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BENEDICT DE SPINOZA

The Elements of His Philosophy

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THE DOCTRINE OF LIBERATION

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Benedictus de Spinoza (Baruch Despinoza) was born at Amsterdam on 24 November 1632, of a family of refugee Jews from the Peninsula, probably (though 'Espinoza' is also a Spanish place-name) more immediately from Portugal. Brought up as an orthodox Sephardic Jew, he received the customary training in letters and Talmudic theology. His people entertained high hopes for his future, but he appears to have become increasingly critical in outlook, and irregular in ritual observance, and was at last formally excommunicated by the Amsterdam synagogue in 1656. About this time he left Amsterdam and lived, first at Ouwerkerk, a village near by, and after 1660 at Rijnsburg in the vicinity of Leyden, associating with Mennonites and members of the anti-clerical Christian community of Collegiants, the headquarters of which was in the latter place. He now devoted himself to intellectual and scientific pursuits, earning his living by the manufacture of optical lenses for telescopes and microscopes. Our knowledge of his life and character is mainly derived from two early biographies: that of his near contemporary J. M. Lucas (see A. Wolf, *The Oldest Biography of Spinoza*), and that of J. Köhler (Colerus) published in 1706 (see F. Pollock, *Spinoza, His Life and Philosophy*, Appendix). He had learned, and perhaps also taught, Latin at the school of the free-thinking F. A. van den Ende, and he was evidently much impressed, and his originality stimulated, by the 'new philosophy' of Descartes. His character comes down to us as that of a man devoted to the search after truth, and wholly disinterested in its pursuit, who gradually won a wide reputation both among his associates and also in the general republic of letters. From his writings also we can safely judge that sobriety, piety, and mental acuity were with him untinged by asceticism, bigotry, and pedantry; and, man of letters, and something of a hermit, as he was, he yet took a keen interest in public affairs. In the early years after his excommunication he appears to have been a prominent member of a philosophical discussion group, and it has been surmised that the MSS. later discovered and published as the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Wellbeing* were connected with this activity. His earliest published work, and the only one openly bearing his name, however, was the *Geometrical Version of Descartes's Principles of Philosophy* (with its Appendix of *Metaphysical Reflections* tacitly providing many a spinozistic gloss on the main work), which had its origin in some lessons he had given to a fellow-lodger. This was published in 1663, and was probably influential in gaining for him in 1673 an invitation from the Elector Palatine to the Chair of Philosophy at Heidelberg—and that in spite of the clamour produced by

his second published work, the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* which had first appeared anonymously in 1670, but was already generally ascribed to him. Spinoza, however, preferred to continue the life of a private and independent scholar. In 1663 he had removed to Voorburg, near The Hague, where the latter work was completed; and in the year of its publication finally moved to The Hague, lodging after 1671 in the house by the Pavilion Canal which is now dedicated to his memory. Here the *Ethics* was completed and prepared for publication. News of this having got abroad, and garbled accounts of its nature rumoured, he decided to withhold publication, fearing a renewal of the clamour raised by the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*—arranging with his printer in Amsterdam that in case of his death before a more favourable occasion should arise this work, together with his other literary remains, should then be brought to light. Though he was in poor health from the increasing inroads of phthisis, he died without other warning in the presence of his doctor alone on 21 February 1677. His posthumous works duly appeared in the same year.

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INTRODUCTION

It is not easy for the modern mind, steeped as it is in the sophistical heresies of a truncated empiricistic philosophy that confines its attention to the objective accidents of experience, ignoring its prime essence, as well as the activity by which alone the objects of experience can be distinguished from those objective accidents, to take up the intellectual standpoint from which alone the thought of Spinoza is intelligible. For the prime essence of experience lies, not in the extrinsic objects experienc*ed*, but in the intrinsic active experienc*ing* as modalized by its objective accidents. There is nothing in the philosophy of Spinoza to exclude an empiricism which takes due account of all these factors of experience—indeed, the 'analytic' method necessarily begins with extant imperfect human experience, and proceeds by emendation of this towards a perfected knowledge of first principles. This is the burden of the analogy[1] which he draws between the making of physical tools, such as a hammer, and the search after truth. Since a hammer is needed in order to forge a hammer, unless nature provided man with crude hammers the forging of iron would be impossible, and man could never be provided with perfected tools. So also the intellect of man must be provided by nature with crude apprehensions, so that 'by its own native force' it can 'form for itself intellectual tools' of increasing perfection, and by degrees advance towards perfected apprehension. It is true that in the *Ethics* his philosophy is expounded, in the main, not analytically but synthetically 'in the geometrical manner', beginning from first principles rather than from crude human apprehensions; but those first principles, though implicit in experience as such, have been made explicit by the analysis and emendation of crude apprehension; and the reversed synthetic order does but accommodate human discovery with the order of nature, i.e. with the order of creation. For analysis and emenda-

