Therefore, this power of conceiving things under the form of eternity only belongs to the mind in virtue of the mind’s conceiving the essence of the body under the form of eternity.” (V. 29 Note).

If the mind understands things by virtue of conceiving only the present actual existence of the body, apart from its essence, it does not understand particular things essentially and has, therefore, no perfect idea of the essence of God. “Things are conceived by us as actual in two ways: either as existing in relation to a given time and place, or as contained in God and following from the necessity of the divine nature. Whatsoever we conceive in this second way as true or real, we conceive under the form of eternity, and their ideas involve the eternal and infinite essence of God.” (V. 29 Note).

Things whose existence is dependent only upon the conceptions we form of them through the modifications of our own body, cannot be understood through the essence of God, nor can they be conceived as real entities under the form of eternity. As soon, however, as man’s mind conceives itself intuitively, man becomes conscious of the essence of God. “Our mind,” says Spinoza, “in so far as it knows itself and
the body under the form of eternity has to that extent necessarily a knowledge of God, and knows that it is in God, and is conceived through God.” (V. 30). Man cannot conceive anything under the form of eternity without conceiving his essence as accompanied by the idea of God as cause. In so far, therefore, as the mind is eternal, it is capable of knowing things by the third kind of knowledge. We read in the Ethics: “From the third kind of knowledge necessarily arises the intellectual love of God. From this kind of knowledge necessarily arises joy accompanied by the idea of God as cause, that is, the love of God; not in so far as we imagine him as present, but in so far as we understand him to be eternal; this is what I call the intellectual love of God.” (V. 32 Cor.).

We have now reached the summit of human understanding and can gather from the tree of highest knowledge that eternal fruit called the intellectual love of God. We succeed in gathering this fruit, only when we come into possession of ethical consciousness, the consciousness that helps us build a pathway through the entanglements of our passions, and constructs the bridge which enables us to pass from servitude to freedom. The more we can be conscious of the power of our mind, the greater will be the joy within ourselves and the clearer will be the understanding that this joy is always accompanied by the idea of God as cause. From this intuitive self-knowledge there must arise the intellectual love of God, because love is joy associated with the idea of a cause—in our case with the idea of God. This love of God is the highest good which we can seek for, under the guidance of intuition. “There is no emotion,” says Spinoza, “directly contrary to this love, whereby this love can be destroyed; therefore, we may conclude that this love toward God is the most constant of all the emotions.” The most effective weapon against negative emotions is this ethical love towards God.

“If there should be anything,” continues Spinoza, “which is contrary to this love, that thing would be contrary to that which is true; consequently, that which should be able to take away this love would cause that which is true to be false; an obvious absurdity. Therefore, there is nothing in nature which is contrary to this intellectual love, or which can take it away.” (V. 37 Dem.). It is, figuratively speaking, the “sword” of the spirit. But where shall we find this weapon? On what plane of understanding can the ethical victory be achieved and upon what does this kind of understanding depend?

In answer to the first question, we reply that it can be found only in our ethical selves, and, further, that we can be victorious only through the use of intuition. As regards the second question, we say that this understanding depends for its real source upon our spirit in so far as our spirit is eternal. With the attainment of this idea of eternity we reach the innermost kernel of Spinoza’s Ethics. We reach that subterranean tunnel which leads to blessedness or freedom—the highest goal for a human being. Furthermore, since from the third kind of knowledge arises the highest possible joy or blessedness, it follows that the human mind can become less passive to emotions which are evil.

The human mind is, therefore, also capable of expressing the eternal power of God. The essence of the human mind is in its depth the expression of eternal perfection. Through the understanding of this, the human mind enjoys the highest
satisfaction possible, namely, the highest bliss associated with
the idea of eternal substance as cause.

“We clearly understand,” Spinoza now remarks, “wherein
our salvation or blessedness, or freedom consists; namely,
in the constant and eternal love toward God, or in God’s love
toward men. This love or blessedness is in the Bible called
Glory, and not undeservedly.” (V. 36 Note). As soon as we
begin to take account of the mind’s eternity, we cannot help
recognizing what is really of primary importance for the
best mode of life. We are not led then, as most people are,
by fear, but by a deeper understanding of life. We are less
subject to the emotions that are evil, because we rejoice in
the ethical love or blessedness. Therefore, we have the power
of controlling our emotions and do not fear death, because
the idea of eternal life, or God, is our guide.

“The general belief of the multitude,” says Spinoza,
“seems to be different. . . . They believe that piety, religion
and generally all things attributable to firmness of mind, are
burdens which, after death, they hope to lay aside, and to
receive the reward for their bondage, that is, for their piety
and religion; it is not only by this hope, but also and chiefly,
by the fear of being horribly punished after death, that they
are induced to live according to the divine commandments,
so far as their feeble and infirm spirit will carry them. If
man had not this hope and this fear, but believed that the
mind perished with the body, and that no hope of prolonged
life remains for the wretches worn out with the burden of
piety, they would return to their inclinations, controlling
everything in accordance with their lusts, and desiring to
obey fortune rather than themselves. Such a course appears
to me not less absurd than if a man, because he does not
believe that he can by wholesome food sustain his body
forever, should wish to cram himself with poison and deadly
foods; or if because he sees that the mind is not eternal or
immortal, he should prefer to be out of his mind altogether,
and to live without the use of reason; these ideas are so
absurd as to be scarcely worth refuting.” (V.41 Proof).

Since the human mind is a modification of the eternal
power of God, it has the capacity of understanding the mean­
ing of eternity. Furthermore, in so far as the human mind
understands things according to the third kind of knowledge,
it necessarily follows that the human mind has an under­
standing of the essence of God or, in other words, knows the
nature of the essential love of the one substance. Perfection
of character is the nature and the source of this love or
blessedness. The intellectual love of God is the crown of
spiritual freedom, and the power of the spirit over emotions
has here its foundation. “Blessedness is not the reward of
virtue,” teaches Spinoza, “but virtue itself; neither do we
rejoice therein, because we control our emotions, but con­
trariwise, because we rejoice therein, we are able to control
our emotions. . . . I have just completed all I wished to
set forth touching the mind’s power over the emotions and
the mind’s freedom. Whence it appears how potent is the
wise man, and how much he surpasses the ignorant man, who
is driven only by his lusts. For the ignorant man is not only
not gaining the true acquiescence of his spirit, but moreover
lives, as it were, unwitting of himself, of God and of things,
and as soon as he ceases to suffer, ceases to be. Whereas the
wise man, in so far as he is regarded as such, is scarcely at
all disturbed in spirit, but being conscious of himself and of
God and of things, by a certain eternal necessity, never
ceases to be, but always possesses true acquiescence of his spirit.” (V.42 Note).

From all this we see how, according to the Ethics of Spinoza, the realization of the idea of the “homo sapiens” is possible. We have seen that the heavenly food which may be gathered by the human spirit from the tree of the highest knowledge is the ethical love of God. Therefore, the man who gathers and enjoys this food, eats of the fruit of the tree of eternal life, and becomes not only during his earthly existence, but for all eternity, the free man, or the “homo sapiens.”

Spinoza concludes his Ethics with the following words: “If the way which I have pointed out as leading to this result seems exceedingly hard, it may nevertheless be discovered. Needs must it be hard since it is so seldom found. How would it be possible, if salvation were ready to our hand, and could without great labor be found, that it should be by almost all men neglected? But all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.”

**PERFECTION**

**ACTION**

**PASSION**

The question often arises: Why did Spinoza call his life-work Ethics? The answer is more apparent from our explanation of the five books. In this title is sounded the keynote to his whole philosophy. Spinoza wanted to help man understand that the highest goal possible for a human being is self-perfection, or the idea of divine freedom. By perfection in general Spinoza means reality—in other words, the essence of each thing in so far as it exists and operates in a particular manner, and *without any regard to its duration*. For no given thing can be said to be more perfect because it has passed a longer time in existence.

We are told by Spinoza that it is possible to reach perfection and to practise the idea of ethical self-evolution, because man is so constituted that he can improve his understanding of the essence of God and consequently, that man can reach a state of true freedom.

In his definition of the third kind of knowledge, Spinoza makes the idea of ethical self-evolution very clear by saying that “this kind of knowledge proceeds from an adequate idea of the absolute essence of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things.”

From this, it may be seen that, before man can understand the true nature of external objects, he must first have some consciousness of the deeper reality within himself, that is, some understanding of God. Such consciousness is nothing else than intuitive knowledge. It may also be called a living desire to come in contact with a deeper reality than that which can be reached through the senses.
As the desire to understand and to be more conscious of ourselves, of God, and of things become stronger in us, we are in turn less hindered by those obstacles which the striving for this goal involves. Thus we gradually begin to live the life of the free man. Spinoza shows in the fifth book of the Ethics how far the human mind is capable of attaining to such a condition.

But the “Spinoza-land of Freedom” cannot be discovered without the “Spinoza-compass.” What is this compass which can guide us in our wanderings through the labyrinth of Spinoza’s philosophy and show us the goal? Spinoza constantly emphasizes the fact that universal concepts (reason) cannot lead us to the real understanding of the ethical truth. To reach this, we may say that one must arm oneself with the spectacles of intuition. Just as astronomy needs a telescope to gather knowledge of the skies, so must ethics utilize intuition as its best instrument to gain knowledge of the essence of man. And just as the astronomer takes for granted the reality of the sky above, just so does Spinoza assume the existence of God or Nature as the axiom upon which his Ethics is built. And now to draw an analogy: Let us suppose that there existed a man who had no understanding of what the sun signified because he had been born in darkness and had always lived in darkness. Would it not be possible to conceive that he, when once liberated, would doubtless enjoy the sight of the sunrise, provided he was endowed with eyesight? Just so can we now say that man, although he does not know of the existence of God, is nevertheless able to find and enjoy this knowledge, for he has an innate capacity of intuitive thinking.

In studying the Ethics of Spinoza with the aid of intuition and not only abstractly, we can begin to understand why Spinoza has been praised by all those who have used their intuition.

Spinoza’s Ethics is an organic whole, constituted of two parts: of an old world (the first four books) and of a new world (the fifth book). The organic whole is preserved and animated by the breath of the idea of God (idea dei) which welds the five books of the Ethics into a perfect harmony. This idea of the ethical love of God, as developed in the fifth book, arises naturally from the principles set forth in the earlier books. To conclude, it is only by the ethical intuition that we can be led out of the bondage of our inadequate conceptions and passions into the kingdom of blessedness or freedom; out of the finite into the infinite. Spinoza’s Ethics thus is not merely a metaphysical theory, but a plan of life. Spinoza was truly a biosopher.
THE study of Spinoza’s life and works reveals the fact that he did not remain a pure metaphysician, but that he also became more and more interested in the problems of human values in their essential relationship to philosophy.

Philosophy may be divided into two classes. First, there is philosophy based on words, images of things, and rationalizations—the abstract philosophy in the form of idealism, materialism, and agnosticism. This is philosophy which lacks the fundamental idea of an ethical life, and the possibility of higher relationships among men. Secondly, there is philosophy based on intuitions, integrations, and realizations—the divine philosophy in the form of ethical mysticism, intuitivism, and Spinozaism.

Spinozaism is the purest form of divine philosophy. It is based essentially on the great ethical quaternary: God, Love, Wisdom, and Friendship.

1. We read in the fifteenth proposition of the first book of the Ethics: “Whatsoever is, is in God, and without God nothing can be, or be conceived.”

2. In the corollary to the 32nd proposition of the fifth book, Spinoza says: “From the third kind of knowledge arises joy accompanied by the idea of God as cause, that is, the love of God; not in so far as we imagine him as present, but in so far as we understand him to be eternal; this is what I call the intellectual love of God.”

3. In the conclusion of the Ethics, he writes: “The wise man, in so far as he is regarded as such, is scarcely at all disturbed in spirit, but, being conscious of himself, and of God, and of things, by a certain eternal necessity, never ceases to be, but always possesses true acquiescence of spirit.”

4. And we read in the appendix to the fourth book concerning friendship: “It is before all things useful to men to associate their ways of life, to bind themselves together with such bonds as they think most fitted to gather them all into unity, and generally to do whatsoever serves to strengthen friendship.”

Spinoza’s main interest lay in the problem of changing theories into ethical actualities or, to put it differently, to find the true philosophy. In one of his letters he writes: “I do not presume that I have found the best philosophy, but I know that I think the true one. If you ask me how I know this, I shall answer: In the same way that you know that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles: for the truth reveals itself and the false.” Spinoza was an intuitive thinker, a biosopher.

Those philosophers who are not intuitive thinkers always misunderstand the most important part of Spinoza’s teaching, his doctrine of the attributes. Spinoza’s idea concerning the “Being possessing infinite attributes,” will always be difficult to understand for those who do not yet realize the importance of his definition of the third kind of knowledge, “scientia intuitiva.” “This kind of knowledge,” explains Spinoza, “proceeds from the adequate idea of the absolute
There cannot be an understanding of the essence of man without the understanding of the essence of God or his attributes. “By attribute,” says Spinoza, “I mean that which the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of substance.” According to Spinoza, the essence of man is constituted by certain modifications of the attributes of God; that essence, therefore, is something which is in God, and which without God can neither be, nor be conceived.

Without an understanding of Spinoza’s doctrine of the attributes, the fifth book of the Ethics will always remain a mystery. We read in a letter to De Vries: “You ask me whether we need experience to know whether the definition of some attribute is true. To this I reply, that we only need experience in the case of whatever cannot be deduced from the definition of a thing. But we do not need experience in the case of those things whose existence is not distinguished from their essence, and therefore follows from their definitions. Indeed, no experience will ever be able to teach us the essence of things; the utmost which it can effect is to determine one’s mind so that it only thinks of certain essences of things. Therefore, since the existence of attributes does not differ from their essence, we shall not be able to apprehend it by any experience.”

If not by any ordinary kind of experience, how then can we understand the attributes? This kind of experience or knowledge of which Spinoza speaks as not enabling us to understand the attributes, refers to experiences classified under the first and second kinds of knowledge, that is, to the experiences of the properties of things and of our own body, and not to the realization of the essence of individual things. Spinoza says, “The highest endeavor of the mind, and the highest virtue is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge”; and also, “In proportion as the mind is more capable of understanding things by the third kind of knowledge, it desires more to understand things by that kind.”

The most important thing in life, therefore, is to perfect our understanding as far as we can, and to make use of the intuitive knowledge, or the essence of things. What does it mean to perfect this kind of understanding? In the appendix to the fourth book of the Ethics, we find Spinoza’s reply: “To perfect the understanding is nothing else but to understand God, God’s attributes, and the actions which follow from the necessity of his nature.”

Right comprehension of the doctrine of the attributes enables us to affirm not only the present existence of the body, but also to have a true idea of the essence of the body as well as of the mind; that means, to perceive things in the light of eternity (sub specie aeternitatis). Man can conceive things in two ways: existentially or essentially; that means, either as existing in relation to a given time and place, or as being in God and following from the necessity of the nature of God. Whatsoever we conceive in this second way as true or real, we conceive under the form of eternity, and such ideas proceed from the eternal and infinite essence of God.

If we understand intuitively the nature of the body and mind and not only imaginatively and abstractly, we learn to see the fundamental importance of the doctrine of the attributes, and to perceive clearly how the mind, in reference to its essence, follows from the divine nature of the attributes. Spinoza calls attention to this again and again in order to
show how the knowledge of the essence of particular things, which he has called intuitive, is powerful, indeed how much more so than the knowledge of the second kind (reason).

The realization of the third kind of knowledge (intuition) brings us the highest possible mental acquiescence, based on the understanding that the human mind, in the attributive sense, cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but there remains something of it which is eternal.

Spinoza's biosophy begins with this conception of the eternal nature of man. By the term Biosophy I understand that science of life which follows from the realization of our substantial nature as the cause of higher principles, laws and qualities of which we can become conscious and which we can apply in the creation of an ethical-social fellowship.

In order to understand Spinoza's teaching biosophically, the fundamental importance of the doctrine of the attributes in his philosophy must first of all be fully comprehended.

The meaning of the doctrine of the attributes can be illustrated by considering the following example. All of us have heard of the existence of Australia. But there are people who are not certain whether to think of it as an island or as a continent. These, then, are two views or two attributes of Australia. If we should think of Australia as a continent, we cannot help calling to our minds all those things which we associate with a continent, namely, mountains, cities, houses, etc. And those are (so to speak) various modifications of Australia. But, if we think of it as an island, instead of associating it with mountains and cities, we think of harbors, ships, water, and so on. The order and connection of its modifications as a continent have reference to the same Australia.

Australia consists of both continental and insular characteristics.

The two attributes, Thought and Extension, are each conceived as being distinct—that is, one can be understood without the help of the other. But this by no means implies that each attribute is a separate substance. For the nature of substance is such that each of its attributes can be conceived in its own way, inasmuch as all of its attributes have always existed simultaneously in it, and no attribute could be the cause of the existence of another attribute, or affect it. However, each attribute expresses in its essence the reality or being of substance. It is not strange, therefore, that substance has several, in fact an infinite number of attributes; for it is easily perceived that everything in nature must be conceived through one attribute or another, and that its reality or being varies in proportion to the number of its attributes. Consequently, it is quite clear that substance, which is absolutely infinite Being, must necessarily be defined as possessing infinite attributes each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence.

Whatever can be perceived by the infinite intellect as constituting the essence of substance must belong to the one substance. Hence, substance thinking, and substance extended, are one and the same substance, perceived either through the attribute of Thought or through the attribute of Extension. Furthermore, a mode of Extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two different ways. For example, a temple, and the idea of a temple existing, are one and the same thing; the visible edifice is a modification of the Attribute of Extension, whereas the idea of it lies in the Attribute of Thought.
Many questions are asked by students of Spinoza’s philosophy concerning the doctrine of the attributes. The answers to these questions differ widely. Each new theory in seeking to prove its tenets, attempts to find support by pointing to different passages in the works of Spinoza. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that the veil which conceals the mystery of the attributes has not yet been lifted. The difficulties which constantly arise in investigations of this problem are to be attributed to the fact that the interpreters have considered almost exclusively only one side of the problem: the definition of the term “attribute”; but they have paid little attention to the equally important conception of “God.” Without regard to Spinoza’s conception of God, the doctrine of the attributes cannot be conceived adequately. What does it mean to understand the conception of God? It means to affirm that “The idea of God in us is adequate and perfect.” (Idea Dei, quae in nobis est, est adaequata et perfecta.) (V. 19 Dem.). And as an idea, according to Spinoza, is not something mute, like a picture on a canvas, this idea of God tells us that “God is substance, consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence.”

Before attempting to explain the significance of the definitions of “God” and “attribute” it is necessary to understand the explanation which Spinoza gives in reference to “definition.” Spinoza teaches that in order that a definition may be perfect, it must explain the very essence of that which it seeks to define and we must be very careful in constructing a definition not to allow any of the properties of the object to be substituted in its stead.

There are many kinds of definitions. A definition may explain a thing as it is conceived by us, which means that it is merely conceived sometimes in an imaginative way, sometimes in a general way. But a definition which helps us to understand the essence of a thing must be conceived as true. If some one has conceived truly that which he has conceived, it would be mere trifling to demand of him a proof that he has conceived the thing.

Spinoza also explains that one of the requirements of the definition of a thing, uncreated as far as the mind is concerned, is that it must not be explained through abstractions. If students fail to understand Spinoza’s conception of God and attribute, it is mainly because they persistently identify God with images or abstractions, and the attributes with finite qualities.

If we confine ourselves strictly to the definition of attribute as given in the Ethics, we discover that attribute is something the intellect perceives as the very essence of substance. Spinoza explains that the actual intellect, whether finite or infinite, must comprehend the attributes of God. From the point of view of finiteness, the attributes are abstract conceptions. But as soon as we begin to understand the nature of attributes from the point of view of infinity, we see them with the eyes of intuitive understanding as realities in God. In short, the true character of the attribute cannot be conceived without the idea of God. “Whatever is, is in God,” says Spinoza, “and nothing can either be or be conceived without God.” (I. 15).

There are two ways of considering the attributes:—the
abstract or relative way, and the biosophical or absolute way. "All things which follow from the absolute nature of any attribute of God must exist forever and infinitely, or must exist eternally and infinitely through that same attribute." (I. 21). The absolute understanding of the attributes shows them as they really are in God. Moreover, as the finite mind perceives only a finite number of attributes so does the essential intellect understand the idea of infinite attributes. The true doctrine of the attributes cannot be perceived from the point of view of abstract intellectualism, but only from the point of view of ethical intuitivism. It follows that the more we understand the essence or reality of a thing, the more we understand the nature of substance as consisting of infinite attributes. Spinoza says: "The more reality, or being, a thing possesses, the more attributes belong to it." (I.9). This does not mean however that we can understand the existential character of all infinite attributes.