[1] *Tract. de Intell. Emend.*, §§ 30–1.

tion there is now substituted analogy and synthesis, the imperfect objects of crude experience being more adequately recognized as more or less imperfect expressions of that perfect being that is the essential object of intellect. For Spinoza, therefore, *analytical* metaphysical method is not from an empirical basis by *ascending analogy* to perfected knowledge, but by the *emendation* of crude experience; and *synthetical* metaphysical method is not the mere *reversal* of the analytical order (which could only bring us back to crude experience) but a movement by *descending analogy* from first principles to adequate knowledge of the real nature of the objects of crude experience as finite and privative expressions of infinite exemplary being. And human finiteness entails imperfection in both movements: the results of analysis being necessarily abstract, and those of synthesis no more than approximate. Man's idea of God or *Natura* is adequate but not exhaustive; his ideas of empirical things analogical rather than incorrigibly direct.

It must not be thought, however, that Spinoza was occupied as a philosopher solely in the intellectual clarification of experience. The moving force of his investigations in this sphere was the impulse to discover the way of human salvation, and the principles of the good life for man. The term 'Ethics' as the title of his central metaphysical work correctly indicates this main purpose which the opening paragraphs of the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* had openly expressed: 'After experience had taught me that all the things commonly met with in ordinary life are vain and futile . . . I at length determined to inquire whether . . . there was anything by the discovery and acquisition of which I might be put in possession of a joy continuous and supreme for eternity. . . . I saw that I was situated in the greatest peril, and pulled myself together to seek with all my power a remedy . . . just as a sick man suffering from a mortal disease, who foresees certain death unless a remedy be applied, is forced to seek it with all his strength, even though it be uncertain.'[1] There is more than a touch of Bunyan's Pilgrim fleeing from the City of Destruction in such passages, for Spinoza is no dweller in the 'village named Morality' with Mr. Worldly Wiseman who 'savoureth only the Doctrine of this world'—he seeks 'the strait gate that leadeth unto life'; so that those who have interpreted

[1] §§ 1, 7.

his philosophy, with its denial of anthropomorphic personality to God, of indeterminacy to human action, of contingency to eternal Nature, as involving the end of all morality, are far indeed from a true estimate of his purposes. Whether they are equally far from a true estimate of his success in carrying out his purposes, is, of course, another question, but one which it is possible, as we shall see, to answer in the affirmative. So also, those many who have styled him 'atheist' (with Hegel who preferred to regard him as an 'acosmist') are guilty not only of mere paradox (for his doctrine is nothing if not theocentric and cosmological) but of a failure to take due account of his fundamental interest in human salvation by the cultivation of the 'knowledge and love of God'. True philosophy must be a doctrine of both God and the world, and of their relations: of divine agency and of the world's emanation and salvation. Spinoza's metaphysical theory fulfils this requirement as amply, and as adequately, as any that has been thought out: for it is a theory of salvation founded upon a theory of reality. Human wellbeing can only be understood in the light of a knowledge of human nature and of the world in which man is born, struggles, and is improved or degraded in a brief duration; and these again in the light of a knowledge of durational man and universe as related to a reality and a source that is eternal. Thus *Part I* of the *Ethics* is devoted to an account of the divine nature and the eternal universe which is its actuality—the exhaustively determinate expression of its infinite indeterminate potency; *Part II* to the nature of man as typical finite creature, framed on the analogy of his source but subject to the privations of self-reference by which his eternity is degraded to durational form, and his action to *conatus* in part characterized by 'passion' and in part by 'exertion', by which he falls into error and vice, or seeks the way of truth and virtue. *Part III* expounds the natures of these durational dispositions as a preparation for the accounts given in *Parts IV* and *V* of the ways of perdition and salvation, of the nature of the man who supposes that he is free in so far as he is governed by passion, and of the man who is truly free in so far as he eradicates the passions by the cultivation of 'exertions', and finally of the nature of the 'blessedness' by which such a life may be crowned and transformed, its durationality transcended, and its eternal creation realized. The division of topics is, of course, not absolute, for the principles of human salvation themselves enlighten