Although the existence of other attributes is not perceived by our minds, nevertheless we can have a knowledge of the essence of the one substance as the embodiment of infinite attributes; and the reality of attributes becomes a fact of intuitive understanding. As God and all attributes are eternal, we can attain to the understanding of the essence of God only under the species of eternity and can also achieve in the same way the knowledge of the idea of infinite attributes. Spinoza says: "The more reality, or being, a thing possesses, the more attributes belong to it." (I.9). This does not mean however that we can understand the existential character of all infinite attributes.

The doctrine of the attributes is very essential in the Ethics of Spinoza. It is impossible to solve the particular problems of Spinoza's philosophy without reference to the idea of the infinite attributes. "As divine nature possesses absolutely infinite attributes," says Spinoza, "each one of which expresses infinite essence in its kind, infinite things in infinite modes—that is, all things that fall under the head-
ing of infinite intellect—must necessarily follow from its necessity.”

As we know modifications only of two attributes, an affirmation of the existence of infinite attributes is possible only through the idea of God. That we grasp but two attributes is due to the fact that man perceives only two corresponding kinds of modifications—the material and the mental. The nature of these modifications reveals to us the character of the attributes. It may be objected by some that this is only an empirical reasoning, and that, since modifications of the other attributes are unknown to us, we cannot know that there are infinite attributes. Spinoza’s answer is, that our minds have the idea of God, which implies the existence of infinite attributes.

We have, besides the idea of God, an idea of our own body, that is, an idea of an existential fact and an idea of the essence of our mind. Spinoza, when questioned about the attributes, replied in a letter as follows: “I turn to your doubts; and in reply to the first, I say that the human mind can only get to know those things which the idea of an actually existing body involves, or what can be inferred from this idea. For the power of each thing is defined only by its essence. But the essence of the mind consists only in this, that it is the idea of a body actually existing. Therefore, the mind’s power of understanding only extends to those things which this idea of the body contains in itself, or which follow from the same. But this idea of the body neither involves nor expresses any other attributes of God than extension and thought. Thus it is clear that the human mind, or the idea of the human body, neither involves nor expresses any other attribute of God besides these two. Moreover no other attri-

bute of God can be deduced or conceived from these two attributes or from their modifications. Therefore, I conclude that the human mind cannot attain to knowledge of any attribute of God except these two, as has been asserted.”

Why do we not know anything of the other attributes in their existential aspect? Because the human mind is so constituted that it can come to an existential affirmation only of that which is connected with the body and with the idea of the body. But, Spinoza says: “In God there necessarily exists the idea of his essence, and of all things which necessarily follow from his essence.” (II.3). A transition from the existential understanding to the essential understanding of the idea of the infinite attributes is possible. Although in a practical way we know nothing of the modifications of the other attributes, we can nevertheless attain to an understanding of the existence of infinite attributes in God with the aid of the third kind of knowledge. If we have once acquired the knowledge of the eternal essence of God, we have a true idea, and that idea contains everything which pertains to the ultimate reality of God. Spinoza says: “As reality and perfection are synonymous terms, God, as the most perfect being of beings, has infinite attributes.” And as “the idea of God, from which infinite numbers of things follow in infinite ways, can be one only,” (II.4) does not this mean that there exists a unity of the attributes in God? The idea that we possess concerning God informs us that in the infinite ocean of Being there must exist as many attributes as there are drops of water in the ocean, even though we are able to perceive only two, with their manifold play of color. But, even if we do not see the tossing waves of the other attributes in the ocean, we know nevertheless that each of the unknown attributes expresses
the nature of the same substance. Therefore, the known and the unknown attributes are factors in the one substance.

The determining factor in the question of the relation between substance and attributes is to understand clearly and distinctly that all the attributes express one and the same primal essence. Therefore, they must in this respect be considered identical. The "pan" (all) becomes "hen" (one), and instead of talking of Spinoza's pantheism, we shall have to speak of Spinoza's hentlieism. It is possible therefore to conceive the idea of the infinite attributes although it is not possible to perceive their modifications with our senses. The visible modifications prove to us, like predicates in grammar, that there must be a subject, but we can conceive a subject without all its predicates.

Because of the impossibility of factually demonstrating the modifications of the unknown attributes, we can deduce their reality only in connection with the understanding of their essence, for they tell us that they are without at the same time telling us what they are. As we do not partake in their modifications, it is true that the characteristics which pertain to the existence of the other attributes are unknown to us. But from the possibility of understanding the essence of God, there follows also the idea of the existence of other attributes.

III

In reference to the idea of the infinite attributes, it will be of great importance for us to keep always in mind that only intuitive knowledge is the key which brings us to the affirmation and realization of the essential nature of man. It further tells us that true ethical progress is possible if we begin to advance from an adequate idea of certain attributes to the adequate knowledge of the essence of man. Spinoza explains clearly in his Ethics how the deepest spiritual love, the love of God, follows from the intuitive process of thinking.

Reason comprehends only properties common to all things, but does not give us the affirmation of the essence of individual things. The rational understanding of nature is realized through the conception of motion as a continuous natural process. As motion and rest are the two main factors in the material processes of things, so essence and character are the pillars of the ethical process in man. In the second stage of knowledge (reason) we deal only with things pertaining to nature in general, that is, with that which underlies the totality of nature considered from an external point of view. Therefore, only by making use of intuition can we understand the essence of nature from within and, consequently, the essence of ourselves. But there is a way for man to proceed from the general understanding of nature under a certain species of eternity (sub quadam specie aeternitatis) to the intuitive knowledge of the essence of God.

On what does ethical progress therefore depend? On the active power within our essential nature, which power varies according to our mental, emotional and physical reactions. The power of our essential nature is increased when it arises from joy. Spinoza says: "The desire which springs from joy, other things being equal, is stronger than that which springs from sorrow." (IV. 18). If the true nature of man is to be realized, he must not stop at the second kind of knowledge. Man guided by the first and second stages of knowledge has by no means reached the highest goal in human life. He is
not yet in possession of absolute ethical freedom which has its origin in the true love of God. The manner of theorizing used by an imaginative intellectualist includes no consciousness of eternity. The wisdom and understanding of a man living in the third stage of consciousness, on the other hand, displays a true knowledge of the one substance. And as only consciousness of eternity can liberate us from servitude, the idea of eternity is really the basis on which biosophy is established.

Man, by virtue of his essence, partakes of eternity, but by virtue of his state of existence in the world, he partakes also of temporal things. The twofold character of man is evident. Let us cite an example—the case of two children born into a family. These two children, considered individually in their temporal being, are independent and finite. But regarded as parts of the family (taken as an eternal entity), they themselves partake of this family. According to Spinoza's teaching, therefore, we as human beings partake with our essential nature of the eternal essence of God, although, in our temporal existence, each man is separate.

Since the essence of man is rooted in the essence of God, which is identical with the existence of God (I.20) and with his eternity (I.Def. 8), the idea of eternity is the springboard from which we can plunge ourselves from the external into the innermost reality. The knowledge of the idea of eternity is man's affirmation of the eternal existence of God; in other words, when the spirit is conscious of its divine nature the ideas conceived by it are as true as God himself. We read in the Ethics: "All ideas, in so far as they are related to God, are true." (II.32).

Our minds are capable of comprehending things under the aspect of eternity only in so far as they affirm the essence of the body. Since man is able to attain to the third stage of knowledge, he can, therefore, realize the true idea of his nature. Inasmuch as the essence of our being consists in clear consciousness, that is, in the forming of adequate ideas, it is certain that "the mind understands more things and will become most perfect of all when it has regard for and reflects on the knowledge of a most perfect being. The more the mind knows, the better it understands its forces or strength, the better it will be able to direct itself and lay down rules for itself; and the more it understands the order of nature, the more easily it will be able to liberate itself from useless things."

The best kind of thinking is intuitive or essential. The more man uses his intuitive understanding, the more ethical his life becomes. True spiritual freedom is to be attained only when one is guided by the "spirit of Christ, that is to say, by the idea of God." Let us quote from the Ethics: "We are told that God forbade free man to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and warned him that, as soon as he ate of it, he would immediately dread death rather than desire to live. Afterwards, we are told that when man found a wife who agreed entirely with his nature, he was certain that there could be nothing in nature which could be more profitable to him than his wife. But when he came to believe that the brutes were like himself, he immediately began to imitate their emotions and lose his liberty, which the Patriarchs afterwards recovered, being led by the spirit of Christ, that is to say, by the idea of God, which alone can make a man free, and cause him to desire for other men the good he desires for himself." (IV.68 Note).
Ethical freedom can be realized only in the third stage of knowledge. The transition from self-aggrandizement in the second stage of knowledge to the love of God in the third is made possible by the idea of eternity. “If we look at the common opinion of men, we shall see that they are indeed conscious of the eternity of their minds, but they confound it with duration and attribute it to imagination or memory which, they believe, remain after death.” (V.34 Note).

As we proceed liberating ourselves both from our negative emotions and negative mentalities, we calm the storms of the outer world raging within our being, and we ripen into the divine fruit of the love of God. This budding and ripening, which must necessarily go on within us, has its origin in the instinct of self-preservation which is a consequence of our being a modification of the eternal substance, the cause in itself (causa sui). This conception of the cause in itself is above all a suggestion of the primal character of the one absolute substance. It is evidently a divine principle to those who have attained to the third stage of knowledge.

IV

What, then, is the real meaning of the instinct of self-preservation in Spinoza’s Ethics? One displays a complete misconception of Spinoza when he interprets the idea of self-preservation as merely the selfish instinct of the brute. Spinoza never expounded the principle of “exploit your neighbor,” but he taught men to make use of their ethical power or virtue, that is, to seek the treasures in their own essence, in order to know better both themselves and their emotions, and to love God. We quote: “He who clearly and distinctly understands himself and his emotions, loves God, and loves him better, the better he understands himself and his emotions.” (V.15).

Man lives instinctively only in the first stage of knowledge, but in the second stage this instinct becomes an endeavor to understand clearly and distinctly. Again we read: “All efforts which we make through reason are nothing but efforts to understand, and the mind, in so far as it uses reason, adjudges nothing as profitable to itself excepting that which conduces to understanding.” (IV.26). The instinct of self-preservation urges us to seek not only food, shelter, and clothing, but also understanding, because the essence of our mind is understanding. From instinctive existence in the first stage, we progress to reasoned conduct in the second, and to a more perfect life in the third stage. And as the mind becomes more efficient in the intuitive understanding of things, so much the more does it endeavor to understand in this way.

We cannot stop merely at instinctive existence, because the essence of the mind is activity, or the power to develop the mind in so far as it truly comprehends things as a part of the infinite understanding of God. As the human mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God, man perceives this or that thing, and that means that God has this or that idea; not in so far as he is infinite, but in so far as he forms the essence of the human mind. “At this point,” says Spinoza, “many of my readers will, no doubt, stick fast and will think of many things which will cause delay. I therefore, beg of them to advance slowly, step by step, with me, and not to pronounce judgment until they shall have read everything which I have to say.” (II.11 Note).
In the first stage of knowledge, the instinct of self-preservation is the foundation of our existence, but in the second stage we begin to know ourselves more clearly. In other words, our inward nature is already active so that, in the third stage, the idea of eternity develops more clearly within us. And the more clearly we understand our essence, with so much greater consciousness do we proceed to overcome our instincts and passions until we finally succeed in passing from our external nature to the realm of the understanding of our essential being, that is, from the exercise of our selfish habits to the idea and the realization of the unselfish love of God and men.

If in the first stage we are playthings on the waves of the ocean of life, in the second stage, we are already able to swim. But it is only in the third stage that we begin to think instead of merely knowing this and that abstractly, or to continue our analogy, we can dive and plunge into the depths of the ocean of eternity.

Spinoza constantly emphasizes the fact that imagination does not lead to the understanding of the one substance. Yet he did not doubt that knowledge acquired through reason can aid us in distinguishing the true from the false and in bringing that happiness or blessedness which makes man free. Let us heed the creative advice of Spinoza to realize our true individuality in a harmonious way:

Man, become eternal! Your essence is rooted in eternity! Through the infinite power of thought, become an eternal modification of the one substance! Draw forever new energy for ethical activities and spiritual consciousness from your union with God, since from this joy in the love of God there will arise the most effective motive for the taming of the passions within you; those passions which are the enemies of yourself. Develop your ethical powers! Live in God—God is power in itself! Do not remain in the second stage of knowledge, but raise yourself to the third and you shall attain the goal!

God realizes himself in man in two directions—in an essential way as well as in an existential way.

Man, by virtue of his origin in God, must first try to preserve himself according to his instinctive urge. This urge, as man's understanding of himself grows, becomes a striving towards virtue, and finally in the third stage of knowledge becomes an ethico-social endeavor to realize the highest idea of life. This affirmation of our essence helps us both to strive in an inward direction and to rid ourselves of confused and fictitious ideas, leading thus to essential self-knowledge. Essence and existence then become one, and the biosophical view is attained.

Only on this basis can we reach a harmonious solution for the problems of life. The thinking of ethical truth, or the idea of God on the one hand, and the living according to this truth, on the other, was the matchless example given to us by Spinoza in his life of harmony with ethical principles.

It is the biosophical attitude rather than the philosophical attitude which is the key to the understanding of Spinoza's teaching. And this biosophical point of view Spinoza expressly states in the following passage: "However, human weakness cannot attain to the eternal order and fixed laws of nature in its own thoughts, but meanwhile man conceives a human character much more stable than his own, and sees that there is no reason why he should not himself acquire such a character. Thus he is led to seek for means which will
bring him to this pitch of perfection, and calls everything which will serve as such means a true good. The chief good is that he should arrive, together with other individuals if possible, at the possession of the aforesaid character. That character is the knowledge of the union existing between the mind and the whole of nature.” (Improvement of the Understanding.) We see then that Spinoza gives us the fundamentals of that which is necessary to be understood for the “wise government of life.”

God, for the intuitive thinker, is the source of his divine achievements. As a result of his union with God, man on the highest level of knowledge is also inspired with love towards particular things. He feels the breath of God in all things in nature, no matter how these things be constituted. Nothing any longer disturbs him because his ideas are never in conflict with objects. He does not judge objects according to his physical senses, but according to their essential capacities. Thus he attains ethical equilibrium. Man emerges the victor only when he experiences the essential power of God in the form of unselfish love. As soon as the human mind begins to express more and more consciously the eternal power of God, man realizes that his essence, in its primal depth, is perfection or reality itself. Through his understanding of this, man associates the highest satisfaction possible not only with the idea of himself, but also with the idea of God and other men. We read in the Ethics: “The good which every one who follows after virtue seeks for himself, he will desire for other men; and his desire on their behalf will be greater in proportion as he has a greater knowledge of God.” (IV.37).

Co-enjoyment, according to Spinoza, is one of the most important manifestations of the life of an ethical man.

Spinoza wanted to introduce ethics into life, but his understanding of ethics taught him that there must be, first of all, the improvement of one’s consciousness. What does it mean to improve one’s consciousness? It means to understand that one’s mind is not only an idea of one’s body but also “a thinking thing.” But that does not mean that Spinoza puts the attribute of Thought higher than the attribute of Extension, as most of his interpreters have wrongly imagined. However, the foundation of ethics is God as a “thinking thing,” or the attribute of Thought. In reality each attribute has the same value, and in this biosophical principle of equality lies the uniqueness of Spinozaism. Spinoza did not deny the importance of the attribute of Extension. His understanding of reality told him that “He who possesses a body fit for many things possesses a mind of which the greater part is eternal.” (V.39). The physical side of man, which is a modification of the attribute of Extension, must be duly considered, as Spinoza says in the following proof of this proposition: “He who possesses a body fitted for doing many things is least of all agitated by those emotions which are evil; that is to say, by emotions which are contrary to our nature, and therefore, he possesses the power of arranging and connecting the affections of the body according to the order of the intellect and, consequently, of causing all the affections of the body to be related to the idea of God.”

Spinoza’s conception of life, therefore, was different from that maintained by ascetic monks. The following passage is significant of this attitude: “Nothing but a gloomy and sad superstition forbids enjoyment. For why is it more seemly to extinguish hunger and thirst than to drive away melancholy? My reasons and my conclusions are these: No God
and no human being, except an envious one, is delighted by my impotence or my trouble, or esteems as any virtue in us tears, sighs, fears, and other things of this kind, which are signs of mental impotence; on the contrary, the greater the joy with which we are affected, the greater the perfection to which we pass thereby; that is to say, the more do we necessarily partake of the divine nature. To make use of things, therefore, and to delight in them as much as possible (provided we do not disgust ourselves with them, which is not delighting in them), is the part of a wise man. It is the part of a wise man, I say, to refresh and invigorate himself with moderate and pleasant eating and drinking, with sweet scents and the beauty of green plants, with ornaments, with music, with sports, with the theater, and with all things of this kind which one man can enjoy without hurting another. For the human body is composed of a great number of parts of diverse nature, which constantly need new and varied nourishment, in order that the whole of the body may be equally fit for everything which can follow from its nature, and consequently that the mind may be equally fit to understand many things at once. This mode of living best of all agrees both with our principles and with common practice; therefore, this mode of living is the best of all, and is to be universally commended.” (IV.46 Note).

Spinoza does not advise us to see things as shadows. He shows us intuitively how to perceive things as modifications of the eternal substance—how to grasp the essence of things. He teaches us to open our minds to the ethical phase of existence, and to assure our ethical safety against emotional attacks. Ethical understanding is creative because it helps us translate ideals into everyday activities. Ethical transformation or regeneration gives us true freedom. In one of his most unusual notes, Spinoza hints at this ethical metamorphosis. “I dare not deny that the human body, through the circulation of the blood and the other things, by means of which it is thought life is preserved, may, nevertheless, be changed into another nature altogether different from its own. No reason compels me to affirm that the body never dies unless it is changed into a corpse. Experience, indeed, seems to teach the contrary. It sometimes happens that a man undergoes such changes that he cannot very well be said to be the same man, as was the case with a certain Spanish poet of whom I have heard, who was seized with an illness, and although he recovered, remained, nevertheless, so oblivious of his past life that he did not believe the tales and tragedies he had composed were his own and he might, indeed, have been taken for a grown-up child if he had also forgotten his native tongue. But, if this seems incredible, what shall we say of children? The man of mature years believes the nature of children to be so different from his own, that it would be impossible to persuade him he had ever been a child, if he did not conjecture regarding himself from what he sees of others. But in order to avoid giving to the superstitious matter for new questions, I prefer to go no farther in the discussion of these matters.” (IV.39 Note).

All know what the technical side of human striving and its foundation is, since we live in a mechanical era. But the question arises: what is the foundation of true culture,
mechanics or ethics? Since the machine age helps humanity cultivate the desire for more possessions and, consequently, to experience great depressions, there can be only one way out of this technico-mechanistic chaos. And that way can come only through the triumph of individual ethics. Although it cannot be denied that technico-mechanistic progress has served to great advantage, nevertheless, from the point of view of ethical human development, it has proved itself to be an obstacle rather than a source of regeneration. We can all foresee what will happen if the mechanically-minded men will continue to rule society. At present we need a new science based not on mechanistic principles but on ethical conceptions of life. Biosophy is this science for the God-conscious men who can make use of their thinking minds. Just as the human mind has ideas which enable it to understand external things, so also does it possess the capacity to have an adequate understanding of the eternal and infinite essence of God. Man is as yet unknown to himself because he does not use his mind adequately. Man cannot be truly happy without his thinking mind. Spinoza, therefore, considers only those things which may lead us to the realization of the idea of God as man’s highest happiness.

But why haven’t we as yet a clear understanding of the nature of God, such as we have of common notions? Spinoza answers: “Because we have attached the name God to the images of things which we are in the habit of seeing, an error we can hardly avoid, inasmuch as we are continually affected by external bodies.” (II.47 Note). But how can we come to true realization of the knowledge of God as the highest good of the thinking mind? As soon as we begin to feel intuitively what is to be understood by the union of the mind and body, we begin to realize that the human body does not merely exist as we perceive it with our senses. “By body I understand that mode which expresses in a certain determined manner the essence of God in so far as he is considered as an extended thing.” (II Def. 1). In God, there necessarily exists a conception which expresses the essence of the human body, and since the body is united with the mind, this essential idea of our physical nature is something which pertains to the essence of the human mind and is necessarily eternal. (V.23 Note). On the basis of conceiving things in this manner, it is not difficult to see that ethics according to Spinoza, becomes a force which brings into consciousness that kind of love which is not touched by passions contrary to our true nature. This love which is beyond intellectualism and sensualism is the reality of our inner life and the only way which leads back to God or Nature.

Men have already learned a great deal about the universe. But what about the ethical achievements of man? What about his victories in the struggle for character-improvement? The next step for man is to obtain the biosophical idea of nature or God. The significance of this point lies in the realization of directing our minds towards the understanding of human nature in a religio-scientific way. If the second kind of knowledge (reason) is the foundation of our technico-scientific undertakings, what other kind of knowledge than intuition can be the basis of our biosophical understanding of God, man, and man’s freedom? Spinoza makes it clear to us in the fifth book of his Ethics that the more we understand the essence of individual things, the more do we understand God. It also pertains to the nature of the mind to conceive the
essence of the body and not merely the properties of our physical nature. “But those things which are conceived in this second way as true or real, we conceive under the form of eternity (sub specie aeternitatis) and their idea involves the eternal and infinite essence of God.” (V.29 Note).

It is very important to distinguish between the two expressions: “sub quaedam specie aeternitatis” and “sub specie aeternitatis.” In the first case, we see things in a rational way as in the exact sciences, but in the latter we perceive things intuitively. On the basis of scientific method, we arrive at clear and distinct conceptions of the laws and properties of things. But it is on the basis of biosophical knowledge (integration) that we come to the true and actual understanding of the divine laws, the essence of ourselves, and the essence of God. The most important step, therefore, for the man who seeks ethical freedom, is to form an idea which expresses the essence of the human body under the form of eternity. This idea will help us improve the understanding of our ethical existence. Since Spinoza teaches that the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed, what then should be a man’s daily task, besides following his existential urges, if not to discover that part of his nature which is eternal? And what else can it mean to find one’s eternal self than to become a sharer of love and peace?

But Spinoza’s doctrine is not theological mysticism; rather is it biosophical intuitivism. The true mystics and biosophers come to the realization of the idea of God on the basis of absolute thought. They neither “theologize” nor “intellectualize.” They consider the order of the whole of nature, or the connection of causes through the attribute of Thought. According to Spinoza’s doctrine of the attributes, there is a possibility for man to understand that the idea of the mind and the mind itself are one and the same thing and are conceived under one and the same attribute, namely, Thought. Spinoza teaches that the idea of the mind, from the viewpoint of its essence, is nothing else than the form of an idea in so far as it is considered as a mode of Thought without relation to its object.

At the end of the first part of the fifth book, we read: “I have now concluded all that I had to say relating to this present life. . . . It is time, therefore, that I should now pass to the consideration of those matters which appertain to the duration of the mind without relation to the body (sine relatione ad corpus).” (V.20 Note). Spinoza gives us therein the key to the biosophical conception of human freedom. We find this thought also expressed in one of the most unusual notes: “These are the things I had determined to show concerning the mind in so far as it is considered without relation to the existence of the body. It is apparent that our mind, in so far as it understands, is an eternal mode of thinking, which is determined by another eternal mode of thinking, and this one again by another, and so on to infinity; so that they all constitute at the same time the eternal and infinite intellect of God.” (V.40 Note).

One of the most difficult tasks for man is to think clearly and to consider his mind without relation to the existence of his body. To what goal, therefore, should our desire to improve our understanding lead us? According to Spinoza, it is the realization of our mind as an eternal mode of the attribute of Thought. If we think of one of the two attributes—let us say Extension—as a pole which has already been discovered, it follows that there must be a way towards the other
pole or towards the kingdom of Thought. The transition from one pole to the other can be accomplished through the understanding of the essence of the body under the form of eternity, and not by merely conceiving the existence of the body under the form of duration. “This idea which expresses the essence of the body under the form of eternity,” says Spinoza, “is a certain mode of thought which pertains to the essence of the mind and is necessarily eternal.” (V.23 Note). The mind, being active in so far as it has true ideas, can be the adequate cause of a new order of life, and possess the power of connecting the reactions of the physical nature or the images of things to the idea of God. The endeavor to re­late the modifications of the body to the idea of God helps us understand ourselves and our emotions clearly and distinctly, and enables us to act more adequately. “Man does not know himself save through the modifications of his body, and the ideas of these modifications. Therefore, when it happens that the mind can regard itself, it is assumed, by that very fact, to pass to a greater state of perfection, that is, to be affected with joy, and the more so according as it can imagine itself and its power of acting more distinctly.” (III. 53 Proof). And as this joy of being active is accompanied by the idea of God, man can free himself from passions by occupying his mind more and more with the love of God.

While we consider the idea of man which involves the eternal and infinite essence of God, we conceive something which is common to all. This knowledge, therefore, will be adequate. “The knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God which each idea involves is adequate and perfect.” (II.46). And as soon as the mind perceives ideas by which it understands itself and its own body together with external things as actually existing, we begin to understand that ideas do not consist of images which are formed in us through the connection of external bodies, and we do not consider ideas as lifeless pictures on a tablet; we see more clearly the importance of the third definition of the second book: “By idea I understand a conception of the mind which the mind forms by reason of its being a thinking thing.” Those who do not see that an idea, in so far as it is an idea, involves affirmation or negation, confuse words with ideas and fill their minds with misconceptions or falsities. In this way, they do not understand that an idea, as a mode of Thought, is not an image of any object. Words and images depend entirely on bodily motions and in no way involve the conceptions of the attribute of Thought. Those who imagine that they have true ideas, although their conceptions of things are false, are lacking the most positive element in our minds, the conception of certainty. “The human mind in so far as it knows itself and its body under the species of eternity, thus far, necessarily, has knowledge of God, and knows that it exists in God, and is conceived through God.” (V.30).

VI

In order to discover the real significance of Spinoza’s teaching, it is necessary to know that Spinoza did not intend to keep his principles and ideas removed from our everyday life. If only that is really useful which helps us to improve body and mind, we must learn to distinguish between external usefulness and ethical usefulness. What is essentially useful to man? Ethical activity or service. Spinoza calls this
ethical kind of service, “virtue,” and he tells us that man can live under the guidance of virtue. But the Spinozaistic “virtue” is not the same as the theological “virtue” which is the opposite of vice. Spinozaistic virtue is blessedness or freedom.

In order to value Spinoza’s idea of blessedness or virtue, it is necessary to understand the basic characteristics of the infinite being which Spinoza calls God. Although “we live and move in him,” we know only two of the fundamental realities, or attributes of God. These two attributes are in God as salt and water are in the ocean. If an individual who is unaccustomed to the ocean happens to get some salt water in his mouth, experiencing thus the unpleasant taste of the salt, he forgets the existence of the water and thinks only of the salty taste in his mouth. But if later he reminds himself of what has happened, he will understand that water and not only salt exists in the ocean. And as soon as he realizes how refreshing the water is, he will not mind the taste of the salt but will learn how to swim and to dive. Similarly, an individual who does not understand the true nature of the one substance, or God, may imagine that Extension (matter) is the only attribute. But by trying to improve his understanding intuitively, he also obtains a clearer conception of the other attribute, Thought, and realizes the existence of himself as a thinking being.

The doctrine of the attributes will remain the greatest mystery in Spinoza’s teaching as long as we shall not affirm the absolute character of the attributes, and understand that what is absolute in God is also absolute in man, which fact we can perceive only intuitively. But what is absolute in man? The only thing that is absolute in man is his charac-
such as a hateful word from our neighbor, or if we are conditioned by some misfortune that befalls us to act in accordance with the passive emotions aroused in us, we are enslaved by these emotions. But as soon as we become conscious of the laws by which emotions operate, we are able to direct our imaginations and emotions to the degree to which our mind has a clear understanding of them. Doesn’t this mean that we can learn the language of the mind for the purposes of everyday life? Thus also, the thinking man can speak not merely by means of imaginative statements or abstractions, but by ethical actions. Just as the speaking of words helps us improve our pronunciation, so does thinking by action help us to perfect our understanding. Activities of that part of the mind which is more perfect than other parts, namely, our ethical reason, make our desires unselfish and lead us to change the ends for which we strive from personal goals to ethical ones. As there is no reaction of our physical nature of which the mind cannot form some clear and distinct conception, one’s mind can bring it to pass, that all modifications of the body or images of things have reference to the idea of God. (V. 14). This proposition is the key to ethical immunity from external influences.

It is true that the power of man is very much limited and infinitely surpassed by external forces of his environment, for man does not have the absolute power of adapting all things outside of him to his best advantage. But he can bear with calmness those things which are not favorable to his own interests, provided that he realizes he has done all in his power to live an ethical life and to understand that he is a part of nature, whose order man must necessarily follow.

Through such understanding, the higher faculty in man, his intelligence, will acquiesce and will accept all happenings contrary to his nature with equanimity. The ethically minded individual, who is guided by intelligence, desires nothing save such things as are necessary, nor can he acquiesce in anything save such things as are true. Therefore, the ethical understanding in man can cause all his desires to coincide with the order of the whole of nature. To seek the eternal, means to raise ourselves to a higher level through the idea or love of God. “This love towards God is the greatest good which we can desire, according to the dictate of reason, and as it is common to all men, we desire that all should enjoy it. Therefore, it cannot be stained by the emotion of envy, nor again by the emotion of jealousy but, on the other hand, it must be cherished the more, according to the more men we imagine to enjoy it.” (V.20 Proof). Only one’s true mind can help one to come to a realization of co-enjoyment and make progress in ethico-social improvements.

Spinozaism is of use only to those who, on the basis of ethical self-realization, are willing to live in harmony with others instead of merely talking or writing about the higher kind of life. Spinoza teaches that the individual with a truly strong character does not hate his fellow-man, does not envy others, is indignant with no one, never despises his neighbor, and is in no way subject to pride. The man who follows the true meaning of religion seeks to overcome hatred with love, and desires for others the ethical goal he himself strives to attain. Furthermore, he guides his life according to the knowledge that all things follow from the necessity of the divine nature. Therefore, whatsoever seems to him evil, impious or horrible, is due to the fact that he conceives things in a confused, mutilated and superficial way. And, as he seeks
to rise above such inadequacies, he strives to see things clearly and without personal prejudice, and to overcome all impediments to true knowledge, such as hatred, rage, envy, derision, pride and all similar emotions. Consequently, he "endeavors as much as he can to act well and rejoice."

These points obviously are concerned with the true freedom of man, which can be realized only under the guidance of ethical reason. "It can easily be seen in what consists the difference between a man who is led by opinion or emotion and one who is led by reason. The former, whether he will or not, performs things of which he is entirely ignorant; the latter is subordinate to no one, and only does those things which he knows to be of primary importance in his life, and which on that account he desires the most; and therefore I call the former a slave, but the latter free." (IV.66 Note). Spinoza, the biosopher, was convinced that man, as a thinking being, can free himself from the evil influences of the "pair of opposites" by understanding the "pair of attributes." We read in the Ethics: "The knowledge of evil is inadequate knowledge." (IV.64). "For all actions for which we are determined by an emotion which is a passion, we can be determined without that emotion by reason alone." (IV.59). "If, therefore, a man moved by hatred or rage is determined to clench his fist and move his arm, this comes about as we showed in the second part, because one and the same action can be united to certain images of things; and therefore both from those images of things which we conceive confusedly and from those which we conceive clearly and distinctly, we can be determined for one and the same action. It is therefore apparent that every desire which arises from an emotion which is a passion would be of no use if men were guided by reason." (IV.59 Note).

In his outlook upon life, Spinoza was neither rationalist nor pantheist; neither optimist nor pessimist. He lived his life without bitterness, and yet, we cannot say that he did not meet with experiences which usually turn men into pessimists. "I endeavor," writes Spinoza in one of his letters, "to pass my life not in sorrow and sighing but in peace, joy and cheerfulness, and thereby I ascend a step higher. Meanwhile I know, (and this gives me the greatest satisfaction and peace of mind) that all things come to pass as they do by the power of the most perfect being and his immutable decree."

In order to understand the perfect life which Spinoza lived, it is necessary to have a clearer understanding of his conception of God. He practiced neither asceticism nor martyrdom, although he gave up vain and futile pleasures, the quest for honor and wealth, and the ties of blood-relationship. He freed himself from national, religious, racial and class prejudices. As a biosopher, he synthesized true religion and science, on the basis of his doctrine of the attributes, which, we may repeat helps us to conceive not only the essence of our minds but also the essence of our bodies under the form of eternity. Thus are we able to understand the attribute Extension not only from the material but also from the ethical point of view.

There are two ways of living. Either man partakes in the life of the body and excludes the existence of the idea of God, or he partakes in the life of infinite reality in which all life is included. Biosophical thinking helps us to eliminate our false, fictitious and doubtful ideas, and aids us in practicing thought-discipline in our everyday life so as to culti-
vate our innermost desire to become free. "As long as we
are not assailed by emotions which are contrary to our nature
we are able to arrange and connect the modifications of the
body according to their intellectual order." (V.10). Spinoza's Ethics, by setting down definite thoughts as a guidance
to man struggling for essentialities, is an invaluable book.
The ideas and principles of Spinoza's teachings are for those
who wish to become more capable of practicing the ethico-intellectual love of God as the highest expression of true
group life or friendship. "Whatever conduces to the uni-
versal fellowship of men, that is to say, whatever causes men
to live in harmony with one another is useful and, on the
contrary, whatever brings discord into the state is evil." (IV.
40). "For whatever causes men to live in harmony with one
another causes them to live according to the guidance of
reason and therefore is good. And on the other hand, those
things are evil which excite discord." (IV.40 Proof).

Do we not need more ethical vitality at the present time
in order to understand the higher purpose of life? Doubtless,
the world needs Spinoza's teaching as it did never before.
It is not enough to study the mechanical causes and effects
in the realm of things and to create physical sciences on the
basis of imagination and reason. It will now be more impor-
tant for men to discover biosophical causes and effects in
human life, using intuition and integration as a basis, and
ethical intelligence as a guide. The understanding of me-
chanical causality alone is not sufficient to enable man to find
the true solution to the riddle of existence. Man must learn
to find the biosophical causes of his confusions and suffer-
ings. We do not yet understand ourselves because we do not
as yet have the courage to face the internal cause of our
struggles. We are, therefore, to use Spinoza's words, "driven
about by external causes in many manners, and like waves
driven about by contrary winds, tossed to and fro, unwitting
of the issue and of our fate."

Spinoza, the biosopher, knew himself, God, and things
from intuitive experience. Truth was for him something of an
ethico-practical nature. Spinoza's realization of the essence
of his mind and body was gradual and step by step he be-
came a partaker in the truth of eternal life, as he himself
says in this unusual confession: "As long as the mind was
employed with thoughts concerning the true and supreme
good, it turned away from its former subjects of thought and
mediated seriously on this new plan; which was a great
comfort to me. For I saw that those evils were not of such a
state that they could not be cured by remedies. And although
at the commencement these intervals were rare and lasted
for a very short space of time, yet afterwards the true good
became more and more apparent to me, and these intervals
more frequent and of longer duration, especially after I saw
that the acquisition of money and desire for pleasure and
glory are only in the way as long as they are sought for their
own sakes and not as means to attain other things. But if
they are sought as means they will be limited, and far from
being in the way, they will help in the attainment of the
end for which they are sought." (Improvement of the Under-
standing).

Spinoza freed himself from the disturbing influences of
the modifications on the plane of matter (Extension) and en-
joyed the eternal self-consciousness on the plane of Thought.
Spinoza, the biosopher, did not merely study as philosophers
do, nor did he merely contemplate as mystics do. He was
rather interested in improving his understanding of the idea of God by means of self-experimentation. He was therefore not interested in the body merely as a form or an abstraction; he wanted rather to understand its essence. "Whatever the mind understands under the species of eternity, it does not understand owing to the fact that it conceives the actual present existence of the body, but because it conceives the essence of the body under the species of eternity." (V.20). Mind, for him, was not only the idea of the body, but also an eternal mode of the attribute of Thought.

Only from the biosophical point of view, that is, by finding the essence in everything, is it possible to see things "sub specie aeternitatis." But let us not forget that it is impossible to come to the understanding of the essence of things unless we have an adequate idea of the attributes. Spinoza stresses the biosophical side of the understanding of the attributes, as is evidenced by many of his propositions. We read: "The human mind possesses an adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God," (II.47), which means that we have the capacity of perceiving the attributes. Spinoza also says: "The highest good of the mind is the knowledge of God, and the highest virtue of the mind is to know God." (IV.28). To conceive things, therefore, through the essence of God, as actually existing, means to see them in the light of the attributes or under the form of eternity.

"It remains to point out," says Spinoza at the conclusion of the second book of his Ethics, "the advantages of the knowledge of this doctrine for the regulating of life which we shall easily perceive from the following points:

"I. Inasmuch as it teaches us to act solely according to the decree of God and to be partakers of the divine nature, the more according as our actions are more perfect, and we more and more understand God. This doctrine, therefore, besides bringing complete peace to the mind, has this advantage also, that it teaches us in what consists our greatest happiness or blessedness, namely, in the knowledge of God, by which we are induced to do those things which love and piety persuade us. Whence we clearly understand how far those are astray from a true estimation of virtue who expect for their virtue and best actions, as if it were the greatest slavery, that God will adorn them with the greatest rewards: as if virtue and the serving of God were not the happiness itself and the greatest liberty.

"II. In so far as it teaches us in what manner we should act with regard to the affairs of fortune or those things which are not in our own power, that is, to those things which do not follow from our nature: namely, that we should expect and bear both faces of fortune with an equal mind; for all things follow by the eternal decree of God in the same necessity as it follows from the essence of a triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles.

"III. This doctrine confers advantages on social life, inasmuch as it teaches us not to despise, hate, or ridicule any one: to be angry with or envy no one. Further, it teaches us that each one should be satisfied with what he has and ready to help his neighbor, not from effeminate pity, partiality or superstition, but rather by the mere guidance of reason, according as the time or thing demands.

"IV. This doctrine confers advantages on the state in common, inasmuch as it teaches in what manner citizens should
be governed, namely, that they should not be slaves, but should do of their own free will what is best.”

This then is the aim of biosophy; to help the man who has become mechanized to rediscover his true nature.

RELIGION AND SCIENCE

“Whatever we desire, of which we are the cause, in so far as we have the idea of God, or in so far as we know God, I refer to religion.”

IV. 37 Note

1. The affirmation of a religion based on ethico-philosophical principles instead of theologico-ceremonial dogmas is the power which enabled Spinoza to create his unusual thought-temple to which only those will gain an entrance who strive to improve their higher understanding of human nature and of life. This firm Spinozaistic foundation protects all those who seek true religion from the pitfalls of ordinary mysticism and sentimentality, and leads them to the realization of an ethico-practical life.

2. “There is a kind of knowledge which I will call intuition,” says Spinoza. “This kind of knowledge proceeds from an adequate idea of the absolute essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things.” Spinoza’s definition of intuition will forever guard his Ethics from being misused by those who are unable to understand his doctrine of the attributes. The attributes are the corner-
stone for the affirmation and the understanding not only of the existence of man's body, but also of his essence. "Whatever the mind understands under the form of eternity," writes Spinoza, "it does not understand by virtue of conceiving the present actual existence of the body, but by virtue of conceiving the essence of the body under the form of eternity." (V.29).

According to Spinoza's teaching, every modification can be seen either as a part without relation to the absolute totality or in the light of its union with the whole. We read in the fifth book: "Things are conceived by us as actual in two ways: either as existing in relation to a given time and place, or as contained in God and following from the necessity of the divine nature. Whatsoever we conceive in this second way as true or real, we conceive under the form of eternity, and their ideas involve the eternal and infinite essence of God." (V.29 Note).

3.

There is a vast difference between the problems of ecclesiasticism based on traditions and the problems of the thinking mind in reference to the eternal religion of life. As there must be various cults and ceremonies in order to keep the masses in ignorance and make them dream of a better life in heaven instead of living it on earth, it is clear that although ethico-philosophical differentiations may exist, they cannot lead to hatred and bloodshed.

The ethico-philosophical understanding of God is based on true thinking and adequate ideas of things, and not on superstitions and fear. It is the characteristic of superstition to adjudge as good such things as are usually painful, and to label as bad that which makes men joyous. Only an envious man can find delight in the weaknesses and burdens of other men. An ethical seeker, however, lives a happy life. In fact, the more joyous a man is in a positive way, the more he partakes of his true or divine nature. A superstitious person who continually speaks of evil rather than of virtue and strength of character, and who always tries to have men avoid evil rather than concentrate upon the things which are truly good in life, is really jealous of those people who enjoy life and seeks to make them as unhappy as he is himself. Such a type of individual is usually troublesome to his fellow-men and would certainly have no place in an ethical society.