us in no small measure about the natures of 'man, and God, and things', and their relations. This is but an example of the unity of the doctrine which must qualify its linear exposition: the *Parts* cannot be separated without risk of obscurity. And just as the ontological and 'soteriological' doctrines cannot be divorced, so neither can these be understood apart from the epistemological (nor this apart from those). None will seriously dispute the broad validity of Locke's contention that critical appraisement of the 'instrument' of knowledge—the theory of the nature and limits of the cognitive power of the human mind—must precede the theory of the nature and reality of its objects; yet equally it must be asserted that theory of knowledge cannot get very far in the absence of a doctrine of the metaphysical status of the human knower, and of the ontological relations of the knower and the known. God's knowledge of the world is not likely to be identical in form and substance with that of even the wisest of men, just as man's knowledge of it must differ from that of an insect—and not merely in range. For insect and man are parts of the world differing not merely in range, but in potency, and God is in no sense a part of it, but the potency that it actualizes. As soon, therefore, as we seek to pass from the study of specifically *human* knowledge to a doctrine of knowledge *as such*, knowledge of man's epistemological specificity is required, and we must make reference to ontological principles. For apart from this reference we shall be liable, nay, almost certain, to fall into the error, either of supposing that human knowledge is a mere limited range of knowledge in general (the peculiar fallacy of theories of 'natural realism'), or of mistaking what is a mere eccentricity and defect arising from the special status and faculty of man, for the essence and norm of knowledge as such. And this latter error is the essential presupposition of the truncated empiricism to which I have referred, which takes what is merely objectively 'given' in human experience (or given as object for human experience) as the foundation and verificatory norm of knowledge, instead of the 'blind spots' of human understanding.

Sophistries such as these are results of the attempt to elaborate a theory of knowledge without due recourse to metaphysical enlightenment concerning the status and limitations of the human nature from the cognitive activities of which the conception of knowledge is primarily taken. Yet how can this enlightenment be

PART I

THE DOCTRINE OF BEING

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CHAPTER I

'CAUSE OF ITSELF'

I. CAUSATION AS ACTION

The conception of causation is fundamental in the philosophy of Spinoza; but it is causation conceived as action, and not as the mere regular sequence of inactive events. For by 'action' here is meant not change of motion or rest, of content or quality, among spatio-temporal objects, nor of mode or content among mental ideas; on the contrary, mere uniform temporal change is essentially the ideal limit of the privation of action. This at the least was established by Hume. By 'action' is signified the distinction in unity of 'potency' and its 'actuality'. For to say that something is 'actual' is to imply that it is the determinate actuality of some potency-in-act. Agency involves both a power of act*ing* and the expression of that power in something enact*ed*, a doing and a deed, and in action *par excellence* that which is enacted is the exhaustive expression of the potency, without inhibition or frustration, by which agency may otherwise be reduced to durational effort more or less effective. Action is thus originally and essentially eternal, and becomes durational only by limitation and modification. Mere uniform temporal sequence can be styled 'causality' only by way of paradox—*lucus a non lucendo*.

Spinoza's philosophical intention, therefore, is to derive all things from a primordial infinite power or indeterminate potency self-actualized in an infinite and exhaustively determinate eternal universe; and it is thus that he conceives that 'infinite beings follow in infinite ways from the divine nature',[1] i.e. from the self-actualizing creative potency-in-act. The further derivation of the durational world of common experience and science, composed of things that in their order and status are imperfectly active, or conative, thus becomes an essential problem, the solution of which constitutes the chief value of Spinoza's theory—affording

[1] *Eth. I, xvi.*

as it does the clue to that reversal of human privation that constitutes the essential character of morality.

It follows that all interpretations of the doctrine of Spinoza that fail to take due note of its *activism*, and interpret causation in terms of the confessedly impotent categories of positivistic theory are thereby hamstrung from the start, and can only proceed to further and more mischievous misunderstandings which seem to involve him in fallacies so futile and obvious as to lie beyond the possible stupidity of the merest tiro.

Part I of the *Ethics* is chiefly devoted to the clarification of the principles governing the nature and existence of the eternal self-actualizing potency, and to the deduction of the formal characteristics of this primordial agent. The essential nature of this being is laid down in the first definition: 'By *cause of itself* I understand that the essence of which involves existence.' Such a being is wholly independent of the operation or existence of what is other than itself, and is thus real *sans phrase*. That alone is primordially real that realizes itself as potency-in-act, subject to no alien contingency.