4.

Spinoza was not so much interested in the difference between true religion, science and philosophy as in their coördination. To him ethics was the common denominator of these endeavors and expressions of human nature. There cannot be ethics without a search for wisdom (philosophy) and unity (religion), and it was Spinoza's conviction that only the highest kind of understanding (intuition) can unite religion, science, and philosophy. But Spinoza was not only interested in the affirmation of the close relationship of these three factors in human endeavor from a theoretical point of view; he was more concerned with the practical consequences which follow from the understanding of such a non-theological trinity (religion, science, and philosophy).

To Spinoza this was not a problem of superficial reconciliation but a question of bridging the gap between them by
ethical self-education or self-purification, by a deeper understanding of the infinite totality of God. Religion, science, and philosophy are one in the minds of those who understand that the essence of human nature is a divine reality.

Religion and science can be coördinated in a creative way only if the seekers for truth have an ethical interest in human welfare. In order to bring this about, he who seeks for an ethical goal must equip himself with sufficient knowledge of nature. It is also necessary for him to unite with other individuals who have similar aims in life in order to form an ethico-social order, or a new society, most suitably adapted to the attainment of an ethical character by as many people as possible. It is evident that unity of effort toward realization of this endeavor helps avoid unnecessary hardships and difficulties. It is further necessary to incur the aid of Moral Philosophy and the Theory of Education; and, as health is a most vital factor in this striving, the science of medicine must be included. Since the new ethical society is concerned also with material welfare and since many difficult tasks become simple through the aid of proper inventions (thus saving much time and useless effort) the science of mechanics must be studied and utilized. But, above all other things, it is essential that a method for the improvement of the understanding be discovered so that the members of the new society may learn to understand in the simplest way possible, the true nature of things.

It is obvious that all sciences are to be used as means toward the attainment of the highest possible human happiness and perfection.

Thus, that part of science which does not aid such a goal is to be discarded as unnecessary.

Although there are difficulties and seeming impossibilities in passing from experiences of scientific realities to experiences of ethico-religious realities, Spinoza pointed out the real advantages of such a transition. In order to attain it, we have to strengthen ourselves constantly through the improvement of our understanding and the love towards God. Our mind is in certain cases active, and in certain cases passive; and moreover, in proportion as it is more active, so is it more perfect. In reference to the love towards God, Spinoza points out: “This love towards God cannot be stained by the emotion of envy or jealousy; contrariwise, it is the more fostered, in proportion as we see a greater number of men to be joined to God by the same bond of love.” (V.20).

This knowledge and understanding of the true nature of human life, seen in the light of the Eternal Now or under the guidance of higher intelligence, has, therefore, also an ethico-social value. Spinoza has proved that such an understanding can never be shaken or destroyed, as there is no emotion in human nature which is opposed to it. Therefore, we can safely affirm the love toward God to be the most constant of all human emotions; and it is easy to conceive the power and strength which such clear understanding or ethical love has in checking and controlling negative emotions. The third kind of knowledge (intuition) based on the love of God is particularly potent in this respect. Although it cannot entirely destroy man’s passions, intuitive knowledge readjusts man’s nature so that his negative emotions play a less important rôle in his life. Furthermore, it is in the very
nature of such knowledge to foster love towards a thing infinite and eternal which we can really come to possess. This love is not stained with faults and shortcomings of ordinary love; it grows ever stronger and stronger until it occupies and absorbs the greater part of the human mind. Spinoza’s intellectual love of God is the intellectual readjustment of one’s mind to the essentialities of the Eternal Now and, therefore, also to the facts of one’s everyday life.

6.

There was enough room in Spinoza’s mind for the love of God, but none for orthodox superstitions. He refused, therefore, to be led by ignorance and the imaginative beliefs of theologians. Instead of depending on traditional revelations, Spinoza used divine intuition as the basis of his scientifco-religious investigations. He realized that God is immanent in everything, and that God can be understood intuitively. What imagination believes to be supernatural, intuition changes into natural realities,—religion as realization of the knowledge of the one substance or God becomes most important in life.

The clash between religion and science disappears as soon as we affirm the essence of science to be philosophy, and the essence of religion to be ethics. As philosophy unites all sciences, so does ethics help unite the different religions. There can be no conflict between science and religion, if science affirms the importance of intuition and religion the greatness of the scientifco-rational faculties.

Logic of scientific objectivity and intuition of religious subjectivity can be brought into harmony on the basis of the understanding of our emotional nature. The greater part of Spinoza’s Ethics deals with emotions. Human life is not only a physico-chemical process; it is also an ethico-religious activity. If science and religion deal with human needs and help eliminate misery, there can be no misunderstanding between them. Both can be applied to everyday life. The Lord’s Prayer or Christ’s Psalm, for instance, can be understood intuitively. Religious interests are human interests, too. The firmest bridge between science and religion is the realization of ethical group-consciousness or friendship. “It is before all things useful to men,” says Spinoza, “to associate their ways of life, to bind themselves together with such bonds as they think most fitted to gather them all into unity, and generally to do whatsoever serves to strengthen friendship.”

We need a new orientation in connection with applied religion among human beings. Only a real contact between religion and science can become the cause for a new kind of activity in human society. Only religio-scientific pioneers can discover Truth and utilize this understanding for group benefits.

7.

Thought or Spirit is one of the infinite attributes of God. But our everyday reason or common sense cannot perceive that infinite Thought or Spirit is real. Only intuition can do that. “For the spirit feels those things that it conceives by understanding, no less than those things that it remembers. For the eyes of the soul, whereby it sees and observes things are none other than proofs.” (V.23 Note).

Scientific or existential proofs are different from intuitive
proofs. Just as mechanics helps to make our mechanical life a possibility, so does ethics make our ethical life an actuality. We need to gain more knowledge by investigating natural phenomena; we also need more knowledge in connection with the investigations of ethical truths. Science and religion should be synthesized into a single unified system of life. Science without religion is mechanism, and religion without science is superstition.

Only an ethical mind can understand the infinite love with which God loves himself, and be peaceful and free in the understanding of this love. Spinoza says that “the intellectual love of the mind towards God is that very love of God whereby God loves himself, not in so far as he is infinite, but in so far as he can be explained through the essence of the human mind regarded under the form of eternity; in other words, the intellectual love of the mind towards God is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself.” (V.36).

8.

Spinoza’s religion is ethical God-religion and not a sectarian church religion. Spinoza points out clearly the source of the erroneous knowledge which men have about the nature of God. Men customarily consider the divine nature, which in truth is prior both to the order of knowledge and the order of nature, as one of the last problems. They put into the first place the objects that affect the senses and, while they are engaged in the study of natural phenomena, they pay no attention whatsoever to the divine nature. Therefore, their first hypothesis which should have been based on the knowledge of God becomes overlaid with information concerning natural phenomena, and this latter knowledge affords no help towards the true understanding of the divine nature. Therefore, it easily can be understood why people contradict themselves so freely on this subject.

There can be no room for theological sanctions and justifications in a teaching which proclaims, “He who has a true idea, simultaneously knows that he has a true idea and cannot doubt of the truth of the thing perceived.” (II.43). Spinoza is the father of the declaration of ethico-religious independence. According to Spinoza, it is only the freedom of our inmost being which enables us to live the life of truth. The understanding of the ethico-religious declaration as the foundation of individual independence makes us free from blind dogmatism.

9.

Spinoza’s religion, based on science and philosophy, is for those who are striving to find ethical salvation—something which is difficult and rare, because it cannot be attained merely by the use of tradition and superstition, but only by the use of our thinking faculties. “If the way,” says Spinoza, “which I have pointed out as leading to this result seems exceedingly hard, it may nevertheless be discovered. Needs must it be hard, since it is so seldom found. How would it be possible, if salvation were ready to our hand, and could without great labor be found, that it should be by almost all men neglected? But all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.” (V.42 Note).

In the Appendix to the first book of his Ethics, Spinoza tells us that truth might have lain hidden from the human race through all eternity had not mathematics, (which deals
not with final causes, but with essences and properties of things,) offered to men another standard of truth.

Spinoza explains that those who are ignorant of true causes confuse the nature of things. Such people imagine that trees might talk as well as men, that men might be formed from stones, that, in fact, any given form may be changed miraculously, into another form. In a similar manner do those who confuse the human nature with the divine, readily attribute man's passions to the nature of God, particularly when they are in total ignorance as to how passions and confusions originate in the mind. But if human beings could think with an open mind and be free from prejudices and confused ideas, they would never doubt the truth that existence belongs to the very nature of substance. In fact, this truth would become a universal axiom in the minds of all. Men cannot demonstrate the existence of God with words and images, but only with true ideas and ethical deeds in their everyday life. Spinozaism is the religion based on conscious understanding of the fact that man is not only a physical but also a thinking being. True thinking makes us more religious. True thinking is a causal reasoning (ratio sive causa) which enables us to see effects intuitively. Therefore, in order to be truly religious, we must first of all be able to understand the essence of God.

There are religions based on words and images, but there is also a true religion of life based on intuitive or ethical will. Spinoza warns his readers to distinguish carefully between an idea, or a conception of the mind, and images of things. For the ethical striver who is seeking to improve his understanding, it is also necessary to distinguish ideas from mere words, whereby we indicate things or give them a name. These three: images, words and ideas, are very often confused, or else people do not take sufficient pains to distinguish them one from another, being entirely unaware of the great importance of this doctrine both in philosophical pursuits and in the ordering of social life.

Spinoza approaches the religious problem in a truly scientific spirit. He is not a believer in tradition but a builder upon the understanding of the intuitive nature of man. Therefore, he is to be considered as an intuitionist, not as a rationalist. We read in the fifth book of the Ethics, "The highest endeavor of the mind, and the highest virtue is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge (intuition)." . . . "In proportion as the mind is more capable of understanding things by the third kind of knowledge, it desires more to understand things by that kind." (V.25, 26).

Spinoza's system is neither a metaphysical philosophy nor a moral doctrine; his teaching is the religion of perfection. Spinoza says: "Reality and perfection (realitas et perfectio) I understand to be one and the same thing." (II.Def. 6). Spinoza agrees with Christ's saying: "Be ye perfect therefore as your Father in heaven is perfect." However, this kind of perfection can be reached only by those who desire to improve their minds in order to understand the essence of God and human nature and who seek perfection not only for themselves but also for others. Self-perfection as group-perfection is the Spinozaistic goal in life. The term "perfec-
tion” has no other meaning in Spinoza’s teaching. To be more perfect simply means to be more real. “In proportion as each thing,” says Spinoza, “possesses more of perfection, so it is more active and less passive; and vice versa, in proportion as it is more active, so is it more perfect.” (V.40).

12.

Novalis, the great German Romanticist, called Spinoza “The God-intoxicated man.” “A God-intoxicated man” is one who calls out God from within himself.

During what we may call the “Adam and Eve” period of humanity, God, the Eternal Reality, called to man and asked him: “Where art thou?” The answer was: “I hid myself.” But in our days it is the man who asks: “God, where art Thou?” for it is now God who seems to be hiding. Spinoza lived to answer this question in our hearts. And he discovered that:

God is the indwelling and not a transient cause of all things. whatsoever is, is in God and without God, nothing can be, or be conceived. Every idea of a particular thing actually existing, necessarily involves the eternal and infinite essence of God. The highest good that man can attain is the knowledge of God. Man’s happiness and freedom depend entirely upon his eternal love towards God. Such love is true peace and acquiescence of spirit, which is in no way different from blessedness.

13.

Spinoza teaches that the cosmic mind underlies all our thoughts. We read in the Ethics: “It is plain that the mind, in so far as it understands, is an eternal mode of thinking, which is determined by another eternal mode of thinking, and this other by a third, and so on to infinity; so that all taken together at once constitute the eternal and infinite intellect of God.” (V.40 Note).

But let us not forget that Spinoza also says that if we are to affirm that intellect and will are related to the eternal essence of God, we must interpret these terms in a manner different from the usual interpretation. Intellect and will, in true nature or essence of God, are necessarily far different from the ordinary human intellect and will. In fact, they are so opposed to one another that no resemblance whatsoever exists between them. Confusion of the one with another arises only through a superficial similarity; as a dog, an animal that barks, may be mistaken for the Dog, the constellation, when we regard the words alone and not the true nature of what the words represent.

In order to understand this clearly, it is necessary to go beyond mechanical interpretation of things. It is necessary to have the intuitive affirmation of the essence of things. “The more we understand particular things, the more do we understand God.” (V.24).

14.

Spinoza was interested in science only in so far as it can serve as a means to improve human understanding, and help create better mutual relationships among men. What is the value of science for human existence? We read Spinoza’s answer in the Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding: “I wish to direct all sciences to one end and aim, so that we may attain to the supreme human perfection which
we have named; and therefore, whatsoever in the sciences does not serve to promote our object will have to be rejected as useless. To sum up the matter in a word, all our actions and thoughts must be directed to this one end.” Spinoza’s conception of life is a scientifico-religious one; scientific, because it is based on intellectual understanding, and religious, because it includes the love of God—God considered as a Being consisting of infinite attributes of which we can understand only two: Thought and Extension.

It is not necessary to know all the attributes in order to attain to the joy aroused by knowledge of the union which the mind has with the whole of nature. Once we begin to think truly, the ethical will within us begins to function and to tend towards perfection. Only by means of true thinking manifested in the willingness to understand ourselves and our emotions, can we understand the essence of God. Spinoza says, “He who clearly and distinctly understands himself and his emotions feels joy and this joy is accompanied by the idea of God; therefore such an one loves God, and so much the more in proportion as he understands himself and his emotions more.” (V.15 Proof).

The foundation of Spinoza’s religion is the understanding of the idea of God and his attributes. Science, on the other hand, deals with different modifications of God rather than with the attributes. However, were science coordinated with true religion, it would be of greater value to man in his endeavor to realize higher culture. In order to establish religious truth with a certainty approaching that of science, we must not understand the significance of religion as sect-religion or as church religion; we must take it as life-religion! Those who understand religion in this way, that is, intuitively and practically, know that it begins with realization of the Idea of God within. “On this idea alone,” says Spinoza, “it depends that man should be free and that he should desire for other men the good which he desires for himself.”

Spinozism teaches that without the desire to improve our understanding of the essence of God (attributes) and the essence of human nature (spirit) there can be no true religion among men. Spinoza’s religion, evidently, has the attribute of Thought for its foundation. Accordingly, man must think in order to be religious. Thus religion, which to most people seems to be something beyond understanding, becomes under Spinoza’s guidance a thing as natural as science.

15.

The religion of Spinoza is not a melancholy one. There is no natural or ethical law which forbids man to enjoy himself. In fact, no intelligent man will ever believe that it is more lawful to appease his hunger and thirst than to disperse the state of gloom into which he may have fallen. No moral being finds joy and delight in the weakness and misfortunes that befall him. Nor will he ever attribute such infirmities as sobs, fears, and other symptoms of gloom, to virtue or strength of character. On the contrary, the more joyfully a man can respond to the events that occur in his life, the more perfect does he become. It is in states of true joyfulness that we partake more fully of the divine nature. In view of this, it is evident that a man striving for perfection of character will endeavor to utilize and understand all things with which he comes into contact and to enjoy them as much as is possible, without such excesses as bring pain and regret rather
than lasting joy. It is also an essential part of man’s moral life to have proper recreation and to enjoy pleasant food and drink. It is part of such a man’s life to keep his dress neat and pleasing in its general appearance. He may also enjoy the delicate beauty of growing plants and flowers. He may gratify his taste in music, sports, theater and other amusements which incur no injury to others.

These diverse activities are essential, since the body of the individual is composed of many different parts, each having its own nature, each being in continual need of nourishment and growth, so that the body as a whole may be fit to carry out all its functions and activities in harmony with its own nature. A well-balanced, active body will also assist the mind to understand many diverse things simultaneously. Such a mode of life is entirely in harmony with ethical principles, and as it could hardly be refuted or replaced by another plan, we may regard this manner of living as the best.

16.

The religious instinct is found in every human being, but it is best developed in those who have realized within themselves that the conscious love of God is the highest expression of the desire for self-preservation. Everybody, without exception, is in contact with the infinite reality. But the question is, whether this contact is a conscious one or not.

Why is it that the infinite is known to some and unknown to others? Because only those who are courageous enough to free themselves from traditions, superstitions, and prejudices can consciously become aware of it. The sooner, therefore, one frees oneself from these obstacles, the better one realizes that the “unknown,” or the highest good, is not the unknowable.

Spinoza says that the highest good of those who live in accordance with the principles of ethics is common to all, and therefore, all can equally rejoice therein. He anticipates the question, what would happen if the highest good of those who strive for the ethical life were not within the scope of all men? Were this true, it would necessarily follow that those men who live according to laws and principles set down by ethical reason, that is, those who agree in nature, would be opposed to one another—(which is an obvious contradiction). To such a question, Spinoza answers that it is not by mere accident that man’s highest good is common to all, but this truth follows from the very nature of reason. The highest good is not something apart from the nature of man, but it is deduced from his very essence, inasmuch as it is in accordance with reason. A human being could neither exist nor even be conceived without having the potentiality or the power of enjoying this highest form of human happiness. It is in the very nature of the human mind itself to have an idea of the eternal and infinite essence of God. There is, in short, but one substance or nature, and to be at one with nature is the highest goal for man.

17.

The goal of true religion is to liberate man. As regards religion, Spinoza has shown that God’s essence or the idea of God is man’s power and, therefore, his virtue. Man, as a religious being, has infinite power. If he uses it ethically this infinite power can help him overcome finite limitations
of his emotional and mental nature. Indeed, the key to man's true salvation lies in this ethical strength to overcome bondage.

But cannot man's salvation become a reality from the scientific point of view as well as from the religious? It can. Science deals with material nature; religion, with God. The result of scientifisco-technical undertakings can help us live in comfort, while true religion can help us realize perfection in our daily life.

Moreover, a balance between external and internal perfection leads towards enlargement of our life consciousness. We need, therefore, both scientific and religious improvement. Science without religion tends to destroy life; religion without science tends to confuse the human mind. How, then, can we face the great ethical test of life? Only in coordination of our religious and scientific undertakings. Such coordination of our religious and scientific tendencies will alone bring true culture. A new era of freedom and friendship in human society will begin with the harmonization of science and religion.

18.

Is man only a mixture of imagination and confused reason? No!—Man is more than that. He is a modification of the first cause. And since he is a modification of it, man can change and learn to think clearly. Thus, he can begin to live an ethical life. Being a modification of the first cause (God or nature), man can become a primary cause, and, as a primary cause, he can attain the stage of self-knowledge, thus changing both himself and his surroundings. This self-knowledge is the key to the realm of eternal blessedness.

It is true that man finds himself in a world of causal necessity. But according to Spinoza, man in his essence is not a machine but a free being. In other words, man can overcome the mechanical necessities of his emotional, physical and mental nature and Spinoza shows him how. According to Spinoza, the thinking mind can do so by understanding and by overcoming the passive emotions. Ethical determinism is not fatalism. Spinoza says: "In proportion as the mind understands more things by the second and third kind of knowledge, it is less subject to those emotions which are evil, and stands in less fear of death." (V. 58).

Man, therefore, can become more conscious of his mental activities because he possesses intelligence. Man can make use of the powers which science and religion reveal to him. Thus, he not only can devise and use mechanical instruments, but he can also practice thought-discipline and self-control. In this manner not only can man conceive of ethical rules of life and apply them to his everyday needs, but he can also rid himself of bondage and thus enjoy freedom.

What, let us ask, is the significance of science and religion for individual life, and for humanity as a whole? Science explains interrelations of objects in nature and the laws working in them, whereas religion explains the relationship of man to God and also of man to man. There is no conflict between science and religion if thinking be recognized as the basis of our life. Science treats of the world of external experiences and things. Religion treats of the conscious internal activities of man—experiences related both to the idea of God and the idea of man. Religion, then, by the use of scientific methods can lead us towards the understanding of the Being Eternal.
Besides material aspects of the world there are also ethical aspects of it. If we accept and wish to reach individual and social integration as the goal of human life, we must recognize science and religion as the two necessary guiding powers that can bring us to it. Moreover, it is only when we begin to think more scientifically and religiously that we are able to understand individual lives and group life.

Religion alone cannot help us live a true ethical life. Spinoza knew it and gave us a religion “ordine geometrica demonstrata”—proved in a geometrical manner. Spinoza also knew that we cannot have a true religion for our everyday life without understanding the nature and force of emotions. Accordingly, he set down the rules of their restraint. Spinoza realized that to those who have been in the habit of ridiculing and deriding human passions rather than attempting to understand them, it would seem strange indeed to treat of human vices and shortcomings after the fashion of geometrical figures and principles. Such persons would undoubtedly think it unusual to approach with accurate and unprejudiced reasoning those things which they regard as entirely opposed to the nature of reason, as ridiculous, monstrous and vain. Nevertheless, it is in this manner that Spinoza explains the nature of human emotions. Nothing takes place in nature, which can be termed defective or imperfect, for the laws of nature are similar everywhere, and the processes by which things are changed from one form to another function in the same manner everywhere and at all times. An ethical thinker tries to find a definite method which may be used to understand the nature of all things. In other words, he endeavors to perceive and comprehend the universal laws through which nature expresses itself, or, as we may say, in accordance with which it acts. Emotions, such as hatred, envy, fear, etc., which we are accustomed to call evil, are, when regarded in themselves, mere effects following from the necessity of laws of nature. These so-called evil emotions have certain definite causes through which they operate. Therefore, Spinoza’s approach to the study of human emotions, their strength, and the mind’s power of checking them is the same as his approach to the nature of God and the mind. Spinoza treats human passions in an objective manner as if he were dealing with lines, planes and bodies.

Just as technique is connected with science, so is ethics connected with religion. Technical facts have scientific foundation, and ethical realities have religious depth and meaning. We know that besides theoretical scientists, there are also practical scientists. Why then should we have only theoretical religionists? Why should we not also have practical religionists—biosophers?

Spinoza’s philosophy is an ethico-religious doctrine of universal importance. It teaches us to change ourselves so as to become living examples of ethical life. Spinoza, furthermore, wants this change to be effected on the basis of the improvement of our ethical consciousness in order to recreate our inner life. His doctrine seeks to encourage men to live according to the precepts of intelligence. His teaching is
built on the understanding and affirmation of the true idea of God within ourselves. To have religion, according to Spinoza, means to have so adequate a conception of the divine reality as to be able to practice the idea of ethical relationship among human beings. We see that science and religion are far from being in conflict with one another, provided they are used as means toward the highest goal in life.

21.

Spinoza’s aim was not to prove God’s existence; rather did he show by geometrical deductions what must follow for those who intuitively regard the existence of God as an axiom. True religion, he proved, cannot exist without such recognition. Furthermore, religion can be true only when it is in harmony with science, and religion can be in harmony with science only when it is not based on inadequate conceptions.

If religion and science are not to become dogmatic, they must function in harmony with the inner and outer nature of man. Moreover, not until science and religion will have a more intimate bearing upon the problems of everyday life will the idea of human progress take on a new aspect. The transition from the realm of imagination to the realm of understanding, or from the level of imperfection to the level of perfection will then become an actuality and Spinoza’s teaching will be recognized in all its significance.

22.

Spinoza’s religion is based upon a thinking God. “Thought is an attribute of God, or God is a thinking thing,” is Spi-

noza’s premise. Therefore, the majority of people cannot as yet understand his conception of God or religion. Spinoza himself knew this, and therefore he says in the Ethics that people usually associate the power of God with the idea of free will of God and his dominance over all things. As a result, they look upon the existence of things and the course of events as accidental. It is a common belief that God is a being possessing the power of destroying all things and of reducing life to nothing. The power of God is often interpreted after the fashion of royal power. It becomes clear that the power which people usually imagine God to possess is not only entirely similar in its nature to the ordinary power of man (as when, for example, God is pictured as a man of magnified proportions), but such imagination also implies denial of God’s ability and strength. To reflect again and again upon the nature of these misconceptions enables men to become active in an entirely new way, and to rise above the superstitions and misconceptions they usually have about each other and about the universe. Thought discipline can make them realize ethical freedom.

23.

Spinoza’s religion does not postulate a personal God, nor does it preach reward for virtue. On the contrary, the last proposition in the Ethics states: “Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself; neither do we rejoice therein, because we control our lusts, but contrariwise, because we rejoice therein, we are able to control our lusts.” And Spinoza further teaches that self-education and self-responsibility, based on the understanding of the essence of
God is the best way of attaining ethical freedom. Traditional beliefs entertained by the multitude of people are quite different. Each one imagines that he is a free man, when he feels himself unfettered and able to follow his inclinations and his lusts. Such a man naturally considers himself enslaved, when forced to obey the decrees of divine law, and he regards religion, virtue, piety and everything that signifies strength of mind as a troublesome burden which, upon his passing from this earthly life, he hopes to leave behind and receive a reward for the period of slavery through which he has just passed, and especially for his religion and virtue. This hope for heavenly rewards and the corresponding fear of dreadful punishment after death is the chief inducement by which men are persuaded to live according to the divine law, as far as their infirmity will permit.

Man is either enslaved or free. But he can attain true freedom of spirit because in his true being there is essence or thought. And by using his true mind man can become ethically active and so become more perfect.

All traditional religions have been and still are ritualistic and based on superstitious worship and creeds. But how can such a religion lead to the true understanding and the practical realization of an ethico-social life? Spinoza answers this question by explaining that he was often perplexed as to why men dispute about religious problems with such hatred and intolerance towards each other. If the religion of a man had to be inferred from his actions, rather than from his professed beliefs, it would be quite impossible to guess to which creed or religious denomination most people belong. The Christian, the Jew, the Heathen, the Mussulman, would be unrecognizable were it not for such external traits as dress, affiliation with particular places of worship, or verbal allegiance to this or that opinion. Although each swears his allegiance to one or the other of the masters, from the point of view of life and conversation, it is the same with all of them.

Spinoza’s religion, however, is not based on a blind emotional appeal. Its foundation lies in thinking and living. His religion is the religion of life, not of death. To quote his own words, “A free man thinks of death least of all things, and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life.” And indeed what else can the fundamental reality of religion be if not life? How can ceremonial rites make human beings free? Would it not rather be the practice of sacrifice in our everyday life that could bring us true salvation? What we need to-day is more heart and mind service, expressed in the form of ethical activity. It is only such activity that is at the essence of true religion. Only such activity can help us be delivered from all evils which is not a theological deliverance but a practical one.

Spinoza was convinced that the intuitive understanding of God gives a sufficient proof of his existence. His religion is not that of blind faith, and it maintains the existence of God who is an immanent and immutable cause of all things rather than an omnipotent judge.

Spinoza was called an atheist because he did not believe
in a finite God. Should he then have continued to travel on the road laden with superstitions and traditions after he had discovered God as a being possessing infinite attributes? His new conception of God not only gave him more comfort but also more freedom and understanding. And is it not more important to attain to the intuitive understanding of truth than to continue blindly under the guidance of misconceptions and confusions? Spinoza knew that, as confused thoughts get possession of man’s mind, he immediately stops thinking of his essential self and becomes enslaved. The problem is to choose between confused imagination and pure thinking, and we know that Spinoza chose the latter.

26.

The main endeavor for thinking man is to seek the truth and to improve his understanding of life. The fact that neither science nor religion has yet fully succeeded in explaining everything does not necessarily hamper him in his search. Spinoza knew, for instance, that he could understand only two of the infinite attributes of God. In a letter to Boxel he wrote: “I do not say that I know God entirely but only that I understand some of his attributes, though not all, not even the greater part of them, and it is certain that our ignorance of the majority of them does not hinder our having a knowledge of some of them. When I learned Euclid’s elements, I first understood that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, and I clearly perceived this property of a triangle although I was ignorant of many others.”

Spinoza admitted that human power is very limited, in fact, is far inferior to the power of external causes. Nevertheless, he advised us to bear with equanimity those things which are contrary to that which consideration of our own improvement demands, especially if we are conscious that we have performed our duty and that the power we have could not have reached so far as to enable us to avoid those things. We are parts of the whole of nature, whose order we cannot help but follow.

27.

Spinozaism is a dynamic religion, based on thorough scientific principles. It is a dynamic religion as opposed to ordinary religions in that its motivating force is the idea of eternity. Spinoza’s religion teaches us how to live an ethical life here on earth. His doctrine helps us to understand that the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body. Although there is suffering, yet the understanding of his philosophy of joy can help us to transform our life into an ethical heaven on earth. He says: “Superstition seems to affirm that which brings sorrow as good and, on the contrary, that which brings joy as evil. But no one excepting an envious man is delighted at my impotence or disadvantage, for the greater the joy with which we are affected, the greater the perfection to which we pass, and consequently the more do we participate in the divine nature.” (IV.App. 31).

Moreover, since joy consists in passage from a state of lesser perfection to one of greater perfection, Spinoza counsels us always to strive and act with joy. We read in the famous note to the tenth proposition in the fifth book of the Ethics: “It is to be observed, that in the ordering of our thoughts and images we must always look to those qualities...”
which in each thing are good, so that we may always be
determined to action by an emotion of joy.”

Acting with joy helps us to see that freedom or blessedness
lies in virtue, and that virtue is the power of self-control.
Spinoza teaches thought-discipline as a means of detaching
emotions from their external causes and as a means of disci­
plining and understanding them. Under the guidance of
ethical reason, man realizes that the love of God is a uni­
versal emotion, and therefore the most constant emotion of
all. This love makes man conscious not only of himself but
also of God and of the world. This threefold consciousness is
as it were Spinoza’s ethical trinity. To repeat, it is ethical
mind-consciousness, God-consciousness, and group-conscious­
ness; and love is the secret of their unity.

For Spinoza, the love of God was a certainty. However, in
speaking of this love of God, it is necessary to remember
that Spinoza’s conception of God is not an anthropomorphic
one. With this thought in mind we can then better under­
stand the relation between religion and science. Science, we
see, is not a menace to true religion because it is interested
in the study of the order and connection of things in the
universe, whereas religion is interested in the order and re­
lationship of human beings. But if religion will continue to
be the result of theological speculations about a personal
God, then science, the fundamental tenet of which demands
investigation before affirmation, must necessarily continue to
be antagonistic to theology.

28.

Spinozaism has its origin in two fundamental conceptions;
in the idea of God and in the idea of eternity. And unless
these concepts of divinity and eternity be made clear in our
minds, religion cannot have a practical effect on our every­
day life. The trouble with ordinary religions is that they are
based on belief in a God who is the product of imagination
and superstitions arising in human desire for future life.
This so-called future life, however, is not an eternal life. It
differs from it as darkness differs from light. We must not
confuse the eternity of mind with duration, nor attribute eter­
nity to imagination or memory, and thus believe that this
part of our mind persists after death. It is not the belief
in the so-called immortality of man but only the certainty of
man’s eternal essence that can make us truly religious and
can give us the sense of oneness with God or nature.

29.

If ethical realism is based on thought and action, then
Spinoza was one of the most realistic of thinkers. “We act,”
says Spinoza, “when anything is done either within us or
without us, of which we are the adequate cause, that is to
say, when from our nature anything follows, either within us
or without us, which by that nature alone can be clearly and
distinctly understood. On the other hand, I say that we suffer
when anything is done within us, or when anything follows
from our nature, of which we are not the cause excepting
partially.” (III.Def. 2). Thus when we know the adequate
cause of any of the emotions, then those emotions become
actions and not passions. Only such activity, therefore, as is
based on real thinking can make us more perfect and can
cause us to suffer less.

Contemplation of the divine accompanied by the under-
standing and affirmation of the essence of the body can bring us deliverance from passions and confusions. To comprehend the essence of our body means to understand the attribute of Extension, and to comprehend that means to feel in our bodies, and to acknowledge in our minds, the idea of God as the eternal good. In true religion, therefore, we have no need of physical symbols to realize the idea of eternity, but we do have need of purification of our senses. An ethical man in purifying himself is active on the basis of real thinking. “The mind no less feels those things which it conceives in understanding than those which it has in memory.” The interest in the vital essence of truth or the idea of God cannot operate in our minds unless we improve our understanding of ourselves, and unless we realize that the possession of a true idea involves certainty. Superstitious belief and ethical certainty are two different things.

That which really constitutes the essence of Spinozaism has as yet been overlooked. It exists in the idea of the union which the mind has with the whole of nature. As soon, therefore, as we understand the ethico-philosophical significance of his teaching, we realize that Spinozaism is a religion of joy and power not of weakness and fear. It is not the fear of a supreme being, but the love of God that is the highest goal of a thinking mind. A religion based on fear suppresses the essence of man. We read in the Ethics: “The superstitious who know better how to reprobate vice than to teach virtue, and who do not endeavor to lead men by reason, but so to inspire them with fear that they avoid evil rather than love virtue, have no other intention than to make the rest as miserable as themselves; and therefore it is not to be wondered at that for the most part they are a nuisance and hateful to men.” There cannot, therefore, be a new society without individuals who are ethically transformed and who aspire towards perfection.

Experience had taught Spinoza not only that ordinary things in life are vain and futile, but it had shown him that there is futile knowledge also. And as futile knowledge and futile things rule human beings, it is indeed in the interests of science to afford us a non-futile knowledge. However, science alone cannot help us free ourselves from futile things. Only the true spirit of scientific cooperation with the true spirit of religion will lead human beings to freedom and to a new consciousness. And this new consciousness will in turn convince us that it is vitally important to love the spirit of science and religion.

Were it not for science, which has been and is steadily gaining ground in the world, it would never be possible to advance to truth. “It would have been sufficient,” teaches Spinoza, “to keep the human race in darkness to all eternity, if mathematics, which does not deal with ends, but with the essences and properties of forms, had not placed before us another rule of truth.” There is a fundamental difference between the empirical conception of science and the mathematical one. The empirical scientist applies the inductive method based on vague experience and generalities, and his conclusions are mere approximations; whereas the mathematical scientist uses, as the foundation of his research, axioms and definitions which have an intuitive and rational value. The intuitive scientific basis of knowledge leads us,
therefore, towards a different kind of realization in the realm of facts. And just as the rational deductions of science are in harmony with principles of our fundamental nature, so do the adequate realizations of religious consciousness follow from the same cause within ourselves. Science and religion can be brought under the same common denominator.

Only the scientific way of thinking can help us understand the underlying wisdom of religion. Why are the so-called religious people unable to live up to their principles? It is evident that they cannot, because their minds are clouded by theological prejudices. Man cannot free himself from his selfish state unless he makes adequate use of his higher understanding. Man can drive out the devil, figuratively speaking, in no matter what form he may appear, only by replacing inadequate notions of his mind with adequate ideas. Men are often deceived in thinking themselves free. The cause for this false opinion lies in the fact that men are aware only of their actions while they are entirely unaware of the particular causes which determine them to do things or to desire things. Their idea of freedom seems to depend on ignorance of the cause of their actions. The assumption that human actions are dependent upon will, is false. No one has yet given us any definite information as to the nature of will and how it moves or affects the body in any way. There are those who boast of such knowledge. Such people, however, arouse either laughter or disgust. As soon as we adequately understand Spinoza's definition of the will, we no longer fall into the error of supposing that the will, as usually conceived, can influence the body and determine it to act, as so many moral philosophers and religionists have maintained. If there is a determinism in Spinoza's teaching, it is the determinism which helps us to understand the nature of will. As will, according to Spinoza, is a certain mode of thinking, and as its fundamental nature involves both affirmation and negation in contradistinction to desire, it follows that our volitions can be determined only by other ideas. And as the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things, it follows that man's power of thinking is equal to his capacity to act. It is therefore possible for the will to affirm or deny other ideas. And as Spinoza teaches that "As thoughts and the ideas of things are arranged and connected in the mind, exactly so are the emotions of the body or the images of things arranged in the body," it follows that the thinking man is able to arrange modifications of his body according to the intellectual order of his mind, and to be assailed less and less by the emotions which are contrary to his true nature. Spinoza writes: "Through this power of properly arranging and connecting the emotions of the body we can prevent ourselves from being easily affected by evil emotions. For a greater power is required to restrain emotions which are arranged and connected according to the order of the intellect than is required to restrain those which are uncertain and unsettled." (V.10 Note).

The will, being but a mode of thinking, may therefore be of an adequate or inadequate nature. As soon as we realize the connection of adequate ideas in our mind, we feel and know that this mental order brings us a joyful realization, and this joy becomes the motivating factor in human life. The more active we are in this respect, the more we free ourselves. Freedom is therefore implied in Spinoza's doctrine of the will; in fact, it is the key to the understanding of his ethical determinism as opposed to fatalism. Spinoza's teach-
ing is not a moral philosophy of precepts, but is a cosmic truth based on the doctrine of the attributes of God. It therefore embraces not only the idea of man and society, but also the truth of reality as the basis of creative life. Spinozism is an endeavor to free humanity from anthropomorphic conceptions in order that the human mind may begin to function ethically and that it may rid itself of the confusions concerning ourselves, society, the universe, and God.

31.

Spinoza’s religion is fundamentally the religion of Laotze, Buddha, and Jesus. It teaches us to improve the understanding of our deeper nature. It further advocates that it is unnecessary to believe in a theological heaven, since it is possible to find within man that reality which is of an eternal nature. Spinoza does not teach us to think of death but rather how to live ethically and how to make life more perfect on earth. “A free man,” says Spinoza, “lives according to the dictates of reason alone, and is not led by the fear of death but directly desires what is good, that is, to act, to live, and preserve his being on the basis of seeking what is truly useful to him. And therefore, he thinks of nothing less than of death, but his wisdom is a meditation of life.” (IV.67 Dem.)

This kind of religion is safe because science can serve as its ally. Science, according to Spinoza, far from being opposed to religion, is in consonance with it. Only that religion which is not based on intelligence as an immanent principle will oppose scientific research and results. The world needs intelligent religious minds. Nothing else can deliver us from evil. And it is this desire to be religious according to the understanding of the Idea of God alone that will enable us adequately to identify the differences in the world and to practice the true religion of unity.

32.

Spinoza’s goal was the re-creation of the consciousness of eternal youthfulness within man. “If once our knowledge and love come to embrace that without which we can neither be, nor be understood, and which is in no way corporeal,” Spinoza says in the treatise on God, Man and his Well-Being, “how incomparably greater and more glorious will and must be the kind of effects resulting from this union; for these must necessarily be commensurate with the thing with which it is united. And when we become aware of these excellent effects, then we may say with truth that we have been born again. For our first birth took place when we were united with the body; but this, our other or second birth, will take place when we become aware in us of entirely different effects of love, commensurate with the knowledge of this incorporeal object, and as different from the first as the corporeal is different from the incorporeal, spirit from flesh. And this may therefore, all the more justly and truly be called Regeneration, inasmuch as only from this love and union does eternal and unchangeable existence ensue.”

We have already achieved a state of advanced civilization but not yet one of real culture. The reason is that the conception of religion has not kept pace with civilization. Spinoza’s idea of God and man told him that we are capable both of understanding the highest goal and of reaching it.
In order to reach the goal of true religion, we must enter upon the path of thought-discipline or virtue. "By virtue and power," Spinoza says, "I understand the same thing, that is, virtue in so far as it has reference to man, is his essence or nature, in so far as he has the power of effecting something which can only be understood by the laws of that nature." (III.Def. 8). True virtue and mental weakness are two different things. In order to tread the Spinozaistic path of virtue, we need special guidance of unselfish reason. Such guidance would enable us to distinguish between those things that possess true advantages, and those that carry with them only temporary advantages. Spinoza says in the Ethics that under the guidance of reason we seek the greater of goods and the lesser of evils. In accordance with reason, we desire a greater good in the future more than a lesser good which can be enjoyed in the present, and we also prefer a lesser evil in the present to a greater one in the future. Spinoza also points out that the man who is guided by ethical reason is not held in bondage by fear. In so far as he attempts to preserve his true being according to the dictates of reason, that is, in so far as he endeavors to live as a free man, he desires to order his life in harmony with the divine laws of nature.

But it may now be asked, how can we follow this path of virtue? That can be done only by not mistaking superstition for religion. In the preface to the Theological-Political Treatise, Spinoza speaks of the superstitious and says that in mistake superstition for religion, people account it impious not to avert the evil with prayer and sacrifice. Such signs and wonders they conjure up continually, that one might think that Nature itself were as mad as they are. Superstition's chief victims are those persons who greedily covet transitory and temporal advantages; such persons (especially when they are in a dangerous situation from which they cannot extricate themselves) are wont to implore help from God with prayers and tears, upbraiding Reason as blind, because she cannot point out a sure path to the shadows they pursue. They reject human wisdom as vain and prefer to believe in phantoms of imagination, dreams, and other childish absurdities, as though they were the very oracles of Heaven.