This primordial being is thus at once both cause and effect, and critics unable to divest themselves of the common notion of 'cause' have often poured scorn upon the conception. Martineau,[1] for example, claims that in the phrase *causa sui* the *causa* cancels the *sui*, and the *sui* cancels the *causa*, and Pollock that the definition 'leaves causation wholly out of account' and 'implies that the use of the word cause in this sense is really inappropriate'.[2] Whether the common use of the term 'cause' as implying temporal production or conditioning is in any degree defensible, and if so how, and in what degree, need not now be canvassed; suffice it to emphasize once more that it is anachronistic as attributed to Spinoza. For him causation is the actualization of potency, not the mere sequence of passive 'events', or even the relation of 'sign' and 'thing signified', but rather what Berkeley distinguished as 'real causality', involving real power to generate or produce. Essentially it is not that the cause *has* the power, but that it *is* the power, and if that power is absolute its actuality (or effect) is, with it, self-existent.

The primordial Real, then, is the duality in unity of cause or

[1] *A Study of Spinoza*, pp. 117–19, 224–5.
[2] *Spinoza, His Life and Philosophy* (2nd ed.), p. 149.

potency and effect or actuality. Spinoza has several ways of expressing this ultimate nature: as a distinction in identity of (1) 'Substance' and 'mode'; (2) 'Creator' and 'creature'; (3) '*Natura naturans*' and '*Natura naturata*'; (4) 'Essence' and 'expression'. Let us briefly examine these variant modes of expression *seriatim*.

1. *Substance and Mode*

Formal definitions of these terms are given at the beginning of *Part I* of the *Ethics*, and there is therefore no valid excuse to be offered by those who carelessly substitute other uses of them derived from alien sources. Substance does not stand for 'matter' either in its commonsense or its Lockian interpretation. It is not a supposed underlying somewhat in which qualities inhere, but 'that which is in itself and is conceived through itself: that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of anything other from which it must be formed'.[1] It is self-existent and self-manifest being, self-actualizing and self-certifying being or potency-in-act. The definition of Mode of Substance at once contrasts it with Substance while maintaining their asymmetrical relation: 'By Mode I understand the *affectiones* of Substance, or that which is in another, through which also it is conceived.'[2] Here the interpretation to be placed on the term '*affectio*', and what it means to be 'in another', and to be conceived 'through another' must be considered.

'In another' is evidently used by way of contrast with the 'in itself' of the definition of substance. Whereas substance is self-existent and self-manifest, what is modal depends for its existence on what transcends, or lies beyond, its own proper nature, and can be conceived only as so related. But this does not mean (as has too often been supposed), at least not primarily and essentially, dependence on extrinsic co-ordinate modes (e.g. on things spatio-temporally other) as things are supposed to depend on their 'natural causes'—a man on his parents, or a tree on the soil and atmosphere, for existence or sustenance. The mode's original 'other' is substance itself as the potency-in-act of which the mode is the actual being thence derived. It is in this sense that Spinoza speaks of certain 'immediate' and 'mediate' infinite and eternal modes of substance[3] (e.g. 'infinite intellect', eternal 'motion and

[1] *Eth. I, Def. iii.* [2] *Eth. I, Def. v.* [3] *Eth. I, xxi; xxii.* Cf. also *Ep. lxiv.*

3. 'Natura naturans' *and* 'Natura naturata'

Spinoza also expounds the primordial nature of the Real by the use of the medieval conceptions thus expressed. The significance of the terms '*Natura naturans*' and '*Natura naturata*' may be traced as far back as the great Greek philosophers: but here it may suffice to say that beginning at least with Plato the distinction makes inchoate appearance in the Aristotelian discrimination of the 'unmoved mover' and 'that which is moved'. This was utilized by Augustine, and developed by Scotus Eriugena into a distinction and identification of God and the world. 'Nature' as creative potency-in-act is God—Nature as creating a nature for itself: Nature 'naturing itself'; Nature regarded as a determinate totality of determinate being—as having received a nature—is the world or Nature 'natured'. This mode of expression and thought was further developed by the Arabian philosopher Averroës, and it reappeared in the thought of the Renaissance philosopher-poet Giordano Bruno. Whether it reached Spinoza from this source, or from earlier or intermediate sources, Jewish or otherwise, we have no certain knowledge. Spinoza expressly defines his use of the terms in *Ethices I, xxix, Sch.*: 'By *Natura naturans* we must understand that which is in itself and is conceived through itself, or those attributes of substance which express eternal and infinite essence, that is, God in so far as he is considered as a free cause. By *Natura naturata* I understand all that follows from the necessity of God's nature, or of any one of God's attributes, that is, all the modes of the attributes of God in so far as they are considered as things which are in God, and which without God can neither be nor be conceived.' This definitely identifies the distinction with that of Substance and Mode as the integral *termini* of creation. Nature, the primordial real, is a unity of agency and deed, and is thus asymmetrically bipolar: as infinite indeterminate potency-in-act it is *Natura naturans*: as *actus*, i.e. the exhaustively determinate actuality, of this potency it is *Natura naturata.* Genetically God is prior to the world; ontologically they are identical as indeterminately infinite and infinitely determinate. It is in this sense that Spinoza speaks of 'God or Nature'—for though in all strictness God is *Natura naturans*, the identity of this with *Natura naturata* validates the phrase. But, of course, *Natura naturata* is not to be identified with the durational world

of common experience—the 'common order of nature', which is temporal, multiplex, and divided—it is the eternal 'make of the whole universe', infinite, one, and indivisible, of which the durational world is but a privation. The common objections to the identification of God and Nature thus collapse, since the durational world with its manifold imperfections is not, by Spinoza, regarded as being incorrigibly divine or fully created.

4. *Essence and Expression*

Spinoza sometimes speaks of the primordial causality which is the essential constitution of 'God or Nature' as the 'expression' of its essence in existence.[1] This is, perhaps, a somewhat less happy mode of statement, because we are apt to think of 'expression' under the analogy of the fashioning of something physical—characters, sounds, or artistic and other artificial products—in accordance with ideas or mental conceptions. But Spinoza must not be taken as conceiving creative action on the analogy of such verbal or artistic 'expression' of ideas in another medium. For Substance, *Natura naturans*, or God is not exclusively mental; nor is modal being, *Natura naturata*, or the eternal universe exclusively non-mental. These are not two beings having the same form, or having different forms conventionally associated, in different materials. We have yet to deal with the distinction of the mental and the physical, and their relation, as it is understood by Spinoza, but they are certainly not to be identified with those of creator and creature. Undoubtedly, for Spinoza the eternal extended universe which is the actuality of Substance as 'extension' may be regarded as an 'expression' of Substance as 'thought', but equally the eternal psychical universe which is its actuality as 'thought' may be regarded as an 'expression' of Substance as 'extension'. This does but emphasize the identity of 'extension' and 'thought' as 'attributes' of Substance. Their distinction is intellectual, i.e. with *respect* to intellect; and it is because philosophy is an intellectual discipline that the creative actualization of potency comes to be conceived as 'expression'. Danger, however, lurks in this usage, viz. that of exclusive 'intellectualism' which forgets that intellect, which for man as

[1] In this connexion see F. Kaufmann, 'Spinoza's System as Theory of Expression' (*Philos. and Phenomenol. Research*, 1940, pp. 83–97).

philosopher is basic, is but a modal being—and not the exclusive actuality of Substance.

II. SUBSTANCE AND ATTRIBUTE

We are thus led next to a consideration of the nature of the Attributes of Substance, their interrelation, and status with respect to 'God or Nature'. Spinoza's formal definition of 'Attribute' indicates clearly enough that the term is not to be taken in the vulgar sense of a characteristic or quality related to Substance as, e.g., sobriety is related to Peter, or redness to a rose: 'By attribute I understand that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence.'[1] The attributes of Substance, then, are the essence of Substance as apprehended, and truly, by intellect: they do not *inhere* in it, but *constitute* its essence. This is further emphasized by Spinoza in *Epistola ix*: 'By substance I mean that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself. *I mean the same by attribute* except that it is called "attribute" with respect to intellect which attributes such and such a nature to substance.'[2] It is equally important, however, not to place an illegitimate emphasis on the relation with intellect as many expositors have done under the influence of idealistic developments from which Spinoza was entirely free. No Kantian or idealistic significance is to be attached to Spinoza's words: intellect does not necessarily condemn itself to phenomenalism by merely imputing the Attributes to Substance that as a 'thing-in-itself' is devoid of them. Nor on the other hand, is the Real limited by intellect whether human or divine. What intellect perceives it perceives truly, for that is the nature of intellect: imagination and its modes are *privations* of intellect. Yet human intellect, circumscribed as it is in its range of objects (though essentially self-transcendent), though it suffers no privation such as to lead it to error, is nevertheless imperfect and, as Spinoza says, differs from infinite intellect 'as the Dog in the heavens differs from the barking animal'.[3] The Attributes of Substance are thus neither qualities or characteristics of Substance nor its phenomenal appearances due to the relativity of human intellect. The Attribute *is* the Substance under the determining scrutiny of intellect. In the letter from which I have already quoted, Spin-