But why is it so difficult for most men to maintain the path of ethical virtue? Most men have no adequate idea of what true virtue is, and therefore they confuse virtue with credulity. It is important to perceive the difference between these two; namely, that true virtue is nothing else than living in accordance with principles of true reason; and credulity consists in this alone, that man allows himself to be led by external things rather than to follow the promptings of his own true being.

There have always been and there always will be religions based on theology. But can there not also be a religion based on biosophy? The biosophical religion differs fundamentally from all theological creeds. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," we read in the Bible.
The Way

What is the biosophical way? According to Spinoza, it is the way in which our understanding is directed towards true knowledge of God, of ourselves and of things.

"The highest good of the mind is the knowledge of God, and the highest virtue of the mind is to know God." (IV.28).

"He who understands himself and his emotions loves God, and the more so, the more he understands himself and his emotions." (V.15).

"The more we understand particular things, the more we understand God." (V.24).

"If the way which, as I have shown, leads hither seems very difficult, it can nevertheless be found. It must indeed be difficult since it is so seldom discovered; for if salvation lay ready to hand and could be discovered without great labor, how could it be possible that it should be neglected by almost everybody? But all excellent things are as difficult as they are rare." (V.42 Note).

The Truth

"He who has a true idea, knows at that same time that he has a true idea, nor can he doubt concerning the truth of the thing." (II.43).

"You ask me," Spinoza writes in a letter to Burgh, "how I know that my philosophy is the best among all those which have ever been taught in the world, or are taught now, or will be taught in the future? This, indeed, I can ask you with far better right. For I do not presume that I have found the best philosophy, but I know that I think the true one. If you ask me how I know this, I shall answer, in the same way that you know that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. That this is enough no one will deny whose brain is sound, and who does not dream of unclean spirits who inspire us with false ideas which are like true ones; for the truth reveals itself and the false. But you who presume that you have found at last the best religion, or rather the best men, to whom you have given over your credulity, how do you know that they are the best among all those who have taught other religions or are teaching them now, or will teach them in the future? Have you examined all those religions, both ancient and modern, which are taught here and in India and everywhere throughout the world? And even if you have daily examined them, how do you know that you have chosen the best? For you can give no reason for your faith. But you will say that you assent in the inward testimony of the Spirit of God, while the others are cheated and misled by the Prince of evil Spirits. But all those outside the Roman Church make the same claims with the same right for their churches as you do for yours."

"Truth might have lain hidden from the human race through all eternity, had not mathematics, which deals not in the final causes, but the essence and properties of things, offered to men another standard of Truth." (I. Appendix).

The Life

"A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is not a meditation upon death but upon life." (IV.67).

"Although each individual lives content and rejoices in
the nature he has, yet the life with which each is content and rejoices is nothing else than the idea or soul of that individual; and therefore, the joy of one differs only in nature from the joy of another in so far as the essence of one differs from the essence of another.” (III.57 Note).

35.

Spinoza was both a seeker and a thinker. He explains the object of his search in the Improvement of the Understanding: “I finally resolved to inquire whether there might be some real good having the power to communicate itself, which would affect the mind singly, to the exclusion of all else; whether, in fact, there might be anything of which the discovery and attainment would enable me to enjoy continuous, supreme, and unending happiness.” Spinoza realized that the love towards a thing which is eternal and infinite in its nature feeds the mind wholly with joy and is unmingled with any trace of sadness. Therefore, such love is to be greatly desired and sought for. It was Spinoza’s conviction that man, with his true thinking capacity, could understand the essence of God.

36.

We read in the Theologico-Political Treatise, “We may be able quite to comprehend that God can communicate immediately with man for without the intervention of bodily means He communicates to our minds his Essence; still, a man who can by pure intuition comprehend ideas which are neither contained in nor deducible from the foundations of our natural knowledge, must necessarily possess a mind far superior to those of his fellow-men, nor do I believe that any have been so endowed save Christ. To him the ordinances of God leading men to salvation were revealed directly without words or visions, so that God manifested Himself to the Apostles through the mind of Christ as He formerly did to Moses through the supernatural voice. In this sense the voice of Christ, like the voice which Moses heard, may be called the voice of God, and it may be said that the wisdom of God took upon itself human form in Christ, and that Christ was the way of salvation. I must at this juncture declare that those doctrines which certain churches put forward concerning Christ, I neither affirm nor deny, for I really confess that I do not understand them. What I have just stated I gather from Scripture, where I never read that God appeared to Christ, or spoke to Christ, but God was revealed to the Apostles through Christ; that Christ was the Way of Life, and that the old law was given through an angel and not immediately by God; whence it follows that if Moses spoke with God face to face as man speaks with his friend (i.e. by means of their two bodies) Christ communed with God mind to mind.”

37.

The eternal religion of truth is based on certainty and not on hope. “Hope,” says Spinoza, “is an uncertain pleasure arising from the idea of a thing past or future, the event of which we will doubt to some extent.” (II.Def.12). But in order to understand Spinoza’s teachings from the ethico-religious point of view, it is necessary to know that a true idea in our mind is that which is adequate in the nature of God, in so far as he is explained through the nature of the
human mind. Therefore, he who has a true idea is, accord­
ing to Spinoza, aware at that same time of his having a true
idea; nor can he have any doubts concerning the truth of the
thing in question.

Since doubt originates in imperfect knowledge of a thing,
and is caused in us by the fact that the order and connection
of events is inadequately conceived by us, it follows that our
mind cannot affirm and be certain of the highest good, when
it is influenced only by external causes. Effects which are
produced by external causes, are indebted for whatever per­
fecion or actuality they may possess entirely to the efficacy
of their external cause, and therefore their existence arises
solely from the perfection of their external cause, not from
their own. On the contrary, whatever perfection is attributed
to substance is due to no external cause; wherefore, the exis­
tence of substance is caused by, and arises solely from its
own nature, which is nothing else but its essence. Therefore
we can be certain of the existence of nothing more than of the
existence of a being absolutely infinite or perfect—that is,
of God. For, inasmuch as his very essence excludes all im­
perfection, all cause for doubt concerning God's existence is
unjustified.

Religion, according to Spinoza, has to do with discovery
of God's nature, or, in other words, with the improvement
of our understanding of the highest good. Spinoza points out
in his Theologico-Political Treatise, that since the intellect
is the best part of our nature, it is obvious that we should make
every effort to make it as perfect as possible, if we wish to
search for that which is really beneficial to us. For the highest
good should consist in intellectual perfection. As all of our
knowledge and the certainty which destroys every doubt de­
pend entirely on our awareness of the existence of God; first,
because without God nothing can exist or be conceived; sec­
ondly, because so long as we have no clear and distinct idea
of God, we may remain in universal doubt—it follows that
our highest good and perfection also depend on our knowl­
dge of God.

What an unusual conception of religion this is! Most
people believe that to be truly religious means to implant
superstitions in the minds of themselves and others. Little do
they realize that in so doing they are mentally enslaving
others. The method of these pseudo-religionists is to frighten
the church-goers with threats of great punishments to be in­
flicted upon them unless they live up to the superstitious pre­
cepts of the church. Superstitious people usually believe that
piety and religion are burdens, which they carry, however, in
the hope of receiving some kind of reward.

These so-called religious and pious people are induced to
live according to the dogmas not because of an inner con­
viction, but chiefly because of fear of punishment after death.

How different is the life of a man whose plan of life is
based on intuitive knowledge and on the love of God (amor
dei intellectualis). "As the love of God," says Spinoza in his
Theologico-Political Treatise, "is man's highest happiness
and blessedness, and the ultimate end and aim of all human
actions, it follows that he alone lives by the divine law who
loves God not from fear of punishment, or from love of any
other object, such as sensual pleasure, fame, or the like; but
solely because he has knowledge of God, or is convinced that
the knowledge and love of God is the highest good. The chief
precept of the divine law is to love God as the highest good,
as we have explained, not from fear of punishment or from
the love of any other object in which we desire to take pleas­ure. From the idea of God follows the principle that God is our highest good—in other words, that the knowledge and love of God are the ultimate aim to which all our actions should be directed.”

What then does man need most? Man needs the guidance of his deeper or more spiritual understanding. There is no other foundation for true liberty or for our deliverance from all evil. In fact, Spinoza says that if men were born free, they would be able to form no concepts about good and evil just as long as they were free. In his religion, theological sin does not exist. The Adam and Eve story is given an ethical interpretation. Spinoza perceived the Idea of God, and not the sinfulness of man to be the true foundation of ethical freedom.

Evil, Spinoza tells us, is an inadequate conception. The idea of Truth excludes images of evil. For the thinking mind perceives all such imagination to be as fictitious and inadequate as the ghosts which young children believe they see in dark rooms. For according to Spinoza, one must clearly bear in mind that a thinking man comes to see that all things follow from the necessity of divine nature. Since he knows that whatever is injurious or evil, impious, unjust, or wicked arises from confused or mutilated ideas, he will put forth his best effort to see things as they really are; he will furthermore endeavor to remove such hindrances to true knowledge as hatred, envy, etc. and instead will endeavor to do good and rejoice.

But in order to understand Spinoza’s explanation of good and evil, it is necessary to rise above the anthropomorphic conception of God.

Spinoza was not merely a rationalist or an intellectualist who took these terms in their ordinary sense. His goal was not merely to conceive an abstract idea of unity. He sought a union which should be comprehensible in terms of everyday life. His goal was the intuitive union with totality that he calls God and which brings man into more intimate contact with the reality of his unselfish nature. Now, since all ideas, in so far as they are related to God, are true, man can live and act wisely when he contemplates God through his improved knowledge.

The true way of life must moreover be discovered individually on the basis of pure understanding. “Inasmuch as God revealed Himself to Christ, or to Christ’s mind immediately,” Spinoza says in the Theologico-Political Treatise, “and not as to the prophets, through words and symbols, we must needs suppose that Christ perceived truly what was revealed; in other words, he understood it, for a matter is understood when it is perceived simply in the mind without symbols.” The religion, based on intuitive understanding of one’s own essence, is the religion which gives us a clear idea of ethico-spiritual upliftment in agreement with the principle of self-transcendence and God-immanence. “All things that are,” Spinoza says, “are in God, and through God must be conceived and therefore God is the cause of all things which are in him. Again, beyond God no substance, that is, a thing which outside God is in itself, can be granted. Therefore God is the indwelling and not the transient cause of all things.”
39.

Spinozaism is the religion of intuition. The understanding of this point, however, can be realized only on the basis of Spinoza's doctrine of the will.

Spinoza's doctrine of the will can help man rebuild himself by showing him how to overcome his narrow-mindedness. Growth, then, is possible. Moreover, since ethical will is the expression of the activity of our true or essential nature, the power of this will is unlimited. Being guided thus by intuitive consciousness, or will, man finally discovers himself to be a religious being. "The essence of man," Spinoza says, "consists of certain modifications of the attributes of God. It is therefore something which is in God, and which without God can neither be, nor be conceived, or an affection or mode which expresses the nature of God in a certain and determinate manner." (II.10 Cor.).

Just as God is the All-Being, so man is a part-being. Every man who exists is necessarily a part of nature; neither can such a man avoid suffering changes which cannot be understood through his nature alone. The strength with which men, as particular things, preserve their being is the power of God or nature, not in so far as God is considered as infinite, but in so far as he can be understood through actual human essence. Therefore, man's power, when it is regarded essentially, is part of the infinite power of God or nature. Were man able to suffer only such changes as arise from his true nature alone, he could never perish, but would live forever. But this supposition is of course absurd. Therefore, if it really could happen that man should suffer no changes save those that can be understood through his nature, and that he should exist forever, this would have to follow from the infinite power of God. As a result of this, it could be deduced that man is infinite, which is obviously absurd. Therefore, it cannot be that a man should suffer no changes except those of which he is the adequate cause.

Man, being under the influence of external causes, is necessarily subject to passions which he can, however, overcome by improving his understanding of God. Spinoza explains that the mind has the power of comprehending that all modifications of the body and all images of things have reference to the idea of God. This relationship of man to God can bring to man the highest joy. Spinoza's idea of the love of God can indeed be understood as the ethical law of God-attraction, just as gravity is the law of physical attraction. Our mind, then, is not only an idea of the body, but also an idea of God. Materialism, therefore, becomes true science, and idealism, true religion.

40.

Our ethico-religious consciousness cannot be completely realized without understanding of the nature of our body. Spinoza says, "By body, I understand that mode which expresses in a certain determined manner the essence of God in so far as he is considered as an extended thing." (II.Def. 1). Spinoza further says that inasmuch as human bodies are fit for many things, we cannot doubt the possibility of their possessing such a nature that they may be referred to minds which possess a great knowledge of themselves and of God,
and of which the greatest or principal part is eternal. Therefore, they should not fear death.

It follows that death is the less feared, the more the understanding of our mind is clear and distinct or, as Spinoza says, "the more the mind loves God." The more the mind is capable of understanding things by the second and third kinds of knowledge, the less it suffers from evil emotions, and the less it fears death. Only he who lives according to the guidance of reason, and is not led by fear of death follows directly what is good and lives on the basis of seeking what is useful for the preservation of his higher being.

A free man, in short, acts according to the laws of his own nature or on the basis of virtue. He differs considerably from the superstitious man who knows better how to rail at vice than to teach virtue, and who is not interested in leading man by reason but endeavors to chain him through fear, in order that he may shun evil rather than love virtue. For superstitious men desire that others should be as miserable as themselves.

There are many people who seek to instill the so-called religion into the minds of men, women, and children by teaching the fear of death. Inasmuch as only superstitions are implanted into the minds of these people, it is no small wonder that we have so many mental and emotional slaves. "We shall thus easily see," says Spinoza, "what is the difference between a man who is led by opinion or emotion and one who is led by reason. The former, whether he will or not, performs things of which he is entirely ignorant; the latter is subordinate to no one, and only does those things which he knows to be of primary importance in his life, and which on that account he desires the most; and therefore, I call the former a slave, but the latter free." (IV.66 Note).

As long, therefore, as man remains interested only in the material world and in the hereafter, he will be unable to think or to live religiously. He will be unable to live in harmony with his neighbors and to create true culture. There cannot be true culture without mental freedom and improved understanding. And to improve our understanding Spinozistically means to find the way out of this machine age into the New Era of ethical brotherhood.

41.

Man has already attained to a great understanding of physical nature. He can already associate physical nature with natural laws and with his own natural needs. Man has advanced in the sciences and has reaped much benefit from them. This intellectual process has indeed brought mankind to an advanced state of civilization. Is it not natural then that man's next step should be the improvement of the understanding of his ethical nature? Then, and only then, will he affirm the idea of God or Truth as the source of divine intelligence in man. He will create a New Era, the Era of true or divine culture and friendship. But, unless man learns to discriminate between selfish intellectualism and ethical intelligence, he will not discover that essence of things which alone can lead us to the new state of culture or friendship. In this connection, Spinoza teaches that it is extremely useful in life to perfect our reason as much as we can. In this consists the happiness or blessedness of man: for blessedness is nothing else than satisfaction of mind, which arises from intuitive
knowledge of God. But to perfect the intellect is nothing else than to understand God and his attributes, as well as actions which follow from the necessity of his nature. According to this doctrine, ethical life is based on intelligence, and things are only good in so far as they help man to enjoy ethico-spiritual life. Only those things are evil which prevent a man from perfecting his reason and enjoying life.

To think of the love of God in our higher mind is different from worship in churches and temples. Living by words and images does not imply a life of thought-independence and ethical activities; it is rather a life of superstition and dogma. But in order to attain to such new consciousness of life, we require an elevation of the understanding to a higher degree. A desire for things of the senses becomes then a desire for more universal things and for still higher realities, such as knowledge of the attributes of God. But it is only with the help of intuition that we can realize the new order of ideas and things biosophically, and not merely abstractedly or imaginatively. Only in that way can we realize that God is the ultimate cause of the realities of life.

If religion does not lead man to an intuitive understanding of God and to the essence of things, it is based on falsities. True religion should be the path leading to the understanding of man's union with the whole of nature, just as science leads man to the knowledge of the laws that regulate the universe and things. Those who cannot synthesize religion and science, and who therefore stress the shortcomings of both, have neither a true idea of religion nor of science, but possess only the name or the formal side of either.

According to Spinoza, the problem of existence cannot be solved without the help of religion and science. Existence is not only duration, nor is it a form of quantity; it follows from the eternal necessity of the nature of God. Spinoza often refers to the existence of individual things in so far as they are in God. “I speak of the very nature of existence, which is assigned to individual things by reason of the fact that they follow from the eternal necessity of the nature of God. I speak, I say, of the very existence of individual things in so far as they are in God. For although each one is determined by another individual thing for existence in a certain manner, yet the force wherewith each of them persists in existing follows from the eternal necessity of the nature of God.” (II.45 Note).

There can be, for Spinoza, no quarrel between science and religion. We see then that, with the help of scientifico-religious intuition, that is, with the desire for unity of part and totality, we can solve our problem of existence not only from the economic, but also from the ethical side. It is this unity of reason with intuition that helps us overcome our instinctive nature and to discover in the consciousness of integration the basis of a new kind of social life. Furthermore, the more conscious we are of this unity, the more perfect and real this unity becomes.

Spinoza's realism is an ethico-religious realism. He takes a scientific attitude towards the world and an ethico-religious attitude towards God and man. With these as prerequisites we can control the outer world technically and the inner
world ethically. Thus we can learn to live not only in comfort, but also in peace. Our civilization was made possible through science, and true culture can become an actuality only by means of a dynamic religion.

43.

God is not only an extended, but also a thinking thing. For man, therefore, there exists not only the world of atoms but also the world of thought. Moreover, the law of cause and effect has always been of great importance in the realm of thought. Spinoza tells us that our individual volitions and ideas are one and the same. Thus, as we improve our understanding of the law of cause and effect we can come to an ethical realization of our will power. “Will and intellect are one and the same thing.” (II.49 Cor.).

Spinoza further says: “There is in the mind no volition or affirmation and negation save that which the idea, in so far as it is an idea, involves.” (II.49). He is opposed to free will as a theological dogma. He is not, however, opposed to the fact that we are free to strengthen our will or to improve our understanding of the law of cause and effect. According to him, therefore, man is not guided by fate, but rather, man guides himself either by false or true reasoning. When he guides himself by false reasoning, he cannot be certain of events. As Spinoza says: “A false idea, in so far as it is false, does not involve certainty.” (II.49 Note). Therefore, those who guide themselves in accordance with that form of knowledge become fatalists. Since falsity consists in privation of knowledge, which all mutilated and confused ideas involve, it is necessary for man, in his endeavor to strengthen his will, to understand the nature of the outer influences. He will then shape his destiny in a non-fatalistic way. In other words, he will become more and more conscious of himself as an adequate cause of all his responsibilities.

44.

Spinozaism, in its true essence, is the first creedless religion which teaches man to live by adequate thoughts and actions, rather than by words and images. Its main purpose is to help create ethico-social communities that function without requiring ritual and priesthood, prohibitions and dogmas. As the goal of man’s life is freedom of mind, it is necessary to understand that, as long as we are guided by passions, superstitions, and traditions, we cannot use ethical principles in a right way. We remain weak and enslaved, instead of growing strong. But as soon as we realize possibilities in our nature to improve our understanding, we learn to persist in the search for true freedom. And, since active desires, proceeding from true understanding, are stronger than passive emotions, we learn to control our confused mind. In this manner, we can discover the ethical source of an integrating love (amor dei intellectualis). That part in us which is eternal can lead us out of darkness or selfishness; it can lead us away from stagnation of thought into the realm of enlightened understanding or freedom. But we must first understand that there is a bridge of understanding between darkness and light, or falsity and truth. It is possible for man to discover the causes which determine his inadequate actions, change them, and thus reach a true realization of himself and things. These achievements can make us conscious of our divine
origin. And as the essence of God necessarily involves existence, we can readily see that the living in harmony with the highest does not involve so much after-life as life in the Eternal Now. A free man can live his life of the hereafter in this good-bad world, although “human power is considerably limited and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes.”

According to Spinoza, there is a way for man to pass on to the knowledge of that “which appertains to the duration of the mind without relation to the body.” (V. 20 Note). Moreover, man has the capacity not only to comprehend the union of the mind and body, but also to understand that all things are united through nature. Hence he can see that there is a way towards a higher union of the mind with the whole of nature, or God. “This union is better understood, and one may gather what it must be like . . . if once our knowledge and love come to embrace that without which we can neither be, nor be understood, and which is in no way corporeal; how incomparably greater and more glorious will and must be the kind of effects resulting from this union; for these must necessarily be commensurate with the thing with which it is united. And when we become aware of these excellent effects, then we say with truth, that we have been born again.” (Short Treatise—Chap. 22).