[1] *Eth. I, Def. iv.* [2] My italics. [3] *Eth. I, xvii, Sch.*

oza offered his correspondent two examples to illustrate the kind of distinction he had in mind: (1) the third patriarch, Israel, was also called Jacob (i.e. supplanter) because he seized his brother's heel; again (2) a plane surface is one that reflects all rays of light without any other change—it is called 'white' in relation to a man observing it. What both examples bring home is evidently the notion of 'respect': what distinguishes an Attribute from Substance is that it is the same but in a different respect; and we know from the definition of 'Attribute' that this respect is respect to *intellect*. Now intellect is not extrinsic to Nature, like a spectator at the games, but is involved in it. Nor is it as such substantial (for substance is indeterminate). It is therefore a mode or actualization of Substance. Thus the respect by which an Attribute is distinguished from Substance is intrinsic—not like that of Jacob to Isaac, or the plane surface to the observer; and the Attribute is Substance with respect to one of its own actualizations. Substance, we have seen, is infinite and eternal potency-in-act, and as such absolutely indeterminate; its actualization consists in its exhaustive determination. But what in itself is absolutely indeterminate must, with respect to its determinate actualizations be a *determining* agency, and thus *reflectively determinate*. As actualizing the determinate its indeterminacy is specified, i.e. intellect as an actual determination of Substance perceives the essence of Substance as a potency-in-act whence flows the specific determinations involved in or essential to intellect. Thus *human* intellect perceives Substance as infinite and eternal *thinking* potency-in-act and as infinite and eternal '*extension*' or physical potency-in-act.

This is the root of the distinction both of the Attributes and of Substance and Attributes. Though Substance in itself is absolutely indeterminate, with respect to its determinate actualizations it is generically determinate—'generically', because as infinite and eternal only the universal properties of finite modes can be unconditionally imputed to Substance. Why, then, it may be asked, does Spinoza single out *intellect* as the referent by which Attributes are distinguished from Substance? The answer is simple enough: because the purpose of philosophy is to make Nature *intelligible*, so that this respect to intellect must be, for it, central.

Further, though *human* intellect thus perceives Substance as

thinking and physical potency-in-act, in so far as these potencies are reflectively determinate the nature of Substance in itself cannot be confined to these Attributes. An absolutely indeterminate potency cannot be the source merely of determinate psychical and physical actuality, for thus it would not be indeterminate but psycho-physical potency-in-act. Its absolute indeterminacy necessitates the inference to infinite Attributes; for only the infinitely determinate can exhaustively actualize the absolutely indeterminate.

The *conceived* (and truly conceived) distinctions of the infinite Attributes of Substance is thus with respect to the actualization of one of them, viz. Thought. Substance as such suffers no such distinction, nevertheless these distinctions are valid since from its very nature as potency-in-act Substance exists only as self-actualizing—as producing infinite things 'in infinite ways'. It may be objected that it is paradoxical to say that Substance is both absolutely indeterminate and also 'consists of infinite Attributes'—and indeed it would be so if the nature of Substance provided no 'logical room' for this disparity, if, for example, Substance were a 'thing' and not an *agent*. The apparent contradiction is 'dialectical' or self-resolved in the conception of creative agency.

For philosophy, then, i.e. for intellect, the primordial Real or Substance actively functioning as creator consists of infinite Attributes 'each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence'. This is 'God or Nature'.

(as many suppose), nor can it be simultaneous in its nature with them, since God is prior to all things in causality, but on the contrary, the truth and formal essence of things is what it is because as such it exists by way of knowledge in God's intellect. Therefore the intellect of God, in so far as it is conceived as constituting his essence' (i.e. as potency-in-act) 'is in truth the cause of things, both of their essence and of their existence.'[1] But this is not a peculiarity of Thought, for *mutatis mutandis* the same may be asserted of all the Attributes which in Substance are indivisible.[2]

2. *Unique*

God, or Substance consisting of infinite Attributes, is not one among many but beside it no substance can be or be conceived.[3] This follows from the definition of God as 'Substance consisting of infinite Attributes': for thus all Attributes are attributed to it, and substances with the same attribute are not discernible or distinct.[4] Spinoza takes occasion in both *Ethices I, xiv. Cor. ii* and *xv Sch.* to deal with the conventional view (entertained by Descartes) that extended substance is created, and additional to the creative Substance or God, pointing out that the arguments adduced in favour of this arise from the misconstruing of the nature of extended substance. He allows that God is not 'corporeal' in the sense of possessing a 'body' determined in length, breadth and depth. Such a conception of Extension, whether taken to be a substance or an Attribute, is erroneous: all 'bodies' are but its finite modes or actualizations: Extension as such is extensional potency-in-act.[5] But this being so, and all potency being proper to 'God or Nature', Extension, though substantial,

[1] *Eth. I, xvii, Sch.*

[2] Here we have confined attention to Substance, or God as *Natura naturans*; but it may be added that no ground for the imputation of divisibility to this can be drawn from the multiplicity inherent in *Natura naturata*, or the finite modes of Substance, to be considered in the next chapter; for even here the multiplicity is fully integral when we consider 'the whole order of nature'. *Natura naturata* as it actualizes *Natura naturans*, is 'infinite, unique, and indivisible'; for each individual part focalizes the whole which is thus immanent in each. *Natura naturata* is not an aggregate of parts but a macrocosm of microcosms to infinity.