45.

Quasi-religious cults are numerous throughout the world. True religious life, however, does not yet exist, although there are here and there individuals who are more or less pious. The desire of doing well which is born in us because we live according to the guidance of reason, Spinoza calls Piety. True religion at present, exists neither in churches nor in temples, neither in families nor in governments, although the Bible and other holy books can be found everywhere. “Inquiry into the cause of this anomaly leads me unhesitatingly to ascribe it to the fact that the ministries of the Church are regarded by the masses merely as dignities, her offices as posts of emolument—in short, popular religion may be summed up as respect for ecclesiastics. The spread of this misconception inflamed every worthless fellow with an intense desire to enter holy orders, and thus the love of diffusing God’s religion degenerated into sordid avarice and ambition. Every church became a theater where orators, instead of church teachers, harangue, caring not to instruct the people but striving to attract admiration, to bring opponents to scorn, and to preach only novelties and paradoxes, such as would tickle the ears of their congregations. This state of things necessarily stirred up an amount of controversy, envy and hatred, which no lapse of time could appease; so that we can scarcely wonder that of the old religion nothing survives but its outward forms (even these, in the mouth of the multitude, seem rather adulation than adoration of the Deity), and that faith has become a mere compound of credulity and prejudices—aye, prejudices too, which degrade man from rational being to beast, which completely stifle the power of judgment between true and false, which seem, in fact, carefully fostered for the purpose of extinguishing the last spark of reason! Piety, great God! and religion are become a tissue of ridiculous mysteries; men, who flatly despise reason, who reject and turn away from understanding as naturally corrupt, these, I say, these of all men, are thought, (O lie most
horrible!) to possess light from on High. Verily, if they had but one spark of light from on High, they would not insolently rave, but would learn to worship God more wisely, and would be as marked among their fellows for mercy as they now are for malice; if they were concerned for their opponents' souls, instead of for their own reputations, they would no longer fiercely persecute, but rather be filled with pity and compassion.” (Theo. Pol. Treatise).

Spinoza was the first world-teacher to leave a message which cannot be used as the basis for idolatry or superstitious worship. It is clear that Spinoza's teaching is not based on imaginations or traditions, but issues forth an ethico-social message. The way to true liberation, or ethical salvation, differs in no small degree from the theological road. The God of reality is immanent in things and in man. In learning of such a God, we improve our understanding of the nature of the Eternal Being, and enlarge our conception of the divine nature. Religion must be combined with science in order to contribute to the welfare of humanity. This is the reason why the third kind of knowledge (scientia intuitiva) has such a definite meaning in Spinoza's teaching. This intuitive knowledge demands, as its foundation, the unity of science and religion. In order to live in accordance with the essence of religion, we need the science of the knowledge of God, or biosophy. This science will help us create the true religion—the religion of friendship.

We now see that theological religions of salvation cannot serve as true foundations for culture and freedom, because they do not take into consideration the higher mind of man. True culture will not become a reality in human society as long as Spinoza is not recognized as the founder of scientific ethics. There are ethical laws as well as natural laws. We already know what natural laws are, but we are not yet well acquainted with ethical laws.

To understand these laws, and thus to enter upon the Spinozaistic path of religion, we need the special guidance of ethical reason. To live in the service of the greatest idea in man, the Idea of God, means to realize the essence of our mind and to become practical idealists, willing at all times to serve humanity. Spinoza's religion is the religion of true thinking, and therefore the religion of practical idealism. Spinoza challenges men to become ethical pioneers.
Who does not know that man needs a new orientation in connection with his everyday problems? Spinoza's teaching, therefore, is of great importance to all those who are interested in learning to practice ethical self-education. His main question is: Can a man become ethically-minded in a living way, or must he continue to live in a pseudo-philosophical fashion, being interested merely in abstractions and imaginations? Spinoza leads us to understand that, as long as we do not seek, nor create opportunities to develop our ethical qualities, our interest in human nature must of necessity be superficial. He therefore challenges the genuineness of our desire to become pioneers on the path to the ethical goal. Indeed, as we now turn our eyes to present-day civilization, we wonder whether there can be found in human society any groups of men with desire enough and courage enough to undertake their own ethical renovation. There already are groups which are sincerely devoted to the study of political and economic problems of society, groups genuinely struggling for the solution of these problems. But a much deeper interest in human beings is necessary to understand Spinoza's Challenge. However, man is not as yet sufficiently interested in human beings from the ethical point of view.

Men, in refusing to bind themselves together ethically, diminish the strength of their minds, and as their true natures become less active, they become more selfish and more isolated. “There is no single thing in nature which is more profitable to man, than a man who lives according to the guidance of reason,” we read in the Ethics. “For that is most profitable to man which most agrees with his own nature, that is to say, man (as is self-evident). But a man acts absolutely from the laws of his own nature when he lives according to the guidance of reason, and so far only does he always necessarily agree with the nature of another man.” (IV.35 Cor. I). We, as human beings, must often ask ourselves when and how we are going to bring out our true nature or character? The Spinozaistic method is a way towards true character-education. Although it is different from other ways, yet it gives to character its root in the principles of love and unselfishness. Spinozaism teaches us that in order to find the true value of our character, we must first of all learn to change the instinct of self-preservation into the consciousness of ethical group-preservation. Such ethical endeavor would bring about a free society wherein individuals enjoy freedom of thought as thinking beings who understand that “The mind can cause all the emotions of the body or images of things to be related to the Idea of God.” (V.14). True ethical understanding comes as a consequence of the realization of the principle of mutuality. Spinoza’s conviction of this is evident when he explains that the power of an individual object, and consequently, that of man, by which he exists and acts, is determined only by another individual object, whose nature must be understood through the same attribute as that by means of which human nature is conceived. Our power of acting, therefore, in whatever way it may be conceived,
can be determined and consequently helped or restrained by the power of another individual object possessing something in common with us, and cannot be thus determined by the power of an object whose nature is altogether different from ours. Spinoza further explains also that the more an object agrees with our own nature, the more profitable it is to us, that is to say, the better it is for us; and conversely, the more profitable an object is to us, the more does it agree with our own nature. (IV.31 Cor.).

Spinoza was not interested in a machine-society. He wrote in the Improvement of the Understanding: “This is the end for which I strive, to attain to such a character myself, and to endeavor that many should attain to it with me. In other words, it is part of my happiness to lend a helping hand, that many others may understand even as I do, so that their understanding and desire may entirely agree with my own. In order to bring this about, it is necessary to understand as much of nature as will enable us to attain to the aforesaid character, and also to form a society such as is most conducive to the attainment of this character by the greatest number with the least difficulty and danger.” In so far as men are of the same nature they are able to rejoice equally in the greatest good which is common to all.

In order to understand man’s true place in society it is necessary first of all to understand his true relationship to nature. Nature, man, and society must be studied as a trinity if we are to understand man as an ethical organism and not merely as a physical mechanism. As an ethical being, man is conscious not only of himself and of his social needs, but also of the laws of God, i.e., of nature. The many contradictions and confusions in the minds of men arise from misunderstandings of the order of this trinity. If our experiences do not aid us in the improvement of our understanding concerning the basic principles of our mental system, we can be assured that we are not guided by true reason or thinking. If we are guided merely by misunderstanding and confusions, it is impossible to pass from servitude to freedom. Of course, the problem of human perfection has its complications, but to Spinoza they are not insurmountable. And he says: “He, who desires to govern his emotions and appetites from a love of liberty alone, will strive as much as he can to know virtues and their causes, and to fill his mind with that joy which springs from a true knowledge of them. Least of all will he desire to contemplate the vices of men and disparage men, or to delight in a false show of liberty. He who will diligently observe these things (and they are not difficult) and will continue to practice them, will assuredly in a short space of time be able for the most part to direct his actions in accordance with the command of reason.” (V.10 Note). What else but ethical stability can cure our individual and social ills? Is not this allegiance to ethical principles within our consciousness the only remedy?

If the existing conditions are so complicated that to struggle fearlessly for ethical freedom seems to be beyond human strength, it is possible, nevertheless, to spur oneself and others to realize human perfection. Yet, we may ask, why does man remain satisfied with all his material possessions? The answer is, because man does not yet clearly know what his essential needs are. Man has already learned what
his economic needs are, what his relationship to his family and country is. And the result has been his striving for political supremacy. But economics, family relationship, and nationalism are all based on the instinct of selfishness and not on the principle of ethical mutuality. It is of little wonder, therefore, that these selfish tendencies have always led, as they always will, into wars and conflicts. The reason for this is that these factors have nothing to do with true thinking. True thinking is based on true ideas and ethical principles, and not on instincts and abstractions. True thinking teaches us to direct our minds towards ethical supremacy. The ethical supremacy, after all, is the only true supremacy, for it rests on the foundation of man's essential self, society and the idea of God. True understanding has nothing to do with circular reasoning. Minds, revolving in circles instead of functioning ethically, become tired of everything and feel ill at ease. Capitalism and nationalism cause man to run in circles. They create limitations. An ethically-minded individual, however, realizes the narrowness of these existing conditions, and, instead of worshipping the boundaries of family and country, thinks of world-unity. Indeed, there already are among intellectuals, some who, less cynical and less pessimistic than the rest, are forwarding the thought that man's true intelligence must be liberated. They agree with Spinoza that "There is no rational life without intelligence, and things are good only in so far as they assist man to enjoy the life of the mind which is determined by intelligence. These things alone, on the other hand, we call evil which hinder man from perfecting his reason and enjoying a rational life." (IV. App. 5).

Spinoza declares that ethics is not an abstract affair, for it deals neither with morals nor precepts. Yet, in order to understand Spinoza's challenge, we must consider two important factors: first, the study of our emotional nature; secondly, the perfection of our intellect. Spinoza says: "There is no emotion of the body of which we cannot form some clear and distinct conception." (V. 41). And he writes elsewhere: "It is most profitable to us in life to make perfect the intellect or reason as far as possible, and in this one thing consists the highest happiness or blessedness of man: for blessedness is nothing but the peace of mind which springs from the intuitive knowledge of God, and to perfect the intellect is nothing but to understand God, together with the attributes and actions of God, which flow from the necessity of his nature. The final aim, therefore, of a man who is guided by reason, that is to say, the chief desire by which he strives to govern all his other desires, is that by which he is led adequately to conceive himself and all things which can be conceived by his intelligence." (IV. App. 4). It is evident from this, what the basis of ethics is, and that its practice involves nothing else than the use of our highest intelligence.

Spinoza demands that we become more active in liberating our intelligence and that we use such trains of thought as will lead us towards greater achievements of an ethical nature. What, one may ask, are ethical achievements? They are the product of unselfish thinking which we devote to the search for light, life, love and liberty. Let us study these four ethical "L's" of Spinoza's system. According to Spinoza,
there is not only light as a form of radiant energy, that reacts on our physical eye, rendering visible to it various physical objects, but there is also a light which acts on our “ethical eye,” making visible to it not only the essence of our own nature but also that of others. By means of this light or intelligence we see things under the aspect of eternity. “We feel and know by experience that we are eternal,” says Spinoza. “For the mind is no less sensible of those things which it conceives through intelligence than of those which it remembers, for demonstrations are the eyes of the mind by which it sees and observes things.” Doesn’t this mean that there is an “Eternal Light” in which we as human beings can participate? Yes! And indeed, we need more light, that is, a greater capacity to think in order to understand more clearly what life is. Yet, the use merely of words and images serves only to bring more darkness than light. “I warn my readers,” writes Spinoza, “carefully to distinguish between an idea or conception of the mind, and the images of things formed by our imagination. Secondly, it is necessary that we should distinguish between ideas and the words by which things are signified. These three things, images, words, and ideas are by many people either altogether confused or not distinguished with sufficient accuracy and care.” Only a true idea of God alone, and not an image or symbol, can bring light to the eyes of the mind. For just as a lamp with an untrimmed wick is bound to function improperly, so a mind lacking mental discipline must of necessity fail to bring the right kind of illumination. There can be no inner light without mental discipline. Do we not, therefore, need more light to guide us safely as we pass by the rocks of life?

The knowledge which a mind has of its union with the whole of nature is the light of true understanding, and is the means whereby we may perceive the essence of things. We cannot examine our own life without possessing our own light, and the more light (intuition) we have in our mind, the more light do we find in our life. Thus, we come to the second “I”—life. Our minds, let us recall, involve the essence or life of God, and not only the finite reactions about us. Essential life is the life of intelligence. It is only under the guidance of ethical reason as distinguished from abstract reason that we can live the best life. The best life is the one which frees man from all the disturbing factors and limitations that usually surround him; furthermore, it frees him from the fear of death. It is man’s ethical goal to enjoy this life. In one of the most striking notes in the Ethics, Spinoza declares: “Nothing but a gloomy and sad superstition forbids enjoyment. Why is it more seemly to extinguish hunger and thirst than to drive away melancholy?” As we see things now, this world seems to be a place of sin and sorrow. Where else, then, if not in our minds, can we find sunshine and light? The ethical life finds its basis in our true intelligence. And it is only when we live this life of true intelligence that our thoughts begin to agree with the dictates of true reason. Doesn’t this life of the higher mind imply knowledge of the absolute Reality, or God? Yes, we must answer, because this understanding of God or Truth is the means whereby we love the essential nature in ourselves and others. How can we enlarge our understanding of the ethical life? We can answer this by saying: by learning first of all how to use our minds. Man does not use his mind adequately so long as he is enslaved by his
passions and instincts; nor does he possess love of the non-perishable in so far as he remains enslaved.

Our understanding of the essence or the life of things increases also the capacity of our intelligence to love the eternal good. True knowledge or wisdom is the joy of life. The more man enjoys a true understanding of life, the more active his mind becomes, and the more, therefore, is he filled with the love of God. What is love? Love is the understanding of the union which the mind has with the whole of nature. Through the understanding of this union, man enjoys the highest and the most permanent happiness. Furthermore, when we act according to the ethical principle of "love your neighbor," we free ourselves from passions. Whereas, love engendered in us by a desire for satisfaction of our instincts leads to the hatred of one another. True freedom cannot exist without true love, and true love cannot exist without real life. True love frees, whereas the so-called "free love" enslaves man. It is only by freeing our inner love-nature that our passions can be restrained. Spinoza says: "Blessedness is not the reward of virtue but virtue itself; neither do we rejoice therein because we control our lusts, but contrariwise, because we rejoice therein we are able to control our lusts." (V. 42). True thought-discipline based on ethical love leads to the highest kind of liberty.

What is the highest kind of liberty? Economic independence is good; political liberty is good; but ethical freedom alone is the best and highest kind of liberty. We already have had declarations of economic and political independence, but the world is now waiting for a new Declaration of Independence: The Declaration of Ethical Liberty. Man's freedom or ethical salvation depends entirely on the power of his mind, for it is the mind alone that can protect us against the destructive passions which beset us in our everyday life. The mind, by enabling us to understand our emotions and enabling us to understand the essence of our individuality, teaches us to love God. Spinoza writes: "He who clearly and distinctly understands himself and his emotions loves God, and loves him better, the better he understands himself and his emotions." The realization that men are not only superficial beings, but that they also possess depth or character, helps us free ourselves and understand more clearly what true liberty is. Furthermore, to understand ourselves and others in the light of liberty means to love God, and to live the ethical-social life of a free man.

Social conditions of Spinoza's time, characterized by prejudice and tradition, were a challenge to his ethical-religious mind, and impelled him to seek truth and freedom. He faced the difficulties of his environment with courage and steadfastness, and realized that social difficulties will exist as long as man does not understand his mental and emotional nature. Through his experiences he learned that understanding demands control, and that mental discipline is the highest form of self-control. He realized that, as our understanding of emotional and mental states becomes deeper, our desire for and aspiration towards the love of God also grows stronger. Thus, we can realize the development of our higher intellect, that is, our true intelligence. As man's individual mind-consciousness is the key to the mind of God, his love is a part of the love of God. Spinoza shows us how to make
our ethical nature the dominant force in man’s life. Just as Spinoza’s deeper consciousness challenged him and impelled him to undergo trying experiences, so does he now challenge humanity, and his Ethics is the symbol of this challenge. Those who do not find this challenge in his Ethics are not awake enough ethically to perceive it. Spinoza urges us to become more active in our search for a new kingdom, namely, for the kingdom of friendship or unselfishness. Unselfish thinking is the only key to this kingdom, whose foundation lies grounded in the attribute of Thought. But to strive for liberation of thought does not mean to become a so-called free thinker. To be really free means to think of the highest goal in terms of thoughts and actions, and not in terms of words, imaginations and abstractions.

He exhorts men to strive for their salvation, and to free themselves despite all difficulties. Spinoza knew that, without change of fundamental conceptions, man’s life cannot become richer or nobler. But Spinozism is principally a challenge to those individuals who, instead of learning to think ethically, prefer to philosophize confusedly. Spinoza, let us remember, always urged man’s realization of his best or most essential part, and continuously demanded the removal of those inner weeds which are the causes of man’s emotional and mental depressions. Spinoza, therefore, always stressed the importance of ethical improvement of human nature.

5.

What Spinoza especially recommended was activity in moments of ethical equilibrium. “So long as we are not agitated by emotions which are contrary to our nature,” he explains, “do we possess the power of arranging and connecting the emotions of the body according to the order of the intellect.” (I. 10). But this cannot be done adequately unless we learn to regard the preservation of our essence as a more vital thing than the preservation of our instincts. Spinoza, in relating how he himself sought for freedom, says that one thing was evident to him, namely, that while his mind was employed with higher thoughts, it turned away from its former objects of desire, and seriously considered the search for a new principle; this state of things was a great comfort to him, for he perceived that the evils were not such as to resist all remedies. Although these intervals were rare at first, and of very short duration, yet afterwards, as the true good became more and more discernible to him, they became more frequent and more lasting; especially after he had recognized that the acquisition of wealth, sensual pleasure or fame is only a hindrance, so long as they are sought as ends and not as means. If they be sought as means they will be under restraint, and, far from being hindrances, will further not a little the end for which they are sought. Wouldn’t it seem from the above, that ethical struggle is inevitably an ethical victory? But in order to improve our weapons for this struggle, we must improve our understanding. Words, images and passions cannot help us in the struggle for essentialities. Only true ideas and corresponding activities based on pure motives can bring us moral independence, which is nothing else but the desire for friendship and for a new social order.

The very title of Spinoza’s main work is a challenge to humanity. Ethics, it is called—thus expressing in its title
the supremacy of ethics above everything else. Spinoza, therefore, demands that we become more ethically-minded.

6.

Spinoza questioned not only the conception of God of all those who claim that they are interested in the highest, but also their understanding of the nature and origin of the mind. He further questioned their conception of the emotions, and their ideas concerning freedom. He uncompromisingly condemned all their traditional and superstitious undertakings, for tradition and superstition become repugnant to man's true nature as soon as they are understood to be inadequate notions. By developing a truer plan of human conduct, he realized that our daily life must be put under the guidance of daily mental discipline if our physical, emotional, mental and ethical natures are not to become the playground for false, fictitious and doubtful ideas.

As soon as our minds begin to function better and to think more clearly, we are able to apply the ethical truth in our lives. The more these essentialities become facts in our everyday life, the more do we understand that to have an adequate idea of the highest is equivalent to having the strongest cause as the basis for our relationship with others. Likewise, things outside of our true selves cease to delude us frequently as soon as we begin to understand that man's mind must be applied as necessarily to religion as it is to the sciences. Through Spinoza's teaching we learn that the ethical language of the mind consists in adequate thoughts and actions, and not merely of inadequate statements. This thinking by action serves to make our desires more and more unselfish. Through 

this influence, we are able to harmonize the ends for which we strive with our higher desires. We thus begin to realize that to strive for true self-perfection means to perfect our character. In that way, we lose our fears and permit our higher nature to lead us to the new realization of truth as the basis for Spinoza's most uncompromising challenge. He knew that by improving our mentality in an ethical direction, we can become more active, and therefore, more perfect. Spinoza's life and teaching were a challenge to the authorities and the society not only of his day but also of every succeeding generation.

It was to the greatest astonishment of his contemporaries that Spinoza arose in the seventeenth century, bold enough to challenge the traditions and superstitions of existing religions. Yet, his abandonment of the old conception of life was not caused so much by his skeptical mind as by his conviction that our so-called civilization is based upon falsity and not upon ethical-social principles. Man, in his eyes, was born to pass from a state of lower activity to a state of higher activity, and finally to the consciousness that the highest activity is the love of God. What other kind of life but one devoted to the love of God can be ethical, and bring ethical prosperity and culture? Spinoza advocated creation of new communities, although he realized that many difficulties were necessary on the way to the realization of truth. But Spinoza reasoned that we can detach ourselves from our emotional and other difficulties by understanding ourselves in an ethical-mental manner, and by making use of our inborn and acquired qualities of character. He also realized that these cannot be true self-understanding, the basis for ethical-community life, without the practise of openmindedness.
Spinoza’s conception of God as a being consisting of infinite attributes is the highest conception of reality. In order to understand it, faith or abstractions can never help. Intuition alone is the key to this understanding. Spinoza, in saying that the foundation of religion is the idea of God, does not mean that the universe is planned for man, but rather that the intuitive understanding is necessary to true religion. We all need Spinoza’s conception of God. We may attribute its value to the challenge it offers to our ethical heroism. In fact, the better we understand Spinoza’s Ethics “ethically,” and not merely “intellectually,” the more clearly do we see how the range of his challenge widens.

We are already sufficiently socially and scientifically minded. But where are those heroic-minded individuals who dare to accept Spinoza’s challenge? To understand Spinoza’s idea of living an ethical group-life on the heroic level means to strengthen our ethical willingness to meet and accept his challenge. The desire to improve this kind of willingness or understanding is the sole foundation for the new heroism. The reply which Spinoza expected to his call was nothing else but a new effort on the part of human beings to practise ethical self-experimentation and group-creation. Such efforts are conducive to clear thinking. Our will is limited, unless we are active and have adequate thoughts. We can have an ethical will to do as we choose when we learn that will and intellect are one and the same thing. Therefore, the more clearly we think, the more active do we become. Only ethical motives awakening the better qualities in man can elevate the individual who has sunk to a low level of selfishness. Furthermore, nothing else but the understanding that ethical virtues are the foundation for social welfare, and that they are the only forces which improve both individual and social conditions, can help humanity rise above selfishness and chaos. The ethical-social problem is society’s most important problem and it will never be solved until man recognizes that ethics must necessarily precede all other interests; that even ethics and economics can be unified, provided ethics assumes priority.

By virtue of Spinoza’s efforts, all the old slogans of society were concentrated into this challenge: *Dare not fail in ethics if you care for true freedom!* Spinozaism is still new to the world. Found in one form or another in libraries and lecture halls, it does not yet give its true living value to society because there are not yet groups of human beings interested in self-perfection, and in group-life based on thought-relationship rather than on blood and color relationships. Let us not forget that material and negative facts are not the only things of value. Ethical and spiritual questions also demand an answer. Why should the eyes of our minds remain closed forever? Spinoza taught us not to escape from materialism to the worship of idealism; he taught men that in understanding the reality of the two attributes, Thought and Extension, we realize the idea of God and of ethical-social relationship.

The Ethics of Spinoza can be understood only by those who have a desire to improve their ethical consciousness, in order to be able to live a life in harmony with the essential laws of nature or God. Intuition alone can lead man to this
new realization. Only with the awakening of more individuals to the improvement of their mental dispositions will human beings come into contact with Spinoza’s Ethics.

“We clearly understand in what consists our salvation, blessedness, or liberty,” declares Spinoza; “namely, in the constant and eternal love for God, or in the love of God for men. And this love or blessedness is called in the Scriptures ‘glory’—not without reason.” (IV.36 Note). In order, however, to free our minds so as to be able to live this kind of love, we must improve our ethical knowledge. This knowledge will help us practice co-enjoyment and enable us to create a new social order on earth. “This, then,” Spinoza reveals as his innermost thought, “is the end to attain to which I am striving, namely, to acquire such a nature myself and to endeavor that many also should acquire it with me. It is then part of my happiness that many others should understand even as I do, and that their understanding and desires should be entirely in harmony with my understanding and desire; and in order to bring this to pass, it is necessary to understand as much of nature as will suffice for the acquiring of such a nature and moreover to form such a society as is essential for the purpose of enabling most people to acquire this nature with the greatest ease and security.” (Improvement of the Understanding).

There never will be a new kind of society unless there be groups of individuals with a new mind. The religious mind of to-day will never do! As far as the religious state of development is concerned, man is still living in the Middle Ages. Neither will the technical mind suffice, advanced as man is in the scientific field.

After Spinoza had critically examined the social-religious status of his time, he freed himself from its limitations by the application of ethical principles. In the Improvement of the Understanding, he tells us that, having found himself in the midst of a very great peril, he was obliged to seek a remedy, however uncertain, with all his energy; like a sick man seized with a deadly disease, who sees death straight before him if he does not find some remedy, is forced to seek it, however uncertain, with all his remaining strength, for in that is placed all his hope. But all those remedies which the vulgar follow, not only avail nothing for the ethical self-preservation, but even prevent it, and are often the cause of the death of those who are possessed by them. Spinoza’s interests transcended the ordinary values of life; he directed his mind towards a thing infinite and eternal. He was convinced that the evils of the world are not insurmountable. One thing Spinoza perceived immediately, and that was that as long as his mind was employed with these thoughts, it turned away from its former subjects and meditated seriously on the new plan of life.

Spinoza’s daring won for him the highest good, and he in turn calls to the world to live up to his ideal.

9.

We are all aware that materialism has been the cause of many wars. Practical idealism alone can be the foundation for peace and freedom. Where are those men heroic enough to accept the challenge of practical idealism? How many human beings are there already who can see with the eyes of their souls the infinite field of opportunity that ethical idealism can offer? Are there many who already seek the path of
the pioneering idealist? They will have to understand that their minds must become open and sensitive to the necessary changes that such a goal demands them to undergo, if they are to proceed as thinking men on the ethical path.

Our needs for health and comfort are well known to us. Now, we must begin to get acquainted with our ethical needs for character improvement and co-enjoyment. Through character improvement we realize our essential being. Through co-enjoyment we are able to care and to share this realization with others. Co-enjoyment is an expression of our ethical-social life. How, then, can we free ourselves inwardly, and so find our soul? Should we not endeavor to discover our true nature and live the life of friendship? Only within a living soul can life be found. We must therefore improve the consciousness of the divine element in us. "The infinite essence of God and his eternity are known to all," Spinoza teaches. "But as all things are in God, and are conceived through God, we can infer from this knowledge many things, which we may adequately know, and we may form that third kind of knowledge called intuition."

It was Spinoza's conviction that he found the real truth, and that the deepest certainty is attainable. He issued his challenge to the thinkers of all times, and defied them to prove that his philosophy is not the true one. "Yet you seem to want to use your reason." Spinoza writes in a letter, "and you ask me, how I know that my philosophy is the best among all those which have ever been taught in the world, or are taught now, or will be taught in the future? This indeed, I can ask you with far better right. For I do not presume that I have found the best philosophy, but I know that I think the true one. If you ask me how I know this, I shall answer, in the same way that you know that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. . . . For the truth reveals both itself and the false."

Spinoza's Ethics has been a teaching which has been challenging society for centuries. Only with adequate thoughts and with the fundamental affirmation that the survival of the fittest is the survival of the eternal can this challenge ever be answered.
CONCLUSION

What are the dominant factors in the lives of men to-day? In the Middle Ages, the world was under the sway of religious fanaticism. With the passing of time, religious fanaticism gave way to intellectualism. And to-day scientific knowledge and scientific studies rule society and humanity. Scientific technique, in short, leads the world. But are the control and management of man’s material interests alone sufficient? Spinoza’s teaching helps us understand that man is not only a mode of the attribute of Extension, but that he is also a mode of the attribute of Thought. In fact, Spinoza bequeathed his Ethics to mankind in order to remind man that nature is not only this and that particular thing, but that nature is also God (deus sive natura), and that man as a conscious being can control not only machines but also himself.

Should not this thought make man feel that ethical engineering is just as important as mechanical engineering? Why, in truth, does not the attribute of Thought exercise such an influence on man as does the attribute of Extension? Human beings have already learned how to use particular things, but they have not as yet learned how to understand one another. But to understand people in more than a superficial manner is very difficult. Can we think of a science dealing with the understanding of the true life of man? Biosophy is such a science, if it is based on the affirmation of the Idea of God in our minds. Biosophy, as such a science, considers man as a human individual, irrespective of his class, race, nationality or religious creed. Biosophy alone is interested first and foremost in the conscious “being within man,” and it has as its ultimate aim man’s freedom.

Spinoza, as a biosophical thinker, was interested primarily in that which is eternal. In his research in this regard, he realized that thinking man can be the adequate cause of effects which can be clearly and distinctly perceived by means of the mind, and thus come to the conclusion that a free or thinking mind is of much greater importance in the universal plan of life than an instinct-driven man whose solution to life is the opinion that death is the end of all things. Spinoza realized that to the living consciousness of man the notion of the so-called after-life is a fictitious conception; that the living soul cannot accept any other idea than that of eternity. The creation of a new society is therefore possible as soon as there will arise individuals who have the desire to share the ethical riches they have unearthed within themselves.

Spinoza constantly urges us to practice the principle of mutuality, for in that way alone, he realized, can we become more and more conscious of the principle of co-enjoyment. He challenges not only our religious conceptions of God but also our psychological understanding of the relationship of mind and body. According to the doctrine of the attributes, the mind and the body are one and the same thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension. Further, all modifications of Thought have God for a cause in so far as he is a thinking thing, and not in so far as he is manifested under any other attributes. Doesn’t it necessarily follow that true thinking cannot be entirely
hindered by the conditions of the body? That which determines the mind to think is a modification of the attribute of Thought, and not a modification of the attribute of Extension. Furthermore, everything which arises in our minds must be referred to the attribute of Thought. The mind of man is therefore the best weapon with which he can gain freedom. But freedom is possible only on the basis of ethical discipline. This discipline of our consciousness is the only power we possess which can keep us in a state of absolute willingness to direct our desires once they assume a downward trend—it is the only weapon which can stimulate us to continuous striving towards the highest goal in life. But in order to do this, we must constantly increase our ethical courage. The more strength we acquire to overcome the external and internal hindrances, the more perfect do we become. Thus, we have Spinoza’s key to ethical freedom. True freedom cannot be attained unless we attack the roots of all evils within us. Only an ethical effort will make us free to become the masters of our minds—rulers and not slaves of our passions.

Spinoza challenges the spirit of ethical pioneering within us. He challenges us to create a new order of life—not merely a scientific order based on the concept of indestructibility of matter, but an ethical order which proceeds from the affirmation of eternity of our minds. Time and again he stresses the importance of the attribute of Thought and reminds us that it is necessary to concentrate not merely on health, comfort and entertainment, but more and more on the values of character, co-enjoyment and friendship. For in no other way is it possible to make our desire for an ethical life more significant and more vital. An empirical approach to truth is not sufficient. We need a biosophical approach, an approach based on understanding of the attribute of Thought. There can be no improvement of our ethical life without an improvement of our ethical intelligence. Spinoza gave us a new motive for our striving; mutual understanding instead of selfish profit!

The understanding of Spinoza’s teaching further aids us to see the difference between ethics and theology. Spinoza was not a moralizing reformer. Neither was he a moral abstractionist, nor a fictitious religionist. He was an ethical revolutionist, a revolutionist whose demands called for radical changes, not only in governmental and social conditions but also in emotional states. Spinoza taught that an emotion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it. He further stated that all who clearly and distinctly understand both themselves and their emotions, love God and love him the better, the more they understand themselves and their emotions.

Spinoza challenged us with his purest conception of God. He is the first to offer humanity a conception of the highest good that is not based on dogmatism, tradition, superstition, false mentalism nor romanticism. Nor is Spinozism an easy optimism. Spinoza taught that it is impossible for men to become more perfect or heroic without sacrificial activities. Men will not be able to modify their ways of thinking, nor in consequence, their modes of living unless they understand Spinoza’s Ethics. It has taken three hundred years to make Spinoza known to the world in a general, intellectual manner. Even if his charms are perceptibly felt and his exploits are loudly acclaimed, Spinoza is not yet understood.

Spinoza’s Ethics can be said to belong to the heroic liter-
nature of the world. Spinoza taught men to live an ethical-social life. But ethical or heroic qualities cannot be possessed by us, unless we are inspired by heroic motives. The world has heretofore made but poor use of Spinoza’s Ethics, because the students of Spinoza have not possessed the heroic type of mind. The Ethics, it must be recalled, is built on a new kind of logic, which we may call relational and not on the logic of words and abstractions. Essentialities in Spinoza’s language differ from formalities. Life lies in essentialities, and the Ethics is based primarily on life, not on death nor on the moral code. Ethics, for Spinoza, is an expression of essentialism, and not of conservatism. From the viewpoint of essentialism, ethics is a unifying force which integrates science and religion.

Spinoza—bold enough to attack theological institutions—did so on a scientific basis. His challenge is therefore a lasting one. He startled the world when he gave up theology for ethics. His thinking was primarily God-centered. Egocentricity has no place in his system. It was this ethical thinking which helped him to realize how great an obstacle on the way towards divine freedom are thoughtless words. He therefore became deeply interested in the living understanding of the nature of God, and rejected traditional beliefs as a foundation for life. His conception of ethical realism was, for him, a guide leading away from pessimism as well as from ordinary optimism. Spinoza was a seer, and his Ethics reveals what he saw and experienced in life. After experience had taught him that all ordinary things of life are vain and futile, he began to recreate his life according to the rhythm of his ethical nature, which was itself but the rhythm of the one substance. Continuing in this endeavor, he finally realized that the highest goal in life is the love of God based on the understanding of the two attributes, Thought and Extension. This love of God is an activity and not a passivity. The love of God, to Spinoza, was the way towards self-perfection. Spinoza, we observe, is a unique translator of the highest kind of metaphysics into practical ethics. His own life was a living demonstration of his idea—of the love for the highest.

Spinozaism, as a true religion of the future, will doubtless draw many people to live the spirit of Spinoza’s Ethics. They will learn to understand ethical principles of life, and gain the power to reshape themselves into more high-minded individuals. Only on the basis of ethical individualism can man become more perfect, and remain so even though the rest of the world continue in its love and practice of the religion of selfishness. The Spinozaistic man will have the power to live in harmony with the highest.

Spinoza realized that in order to find the highest good within ourselves we must coordinate science, philosophy and religion. He was also aware that there can be no true religion unless the ethical mind serves as the foundation on which to affirm and to understand the idea of God. He acted in accordance with his findings, and became free. Spinoza must indeed, have lived a great and noble life to have been able to influence so many thinkers of the past and present. But the future alone is to unveil his true power. Spinoza was one of the rare master-minds of ethical spirituality, of something entirely different in its scope from orthodox religiousness. His idea of the love of God, or the union which the mind has with the whole of nature, is entirely different from mystical self-glorification. Misunderstood and persecuted in his own life, Spinoza now shines forth as a beacon to the
darkness of a selfish world, and with the radiant light of his mighty soul he inspires all those who have already reached the realm of intuitive understanding.

Spinoza’s philosophy is an ethical-religious doctrine of universal importance. It teaches us how to change ourselves so that we may become living examples of truth. Furthermore, Spinoza wants this change to be effected on the basis of the improvement of our ethical consciousness in order to recreate our inner life. His doctrine seeks to encourage man to live according to the precepts of intelligence. To have religion, according to him, means to have so adequate a conception of the divine reality as to be able to practice, under the guidance of ethical reason, the idea of ethical relationships among human beings. Therefore, we see that science and religion are free from conflict with one another, provided they are used as a means towards the highest goal in life.

The most important point in Spinozism, therefore, is the idea that a true religious understanding is inseparable from ethics. To become a free man is possible only when our conduct is based on ethical principles of mind-discipline and group-consciousness. Spinoza teaches us to be friendship-minded, and to act with the goal of friendship as an incentive to the creation of a new society. It can then be seen that, according to Spinoza’s conception of life, man proceeds from the understanding of the essence of God to the understanding of man’s ethical-social duties in life. And so we may say that Spinoza is not only a philosopher—but also a biosopher.

Spinoza’s ethical-religious conception of life is based on a naturalism which not only helps us to see things with an attitude surpassing a selfish point of view, but also helps us to see things in the light of eternity (sub specie æternitatis).

His idea of religion is the idea of man’s relationship to totality, or nature. Spinoza was not interested in religion as cult, but rather in religion as culture: the religion of friendship or mutual understanding.

The novel element in Spinoza’s religion is his comprehensible God. For him the greatest good to which the mind can attain is the knowledge of God, and the greatest thing that the mind can understand is God; that is, a being absolutely infinite, and eternal without whom nothing can be, nor be conceived. Therefore, the thing which is most useful to the mind is knowledge of God. Again, only in so far as the mind understands, is it active, and thus far can it be absolutely said that it acts according to virtue. To understand is the highest and absolute virtue of the mind. But the greatest thing which the mind can understand is God. Therefore, the greatest virtue of the mind is to understand or know God.

Spinoza was convinced that, with the power of intuition, man can create a new order and connection of ideas in his mind, and therefore a new order and connection of things—in other words, a new society. Spinozism is not stoicism, it does not teach indifference to the essential value of the emotions in man. Spinoza’s idea of ethical self-education not only protects us from superstitions, but serves also as the fountain of the deepest emotion possible to human beings: the love of God. This love towards God is the most constant of all emotions, for such love cannot be destroyed, since it is not accompanied by the defects of ordinary love.

Spinoza searched for the missing link in our spiritual origin, and discovered it in the true idea of God. But since our thoughts are occupied solely with external objects and means of acquiring them regardless of our fellow-beings,
how can there be religion in our deeds? As long as there is no religion in our thoughts, there can be no religion practised in deeds. If religion is realization of the Idea of God in man, then our minds must not be connected with objects merely in an external way. But, since it is also in the power of man to understand the essence of things, he can come to a new order and connection of ideas. This new order and connection of ideas based on certainty will become the foundation for true character-building.

Spinozaism, as the first ethical-religious teaching on a scientific basis, shows the way of true thinking and true living. Thought, therefore, assumes priority in Spinoza’s system. On the other hand, Spinozaism, based on the understanding of the attribute of Thought, helps man to come to the realization of the essence both of his mind and body. Thus, in Spinozaism salvation becomes a reality and not only a dream, for deliverance from evil or from inadequate knowledge is possible only on the basis of an ethically active mind.

Spinoza shows us clearly that there never can be a normal, social consciousness in man without an ethical one. Although we do not possess a free will as commonly understood, nevertheless we can free our minds and endeavor, at the same time, “to act well and rejoice.” Spinoza’s Ethics shows us how to discover the essence of life. With its aid, it is possible to lift our minds into the ethical realm of understanding, and to act under the guidance of reason, or the idea of God.

Reason or thinking, according to Spinoza, is not merely an abstraction but an activity. To love God means to think with the certainty that excludes all errors. Such thinking enables man to use the strength and power of his mind in an unselfish way, and to promote ethical-social integration. Such conscious direction of one’s thought is the most important factor in life.

True, we already have freedom of speech to some extent. But man does not yet think adequately. Political revolutions of the past have brought only superficial betterment and apparent peace. Democracy, heretofore, has been based and still is based not on mutual understanding but only on mutual tolerance. The political democracy which we already have is not yet the true or ethical democracy. As mechanics is the foundation for physical sciences so should ethics be the basis for social sciences. As long as economics, however, and not ethics, is the foundation of social sciences, war and animosity will continue. As we need and already have laboratories for physical sciences, so also do we need laboratories for social sciences—such laboratories should be understood as groups of human beings who come together for the purpose of studying their emotions and minds, for the improvement of their characters. Many things are being done for our welfare, as physical beings, but little is being done for us as thinking beings. And yet economic stability is and always will be impossible as long as ethical equilibrium is lacking, as long as technicalities precede essentialities in importance.

Spinoza urges us to cultivate ethical-social understanding, and thus to create a true society. His teaching is, for a thinking man, the way of life.
EPILOGUE

“To make an end of all this,” we read in Spinoza’s treatise on “God, Man, and his Well Being,” “it only remains for me still to say to my friends to whom I write this: Be not astonished at these novelties; for it is very well known to you that a thing does not cease to be true because it is not accepted by many. And also, as the character of the age in which we live is not unknown to you, I would beg of you most earnestly to be very careful about the communication of these things to others. I do not want to say that you should absolutely keep them to yourselves, but only that if ever you begin to communicate them to anybody then let no other aim prompt you except only the happiness of your neighbor, being at the same time clearly assured by him that the reward will not disappoint your labor. Lastly, if, on reading this through, you should meet with some difficulty about what I state as certain, I beseech you that you should not therefore hasten at once to refute it, before you have pondered it long enough and thoughtfully enough, and if you do this I feel sure that you will attain to the enjoyment of the fruit of this tree which you promise yourselves.”
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