[3] *Eth. I, xiv.*

[4] *Eth. I, v.*

[5] The alternative interpretation of Extension as empty three-dimensional space is, of course, equally improper.

can be no substance distinct from the infinite creative Substance.[1]

A word is perhaps required concerning Spinoza's distinction of 'unity' or 'singleness' as applied to 'God or Nature' and its 'uniqueness'—the former description being regarded by him as 'very improper'. 'A thing can only be said to be one or single in respect of its existence and not of its essence: for we do not conceive things under numbers until they have been brought under a common genus. . . . Hence it is clear that nothing can be called one or single unless some other thing has been conceived which agrees with it.'[2] Thus, the uniqueness of 'God or Nature' follows from its indeterminate infinity as essence or potency-in-act which excludes the possibility of another.

3. *Infinite*

In his *Letter on the Nature of the Infinite*[3] Spinoza distinguishes between 'infinite by nature or definition', 'limitless', and 'innumerable'. Now Substance, the primordial potency-in-act, is by nature indivisible, and hence its infinity cannot mean limitless multiplicity of parts. Again, since it is unique its infinity cannot mean the indefinite remoteness of extrinsic limits, or, indeed, the mere absence of limits. Its infinity (in spite of the negative suggestion of the term itself) is 'by nature or definition'; and this has application not only to its nature as 'substance' (for 'every substance is necessarily infinite'),[4] but also to its special nature as 'consisting of infinite Attributes each of which expresses . . . infinite essence'.[5] The Attributes are infinite *in number* only with respect to the intellect by which they are distinguished. Substance is infinite as potency-in-act, potency being, as such, by nature indeterminate, i.e. involving no negation, either intrinsic (for it is indivisible) or extrinsic (for it is unique). It is only when Substance is conceived as modally actual that the infinity of 'God or Nature' can be interpreted as limitlessness or innumerability, and that a 'part' of *Natura naturata* (such as a man) can be regarded

[1] It must be admitted that the Cartesian phrase 'extend*ed* Substance' is misleading and, indeed, paradoxical. The comparable phrase, 'think*ing* Substance' is more correct. And the same applies to the Spinozistic phrases '*res extens*a' and '*res cogit*ans'.

[2] *Ep. l.* [3] *Ep. xii.* [4] *Eth. I, viii.* [5] *Eth. I, xi.*

as '*Deus quatenus finitus est*',[1] and the Attributes which it expresses as numerable, e.g. Thought and Extension. And even so the finiteness of the 'part', and the numerability of the Attributes involved, are not absolute, but must be qualified by essential relation with a complement, and by the limitless numerability of the Attributes, respectively.

Thus, Substance, 'God', or *Natura naturans*, is infinite by nature or definition, and can in no wise be *conceived* as finite (though we may attempt so to *imagine* it). But *Natura naturata*, abstractedly conceived is infinite in virtue of its cause, viz. *Natura naturans*, and can be divided into parts, and viewed as an indefinitely great assemblage of such parts. Yet this is to conceive it as merely 'given', as 'actual' but not 'enacted', after the fashion of the empiricists. For *Natura naturata* is only properly conceived as eternally flowing from the primordial potency-in-act; and as so conceived it, too, is infinite by nature or definition. And so again, its finite 'parts' are not mere *sectors* of the 'whole', but exist only in relation with their complement, and thus as 'microcosms' or 'finite-infinites'. This is a topic to which we must presently return.

II. EXISTENCE OR ACTUALITY

'God or Nature' exists or is actual as *Natura naturata* exhaustively and determinately realizing the infinite, indeterminate potency-in-act that is *Natura naturans*. This self-actualization is neither a mere possibility, nor is it contingent, but necessary. Thus the actual world is the only possible world.[2]

1. *Possibility, Contingency, and Necessity*

Spinoza had had conversations with Leibniz, and it is conceivable and perhaps even probable that *Ethices I, xxxiii* was directly aimed at the Leibnizian conception of infinite possible worlds in the mind of God, from which he chose the best for creation. The

[1] Cf. *Eth. II, ix; xi, Cor.* As difficulties have been raised by some commentators concerning this doctrine of the relation of man and God (cf. H. Barker 'Notes on the Second Part of Spinoza's *Ethics*', *Mind*, N.S., xlvii, pp. 437 *et passim*) it may be well to say here that Spinoza does not equate the human mind as durationally extant with '*Deus quatenus humanae mentis essentiam constituit*', but only as thinking adequately.

[2] *Eth. I, xxxiii.*

idea is anthropomorphic, interpreting creation as a sort of artistic production *ex nihilo.* It fails by reason of the paradoxical nature of the being which must be imputed to the uncreated possible worlds which are at once 'ideally' actual and also merely possible. For nothing can be said to be *merely* possible if 'possible' is distinguished from 'contingent', that being contingent that is known to issue from a cause the existence of which remains in doubt.[1] Now all that exists or is actual is the actuality of potency-in-act original or derived, and it is thus that actual existence is necessary though not extrinsically compelled. Necessity, rightly understood, is true freedom or potency-in-act. This is not to deny that *durational* things are authentically contingent in so far as the occurrence of durational causes cannot be certainly foretold by durational minds. But, as we shall see, durational things are privations of eternal beings, and their contingency is concomitant with their privativity. As referred to this or that finite 'part' of *Natura naturata* they may be authentically contingent, but as referred to God they are certainly necessary.

Now, when we consider 'God or Nature' as *causa sui* no such distinction of certain necessity and authentic contingency can be entertained, much less any notion of its being merely possible; for *Natura naturata* is the very exhaustively determinate actuality of the infinite indeterminate primordial potency-in-act that is *Natura naturans.* Because that potency is infinite, unique and indivisible, its actuality is perfect and necessary. For a 'potency' not 'in-act' is no potency at all.

2. *Proofs of the Existence of God*

Those who thus far have followed the development of Spinoza's doctrine will notice with no surprise that he concludes the real existence of God in a laconic inference occupying but three lines of the text: 'If it be denied, conceive that God does not exist.

[1] It should not be necessary to point out that *mere possibility* must be distinguished from *potentiality* (though even philosophers of high repute have sometimes failed to discern them, and rejected the one on the ground of the vacuity of the other). A block of marble 'has the possibility' of becoming an Apollo (or many another statue), but not the potentiality, even in the sense in which an acorn 'has the potentiality' of becoming an oak tree (and no other)—though even here the potency is not wholly intrinsic or immanent (as with the *causa sui* or an eternal *creatum*).

Then his essence does not involve existence; which is absurd.'[1] That he also deigns to add two or three other proofs, *a priori* or *a posteriori* in form, implies no recognition of dissatisfaction with this essential proof, which indeed is involved in all of them as *conditio sine qua non*.

The first additional proof proceeds from the principle that what exists or is actual is so by reason of a cause or potency-in-act, and what does not exist fails to exist by reason of the opposition of some cause or potency-in-act. This cause of existence or non-existence must lie either in the nature of the thing itself or beyond it: in its nature when it is necessary or impossible; beyond it when it is contingent. That for which there is nothing, intrinsic or extrinsic, that can prevent existence, exists necessarily (the main proof); thus 'God or Nature', which is 'absolutely infinite and consummately perfect' so exists.

The second additional proof is *a posteriori* in form, proceeding from the existence of 'ourselves'. This existence implies a 'power to exist' possessed by such finite beings; and if God did not exist the power of these beings to exist would exceed that of a being absolutely infinite; which is absurd. Thus either nothing exists or God exists necessarily.

But as he says in the *Scholium* that follows: 'In this last demonstration I wished to prove the existence of God *a posteriori*, not because it does not follow *a priori* from the same premisses, but in order that the proof might be more easily understood.' He then gives the *a priori* form of this *a posteriori* proof (forming a third additional proof): To be able to exist is a potency, and it follows that the greater the potency the greater the ability to exist. Now 'God or Nature' is defined as absolutely infinite in potency, and therefore exists necessarily. Here the point is, of course, that power to exist is not an extrinsic power imputed to God but God's very essence from which existence or actuality flows.

It needs little acuity of perception to recognize the equivalence or dependence of all these proofs upon the same principle, viz. that expressed in the main proof, commonly called the 'ontological proof'. I say 'equivalence with' or 'dependence upon', for a distinction may be drawn according as the proofs are, in Cartesian phrase, 'analytic' or 'synthetic' in method. The 'ontological proof' is, of course, as such 'synthetic', proceeding from

[1] *Eth. I, xi.*